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Black Shadows

Long, Complete Story. By GEORGE GERRISH.

On the other side of the road was a high wall, on his right a gloomy cemetery, which the twilight seemed to make more sombre still. All at once Jack became aware that he was being shadowed. A man in strange garb was following him. Jack turned half nervous, and waited for the mysterious stranger to approach.

No. 230.

Black Shadows

By GEORGE GERRISH,

Author of "The Fags of the Fifth," "Saving the School," "Captain Charlie," &c.

CHAPTER 1.

HOME.

The little shop in Maypole Street was all in a stir and bustle. Mrs. Anson was rushing upstairs and downstairs at the back, while Mr. Anson, who usually sacrificed all domestic ties to business, kept leaving customers to fly off into the back-parlour to offer suggestions to his wife, who was far too busy to heed one of them.

A customer entered, and the shopkeeper came bustling out, immediately after receiving the order, to dash in again.

"Mind the water-jug is filled, Jemima," he said to his wife, and bolted back into the shop.

"Did you order a tin of sardines or three beers, sir?" he inquired.

"Neither!" replied the customer icily. "I requested you to send three pounds of gorgonzola."

The trap was then pushed up, and Jack appeared.

"I beg pardon, sir. Must apologise. We are domestically, I may say, sir, in a great state of excitement."

"I perceive so."

"Fact is, we are expecting a visitor, a foreigner, sir, from abroad."

"A foreigner from abroad, eh? That's strange!"

"Excuse me, sir, excuse me. Duty calls. I must keep my supervising hand on things, you know!" And he made another hasty exit.

The customer also made his exit, and two small street-arabs entered.

Mr. Anson dashed out. "Three bottles of gorgonzola!" he cried. "John, where are you? Can't you be left a moment? Why can't you attend to the shop?"

"John's out. Hasn't come back yet!" The speaker, a youth of some twenty years or more, lean, pale, with lank black hair parted in the middle, and a habitual sneer on his features, rose behind the counter.

"He's been a time, the lazy young vagabond! I'll talk to him when he comes back. Just drop what you're doing there, Mike, and attend to the shop, there's a good chap."

Michael leered—a significant leer—which did not bode too well for the future peace of the absent youth. He attended to the customers as they came in, and presently the expected John walked in, to be greeted with a leer and wink from his shop-mate.

"You're a-going to get it!" said Mike, with a wink to a young woman he was just serving.

"Bit 'ard on 'im, ain't they?" replied the customer, as she held up her apron for her purchases to be put in.

At this moment Mr. Anson himself appeared again.

"Oh, you've come back, then, John Anson?" he said sarcastically—"you've come back, have you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, look you here, you're getting a sight too lazy for this show! I want workers, not wasters and loungers! No wages for you this week; and let me catch you idling again, and I sack you straight out, and out of doors you go without a penny, to grub in the gutter, nephew or not!"

John Anson made no reply, but his face wore an expression of thoughtfulness. He was but nineteen years of age, and though he had been years in business — and, notwithstanding his uncle's remarks, was fairly smart at it—he loathed the work he was employed upon, and sighed for wider fields and higher scope beyond the range of a little insignificant grocer's shop. He felt he would almost make any sacrifice to get away.

He knew his uncle and aunt detested him, though up to the present they had been unable to turn him away. He had been the son of an elder brother, a ne'er-do-well, whose wandering life had led him to his death—he had been drowned at sea.

Anson the grocer, a man of meaner spirit, had settled down to his little business, and beyond his own affairs had no thought for the wider world beyond. Apart from his uncle, aunt, and cousin, Jack had no relations on earth, his loved mother not having outlived her husband.

Once cast these off, and he knew he would be free and careless as the air. The thought exhilarated him, and he absent-mindedly began pouring best Ceylon tea into a biscuit-box.

Fortunately his uncle was making a visit to the back-parlour at this moment, so the lad escaped the sound rating he would otherwise surely have had. As it was, the genial Michael laughed and guffawed loudly, looking out of the corner of his eyes at the door leading to the inner room, in the hopes his father would come out.

Jack looked at him in a scornful way, but still said nothing. These two had never been friends. Mike feared and hated Jack, and Jack returned the dislike with a cool contempt that was, to say the least of it, provoking.

A man entered the shop, or rather lounged in, with an air that showed at once that he had come to beg instead of buy. He was ragged and unkempt, and wore a piteous air.

"Get out!" exclaimed Michael, who recognised in him one of his father's old employees, who had been dismissed when too old for service.

Jack put his hand in his pocket and drew out sixpence, the whole stock of his worldly wealth. He placed it in the old man's hand.

"Here you are, Jenkins, only don't come here again!" he said gently.

"Thanks, Master Jack. You've a kind heart. Bless you, bless you!" And the old man hobbled out.

Michael looked at his cousin as though the latter were out of his senses. "You've done a nice thing, encouraging tramps and thieves to come in here!" he sneeringly said.

"Who's encouraging thieves and tramps?" inquired the proprietor, coming forward.

"John was giving money to old Jenkins," replied the truthful Michael.

Mr. Anson stared at John in wide-eyed wonder, and was just about to make some scathing or cutting remark, when a stranger who had entered the doorway a moment before came forward. He was clad in a heavy, thick fur ulster, and had on a sealskin cap. His face, as far as could be seen, was intellectual and refined in the extreme. Wavy black curls peered

from beneath his cap, and his carriage was upright and fearless.

Stepping forward, he looked keenly round, and took in the men before him at a glance, which rested on Jack Anson a brief space longer than on the rest.

"Mr. Thomas Anson?" he inquired, in a deep but pleasant tone.

The old grocer had guessed who it was. He was now all smiles and obsequious bows.

"Mr. Guilbert?" he replied. "I am Anson, humble but honest."

"I am glad to hear it," replied the stranger, speaking with a slightly foreign accent. "It is here are my rooms, if I mistake not?"

"You will find them ready for you, sir, I think. Jemima! Jemima!"

Mrs. Anson came hurrying down, and the guest was ushered into the back-parlour. Shutting the door, the two lads were left to mind the shop, while this was the conversation that went on as the visitor was divesting himself, with the officious help of the tradesman, of his heavy ulster and outer garments:

"We shall do everything to make you at home!" said Mr. Anson, panting for breath, having succeeded in partially disrobing his visitor. "Now, sit down by the fire and warm yourself, sir, for it is very cold outside. After tea we will show you your rooms, the best we have."

The stranger comfortably settled himself in the armchair. With the fire-light playing upon his features, one could see there was a rather haggard look on his face, and a restless expression, almost that of a man afraid of something. He was nervous, too, as nervous as a cat, as the saying is.

"Here," he said authoritatively, "I have something for you to understand before we go further! Close that door!"

Anson did so, and he and his wife approached nearer. In the shop Mike was standing with his ear to the keyhole; Jack was down in the cellar.

"Money is no object with me," said the foreigner, "and you will be well repaid for any trifling inconvenience I may cause you. Do not wonder if I return late or go out early. Ask no questions of anyone about me. Do not wonder at anyone who may visit me. I give you my word, as a gentleman, I will put your reputations or your house or yourselves in no danger. If you speak to me, and I do not answer, do not be surprised. I am a strange man!"

The door rattled. Mike was getting up from his crouching position.

"What is that?" exclaimed the stranger sharply, fixing his piercing eyes upon the shop door, and his hand as if involuntarily creeping round to his hip-pocket.

"Nothing, sir, nothing! Do you suffer from your nerves? Would you like a little brandy in your tea?"

"I should. Remember, any letters addressed Jean Guilbert, are brought to me at once. Do not wonder at any of my letters or from whence they come."

He drank his tea, and having eaten a little, the grocer and his wife escorted him to his rooms.

He expressed satisfaction in rather an absent way, which did not prepossess Mrs. Anson very much in his favour. Intimating that he might like to make some alterations in his toilet, they retired, first obsequiously asking if anything was wanted.

Mrs. Anson had barely shut the door when she gave a jump. The handle was being turned on the inside. The guest must have crossed the room as quickly and noiselessly as a mouse, for he had been standing in front of the looking-glass barely a moment before. The two, intently watching outside and listening, heard the key in the bedroom door turned with a click, and next moment something heavy, that rattled, was thrown down upon the dressing-table.

"Revolver!" murmured Thomas Anson, below his breath. "We've got a corker here, Jemima, this time, and no bloomin' herror!"

It was some three hours before Jean Guilbert came downstairs again, and then the two lads were in the parlour. What was it? He looked different somehow. Mrs. Anson, the most observant of the married pair, was able to tell first. He had just shaved off his moustache. She was unable to repress a sudden start, but having her lodger's piercing eyes fixed upon her as though suspicious of her every movement, she recollected herself.

The stranger took the armchair, and remained thinking deeply. The family, tired at length of the tedious silence and gloomy taciturnity of their new guest, retired for the night, with the exception of old Anson and Jack, the latter having some brain-racking account-work to keep up.

Over his cheerful and soothing pipe, the grocer tried vainly to draw out Jean Guilbert, but without the slightest success; and after a half-hour or so, the latter remarked: "Don't wait for me, Anson. I shall not be going yet, and would like some time to think."

The grocer rose up inwardly marvelling. He was one of those cheap, vain men, who regard themselves as superior to almost anyone they come across, and, being tyrants in their own homes, patronise every stranger whenever they get a chance; and, sure of their own microscopic store of knowledge, will admit no reply to any arguments or words of wisdom they may set forth. Thomas Anson was vain, conceited, narrow-minded, bumptuous, patronising, and, in fact, a fool and intolerable cad or prig in whatever was outside grocery, for everything outside this noble profession he had a most biting and keen contempt for.

Putting up his pipe, he casually left the sitting-room; while, as if now unconscious of his very presence, Jean Guilbert drew his chair up to the fire and remained very still, looking deep in the glowing embers and flickering flames. A quarter of an hour passed, the silence broken only by the scratching of Jack Anson's pen.

All at once Jack gave a start at something he had come to in his accounts. He went deadly pale, and his hand visibly shook. Looking up, with a smothered exclamation, he was astonished to find the eyes of Jean Guilbert staring straight at him. The latter, in an almost uncannily, noiseless way, must have worked his chair round to look at the lad.

"What is it, my boy?" The words were uttered in a low, melancholy, but all the same rich and musical tone.

"Nothing, sir, nothing!" replied Jack with emotion, in a choked voice.

"I noticed you before, my lad. Your name is Jack Anson, is it not?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jack, his face brightening somewhat.

"It is your uncle who keeps this business?"

"Yes, sir; he is my only relation, and I am his only one. I have been here some years now."

"Happy?"

Jack flushed at the question. Could he answer truthfully and give away the private affairs of his family. However, before he had time to decide, Jean Guilbert spoke again.

He had been watching the workings of the lad's face.

"True happiness is not the lot of any one on earth!" he said, in a subdued voice. "It is our greatest inheritance from the hereafter!"

As he spoke, the grocer's lad observed him cross himself.

"How long will you continue working?" asked Guilbert.

He seemed perfectly at home with the English tongue, and talked it like a native, only a very slight foreign accent being noticeable.

"I—I am just going to put my books away," replied Jack. And one could notice he seemed terribly worried about something. He rose and went to the door.

"Good-night," said Guilbert.

"Good-night, sir," replied Jack. And the visitor, turning round to the fire again, once more relapsed into dreamland.

CHAPTER 2.

THE STRANGER.

When Mrs. Anson came down next morning, the back-parlour was filled with the fumes of tobacco smoke. She coughed, and made a great many remarks concerning the questionable moral character of her new lodger. The latter did not hear them though, and probably would have thought little of them if he had. He lay asleep in his room, with the door locked, and was not expected down before dinner, the meal in the household of the grocer always taking place at one o'clock sharp.

Jack's face was still haggard and drawn—in fact, he looked quite different to his ordinary self, as several customers who called in observed. He was a general favourite with all who dealt at the shop.

During the morning his eyes kept wandering furtively in the direction of his cousin, who, with an obsequious smile and bland, suave manner, was serving behind the counter on the opposite side. In the household was still another person whom we have not yet mentioned. She was Edith Wilton, a young lady boarder, really the ward of Mrs. Anson. She was eighteen, with a nice figure, and very pretty for her age.

This morning her looks followed Jack from one part to another, and she appeared uneasy at his pallor and evident nervousness.

"What is it, Jack, dear?" she asked, when she was alone with him on the quiet.

"If I were to leave here for some years, Edie, might I hope you would be true to me?"

The girl looked trustingly and with a pleading look up into his face. There was no doubting her.

"I don't understand, Jack. You're not going away and to leave me to the mercy of that wretch over there?" They were in a corner of the shop while they were talking, and at this moment Michael's head appeared round a corner of a stack of sugar packages.

It was Mrs. Anson's fondest wish for her bright and beaming son to marry this girl, an idea that Edith could not for a moment tolerate.

Before either could speak again, however, a cracked voice, insinuating, almost beggarlike, in its whine, was heard down the shop, asking in a familiar way: "And where is my old friends and my young friends, not to speak of Bullseyes the cat?"

"It's that wretch Timothy Truffles!" said Edie, under her breath.

Timothy Truffles was indeed the caller's name. He was fat, with a very oily face and bald head, short, and with a beery look about him. He smelt strongly of cheap spirits and still cheaper cigars, and as he stood mopping his forehead, he cocked his eye in a not prepossessing manner round the shop to discover where his friends were.

"Ah, good-morning, Mr. Truffles," said Mike, coming forward and rubbing his hands together up and down with pleasure.

"Good-morning, dear boy. How's things?"

"Pretty fair, thanks! How are they with you?"

Mr. Truffles here cocked his eye, and winked in a manner as though there was something very deep in the question. Mike winked back. Edie retired to the shop-parlour, and Truffles seemed just in the least bit disappointed. Both turned round to look at Jack, who was standing near the trap leading into the store-cellar beneath.

"Our young friend seems a trifle out of sorts this morning!" remarked Truffles. "No late hours, I hope, or dissipation? Ah, young men, beware of dissipation. It will ruin body and soul. I often wonder how men can drink when they see such awful examples, as some I could mention, before them."

Jack could not help giving a little smile. Some people might even take warning by themselves!" he remarked. And, without waiting for an answer, he dived down the steps into the cellar.

"That boy will meet his death on the scaffold!" ejaculated Timothy Truffles, Esq. "And now, dear boy, as there's no one in the shop, just accidentally shut down the cellar-flap and put a tea-chest on it, to make sure we have no listeners, to say the same of peepers, and then we can discuss a little business."

The action was done in a moment, and Mike sitting on the chest. Truffles was a commercial traveller, and stood with his bag behind his back. They talked in low, earnest tones for some time of evidently something not too well able to bear the open daylight. The conversation was at length interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Anson himself, who inquired immediately, while sniffing round with a suspicious air, where Jack was?

Mike replied that he did not know—in fact, had not the faintest idea.

"Lazy young vagabond!" replied the grocer, who was evidently in no good humour, "I'll teach him when I catch him!"

"I'm afraid there's not much good about the lad. He always seems to disappoint one!" remarked Truffles, with a scuffle.

"I'll kick him out, that's what I'll do!" said Anson senior. "Good-morning, Truffles." And he walked into the house from the shop.

"Good-morning, sir. Seems to have had his fur rubbed the wrong way," remarked the commercial.

Mike screwed up his nose, and tossed his head contemptuously, as much as to say, "the old cock's always taken a bit this way."

A violent hammering could now be heard coming from under the tea-chest. Both Truffles and Mike hurriedly removed the latter, and the trap was then pushed up, and Jack appeared.

"You did that on purpose, you couple of cads!" he said, and walked off.

Truffles sent a vile, spiteful, malevolent glance after him, but Mike only laughed, and, shaking hands with his friend, bid the latter good-bye, as the dinner-bell was beginning to ring, and it was Jack's turn to mind the shop and have his dinner afterwards.

The new lodger appeared at dinner clad in a smoking-jacket. In the daylight he looked even more pale and haggard than he had done the previous night. He spoke little, but seemed to keep his eyes nervously fixed on the door leading into the shop.

That evening he went out about eleven, and Jack, who was still up at one, heard him return just as he was going to bed. No one had observed him go out, but as Jack opened a door suddenly into the passage soon after the clock had just struck one, when Guilbert had a moment before entered, and came suddenly upon the latter, he was startled at first and did not recognise him.

Jack had a candle in his hand, and was on his way to his room, and as the light flashed on the foreigner's face, he saw the man recoil involuntarily as though possessed by a sudden terror. But was it Guilbert? Jack was so astonished he could do nothing but stand and gape, for the man before him had a beard and moustache.

It was Jean Guilbert beyond a doubt, and a moment after, with a hollow, though rather nervous laugh, he had pulled them off and revealed himself.

"I look strange in these," he said quietly, with a smile, "do I not?"

"It alters your expression!" replied Jack coldly. And he made as though to proceed on his way.

"Stay one moment," said Jean Guilbert. "Jack, my lad, I have taken a strong liking to you. I am an honourable man in the affairs of the world, believe me. I want a friend. Will you be that friend? You regard me with suspicion, perhaps; but as I am a gentleman by birth, so I endeavour to act up to my station."

There was no hypocrisy in those quiet but almost pathetic tones. There was the hungering desire which all experience for friendship and comradeship. Jack took the hand outstretched, and held it for one moment in his own.

Then Jean Guilbert turned away with something very like a muffled sob, and made his way to his room, while Jack stood in the passage, his eyes staring into vacancy.

When at last he roused himself and went upstairs, the house was still as death. For an hour he busied himself over some figures, and then, with a contented face, which bore all the same the expression of a great resolve, he went to bed.

CHAPTER 3.

THIEF AND ASSASSIN.

"Michael, I want a word with you. Come into my room."

"What's up now?" replied the youth addressed, with an obviously put-on air of nonchalance.

"Come in here and I'll tell you."

His knees shaking, and his white face going paler still, with the emotion proceeding from an evil conscience, Michael followed his cousin into the latter's room. Jack shut the door and locked it.

"Now, then," he said, "I have something to tell you. I have just done making up the books. Last night I finished."

Michael was shaking in his shoes, and his hands were trembling.

Steadying himself, he replied in a quavering tone, in which he tried to throw some spirit of bravado:

"Well, what of it? I don't see what that has to do with me!"

"You don't, eh? Well, allow me to tell you that you have falsified the accounts, and have embezzled sums amounting to nearly one hundred and fifty pounds!"

Michael's lips curled, and he snarled, "It's a lie!"

"It's the truth, you thief and cur; and you've done it in such a way as to attempt to throw the guilt on me!"

The other youth brightened up. There came a gleam of hope in his eye. He had caught at the suggestion. Jack had rather given himself away.

"I don't know what on earth you're talking about, but if you want to gain me as accomplice in any dirty scheme of yours——"

There was no end to the sentence. Jack seized him by the throat, and forced him back till he was nearly strangled.

"Let go! Let go!" gurgled the thief.

"Confess, then, you lying hound, or I'll strangle you, cousin or not!"

"I—I cuc-confess!" gasped Michael, who knew there was no one to witness the words against himself.

The hands were removed from his throat. They left a dark ring behind.

"Sit down!" ordered Jack sternly. "I have a proposal to make to you."

Michael obeyed.

"The defalcations will be discovered in a week's time, when your father's accountant examines the books. By that time I shall have gone, no one besides myself knowing whither. Michael, it is that brute Truffles, I know, who has caused you to do this. He has led you astray. You know the effect a discovery of this sort would have on your father and mother. Can you restore the money? Pull up before it is too late, and I will help you."

Michael's eyes gleamed. "I cannot restore it. I have not a penny."

"I thought so. And I will help you in this way. In a few days I shall have gone. I am content to let the guilt rest upon me, and to take it with me, too. They will not have me tracked for their own sake. If you will faithfully promise to reform your life, I will do this for you. What is your answer?"

For a few minutes there was a still silence. Michael, with brows contracted and deeply-knit, and his eyes shifting uneasily, was weighing the pros and cons of the question.

"Is there nothing more you want?" he inquired, looking sharply at Jack.

"Nothing, except your promise to give up all communication with the man Truffles, who will, if encouraged, only lead you deeper into the mire of crime."

"I promise." He held out his hand. Jack, in his open-hearted manner, never hesitated. He took it.

"When do you propose to go?"

"Within the next few days. I can tell you nothing more definite."

Jack unlocked the door, and his companion departed, not

without a gleam of satisfaction and inward triumph in his eye. Poor Jack! Good and pure-hearted, he could not believe how utterly corrupt some natures may become.

That night Jack sat up again, employed on the books and other extra work which the grocer always shoved on his already over-loaded shoulders. When it was dusk, Jean Guilbert went out closely muffled. Jack was the only one up when he returned, bringing someone in with him, whom he ushered silently up to his room just over the back-parlour of the shop.

There was plenty of work to do yet, and the lad sat calculating figures and totting accounts till that great silence which always comes before dawn filled the house.

"4, 14, 28, 57, 89, 92—284," went Jack, his brain working like a machine. He was about to jot down the total, when something seemed to arrest his pen. His hair began to rise. It was a hollow groan he heard.

A pause, in which his nervous power was strained to the uttermost. A dull thud above his head, like the sound of a fall. A muffled cry, barely discernible, but which reached his ears. "Help! Help!" It was long and plaintive.

Jack hesitated only for one instant; the next he was speeding up the stairs, holding in his hand the heavy ebony ruler. He did not shout for assistance—some instinct seemed to warn him against making a noise.

The door was locked, but the passage was narrow. Placing his feet against the wall, the young fellow pushed with all his might. The door gave way almost noiselessly, and without disturbing anyone, for all the family slept at the top of the house. Jack turned to enter, and the sight that he beheld almost caused him to utter a cry of horror.

On the floor lay Jean Guilbert, and on his breast knelt a man whose left hand clutched Guilbert's throat, and whose right hand held poised aloft a long, cruel dagger. It was not this that unnerved Jack so, though this was bad enough. But the face of Guilbert on the floor was the exact image of the face of the man kneeling on him, only the latter was as Guilbert had been a few nights before. He wore a beard and moustache.

"Help!" gurgled the prostrate man. "Help!"

Jack was himself again. He sprang forward, and while the would-be assassin turned to raise himself, brought down the heavy ruler on his temple and stretched him unconscious on the floor. The dagger rolled away with a sharp clink.

Jack went to the door now as though to summon assistance, but the voice of Jean Guilbert recalled him. "No, no, do nothing! No one but ourselves has seen or has heard. Close the door."

Jack obeyed. And when he turned round again he saw Guilbert carefully examining the stunned man's head.

To the lad's surprise, he cried joyfully, "Thank Heaven, he is not hurt; only a little blow!" And he began pouring some brandy down the man's throat.

"Are you going to give him in charge?" asked Jack.

"No, no!" replied Guilbert sharply, with a startled look in his eyes. "Nothing like that! Will you leave us now, Jack. He is coming-to once more. See!" And the man opened his eyes, but closed them again instantly.

They were the same eyes as Jean Guilbert's. The face, in fact, was an exact representation of Guilbert disguised in a beard.

It was not a criminal face, but one refined and gentle, even prepossessing.

Jack Anson hesitated to go, but the man he had so opportunely assisted seemed to guess what was in his mind, for he said, with a smile: "Don't trouble about me now. I shall be quite safe."

There was nothing to do but go, so Jack hesitatingly obeyed.

Once downstairs he closed his books, and, leaning back, lost himself in thought and dreams. Footsteps outside brought him back to reality with a start. He almost fancied it was again the thud of the body falling.

He heard a muffled voice say in a low, bitter tone:

"Fate! Fate!" And then the footsteps passed. A moment more, and the street-door opened, someone departed, the door closed again, and was relocked, and Jack heard the retreating steps of Jean Guilbert upon the stairs. The dawn would break shortly. Looking from the window over the back, Jack saw a faint dim streak in the sky. It was daybreak. He quietly made his way upstairs and threw himself across his bed. The events that had just taken place precluded any idea of sleep.

What could the mystery be that surrounded Jean Guilbert? Despite the almost repulsive aspect of Guilbert's surroundings, the young fellow could not help feeling a strong liking and respect for the stranger with his strange ways. But it was no use trying to solve the mystery. Perhaps time would know only too soon. With this idea in his mind, sleep at length came over him just as the clock struck four.

CHAPTER 4.

ANOTHER'S GUILT.

It was the morning of the third day after the terrible attempt on Guilbert's life in the dead of night.

Mr. Anson came down early. It was to be a very busy day for him.

"Where's John?" he exclaimed testily, when the breakfast-bell had been rung twice. "What does he mean by this behaviour?"

Seizing the bell, the grocer rang it with all his might, and even brought out Guilbert from his room to inquire if the place was on fire. John, however, appeared not, and this sufficed to work Anson senior himself into a flaring and towering passion. He sprang up the stairs with the intention of wreaking summary vengeance upon the delinquent. But when he reached the room he found it completely empty, and, what was more, the bed had not been slept in.

Mr. Anson pricked up his ears and nose, and began to sniff around.

Things were looking a trifle suspicious.

"Jemima! Jemima!" he yelled downstairs. "Come up here!"

Mrs. Anson hurried up to her spouse, and found him with a letter in his hand. His rage had left him, and he was beginning to be afraid, though of what he knew not.

"This—this was pinned on the dressing-table," he said, in a faltering voice.

Not so fearful of the contents as her husband, the good lady broke open the envelope, and hastily ran her eye over the writing within. This was what she read out to her trembling spouse:

"Dear sir,—Being unable any longer to remain in the position I occupied with you, I have, as you doubtless have guessed by this time, taken French leave. If anything should occur which might cause you to have inquiries made, I may tell you it will be only waste of time and money to try and track me. My work, as you will see, is quite up-to-date and straightforward. Regretting I have been obliged to fall back upon this summary course of leaving you, with always best wishes for your health and happiness as well as that of my aunt.—Your indeed sincere nephew, JOHN DAVID ANSON."

This epistle, brief and to the point, finished, the couple looked hard at each other for a minute.

"Devil a penny I spend over the ungrateful young cur!" said the grocer, himself breaking the silence.

"And it's best not to say too much to anyone about it," remarked his wife cautiously. "There's a lot of tales got about already, as how we didn't treat him fairly, or some such rot, and they might say now that we actually drove him from the door!"

"You're right, Jemima. If anybody asks what's become of him, simply say we've sent him away to learn the trade in another situation, as he was too troublesome by far here and worried your nerves."

There was, however, all that day and the next two or three, some considerable anxiety on the part of both Mr. Anson and his wife; but as no Jack turned up, and no sign was seen of him, they at length quieted their fears, and business routine went on as though undisturbed, an unsophisticated young man from the country filling Jack's vacated place.

Jean Guilbert had asked the next day after the disappearance what had become of Jack, and having received the explanation given to all comers, he turned aside and did a little laugh in his sleeve, thus giving a suspicion that he knew more about things than he cared to say. Mr. and Mrs. Anson, though, of course, had no suspicion that he could in any way be concerned in it.

The day for examining the books and balancing them and totting up the profits came, and the grocer took his accustomed seat in the centre of a pile of ledgers, with a self-satisfied, complacent smille, all ready to call out to his partner in joy and sorrow—not to speak of the grocery business—the profits for the year.

He waded through ledger after ledger, and each time emerged more smiling.

But suddenly his aspect changed. His face took an ominous frown. He took down another book, and began to compare the two. Through a little trap-window in the shop an anxious, pallid face was peeping, watching the old man's movements, and taking in every glance and expression. It was Michael Anson, and he knew the fateful moment had come.

The book his uncle had glanced through first showed a deficit. On comparing it with another ledger, the accounts would be revealed as falsified. Mike Anson trembled in every limb, his hair began to rise on end, and cold sweat stood out upon his brow.

He turned away, making a desperate effort to control himself, and handed a purchaser a saveloy instead of a tin of sardines. Having been requested, in language more forcible than polite, to exchange the sausage, which had been handed, not even wrapped up, the customer had no sooner left than in stalked Mr. Timothy Truffles, beaming and oily as usual.

At once he noticed the forlorn aspect of Michael, and his demeanour changing, too, to one of cautious cunning, he approached the young man, and hastily whispered: "What the

plague's wrong? It ain't been found out yet! You ain't been copped!"

"No!" replied Michael. "But he's just on it now, and he'll make the discovery in another minute."

"No wonder you look bad, then, watching the whole show from here. It wants some nerves, that does. Here, put on your hat, and come and 'ave a drink. It'll buck you up!"

Michael looked round the shop, and it being a slack time, and he in a condition when strong liquor was an absolute necessity, he took down his hat, and, beckoning to Truffles, whose evil, leering face was at the trap looking into the small counting-house, they left the shop in company.

"You're quite right," remarked the older man, in a low tone, when they were once out into the street, "to 'ave watched 'is whiskery old frontispiece. You would 'ave swore 'e'd got 'em, and right down bad, too, snakes and toads and sarpints, to say the least of it!"

Michael drank his brandy, and with a wild eye and his cowardly form trembling, they made their way back. Everything was still quiet. Advancing with the utmost caution to the trap on tip-toe, Timothy Truffles peeped in.

"And, by the way, madam, I 'ave something to perpose to you. I 'ave 'ere a little list for my Benevolent Orphans' Fund—secretary, treasurer, manager, director, and committee, Mr. Timothy Truffles. I 'ave several promises, and among my list of donors is 'er Grace the Duchess of Bouncer. Would you care, by making a little donation, to 'ave your name down next on the list to the duchess? Er—ahem!"

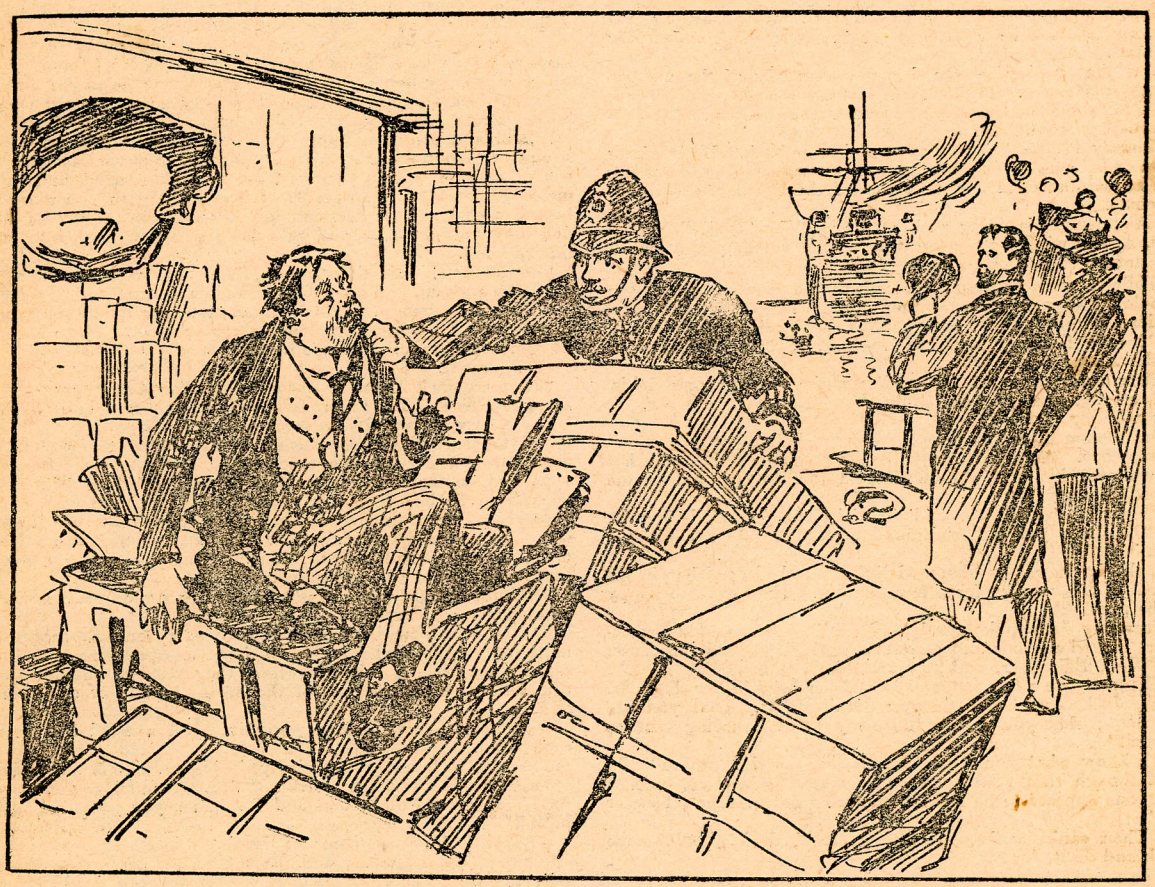
Mrs. Anson could not resist. She reached for her purse, and glanced within.

"Er—er—well—er—how much am I supposed to give?" she whispered.

"The subscription is not limited, madam. Anything from 'arf a thick 'un—I should say suv'rin!"

Mrs. Anson looked a little straight, but she was no more able to resist having her name directly next to that of a real live duchess than—well, than any other lady would have been in like circumstances.

Half-a-sovereign was in Truffles's pocket before another minute, and he was ostentatiously holding out a list for her to write her name in, when a sudden diversion occurred, as un-



The last sight to be seen on land was that of Truffles being marched off to gaol by two policemen.

He turned, and made signs for Mike to approach.

Old Anson was calculating and totting up a column of figures on paper. He saw him write the total £150 11s. 4d., and he started back against the counter, the cold sweat pouring down him.

He was under the fire of crime for the first time, and he was inwardly resolving that, come what might, he would never subject himself to such inward torture again.

"Good-morning, Mr. Truffles. And how do you find yourself this morning?" Mrs. Anson came out into the shop, and extended her hand gracefully and courteously.

"Je porter myself biong! French, you know, for Pretty well, thanks! 'Ow's our worthy man of business this mornin'? The head of the firm after, of course, the esteemed lady before me, yet really too young to 'ave the burdens and care and mental trials of the grocery trade laid on her fair young shoulders."

Mrs. Anson did a lively smile. "Oh, Mr. Truffles, what a creature you are!"

expected on the lady's part as looked forward to on the part of the other pair.

Mike Anson started back, and crouched behind a pile of goods on the counter as he saw his father, haggard but excited, with hectic flush and sparkling eyes, force the door and rush into the shop, shouting: "I've been swindled, robbed, cheated! The books are falsified, and over £150 has been stolen!"

There was a moment of silence following this speech. Everyone looked in profoundest astonishment.

"My dear, dear sir!" exclaimed Timothy Truffles. "Oh, the wretch, the ungrateful thief. I never liked that boy, I didn't, 'struth!"

"You're right, Truffles. It's that boy. I thought it suspicious, Jemima, when he made off as he did; but I never thought he'd have tampered with the books. The thief! The thief!"

But in the doorway leading into the inner room stood another figure, and in the room, with a look of horror on her face, stood Edie Wilton.

"Who is a thief? Did I not hear the word mentioned?" It was Jean Guilbert.

"John Anson, my nephew. He has falsified his books, and when he saw discovery was inevitable, like the mean cur he was he sneaked off and left others to suffer for his dastardly acts!"

"He is no thief! Jack would not touch a penny which did not belong to him. How dare you call him a thief?"

Everyone looked at Edie in blank astonishment; but she did not care, and her bosom heaved, and her bright eyes sparkled. She would not have her sweetheart slandered.

"If there is doubt or suspicion, look in other places," said Jean Guilbert. "I would stake my life on Jack's honesty." And he took the girl's hand, and held it in his own.

Timothy Truffles snuffled, and a look of contempt appeared on his features.

"People don't run away for nothing," he observed, with a sneer.

CHAPTER 5.

FROM CRIME TO CRIME.

Now, leaving the shop, let us return to Jack, if we can find him, and see how he is faring while the charge still hangs over his head.

It is the evening on the day the discovery of the missing money was made.. In the back parlour it is being discussed, and Jack's guilt is becoming clearer to the eyes of all sensible persons every moment.

Timothy Truffles has been away and come back. He is taking quite an interest in the affair, and of course, being an old friend and acquaintance, as well as a man of the world, his advice is welcome.

"Ah! fancy his doing such a thing! Well! well!" sighed Mrs. Anson, wiping away the tears. "Take example, Michael, and never get into bad company."

While this was going on, through the passage and out at the side-door, slipped Edie Wilton. She looked worried and anxious, and every now and then, as she hurried up the street, she looked fearfully back, as if afraid of being followed or shadowed.

After a mile or so of hard walking, she reached some fields, and, coming to a gate, she stopped and glanced round her. It was a lonely place.

But a moment or two passed, however, before she was joined by someone. A dark figure, with coat-collar turned up and hat drawn over his eyes, appeared from the shadow, and made directly towards her.

He gave a low whistle, and the girl stepped towards him.

"Oh, Jack, you did frighten me. It didn't look a bit like you."

Jack—for it was he—laughed lightly, and clasped her in his arms. Neither spoke for a few minutes. They were so happy to be reunited.

Presently Jack spoke gently and softly, for he saw his sweetheart looked anxious and careworn, and he guessed the cause.

"Well, Edie dear, and how are things at home?"

The girl gave a low sob, and buried her head in her shoulder.

"Oh, Jack, Jack! tell me you didn't do it. That you are innocent; that you didn't run away to avoid being sent to prison!"

"I know what you mean, my darling; and I can tell you that though things look very very black against me, though everyone appears to be against me, yet I am innocent, I swear it!"

"Then can't—can't you clear yourself, Jack? Oh, come back and do it, for my sake!"

The young man clasped her fondly to him. "No, no, Edie, not now; but some time in the future I will come. I cannot go back now; better to bear the guilt. There is one who believes me innocent, I know—Mr. Guilbert."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Edie. "He said so."

"And you will trust me too?"

"Yes, Jack—yes. Of course I will. Only if—if you could just come back and——"

"No, Edie. I have resolved to leave England. Some day I promise you I'll come back and clear myself, and will you wait for me till then?"

Edie looked up into his face. There was no doubting her absolute faith and true-heartedness.

"This is the last time we shall see each other for many years it may be, darling; but always believe in me, and I will yet show there is grit in me!"

There was silence again for a short time. Their feelings were too deep for ordinary words. Then at length Edie realised with a start that she had been out some considerable time. What followed we will not disclose—it was nothing more than the love-parting which takes place every day. These two were not to see each other they knew not for how long. It might be years, it might be for ever; but they would still be true to each other.

Heedless of any risk, Jack accompanied his sweetheart back to within a short distance of Anson's shop.

Then, once more, a final farewell, and they had parted, Edie to go in and sob herself to sleep, Jack to turn with set, determined face to the outer world.

He wandered on for some time, and became conscious that it was getting very late. He also had a feeling that someone was watching him. It was instinctive.

Suddenly, as if seized by an irresistible impulse, he turned, and beheld, some distance in his rear, a black, closely-muffled-up figure, looking dim and weird in the moonlight, which shone brightly down the deserted street.

For some moments did Jack Anson stare curiously at that mysterious form, which now began to approach him at a rapid pace.

It was an eerie feeling which crept over him. There was a stone-wall one his left, and over the other side of the road there was the low boundary of a cemetery. By no means a coward, still our hero felt his flesh creep somewhat, and a shiver pass down his backbone. He turned, and took a few steps onward; then paused and looked behind again.

The stranger, whoever it was, was stalking along in the shadow of the wall, keeping evidently on his track, and prepared seemingly to dog his footsteps wherever he might go.

Again Jack stopped, and this time his shadower approached him at a rate even more rapid than before.

Nearer and nearer it approached, till it came quite up and stopped in front of him. All that was visible of the face was a white forehead, almost concealed under a black cowl, and two piercing eyes. The stranger was robed in the garb of a monk; but, as Jack knew the dress was not allowable in the streets, he put the person, whoever it was, down as belonging to some brotherhood.

"Follow me!" said the stranger, in a harsh, metallic voice.

"Who are you, and what do you want with me?" asked Jack.

"That matters not. You will have an offer made you, and in any case I swear before Heaven that you shall come to no hurt, nor will I lead you into a trap."

Jack paused.

"You are Jack Anson, nephew of Jeremiah Anson, grocer, of Maypole Street. The young fellow started, then said abruptly: "I rely on your promise, and will follow you."

No further words were uttered, but the man in the monk's garb abruptly turned and strode off, Jack following. It may seem strange that our hero hesitated so little before following one whom he had certainly never met before, and who, too, seemed so extraordinary both in person and dress. The truth was, Jack was in desperate straits. He had no money, no home, no food, and a chance of anything turning up—even a chance like this, was not to be despised.

Anyhow, he felt he could not be much worse off than he was now—well-nigh desperate.

For over an hour did this ill-assorted pair tramp through the midnight streets, and then, when dawn was just streaking the eastern sky with a thin grey line, they reached an old and tumbledown tavern in one of the meanest parts of our great city.

Here they paused before going in. Not a word had been exchanged.

The man in black said suddenly, in his metallic tones, which seemed to click out the words: "You are hungry, you need food and rest. Follow me, and I will see you provided with both."

So saying, he opened one of the doors into the tavern, and entered. Jack followed, and, having passed through a cheap bar, smelling vilely of stale beer and tobacco smoke, they emerged in a dark passage, where was stationed a foreign-looking man, who greeted the black-robed man with respect, and, having scrutinised Jack, he ushered them through a door at the end of the passage. As he opened the door, someone lurched out, and in the dim light Jack recognised the features, and turned his face away. The man reeled as though drunk. It was Timothy Truffles.

Taking no notice of the new-comers, he lurched down the passage and disappeared. Jack and his guide having entered the room, the door was closed upon them. There was a strange odour pervading the atmosphere, and clouds of thick smoke seemed to hang about the place. It was a large room they were in, lighted only by a couple of oil-lamps, round which fluttered a few flies. Mattresses were spread all round against the walls, a few tables, with chairs, occupying the centre.

No one at present was seated at the tables, though many were lying or sitting on the mattresses, some smoking, a few playing with dirty, greasy-looking cards.

The type of face there was of the very lowest. Beside himself, and possibly his guide, Jack could not see a single English-looking person in the place, most of them being Chinese. It

was not long before he guessed his whereabouts. He was in one of the sickening opium-dens of East London.

The attendant from the passage came in and approached them. The stranger spoke a few words to him in a low tone, and using a foreign language. The attendant went out, but presently reappeared with some food, which he placed before Jack. He also brought a bottle of wine and a glass of spirit for the man in black.

"Set to," said the latter. "I have something of importance to say, but it can wait, for you have eaten nothing since dawn yesterday."

Jack started and stared. Was he the subject of a system of espionage; if so, what for and why? He felt vaguely uneasy; but, ravenously hungry, he devoured the food before him in a very short time. Asked as to whether he would like more, he replied in the negative, and his companion, who had not removed his cowl or hood, or revealed an inch more of his features, remarked: "Very well, then. Prepare to listen to a strange proposal. I have brought you here, and have paid for your dinner. Swear to me you will not reveal to any mortal soul at any time what I am about to tell you. It is an offer which you will be open to accept or not, as you wish. There will be no persuasion either way. Will you give me your oath?"

Jack hesitated. He felt a trifle nervous, if the truth be told. Also he did not wish to get implicated in any way in underhand work. Still, it seemed cowardly to draw back now.

"I promise," he said slowly.

"Very well," said the stranger, whose fierce, sparkling eyes glittered as never before. And, bending forward, he hissed into Jack's ear: "You left your uncle's on account of an embezzlement."

Jack started. "Indeed I did not!" he said.

A smile must have crossed the face of the man in black, for it seemed reflected in his eyes. "All right," he said, "do not fear. I will not betray you. But, having heard this thing about you, it struck me you might be useful in business of my own."

Jack began to understand. He was about to withdraw his promise, when his companion said: "Hush! Now listen, and wait till I have finished before speaking." Bending still closer forward, he spoke in a subdued undertone, only audible to Jack. "You have now a chance of earning five thousand pounds, a chance which will never occur again in your life. You have conquered lesser things, and escaped scot-free; but what is £150 to £5,000?" Here he leaned forward and tapped the young fellow on the shoulder. Jack realised now for the first time the truth of the downward path of crime. Make but one false slip, and there is no retraction till the bitter end. However, he said nothing, but allowed his companion to continue.

"There is in the Anson's house a man going under the name of Jean Guilbert. It is necessary that that man's life should be taken. Hush! don't start. It is a secret mission from a nation, and you are offered it. You will be protected from justice, and safely guarded from harm. All you will have to do is to make away, with the aid of the dagger, poison, or any other means, without delay, of Jean——"

Jack had started up by now, his whole face ablaze. The man before him drew back, and felt for some hidden weapon to defend himself it seemed. But just as a serious encounter seemed inevitable, the door opened, and someone entered. The new-comer came up under the lamp, and our hero at once recognised that beard and face. It was the man who had attempted to assassinate Jean Guilbert.

He gave a start as he saw Jack, and appeared at a loss; but, almost instantly recovering himself, he beckoned our hero's companion aside, and, after a minute or two's conversation, pressed some notes into his hand. The man in black, with a shrewd glance at Jack, then took his departure, without another word or sign to the youth he had lured into this strange den.

CHAPTER 6.

EXILED.

Jack Anson sat still, vaguely wondering what was going to happen next. He felt himself in no safe position, but resolved to make a desperate fight should he be attacked. As soon as the man in monk's garb had disappeared, the other one, the new-comer, came up.

"Is it possible, Jack, you don't know me? And here have I been searching London inside and out to find you."

There was no mistaking those clear, mellow tones, tinged with melancholy. Jack, intensely relieved, seized the hand before him and wrung it. Guilbert disguised!

"Sit down," said the latter. "I have something to tell you. I may be able to do something for you."

And a minute before Jack had been offered £5,000 to slay this man, his benefactor. There could be no honour in keeping a secret like that, the true honour being in its revelation. He was about to speak, to blurt all the nefarious plot forth, when a gentle hand was laid on his shoulder, and the low voice of Guilbert restrained him.

"I know, Jack, my lad. You have been offered money in exchange for my life. Say no more about it!"

Jack looked at his companion in amazement. It was altogether beyond his comprehension. Guilbert noted his surprise, and said: "Some day you may know all these things, Jack. Don't seek to know them, for they bring with them unseen dangers. There is a hidden menace in every action of a friend. There is the assassin's knife, the poisonous drug hidden behind the smile of comradeship. You are the only one on earth I would trust, and this is why I have sought you."

He paused, as if to give emphasis to his words, and then continued: "In a few days from now I set out for Australia, either alone or with a companion. The latter course is infinitely preferable, but there is only one companion I would take, and that is you. Will you come? I have enough money for us both, and we can do some prospecting when we arrive, for, as you know, there is talk of a great new gold-field just discovered in the centre of Australia. What do you say? Will you come? There will be more than a chance of you making your fortune."

Jack needed no second invitation. He accepted with joy. Here was the very chance he had been seeking.

"Very well, then," said Guilbert. "Let us leave this hole now, then. I will see you safe somewhere for to-night, and to-morrow will call round for you, when we can book our passages by the next boat, and also purchase outfits."

The doorkeeper respectfully bowed as they made their exit into the street, where the fresh air of midnight, cold and chill,, seemed splendidly bracing after the sickening odours of the opium-den.

Hailing a hansom, it carried them quickly towards the wealthier part, and Jack having at length been put up at a first-class private hotel, Jean Guilbert took his leave till the morning.

There was not much sleep for our hero that night. He turned from one side to the other, and then for some time lay awake, listening to the chiming of the church clocks and the deep boom of Big Ben, and wondering where his strange adventures would end. Up to a few weeks ago his life had been commonplace and dull in the extreme. Now it seemed changed entirely.

The clocks struck three before sleep at length came over Jack, and then he dreamed of assassins in big hoods, of gigantic and terrible-looking monsters, who followed him about, with stilettos and cups labelled poison in their hands.

But with the morning all the dark visions of the night faded away. The day was spent almost before it was begun. Passages were booked on an outgoing liner, outfits were ordered, and many other little incidentals necessary to travelling were purchased, through the experience of Jean Guilbert.

The few days—just over a week—which followed were soon passed. Guilbert had settled up his affairs with the Ansons, and on the day before sailing visited our hero.

"Jack," he said, "my mind is not yet quite clear or easy about that £150. One never knows when it may crop up. Of course, I know you had nothing to do with it; but still, you see, your taking the blame will make people talk. I have been thinking things over, and as your uncle is none too well off, I suggest we write him an anonymous note enclosing the money!"

Jack's eyes gleamed. "I—I hardly like——" he stammered.

"Don't mind the money, Jack, for Heaven's sake. At the present time, £150 is nothing, absolutely nothing to me. Come, now, write a letter, in a disguised hand if you like, and we will enclose the £150, and it will be off our minds."

There was nothing to do but obey this kind request, and thus it was that the following morning Mr. Anson, to his intense joy and excitement, received the following, written in a disguised hand:

"Dear Sir,—You have recently suffered by embezzlement. Kindly allow me to make good the loss you sustained by enclosed. You need have no scruples about accepting it.—Signed,

"To Right the Wrong."

Jack smiled as he wrote the last sentence, which had been suggested his friend.

"Scruples!" he exclaimed. "Uncle Jeremiah's scruples were adjustable on a sliding scale.

The luggage and baggage had been sent aboard the steamer, which, in a few hours, was to sail. Guilbert and Jack left the hotel, and proceeded to the railway-station, to take train to the docks.

Unobserved behind them was a short, stout man, who had followed them from the hotel. When they entered a first-class carriage, he seated himself in a "third smoking," and at the docks he left the train and followed our two friends to the steamer, seemingly unobservant, and smoking a short clay-pipe.

There was all the noise and bustle of approaching departure.

Sirens screamed, officers shouted and bawled, crowds of porters and seamen ran hither and thither mixing with excited and bewildered passengers, and it took some time for Guilbert and Jack to thread their way through the throng to reach their own vessel. The feat, no easy one, was accomplished, however, at length, and they walked up the gangway on deck. At the deck end stood a man, a Lascar, with surly face and beetling eyebrows. He stared from under them at the two passengers, and uttered an exclamation of satisfaction under his breath. However, neither Jack nor Guilbert noticed him, and they passed to the stern to watch the crowd on the deck.

"Who is that sitting on the packing-case?" said Guilbert, pointing to a man smoking a short clay, the very man, in fact, who had followed them from London.

Jack stared hard, and suddenly exclaimed: "It's Truffles!"

The siren at this moment uttered its warning blast, and the man with the clay stood up. Yes, Truffles, beyond a doubt.

The gangways were hauled aboard, the hawsers were cast off, and the "Queen of the Orient" moved slowly away into mid-stream.

People waved their handkerchiefs, and shouted good-byes and God-speeds. None, however, were for Jack or his friend, though someone had come to see them off.

As the vessel moved further away, so did the spirits of Truffles seem to rise.

He stood upon his packing-case, and executed a step-dance, waving his hands and hat.

Suddenly, however, his joy came to an untimely end.

The packing-case on which Truffles had climbed was as high as himself, and as the ship moved off, and the chance of any passenger relanding appeared to vanish, so the excitement of Timothy Truffles increased, and he sprang into the air, and could be observed indulging in all sorts of eccentric pranks in his war-dance, or, rather, dance de joie.

But what was it that happened? Splinters flew up of a sudden, and Timothy Truffles seemed to have vanished into the interior.

Even the two watchers on deck could hear the sound of a tremendous smashing of crockery and glass-ware, and Jack fairly broke down with laughter as the last sight to be seen on land was that of Truffles, who, on being hauled out of the case, was marched off to gaol by two policemen. His triumph had been but momentary.

As hour succeeded hour, the land faded, the stars appeared in the sky, and in the moonlight the shores of old England faded away in a grey, ghostly mist.

Many were the adventures and perils to be encountered before Jack would ever set his foot on the homeland soil once more.

Jean Guilbert by an almost superhuman effort wrenched himself free.

CHAPTER 7.

RETRIBUTION.

For some days the weather proved all that could be desired, and the voyage was very enjoyable.

Jack and his friend roamed about the vessel without any sense of restraint, and it was to be noticed that for once in his life Jean Guilbert began to drop that anxious look and suspicious glance which he shot round every place he entered.

One night in the pale moonlight they stood at the stern. There was rather a swell on, and they were holding to the bulwarks.

Jack was in the shadow, and from the back could not be seen. Jean Guilbert stood in the moonlight.

They were talking of various things, strictly of their plans of life in the country they were bound for, and other details, when a dark form in the shadow of the deck-house gradually approached.

A sharp slip across the deck, and the figure was at the back of Jean Guilbert. Hands were raised, a look of terrible malignity was on the would-be murderer's face, but he recoiled, having caught sight of Jack, with a muttered curse.

"One good shove would have done it!" he murmured, as he slunk off.

"What was that?" said Guilbert, looking up from where he was leaning.

"Only one of the seamen," replied Jack.

"I do not think so. Something inwardly tells me that I am in danger. No, it is not fancy, my dear boy. I must be on my guard. It is intuition and premonition."

Nothing further, however, occurred for some weeks to justify Guilbert's suspicions. His fears seemed to be at rest, when one morning he came on deck pale and haggard. Jack could see something was wrong.

"What is the matter, sir, are you ill?" he asked anxiously.

"No, Jack, not ill in that sense, only my premonition was right. Listen. I will tell you. No, not here. Let us go to our old place at the stern."

They moved to the desired spot, and Guilbert unfolded the following:

"Last night," he said, "I had retired to my cabin, and, having locked the door, I retired, having, as usual, placed a glass of water by my side. I slept. Suddenly a feeling of intense horror came over me in my sleep. I dreamt a man was standing over me with uplifted dagger, ready to plunge it into my heart.

"So weird was the sensation that I involuntarily woke, and, opening my eyes just slightly, I beheld a man in a mask bending over me, a long stiletto in his hand. The dream had foreshadowed the reality.

"For a moment I lay paralysed, not comprehending what was taking place. Then a sudden, last struggle for life impelled me to spring at my assassin's throat.

"The moment of inaction, however, saved me, for he drew back suddenly and sheathed and concealed the dagger about his person. Evidently that was not to be the weapon used. What caused the diversion in my favour I soon learnt. There was a bottle of medicine beside my water on the table, and it had attracted his attention. He drew from his pocket a small

powder, and I saw him drop half in the bottle, and half in the glass of water. I have since analysed it. It was strychnine."

Jack had been intently listening. He looked up at the calm, impressive face beside him with a look of horror, for the deed and admiration for the victim combined.

"Once again did the villain, whoever he was, bend over me. Being satisfied that I had neither seen nor heard, with a chuckling, devilish laugh he left my cabin, and I could now see what way he had entered it. He had a duplicate key. Once he was out I breathed more freely, and, having got up, I bolted and secured the door to prevent further intrusion, and then slept again."

Such was the weird story revealed by Jean Guilbert. Jack was of opinion that he should go at once to the captain and acquaint him with the facts, in the hope that the man might be recognised. But his friend thought otherwise, and determined to keep a strict watch now that he had had this warning.

Three weeks passed, and the "Queen of the Orient" was nearing her destination. It had thundered and lightened all day, and the passengers had been kept below. But at night, though the seas were high, a few were allowed on deck, Jack and Jean among them, they taking their old place starboard of the stern.

It was dark, for though the stars were shining overhead it was difficult to make out one side of the deck from the other.

Jean Guilbert crossed from starboard to port to observe a curious phenomenon. He had just clutched the bulwarks, when someone came hurling against him with terrific force. Who it was he could not make out for the moment; but one hand was wrenched away from the bulwarks, and he swung right round.

Before, however, he could utter a cry, the dark form threw itself on him, and exerted all its powerful strength to force him backwards over the bulwarks, or to break his back.

Guilbert, however, was wiry as a cat. He clutched his antagonist, and managed to regain his position. They reeled about the stern in a deadly embrace.

The assassin's eyes gleamed diabolically. He tried to draw a weapon, but could not succeed, as his foe had his wrist in a grip as of iron.

"Look out there! Hold on for your lives!"

The warning cry was only just in time. Every man on deck on the first officer's shout clutched whatever stationary was nearest.

An enormous wave of water of the late storm came rearing and foaming over the deck. Still in the stern the two men struggled desperately. It seemed as if they must be carried overboard. No one had noticed them yet. Just, however, as the mass of roaring and seething water reached the captain, Jean Guilbert, by an almost superhuman effort, wrenched himself free, and hurled his antagonist into the foaming wave which came on like a cataract. Next moment Jack's friend had thrown himself on the deck flat, and grasped some of the iron stern fittings.

The water passed over him, and it was as much as he could do to prevent himself being swept or sucked overboard. When it had gone, and, drenched but safe, he rose to his feet, the deck was quite clear. The assassin had gone to his doom.

"Man overboard!" said Guilbert.

"Where away?"

"From the stern."

A blazing buoy was thrown into the water, and just in time to show a hand and agonised face disappear in the depths of the sea. It was impossible for a boat to be lowered.

"Lascar Karl!" exclaimed the chief officer.

"Good riddance!" muttered the boatswain and a few of the seamen around him. "We don't want any of his sort."

It was the last exciting incident of the voyage. The storm cleared away, the seas went down, and the "Queen of the Orient" was soon at our friends' destination for the present—Perth, the capital of Western Australia.

All doubt and fear seemed now to have been removed from Jean Guilbert's mind. He was as happy and light-hearted as a child, laughing and talking as though the terrible past had never occurred.

It was not the intention of the friends to stay in Perth long. Gold had been discovered in the centre of Australia, and it was their intention to proceed to the fields. A hazardous, risky journey, even fraught with more perils than the Klondike.

There was no fear, however, in the hearts of the pair of chums, as they now were, when they set out for the interior, with one black as servant and attendant and guide combined. It was hard work, and the interesting country which they first passed through soon changed to sandy desert. Jack, for the first time in his life, felt what it was to leave his own countrymen behind, and he felt a trifle homesick. But the bright vision of Edie, his sweetheart, cheered him up, and he pictured himself going home rich beyond an ordinary mortal's dreams, clearing himself from taint of suspicion, and marrying the girl of his choice. But there are long years before you yet, Jack.

Let us watch them, dear reader, disappear in the desert, and see the last of them for the present, for it is not our purpose to follow them on this wandering. Everyone knows the adventure and excitement of a gold-field, the thrilling episodes which occur in everyday life where these, usually the scum of the universe, are gathered together.

But Jean Guilbert is no 'prentis hand at the game. They may experience hard luck, they will encounter dangers and perils; but we have no space to describe them here.

Let the years pass while we wait for their return.

Six months—a year.

Two, three, four pass away in slow succession, but still the wanderers return not.

Many steamers come in and out. Travellers arrive and depart; wars, bloodshed, and famine come and pass away.

Five years have gone, and on the very day Jack and Guilbert set out for the diggings, the "Queen of the Orient" arrives once again.

This time she brings another passenger, a man, or rather a wreck of a man, dissipated, wretched, with hollow eyes and sunken cheeks and wild look.

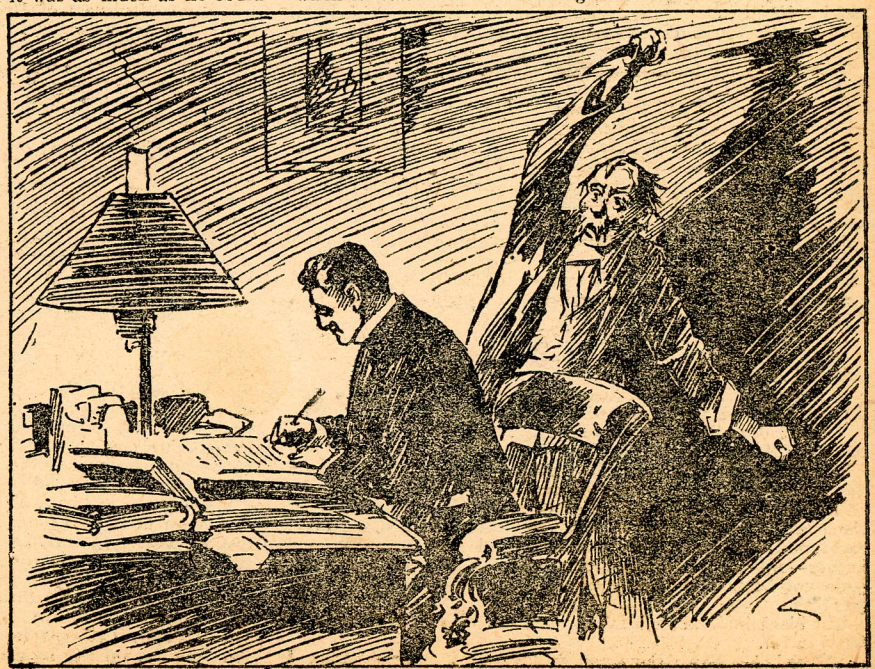
The very night he arrives he makes his way to a den in the lowest part of the city. He is a victim of the opium habit. Under the influence of the drug, he is restored temporarily to something like he might have been once; a look of contentment, enjoyment, even happiness spread over his features, which surely we can recognise.

It is our old acquaintance, without his sleekness and stoutness, Timothy Truffles.

And about this time, too, a band of men arrive from the East, as the other stranger had arrived from the West. Gaunt, bronzed, lean men all of them, pinched from long travelling and small diet. They cheer as they enter the streets, so glad are they to reach fellow-countrymen again.

Foremost are, yes, our two friends, Jack and Guilbert; but how changed is Jack.

Swarthy, big, well-developed, he looks twice the size he did when he started out—a thorough Briton to the core.



A man glides in. With two steps he is behind the chair in which sits Guilbert.

After five years' hard toil they have come back—rich, their dreams fulfilled.

CHAPTER 8.

VENDETTA.

Six months have elapsed since the return of Jack and his friend from the goldfields. In a small, but splendidly-furnished house on the outskirts of Perth they dwell, unable and unwilling to return to the old country just yet.

They are resting, and deciding on their next step, which will probably be a move still more to the eastward.

For the last few days Jean Guilbert has worn one of his old troubled looks—one of those looks of haunting horror, causing him to start, and his eyes to fearfully glance at every footstep.

"You are overworking yourself," said Jack, for he knows that every night Guilbert spends in his study, intent on a book he is writing—a book that shall make a stir in the civilised world, that shall make his name famous. It is a book connected with his life, and in that, and that alone, will probably be found the explanation of the mystery hanging over him.

"Are you going on to-night writing?" says Jack when, after having been out during the evening, they have returned home to bed.

"Yes," says Jean Guilbert. "But don't laugh at me, Jack, if I tell you something. I have a presentiment that my end is not far distant. If I was called suddenly, Jack, as I have no friends in this world, the gold I have is yours—all yours!"

Jack did not speak. He knew too well that Guilbert's instinctive feelings and forebodings were never without just cause. He left him that night, after having shaken hands affectionately. Next day they were to settle more definitely where their next move was to be.

It was night. By the aid of a solitary lamp in the library sat Jean Guilbert—writing. Every now and then he glanced up at a watch before him on the table, and each time he looked it seemed to give him new impetus, for he would start writing faster than ever.

He has not looked up for some time now, so absorbed is he in his work. The red shade of the lamp concentrates the light on the paper before him, and all the remainder of the room is in a half-darkness.

"Click!" The writer goes on. He has not noticed the noise.

Without a single sound, except the ominous click when the latch gave, the door opens, and a man with a ghastly face and a cap drawn low down over his forehead, glides in. His eyes gleam brilliantly, but fiendishly. He leaves not a moment to consider his action; but with two steps is behind the chair in which sits Guilbert. Still the latter is unconscious of the awful presence near him.

A rustle, and a flash! A deep groan!

A stiletto has pierced through Guilbert's back, and he leans backward and rolls on the floor, his hands wildly clutching the air. But the dastardly assassin is not yet satisfied. He gives his victim still another deadly thrust in the chest.

This done, he looks round to escape. The dying man beckons him.

"Go! go! quickly!" he groans. "Stay, and you will pay—the penalty—with your life!"

The murderer wipes his hands and his stiletto upon the table-cloth, and then cautiously creeps away.

For a few moments Guilbert lies where he has fallen. Then, with a laborious and painful effort, he turns over, and commences to crawl to the door.

Jack, asleep upstairs in his room, suddenly awoke with a horrid feeling that someone was bending over him. His hair began to rise on end, for, half awake and half asleep, he heard a scratching at his door, every now and then interrupted by a deep groan.

To spring from the bed and light a candle was but a moment's work, and the next instant he had turned the handle and had looked outside. There was no one there.

A moan came from the floor at his feet. He bent his eyes downwards, and, with a cry of horror, knelt beside the figure.

"Jean! Jean!" he implored wildly. "What is it? Who has done this? Help! help!"

The cry rang out through the deserted house. Servants came hurrying down from above. A policeman came in from the street, having found the front-door open; but before any of them could arrive, Guilbert, with the strength of a dying man, exclaimed: "Jack, if—if you ever—find who was—the real author—of this deed—for my sake—with my last words I entreat—do not harm him in any way—or prosecute him. I trust you!"

The black look on Jack's face vanished. He took his friend's hand in his.

"Thanks! Some day—you will know I am not—what I seem," murmured Guilbert. By this time the policeman had arrived, and one of the servants was despatched outside with his whistle to summon assistance. Another officer arrived, and just in time to hear Jean Guilbert's dying words.

"It was a burglar—I believe," he gasped. "No one here—is implicated in any way. Burn the book I was—writing, Jack!"

He ceased speaking. With his head on Jack's knee, he took our hero's hand, and, with what seemed a murmured prayer, his face grew brighter.

Raising himself up as far as he could, he cried out in a foreign tongue the words "Liberty! Liberty!"

A cold shiver passed through him, and all was over.

Jack reverently placed the body on the floor, and together he and the officers of the law followed the trail of blood down into the library, where further investigations were made.

* * * * * * *

The weeks that followed the cruel murder of Jack's friend brought no fresh light to the case. Everything was shrouded in mystery. Jack did not leave Perth, but intently watched developments. Some strange power kept him there, regardless of his wish to get away from a scene so terrible to his thoughts.

Six months had passed in this way, and then there came, one night, a summons for Jack to attend a death-bed in another quarter of the city.

It was pitch dark and raining heavily, but, having wrapped himself up, our hero followed the servant who had come for him, till the latter stopped at one of the largest houses in the place.

Jack was respectfully but silently ushered in, and though he had a certain vague idea, yet he was by no means prepared for the surprise that awaited him.

Conduoted upstairs, he stopped outside a bedroom-door just in time, as the door opened, to hear a fretful but weak voice say: "Has he not come yet? I cannot last much longer!"

As our hero entered, a man in a sumptuous bed the other side of the apartment looked round at him.

It was Jean Guilbert's double, and Jack could not now tell the face from Jean Guilbert himself. The rich man's face lit up as he caught sight of Jack, and he beckoned him to the bedside.

"I am glad—very glad you have come," he said, in a faint tone, "for I have something of the highest importance to tell you—something that has haunted me, that has chilled my blood, and broken my heart; that has brought me prematurely to my death-bed!"

Jack sat down in the chair by the bedside, and the patient motioned to the attendants to withdraw, which the last of them did, having, however, mixed for the rich man a glass of strong brandy-and-water, of which, as he related the following history, he took frequent sips, that his strength should not give way.

"Listen carefully," he began, "and do not be surprised at anything you may hear. I am known here as Max Varner, merchant. My real name and title is Prince Sergius Lovarni, one of the foremost of Russian nihilists." Jack started, but the sick man continued: "There were two of us, a twin—Sergius and Theodore—sons of the Grand Duke Lovarni Moritzka. We were brought up together, and we roamed about together. Then, for the sake of freedom in our beloved country, we embraced the cause of nihilism." He paused to take a draught of the spirit and water. Then continued, while Jack was growing more and more absorbed in the story.

"The section of the Secret Nihilist Society we joined was one devoted to the most extreme methods. Indeed, the members were anarchists solely. They stopped at nothing in their mad desires for vengeance and the overthrow of the Government of oppression. So infatuated was I that I joined them in everything. My brother Theodore, more calm, reasonable, and less merciless in his methods, stood aloof from many of our plans; but we did not mind that so much, as we knew him to be too honourable to betray us.

"At last, one of our number formed a desperate plan for twenty assassinations. These included the heads of various States and all classes of eminent men, renowned in literature, art, and science. Each one of us was to be pledged to kill a man. My brother at first indignantly denounced this wholesale butchery; but, seeing we were determined, he resorted to more threatening measures, and at last he told us to our faces that he would inform the police of our design the moment the first murder was perpetrated.

"We jeered at him, and told him he dare not, giving, too, a few hints of what he might expect were he to persist in his disloyal attitude to nihilism. The first assassination was accomplished. We received another warning from him. The second murder came off, and then, to our dismay and horror, we found he had carried out his threat and denounced us. That it was an act by which he would gain no profit, he well knew. He would take no reward from Government, but retired abroad, knowing the penalty he would have to reckon with us, and our vengeance, he knew well, would indeed be terrible.

"Most of us managed to escape the vigilance of the police—two were, however, caught and executed. Outside the Russian border, in a town, we held a meeting. Terrible were the denunciations hurled upon the head of my brother. No one knew his whereabouts, not even myself; but it was agreed he must be found and slain. For this purpose all our names were written down and folded up, and put into one hat, and into another hat everyone threw money to the utmost extent of his means, for it would possibly, nay, probably, take years to accomplish the vendetta. The lottery was drawn, and mine was the fatal name. My brother nihilists congratulated me, and shook me by the hand; but I could not see, my vision swam, and I fell insensible. When I came to I was alone in the chamber. A bag of money was in my hand, and a ring was upon my finger—a plain, gold signet, on which was inscribed the single word 'Vendetta.'

"I knew my fate. It was to be that of Cain!

"For years I followed my brother from place to place, but only once did I have the courage to attempt his life myself. It was you, then, that saved his life, and held in check my wavering arm. It was I who tried to bribe you in the tavern in the East End. My brother would not raise his hand against me, but he knew I could treat him as he treated me. Time after time did I bribe murderers and cut-throats to attempt his life. Each time I failed, till at last I met a man more desperate and abandoned than the rest, a man sunk in the last stages of the opium habit. He succeeded."

Sergius Lovarni, for such we have seen was the dying man's true name, gasped. He could not speak much more.

He choked, but having drunk some more of the spirit and water, he raised himself.

"You—you are free," he said to Jack; "we have no vendetta against you. It is ended. Ah, Theodore, my brother. Theo——"

The name caught in his throat, a low gurgle, and his head fell back, and his spirit left him.

Prince Sergius Lovarni was dead.

A quarter of an hour after, Jack Anson stood once more in the cold, wet streets. Looking first up and down, he turned and made his way in the direction of his own house.

Despite the tragic occurrence of the last few months, his heart felt now a strange sense of freedom. He made up his mind to leave Perth at once for his native land, and a great longing rose in his heart as he thought of the girl he had left years ago in London, the golden but merciless city.

All at once, while treading along through the rain through the lowest quarter of the city, his hands in his pockets, and his head bent down, something seemed to leap upon his back, and two thin, cordlike hands clasped him round the throat. He felt himself being strangled; but, with rare presence of mind, he turned round and went back against the wall with crushing force.

The ruse was successful. The hands let go their hold, and the would-be assassin fell heavily to the ground.

Jack knelt down, and beheld, by looking closely, the haggard, ashy, pale face of Timothy Truffles.

"I'm—I'm done for!" groaned the latter. "Give me in charge! I knew he'd blab!"

Jack's eyes lit up.

"Come, out with it! Tell me all you know, and I swear I'll take no proceedings against you!"

"You swear that?" groaned the huddled-up figure. "Well, it don't matter. I'm pretty well done for, as it is. Help me into that house opposite and I'll tell you."

Jack picked him up as if he had been a child, and Truffles, groaning hard, was borne into the house he had mentioned.

Just inside a lantern was flashed in Jack's face, for the house was in darkness.

"It's all right!" groaned Truffles. "Let us pass!"

Recognising the injured man, the proprietor, a mulatto, with something of the Chinaman about him, allowed them to pass inside.

A large saloon, dirty and evil-smelling, reeling with the fumes of opium, opened upon them, round which were ranged straw beds on which reclined the smokers.

"Put me down in the corner," groaned Truffles; "there we can talk without being overheard."

Jack did as he was bid, and Timothy mournfully requested a pipe of opium. This was brought him.

"All I want is for you to let me die in peace," he said. "I'm done for, and I'll tell you all I know."

Jack placed himself to listen intently.

"I was the chap as murdered your pal, as you know." A hasty, fierce expression was on Jack's lips, but he checked himself. "I did it when I was desperate and wanted money, and him you've just seen put me on it. He's gone to answer for what he done, and I'm going too. Your people at home are dead, 'cept Mike, who married your gal."

Jack started up.

"Leastwise, that's what he says. Feel in my pocket, and you'll find his letter."

Yes, there was the letter, and the lines: "If you find our friend John, kindly tell him I've married his old flame Edie."

Seeing the look of agony which crossed Jack's face, Truffles's expression grew more human, even a little pitiable. "Never mind, young feller," he said, "it's only a blind to keep you away, take my word for it. That's all I hev to tell yer. Good-bye."

Jack rose to depart, an aching at his heart.

"Can I do anything more for you?" he said.

"No, thank 'ee. Take my tip, go home and marry the gal. She's all right."

Jack departed, and when he had gone some hot tears began trickling down the opium-smoker's face.

Truffles was but human after all, and in this, his almost last hour, he felt sorry for the pain he had caused.

Next morning, when Jack called to inquire after Truffles, he heard that the sick man had passed away during the night in an opium sleep.

"Home!" murmured Jack. "There is nothing to keep me here. Home and Edith!"

CHAPTER 9.

ENGLAND, HOME, AND BEAUTY.

In a second-rate London street, one bright, spring day, stood a weather-beaten and bronzed but tall and powerfully-built young man, of twenty-four or thereabouts.

He gazes intently upon a closed shop, above which is the name, Jeremiah Anson and Son, provision merchants, wines and spirits, not to be consumed on the premises.

"Why is it shut up?" murmurs Jack, for it is he. "Surely Michael is carrying on the business?"

Then a thought flashed through his brain and made him start.

Turning to a lounger, who stood idly with his hands in his pockets at the kerb, Jack inquired of his relations.

"I've been away some years, he said. "Can you tell me what has become of the Ansons who lived here?"

The man looked him up and down, and as Jack seemed pretty well to do, remarked shortly: "Gorn!"

"Where?" asked Jack.

"'Bove or b'low. Got friends in both places most likely. They've snuffed it long ago!"

"And their son and ward, do you know about them?"

"Young feller doin' time, for seven years, for forgery. Gal, don't know what's become of her. Gorn away."

This was all the information Jack could get, and, having handed the man some money, he walked sadly and thoughtfully away.

Week after week did he search.

Advertisements appeared in the agony columns of every paper, and in every place he thought of he looked for her.

But at last came hope renewed, just when its last spark was beginning to die out. He received a letter. "Call at Pantheon Theatre any evening after performance."

That night he went, and on the stage, as leading lady, he beheld Edith Wilton. At the same moment her eyes, too, were restlessly wandering along the row of faces in the stalls, and she beheld him.

She sent for him between the acts.

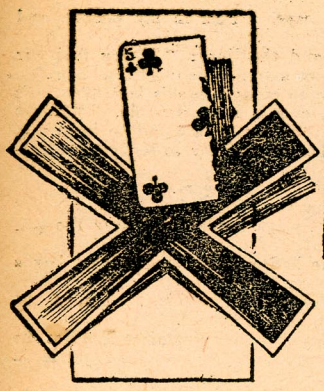
In her own room he clasped her to him. There was no need to assure him of her fidelity. Her heart was his for ever.

"I will leave this life," she whispered, "for though I am successful, I hate it! We will work together elsewhere. I am so glad, Jack, uncle found out your innocence before he died."

"There will be no need to work, dearest," he whispered.

"I have had rough luck, but Providence has been good, and I can claim you as mine now, for the black shadows are dispelled for ever."

THE END.



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 craftly 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 someone 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.

Lamaret is carried to the inn. One day Merrick, who turns out to be Lamaret's son, visits the wounded man, and tells him how he has been deceived in thinking Harry dead.

Lamaret disappears. Harry and Shaggy go to Merrow to visit Mrs. Evans, the old lady who befriended Harry when he escaped from the reformatory. They knock at her door.

[Beginners this week should procure the last number of the UNION JACK, which contains earlier part of following chapter.]

CHAPTER 52 (*continued*).

Shaggy saw his embarrassment, and hastened to the rescue.

"Know where Harry Evison's buried? Should rather think so. My cousin and me——" He indicated Harry.

"Your cousin?" interrupted Angela. "I never knew you had a cousin, Shaggy?"

"Didn't yer? My hi! then you've lost something, Angela. Didn't know that I had a cousin, Harry Hobbs, didn't yer? Can't yer see the family likeness in our hair—auburn, lovely auburn? 'Sweet auburn, loveliest village of the plain,' as the poet says. My cousin's the plain 'un; I'm the beauty."

Angela smiled sadly. Harry quietly nipped him in the arm, but Shaggy did not move a muscle.

"Wonder I never told you about my cousin, Harry Hobbs, of Merrow, Angela," he went on; "but, as you can see for yerself, he isn't much of a fellow to boast about. 'The family scapegrace,' I call him. He'll never set the Thames on fire, unless it's with his hair."

Harry administered another sharp nip to Shaggy, with the same result as before.

"I am sure your cousin is not so bad as you try to make out, Shaggy," said Angela sweetly. "But we were speaking of Harry Evison."

"Ah, yes; Harry Evison!" continued Shaggy. "He's a hoss of another colour. Poor Harry was a nice-looking sort of chap, he was. He didn't give you the cholera when you looked at him, he didn't. I don't wish to be disrespectful to my cousin here, but it's good for people to know the truth sometimes. What I was going to say was, I took my cousin along o' me to poor Harry's funeral. So we ought to know where he's buried. He's buried in Stentham Churchyard."

"Stentham Churchyard!" echoed Angela.

"Yes; but I can't tell you any more about it now. Time for visitors is nearly up, and you haven't spoke to your friend here; so, if you don't mind inviting us one evening to your place, Angela——"

"Come to-night, Shaggy," said Angela earnestly.

"Can't come to-night. My cousin and me are going to the opera," said Shaggy grandly.

"The opera!" echoed Angela.

"Yes; the Italian opera. We're going to hear the primo buffalo, Pauline Anconia. I wish we could take you, too; but our box won't hold more than two. How will to-morrow night suit you?"

"To-morrow night will do," said Angela sadly. She was thinking that if she had lost a dear friend, and had attended that dear friend's funeral, she could not have gone to the theatre immediately after. Both Shaggy and his cousin went down several degrees in her estimation.

"So longi!—good afternoono!—tillo—we meet again—o!" said Shaggy, making a low bow to the amazement of Angela. "I—taliano—you understand—o?"

Peggie's eyes were dancing brightly. She began to think that the newsboy was a most amusing character.

When they had left the hospital, Harry was unusually silent. Shaggy, glancing sideways at his face, noticed that it had become very gloomy.

"Doesn't my I-talian agree with your digestion, or have I offended you, old chap?" asked Shaggy, after they had walked along for some distance in silence.

"Offended me!" said Harry, rousing himself. "I don't think it's possible for you to do that. I was thinking of Angela——"

"Of course, you were," laughed Shaggy. "You think of her pretty often, it strikes me; but why should thinking of her make you look like the outside of an undertaker's shop?"

"Well, I was thinking of that letter we rescued from the rats. If it should ever turn out that Angela is related to that scoundrel who tried to kill my father, and who has escaped from the clutches of the law to work out still further mischief!"

"Nonsense! Don't think of it, Harry. She's too good to

be related to a scoundrel like that. Besides, how can you make Angela Mawker into Angela Lamaret?"

"By the same way that Harry Temple was turned into Harry Evison, and Harry Evison into your cousin, Harry Hobbs. It only means the changing of a name."

"Come, come; we've got enough on our hands without worrying ourselves about that," said Shaggy cheerfully. "Don't forget we're due at the opera to-night. So buck up! We've only got time, don'tcherknow, to go home and put on our dress-suits, don'tcherknow, and dine, dear boy. Time's getting doosid close; so come, along, my bloomin' johnnie, to the operah!—to the operah!"

A couple of hours later, Harry and Shaggy were standing amongst the crowd outside the gallery doors of Her Majesty's Theatre.

There was a tremendous throng of people. Though Pauline Anconia had never appeared before a London audience, she had already created a great sensation at Paris and Vienna; and her fame had preceded her.

Additional interest was centred in the occasion from the fact that she had decided on a remarkably bold step.

She had decided to make her first appearance before the most critical audience in the world in a new opera; and this opera, it was whispered, was by an entirely unknown composer. A step like that was very rare, as it was considered extremely hazardous.

Greater curiosity was aroused by the fact that the name of the unknown found no place on the playbills announcing the production of the new opera and the appearance of Pauline Anconia.

Who was the mysterious unknown? That was the question on everybody's tongue.

CHAPTER 53.

AT THE OPERA—WHAT HARRY OVERHEARD AMONG THE "GODS"—THE PRIMA DONNA.

"Slap-up audience, ain't it, Harry?" whispered Shaggy, when they had secured their places in the gallery, right in the front row.

Harry did not answer. He was drinking in the scene.

He had been on several occasions to the theatre, but never to the opera. It was like a new world to him. The people there were quite a different class, as it seemed to him, to those who attended the theatre.

The prices were twice as much, to begin with, and Harry noticed that he was surrounded by people of much greater refinement than those ordinarily met with in a gallery.

Many of them, in fact, had been unable to obtain seats in any other parts of the house. Most of them had opera-glasses, and Harry could hear, from the conversation going on around him, that these people were thoroughly familiar with every opera and operatic artiste of the day.

He was particularly struck with the languid conversation of a couple of "swells" behind him.

One was a young man of about twenty-eight, with a fair, washed-out type of face, as though he had gone through every form of dissipation, and life had long ceased to provide him with any fresh attraction. The other was a trifle older, darker complexioned, and of a stouter build.

The fair man wore a carefully-curled moustache and Vandyke beard.

"By Jove! There's the guv'nor and Gwen!" said the younger to the elder. "He hadn't the politeness to offer me a place!"

"Because he knew that you would be more in your element among the gods, Forsyth," laughed the other. "Up here, surely one ought to feel himself equal to the highest station in life."

As the latter was speaking, Harry noticed that many opera-glasses were turned to one of the boxes in the second tier above the stage, where an elderly gentleman and a young lady—the latter ablaze with diamonds—had just entered.

"That's the Earl of Beaufoy!" Harry heard a talkative lady next to him exclaim to her husband. "That's his young wife—his third!"

"His third?" exclaimed her husband.

"Yes; don't you remember reading about the marriage in the autumn?"

"In the autumn?" said the man. "It ought to have been a little later—in the winter—December mating with the May-time. But, by Jove! What superb diamonds she seems to be wearing!"

"Yes; the famous Beaufoy diamonds. They are a fortune in themselves. Her ladyship is said to have married the earl for the sake of wearing those diamonds. Ha! The Prince and Princess!"

The whisper travelled round with wondrous speed.

The Prince and Princess of Wales, and other members of their family, had entered the Royal box.

Immediately the orchestra struck up the National Anthem, and the vast audience rose to its feet.

Harry and Shaggy thought they had never witnessed a more impressive spectacle. Then the audience settled down to listen to the overture.

"By Jove! They've nabbed the Prince and Princess! If this opera doesn't go off with a swing, it won't be because it hasn't received patronage in high quarters," said the young man behind Harry, whom his companion had addressed as Forsyth. "Is it the actress or the opera that's fetching the people, Dacre?"

"Partly one—partly the other. Anconia is, of course, the chief draw; but everybody is curious about this new opera."

"I don't care a snap of the fingers about the opera. It's the actress I've come to see; and if she isn't the charmer you have described her, Dacre——"

"Write me down an ass, Forsyth. When I saw her in Vienna last season everybody was raving about her; and, if I mistake not, London will soon be following the example of Vienna."

"Hush!" went round in a subdued whisper.

The overture had concluded, and the curtain rose.

From that moment the audience followed with rapt attention the story of the opera. A brief description of it may not be uninteresting to the reader.

It dealt partly with a realm of fairydom, and partly with a realm of real life. A barbaric prince of an old German principality got lost at night-time in the intricacies of the Black Forest. Here he is sheltered and protected by a lovely fay and her attendant elves. Bit by bit the fay leads him from barbarism to a nobler life.

He goes back to his father's court, just in time to learn of his death. He thereupon becomes King, and, forgetful of the fay, marries the Princess of a powerful court.

Then his troubles really commence. He has to fight battle after battle. A troubadour haunts the camp, and on two occasions the troubadour saves the King's life.

Eventually the troubadour warns him in a song that a rebellion has been going on during his absence from his kingdom which it will require all his energies to suppress.

The King returns to his kingdom, to find that the troubadour's warning is only too true. The rebellion is in full swing; but he makes a still worse discovery—that his wife has been actually engaged in fomenting the rebellion against him.

He suppresses the rebellion with an iron hand; and then, sighing for the simple, happy life he once had in the forest, he resigns his crown, puts on the beggar's gabardine and knapsack, and turns his footsteps in the direction of the forest.

He tramps many weary miles without finding the haunts of fairydom; but at length he hears the tender strains of a song sung to him by the troubadour when he lay ill in camp.

He looks round, but can find no trace of the singer. He follows the strains of the voice, and at length, footsore and weary, he comes once more to the court of the fay. Here he finds that the troubadour and the fay are one; and eventually he dies, at perfect peace and serenely happy in her arms.

Pauline Anconia acted the double part of the fay and the troubadour.

At the moment of her entrance on the stage she was received with a perfect hurricane of applause. As for Harry, he leapt to his feet in his excitement; for he at once recognised in the lovely actress she whom he had seen in the mortuary on that ever-memorable night when he had visited the dead body of Pierre Evison.

"Sit down—sit down!" came angry shouts from people behind.

But so absorbed was Harry in the actress on the stage that he did not hear the shouts. He would have remained standing, in spite of them, had not Shaggy tugged at his coat-tails and pulled him down by might and main.

"Is it her?" asked Shaggy.

"Yes, yes; but—oh, heavens!—listen!"

It was not that the voice of the vocalist was so perfect an instrument that its sweet notes penetrated every part of that vast building; it was not that the melody was so charming that the audience hung enraptured upon every note; it was not that expression and acting were so exquisite that there was perfect harmony between the two.

It was not these things only that had sent a thrill through Harry, and held him riveted to his seat. He had recognised in the song the great vocalist was singing, in spite of the fact that she was rendering it in Italian, the melody he had heard Angela sing on more than one occasion—the melody Lamaret had heard her singing on the night he had killed Pierre Evison.

"The wheel of the world turns round and round,
Those who are uppermost soon may be
Down in the dust, or under the ground,
The King in chains, the serf set free;
Over the track, in sunshine or rain,
It rolls on, over and over again."

"What's wrong, Harry?" asked Shaggy, anxiously.

"Angela's song!" gasped Harry.

At its conclusion the audience vociferously encored it, and she was compelled to repeat the last verse twice over.

It was in the realm of the fays. And from that time till the end of the first act Harry felt himself in another sphere—a sphere of bliss and beauty.

When the curtain descended, the vocalist was called before it; and it was quite evident, thus early in the evening, that the opera would be a great success.

"Well, what do you think of our prima donna, Forsyth?" Harry heard one of the "swells" in the background exclaim.

"Divine—exquisite, Dacre! For once you have not exaggerated in the least. You must get me an introduction. I wonder what Gwen thinks of her. By Jove! I believe she has spied us out!"

The young wife of the old earl had turned her opera-glass in the direction they were not often in the habit of travelling—to the gallery. She kept them attentively fixed upon Forsyth and Dacre.

"We may as well return the compliment," said Forsyth, with some bitterness, as he in turn lifted his opera-glass and directed it to Lady Beaufoy's box.

Instantly Lady Beaufoy lowered her glass, and drew back from the front of the box.

"She has beat a retreat in face of the enemy!" laughed Dacre.

"Yes, by Jove! My dear mother-in-law knows how to snub a fellow when she wants to."

Harry could not help hearing this conversation, for, though it was carried on in a whisper, the two, as we have already explained, were seated immediately behind him.

His mother-in-law! Was it possible that this was a son of the Earl of Beaufoy?

There was no time for further conjecture, however, for at that moment the curtain again ascended.

The second act was no less successful than the first; and so the opera went on triumphantly until its close.

Then shouts were raised for the composer. For a long time there was no response.

At length Pauline came forward, leading a young man, who seemed to shrink from the ordeal he was now called on to confront.

He had a long, almost womanish type of face, clean-shaven like a priest. The hair, long and wavy, of a light chestnut, was swept back, without parting, from a broad, noble forehead.

The hazel eyes were large, inexpressibly tender, inexpressibly mournful. At this, the moment of his triumph, there was no smile in them. He simply bowed, and hastened across the stage, with the lovely vocalist, who had done so much for his opera, as though anxious to escape from the clamour of the audience.

Harry was again clutching at the arm of Shaggy.

"The organist of St. Lazarus, Shaggy!" he cried.

"You don't say so? He's a melancholy-looking sort o' covey, ain't he?"

"Yes; he doesn't look altogether happy, in spite of his great triumph. But, nevertheless, it's a noble face."

"I'm with you there. A man like that couldn't do anything shabby, I know."

"Let's go down, and try to see something of the singer as she comes out of the stage-door," suggested Harry.

Shaggy was perfectly willing. And the two reached the stage-door at the narrow side-entrance while the bulk of the people were only just leaving the theatre.

Quickly as they had descended, however, the gentlemen who had sat in the rear of them were there before them.

They had evidently tried to get an interview with the great singer, for Harry, as he stood for a moment by the door, heard the doorkeeper say:

"I'm very sorry, my lord; but mademoiselle refuses to see anyone."

"Snubbed, by Jove!" said Lord Forsyth, as he came out of the door with his friend.

"Ah, yes," assented Dacre. "That's nothing when you're used to it, dear boy. We must manage things better next time!"

Lord Forsyth hailed a hansom.

"To the Pelican Club," he said.

The two entered the cab and were driven off.

Harry and Shaggy waited some time longer, and presently were rewarded by seeing the vocalist come from the stage-door and enter her carriage. She was closely veiled and cloaked, after the manner Harry had more than once seen her.

She was conducted to her carriage by the organist of St. Lazarus. He bent for a moment over her hand when she had entered the carriage; then the latter was driven rapidly off, and Arthur Mayfield retreated through the stage entrance.

Harry and Shaggy, in turn, retreated—in the direction of their humble lodgings in St. Giles's. Harry determined that he would see Pauline Anconia on the morrow.

CHAPTER 54.

THE GREAT SINGER'S HOME—A LOVER'S PLEA—THE LEGACY OF HATE.

A room adorned with tapestries, ivories, marbles, bronzes, palms, roses, satins, and velvets. The carpet was as soft to the feet as moss. In a gilt cage by the window was a canary, which was pouring forth its glad song to the morning.

Pauline Anconia tossed impatiently to one side a paper she had been reading, and it fell amongst a pile of others on the floor.

"Pah!" she cried, rising to her feet. "How this newspaper criticism stifles one. The praise is as unmerited as the censure; and both are the outcome of ignorance. Ah, sweet birdie"—she rose, and, taking a piece of sugar in her fingers, went to the cage, where the canary was still singing as though, in the exuberance of song, it would burst its throat—"ah, sweet birdie! one true note of yours is worth all those false ones that I have been trying to read. What! silent?" She had placed the sugar in the cage. The song of the singer was hushed. "Ah, birdie! how true to life you are. I give you the sugar of criticism, and—I spoil your song. Ah, me! Ah, me!"

As she stood with her expressive face upturned to the cage, she was more beautiful, if possible, than she had seemed on the stage.

Her figure was only of average height, but it was perfect in contour and form. The oval face—unspoiled by powder or paint—was as clear and expressive as a mirror, in which every thought and feeling found expression. Her eyes were like forget-me-nots. She was dressed in a simple costume of grey, her sole ornament a necklace of pearls, that vied with the whiteness of the neck.

A servant entered at that moment with a card.

Pauline inclined her head to indicate that she was at home, and in a few seconds the maid returned with the visitor—the organist of St. Lazarus.

"Ah, I see, Pauline," he said, with a gentle smile, after he had greeted her, "you have been devouring the papers. I hope their contents will not affect your digestion."

"No, Arthur; it is yours I have been thinking of. Haven't you read——"

"No, indeed; have they been saying anything awful about me?"

"Well, not exactly awful; but it's all so grossly unfair."

"Why?"

"Because, wherever there's anything to be praised in the opera, they praise me. Wherever there's anything to be blamed, they blame you."

"Is that all?" His usually sad face at once filled with sunshine. "Why, there's something in the critics, after all. For the future I shall place more reliance on their judgments."

"That's the way with you, Arthur. I sometimes feel inclined to shake you."

"I wish you would carry out your inclination!" he smiled.

"You're quite indifferent as to what people say of you, or think of you," she went on, without noticing the interjection. "But there's one thing you must know—that your opera was a great success. Whether the critics blame it or praise it, is a matter of no great import. The world will rush to see it. You have placed your foot where I always said you would place it, Arthur—you have placed it firmly on the ladder of fame. You dare not say that you are indifferent to that?"

"But I dare, Pauline. I am indifferent to that; indifferent to everything. Pardon my speaking of a forbidden subject; but I cannot help myself. I am indifferent to everything, save you! I wrote that opera to please you——"

"And I played in it to please you."

"Ah, yes; you are kindness itself. You have the power to make or mar any composer's work, and it was your singing last night which made my opera a success. But I care nothing for success, unless—unless, Pauline, I can share it with you."

"Have I not appealed to you—nay, commanded you—never to speak of that again?" she said sternly. Then her voice softened as she noticed the sudden pallor of his face. She took a step nearer to him, and, placing her hand upon his arm, said pleadingly: "Why, why, Arthur, will you compel me to speak thus harshly?"

"Pardon me, Pauline; I cannot help it. My love for you is killing me. I must speak or die. You say that you love me in return. And yet you will not consent to be my wife. Have pity on me—have pity on me! Why not risk everything—everything—even that awful legacy of hate—the Scarlet Cross?"

"Why, Arthur, because I know that if I were weak enough to consent, you would some day be involved in the curse that is resting on me and all my race. Even the fact that you know

me and speak to me, seems to be dragging the curse nearer to your threshold. You remember that poor lad who met his death at your father's hand?"

"Heavens! yes! Poor Harry Evison!" groaned the organist, covering his face with his hands.

"He never knew—no one knew except his own father and yourself—that he was my cousin. I blame myself night and day for telling you the secret, for see what followed? The poor lad, led by the invisible thread of that fatal curse, entered your father's house. You know the rest—your father shot him."

"Ah, do not speak to me of that, for pity's sake, Pauline!" groaned Arthur. "I would have given my life to have saved the lad's, even though I doubt not my father's story was true. He had entered the house for no good purpose."

"Heaven only knows! Who are we to censure him—we who have never had his trials and temptations?"

"I am not censuring him, Pauline. I can only pity him. Did I not say that I would have given my life rather than that he should have fallen by my father's hand?"

"I know you would. It is because I wish to save you from yourself that I will never consent to become your wife."

"Never?" he mournfully moaned.

"From the moment of knowing you I have brought you nothing but misfortune. Your father discarded you because you were unwise enough to fall in love with me. Then you lost the little fortune your mother left you by investing it in some bogus company, and last of all your father shoots my cousin. I could make the list of fatalities much longer, but it is unnecessary."

"Quite; let me, however, add one item which you have omitted."

"Well?"

"That though disinherited by my father, I have found a richer inheritance than the one I have lost in the friendship of Pauline Anconia. If I have lost one fortune, she has given me something which is far greater—fame. What's that?"

As he spoke, his eye rested upon one of the papers lying on the table, which Pauline had not troubled to read. He pointed to a line—

"SIGN OF THE SCARLET CROSS."

It was a personal paragraph given at the end of the criticism of the opera. After the above striking head-line, it proceeded:

"We are enabled to give a few interesting facts in connection with the composer of the opera which proved such a striking success at Her Majesty's last night. Like most composers, he has had a very chequered career. His father, Richard Mayfield, Esq., J.P., is one of the magistrates for the county of Hampshire. Through a romantic attachment, the son left his father, determined on carving out his own fame and fortune. After a great number of hardships, he at length succeeded in obtaining the appointment of organist of St. Lazarus.

"The great singer, Pauline Anconia, was a frequent attendant at the services at St. Lazarus. She appears to have discovered his genius, and was the first to introduce him to the operatic stage.

"But the one startling fact to which we wish to direct attention is this—Richard Mayfield, Esq., J.P., the father of the young and now famous composer, is the gentleman who shot down a boy-burglar a few week's since. This boy was the youth who was connected with the now celebrated case knows as 'The Sign of the Scarlet Cross.' Could the young composer possibly find a better or more attractive title for his next opera? We make no charge for the suggestion!"

They stood side by side reading the paragraph together.

"You see, Arthur," she said mournfully, "that fatal sign follows us about wherever we turn. It is impossible to escape it."

A servant entered at this moment.

"There's a young man downstairs wishes to see you, miss."

"What name?"

"Henry Hobbs."

"Hobbs—Hobbs!" said Pauline, repeating the name as though she were trying to recollect it. "Did he tell you his business?"

"No, miss; but when I said he couldn't see you unless he told me what his bis'ness was, he said it was most particular, and he must see you. It was to do with the 'Sign of the Scarlet Cross.'"

Pauline exchanged glances with Mr. Mayfield.

"Very well, I will see him, and hear what his business is. Show him in."

The servant went out.

"You heard what she said, Arthur?"

"Yes," he said mournfully.

"You see how true my words were—it is impossible to escape that fatal sign. Henry Hobbs—Henry Hobbs! Where have I heard that name?"

Before she had come to a decision on the point, the door once more opened, and our hero entered the room.

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

WHAT IS HEROISM?

The world will never tire of asking the question, "What is heroism?" Great disasters that are deplorable because of the terrible waste of human life are often of value when they demonstrate the principle that governs brave action in an emergency. The destruction of the battleship "Maine" is an illustration.

The "Birkenhead," the "Victoria," and the "Maine" will, for many decades, afford examples of conspicuous manliness. When Captain Wright, of the "Birkenhead," gave the order for the men to fall into place, they obeyed without a word, and there they stood at silent attention until the vessel heeled over and cast them into the water, which each man knew was teeming with sharks, waiting to devour their victims. To these heroes Napier awarded the palm of self-sacrifice.

The cabin-boy on the "Victoria," refusing to leave the sinking ship—and preferring death, side by side with his admiral on the captain's bridge—who can forget? His devotion illumines one of the saddest blunders in naval history.

The catastrophe that wrecked the "Maine," happening at night, was so sudden, and the convulsion was over in so brief a time, that a chance of displays of heroism seems next to impossible. And yet we learn that in the terrors of that awful scene—when impenetrable steel was rent like porcelain, and human lives by the hundred were hurled into eternity—every surviving man immediately recovered himself and stood to his discipline. Not one comrade was forsaken by another. The last seen of the lost lieutenant was at the turret under his charge, weak and staggering with his wounds.

The marine on duty, true to his habit of service, rushed through a dark passage flooding with water, saluted, and reported that the ship had been blown up, and was sinking. It did not occur to him to save himself until his duty was done. Officers and men, in danger of being swamped with the death-struggle of the ship, rowed round her trying to save life, careless of their own. The captain was the last to leave the vessel. No man sought his safety at the sacrifice of another's, or sought it first.

A lady novelist tells a pathetic incident of the American Civil War. In Helena, Arkansas, she came upon a poor soldier boy near death. "He accepted my offer," she says, "to write a letter to his mother; but, pointing to a comrade in the next bed, said:

"'Write for him first; I can wait.'

"I doubted if he could wait, for already the pallor of death was overshadowing his face, and I urged him, saying:

"'Speak as rapidly as you can, and I will write rapidly; there is time for both letters.'"

But he repeated, "Take him first." The lady reluctantly obeyed the persistent request; but wrote as fast as she could, anxiously watching the dying lad. Noticing that her eyes sought him constantly, he feebly beckoned a nurse to turn his head around, so that the lady might not be disturbed by his whitening face. When she went to his bedside, the lad had passed beyond the need of her services.

In every noble mind the thought of others is the preferred thought—"I serve myself last. I can wait."

FATAL POSSESSIONS.

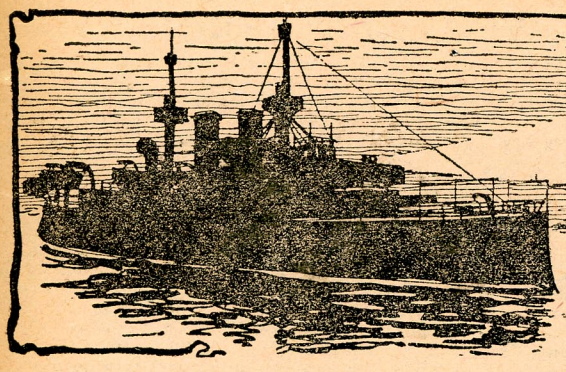
Money is not often regarded by men as a curse. There is, however, one instance in history in which it brought speedy death to its possessors. The recent finding, near Vilno, Russia, of an old military knapsack filled with French gold-pieces coined about the beginning of the century, recalls that instance.

After the destruction of Moscow, the bold conqueror, Napoleon, was compelled to seek safety by a return to the frontier. He himself hurried on ahead of his army. The removal of the war treasure, which at that time consisted of twelve million francs, was entrusted to Marshal Ney. The gold was transported in barrels, and placed on carriages drawn by picked horses.

These horses, though the best in the host, were not able to save the treasure. Napoleon never saw it again. Not far from Vilno the waggons stuck in a defile, and no efforts availed to move them.

Rather than see the treasure in the hands of the Russians, Field-Marshal Ney gave orders to break open the barrels and distribute the money to the returning soldiers as they passed. The command was obeyed. Eagerly the men took the well-earned gold. Some of them threw away all their belongings in order to fill their knapsacks with the yellow coins.

Only a few of those who thus encumbered themselves ever reached the frontier with their gold. That which had been intended for their benefit, proved too heavy a burden. The soldiers perished in the attempt to carry the gold with them.



FROM THE QUARTERDECK.

The Editor's Chat with his Readers.

For next Friday's UNION JACK I have secured a powerful story of life and adventure at Klondyke—"The Mark of the Miner's Hate."

Once again I have to urge upon my good friend "Constant Reader" (every one of him) that if he wishes to be sure of getting his "U. J." every Friday he really must give his newsagent an order to reserve it for him week by week.

The Albert Medal, "Inquirer," is given for gallantry in saving or attempting to save life at sea, and in some cases for similar acts ashore. Here is one of the most notable cases, comprising an act of unprecedented courage:

Toward the end of the year 1897, the British torpedo-boat destroyer "Thrasher," with its mates "Lynx" and "Sunfish," left St. Ives on a passage to Falmouth. On the way the "Thrasher" grounded on a point, causing serious injury to the boilers and the bursting of the main feed-pipe.

The burst pipe instantly filled the stokehold with scalding steam. In it were two stokers, Edward Lynch and James Paul. All the rest of the boat's company were landed on the rocks, but the doubling up of the deck had prevented the egress of the stokers by the starboard hatchway.

There was still a port-hatchway, which was partially closed, and toward this the two men made their way, Lynch in the lead. Directly under the hatchway, and discharging through it, was the break in the steam-pipe. Lynch rushed through it safely, and turned to help his mate Paul.

But an instant convinced him that Paul was unable to follow. Then Lynch lay down on the deck with his head and face in the escaping steam, seized hold of the sinking Paul, and by a remarkable exercise of force and tenacity drew him up on the deck.

Lynch then rose on his feet, but it was observed that he was badly scalded about the head, arms, and upper portion of the body. The surgeon began to apply oil and wool to his burns, but he repelled the attention.

"I'm all right," he exclaimed; "look after my chum! He's very bad!"

He had said nothing about the way he had rescued Paul, but his manly conduct led the surgeon to investigate, and it was ascertained that, in order to rescue his comrade, he had plunged the whole upper part of his body into what was practically a boiling caldron. More than this, it appeared that Lynch had previously sacrificed his own chance of escaping from the stokehold the other way in order to stay with Paul.

In recognition of this act of self-sacrifice and bravery, Lynch was presented with the Albert Medal of the first class, which is given primarily for gallantry in saving or attempting to save life at sea, and, in some cases, for similar acts ashore.

Great Britain is not a military nation, yet our Army cost in 1897 £18,270,000, and our Navy £22,170,000, a total for both arms of the Service of £40,440,000. The expenditure of France in the same year for these two purposes was £35,000,000, and of Germany £31,400,000. Their armies are much greater than that of Great Britain, but their navies are smaller than ours. Probably four-fifths of these enormous aggregates might be saved, were it not for the necessity to protect colonies, to guard frontiers, and to be prepared for numberless dangers. Little wonder that the Czar of Russia, whose standing army is the biggest in the whole world is asking the other nations to call a halt in the spending of millions.

Sergeant Walker, of our army in Northern India, was taken prisoner by the Afridis and kept for six weeks. On rejoining his regiment he was court-martialled for being "absent without leave." The singular experience is somewhat similar to a story told of the Indian War in 1757:

A man-of-war's man, Strahan by name, captured almost single-handed one of the forts on the Hooghly. The fort, which was strongly situated, was besieged by the admiral, and Strahan, during the time of midday repose, wandered off "on his own" in its direction.

Gaining the walls without discovery, he took it into his head to scale a breach made by the cannon of the ships, and on reaching the platform he flourished his cutlass and fired his pistol at "the niggers," shouting "The place is mine!"

The native soldiers attacked him, and he held his own with indomitable pluck till reinforced by one or two other tars who had straggled out of camp and heard his huzzas. The enemy, unprepared for this ill-timed attack, and fearing further invaders, fled from the fort upon the opposite side, leaving twenty cannon and a large store of ammunition.

Much to Strahan's surprise, he was lectured by the admiral for his breach of discipline, and was dismissed with hints of future punishment.

"Well," said Strahan, "if I'm flogged for this here action, I'm blowed if I ever takes another fort as long as I live!"

When the Prime Minister of the Chinese Emperor has a grudge against one of the nobles, he advises his Royal master to pay him a prolonged visit. This visit almost ruins him, for the Emperor usually travels with a retinue of 10,000 persons. A week's visit is likely to drain the host's bank account and drive him to the verge of lunacy.

A sailor reader writes to say that he has often watched the petrel, but he has been very much puzzled as to where it sleeps. Our friend's puzzle has also puzzled many others. Petrels in flocks sleep upon the water at night. Off the Cape of Good Hope on bright moonlight nights, when the weather would permit, one may see through a strong night-glass dozens of the sleeping petrels pass directly under the bows of the ship.

The stormy petrel, in proportion to its size, has immense wing-power, for it is the smallest web-footed bird. It belongs to every sea, and, though seemingly so frail, breasts the utmost fury of the gale, skimming with incredible velocity the trough of the waves, and gliding rapidly over their crests. It does not make a practice of alighting on the water, and seldom rises higher than eight or ten feet above the surface.

Though the petrel is swift, the frigate-bird is far swifter. Seamen generally believe that the frigate-bird can start at daybreak with the trade winds from the coast of Africa and roost the same night upon the American shore. Whether this is a fact has not yet been conclusively determined; but it is certain that this bird is the swiftest of winged creatures, and is able to fly, under favourable circumstances, 200 miles an hour.

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