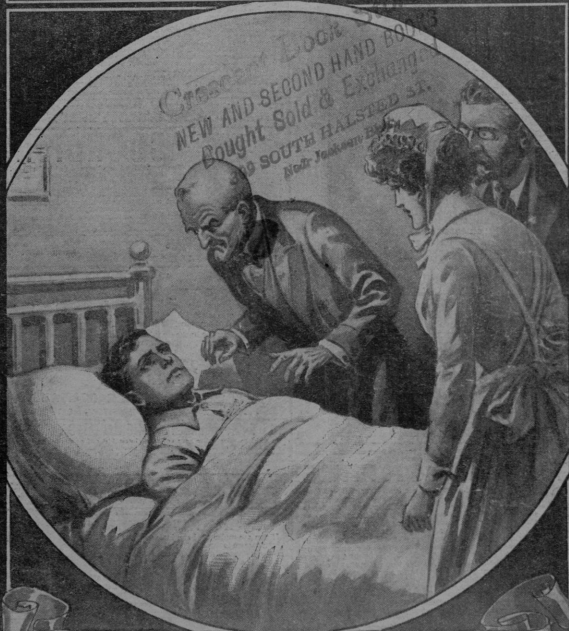


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TINKER'S TERRIBLE TEST.

... A TALE OF ...

SEXTON BLAKE, TINKER AND PROFESSOR KEW.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Kew Makes a Strange Compact.

ABOUT ten o'clock one evening, there turned into one of the dingier side-streets of Pimlico, a curious figure. It was that of a wizened, sloping-shouldered man, dressed in a loose-fitting frock-coat, and wearing a wide-brimmed, tall-hat. The hat was pulled down well over the head, and the head was bent forward so that only a glimpse of the yellow, hairless face could be seen.

The strange-looking individual moved along at a slow pace, with his hands clasped behind his back, and his eyes fixed on the pavement. It seemed as though he was oblivious to his surroundings, but now and again an acute observer might have noted that he turned his head occasionally, and his black, bead-like eyes shot a side-glance over his shoulders.

There was a faint mist hanging over the city that evening, and, although in the better-lighted thoroughfares it had but little effect, here, in the dingier region of Pimlico, the feeble lights from the lamps were hardly able to pierce the mist, with the result that between each lamp was a patch absolutely in darkness.

The man moved on slowly until he found himself walking down a street even narrower than the rest. Again he slackened his pace, moving now at little more than a crawl.

From somewhere in the darkness a scraping of a foot came to his ears, and he halted. A moment later, a burly, thick-shouldered man swung out of the mist, and a big hand was laid on the frock-coated figure's shoulder.

"Can I have a word with you, mister?" a harsh voice said.

The burly fellow was treated to a long, searching look.

"What do you want?"

"You—you're a doctor, ain't you?"

The thin lips of the wizened man lifted in a slow smile.

"Look here, my good fellow," he said. "There's no good of you going on any further with this pantomime. You know exactly who I am. You and that other fellow who is with you, followed me from St. Cyr's Hospital!"

Dusk though it was, the blank dismay on the rough-looking man's face was plainly visible.

"I—I ain't—"

An impatient gesture came from the bird-like man.

"Don't waste my time," the shrill voice snapped. "You know well enough that I am Professor Kew of St. Cyr's. I saw you looting about the gate of the hospital when I left it."

A faint chuckle sounded.

— NEXT WEEK: —

"THE YELLOW OCTOPUS."

A TALE OF BLAKE, WU LING, AND DR. HUXTON RYMER.

"I soon realised that you were following me," the cynical tones went on; "and I led you a long dance, didn't I? Right through the park, and on down Sloane Street. I made you step it out."

The burly man took his cap off, and passed a heavy hand across his brow.

"Right you are, professor," he said. "It strikes me my mate and I have been a pair of blinkin' fools!"

He turned his head and called softly into the darkness:

"Hi, Jerry!"

There was a moment's pause, and another man emerged from the mist. He was leaner and taller than the first-comer, but in dress and appearance they were very much similar. They were obviously "roughs" and their faces, looming in the dusk, were those of men of the lower type.

"'Wot is it, Jem?" the newcomer asked.

The man addressed as Jem nodded towards Professor Kew. "E-'o knew ol' abart us," he said, with a slight, uncomfortable laugh. "'Knew we was follerin' 'im. That's why e led us all this way."

Jerry smothered an oath, for the chase had been a hot one, and the pace set by no means slow at times.

"I wished we was known abart it sooner," he said. "'Ave you told 'im wot 'o's on?"

"'Not yet," said Francis Kew. "'And, as I think I've wasted quite enough of my time in giving you fellows a lesson, you'd better hurry up and tell me what you want."

Jerry took a pace forward and lowered his breath.

"'A pal of ours 'as been—as been—badly 'urt," he said. "'E-'o was playin' 'w' with a revolver and didn't know it was loaded, and it went off. 'We was wondering if you would come and 'ave a look 't 'im."

Kew glanced at the figures for a moment.

"'Why did you select me?" he asked. "'There are thousands of doctors in London who might have attended to your friend."

Jem jerked his fingers towards his companion.

"'It was Jerry as picked on you, sir," he explained. "'E'd a friend who was in St. Cyr's one, and you operated on 'im and cured 'im. 'Jerry swears by you, sir!"

"That's very kind of Jerry," said Kew cynically.

But as he spoke he had not removed his eyes from the two men, and his quick brain was valuing them.

"'Unless you are both criminals I am very much mistaken," Kew thought. "'Criminals of the housebreaking type, I should think."

"'We would pay yer very well for wot you did to our chum," the man went on eagerly.

"'How much?"

There was a lot behind that question, much more than either of the two roughs imagined.

Jerry and his companion consulted together for a moment in low tones, then Jem turned towards Kew.

"'We wouldn't mind givin' yer a hundred quid in gold, so long as you—you didn't tell anyone what was happenin'."

The vulture face of Professor Kew shone in the dusk.

"'A hundred pounds!" he said. "'It would have to be money down before I started."

The two men chuckled.

"'If yer'll come wir us now we'll put it into your hands at once," said Jem.

Kew had been making a swift mental calculation.

If those men were capable of paying a hundred pounds for a simple operation it meant that they were more than well supplied with money. There could be no doubt but what that money had been gained dishonestly. There was a suggestion of mystery about the affair which appealed to Kew, while his cupidity was also aroused.

"'Very well," he said. "'I will come with you. You say the bullet is still in the wound?"

"'Must be, sir," said Jem. "'The hole is there where it went in, but there ain't any 'ole to show that it's come out."

"'I must get my instruments," said Kew. "'I have chambers in Jermyn Street, and I keep them there. One of you had better come with me, and then he can take me to the injured man afterwards."

His brisk, business-like air seemed to satisfy the two rough-looking men.

Again they moved aside, and whispered for a moment, and then it was Jem who moved forward.

"'I'll come along with you, sir," he said, "and Jerry'll go on and get everything ready for yer."

Kew wheeled round, and, accompanied by the tall, slouching figure, he plunged into the maze of streets until at last he reached a wider thoroughfare, and found a taxi. The vehicle took him swiftly up to Jermyn Street, and when he alighted from the taxi, Kew suited himself to find Jem at his heels.

"'You're not taking any risks, my friend," said Kew quietly.

U.J.—No. 525.

The big fellow grinned.

"'Yer might 'ave a telephone," he said, "'and I—I didn't want yer to—talk to anyone."

Kew knew that the anyone Jem referred to was the police, and a faint stirring of humour came into the professor's brain as he went on up the narrow staircase.

Jem little dreamed that the police were just about the last people that Francis Kew would dream of holding communication with.

When he reached his chambers he switched the electric light on, then, while Jem stood in the doorway, Kew drew a small leather bag out of a cupboard and opened it. He selected a case of instruments from the long row of cases on his desk, placed a bottle of disinfectant in the bag and a few rolls of lint and antiseptic wool. Finally, a pair of rubber gloves were added to the contents of the bag, then Kew was ready.

The business-like way in which he had moved about his task had impressed Jem, and there was a certain air of deference about the big fellow as he stood aside, allowing Kew to pass out of the room.

"'There's only one thing I've got to ask yer, professor," he said. "'We'll have to get into a taxi, 'cos it's a long way from 'ere. But when we gets out I'll 'ave ter blindfold yer."

"'Why?"

"'They were passing down the staircase now, and Jem turned his head towards the figure behind him.

"'Cos you're gettin' a hundred pounds for the job, sir," he said, not without a touch of humour, "'that's why. We don't want yer to find the place again."

Any doubts as to the nature of the task that Kew might have had vanished then, but he was quite content to agree to the stipulation.

It was a long journey that they took in the taxi-cab, and it was over the best part of an hour before they came to a halt at the end of an unlighted alley.

Kew had been watching every turn that the taxi gave, and his mind's eye took a quick photograph of the dark street down which they had passed, while down the street Jem touched his companion on the arm, producing a thick handkerchief at the same time.

"'We ain't got very far to go, sir," he said.

He did not know that Kew had been counting the lamp-posts. They had passed eight of them before they halted, and when the bandage had been adjusted over his eyes and Jem had taken his arm, Kew began to count his steps.

First of all the thick-shouldered man led his blindfolded companion across the street, then they turned to the left when they reached the pavement.

Kew deliberately dropped into a little quick pace of about eighteen inches. He counted a hundred before Jem turned from his course, and Kew knew that he had gone fifty yards further down the street. He was turned towards the right then, and the hollow sound of their footsteps told him that they were passing under an archway. This time there were forty paces taken, then again he was turned to the left, and at the end of three paces Jem's voice sounded.

"'There's a stop here, sir."

Kew cleared the obstruction, and found his feet on a wooden passage. He went down it about five or six paces still guided by his companion, then:

"'Stairs now, sir," said Jem.

Kew felt the tread of Kew under him as he climbed, and the way in which the banisters ran told him that it was a circular type of staircase. There were twenty steps in the first flight and eighteen in the second, then he was led across a carpeted landing, and the change of temperature told him that he was in a lighted room.

"'All right, sir," said the voice of Jerry, and the next moment the bandage was slipped from Kew's eyes, and he saw the interior of the chamber into which he had been led.

It was by no means a badly-furnished apartment. There was a mahogany wardrobe and a dressing-table, a big book-case well filled with volumes. In the centre of the apartment stood a wooden bedstead, and by its side was a small desk, on which a shaded lamp stood. There was a figure on the bed, and Kew noted a haggard face watching him from the pillow.

There was no need for Kew to ask if that was his patient. The face was drawn into a mask of pain, and the hands lying on the blankets were clenched and tight.

Jem and Jerry proved themselves efficient assistants in their rough way. Criminal though Kew was, he was a master in the art of surgery, and the grim operation was performed successfully, the bullet being discovered in the wound, the latter bathed and dressed, and the pallid-faced patient settled as comfortably as possible.

The wound was in the back of the shoulder-blade, but Kew did not comment on this, although a quick smile lifted the corners of his lips for a moment as he thought of the explanation that Jem had given him.

By no possibility could that wound have been self-inflicted. It seemed to Jem and Jerry that Kew took an unnecessarily long time over the completion of his task, for they noted that he sounded the man, tapping carefully on the chest, and listening. They did not realize what that meant, and Kew made no effort to enlighten them, but it seemed as though his patient understood, for there was a faint, half-mocking expression in the man's eyes as they met Kew's.

"The whole operation had been carried out in silence, and it was only when it was over that Kew spoke to his iron-nerved patient.

"You have stood it very well," he said.
"The man's face gleamed for a moment.
"I have stood more than that, my dear man," he replied in a faint voice.

It was a cultured, gentlemanly accent, very different to the rough tones of Jem and Jerry. There was a suggestion of refinement about the haggard face, and the mystery of it all came to Kew.

Yet he knew that it was useless to make any inquiries, for the men had evidently made up their minds to keep the matter a secret.

When he had first started his operation, Kew had placed his bag of instruments on the desk by the side of the bed, and the shade of the lamp had been tilted so that the light might fall full on the face of the patient.

After he had washed his hands in hot water, provided for him by Jem, Kew turned to replace his instruments in the bag. He poured a little of the disinfectant out into the basin, and cleaned the polished steel probes in the pincers. As he did so, his keen, black eyes wandered about him, and he saw on the edge of the desk a small book volume.

It was one of the plays of Moliere in French, and it looked as though it had been well-thumbed.

What followed then proved the cunning which Kew had as a second nature. The way in which he dropped the wide wad of cotton-wool over the volume seemed to be quite accidental, but which he picked the wad up again and placed it in the bag, the small volume was concealed in its folds.

He made no attempt to hurry his cleaning operations, and it was only when a growling word came from Jem that Kew hastened to complete his task.

"Ere yer are, sir; I'm much obliged to yer," the big fellow said, holding out a small, weighty bag; "you'll find a 'undred o' the best there. Would yer like to count 'em?"

Kew simply weighed the bag in his hand, then dropped it into his pocket.

"No, that's all right," he said; "I don't think it would pay you to swindle me."

Jem grinned.

"I don't think it would," he agreed.

"And now, if you're ready, sir."

He lifted the folded handkerchief, with a suggestive movement. Kew nodded his head.

"Very well," he returned; "I'm quite ready."

Again the handkerchief was adjusted, and as Kew turned away a voice came to him.

"Thanks very much. Good-bye!"

"Au revoir!" said Kew, with a meaning in his voice that did not escape the patient, for a faint laugh followed him out of the door and along the landing.

It was Jem who accompanied Kew, and he led the professor out through the hollow-sounding archway, turning this time in the opposite direction to which he had come. But if the big fellow hoped to deceive Francis Kew by that trick he was quite mistaken.

The professor did not even trouble to note the turnings now. He had memorised the way by which he had reached the place, and that was sufficient for him.

At the end of five minutes' doubling and turning, Jem came to a halt, and slipped the handkerchief from the bead-like eyes.

Kew found himself standing under a lamp-post, and at the end of the street he saw a lighted thoroughfare.

"You'll be able to find a taxi there, sir," Jem said; "and I think I'll leave you now."

He touched his forehead in a salute.

"I 'opes you'll keep yer word about this affair," he added, a grimmer note sounding in his voice; "'cos if you were to break it—well, it mightn't be too good for yer."

The culture face smiled.

"You need have no fear of my revealing anything of what has happened to the police, my friend," said Kew calmly; "I quite understand that they would be likely to ask some very awkward questions. Good-night!"

He strode off down the street, and Jem stood on the edge of the kerb watching him go. The curious shape of the surgeon made a distinct impression on the ruffian, and he shook his head doubtfully as he watched the vanishing form.

"You may be a professor," he thought; "and may be a big pot in yer way, but if yer ain't one of us now yer jolly soon will be, or yer face believ's yer."

Slipping his hand into his pocket, Jem pulled out a packet of cheap cigarettes, lighted one, then turned on his heel began to stride back into the dusk.

Jem had neither seen nor heard the last of Professor Kew, and he was soon to discover that in many ways it would have been better for the man, racial though he was, had he never set eyes on that culture face.

For as Kew leaned back in the seat of his taxi, and was carried rapidly westward, one thought was running over and over in his mind. It was the result of a discovery he had made as he examined his patient.

"Absolutely in the last stage of it," he muttered to himself; "one of his lungs is completely gone. In less than three months that man will be dead—he is absolutely doomed to die."

The lean head was lowered on the breast, and the long, talon-like fingers were clasped together, while the small, beady eyes were clouded with thought.

"Dead in three months!" Kew repeated; "nothing in this world can save him. I ought to be able to make use of a man like that, he is just the type of fool I require—some one who can carry out my plans and then obligingly vanish!"

A little cackle of laughter sounded.

"A dead man can neither give evidence nor suffer for any crime that he may have done," he mused on. "By heavens, this is an opportunity that I must not miss."

A quick thought came to him and, reaching out, he picked up his bag and opened it. The fold of wadding came beneath his groping fingers, and a few moments he had a small round volume in his hand. There was an electric bulb in the roof of the taxi, and the switch was close to Kew's elbow. He turned the light on, then opened the volume.

On the inside leaf of the cover a name had been written in bold, clear writing.

"Gilbert Fordyce Dykes," he read slowly. "Quite a nice name."

The volume was closed with a snap, and again the bird-like figure leaned back.

"I must find a task for you, Gilbert," the beady-eyed surgeon muttered, half to himself; "there must be something that you can turn your hands to in the brief interval of time that is left to you on earth—something that will be of benefit to you, and most certainly to me."

But what that something was requires another chapter to reveal.

Out of that night's work, Francis Kew had to appear in a new and more sinister light, and a fresh departure in the annals of crime had to be recorded against him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. At Lady Marjory's House.

IN the spacious, well-appointed drawing-room of Lady Marjory Mountjoy's house, a party of people had gathered.

It was early in the afternoon, and the group seemed an animated one.

In the centre of the party, with her regal figure drawn to its full height, Lady Marjory was speaking in her clear, crisp voice.

"I think it a splendid idea," she said; "I feel quite proud of it. I am quite sure that we will get heaps of money for the hospitals, and the idea will be such a novel one that everyone will feel inclined to contribute."

A murmur of approval marked her speech, and turning round slightly, Lady Marjory nodded towards a lean, stooping figure who was seated at the end of the table.

"What is your opinion, Professor Kew?" she asked.

Kew's bird-like features did not move. He had played a very small part in that discussion, contenting himself by sitting there and listening.

"I am quite sure that whatever Lady Marjory undertakes will be a success," he said, in that suave, half-cynical way of his.

Lady Marjory gave him a little arch bow in return for the compliment. Then the group broke up, and everyone began to chatter about what was going to take place.

It had been Lady Marjory's idea, and had certainly got the semblances of something new and original.

She was going to give a garden-party the latter part of the following week at which as many as possible would be invited to attend.

After tea had been served, it was Lady Marjory's idea that a number of ladies, dressed in the garb of hospital nurses, should enter the spacious lawn with a miniature ambulance wagon behind them.

And into this ambulance wagon the guests were to be invited to put just whatever they pleased, either cash or jewels.

And as Lady Marjory was one of the wealthiest hostesses in London, it was not at all probable that her idea would meet with anything else but great success.

The general opinion of the guests gathered in the drawing-room was favourable; and as Kew listened it came to him that here was the very enterprise that he had been seeking. Into that tiny ambulance would be poured quite a considerable booty in the way of money, and even jewels, for it was Lady Marjory's determination that no one should escape.

Kew had been invited to attend the little reception in the drawing-room, and he had been one of the group of committee-men and trustees who had come from the various hospitals.

It was just about five o'clock in the evening when he found himself able to make his adieux, and leave the great house; and as he walked swiftly along through the wide streets his alert brain was turning over the matter that had just been put before him.

"There is not the slightest doubt but that there is something in it," he muttered. "These people will be forced to pay up, and lively, too. By Jove, what a haul that little ambulance will make if I can only get a hold of it."

There was no thought in his callous mind of the needs of the hospitals for which the money was intended.

It was just that the sort of reckless crime that appealed to Kew, and he felt that if he could carry it out, if he could make the treasure of the little ambulance his own, it would be a distinct move forward on the path of crime he had set himself.

And in his usual way, it was necessary that he should have a tool. It was then that Kew decided upon employing the man whom he had last seen stretched on the cot in the dingy bed-room in the East End.

A month had passed since that visit of Kew, and he had made no attempt to go near the man. But he had studied the papers carefully, and read an account of a robbery in which one of the men, in escaping, had been fired at; and it was stated by the man who fired the shot that he distinctly saw the fellow stagger and fall.

In his mind Kew was satisfied that the wounded man whom he had tended, was no one else than the man who had been fired at as he retired from his burglarious mission.

"I will look him up now," the little man muttered to himself; "he must have just about got over his wound, and it ought to be healed. I'll have to get him away from those two confederates of his, for they are no use to me. I recognised that the other man was a gentleman, and it is that type of man that I want to help me now."

Already the glimmerings of a plan by which he hoped to corner the little hoard that would result from Lady Marjory's subscription, had come to him. But it wanted elaborating, and Kew had first of all to find a tool capable of carrying out his instructions. He had also to find a tool who would not be likely to give him away in the event of failure, and the condition of the wounded man—the fact that he was deep in the toils of consumption, and from Kew's examination could only live a few months—seemed to point to him as an ideal person for the purpose.

"I don't suppose he knows he's so near to the grave," the cold-hearted criminal muttered; "and that is all the better

for me. He might not be so ready to help me if he realised that the least shock, the least excess of rage, or fear or pain would give the final closing touch to that already overburdened heart of his. Already, he is little else but a walking corpse. He might as well make himself useful before he goes."

It was on the Wednesday afternoon that Lady Marjory had called her guests together to make her announcement. On the following day, late in the evening, Kew, after leaving St. Crys, proceeded to his house in Maiden Vale. He was only in the house about half an hour, but when he emerged there was a great difference in his appearance. He had discarded his usual frock coat and tall hat, and was now dressed in a sober-looking suit, over which he had slipped a single-breasted coat that was obviously the worse for wear.

It was seldom that Francis Kew troubled to disguise himself, but he was going to a low-class quarter of the great city, a quarter in which frock-coats and tall-hats are mainly conspicuous by their absence.

It was a proof of the wonderful memory of the arch-criminal that without halt or turn he made his way across London, and was dropped at last from the taxi at the street where he and Jem had alighted. As soon as the taxi had gone Kew paced down the street until he reached the lamp-post—the eighth lamp-post down the street—where Kew had been halted and blindfolded. The street was empty, and Kew was able to carry out his movements without being molested.

He crossed the street, then counted his hundred paces. He came to a halt, and glanced towards the houses, and a quick smile crossed the thin lips, when he noted that he was only a few yards out of his reckoning; the archway standing just that distance further down the street.

Pulling the soft cap that he wore a trifle lower over his brow, Kew entered the archway, and once again took up his count.

He was more careful this time, making each pace methodically. The doorway, with its step, was gained, and a touch of Kew's hand found the door open.

With noiseless paces the thin, wizened figure went down the passage, turning finally as he reached the stairs. He climbed to the second landing, and made for the door opposite. It was pitch-dark on the landing, but there was a faint beam of light shining through the keyhole, and, dropping on one knee, Kew glanced into the room. He was able to make out the angle of the bed, and also a portion of the fireplace. There was a fire in the grate, and a chair was drawn up close to it. In the chair was seated a limp figure, and as Kew studied the face of the man he recognised it again.

It was that of the man on whom he had performed the operation. The man whom the fly-leaf of the book had told him was Gilbert Fyfe Dykes.

It was imperative for Kew's plans that he should see Dykes alone, and the reason professor was not sure whether there was anyone else in the room, for his view from the keyhole was a circumscribed one.

Rising to his feet, Kew knocked twice on the door; then, in an alert attitude, drew himself back into the shadow and listened.

Had Jem or Jerry been there he would have heard their heavy footfalls making for the door, and he would at once have beat a hasty retreat. But for a moment there was silence, then he heard a voice call.

"Come in!"

There was a certain refinement about the tones, and Kew, turning the knob of the door, entered.

Gilbert Dykes had raised his head, and the black-shadowed eyes were fixed with a keen scrutiny on the wizened shape of the intruder.

When Kew had passed through the doorway he closed the door behind him, then turned towards the figure of the man in the chair.

"Come in, professor," the quiet voice said.

Kew, despite his assurance, was taken aback for a moment. He had not anticipated that Dykes would recognise him so easily.

"You know me, then, I see?"

The thin, haggard face lifted in a quick smile.

"Recognition is not difficult," said Dykes. "I doubt if there's another man in England with the same type of countenance as yourself."

The vulture face went grim.

"Quite so," said Kew, sauntering across the room. "But I hardly thought that you were in a state to remember me again, whether I saw you last. How is your wound?"

"Quite healed," said Dykes. "Only I'm just a little weak yet. Sit down!"

Kew dropped into the only other chair which the room contained, and for a moment the professor and his host eyed each other just as men do before engaging in a conflict.

"I do not put down your visit to anxiety on my behalf," said Dykes. "What have you come here for?"

Kew realised then the manner of man he had to deal with. Gilbert Fordyce Dykes might be a criminal, might even be wanted by the law, but there was no mistaking that he was a man of education, and it was more than likely that at one time he had moved in good circles.

"I might as well be frank with you," said Kew, in his cold foice; "and, in the first place, I believe that you are implicated in that Goswer Street affair." He shot a searching glance at Dykes, and noted that the haggard face could not quite control itself. "The description that the porter gave tallies exactly with you," the professor went on; "and the position of your wound settles any doubt."

"Well," said Dykes, "that is all very interesting, but what are you getting at?"

"The robbery was a cool and carefully-planned affair," said Kew; "and I congratulate you on it. It was only a piece of

"Why have you chosen me?" Dykes asked. "I can assure you that Jerry and Jem are both expert housebreakers—"

Kew made an impatient gesture.

"You quite mistake me," he said. "I am not of the ordinary burglar type. When I set to work on a thing it must be something worth while, and there is no safe-breaking or dark-lantern methods about my way. In this particular instance I want a gentleman, and you are the man for my purpose."

"What is your plan?" asked Dykes.

"Next Friday afternoon a big garden-party is going to be given at a certain well-known house in the West End. It is to be given in aid of the hospital charities, and the method of collecting subscriptions is going to be a novel one. Instead of the usual cheques and promises, the guests are going to be invited to place money in the shape of notes and gold, or money's worth in personal jewellery in a little toy ambulance that will be wheeled around the grounds. The contents of

THE "U. J." "IRON WALLS OF GREAT BRITAIN" GALLERY.

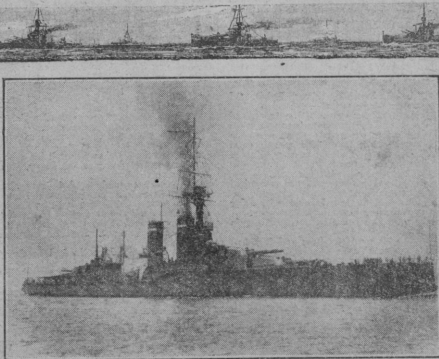


Photo by

[S. Crisp, Southsea.

H.M.S. KING GEORGE V.

This battleship was completed in 1912, and is of the same class as the "Ajax," "Audacious," and "Centurion." Each has a displacement of 23,500 tons, and a speed of 21 knots. I. H. P. 31,000. Their main armaments consist of 10 13.5 inch guns.

NEXT WEEK.

H.M.S. TRUNDERER.

bad luck that allowed you to be winged as you escaped. I want a man to help me with a plan that I have in view, and it appears to me that you are the right man."

"I don't quite understand you," said Dykes.

Kew leaned forward.

"I am also one of the type that prefers to help itself to other people's property," he said slowly. "The world's wealth is so badly distributed, that men such as you and I are entitled to try our hands at adding to our own stores."

It was a cynical and quite false statement, but it did not deceive Dykes.

"You mean that you are a thief?" he said bluntly.

Kew's thin cackle broke out.

"You can put it that way if you like," he put in.

"And you want me to help you in some scheme?"

"I do."

that ambulance is what I am after, for I know that it will be worth at least nine or ten thousand pounds."

"And your plan?"

Kew tilted his head on one side, and his bead-like eyes brightened.

"That must come later," he said. "I do not propose to make a confidant of you until you are out of here, and have agreed to help me."

The emaciated figure in the chair was silent for a moment.

"I suppose this is in the nature of a threat?" he said; "for if I refuse to help you, it means that you will probably give the police the necessary information?"

"I am glad we know each other so well," said Kew grimly. "that idea was certainly in my mind; but, of course, you will not be such a fool as to refuse."

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IN "THE YELLOW OCTOPUS." DO NOT MISS IT!!

"Can you tell me the name of the people whose house we go to?"

"Well, there is no harm in doing that," said Kew. "It is Lady Marjory Mountjoy who is responsible for the party, and it will be at her town house."

Kew was not looking at Dykes as he spoke, and he failed to see the curious light which came into the dark eyes for a moment.

"Lady Marjory Mountjoy," Dykes repeated.

Kew looked up then.

"You know her?"

"I know Lady Marjory Mountjoy very slightly," said the man opposite him. And the meaning of his remark escaped Kew then.

"Here is my address in Jermyn Street," the professor went on. "I will expect you on Sunday evening. By that time I will have the whole of my plans ready, and—"

The creak of a board on the landing outside brought him on the alert. The man in the chair drew a quick breath.

"Look out for yourself," he said. "If it is either Jem or Jerry, I wash my hands of what may happen to you. They have been scared about you ever since they brought you here."

With a cat-like movement Kew had leaped from his chair, and a sudden dart carried him across the room. He had glanced round, but there was no place where he could hide, and, as he reached the opposite side of the room, the lock of the door creaked, and the door opened, allowing the burly, hand-jawed Jerry to appear.

There was no doubt but what the strain of the long hiding from justice had told on the fellow. His face was pallid, and a straggling beard had grown on his chin. His eyes had that quick, fox-like way of turning swiftly which tells of the brain harassed.

"Are yer alright?" he asked, striding towards Dykes. "I 'eard that someone came up the stairs just—"

Kew had pressed himself in the corner of the room, and Jerry had not noticed him. The professor began to move towards the door, but his foot chanced to strike against a stick resting on the wall, and it fell. With a swift snarl Jerry wheeled round, and his eyes blazed as they alighted on the stooping figure in the shabby coat.

"Allo, who are you?" Jerry cried in a thick voice.

The words had hardly left his lips before he had recognised the hooked nose and long, lean chin.

"The professor," Jerry 'aveens!' the broad-shouldered burglar shouted, a quiver of rage running through his taut body.

He leaped across the room, his hands outstretched to grip at the lean, wizen neck of Dykes.

There was no mistaking his purpose. Fear and fury had maddened him, and it was death that was leaping towards the arch-scoundrel crouching against the wall.

With a quick movement, Gilbert Dykes thrust his chair aside, and arose to his feet. The sallow face was intent and eager as he watched the bull-like rush that Jerry made, but no sound came from Dykes.

"I know'd you was a cursed spy!" Jerry roared, as he closed with his puny antagonist.

The thick fingers circled around Kew's wizen neck and tightened there.

But the very touch of the fingers aroused the professor out of the momentary panic that had come to him. As Jerry's face, inflamed and livid, the hard eyes staring out from the low forehead, and the lips, with the straggling beard twitching convulsively, thrust itself forward into Kew's pallid one, the professor's lean fingers darted towards his breast. The hand slid in between the gap of the buttons, and fumbled in the pocket for a moment.

"Ye'll never git out of this place alive!" Jerry hissed.

A convulsive shudder ran through Kew's body as he felt the breath almost choked from him. His face was growing black now, and the bead-like eyes began to protrude. With one last, desperate effort, the professor succeeded in withdrawing the little round steel tube that his talon-like fingers had been searching for.

From his position at the fireplace, Dykes saw the steel flash as Kew swung his hand back. Then, suddenly and swiftly, it was driven forward, and the shining point his deeply into Jerry's thick throat.

The effect of that blow, not by any means a heavy one, was astounding. For, as Kew drew back his hand with the steel tube in it, Jerry seemed to stiffen suddenly, and his muttering voice died away in a whisper.

Breathless with interest, Kew came forward slowly across the room. He saw Kew raise his hand, and disengage the thick fingers that were around his throat. Then, with a quick stoop, the professor slid beneath the outstretched arm of the huge figure, and stepped aside.

Jerry still stood stiff and rigid, arms outstretched, and fingers still crooked as though they were holding the wizen neck.

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"My heavens, what have you done to him?" Dykes breathed, staring aghast at the hulking, motionless form.

Kew, with heaving breast, rested against the wall for a moment, his eyes glittering, and his face a mask of grim triumph.

"What have you done to him?" Dykes asked again.

He was close to Jerry now, and he leaned forward to stare at the man's face. It was set and motionless, but the eyes were wide and staring, and he could hear the breath coming and going through the thick lips.

At the back of the neck, just where the backbone joins the bones of the skull, was a little bead of blood which had oozed from the tiny puncture, and there was a little black, discoloured ring around it.

"I have prevented him from harming me or anyone else!" came the cold, cynical voice of Francis Kew.

"What is the matter with him?" Dykes asked.

—Kew stepped up to the side of the wondering man, and balanced the steel tube between his fingers. Dykes saw then that at one end of the tube were a number of thin needles which ran into the hollow interior.

"Jerry is quite safe," said Kew. "I've only used a certain drug on him that has the peculiar property of numbing the brain-cells for a certain period. It is really a temporary paralysis that he has now. He stepped to the side of the motionless figure, and nodded towards Dykes: "We might as well make him comfortable," he went on. "Help me to take him to the bed."

With Dykes at the other side of the man, Kew led the great figure across the chamber, Jerry moving his legs in a curiously stiff, jerky method that was almost mechanical in its action.

When the hulking fellow was laid prone on the bed, Kew glanced across and met Dykes' eyes.

"I am rather glad that happened," he said. "It will be an object lesson to you."

The lean, stooping figure seemed a sinister, evil shadow as it loomed above the prostrate man.

"I have a short way of dealing with my enemies," said Francis Kew.

With an effort, Dykes removed his eyes from the culture face, and looked down at the heavy, rigid countenance of the man on the bed.

"You have certainly settled Jerry all right," he said; "but, by heavens, I must admit that I thought he was going to settle you! How long will he be like this?"

"In four days' time the effect of the drug will have worn itself away," said Kew; "and until that time he is quite safe to be left as he is. Someone will have to feed him, of course."

He turned away from the bed as though to dismiss the subject.

With a clean handkerchief, Kew carefully wiped the needles on the deadly little weapon; then, pulling a sliding button up, the needles vanished through their small holes, and Kew replaced the steel tube in his pocket.

"It is safer than a revolver," he said, "and much less noisy." He glanced across at Dykes again. "Perhaps you are satisfied now that I am worthy of working for," he went on, "for I promise you that whatever I set out to do I accomplish, and there is no risk attached to it, either for myself or for those who work for me."

His cool, calm manner had its effect on the man opposite him. Kew paced across to the door, and flung it open.

"I shall expect you on Sunday evening, at seven o'clock," the harsh voice said, "and I will give you half an hour's grace. If you are not there by half-past seven, I will know that you do not intend to join me, and I will then see to it that you never join anyone else!"

"Meaning Scotland Yard, I suppose?" said Dykes.

"Exactly," said Professor Kew.

The door closed, and for a long moment the tall figure of

Fordeye Dykes stood rigid in the centre of the room.

"What a small place the world is," the man muttered to himself, with a half-cynical laugh. "Why should it be Lady Marjory Mountjoy's place that I should have to go to?"

He strode across to the window, and looked out into the grimy courtyard, and there was a curious expression in his sunken eyes.

"Marjory," he said, half to himself in a dreaming voice, "I thought I had seen the last of you! But, unless I am very much mistaken, Fate and Francis Kew will see to it that we cross each other's paths again. I wonder what the outcome of it all will be?"

A sudden fit of coughing caught him, and for a long minute his thin frame shook with the fierce convulsions. When the paroxysm had passed, he raised the handkerchief to his lips.

There was a fleck of blood on the white surface, and Fordeye Dykes looked at it from out of his pain-racked eye.

(Continued on page 8.)



"PAY! PAY! PAY! LADIES AND GENTLEMEN," SHE SAID IN HER CLEAR RINGING VOICE.



IN "THE YELLOW OCTOPUS." DO NOT MISS IT!

"I am going to help Kew on Sunday," he said. "I might as well take the risk. It will give me some excitement; but I doubt if Francis Kew, or anyone else in his profession, can help me."

He turned away from the window, and the cold sweat that had come on his forehead was dried away.

"But I don't want to die in prison," the man murmured. "That would be a very exciting finish to a life that has only been in existence for twenty-five years. No, if I am going to die, I'll die with my boots on."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Blake and Tinker Attend the Reception.

"WHAT'S the card, guv'nor?"

Sexton Blake and Tinker were seated at breakfast, and the great detective had been going through his usual morning correspondence, which, as a rule, consisted of letters from various organisations asking the wealthy and well-known detective for subscriptions.

Sexton Blake's charity was well-known in London, and no deserving case was ever neglected by him.

"Oh, a fete of some sort, Tinker," Blake said, handing the gold-edged card to the lad. "There's a letter with it."

The letter was written in a dainty hand, and Blake smiled as he read the name.

"I suppose we'd better go," he said. "You can come in this, Tinker. Here, read it!"

Tinker read the note, which ran as follows:

"Dear Mr. Blake,—I have never had the pleasure of meeting you, but my husband, who is in the War Office, knows you personally, and has given me your address. By the enclosed card you will see that I am having a garden-party next Friday, and there will be a subscription made in aid of the Hospital. I want to make the thing a big success, and I have got rather a novel idea. I don't want cheques or things, but I would like you to bring along something of value in the way of jewellery of your own. The jewellery will be collected after tea, and afterwards it will be sold by auction. Whatever you give must bear your card, and something from such a famous man as yourself will, no doubt, bring quite a big price at the auction. Don't you think this is a cunning idea?"

"Do, please, come, and bring your assistant with you, whom, my husband says, is almost as famous as yourself. Am I mistaken, or is his name really Tinker—Yours sincerely,

"MARJORY MOUNTJOY."

There was a grin on Tinker's face as he returned the note. "That settles it, guv'nor!" he said. "Bang goes my new sleeve-links!"

Blake smiled.

"Yes; I'm afraid they'll have to go, Tinker," he went on. "But anyhow, it's in a good cause, and I know that every penny will go to the hospital."

It was on a Thursday morning that the letter arrived, and Blake promptly sent off an acceptance of the invitation. On the following afternoon, at about half-past three, he and Tinker left the unpretentious house in Baker Street, and, entering a taxi, were driven to the big house in the West End.

There was a crush of vehicles outside the wide gateway that told Blake the affair was going to be a pretty big one. He and Tinker found themselves at last on the spacious lawn where Lady Marjory was receiving her guests.

Blake's and Tinker's names were announced, and the regal-looking woman gave the detective a friendly pressure of the hand, while her splendid eyes rested with a certain amount of curiosity on the handsome face.

"Don't go far away, please, Mr. Blake," she said. "I have always wanted to know you. My husband has told me quite a lot about you."

The lawn outside the house presented an animated appearance, and Blake presently missed Tinker. The young assistant was evidently bent on enjoying himself, and Blake caught sight of the lad chatting away in a merry group.

Lady Marjory was glad when the reception was over, and she sought out a shady place on the lawn, seating herself at a little table, with Blake and a few other ladies and gentlemen around her.

The servants of the house were already beginning to serve tea, when Blake, who had been talking to Lady Marjory, saw the bright, animated face go suddenly pale. A shadow fell across the table, and Lady Marjory arose to her feet.

A tall, thin figure, with haggard face and hollow cheeks, was standing in front of her with outstretched hand. Blake stepped aside, but he could not help hearing the faintly worded greeting that broke from the woman's lips.

"Gilbert—yon!"

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"And why not, Lady Marjory?" the new-comer replied in a quiet, cultured tone. "Aren't you pleased to see me?"

Lady Marjory had caught the man's hand, and was looking with a rapt, almost anxious expression into the emaciated face.

"I hardly recognised you, Gilbert," she said. "What has happened to you? You have altered dreadfully."

"Four years makes a lot of difference to a man, Lady Marjory," came the quiet reply, "although it has made very little difference to you. You are lovelier than ever."

Sexton Blake moved further away then, for he realised that this meeting was not an ordinary one. It seemed as though for the moment Lady Marjory and her companion had forgotten where they were.

A footman came forward bearing a tray with the tea-things, and Blake accepted a cup.

As he raised the cup to his lips he heard the swish of a silk dress, and his host joined him again.

"Did you notice that man who spoke to me, Mr. Blake?" she said, glancing at the keen grey-blue eyes of the detective. "Don't you think that he is—is ill?"

Blake nodded his head.

"He certainly does not look very fit."

Lady Marjory was silent for a moment.

"He is a very old friend of mine, one whom I had lost sight of for years. His appearance just now disturbed me dreadfully. To me it looks as though he has one foot in the grave."

Blake himself had noted the sunken eyes and the thin, bloodless cheeks of the stranger. The great detective had seen too many men to be mistaken in his judgment.

"He is dying of consumption," Blake thought, "but I won't tell you that."

At that moment a little cheer rang out, and from a dense fringe of shrubbery a quaint little group appeared. Four beautiful girls, dressed in the demure costume of a nurse, each with a broad ribbon looped around her slender shoulder, came into view. Behind the quartette of nurses a little ambulance appeared. It was an accurately-made little vehicle. It stood about two feet high, and the body of it was about a foot high by a foot and a half long. The top was painted to represent a canvas cover of an Army Red Cross ambulance, but in the centre of the top a wide slot had been placed.

Behind the vehicle came other two demure-looking nurses, each with a ribbon in her hand. The ribbons were attached to the rear axles of the vehicle, and served to balance it as the little waggon trundled across the smooth turf.

Most of the guests were already aware of what the ambulance was there for, and a big crowd came behind it as it moved across to where Lady Marjory was standing.

The sight of the ambulance seemed to banish Lady Marjory's depression for a moment. She placed her cup and saucer down on the table by her side and stepped forward.

"Pay, pay, pay! ladies and gentlemen!" she said in her clear, ringing tones. "And I will be the first."

With a quick, impulsive movement she drew her rings from her shapely fingers, and cast them, one after another, through the slot into the little vehicle.

There was a touch of personal sacrifice about the action which appealed to the guests, for as Lady Marjory stepped back the crowd closed around the little vehicle, and a perfect torrent of all kinds of jewellery, most of them extremely valuable, were slipped into the receptacle.

It was a splendid ruby pin, the gift of an Indian prince, that Blake fastened to his card and dropped into the slot.

As the ruby pin landed the smiling ladies went, drawing their rapidly increasing loads. Standing by Lady Marjory's side, Blake watched their progress, and there was no doubt about the richness of the harvest they were getting.

The beautiful hostess clapped her hands together, and her face was alight with animation.

"Oh, it's going to be such a success," she said, "and I am so pleased! It means so much for the poor sufferers in the hospitals."

"It is a very worthy thought, Lady Marjory," said Blake, "and deserves to succeed."

The ambulance had now reached the far end of the lawn, and Blake saw it wheel to make its way towards a path that ran around the edge of the shrubbery.

"They are going to take it to a marquee, and the little committee that I've got together will sort out the jewellery; then we're going to have an auction," Lady Marjory explained. "But, of course, we won't have the auction until after everybody's had tea."

A band that had been concealed in one of the outhouses began to play then, and Blake turned away. The hurdy-hurdy had broken up into a number of little groups, and the waiters and footmen were busy attending to their wants.

Blake moved through the throng, halting now and again to exchange a bow and a word with someone who recognised him.

"I wonder where that young rascal has got to," the detective thought. "I didn't see him hand over those gold sleeve-links. Perhaps he's dodging that; but I'll take jolly good care that he pays up!"

Three or four minutes later the ladies who had drawn the ambulance returned to the lawn and joined their parties. Blake had sauntered close to the screen of shrubbery, and was just crossing the path, when he heard the sound of running feet, and, glancing down the path, he saw the portly figure of Sir Arthur Mounjoy running towards him.

The War Office official caught sight of Blake at the same moment, and into the heated face there leaped a flash of relief.

"Blake, Blake! The very man I want!" Sir Arthur broke out, darting up to Blake and catching the detective by the arm. "A terrible thing has happened! By heavens, I don't know what to do, or how I am to explain!"

His broad chest was rising and falling, and he was obviously in great distress.

"What is it, Sir Arthur?" Blake asked, drawing a little further down the path, so that they might be screened from the observation of the guests on the lawn.

"The ambulance!" said Sir Arthur. "We—we opened it just now, and it's—it's empty!"

He swept a hand across his face.

"Absolutely empty!" he said, with the air of a man too dazed to think. "But come, Blake! Thank Heaven I have found you! Come and see for yourself!"

The excited man led the way down the path at a pace that was almost a run, and presently Blake found himself entering a small, striped marquee. There were four or five gentlemen inside, all of them obviously sharing Sir Arthur's feelings. In the centre of the marquee stood the little ambulance, but the top had been removed, and a glance into the interior revealed the fact that it was empty.

"All right, gentlemen," Sir Arthur broke out, running forward with his arm beneath that of Sexton Blake, "here is someone who can help us if such a thing is possible. This is Mr. Sexton Blake, the great detective!"

It seemed as though every man there knew Blake, by repute at least, for they drew aside a little to allow the quiet-looking, alert man to approach the ambulance.

"You see for yourself, Blake," Sir Arthur said, "the thing is absolutely empty! These gentlemen were present here when I prised open the top, and they will bear me out when I say there was nothing inside."

"That is so."

"Never was more astounded in my life!"

Blake's face became keen and set then.

"You say that you prised the top off, Sir Arthur?" Blake began. "Did you require much force to do so?"

Sir Arthur lifted the top and pointed to the marks where the steel chisel had been at work.

"It was meant to be difficult to remove," he said; "we were afraid of it tipping over, you see."

"Well, there's no doubt about its being empty," said Blake, with a smile; "and I am also sure that it was well-filled when it left the lawn."

Sir Arthur shrugged his shoulders in despair.

"Well-filled," he broke out. "Why hang it all, man, I dropped in a pair of diamond sleeve-links that were worth about ninety pounds!"

"My subscription was a diamond-studded cigarette case," another man observed; "and I saw it go through that very slot—"

Blake picked up the top of the ambulance and was examining the slot carefully. He did not say anything when he laid it down again, but he turned towards the entrance to the marquee.

"I'm afraid we'll have to make some inquiries," he said.

"Do you think you could get one of the young ladies who drew the little vehicle to come here?"

One of the committee stepped forward.

"I can do that," he said. "My daughter Clarice was one of them. I'll go and fetch her."

He hurried away down the path and Blake turned towards Sir Arthur.

"Which way did the ambulance come, do you know?" he asked.

There were two paths leading to the marquee, and Sir Arthur seemed to find it difficult to answer the question.

"I think it was the right-hand one," he said at last; "but I wouldn't be sure."

Blake ran his eyes along the gravel, and he noted the narrow lines such as might have been made by the little vehicle, but they led to a dead end on the left.

"I suppose the right-hand path is the most direct one to the lawn?" he said.

"Yes, that is so," said Sir Arthur. "Why do you ask?"

"Because it seems to me as if the ambulance came by the other path," said Blake, pointing to the lines.

The flutter of a dress on the right-hand path heralded the arrival of one of the young ladies. She was still wearing the scarf of blue ribbon, and there was a perplexed look on her fair young face as she halted in front of the group outside the marquee.

"The pater has just told me about what has happened," she said, in a little frightened voice; "but I cannot believe it. I don't understand."

Blake saw that the young girl was obviously frightened, and he set to work to calm her.

"Oh, I suppose we will find there is a very plausible explanation for it," he began; "and, anyhow, I'm sure that no blame can attach itself to you or your friends. But now, if you will help me, I would like you to show me the way that you came with the ambulance after you left the lawn."

The girl turned at once, and it was towards the left-hand path that she headed, with Blake by her side, while Sir Arthur and his silent committee walked on behind her.

The left-hand path wound sharply and, about twenty yards down it Blake noted that there was another fork in the path. This was caused by what was practically a small island of bushes about ten feet in width, by about three times that distance in length.

The girl turned towards the left fork, but just as Blake wheeled to follow her he noted that the tracks of the ambulance ran right down the right branch.

"One moment," he said, coming to a halt; "are you sure that you brought the ambulance along this way?"

The girl stopped.

"Oh, no," she said; "only all the team came this way, but the gentleman who was sent to give us a hand made a mistake and took the other path."

"The gentleman who was sent to give you a hand!" Sir Arthur broke out.

Instantly the quick-witted girl realised that here was the partial solution to the mystery. She came to a halt.

"He met us just at the other end of this clump of trees," she said, "and pushed the ambulance for us. We all went on ahead, but not very far, and we could see him go down the other path. One of us called to him and he met us at the other end."

"Then," said Sexton Blake; "during the brief interval that the unknown gentleman helped you, the trick was accomplished."

"But that's impossible!" the girl cried. "We—we saw him nearly all the time. Look! you can see for yourself the bushes are not very thick."

It was certainly possible to get a glimpse of one path from the other, but the shrubbery was fairly thick, and, here and there, grew a trifling denser.

Blake saw that the red lips of the girl were beginning to tremble, and he placed his hand, with a little kindly touch, on her arm.

"I can assure you that you cannot be blamed for this," he said. "Whoever carried out the trick must have been an accomplished rascal, and must also have had confederates."

"Oh, no," she said. "Dreadful! I will never forgive myself," the girl broke out, white to the lips.

The gentlemen closed round her and began to murmur their sympathy, and gradually the distracted little woman regained her nerve.

"I've only one more question to ask you," Blake said. "You say that the gentleman brought the ambulance round here, and you met him again?"

"Yes. He—he apologised for his stupidity, and we—we laughed at him. Oh, if I'd only known!"

The blue eyes flashed, and the little well-shaped fists were clenched.

"And he seemed a gentleman, too," the girl added. "In fact, he first stopped us to put something in the ambulance. It was a pearl brooch-pin. I remember that quite distinctly."

Her father stepped forward.

"Would you recognise the rascal again, Clarice?" he asked.

"Oh, yes—yes!" his daughter returned.

Sir Arthur glanced at Blake.

"Then it would be better if Clarice went at once and tried to find out if the man is still in the grounds," he said.

"In fact, she might go down to the gates and watch anybody who leaves."

This suggestion was adopted at once, and the young lady in the nurse clothes and her father hurried off to take up their post.

Blake nodded to his companions.

"Are you gentlemen?" he said. "I think we will just try to reconstruct the clever crime."

He led the way around the shrubbery, taking the path on the right. Half-way down he came to a halt and an exclamation broke from his lips.

"That door," he said, pointing to a small wicket gate let into the solid wall. "Where does it lead to?"

It was something like a groan that broke from Sir Arthur's lips.

"That settles it!" he broke out. "I'd forgotten all about that confounded doorway. It leads into a small lane that runs down behind our place. It hasn't been used for years, I believe."

There was a strip of turf, perhaps ten feet wide, dividing the path from the doorway. Sir Arthur made as though to step on the grass, but Blifke touched him by the arm.

"Just a moment, Sir Arthur, please," he said. "The wealthy baronet and his companions halted and watched Blake interestedly. Stooping down, Blake searched about in the grass, then presently he moved off towards the doorway, halting and straightening himself up when he reached there.

"Two men have passed out through this doorway within the last hour," he said; "in fact, they may only have gone a few minutes ago. Look! their tracks are quite clear."

They had not been clear, but as the detective pointed them out, his companions were able to trace the distinct imprints of feet on the bruised grass. Blake knelt down and measured the tracks. One was that made by a foot not more than eight inches long, while the other was nearly twelve. The smaller footprint had made the deeper impression, a point which Blake remained upon.

"It was probably the smaller man who carried away the ambulance," he said; "or rather, I should say, that portion of the ambulance which is portable."

"You—you really think that that is how it was worked?" Sir Arthur asked.

Blake nodded. "It is the only way possible," he returned. "You must remember that the six young ladies were walking along the path on the other side of the clump of bushes. The man who was wheeling the ambulance had no time to stop, much less to break the thing open and take out the contents. Besides, you admit that you found it all you could do to open the thing yourself."

"Then you think that there was a duplicate ambulance made?"

"We will soon be sure about that when we get back to the marquise," Blake said. "I want to examine the door now."

He stepped up to the little wooden barrier and peered at the lock for a moment. It was of the ordinary type; the catch sliding back by means of a small knob. The lock and knob were covered with dust, but as Blake pressed the knob, it yielded to the touch of his fingers and the door opened noiselessly.

"The hinges have been oiled and so has the lock," he said; "and quite recently too. Look! you will notice the oil-stains on the wood."

From the slot in which the catch moved in and out a trickle of oil was oozing. Sir Arthur bent his head and examined the lock for a moment.

"You can see what has happened," he broke out. "That catch was screwed right through, but the screw that held it has been removed."

"Quite so," said Blake, stepping through the doorway.

Here he made another discovery. The keyhole, by which the lock could be operated on from the outside of the door, was filled in, and had evidently been painted over once, for the paint was still undisturbed.

"And all that took place was managed from the inside," Blake went on, pointing towards the sealed keyhole.

A murmur ran round the little knot of watchers.

"Which means that it was either some of our guests or the servants?" said Sir Arthur.

"So it would appear," Blake returned. "However, the main thing is that there is little chance of our finding the perpetrators now. There is no doubt but what they have escaped, the first man evidently making away with the booty, and the other—the rascal who tricked those innocent ladies so cleverly—coming back down the path as soon as he had handed over the ambulance, and following his confederate out through this door."

The terse versatility with which Sexton Blake built up the clever trick made a profound impression on his listeners.

"By Jove! That's splendid!" said Sir Arthur. "I think we must all agree, gentlemen, that Sexton Blake is right. He has made the whole thing appear like a picture in my eye. I can follow the whole rascally thing from beginning to end."

There was a murmur of assent from the group; then Blake, stepping in through the doorway again, closed the door.

"There is nothing more to be found out there," he said—"not for the present, at least. I think we might as well go back to the marquise and—"

His eyes had been resting on the grass as he spoke, and Sir Arthur noticed him stiffen suddenly, as a well-bred pointer might have done.

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"What is it, Blake?" the little baronet asked.

"Look!" said Blake, extending his finger towards the grass which ran along the side of the wall. "Unless I'm mistaken there is a third line of footprints there."

Thanks to the shadow cast by the wall, the grass there was deeper than the rest, and following Blake's extended hand, Sir Arthur and his companions were able to trace another line of footprints. But these did not come to the path, seemingly holding along close to the wall so far as they could be followed by the eye.

"It might be one of the two men," Sir Arthur suggested. Blake stepped forward, and, finding a clear footprint, he measured it.

"It is quite distinct from either of them," he said. "It is just about nine inches. No; I'm afraid there is a third party—a third party who also passed out through that door."

"By heavens!" Sir Arthur rapped out. "It appears to me as if the place was swarming with thieves! Three of them, and one, at least, one of my guests! Good heavens, I'll never get over the disgrace!"

They turned then, and made their way back down the path towards the marquise, leaving the question of the third line of footprints to be settled, Blake little dreaming of the real explanation of their presence, or he might have found a grain of comfort in them.

When they reached the marquise Blake went at once to the ambulance, and first of all picked up the loosened top.

"I had the first hint that the affair was a case of duplicating," he began, "by this." He pointed to the slot. The paint around it was unscratched and smooth. "I happened to know that there must be at least one scratch in the original ambulance," Blake said, "for the point of a ruby pin which I dropped in caught on the wood. And besides that, it was impossible for all those pieces of jewellery to be put in there without dulling the paint a little."

The matter seemed easy enough now that it was explained to them, and the loose top was handed round from man to man.

Blake leaned over the empty receptacle; then, placing one hand on either side of it, he gave it a sharp tug. The body of the thing came away in his hand, revealing the fact that the ambulance consisted of two separate pieces—the framework on which the wheels carried and the body which fitted into a square receptacle in the centre of the frame.

On each corner of the squared-socket clips had been placed to keep the body rigid, but, as Blake had proved, a sharp pull was sufficient to loosen them.

"That settles it," Sir Arthur groaned. "The fellow simply had a duplicate, and was waiting in readiness. As soon as his companion came along he snatched out the jewel-filled one and thrust the empty one back into the catches. The whole affair couldn't have been a matter of seconds."

A blank look passed round the group of perturbed gentlemen, for the neatness and cunning of the clever ruse hinted that it was the work of more than an ordinary brain. "By Jove, Blake, I'm afraid that they've fairly got us!" said Sir Arthur. "And what a tremendous haul they must have made, too!"

They closed around Blake then, eyeing him anxiously, doubtfully.

"Do you think there is any possible chance of catching the brutes?" someone asked.

Blake's alert face set into a grim smile. "There is always a chance of catching everyone, gentlemen," he said. "Even the cleverest criminal finds himself at the end of his tether one day or other."

"By Jove, I'd give a thousand pounds if we could catch them!" Sir Arthur broke out. "It's not so much for my own sake as for the sake of my wife. I don't know how the dickens I'm going to tell her—"

He never completed his remark, for suddenly the wide entrance of the marquise was darkened, and Lady Marjorie, with Clarie behind her, hurried into the tent.

"Oh, Arthur!" she said. "I've heard all about it. What shall we do—what shall we do?"

She seemed to be in a state of feverish excitement—an excitement greater than the incident necessitated. Her face was almost ghastly in its pallor.

Sir Arthur and the rest of the gentlemen tried to soothe her, and gradually Lady Marjorie seemed to recover her nerve slightly.

It was decided then that the guests should be told as quietly as possible, and a general move from the marquise was made.

Sexton Blake had dropped behind, to exchange a word with one of the committee, and when he sauntered down the path he found himself alone for the moment.

On reaching the lawn he noted that the guests were already making their departure, and presently he found himself in a little press of people, passing through the wide drawing-room.

He reached a big, high screen, and as he halted there for a moment, waiting for his turn to pass out through the doorway, a voice came to him:

"I assure you that it could not have been him, Clarice. Promise me that you will not say a word about it to anyone."

It was Lady Marjory's voice, and it was tense with emotion. Interested in spite of himself, Sexton Blake halted for a moment to listen.

"If you assure me, Lady Marjory, it is all right," Clarice's voice returned, "I will not say another word about it."

The surge of people caught Blake up then, and he was carried on through the wide doorway, across the hall, and on down the avenue to where the lines of vehicles were waiting. The scrap of conversation that he had heard, vague though it was, repeated itself again and again in Blake's mind.

"I wonder who it is that Lady Marjory is so anxious about!" he thought. "And why should she ask her friend to keep silent?"

He reached the pavement, and went off down the street for a little way. Sir Arthur had promised to look him up early on the following morning with certain details which Blake had asked of him.

Blake stood quietly watching the groups of guests as they sauntered out of the wide gateway. He was waiting for Tinker, and presently the non-appearance of that youngster began to annoy Blake just a little.

"Hang the young beggar! I won't wait for him any longer!" he said to himself. "He knows the way to Baker Street all right, so he can follow me when he likes. I expect he's got interested with someone, and may have gone off with them."

Which, in its way, was true enough. Tinker had certainly got interested in someone, and had gone off with them. But the "going off" was not of the lad's own volition, and Blake's assistant was, at that very moment, in as tight a hole as ever he had been in his swift life.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Tinker in Trouble.

THE beginning of Tinker's trouble was really caused by the fact of the youngster having forgotten the real object of the garden-party. He had met a youngster whom he knew, and they had got talking about matters sporting, with the result that neither of them noticed the ambulance making its tour of the grounds.

It was only when the little vehicle had been turned down the path by its grey-garbed team of beautiful girls that Tinker caught sight of it.

"My hat!" he said. "I forgot all about that thing. I've got a pair of sleeve-links to put in it. I won't be a moment."

He nodded to his companion and hurried off across the lawn; but the branching pathways confused him, and he lost sight of the ambulance. His search for it brought him to the little island of bushes just as the lean figure of Dykes came darting back along the path.

There was a certain furtive haste about the man which brought Tinker's search to a halt for a moment. He saw Dykes dart across the lawn, open the door, and after a quick glance to right and left, pass through it, pulling the door to behind him.

The way in which the man had made off was sufficient to tell Tinker that something out of the ordinary had happened, and, keeping close to the side of the wall, the lad hurried along it until he reached the doorway. A moment's examination enabled him to open the door, and he thrust his head out cautiously.

He was just in time to see a man wheeling a small hand-barrow on which a square object was placed, go round a bend in the lane. About twenty yards away from the man was the tall figure of Dykes in his correct morning-coat and tall hat.

Tinker had another glimpse at the barrow as it turned the corner, and he noticed that a big piece of sackcloth had been placed across the object on it. A few moments later the barrow and the man following it had vanished. Then Tinker slipped out into the lane and followed.

The youngster had no idea of what had happened, but there was something suspicious about the affair, and Tinker's quick detective instincts were aroused at once.

"That fellow was evidently afraid of being seen," he

thought, "and was jolly glad to get away. I wonder what the deacons it means?"

The only way to find that out was by following, and this Tinker did.

Any doubts that he might have had about the association of the man with the barrow and the well-dressed figure behind him were speedily disappearing as the chase went on.

The man trundling the barrow stuck to his task steadily, pushing the light structure on down the streets. He never looked around, but the figure in the morning-coat was always within sight of him, and, whichever direction the barrow turned in, the tall figure followed suit.

It was only when he crossed the traffic-filled thoroughfare beyond Hyde Park, and went on up Edgware Road, that Tinker began to appreciate the fact that he was in for a long chase.

"This is getting interesting," he thought, as he sauntered along, perhaps a hundred yards behind Dykes. "I wonder what the deuce is that fellow up to?"

Edgware Road is a long thoroughfare. Tinker was beginning to feel just a little tired before he reached the end of it. But the barrow was still moving on, and presently it turned into a quieter street, vanishing from Tinker's view.



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The youngster quickened his step, and reached the corner just in time to see the barrow disappearing down narrow lane. The man in the morning-coat had now dropped all pretence of disinterestedness, and was walking along beside the individual pushing the barrow.

"It looks as if I'd come to the end of my chase at last," said Tinker, as he started off down the street.

He was sauntering along on the opposite side of the pavement, and as he reached the gap of the narrow lane he looked down it. He might sight of a number of sheds, evidently used as storerooms. Outside one of them the barrow was standing, but its load and the men had vanished. The open door opposite the barrow indicated to Tinker where they had gone to; and the lad sauntered on, his mind busy with the new problem.

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IN "THE YELLOW OCTOPUS," DO NOT MISS IT!

He had taken a careful mental note of the position of the shed, but he knew that it was too risky to go down that lane at the moment. There might have been another opening into the place, but Tinker was not going to risk a search.

He reached the other end of the street, and came to a halt. He was in something of a quandary, and, while his mind was still tackling the problem, it was solved for him by the appearance of the two figures of the men he had followed.

They both came out of the lane and turned up the street, moving off at a quick pace.

Tinker had slid into the corner, and it was well for him that he had done so, for he saw that he taller of the two had every now and again looked back, as though afraid of being followed.

"It would give the game away if I appeared now," Tinker muttered. "He has evidently got suspicious. I'll have to let them go."

Had Tinker been aware of what had really happened, it is very likely that he would have made an attempt to track the men; but, of course, he had no idea as to the valuable contents of the square-shaped package in its canvas covering.

So the lad waited until the two figures had vanished around the far end of the street; then, moving out from his hiding-place, Tinker went swiftly down the street, and turned into the lane. The barrow had also disappeared now; but the lad's memory was a good one, and he entered the cobble-paved lane, passing close until he came to a halt, one of the stores. Two narrow tracks running up to the doorway indicated that his judgment was not at fault.

"They have put the barrow in here as well," he decided, approaching the wide double door. "I must have a look inside."

The doors were fastened by a hasp and padlock, and the padlock was a modern, well-constructed affair.

"There would be no chance of picking it with a bent nail," Tinker thought.

Above the wide doorway was a square opening, leading evidently into the loft. Above the gap hung a wooden arm, at the end of which a rusted block hung.

"I might be able to get in there if I could find a rope," said Tinker, glancing around him.

He went on down the lane, and presently, in a narrow passage, between two sheds, he found what is a common object in places of that type—a length of frayed rope.

It had evidently once been tied around a packing-case, for it was knotted and twisted together; but Tinker picked up the tangled heap, and set to work to unravel it.

At the end of ten minutes' work he had a length of rope, about twenty feet in all, which, although by no means very presentable, was strong enough to bear his weight.

All this had taken some time, and the first signs of dusk were settling as Tinker made his way back to the store again.

He had made a wide loop on one end of the rope, and, after half a dozen abortive efforts, the youngster succeeded in slinging the loop over the thick beam. Tinker worked it along the beam until it was close to the wall; then, after swinging on the rope to test its strength, the lad began to climb.

He climbed hand over hand, with his feet hanging limply beneath him, and the rope hardly moved as he swung upwards. A minute later his foot was on the ledge of the entrance to the loft, and a pressure against one of the wooden doors saw it give.

Slipping the noose from the wooden arm, Tinker gathered the rope into a neat coil, and deposited it on the floor of the loft close to the doors. Then he closed the gap behind him, and, moving cautiously now—for the loft was practically in darkness—he made his way across it to where a black square in the floor indicated the presence of a trapdoor.

The trapdoor was close to the back wall of the store, and to the wall itself a wooden ladder had been attached as a means of access to the loft. Tinker swung on to the wooden rungs, and dropped swiftly through the trap, to find himself in the store.

Sufficient light was coming through the gap of the wide entrance to allow the youngster to make out the various objects in the narrow space. The barrow stood immediately inside the doorway, while on the left there ran a long bench. On the bench stood the square package, and the canvas wrapping was still adjusted on it. Beneath the bench stood several square, red-painted tins, which Tinker recognised at once as being the receptacles in which petrol is retailed.

There was a tang of the volatile spirit in the air, and it was fairly evident that the store was used either as a garage or as a place for keeping motor-car accessories.

"Perhaps I've come on a wild-goose chase, after all," Tinker thought, for there was certainly nothing very suspicious about the look of the place.

He stepped up to the bench, and reached the canvas-covered package. He noticed now that the canvas was in reality a

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huge sack, such as forage is carried in, and the square-shaped object had evidently been dropped inside it.

Lifting one corner of the sack, Tinker pulled it back, revealing a glimpse of what it contained.

"Good Scott!" the youngster broke out. "It's the body of the ambulance!"

With quickened interest now, he tugged the light, square-shaped body out of its receptacle, and lifted it. In doing so he shook it slightly, and he felt its contents move.

Dropping it on the bench again, Tinker peered through the gap in the top, and, dark though it was, he was able to see the gleam of glittering gems and jewellery.

"By Jings! it's a case after all!" he broke out. "These fellows have collared the whole of the jewellery, and taken the ambulance with them, too! I wonder how the deuce they managed that?"

So interested was he in his discovery that for the moment Tinker was oblivious to his surroundings. He lifted the box again, and turned towards the doorway, intending to carry it nearer to the light, so that he might make a closer inspection. But as he turned away from the bench a faint creak came to his ears, and, with a quick start of alarm, the youngster whipped round.

In the back wall of the stores, close to where the ladder ran up through the trapdoor into the loft, a door, which Tinker had not noticed before, had opened, and framed in it was a wizened, stooping shape.

The whole scene leaped into Tinker's eyes like a flash. He heard a quick, angry exclamation; then the figure in the doorway leaped forward, and a long, thin arm was raised.

Tinker caught the flash of steel, and, realising his danger, the lad dropped his burden and made a lurch forward.

Phip!

The little, tense explosion of compressed air sounded, and something sharp and stinging buried itself in the youngster's cheek.

With a cry of pain, Tinker raised his hand and scratched the little, wool-tufted dart out of his flesh, casting it away from him; but even as he did so he felt a cold, numbing sensation run like an icy tide through his tense young limbs.

With a mad effort the plucky lad tried to reach the menacing, evil figure standing in front of the doorway. Tinker's tottering run carried him half-way in his journey; then the swift drug completed its task, and, with fingers that groped vainly for a hold, the lithe, active figure of the young assistant fell face forward almost at Francis Kew's feet.

"Jules! Quick!"

The sound of hurrying feet came, and then, in through the opened doorway, darted the stocky figure of the man who had been pushing the barrow. It was Professor Kew's chauffeur, and as his eyes alighted on the prostrate figure at his master's feet, a thin gasp of astonishment broke from Jules' lips.

Kew drew aside, and folded his arms across his narrow chest.

"You blundering fool!" he broke out. "Is this how you do your work? By heavens, it is well for me that I insisted on coming here at once!"

"But, monsieur—"

"What is the use of buts?" Kew blazed. "They will not explain the presence of this fellow. I tell you I only arrived here in the nick of time."

His anger was terrible to witness, and Jules cowered away from the rage in the cold, vulture-like face. After a moment Kew seemed to master his passion then, stooping down, he caught at Tinker's shoulder, and, with a quick pull, turned the youngster's unconscious body over.

The lad's white, stark face stared up at him, and Jules saw his master start, peer closer for a moment, then a thin breath came from the bloodless lips.

"Tinker!" Kew broke out. "By heavens! Can his master know what has happened?"

He straightened up sharply and glanced around him, with the sidelong glance of a bird of prey. There was just a trace of fear in the crouching figure as it turned its head from side to side.

"The loft!" Kew broke out, in a savage whisper. "Quick! Jules, see if anyone is there!"

With a bound the chauffeur reached the ladder and shinned up it, until his head was above the level of the floor.

"There is no one here, monsieur," he said.

"You are sure?"

"Yes, monsieur."

At that moment a double knock sounded on the wide doorway of the shed, bringing Kew round like a flash.

"That ought to be Dykes," he murmured; "but I must make sure."

A swift run saw him across the stores, and he applied his black, bead-like eyes to the narrow gap between the doors.

"All right, Dykes," he said, with a breath of relief; "come in!"

The tall man had gone round by the lane in order to assure himself that there was no one spying. As the door opened and Dykes entered, he caught sight of the figure of Tinker lying prone on the floor.

"Good Heavens! Who's that?" he asked.
Kew's face was a study of remorseless anger.
"That is someone who will have to pay dearly for his temerity," he said. "I have met him before, him and his master; but this is the first time that I have ever had a chance of getting him as he is now, helpless."

In a few words Kew explained to Dykes the discovery he had made, and just as he completed, Jules dropped down from the loft with the length of knotted rope over his shoulders.

"In quick, voluble French the chauffeur told where he had found the rope, and what it implied.
"Yes, that's about it," said Kew; "he must have got in by way of the loft. But by what witchcraft did he find out that the ambulance was here, and how were his suspicions aroused?"

"It was that question which tormented the keen brain of Kew, for in it he saw the implacable hand of his inveterate enemy, Sexton Blake.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Dykes, glancing down at the pallid face of Tinker. "I never saw him before in my life. Is he dead?"

Kew shook his head.
"Not yet," he returned grimly; "but he is quite safe, and will remain so until I find a means of disposing of him."

His small eyes were full of a fierce satisfaction as he glanced up at Dykes.

"I must find out first how he came here, and who sent him," said Kew. "I want to know if his discovery was the result of an accident, or otherwise. If he was sent here by his master, Sexton Blake, it means that our plans, by some way or other, have been found out."

"Oh, impossible!" Dykes broke out. "How could they be? Everything came off without a hitch."

His haggard face twitched for a moment.

"There wasn't even the slightest excitement in it," he said slowly; "it was just as though I was robbing an—an old friend. One who I trust is. If he was sent here by his master, you're getting sentimental, and this is not the time for that. I have first of all got to dispose of this fellow, and I dare not do that until I know how he came to find this place.

"I'm sure it was only an accident," Dykes said "in fact, he may have followed us. I told your man Jules, that I felt someone was tracking us. It was just an instinct I had, and I feel sure that I was right."

"Oh, we'll soon find out!" said Kew. "And, meanwhile, this young fool is quite safe here."

"You mean to leave him as he is?" Dykes asked, horrified. A low chuckle broke from Kew's lips.

"Why not?" he returned. "He will not move hand or foot for the next forty-eight hours, and by that time I shall know the truth."

"And if you find that no one is aware of what has happened to him?" Dykes put in.

The cold, culture-face nodded, and the small eyes took on a fiendish glare.

"If I find that out I will see to it that he never tells his story to anyone," said Francis Kew.

He turned towards Jules and nodded.
"You can bring the swag along now," he said, "and leave everything else here just as it is."

The chauffeur picked up the little receptacle with its precious contents, and went off through the narrow doorway and beckoned to Dykes.

"Come along!" he said. "I am anxious to see what sort of haul we have made."

To reach the doorway Dykes had to pass the rigid figure of the lad, and suddenly, with a muttered word, the haggard-faced man came to a halt.

"No, I'm hanged if I can leave this chap like this!" he said, swiftly. "I'm not quite such a merciless beast as all that. Just wait a moment, and I'll make the poor beggar a little more comfortable."

Kew had made an impatient step forward, but it came to him that it would be better for him to fall in with his confederate's suggestion, so, with a cold smile on his lips, the wizened, bird-like scoundrel leaned against the doorway and watched Dykes at work.

There were a heap of sacks in one corner of the store, and these Dykes gathered together, arranging them in a thick pad, and placing them along the centre of the barrow. On this rude support he placed Tinker, propping the lad's limp head upon a folded sack.

"Very pretty!" Kew sneered. "Are you quite finished?" Dykes came across the store slowly.

"Yes," he said, "I'm quite finished, Kew. But there's

one more thing I've got to say to you. I took a hand in this scheme of yours on the assurance that there would be no blood spilt."

The fallen face twitched for a moment.
"I have fallen low enough, Heaven knows," said Dykes, in a tense, bitter tone; "even to the extent of stealing from my own friend. But I have never been guilty of murder, and have never been associated with anyone guilty of it."

He glanced at Kew, and there was a meaning light in his deep eyes.

"The only being I have ever killed," he ended, "is Gilbert Fordyce Dykes, and that is not so much murder as suicide!"

Francis Kew was sufficiently keen to see that the tall man, capable too though he had proved himself, had a will of his own.

There was a moment's silence, then the professor shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said, "I will tell you what I can promise. That young fool there has nothing to fear from me personally, and whatever his fate may be, I will take no active part in it, and neither will you. Does that content your scruples?"

Dykes nodded.

"It does," he said, "so long as neither you nor I are guilty of harming this youngster, I am quite content."

He was soon to learn the subtle villainy of the lean, wizened rascal who had made his promise so glibly.

For in his heart of hearts Francis Kew had already sentenced Tinker, and was only awaiting to find out the truth about the lad's appearance, to carry the sentence out. And the sentence was death.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. The Next Morning.

AT ten o'clock on the morning following the garden party, Sexton Blake was seated in his quiet consulting-room in Baker Street. There was an unusually thoughtful expression on the clean-shaven face, and the steady eyes were just a little troubled.

Sexton Blake had sat up late on the previous night waiting for Tinker to reappear. But the lad had not yet put in an appearance, and knowing his young assistant's ways, Blake began to feel that something must have happened to the lad. It was very unusual for Tinker to stay away all night, and even when he did do so, he always made it a point to communicate with Blake, usually by telephone.

"I hope he hasn't got into any trouble," the detective muttered; "he always seems to be getting into some sort of scrape or other."

There was a deep and abiding bond of affection between the solitary detective and his young friend. They had been together so long, had been in so many tight corners, had shared in triumphs and failures, that Blake always felt uneasy and depressed when Tinker was absent.

The fertile young brain of the assistant had often been of great help to him, a fact which the great detective was the first to admit.

"I'll give him until lunch-time," Blake thought; "then I'll start in search for him."

There was an uneasy feeling at the back of his mind that all was not well with Tinker. It was just one of those premonitions that come to a man which he can neither explain nor control.

A knock at the door of the consulting-room aroused him from his musings, and he glanced up. The old landlady who attended to his and Tinker's wants, bustled into the room with a card in her hand.

"The gentleman says he has an appointment, Mr. Blake," she said, holding out the card.

It was Sir Arthur Mountjoy, and Blake asked the landlady to show him in.

The War Office official's healthy face was just a trifle pale, and there was a certain nervous excitement about his appearance that told Blake the baronet was still very much perturbed about what had happened.

"I—I suppose you haven't found out anything, Blake?" was Sir Arthur's first query.

Blake smiled quietly.

"I haven't had very much time, Sir Arthur," he said. "I'm afraid, however, that you will have to remove your objection to making it a Scotland Yard case. It seems to me that the rascals have collared the booty all right, and the only way of tracing it now is by the usual channels."

"And these?"

"You will first of all have to get a list of the various pieces of jewellery, or at least, as many of them as you can. You can do that, of course, by communicating with the guests, and asking them to let you have a description of their personal gifts."

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Sir Arthur flung up his well-shaped hands in a gesture of despair.

"But, my dear Blake, that would be a terribly long job," he protested; "and, as a matter of fact, I doubt if we'd ever get a complete list. You see, in a great many instances, people came along and brought friends with them whom neither Lady Marjory nor myself knew. It would be quite impossible for us to get into touch with these people."

"That is so," said Blake quietly; "and I quite appreciate your difficulty."

"As a matter of fact," Sir Arthur went on, "I would rather do anything than allow it to get into the papers. I'm a fairly wealthy man, as you know, and Lady Marjory and I have been discussing it this morning. She suggested that I pay to the hospital charities a sum which we considered would cover the probable result of selling the jewellery."

"But that is a tremendous sacrifice, Sir Arthur," he said. "I don't think anybody could expect you to do that."

The baronet shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it was really Lady Marjory's idea, and to tell you the truth, she has offered to stand the whole loss herself. She has a small income of her own, and it is realisable. In fact, she almost begged me to allow her to do it; but, of course, I wouldn't listen to that."

Blake was silent for a moment. The information that he had just heard awakened a new train of thought in his mind, and the question formed in his brain: Why was Lady Marjory so anxious to shield the rascals who had tricked her?

"I think it is very foolish of Lady Marjory," Blake said aloud; "and it is practically conspiring to defeat the ends of justice, you know. You must not forget that these men are rascals, and have been guilty of a crime."

"That's exactly what I said to my wife," Sir Arthur broke out; "but then, you see, Blake, it is the publicity that she dreads. The idea of the collection was hers, and she feels in a sense responsible for it."

Blake leaned forward.

"I never care to advise a husband where his wife is concerned," he said slowly; "but in this case, Sir Arthur, I think I should be very chary of doing as you suggest."

The baronet laughed.

"Of course, I don't want to throw away that huge sum of money," he admitted, "and I hope that you will do your best to find the brutes. But it is the Scotland Yard business that I am against. I don't want the thing in the papers, and everybody talking about it."

"Very well," said Blake. "If you refuse to put it into the hands of the police, of course, I cannot force you to do so."

"But I want you to go on with it, you know," the War Office official cried; "and, candidly, Blake, I feel that you can do more than any police. I have been congratulating myself about your presence at the party ever since."

He slipped his hand into his pocket, and brought out a silver-bound notebook, which he opened, turning the pages swiftly.

"By the way," Sir Arthur said, "I have brought the information you asked for. The firm who supplied us with the little ambulance is Thornton, Blere & Co. It is only a small place, and their offices and workshops are in Amarsatz Street, Soho."

"You have not communicated with them in any way, I hope?" Blake said.

"Oh, no! As a matter of fact, I did not even know who they were until I asked my wife this morning."

He glanced at the list again.

"You also asked me to find out who the firm was who did the catering for us. It was Ligat's."

Blake had drawn a pad of paper forward, and taken the addresses down, then Sir Arthur arose to his feet.

"I'm going down to the War Office now," he went on, with a wry smile; "although I must admit that I don't feel very much like work. Please 'phone me as soon as you find out anything."

Blake pushed back his seat from the desk and arose.

As Sir Arthur held out his hand, he glanced into the detective's face.

"You seem rather troubled this morning, too, Blake," he said. "What's the matter? It's not my case, I hope?"

"Not quite," said Blake, "but, as a matter of fact, I am just a little worried. My assistant, Tinker, has not turned up yet!"

"Oh, I remember Tinker!" said Sir Arthur quickly. "A bright-eyed, keen youngster. I shouldn't worry about him, he looks well able to take care of himself."

"He was at your party yesterday, with me," said Blake;

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"but we lost sight of each other just before tea, and I did not see him again."

"Did you wait for him?"

"Not very long," Blake admitted. "Under ordinary circumstances I wouldn't trouble about him, but Tinker has an uncanny knack of getting himself into tight corners, Sir Arthur, and I have a strong feeling that by some means or other he has been singled again."

"By Jove!" the baronet broke out. "Do you think that he may have found out something about these thieving rascals?"

Blake shook his head.

"I can hardly venture an opinion on that," he returned. "It would be pure guesswork. All I know is that he has not turned up yet, and knowing how regular he usually is, I am anxious about him."

"Well, you might let me know when he turns up," said Sir Arthur, as he turned away.

A few minutes after the baronet had left the quiet house, Blake also emerged, and turned in the direction of Soho. It was for the little toy-makers' firm that he was heading, and after some difficulty he found it.

It proved to be a two-storied structure, standing in a yard stacked with timber. Blake made his way to the little office, and after he had stated his business to the clerk there, a stout, contented-looking man in his shirt sleeves, came out from the workshop, and approached Blake.

"You can I do for you, sir?" the little man said.

"I've just called in connection with a certain order that you executed for Lady Marjory Mountjoy," said Blake. "It was a little ambulance, and I believe it was specially constructed for her."

Mr. Blere looked up.

"Dot ambulance again," he said; "you are the second person who has asked me about it to-day."

"Indeed! Who asked me about it?"

The jovial face set slightly.

"Dot's more dan I can tell you, Mr. —"

"My name is Blake," said the detective. "Sexton Blake. I have been employed by Sir Arthur Mountjoy to look into this matter."

"You mean you're a 'tec!'"

Blake bowed.

"That's right," he said.

The stout man came a step nearer.

"Vot's it all about?" he asked. "Is dere some mystery in it?"

"I'm afraid I can't explain that to you, Mr. Blere," Blake returned quietly; "not at present, at least. Still you can help me very much if you let me know just exactly what happened in connection with the ambulance."

"Vell, I don't mind doing dot," said Blere. "It has noding to do with me. I did the work, and I've got her ladyship's written instructions, and dey'll haf to pay me!"

"Oh, I don't think there is much fear of that," Blake said, with a smile.

"Ain't dey?" said the guttural voice. "Vell, I'm not so sure about dot. I'll get paid for the first ambulance all right, but dey seem to want to cry off for the second body vot I supplied."

Blake's eyes lighted up.

"The second body, eh?" he said. "Aht. That is the trouble, is it?"

"It ain't any trouble so far as I am concerned," Blere said. "My clerk can swear dot he got the telephone message ordering der duplicate body on the same day as the first one vos delivered. And ven the man came for the second body, ve made him sign for it."

Blake was on the scent of the affair now, and he began to question the toy-manufacturer closely.

"When was the original ambulance delivered?" he asked.

"Early in the week," said Blere. "Lady Marjory asked me to send it up to her house. I believe dot dere vos a committee of gentlemen dere whom she wanted to show it to."

"And the second order—when did you receive it?"

"About two hours after the first one was delivered," replied the toy-maker. "My clerk took the order, and wrote it down in the telephone message-book. If you'll come into the office I will show you der exact words."

He bustled into the little office with Blake at his heels, and, lifting the message-pad from his 'phone, he turned the leaves until he came to the Monday section.

"Dere it is," he said, holding the pad out.

In a round, boyish hand was written a message as follows:

"Lady Marjory wants an exact duplicate made of the body of the ambulance supplied to her to-day. The body must be ready and complete by Friday morning, and Lady Marjory will send her own messenger down to receive it."

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TINKER'S DETECTIVE INSTINCTS WERE AROUSED.

FRAMED IN THE DOORWAY WAS A WIZENED STOOPING SHAPE



TINKER CLIMBING UP INTO THE LOFT.



"YOU ARE NOT FAR WRONG, KEW," SAID BLAKE; "I THINK I HAVE CORNERED YOU AT LAST."



THE DEATH OF GILBERT FORDYCE DYKES.

H. Lewis.

"Dot's plain enough, ain't it?" said the toy-manufacturer triumphantly.

Blake nodded his head.

"It seems so," he returned. "And you say that the messenger called on Friday?"

"Yes. And he signed for der second body before he took it away vith him."

There was a long receipt-book lying on the desk, and Blere's fat thumb turned the leaves back.

"Derf it is," he said, indicating a line.

Blake glanced at the signature of the messenger, but could make neither head nor tail of it. It had been written in a cramped, indistinct scrawl.

"You are certainly in the right, Mr. Blere," Blake said; "there is no doubt that you did manufacture the two bodies." A grim smile crossed Blake's face. "We have had ample proof of that."

"Den vly should her ladyship—" Blere stopped and looked confused.

"Her ladyship," Blake repeated; "does she know that you supplied two bodies?"

"She must do," Blere broke out. "It vos at her orders."

Blake saw that the stout man was trying to cover his mistake, and he did not pursue the matter. The little slip that Blere had made was quite sufficient for Blake's purpose.

"Lady Marjory has either been there, or has communicated with Blere," the detective mused as he found himself walking up the street again. "And she has evidently asked him not to say anything about it."

There was a shadow of a frown on Blake's face, for Lady Marjory's movements were beginning to trouble him.

What purpose did she have in moving so mysteriously in the affair?

"Is she trying to shield someone?" Blake thought. "It seems to me as though it was very like it."

He made his way back to Baker Street, reaching there somewhere about twelve o'clock. There was no sign of Tinker, and Blake, after pacing up and down his study for half an hour, came to a swift decision.

"It is useless for me to go on with the case unless I can find out what Lady Marjory is doing," he said, aloud. "I will go and see her now."

It was not very far to the big house in the West End, and when Blake was ushered into the morning-room he found Lady Marjory and the girl whom he knew as Clarice seated together there.

Blake glanced keenly at his hostess as he approached, and he noted that the beautiful features were almost deathlike in their pallor, while a network of wrinkled lines had appeared on the usually smooth cheeks.

From her agitated way of greeting him, the detective saw that Lady Marjory was afraid—and it seemed to Blake as though her fear was chiefly centred on him.

Clarice also seemed to share the other's agitation in a minor way, and Blake felt the quick constraint that fell on the two ladies as he bowed to them.

"We were just talking about the dreadful affair as you came in, Mr. Blake," said Lady Marjory, in a hurried tone. "I suppose my husband called on you this morning?"

Her eyes were bright and feverish as she looked up at the detective, and Blake heard her catch her breath as she waited for his reply.

"Yes, Sir Arthur did call, Lady Marjory," said Blake.

"And—did he tell you what we have decided to do?"

"I don't know how to answer that," Blake said. "I didn't know that you had come to any fixed decision."

"Oh, yes, we did," Lady Marjory went on. "We—we don't want the publicity, and Arthur and I have agreed to pay the charities six thousand pounds, which we think would have been the probable result of the sale of the stolen property."

"Sir Arthur did mention that to me," said Blake coolly; "but I think I have persuaded him not to go on with it."

Fear leaped into the hazel eyes of the hostess.

"You persuaded him not to go on with it?" Lady Marjory broke out. "But I—I insist on going on with it. I will send the cheque myself this afternoon."

Blake's face was stern. He saw then that he would have to adopt a stronger attitude with the woman.

"You will be very foolish if you do that, Lady Marjory," he said; "for your action is simply encouraging crime. From what I have gathered to-day, I can assure you that the case has become very much more simple. I believe that we will be able to find the thieves."

"From what you have found out to-day?" Lady Marjory said, in a choked voice.

"Yes," Blake put in; "I have been to Thornton and Blere—"

"Ah!"

Lady Marjory sat down suddenly, and her slender fingers tightened over her handkerchief.

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"And Mr. Blere has told me all about the duplicate body," Blake went on. "Of course, you did not order it, and, therefore, it proves that whoever did send that telephone message must have known the construction of the first ambulance. Must even have examined it, otherwise he would not have been sure that the second body was capable of being placed in the catches on the wheels."

There was a silence in the room, and Lady Marjory's eyes never left the clean-shaven, intelligent face.

"I'm afraid I'm very dense, Mr. Blake," she said, in a quavering voice; "and I don't quite understand. What is it that you really mean?"

"I mean that on Monday, when the ambulance was inspected by you and the committee of gentlemen, you must have shown to them the method by which the body of the little vehicle was held in its place. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, I did do that. But, as a matter of fact, it was first suggested by someone that the body should be made detachable."

"Who suggested it?" Blake asked.

Lady Marjory wrinkled her brows for a moment, then she shook her head with a little pathetic shrug of her shoulders.

"I can't remember now," she said. "I—I've had so many things to think about that my brain seems to be in a whirl. Perhaps it will remember later on."

"It does not matter very much," said Blake, little dreaming how much it really did matter. "The fact remains that it was someone who knew the construction of the ambulance that contrived the theft. He knew that the body was detachable, and could be removed easily and swiftly."

He looked at Lady Marjory for a moment.

"If we can find the person who took delivery of the second body from Blere, we can also find the thief," said Sexton Blake.

Lady Marjory arose to her feet.

"But why should you trouble any further, Mr. Blake?" she went on. "Both Sir Arthur and I have practically agreed to let the loss be ours. It—it is hardly fair of you to insist on continuing the matter."

Blake drew back a pace.

"Of course, if you are really bent on shielding the thief," he said stiffly, "there is nothing more for me to do. Do I understand that it is your wish that these criminals should not be brought to justice? That you deliberately want to allow them to escape scot-free?"

Lady Marjory's lips trembled, and her eyes glanced down to the floor. She could not meet the honest indignation in the blue eyes in front of her.

"It—it is the publicity," she repeated, unable to find anything else to say.

At that moment there came a welcome interruption in the person of a footman who appeared in the doorway.

"Sir Arthur is on the telephone, and would like to speak to you, Lady Marjory," he said.

Lady Marjory looked at Blake and then at Clarice, and the detective fancied it was something of a warning, imploring glance that fell on the younger girl.

"I will not stay, Lady Marjory," said Blake. "I want to get back to my rooms. I may see you later in the day."

It was impossible for Lady Marjory to say anything then, in front of the servant, and Blake left the house. But he went no further than the corner of the street, where, lighting a cigar, he puffed away slowly.

Half an hour later his vigil was rewarded, for he saw the slender, well-gowned figure of Clarice Tremaine come out through the high, arched gateway, and turn in his direction.

The girl did not recognise Blake until she was close to him, and as he raised his hat the detective noted a swift flush stain the lovely cheeks.

Blake had made up his mind now, and he went to the point at once.

"I have been waiting for you, Miss Tremaine," he said gravely. "I wonder if you know why?"

She looked up at him with the frightened eyes of a fawn. Blake's face was kindly, though stern.

"I want you to tell me the truth," he said. "I know that there is some secret weighing down on you. I can see that quite plainly. What is it that Lady Marjory has asked you to keep away from me?"

They were pacing down the pavement together, and Miss Tremaine had her head bent so that Blake could not see her face. But he saw the white-gloved fingers plucking at the edge of the leather bag she carried, and suddenly his patience was rewarded.

"I have told you, Mr. Blake," Clarice Tremaine broke out, "I—I have tried to be loyal to Lady Marjory. But I can't help it; the thing has been worrying me dreadfully. I did not sleep a wink last night for thinking of it."

"What is it?" Blake asked.

"The—the man who came after us to help us with the ambulance," said Clarice. "I did not tell you at the time,

but I—I remembered seeing his face before. He was speaking to Lady Marjory just before tea." She glanced up at Blake's sudden exclamation. "And, unless I am mistaken, you were quite close to them," she went on. "Don't you remember him? A tall, thin man he was."

Swift as a flash a memory came back to Blake of a haggard face with deep-set, sunken eyes. He remembered the little snatch of conversation which had taken place between him and Lady Marjory after the tall, thin stranger had gone off. Lady Marjory had been strangely disturbed.

"You are sure there is no mistake, Miss Tremaine?" Blake asked.

"Oh, no!" the girl returned. "His face was much too striking a one to forget!"

"She came to a halt, and glanced up at Blake.

"As soon as I remembered where I had seen his face before I went to Lady Marjory," she said, "but she—she assured me that it could not have been the same. That there was some mistake."

Her voice took a stronger note.

"But in my heart I know that I was not mistaken," Clarice Tremaine went on. "The man who was speaking to Lady Marjory was the same man who took the ambulance round the path. I went to Lady Marjory this morning to get her to let me tell what I know."

"And what did she say?"

"She told me that everything was going to be settled," Clarice said; "that there would be no need for me to trouble any further, as no one would lose anything, except—except her."

"They looked at each other for a moment, then Blake shook his head.

"I hope you won't misunderstand me, Miss Tremaine," he murmured slowly. "I can assure you that I am Lady Marjory's sincere friend. I believe that she is a pure and noble woman. But I am also assured that she is making a sacrifice for someone that is not worthy of it. No doubt that very person has been relying on her clemency as rascals of that type often do. Only the most abject coward would shelter himself behind a woman's skirts."

"Clarice Tremaine was silent for a moment.

"I wonder if you are right, Mr. Blake?" she said presently.

"Lady Marjory told me the name of her friend. He is Gilbert Fordyce Dykes, and he is Lady Marjory's cousin. I believe they were once boy and girl sweethearts—at least, that is what she told me this morning."

"She told you her aim here?"

"And now," she said, "I have told you everything. But I hope that whatever you do you will try to avoid hurting Lady Marjory, whom I love very dearly."

Blake's smile was very gentle as he took the soft young palm.

"If you knew me better you would hardly need to ask that, Miss Tremaine," he said quietly. "Still, I give you my promise. Lady Marjory will not be harmed by any act of mine."

It was a brighter, more contented girl who left the detective and went on down the street, with her light, graceful step.

"Gilbert Fordyce Dykes," Blake muttered. "Not a very common name. The web seems to be closing in now, slowly but surely. My next move is to find this man."

How he accomplished that purpose another chapter must reveal.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Tinker's Dreadful Ordeal.

"A MOST extraordinary thing, my dear Tremaine," said Kew, in his cool tones. "But, after all, I don't think there is anything that the committee can blame themselves for."

Tremaine—Clarice's father—was chatting to Kew in the smoke-room of his club. The professor had just arrived there, and the troubled committeeman had gone over the history of the case.

They had just finished lunch, and were having their after-dinner smoke, and Kew pumped the unconscious man until the whole details of the discovery at the garden-party were in his possession.

"I only wish you had been there, Kew," Tremaine said. "You would have realised what an awful hole we felt in."

"Unfortunately, my duties at St. Cyr's kept me away," the cunning scoundrel said, "and, therefore, it was impossible for me to attend."

He leaned a trifle closer.

"And now," he went on, "I think that you said the—the detective who—was named to be in the grounds was named Sexton Blake. Is that right?"

"That's quite true," said Tremaine.

"And from his discoveries you came to the conclusion that there were at least two men in the affair?"

"Yes," the committeeman went on. "That fellow Blake is a wonderful man, and I have no doubt about it but what his theory of the case was absolutely correct."

Kew ventured to allow a sneer to cross his cold lips.

"Oh, theories are all very well, and those detectives are famous for that type of thing!" he said cynically. "But very often their theories prove to be anything but correct. Still, that is nothing to do with me, and I am glad that someone is interested in the case."

"He has," Sir Arthur said, "Tremaine said, "and he assured me that Sexton Blake was doing his best to discover the perpetrators."

"Has Sir Arthur seen Mr. Blake this morning?" Kew asked.

There was a touch of anxiety in his voice which escaped the notice of his host.

"He has," Tremaine returned; "but Blake had nothing new to report."

Kew then turned the conversation into other channels. He was quite content, for he realised that if Blake had known where Tinker was the detective would undoubtedly have made an effort, ere this, to have rescued his assistant.

And so the point which Kew required settling was no longer a difficulty.

With a left the spacious club premises about half an hour later the lean, stooping figure seemed to be very well satisfied with himself.

"I know now that Blake did not send Tinker on our track," Kew muttered, "and I don't care very much how he came to follow, and find the stores."

He was satisfied now that Tinker had worked off his own bat so far as the actual finding of the hiding-place of the body of the ambulance was concerned. And that meant that neither Blake nor anyone else had any idea of what Tinker was up to.

The vulture face of the professor seemed to gleam like a death mask as he hurried along the streets.

He had made up his mind now that Tinker would have to be got out of the way. A memory of his promise to Dykes flashed into the lean scoundrel's mind, and his thin lips twitched for a moment.

"I promised that I, personally, would not be responsible for that young fool's death," he muttered, "and that promise I will keep. But he will have to die!"

It was towards the hospital that Kew turned his steps, and he remained in the great institution for the better part of three hours. It was almost five o'clock in the evening before he finally left his private room in the hospital, and when he did so he headed at once for the neighbourhood in which the stores were situated.

He did not take any particular care as he turned into the quiet side-street, and made his way towards the lane which gave access to the stores.

There was no one about in the street at that hour of the afternoon, and it being Saturday, even the stores were untended and unoccupied.

It was down the narrow passage leading to the rear of the stores that Kew turned, and, crossing a courtyard and going on down another passage, he reached the small door let into the back wall of the store.

He withdrew a key, and thrusting it into the lock turned it and entered the half-lighted place.

It was his first visit since he had left Tinker on the previous day, and the first glance of his small eyes revealed the fact that the lad was still lying mute and motionless on the rude litter that the kindly hand of Fordyce Dykes had supplied for him.

Closing the door behind him, Kew stepped noiselessly across the floor of the small structure, and came to a halt beside the barrow.

Bending down, he looked at the white, motionless face of Tinker, and saw that the eyes were open. The eyes did not move, and yet, in their depths, Kew saw something of life dash, a shadow as it were of some inner feeling that crossed the dazed brain.

A cynical chuckle broke from the evil ruffian's lips.

"You can hear and see me," he said, in a low tense voice, "I know that. It is only your limbs and head and tongue and eyes that are paralysed, otherwise your brain is as clear and alert as ever."

Again the answering flash came into the wide eyes of the youngster.

"And as you can hear me," the voice of Kew hissed, "I might as well tell you what is going to happen to you."

He bent a little closer until his breath swept Tinker's rigid cheeks.

"You have deliberately placed yourself in deadly peril, you fool!" he went on. "It is not the first time that you and I have crossed each other's tracks, and I warned you before that the day would come when you would bitterly repent it. And now that day has come, and, by heavens, I

swear that you will never live to reveal what you have heard or seen here!"

The eyes into which he was looking so closely seemed to flash a mute defiance.

"Oh, yes, you're plucky enough!" Kew went on, knowing well enough that the lad could hear every word that was said, although his powerless tongue and inert body could not give any signal by way of reply. "I never doubted your pluck, but pluck is not everything. I have voted that you shall die by my instrumentality, Tinker, and I mean to keep my word!"

Professor Kew was right when he said that Tinker could hear every word that broke from his thin lips. As a matter of fact, the lad had never but consciousness. What manner of strange drug it was that Professor Kew had used on Tinker the lad was never able to discover, but as the dart struck him the lad felt his limbs give way beneath him, and he fell prone on the floor.

He heard every word that Dykes said to Kew, and he was aware of the kindly deed that the tall, haggard-faced man had done. He knew that Dykes had carried him on to the barrow, and had placed him there in as comfortable a position as possible, and Tinker had heard the door close behind the trio of thieves as they left the store with their booty.

And night through the long terrible night the lad had lain there in a state that was almost worse than death itself. He could neither move limb nor body, could not even turn his head and his lips and tongue seemed to have lost their power of movement.

Yet his brain, his clear, alert, quick brain was just as alive and potent as ever. There was a curious demoniac torture about the effects of this deadly drug, for while it left its victim helpless it did not give a merciful oblivion.

It was a type of paralysis, similar to that which has sometimes seen a man laid in his coffin, though life and knowledge were still in his inert body.

He had watched the grey dawn steal through the gap in the top of the wide doorway, had watched the shadows lengthen and then fade again, and at last he had heard the grind of the lock, and the quick, soft footfalls of Kew reached his ears, then he had seen the lean, evil face loom above him.

The words which Professor Kew spoke sounded to Tinker like the breath of doom. He knew the implacable villain too well to hope that any feeling of mercy or remorse would soften him.

If Francis Kew said that he should die, it would not be the professor's fault if he did not carry that out.

Yes, helpless and in his enemy's power though he was, Tinker felt his brave young heart strengthen itself in readiness for whatever terrible trial lay before him.

"You will have to wait here for just a few hours longer, my friend," the voice of Kew whispered. "It is too light yet for me to take you away, but as soon as the darkness comes I will return, and you will be taken somewhere where you will find the end of your existence!"

A thin, cackling laugh rang out, a mad, mocking sound in the quiet store.

"You will die, you young fool," Kew breathed—"die, do you hear? And your master will not even know what has happened to you!"

The lean, evil face was withdrawn, and Tinker, listening eagerly, heard the soft footfalls pass across the store again and die away. Then the door closed, and silence reigned once more.

Dumb and helpless, the youngster lay on the barrow, his thoughts turning to a hundred things as he lay there.

"The gu'nar will never even know how I died," his thoughts ran. "By heavens, I wish I could send only one message to him! Oh, if I only had the will power to throw aside this deadly feeling that has come over me!"

But, strong-willed though he was, the drug had set its powerful bond on him, and he lay helpless and mute beneath its grim effects.

Hours must have passed before Tinker heard the crunching noise of wheels sound on the cobbled lane outside the store. Then, a few moments later, there came the rasp of a lock, and the great doorway swung back, allowing a breath of the cool, night air to fall on the motionless figure of the lad on the barrow.

Hands were stretched out, and lifted Tinker from his rude litter, and he found himself being carried across the cobbled stones until at last he knew that he was in the interior of a vehicle.

His eyes, remaining in the same fixed position, were staring up at the roof of the cab, and it was only his ears that could help him to realise where he was.

The boom of the two doors told him that his captors, whoever they were, were closing the stores again; then, a few moments later, he heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and the vehicle began to turn slowly; then, at a more rapid pace, it

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passed out of the lane and turned into the smoother-paved street.

There was someone in the cab with Tinker. He sensed that, and he could hear the fellow's slow breathing.

But the custodian, whoever he was, made no attempt to get any more near to the lad; and, Tinker, lying half bent on the broad seat, was carried on and on through a maze of streets, until at last the vehicle passed through a wide gateway and came to a halt.

The man in the cab slipped out, and a few moments later Tinker heard voices close to him.

He was lifted from the vehicle, and placed on something which he recognised later as being a stretcher. Lying flat on the stretcher, his eyes first caught a glimpse of blue sky, then the top of a ceiling, as he was carried down a narrow passage.

Finally, he was carried into a long, wide apartment, and a moment later he found himself stretched out on what was, undoubtedly, a hospital cot.

There was a light gleaming above his head, and presently there framed in the halo a nurse's face. The face seemed a kindly one, for the eyes were pitiful as they looked down at Tinker.

The lad heard her soft voice murmur something, and he strained his ears to catch what it was.

A moment later a deeper voice, that of a man, sounded, and this time he was able to understand the words.

"Yes, poor chap, he seems to be just about at the end of it, doesn't he?"

Almost unconsciously, Tinker felt someone raise his hand and hold it for a moment, then drop the limp arm back on the cot again.

"It's paralysis, isn't it?" the nurse whispered in a voice that was loud enough for Tinker to hear.

The reply did not reach him, but it was evidently an affirmative one, for he saw the nurse shake her head; then the head was withdrawn out of the little space which his eyes commanded, and the kindly hands began to attend to him.

He knew then that he was in a hospital, some quiet institution for the sick and ailing. Even then he hardly realised what it all meant, and just for a moment it came to him that someone else had found him in that store, and had shifted him to this house of healing, as being the only place fit to receive him.

But he was soon to be undecided so far as that was concerned.

As soon as he had been stripped and changed into the comfortable hospital garb, the attendant returned, then the half-an-hour passed, and presently Tinker heard a well-known voice.

It was the odd, calculating tone of Professor Kew, and a few moments later, the little, stooping form, followed by another tall one, came to the side of the cot.

Tinker's eyes just picked out the malevolent face of Kew, and he saw the evil eyes gleam for a moment into his own.

"Is this the case that you wanted me to give my opinion on, Doctor Randolph?" Kew's sibilant voice asked.

"It is, professor," came a deeper tone. "I feel sure that it is a case of paralysis; but I want your expert opinion on it as well, if you don't mind."

Kew bent over the motionless figure on the cot, and in his clever way he made his false examination.

The grave surgeon standing behind him could not see the evil, mocking look in the vulture face as it bent over the lad.

"You are quite right, doctor," Kew said, as he straightened up. "It is undoubtedly a case of brain paralysis. Some of the cells are affected, and I would suggest that there is some foreign substance pressing on them."

Tinker did not hear the other's reply, but Kew deliberately raised his voice so that his helpless victim might hear him.

"I suggest that you operate at once," the awful voice went on; "it is the only chance you have!"

Operate at once!

Horror surged into Tinker's heart then, and with all his will power he tried to make some sort of movement that would reveal his knowledge of what was taking place.

But it seemed as though every limb was bound in cold steel, and his effort was hopeless.

"No!" It was Kew's voice again. "I will not undertake the operation. I am too busy just now. But I am quite sure that you will be able to follow my theory, doctor, and, if you like, I will give you a rough outline of it."

Then two men moved away from the cot, and their voices died away into an indistinct murmur.

A faint, cold sweat had gathered on the lad's brow, the only outward indication of the terrible, mental strain that he was undergoing. He saw now Kew's evil ruse. He had been taken to some strange hospital, and it was evidently one in which Kew was the consulting surgeon, for it was the

evil professor who had been called to give an opinion on the case.

And Kew had deliberately lied to the house-surgeon, with the result that soon, in a few moments, perhaps, Tinker would be carried away to the operating theatre, and laid on the cold slab, ready for the incision of the deadly knife.

In his young life, Tinker had been in many tight corners, but this ghastly experience was one that he had never undergone before. It was the dreadful torture of having to lie there, still and silent, thinking a thousand thoughts, but unable to raise even a hand to defend himself, that made the youngster's courage droop for a moment.

"Guv'nor! Guv'nor!" Tinker thought in his agony.

It was towards his great, kindly master that his mind turned now in his extremity. Often in the past, Blake had turned up just in the nick of time and saved his young assistant and, even at the eleventh hour, now, Tinker did not quite despair.

"If I could only find some means of making them understand, of making them know what is happening to me," he thought, his brain reeling in his head.

He went through a very agony of doubt and despair then, and his staring eyes, fixed on the white ceiling above the light, shone with an unearthly radiance. Long moments passed, then at last another voice came to his ears.

"This is the patient."

It was the voice of the nurse, and Tinker felt kindly hands stretch out and lift him. A cold shudder ran through his young veins as he was lifted from the cot and placed on the stretcher.

Presently on its noiseless rubber wheels, it began to move down the ward, the attendants pushing it slowly down the wide gap between the cots.

There were many patients in that ward, some of them convalescent, and heads were raised, and hollow eyes followed the melancholy procession as it wended its way down the ward. The inmates realised that another human being was going to undergo a fierce ordeal—a necessary ordeal, no doubt, but one in which life and death would hang in the balance.

The doors at the end of the long ward were held apart, and the silent-wheeled stretcher passed out, while the doors closed behind it.

It went on down the waxed corridor, and the lad lying motionless on the stretcher, heard, afar off and dimly, the sound of a clock striking.

His alert ears caught each chime, and he counted them swiftly.

"Eleven o'clock," he thought.

He knew that he might never hear a clock chime again, and suddenly, into his young heart, there came a swift resolve.

If he had to die, at least he would die well.

He knew, or, at least, he could dimly judge of the agony that awaited him. It was not the first time that he had seen the interior of an operating theatre, and he knew just what manner of scene it was that he would take part in.

At the end of the waxed corridor, the ambulance was wheeled down a slight slope, and then Tinker found himself being moved, until at last he was placed on the operating-table in the centre of a great white apartment. He was immediately under a huge arc-lamp, and its light seemed to send a dazzling halo over every corner of the room.

Around him, dressed in white garb, there was gathered a

little circle of quiet-eyed young men, whom Tinker knew were the students of the hospital.

They had assembled there specially to see this surgical operation performed by the house-surgeon. To them it was simply a feat of skill, and was specially devised for the purpose of saving the patient's life.

The great Professor Kew himself had advised the operation, and Kew was known to be one of the most skilful surgeons in London. Whatever his opinion was, stood, and not one of the quiet gentlemen standing there dreamed for a moment that he was taking part in what was little else than a dastardly crime.

The minutes passed slowly, and Tinker's heart began to throb so loudly that it seemed to him as though impossible that the quiet group around could not hear it.

A step sounded by his side, and above him there appeared the kindly visage of a bearded man.

It was the house-surgeon, and he was clad in a long, white, spotless robe that covered him from head to foot.

For a moment the bearded face looked into his own, keen yet kindly, with just a shadow of sympathy in the well-formed features.

"I don't think he will require an anæsthetic," the surgeon's voice said. "I think I can operate at once."

A chill, numbing cold crept like a tide into Tinker's heart.

His dreadful ordeal was about to commence.

Was there no hope for him? Had he to die there on that cold slab, in front of the eyes of those silent witnesses?

It seemed, indeed, as though he was beyond human aid.

With a slight scrape of his foot, the house-surgeon turned towards the little table on which the antiseptic kettle stood which contained his surgical instruments.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sexton Blake Works Hard.

THE information which Sexton Blake had received from Miss Tremaine opened up a new track, on which the detective promptly set himself. He headed for Baker Street at once, and entered his study. The old landlady appeared, and informed him that Tinker had not yet returned—a point which began to trouble Blake more than a little now.

However, for the moment it was the missing jewellery that was his first object. He had undertaken the elucidation of the mystery, and,

although Lady Marjory had almost begged him to give up his quest, Blake instinctively felt that it would be unfair to Lady Marjory herself if he were to do so.

"There is not the slightest doubt but what she is trying to shield that fellow Dykes," he thought, as he dropped into his chair by the desk. "But Lady Marjory is of that warm-hearted, impulsive type who are capable of making many sacrifices, and very often for worthless causes!"

A quiet smile crossed the clean-shaven face.

"Oh, no, Mr. Fordyce Dykes," the great detective murmured grimly, "you are not going to shield yourself behind a woman! I want to find you and get to the root of this affair!"

From a small, drawerless desk, Blake pulled out a bulky notebook, the pages of which he turned over until he came to a certain section. There were three or four pages full of telephone numbers, and they ranged over all the exchanges in London.

Against each number was a certain mark, and Blake, after U.J.—No. 525.

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running his eye down one of the columns, lifted the receiver and gave a number.

In a few moments a harsh voice replied.

"Is that you, Sam?" Blake asked.

"It's—it's Mr. Blake, ain't it?"

"That's right."

There was a slight pause; then:

"Anything I can do for you, guv'nor?"

It was a marine store in one of the worst streets around the Tilbury Docks from whence Blake's informant was speaking.

"Well, I'm not sure, but there might be," said Blake. "I want to find a certain man. His name is Gilbert Fordyce Dykes, and he is tall, rather sallow, hollow-eyed and hollow-checked. He dresses pretty well, and has been a gentleman. Have you chance to see him anywhere about, Sam?"

"No, guv'nor. Ain't seen anybody of that description among the boys I know."

This conversation differed but slightly from the others that took place over the phone.

Patiently and methodically, for the best part of an hour, Sexton Blake waded slowly through his list of numbers. It was to all sorts and conditions of places that he phoned—shabby eating-houses, grimy-looking furniture shops, doubtful public-houses.

That list which Blake had in the book was worth more money than the detective cared to think about. It was the slow, painful harvesting of years, and Scotland Yard would have gone mad over it had it come into their possession.

They represented really the unregistered headquarters of half the criminal circles in London. They were mostly "fences," but each and every one of the speakers seemed to recognise Blake's voice, and were obviously only too eager to help him if they could.

And so, steadily, the detective gradually phoned his way through each district, until at last he received the information he desired.

It was a guttural German voice that answered him, and it emanated from the person of a stout, grey-waistcoated pawnbroker.

"I think I know your man, Mr. Blake. He's in tow with a couple of others that go by the name of Jem and Jerry."

"What is their particular lay?"

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"Dot vos more dan I could say," came the cautious reply. "But I know they are crooks all right. I can't say I haf ever seen the tall chap you vos talking about, but I heard the boys speaking about someone whom Jem and Jerry had with them in their rooms."

"You know where they stay, then?" Blake asked.

"Yes. Second floor, No. 6, Doggel's Alley. Dot's a turning out of Marden Street, Whitechapel."

Blake hastily scrawled the address on the corner of a blotting-pad.

"Right you are, Carl. I'm very much obliged to you."

"Of course, dis bit of yerk is on der usual terms!" the stout pawnbroker remarked. "No names, no nodding!"

Blake smiled at the receiver.

"Oh, yus, those are the terms, Carl!" he said. "Good-bye."

Pushing back his chair, the detective arose and stretched himself. He had been sitting so long at the same post that his muscles had become slightly stiffened; but there was a look of contentment on his face now.

"I'll get down to Doggel's Alley as quickly as I can," Blake decided; "for if Carl admits that he thinks it is the man, there is every chance of it being so."

Passing out of his study, the detective entered his bedroom, closing the door behind him. Ten minutes later the bedroom door opened to allow a square-shouldered, black-bearded man to emerge. There was a blue reefer jacket buttoned across the broad chest, and the brass buttons on the jacket were adorned with an intricate brooch, and it seemed as though, by some extraordinary means, Sexton Blake had actually made his body contract, for as he passed along the corridor he looked a man very little above the middle height.

Blake travelled by bus to Whitechapel, climbing to the top seats, and taking his place as though he was just an ordinary passenger. His make-up was just that perfection which long years of experience brings, and to anyone who chanced to look at him he was just a typical shell-back, dressed in his best, shore-going togs, enjoying a brief spell in London.

It was about five o'clock when Blake turned into Doggel's Alley, but in that narrow thoroughfare, between the high buildings, it was already almost dark. At the various doorways were standing groups of shabby-looking men and frowzy, untidy women; while on the edge of the pavement sprawled little, dirty-faced children, enjoying themselves as only children can, even in the most sordid surroundings.

Blake swung along with his rolling gait until he reached No. 6; then, after a glance round, as though in doubt whether it was the right number or not, he stepped into the dark passage, turning up the narrow staircase.

The stairs creaked to his tread as he ascended, and on the second landing he came to a halt.

There were two doors on the landing, and Blake went to the first one and opened it cautiously. He drew a blank there, for a glance into the dim interior told him that it was unfurnished and unoccupied.

Crossing to the other door, Blake listened for a moment. There was no sound, and, with one quiet breath, the detective thrust the door open and entered.

His eyes travelled around the chamber, and alighted at last on the bed. He saw a huge figure stretched out on it, with arms and legs rigid.

In the dim light it seemed as though the man was dead, and Blake, closing the door, hurried across the room. On the left of the bed there was a window, and, thanks to its elevated position, it was fairly light. Blake stepped to the other side of the bed, and, bending down, looked at the motionless man for a moment.

There was no mistaking what type of man it was that lay there. Jem's heavy, frontal face, white and rigid though it was, had not lost its criminal look.

Blake straightened up.

Just for a moment he had feelings that it must be Dykes who lay there; but there was no resemblance between this broad-shouldered, brawny ruffian and the tall, cadaverous-faced man whom the detective had seen speaking to Lady Marjory.

Blake's eyes were still resting on Jem's face, when suddenly he saw the head move slightly. Again he bent over the figure, and this time he placed his hand over the heart. It was beating slowly.

Raising his hand to the man's head, Blake turned the face slightly, and it was then that he noted that the eyes were open and staring straight at him. Despite the half-light, Blake saw that there was intelligence in the orbs. They had not the dull, vacant stare of the fevered.

"What's the matter with you, matey?" Blake asked, in a deep tone. "Ain't you well?"

Jem was just getting over the effects of the strange drug that Kew had administered. He was able to move his head, and even his body slightly; but, so far, he had not recovered

the use of his tongue. Yet the big fellow tried his best to speak, and the inarticulate muttering that came from his lips gave to Blake a clue of what was the matter with him.

"He seems to be half paralysed," Blake thought—"just as though he was recovering from the fever."

The detective felt instinctively that this was one of the two men whom he had come in search of, and he realised now that he would have to help the fellow to regain the use of his limbs if he wanted Jem to help him.

"Can't speak—oh, mate?" Blake said aloud. "Would yer like me to 'elp you? I've 'ad a bit of experience with cases like yours!"

Manner and voice and speech was exactly suited to the part that Blake was playing.

He looked down into Jem's eyes, and saw the hopeful gleam that leaped into them. The man even made an attempt to nod his head to indicate that he was only too ready for the experiment.

"Right!" said Blake. "I'll start now."

A few moments later a dramatic scene began in that half-lighted chamber. Aided by his great strength, Blake had half-dragged, half-lifted Jem's partly-dressed figure out of the bed, and, with one of Jem's great arms over his shoulders, Blake was making the huge fellow move backwards and forwards across the room.

For the first few minutes all the movement was done by Blake, for Jem's feet refused to move, and he was simply dragged forward and fro. But Blake presently began to feel a new warmth coming into the huge figure, the stagnant blood began to move more swiftly, and little by little, Jem began to feel the use of his limbs returning to him.

The sweat was pouring down Blake's face, but he stuck to his task, and for the best part of half an hour, the two figures paced up and down the chamber.

It was a hoarse murmur that first told Blake that he had been successful.

"I'm—I'm beat; let me rest a minute!"

They were the first articulate words that Jem had uttered for over a week, but Blake made no attempt to fall in with the fellow's suggestion.

"No! No! You've got to stick to it now. Come on! Stick to it—stick to it!"

And Jem, setting his teeth together, obeyed the commands of his companion, and presently his tottering footsteps gave place to a firmer, surer tread, until at last, with a great cry, the broad-shouldered fellow flung himself away from Blake, and standing in the centre of the room thrust his great arms above his head.

"I'm right—I'm right!" Blow me, I'm right!"

It was a hoarse, tremulous voice that spoke, and Jem's ugly features were lighted up with a look of absolute triumph.

Lunging forward, he held out his hand.

"I—I don't know who yer are, mate," he said huskily, "but I'll never forgit yer for what yer've done for me. By 'eavens, I thought I was booked! For a week I've lain there 'arf dead!"

He passed his hand over his clammy brow, and a shudder ran through his thick frame.

"I feels as though it 'ad been a bad dream," said Jem; "the sort o' thing yer gits arter a 'eavy supper. But it ain't been no dream, it was real—real. And you was the man that's 'elped me out o' it."

He pressed Blake's hand in a fierce grip, then crossing the room, Jem, with fingers that shook slightly, struck a match and lighted the solitary gas-jet, then turned again to his visitor.

"I jest wanted to see yer face, mate," he said; "'cos I don't want ter forgit it, yer see!"

Blake saw that the man was genuinely grateful, and the detective's long experience of all classes of criminals had proved to him that very often the lowest type would sometimes rise to a fine level of human feeling.

Realising this, Sexton Blake took a bold step.

"You say you are grateful to me," he said, in his natural voice now. "I wonder if that was merely talk, or do you mean it?"

Jem stepped back to the mantelpiece, and was staring at the bearded figure.

"I—I did mean it!" he broke out. "Who are yer? Wat's brought yer here?"

Sexton Blake passed his hands over his face rapidly, and removed his black beard, the cap followed, and his clean-shaven face was revealed.

"My name is Sexton Blake," he said quietly; "I've no doubt you've heard of me."

Jem had leaped back to the bed now, and was clutching at the end rail of it.

"The 'tec!" he said. "Yes—yer've come for me, then, haven't yer?"

Blake shook his head.

"Oh, no!" he returned; "I've not come for you! I was in search of a man named Gilbert Fordyce Dykes, and I understand that two men named Jem and Jerry were likely to know where he was."

"Is that the 'onest truth? Yer ain't after us!"

"I am only after Dykes," said Blake. "And now, who are you? Jem or Jerry?"

"I'm Jem, I am; but Jerry'll be 'ere presently, if yer wants to see 'im as well."

The big fellow had lumbered forward and dropped into one of the crazy chairs. He was evidently still weak from the effects of the drug, and his eyes were heavy as they stared at Sexton Blake.

"Oh, I don't know that I want to see Jerry!" Blake said; "I've no doubt you'll be able to tell me all I want to know."

He came a couple of paces forward.

"Now then," he said, "where am I to find this man Dykes?"

Jem looked up at him.

"You're sure that you ain't going to go for Jerry an' me arterwards?" he said. "'Cos Jerry's my pal, 'o is."

A sudden look came over his heavy features. "We've both done stretches in our time, but I ain't goin' to see 'im in chokery through any words o' mine."

Blake nodded. The very fact of Jem lying there helpless on the bed made it impossible for him to have taken any part in the robbery.

"I think you can make yourself easy on that point, Jem," he said; "the matter that I am investigating was something that took place yesterday. I don't know whether you know if Dykes took part in it, but I want to find out."

"Yesterday," Jem repeated with a note of delight in his voice; "then I can prove that neither Jerry or me had anyfink to do with it. 'E only went out for an hour yesterday, and that was to fetch a doctor—not that the doctor could do much good to me."

There was no reason for the fellow to lie, and Blake felt instinctively that he was telling the truth.

"All right, Jem," he said. "Then I can promise you that neither you nor your pal will appear in this at all. Now,

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what about Dykes? Has he been here to see you? Where will I find him?"

Blake had been watching the heavy face, and he saw a look of savage ferocity come over it. For six long days Jem had lain motionless, but his brain had been working all that time, and all his concentrated hate had been turned on one man.

"By 'eavens, I'll tell yer orl abart it," he said, leaping to his feet. "If yer wants to know where to find Dykes, I can put yer on the man who 'e's workin' with."

"You can?"

"Yus!"

Triumph gleamed in the burglar's features now, and his huge fists clenched and unclenched convulsively.

"It's the same man as laid me flat for a week—a 'uman vampire, that's wot I call 'im. Oh, 'eavens, wait till I gets a chance to lay my 'ands on 'im!"

"The name—the name! What is the name?"

"E calls 'imself Professor Francis Kew," Jem hissed.

Master of himself though he was, Blake could not repress the swift exclamation that came to his lips.

Jem leaned forward eagerly.

"Yer knows 'im, then, do yer?" he said.

Blake's blue-grey eyes flashed.

"By heavens, I do know him!" he returned. "He's the most cunning crook in all London. But how did he come to get in touch with Dykes?"

A savage oath broke from Jem's lips.

"Me an' Jerry was to blame for that," he said. "Dykes 'ad an accident, and we 'ad to git a doctor ter look arter 'im, an' we brought that skunk Kew 'ere."

Blake dropped into a chair, and nodded towards Jem.

"You interest me," he said. "Now, I want to hear the whole story."

The history did not suffer in the telling.

And when he finished his history Blake was content. He saw now that there was little doubt but what it was Kew's master-brain that lay behind the cunning crime that he had set himself to execute.

He arose to his feet, and nodded towards Jem.

"All right, Jem," he said. "I believe every word you have told me, and we'll call our little deal quits now; for if I was of assistance to you, you have been the same to me."

He turned towards the door, and Jem held out his hand.

"Were are yer goin', guv'nor?" he asked.

A grim smile flashed across Sexton Blake's lips.

"I'm going on the same errand as you went some time ago, Jem," he said. "I am going to look up Professor Kew."

"I wish I could come with yer, guv'nor," Jem muttered. "I've got a score ag'in that 'ound that I'd like for pay back!"

"I think all scores against Francis Kew will be settled before very long," the quiet, steady tones of the detective returned. "But you cannot come with me just now, Jem; this is a game that I must play alone."

He passed out of the chamber, closing the door behind him, and hurried down the stairs. A glance at his watch as he passed into a water-toughfare told Blake that it was now almost seven o'clock.

A taxi carried him back to Baker Street, and he reached there shortly before eight.

"No sign of Tinker yet!" he said to the landlady as he entered.

"No, dnat the young scamp!" The landlady was never under any delusions so far as Tinker was concerned. They were both very good friends at heart, but the garrulous old dame always pretended to look upon Tinker as a creature born to trouble. "I should give 'im a good talkin' to, sir, when he comes back, if I was you."

Blake went into his bed-room, and as he changed, the face of his young assistant began to obtrude itself.

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Tinker has got on to this matter," he thought; "it is just like him to stumble over something of the kind, and, by heavens, if he has crossed swords with Kew, his long absence suggests that he has had the worst of it!"

This decision only strengthened Sexton Blake's determination to seek out Kew at once. There were several places where he knew he might find his man.

He telephoned first to St. Cyr's, and, without giving his name, received the information that Professor Kew had left there early in the evening, but was expected to return again.

It was, therefore, the flat in Jernym Street that Blake made up his mind to visit. Francis Kew in his bold way had never made any attempt to conceal his address.

From Baker Street to Jernym Street is but a step, and as Blake halted on the opposite side of the pavement, he noted

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that the windows on the second floor—the floor in which Kew's chambers were situated—were lighted. A feeling of satisfaction came down on Sexton Blake as he crossed the street, and, entering the quiet doorway, made his way up the stairs.

His first knock on the door of the chambers was not answered; but he heard a rustle such as a newspaper might have made, as someone moved it.

He knocked a little louder, and then slow footfalls came to his ears, and a moment later the door was opened cautiously.

Blake had expected to see the little wizened shape of Professor Kew, but it was a tall, thin figure which stood in the gap of the door.

Stepping forward quickly Blake was inside the room before the man at the door was able to realise his intentions.

As he entered the detective glanced at the face, and with a quick thrill of satisfaction, recognised it at once.

It was the haggard, pallid features of Fordyce Dykes that he was looking into.

"Professor Kew is not here just now," Dykes began.

Blake sauntered into the chamber and coolly seated himself in a chair. Dykes did not notice that the chair which the detective occupied was so placed that Blake would be the first to reach the door, for the tall man had followed him into the room now, and was leaning against the desk.

"I wanted to see Professor Kew, but that can wait," said Blake quietly; "as a matter of fact, I also came to try and see you."

"To see me! Why?"

Blake's face was stern and set.

"Your name, I believe is Gilbert Fordyce Dykes?" he began.

He saw the lean figure start and contract, while a furtive look leaped into the hollow eyes.

"It is hardly worth while for you to attempt to deny your identity," Blake went on; "for, as a matter of fact, I saw you on Friday, at Lady Marjory Mountjoy's garden-party."

Dykes made a bold effort to recover his nerve, and partly succeeded.

"Admitting that I am whom you say I am," he said, "I quite like to see why you have troubled yourself to come here in search of me."

He was toying his best to preserve a calm front, but Blake saw the thin fingers fidgeting and unfolding, and he knew that the man was fighting hard to retain his composure.

"You may understand a little better, Mr. Dykes," he said, "when I tell you that my name is Sexton Blake, and I am a detective. I have been engaged by Lady Marjory to try and trace the whereabouts of the jewellery that was stolen from her garden-party."

Dykes was looking heavily against the desk now, and on his forehead a couple of beads of sweat were standing.

"I—I did not know that anything had been stolen," he began.

Blake leaned forward.

"Oh, yes, you do!" he said, in an inflexible tone. "You know that you and your confederate carried out the trick with the duplicate ambulance. It was a cunning enough ruse in its way. But someone who saw you at work has identified you."

A sudden inspiration came to Blake. If Tinker was really in Kew's power, Dykes was certainly bound to know something about it.

A glance at the desk revealed the presence of a tray on which a little pile of tea-things stood. Blake also observed that Dykes was wearing a pair of slippers, and in an ash-tray were a number of cigarette ends, and these little clues, trivial though they appeared, were sufficient to tell Blake that Dykes had been in the chambers for some considerable time, perhaps three or four hours.

"Your informant has been rather rash in his statements," Dykes said, in a slow voice.

"I am quite prepared to trust him," Blake returned, taking advantage of the opening; "more particularly as he chances to be my own assistant, Tinker."

It was a shot in the dark. Just one of those tilts at fortune that one must take now and again if success is to be attained, and it had the desired result.

Dykes straightened up as though he had been shot, and a quick, gasp of dismay broke from his lips.

"Tinker!" he repeated. "By heavens! Has he escaped then?"

Blake leaped forward, and his powerful hand closed on Dykes's arm.

"No!" he said. "Tinker has not escaped. But, by heavens, if you do not tell me where he is, you'll be in Vine Street before half an hour is passed!"

There was no mistaking the meaning in the detective's voice, and Dykes stood rigid and mute.

"Arrested!" he muttered. "But you cannot do that. What is the charge?"

"Theft, and—perhaps murder," said Blake, in his low voice. "And your accomplice, Francis Kew, will soon be with you."

"You—you know that as well?"
It seemed as though Dykes had crumpled up now, for his clothes hung about him in loose folds, and his haggard face was ashen.

"I know much more than that," said Blake. "I know that you are simply a tool in the hands of the cleverest scoundrel in London; I know that whatever part you played was a minor one, and behind you was that bloodless vulture of a man."

He looked at Dykes for a moment.
"Francis Kew has always chosen his tools well," he said, "and has always taken care that he should have a loophole of escape. Can't you see that he has made an absolute tool of you, man? What part has he played? What risk has he taken?"

"None—none—"
Dykes broke out, with a swift, indrawn breath: "I've known that all along. By heavens, I'm almost glad that you have come here to arrest me, ever since yesterday afternoon I've lived in a perfect torment!"

He swung round, his face working convulsively.

"Kew had a hold on me," he said; "he knew that I—I was wanted by the police, and I only bought his silence by consenting to do what he asked me to do. But, by heavens, Mr. Blake, when I—I met Lady Marjory—we used to go to school together, when we were little kiddies," he went on, his voice faltering—"I always knew that she was too good for me; but she knows that I have always loved her. I was never really fit to black her boots, and I knew it. But she—she always stood up for me, and was kind to me to the very end. Then yesterday, when I met her and knew what I was there for, to rob her and her guests, I tell you, sir, I felt the meanest cur that ever breathed!"

The sloping shoulders were square suddenly, and the head lifted back.

"But, by heavens, I've done with it!" Dykes broke out, "If I am to die in a convict cell, then I will die there. But I'll be Francis Kew's tool no longer!"

He dropped into a chair, and, removing his slippers, began to lace up his boots. A paroxysm of coughing stopped the proceeding for a moment, and Blake saw the red stain on the white handkerchief as Dykes slid it into his pocket again.

The detective would have been more than human had he not felt a quick stir of compassion run through him, and his eyes were just a little softer as they glanced at the lean, thin figure.

He knew, was already aware of how Kew had got into touch with Dykes, and now as he looked at the man on whom it seemed as though death had already placed its mark, a swift suspicion of the truth came to Blake.

In the past, Francis Kew had always chosen his accomplices cunningly, so cunningly, indeed, that Blake, despite the fact that he was aware of Kew's criminality, had never been able to bring evidence against the alert-brained rogue.

"By heavens, that man must be a cold-blooded fiend!" the detective thought. "For I know why he has chosen you now. His skill as a surgeon told him that you were practically

doomed to die. No doubt he hoped that death might intervene if ever it came about that you should have to give evidence against him."

He had moved away from the desk now, and a moment later Dykes arose to his feet.

"I am going to try to right a wrong that I have done, Mr. Blake," the tall man said, in a steady voice; "and if you came here to arrest me, I hope you will delay that until I have completed my task."

He stepped towards the door, lifting his hat and coat from a small stand that stood against the wall.

"I know where your assistant is lying," he went on, "and I want you to come with me to release him. After that, I will take you to Kew's house and make him deliver up the jewellery."

The haggard eyes stared at Blake for a moment.

"Can you trust me to do that?" he ended. "I know that I have forfeited all claims, but I—once was a gentleman, and I give you my word of honour, tattered though that honour may be, that I will go with you to whatever police-station you choose to select, as soon as I have done these two things. Will you come, Mr. Blake?"

The detective inclined his head, and together the two men passed out of Kew's chambers and went down the stairs.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Kew Drives a Hard Bargain.

IT was between nine and ten o'clock on Saturday evening that the vulture-faced professor, leaving the quiet hospital to which Tinker had been carried, made his way slowly back to the West End.

There was a grim smile on the lean, evil visage, and as the little wizened—slim—paced along with bird-like steps, Francis Kew had the aspect of one who is very well satisfied with himself.

He had arranged his scheme with the diabolical cunning characteristic of him. He was consulting-surgeon to that quiet hospital, and it was for that reason that he had selected it. He knew that the curious condition in which Tinker lay

would baffle the house-surgeon of the institution, and he had relied on the fact of his calling him in to give his expert opinion.

Matters had panned out just exactly as he had hoped, and as the reader is already aware, Kew had given his opinion that an operation on the head was necessary. He had hinted that the paralysis, or coma, in which the lad lay was due to some internal factor, probably a bone pressing against the brain.

He knew, also, that such an operation is always attended with tremendous risk, and the odds were that Tinker would never recover from it.

"But I will have nothing to do with it," Kew muttered. "No one can point a finger at me, and even the susceptible Dykes, should he ever come to hear about it, will not be able to say that I took an active part in the affair."

His cold visage wrinkled into an evil smile.

"It is murder by proxy," said Francis Kew. "An unusual crime, I should think."

He did not hurry, for he knew that there was plenty of time for him to reach St. Cyr's. There would be at least an hour's delay in the other hospital before the operation began,



"THE FIFTH AT TELFORD'S."

Tinker dropped the match in the midst of the great pile of fireworks. The next moment there was a roar, a flash, many bangs, and Mr. Rose was wildly dancing to the accompaniment of merry Catherine wheels, double crackers, etc., etc.

(See the jolly tale of Tinker in next week's "BOYS' FRIEND." Monday—1d.)

and Kew only desired to beat St. Cyr's at the actual time that the operation in the other institution would take place. It was just an additional alibi, an extra precaution in the event of any inquiries being made.

It was a quarter past twelve when he turned into the quiet side-street in which the great hospital was situated, and he entered the wide hall, passing through it and making his way towards his own room.

He always walked with a noiseless pace, and his advent was not observed by the porter in his small office.

Kew reached the door of his room, and, in an absent-minded way, turned the knob and entered. It was only when he noted that the room was lighted, and two figures arose at his entry, that the stooping figure straightened up suddenly, and a low exclamation broke from his lips.

With a quick movement, one of the figures had slid across the room, and, a moment later, the man was between Kew and the doorway.

It was Dykes, who had first caught the professor's eye. He was seated in the armchair close to Kew's small desk. The lean-jawed surgeon shot a quick, penetrating glance at Dykes; then, turning his head sharply, he glanced over his shoulder at the figure leaning against the closed door.

A thin, quick breath came from the professor's lips. "Ah!"

It was only a monosyllable, but it suggested much. Dykes saw the winced figure tauten, as though Kew was calling on all his resources. For it was Sexton Blake who was facing the criminal, and the glance that these two ancient enemies exchanged was like the signal that marks the opening of a battle.

"I'm rather surprised to see Mr. Blake in the company of this gentleman," said Kew, his face dark with suspicion. "I take it that it means trouble for me."

"You're not far wrong, Kew," said Blake. "I think I have cornered you at last."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I know the share you took in the robbery at Lady Marjory Mounjory's garden-party. The man who was your tool has found it wiser to take himself out of your power."

It was an evil, malicious stare that Kew fixed in the direction of Dykes, but the haggard face of the tall, thin man did not change. Dykes was resting back in the chair, with his legs crossed and his arms folded over his chest. He made no attempt to enter into the conversation, evidently content to leave it in the hands of Blake.

"So you've cornered me, have you?" said Kew. "That sounds very pleasant!"

"Not so very pleasant for you," Blake returned, eyeing the cool villain calmly. "In a few minutes you'll be arrested, and Scotland Yard will deal with your case."

Kew glanced at the clock above the mantelpiece. It was exactly a quarter to eleven.

"Well, if you really mean to arrest me," he said, his face a mask that hid the sinister thought in his brain. "I don't suppose there's any immediate hurry, is there? I have one or two things to do—hospital work, you know—several diet-sheets to be prepared. You can spare me a quarter of an hour, I suppose?"

It was quick instinct that told Sexton Blake that there was something behind this coolly-voiced demand.

Francis Kew crossed the chamber, and Blake watched him like a cat watching a mouse. When the surgeon reached his desk Blake nodded towards Dykes.

"I want you to search that man," he said slowly. "See that he has no weapon about him."

Kew shrugged his shoulders and came to a halt, raising his hands above his head.

"Search away, my dear fellow," he said; but his head-lice eyes blazed with a smouldering fury as Dykes, rising to his feet, obeyed Blake's request.

But Dykes's search was fruitless, beyond a few odds and ends. There was no weapon of any kind on Kew.

"You may sit at your desk now," said Blake, "but I want you to keep your hands above it. Anything you do you must do openly."

A sneer lifted Kew's thin lips as he seated himself.

"You don't think that I would attempt to kill either of you?" he said.

Blake's eyes hardened.

"Oh, no; it's not that I fear," he returned significantly. Kew's curious racking laugh broke out.

"Oh, I see!" he said. "You are afraid that I might commit suicide; but you need have no fear of that. I'm not nearly tired of life yet, and I assure you I find great pleasure in it."

His cool, easy bearing made a profound impression on Dykes. The tall man crossed to the mantelpiece, and, leaning on it, watched the winced figure as it bent over the desk.

U.J.—No. 525.

Kew drew a number of slips of paper towards him, and, dipping his pen into the ink, he began to mark out the various charts. Anyone watching him might have thought it was just an ordinary scene that was taking place, but it was really cloaking what was little else than an intense drama.

As a matter of fact, Kew had simply adopted the plan of marking the charts in order to gain time. He knew that he was in a tight corner—the tightest that he had ever been in—and his shrewd, lightning-like brain studied the problem over, trying to find the best way out of his difficulty.

Five minutes passed; then Kew, after a glance at the clock, leaned back.

"You are not of the type that one would care to make a bargain with, Blake," he said; "but still, I'm willing to make a proposal to you."

"I want no dealings with you!" Blake returned swiftly. Kew shrugged his shoulders.

"That was the answer I expected," he returned. "Still, I think you might hear me out."

Dykes flashed a look at Blake and half inclined his head. It was against Blake's wish to enter into any sort of conversation with the cunning criminal, yet something urged him to listen to what Kew had to say.

"I have no doubt you've got some plan at the back of your head," he said. "What is it?"

Kew's fingers folded together on the palms as the hands lay on the desk. That was the only sign that the wizened man gave to indicate the tenseness of the moment. He was just hazarding a last throw with Fate, and his liberty depended on his success.

"The jewellery that Mr. Dykes and I collected," he began, "is quite safe, and I am prepared to return that."

He nodded towards Francis Dykes. "And by doing so, of course, I clear this gentleman; for, unless I am very much mistaken, neither Lady Marjory nor Sir Arthur are very anxious to go on with the matter."

Blake did not know at the time that Francis Kew was a member of the committee, and it was through that that the vulture-faced surgeon had gained his information, so far as Lady Marjory was concerned.

"I cannot answer for what Lady Marjory may do," said Blake.

"Of course not," Kew returned. "I am quite content to let the decision rest with her."

He leaned forward slightly.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I have foreseen something like this. I doubted my amiable accomplice here. Dykes is really a criminal by accident, but not by instinct. I was afraid that he might turn at the last, and I have arranged that as soon as I am arrested the ambulance, with its contents, will be delivered by special messenger to Lady Marjory."

His sallow face twitched slightly.

"With all due deference to you, Blake," he said, "I doubt very much if you will be able to get Lady Marjory or her husband to make a charge against me—especially as I shall certainly see to it that Dykes takes his place along with me in the dock."

Blake hardly needed to be reminded of that fact, for his interview with Lady Marjory in the morning, and the information that he had subsequently received from Clarice Tremaine, had convinced him that, no matter what might happen, neither Lady Marjory nor her husband would appear to prosecute.

"It was very well thought out, Kew," he said; "but I think that I may be able to dispense with Lady Marjory's evidence. You see, I personally have an interest in the case." His voice took a vibrating note. "For among the booty that you stole was an article belonging to myself. I, therefore, alone, can appear in the part of a prosecutor."

It was a distinct hit, and it revealed itself in the quick twitching that came to the long, lean fingers on the desk.

"Very well," said Kew. "It is now my turn to bargain with you."

"You will find that a hard task," said Blake.

Kew's voice took a vibrating note.

"Have you any idea what has happened to Tinker?" he asked.

...Dykes started, an action which did not escape the observation of Kew.

"I have no doubt but what my friend here took you to the empty stores," he said mockingly. "But you did not find Tink there."

"Do you mean to say that you have removed him to somewhere else?" Dykes broke out. "I thought he had escaped."

Kew glanced up at the clock. It wanted five minutes to eleven!

With a dramatic gesture, the professor arose to his feet. "I want to tell you something, Sexton Blake," he said,

pointing at the clock. "In five minutes from now, unless you agree to my proposal, the boy whom you know as Tinker, will be as near to death as ever human being came."

"You infernal scoundrel!" Dykes broke out, making a quick rush forward. "You promised me that there would be nothing of that, you promised that you would not injure him in any way!"

He was close to the thin, tense figure now, and for a moment the two men glared into each other's eyes.

"I have not broken my promise," Kew said sharply. "I said that I, personally, would not touch him, and neither will I! He is not in my hands, nor is he in the hands of any accomplice of mine, but I swear to you that in less than five minutes he will be close to the Valley of the Shadow."
There was no mistaking the intense earnestness in the terrible voice. Blake, despite his iron nerve, felt his heart contract suddenly.

There was no being in the world that the detective loved so well as that keen-eyed, merry-faced waif of the streets that he had made his assistant.

Kew's vulture-face was set in a hard, grim expression, and it came to Blake that the man was speaking the truth.

"Five minutes!" said Francis Kew. "That is all the time you have left to decide in. You must either choose to let me go free or you can call in the police. But if you do the latter, remember that you are signing your assistant's death-warrant!"

"You unspeakable brute!" the tall, haggard-faced man broke out again. "Where is he? What have you done to the lad?"

"That has nothing to do with you, Dykes," Kew said. "The matter is not in your hands. It is Mr. Blake who has to decide."

He glanced again at the detective.

"I know that you have a big grudge against me," he went on calmly; "and so far as this case is concerned the odds of victory are distinctly with you." A spasmodic contract the vulture-face for a moment. "You see already what I have to do; return the jewellers and even forgo my revenge on you and your assistant. If I do go free it is with empty hands, and that is a very poor reward after all my work."

He certainly spoke the truth. Sexton Blake had the whip-hand, but there was always the case of Francis Kew himself to consider. Blake felt that he would have given all he possessed to corner the cunning-brained rogue. Yet—

"You have only four minutes now," said Kew.

A deep breath escaped from the detective's lips. He would have sacrificed anything, even his own life, but he felt that his own personal enmity against this man should not stand in the way of saving Tinker.

Many times and often had the youngster made great sacrifices for the sake of his beloved master, Tinker's devotion to Blake was the dearest thing that Blake had in life.

"I only want your word, Blake," said Kew; "and it will only cover this case. Should we cross swords again we will meet on level terms as usual."

Dykes turned to Blake.

"For Heaven's sake agree, man!" he breathed. "Don't risk that poor youngster's life for the sake of revenge on this dastard!"

"And I have one other offer to make to you," said Kew, in a slow, cynical tone. "If you do agree to my proposal, and you find out later that Tinker was not in danger, I am willing that you should send the police here at once and have me arrested."

He waved his hand around the quietly-furnished room.

"I am not difficult to find," he said, "and I can assure you I'm not going to hide myself now. When we meet, Blake, we meet in the open, you on one side of the law and I on the other."

Dykes was close to Blake now, and he was looking into the grim, intent face of the detective.

"Don't hesitate for Heaven's sake," he breathed. "After all, that can't be right. He loses everything that he tried for, and you can give him his liberty for a little time longer."

"Time flies!" said Kew, in a thin, warning voice.

With an effort Blake choked back the desire that had mastered him; and, striding up to the table, he looked into the vulture face.

"I agree to your terms, Francis Kew," he said. "Now, where is Tinker?"

Kew had been standing motionless during that momentous interview. But now, with a swift run, he crossed the room and reached a telephone fixed in the wall.

"Quick, put me on the exchange," he said.

There was a moment's pause, then Kew gave a number.

"Is that Margery Hospital?"

Dykes and Blake leaned forward to listen to the thin voice:

"I want you to go to Doctor Randolph at once. Yes—yes! I know he's in the operating theatre, but I'm Professor Kew, of St.-Cyr's, and I find now that I made a mistake—"

"Heavens, what does it mean?" Dykes whispered. "—the patient that I examined this evening, and who is now in the operating theatre must not be operated upon. Tell Dr. Randolph that I am coming up at once, and that he must not touch the patient until I arrive. Hurry up, now, and I will wait until you return!"

Unable any longer to contain himself Dykes flung himself across the room.

Kew had moved slightly away from the telephone now, but was still holding the receiver to his ear.

"What do you mean? Who is it that you are referring to?" Dykes broke out.

The vulture face turned to him.

"The patient I am referring to is Tinker," he said; "and when the porter of the hospital returns I shall know whether I have been too late or not!"

"You—you mean to say that it was Tinker who was going to be operated upon?" Dykes said, in a horrified tone.

The bead-like eyes of the professor glistened.

"That is so," he returned. "And, as you see, I took no active part in it. Now stand back, and let me listen. I may have been too late."

At his words, Dykes staggered back a couple of paces, then a tense, grim silence fell on the room.

Suddenly a whirring noise was heard, and the silvery bell in the little clock on the mantelpiece chimed out the hour of eleven.

THE NINTH CHAPTER. The End of Fordyce Dykes.

RID and motionless, yet with every nerve on the alert, Tinker lay on the operating-table, his eyes fixed on the glaring light above. There was a death-like silence in the quiet theatre, and the lad could hear the steady breathing of the little group of students gathered around the table.

The mental agony that the youngster went through then was such as he had never experienced before. He could not speak, could not move foot nor head, yet he knew all that was going on around him.

He could hear quite distinctly the hissing of the steam disinfecting kettle, and at last the shadow of the surgeon fell across him, and he saw the bearded face looming above him.

In an agony of despair the lad waited, and it seemed to him as though his heart was leaping convulsively in his breast.

A moment passed and then another, and Tinker's whistling brain which had now given way to the intense mental strain, began to clear slightly.

"Why didn't the man commence?"

The youngster felt as though he could not endure another moment of that awful agony. He felt as though his life was going out from under the terrible strain.

Something like a film had come over his eyes, as though from a great distance, he heard a voice.

The film cleared from his eyes and he noted then that the surgeon was no longer leaning over him.

"Go and see who that is!"

Tinker recognised the deep voice of Doctor Randolph. Someone moved from the side of the table and Tinker heard a door open.

A confused murmur of voices came to the youngster as he lay there beneath the glare of the light. Then, footfalls sounded close to the operating table, and a strange voice came to Tinker's ears.

"An urgent message from Professor Kew, sir," the voice said. "He—he does not want you to operate now—"

Tinker felt as though he was sinking into unconsciousness, and he strained his ears to hear the rest of the words.

"He—he is coming along—"

A merciful oblivion came down on the youngster then, and he heard no more.

Tinker had fainted!

The message which Doctor Randolph had received sent a little sensation around the group of students. There was no attempt on the part of the surgeon to gainstay the order. Francis Kew's reputation as a surgeon was too great for that, and professional etiquette prevented the lesser skilled surgeon from making any remark.

A couple of attendants came forward, and Tinker was wheeled back to the quiet ward where the nurse on duty took charge of him.

About half-past eleven a taxi-cab drove up to the hospital and from it two men emerged. They were Sexton Blake and U.J.—No. 525.

Dykes, and, after stating their business to the porter, they were led into the private room of Doctor Randolf.

What transpired there was never revealed, but some five or six minutes later, the surgeon with his two visitors behind him, entered the ward in which Tinker was lying.

Without a word to the nurse the surgeon went up to the young assistant's cot, and drawing a small sealed packet from his pocket, he loosened the wrappings and opened the box. Lying snugly in a roll of aseptic wool was a small hypodermic syringe. The plunger had been drawn out to its full extent, and as the surgeon lifted the instrument its weight told him it was filled to its full extent.

He bent over the lad, and Blake and Dykes were not able to see what he did, but a few minutes later he straightened up and Blake caught sight of the syringe. The little knob of the plunger had been forced home now, and the injection, whatever it was, had been safely administered.

It was Francis Kew who had handed Blake that packet with a sealed note to deliver to Doctor Randolf.

Dykes came forward till he was close to the foot of the cot, and there was a strained, anxious look on the haggard face as it stared down at the motionless one of the lad stretched out on the cot.

For it seemed to Gilbert Fordyce Dykes as though Tinker was dead, so rigid and motionless was the figure.

The moments passed slowly, each of them seeming an eternity to the watchers. Then, suddenly, one arm of the youngster was raised.

An articulate sound came from Dykes' lips, but a quick motion from the surgeon made him control his feelings again.

Slowly the hand went up to the head, and was pressed against the lips and brow. Then, with an obviously painful effort, Tinker raised himself until he was resting on his left elbow.

His eyes travelled first to the lean figure at the foot of the cot, then to the bearded face of the surgeon. A spasm of pain seemed to run across the features for a moment, then Tinker's eyes went on and fell on the clean-shaven, intent face of his master.

"Guv'nor!" Tinker broke out, the dawns of intelligence coming back to his face.

He stretched out his right arm, and a moment later Blake was by his side. The way in which the detective wrapped his arms around the youthful body, and hugged Tinker close to him was a revelation to Dykes.

He had always looked upon Sexton Blake as a curiously unemotional man, but it was evident that the detective had depths of feeling that were never revealed in outward view.

"It's all right, Tinker," Blake said, in a husky voice.

"Oh, guv'nor, I-I've had such a rotten dream!"

The lad had wrapped his arm around Blake's neck and was looking round the ward.

"And I ain't too sure that was a dream," he went on, in a slow, uncertain voice. "Get me out of this, guv'nor, as quick as you can. I don't like the look of the place a bit."

The bearded surgeon came closer to Blake.

"It is quite safe to remove him if you like, Mr. Blake," he said.

"Very well, then, we'll do it," Blake returned.

There was something pathetic in the way Tinker tried to help Blake and Dykes as they dressed him.

The lad was obviously suffering from the terrible strain that had been placed upon him.

It was on Blake's arm that Tinker leaned as he left the hospital, and the trio entered the taxi-cab to make their way down to Baker Street.

It was long after midnight before Tinker was tucked up in the sheets of his own bed and sleeping quietly. Blake and Dykes went into the detective's study, and when they found themselves alone a silence came down on them.

Blake had dropped into his easy chair, and had pulled out a briar pipe from his case.

"Help yourself to a smoke, Dykes," he said, indicating a box of cigars.

The face of Gilbert Fordyce Dykes was set in a grim, determined look.

"No, thanks, Blake," he returned. "I—I think if you have finished with me, say I—I'll go."

Blake lighted his pipe before he replied.

"There's a spare bed here if you'd like to stay the night," he said.

Dykes seemed to find it difficult to speak.

"No, I—by heavens, you're too good to me, Blake! I'm not worthy of it, you seem to forget that I am nothing else but a criminal, and that only the slenderest of chances prevented me from being in prison at this very minute."

"I never judge a man's character," Blake returned. "How anyone spends his life is nothing to me. It is quite true that you have been a criminal, and I do not even ask you how you came to seek the shady ways of life. But you did your U. J.—No. 525.

best to help me, Dykes, and it is certain that had it not been for you, I should never have been able to find Tinker."

Dykes face went a shade paler.

"I will never forget that scene," he said. "It was the chancest moment that I have ever lived."

He looked at Blake suddenly.

"You had to give your promise to Francis Kew," Dykes murmured, "and you cannot go back on that. But, by heavens, he extracted no promise from me!"

The tall, emaciated body was drawn to its full height.

"I feel that such a man moving about in London is a danger to the people," Dykes went on in a slow tone. "I feel that—"

He came to a pause suddenly as though afraid of what he was going to say; then, striding across the room, he held out his hand to Blake.

"Good-bye, Mr. Blake," said Gilbert Fordyce Dykes, "I don't suppose I shall ever meet you again, but I will never forget what you tried to do for me."

There was a certain grim determination in the tense lips that told Blake that it would be useless to attempt to argue with him.

Dykes had evidently made up his mind to do something, and Blake felt that he could almost make a shrewd guess as to what it was.

He arose to his feet and shook hands with Dykes. Then he escorted the tall figure to the front-door of the house, and stood on the step watching Dykes until the man had vanished.

"I wonder if I have done right?" Blake thought, as he made his way back to his rooms again. "I think I know what is at the back of that man's mind. He does not mean to let Francis Kew get away so easily as he has done so far."

With his pipe between his teeth, and his hands clasped behind his back, Blake spent the better part of half an hour standing up and down his study.

"I believe I was right in sacrificing my hold on that regius for the sake of Tinker," he decided, "although I don't believe I'd have done it for anybody else in the world. Kew will return the jewellery all right; he is too cunning to let me have a chance of going for him in that respect. It is a victory to me, as he says, but it is not a complete victory, and the personal feud between Kew and I has still to be settled."

He halted by the grate to knock the ashes out of his pipe.

"And it seems as though Dykes has also a grudge against Kew," Blake thought, half aloud. "I wonder how that is going to settle itself?"

He little dreamed of the curious happening that was to mark the close of that memorable case.

For Blake was right when he had decided that Dykes was off in search of revenge. All the tall man's energy seemed to be centred on the one person now, and that was the lean, wizened professor.

Through the empty streets of London Dykes strode like a shadow of doom.

On and on he paced until he reached the East End. He had walked the better part of six miles, but the burning desire for revenge in his heart seemed to give a fictitious strength to his limbs.

Blake had told Dykes of the scene that had taken place in No. 6, Doggel's Alley, and it was towards that quarter that Dykes turned now. He wanted a man to help him, and he knew that he would have to seek no further than Jem.

The sparsely-furnished chamber on the second floor was in darkness when Dykes pushed the door aside and entered it, but the splutter of the match as he lighted it brought a bulky figure up in the bed, and the steel rim of a revolver-muzzle was thrust forward sharply.

"All right, Jem," Dykes said in his quiet voice. "I want a word with you."

With easy nonchalance he crossed the room, paying no attention to the revolver, and lighted the gas.

"So yer 'ave come back, 'ave yer?" Jem broke out. "Mebbe yer found it didn't pay yer to git mixed up with that evil-faced skunk?"

"I never expected it would pay me, Jem. I was forced to do what he told me, and now, by heavens, I'm out for revenge."

"Revenge?"

Jem's bulky figure was out of the bed at once, and his face was glaring into the haggard one of Dykes.

"Is that straight? Are yer goin' to 'ave a cut at Kew?"

"I am," said Dykes, "and I wanted someone to help me. I wanted a man who is a skilled house-breaker, and I couldn't think of anybody better suited than you. Besides, unless I'm very much mistaken, you'd like to get your own back on Kew yourself?"

The heavy jowl of the burglar thrust itself out suddenly, and his sullen features were suffused with a mottled rage.

"I should just think I do," Jem muttered in a savage

undertone. "Wot's yer game, Dykes? I'm yer man whatever it is!"

"Oh, it's an easy game," said Dykes. "I'm going to Kew's house in Maiden Vale, where he always lives, and then I'm going to get him to sign a confession admitting his robbery and the attempted murder. He'll sign that, or by heavens, I'll shoot him for the dog he is!"

"It'd be better if yer shot him first," said Jem. Dykes wheeled on him sharply.

"I'll carry this out my own way," he said. "All I want is to get that confession and hand it to someone. I'll then give Francis Kew twenty-four hours to get out of England, and if ever he shows his face here again, he'll be arrested!"

"It ain't enough!" Jem said savagely. "It ain't half enough!"

"It's enough for my purpose," said Dykes. "I want to see him out of this country, a ruined, known criminal. If I do that, I'll have done a little service in my life."

He arose to his feet.

"And now, Jem, what is it to be? Yes, or No?" Jem began hurriedly to dress himself.

"It's 'yus!' the hoarse murmur came.

A belated taxi had an unexpected fare in the shape of Dykes and his companion, and it was shortly after five o'clock in the morning that they stepped out of the vehicle and made their way to the quiet villa at the end of the little side-street where Francis Kew lived.

There was no sign of daylight yet, and presently, when they reached the little line of railings that divided the front garden of Kew's villa from the street, Dykes came to a halt and motioned to his companion.

Jem slid over the railings with a dexterous movement of his heavy body, and a moment later he was blotted out against the wall of the house.

Standing in the shadow thrown by one of the trees that stood at regular intervals along the edge of the pavement, Dykes kept watch.

The tall man was beginning to feel just a little weary now; there was a cold feeling about his limbs, and once as he stood there he had to clutch at the tree while the dark street swam around him. It was not by any means the first time that Dykes had had one of these fainting fits; it was the dread sign of a weakened heart.

"S-s-st!"

A faint hissing sound came from the garden, and with an effort Dykes recovered control of his weakened limbs again.

Peering into the garden he saw the shady figure of Jem beckoning to him. Leaving the shadow of the tree, the tall man slid over the rails of the garden, and, stepping noiselessly now, reached the bulky shadow of his companion.

"I've opened a window at the side," said Jem. "I don't know wot room it lets inter, but I suppose you knows."

"At the side," Dykes repeated thoughtfully. "Yes, I think I know. That must be Kew's study. It leads out into a passage on the left of the stairs. All right, Jem, you can wait until I return."

Jem extended his arm, and Dykes felt something cold pressed into his fingers.

"Dunno if yer've got one or not, but this is a dandy," said Jem.

The cold fingers of Dykes closed around the butt of the revolver, then, wheeling round, the tall figure went round the angle of the wall and vanished.

His curiosity urged Jem into a course which he knew was against the wishes of his companion. The burglar did his best to stay where he was, but his feelings proved too strong

for him, and presently he slid around the wall and darted down the side of it, reaching the opened window.

Dykes had already disappeared, and, kicking off his shoes, Jem drew himself through the window, dropping lightly into the dark room. He had to feel his way across the chamber, moving very cautiously step by step.

He followed the wall until he reached a doorway, and found that the door was open.

As he stepped into the passage Jem saw that the light from an outside lamp-post was shining through the coloured glass in the panels of the front hall. A movement ahead made Jem peer a little closer. As his eyes grew accustomed to the half light, he noted the tall figure of Dykes.

It was in a half-crouching position, with his hands clutching tightly at the top of the banisters of the stairs.

Jem heard a few quick breaths sound, then suddenly the tall figure slid away from its support, and with a faint thud it fell at full length on the tiled floor of the hall.

With an exclamation of horror Jem darted forward, and dropped on his knees by the side of the long figure. Stooping down, the burglar raised the head and listened.

There was no breath issuing from the lips, and the limp tilt of the head told Jem what had happened.

Gilbert Fordyce Dykes was dead.

At this sudden and terrible end to their adventure, Jem found himself kneeling for a moment unable to move.

"He's gone!" the burglar muttered. "No doubt about that."

Jem himself had been a witness of the death of Dykes, and he knew that it was no outside agency that had accomplished it. Both Jem and Jerry were aware that their gentlemanly companion had never been far from the borderland of death. His emaciated frame and the terrible cough that racked his body now and again were plain indications of that.

It was the tense excitement following the long exertion that had put an end to a wasted life.

There was a grim mockery in the fact that Dykes had died at the foot of the stairs that led to the bed-room of the man whom he meant to have his revenge upon.

It came to Jem presently that it would be madness for him to remain there, or even to allow his companion to do so. The burly fellow picked up the limp body, and its lightness was a revelation to Jem.

"Poor old Dykes!" he said. "He couldn't have been anything more than skin and bone."

How Jem escaped with his burden was only proof of the cleverness of that broad-shouldered burglar. But he did do so, and also succeeded in carrying Dykes back to Doggel's Alley.

It was weeks after before Sexton Blake learned the truth of what had happened, and then it was only an accident that sent Jem across his path.

By that time Lady Marjory and her husband had almost forgotten the incident of the robbery; but Blake, knowing that the woman would like to hear the story, visited Lady Marjory later on, and told her what Jem had said.

There were tears in the woman's eyes when he finished the tale, and she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes for a moment.

"Poor Gilbert!" she said. "You know, Mr. Blake, I think that he was always aware that death was going to come to him early in life, and that made him the mad, reckless man that he was. But he did do his best to make up for his transgressions, and I think that we can both pray for his peaceful rest."



THE END.

IN "THE YELLOW OCTOPUS." DO NOT MISS IT!

Fair, open and honest criticism is what I ask of you. It helps me to keep the "UNION JACK"



essentially a paper for all classes. I value equally, criticism from the highest to the lowest.

READ ON H.M.S. LORD NELSON!

"No. 16 Mess H.M.S. Lord Nelson,
"1st Battle Squadron, Gibraltar.
"Dear Old Skipper,—I now take the pleasure of writing you once again, just to convey my shipmates' and my own opinion on the story of 'The Scorpion and His Wife.' My chums wish me to say that they think the story most unique, and hope that you will continue to write about him occasionally, but they sincerely wish you NOT to stop any 'Y'onne' or 'Wu Ling'.

"Of course, it was welcomed out here on the Rock, as this is the birthplace of the Rock Scorpion. After my shipmates had finished reading it, I took it ashore, and gave it to one of the Scorpions ashore who could read English, and he told me he would like another if I had one. I told him that at present I had not another, but I would most probably have another shortly, and I would let him have it. Well, he pitches me off all sorts of things—such as bunches of grapes, etc., just to show his thanks.

"Well, dear Skipper, there isn't any need for me to tell you how long I have read THE UNION JACK, or how I obtain it, as I have written to you before, and told you. I am sorry I can't write you a longer letter, as I am very busy at present working on a damaged dynamo; but I had to write this, as my shipmates have continually worried me. If you write a nice long reply, I will put it on the notice-board, as I did the former one.

"Trusting you and your staff are in perfect health, etc.,
I am your ever sincere chum,
H. E. C."

Thanks, H. E. C.! Yours is a true, breezy, naval letter! Convey to all your shipmates my very best wishes, and tell them that I am shortly publishing a splendid photograph of the Lord Nelson. Ask them to look out for it!

You have by this time received my personal reply to your letter, and I hope it occupied the proud position on the notice-board, as you promised.

MY CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.

I have been studying very closely all letters containing suggestions for the forthcoming Christmas Double Number of THE UNION JACK LIBRARY, my chums, and have decided that the following characters are the most popular ones to include in the splendid 80,000-word yarn the issue will contain:

Sexton Blake, Tinker, Pedro, Yvonne, Wu Ling, Dr. Huxton Rymer.

What do you think of that as a cast? I am pretty sure that one would have to go a very long way to get a stronger set of characters for a story, and I am looking forward to a number that will go down to history as a complete triumph and record in journalism.

The action of the yarn will be in London, America, and China. I have made arrangements with "Val," your favourite artist, to prepare a really good coloured front illustration, and I am also making special arrangements for the issue to be a fine and well-produced book. I shall have some more to say on this subject later on.

CECIL HAYTER'S NEW SERIAL, "THE TRAGEDY OF THE OKLAHOMA," HAS CAUGHT ON!

I thought it would, my chums. Every letter contains some praise for this latest product from the great Cecil Hayter. Now, I am going to run this serial in two parts, each part to run about seven weeks.

The first part is now drawing to a close, and part two will immediately follow, and will prove even more interesting and dramatic than part one. I will publish the title of part two next week. In the meantime, please try to get some new chums for me. Remember, new serials mean new readers!

MY NEW PHOTO GALLERY.

This week sees the first of the new series of battleship photographs, my chums. I feel sure that this side issue in the old paper will prove successful. I hope so, at all events. That all patriotic Britishers are interested in their Navy goes without saying, and that is one great reason why my "IRON WALLS OF GREAT BRITAIN" Gallery should be most popular.

I want every chum of mine to talk about it!

SEXTON BLAKE ON THE PICTURES.

In reply to the many anxious inquiries on this subject, let me say that I shall be in a position to publish some definite statements very soon. They will appear on this page, so look out for them.

TO BE TRUSTED IN ANY HOUSEHOLD.

"Tumby Bay, South Australia,
"September 1st, 1913.

"Dear Skipper,—I am writing this in order to in some way express my appreciation of your valuable paper, THE UNION JACK.

"I am pleased to say that I have read the 'U. J.' for the past five or six years (although I do not quite recollect the name or number of the first copy), and I think it is the best book, both for young and old.

"A paper such as yours can be trusted in any household, as not one copy that I have so far read has had anything contained in it other than good, clean, healthy reading.

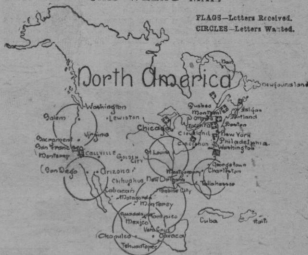
"Of the three characters—Curly, Plummer, and Yvonne—I think I prefer the latter, although one is always sure of a good time when either of the former are at work. I am anxiously looking forward to next week's UNION JACK, which will be entitled 'The Missing Guests,' and I am expecting a real treat, as usual. Before starting on the yarns, I always turn to the 'Skipper's' page, and read the letters from the various chums in different parts of the world.

"My UNION JACK comes to me from Adelaide, where it is first read by a friend; and then, when I have read it, father, mother, and my brother have it.

"The copy I am reading at present—'The Long Trail' (about Sir Richard Loxley and Lobangu) is dated June 7th, so you see it is a trifle late when my 'U. J.' comes to hand; but I assure you it is just as eagerly sought after away out here in Australia as it is by the London chums, who receive it every week.—I am, etc., faithfully yours,
"VICTOR W. DIXON."

(Now turn to page iv. of the Cover.—SKIPPER.)

THIS WEEK'S MAP.



FLAGS—Letters Received.
CIRCLES—Letters Wanted.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

Two negroes run amok on the "Oklahoma," and kill the captain and all the crew, with the exception of our hero Jim and Mike Langton. These two escape to the shore,

THE TRAGEDY OF THE OKLAHOMA



By CECIL HAYTER.

Little Sheriff's Crack Shot.

"Hades won't be in it," he went on. "There's a fearful lot of niggers around, and whites are some scarce. I'll bet my last wad of dollars that feller gets hold of the niggers, and works 'em up for mischief. He knows the way to get at 'em where they live and make 'em hustle. We're in for a black risin', same as in seventy-nine. I ain't got any use fer niggers, anyway."

Simpson and Hart exchanged glances significantly.

"Guess you're about right," said the latter; "and, what's more, this White seems to hev got his paws on considerable dollars and a smart boat. He'll be sneakin' up an' down the coast, bribin' and coaxin', an' he'll get a batch of bad niggers off of most of any of the plantations, an' then go for a big haul. Now, I ain't giving a sack of beans for any nigger trash, as a general rule. Give me a gun, and I'll stand off a whole crowd of 'em to my own cheek and not quit smokin'. But when they go real nasty, and get mad-like, why, I surmise it's a different kind of proposition. Most of you folk ain't seen a nigger rush on business. I hev. Yessir. An', what's more, it ain't wholesome when it comes. You may go and blow around 'bout despisin' black trash, an' all that. I guess. It eases yer minds, and don't hurt any. Well, I ain't scary, as a rule, and I don't allow no man to call me any sort of zaboat; but I do say right here and now that it takes sand to keep your end up against a rush of 'em when they've tasted blood, and got real wild with the wool flyin'. An' Jake Simpson here can bear me out; he's bin thar with both feet an' his boots on!"

Simpson nodded.

"See, here, boys, this is how I figure on it. There's goin' to be trouble—hoop bad trouble. When, sez you, Dunknon, sez I. But it's comin', sure. Maybe, to-morrow, or next day, or next week. We ain't got guns to go around. Shells is short, powder's short, an' if we can't skip around lively, foodstuffs are goin' to be tarnation short, too. I vote for quittin' right now before the dance begins. We can tote our blongings and the womenkind up to Dunville. There's a store there, and a caboose; and we can kind of prepare. Then one of us, or maybe two, can get up north by the creeks to Punta Gorda or Myers, and get on the wires asking for a few good men to be sent down, and round up the whole bag of tricks."

"An' what then, Jake?" said a voice.

Simpson's face grew hrd and stern.

"What then? I'll tell you what then, smart enough. Yessir! I'd round up every blame nigger in this section, and drive him in with the business end of a rifle in the small of his back, and persuade him to look on whilst we took this White and his men, an' strung 'em up and riddled 'em through and through. That's the only way we're goin' to stop this nigger racket. It's all very well for them tarnation Northern papers to holler and scream, and get out fancy pictures of the brutal horrors of lynchin'. I'd like to get a parcel of their fool editors and writer chaps, and plant 'em down right where the trouble is. I surmise they'd be singin' another tune—pretty lively, too—and be askin' for railway time-tables and next express north with a restaurant-car to revive their jaded nerves. Yes, sree, that's about the size of it."

There was a moment's silence, and then one of the younger men—a raw hand from Jacksonville way—broke in.

"Sag, it seems pretty ornary and mean to cut and run before a handful of low-down niggers!"

"Is that so?" drawled Simpson. "Waal, I guess no one's goin' to hurt you if you choose to stay right here, and do the heroic act. Maybe, they'll put yer picture in the Sunday editions, but I reckon it'll appear in the funeral advertisement columns."

A faint snicker of laughter went round, and the young man retired abashed.

The rest of the night was spent in packing up such goods and chattels as had escaped the negroes' ruthless spirit of destruction, and by dawn the settlement of Tortuga was a deserted waste of charred and smouldering black ruin,

and are pursued by the blacks, Jim and Mike take refuge in a small settlement, but the negroes fire it, and they escape in the "Oklahoma." The settlers discuss the possibility of their return. (Now go on.)

Dunville is a small township, boasting, perhaps, twenty able-bodied men out of a total white population of some seventy souls, and a black one of nearer seven hundred, including some scattered farms and hamlets.

It consists of one broad white-sanded street, with a plank side walk, and a row of frame houses and stores, and another shorter street running into this midway at right angles. It is close on a hundred miles, as the cross flies, from the railway head, and lies well south of the cattle and orange belts. Yet it is a fairly prosperous little place, and prides itself on its advanced civilisation.

It boasts a caboose or jail, a small building of three cells and a warden's room; a school, which also performs the duties of a courthouse and town-hall; a drug store, for being a prohibition county the intelligent native buys his whisky from the chemist in a medicine bottle instead of at a bar—and last, but not least, it boasts a sheriff—locally known as the Little Sheriff, a personage of considerable celebrity.

He was a man built in one of Nature's freakish moments on a diminutive scale, standing a bare five foot two. But what he lacked in bulk and inches he made up for in courage. His pluck was that of a fighting bull-terrier, and his reputation for marksmanship and fancy shooting was the terror of the less law-abiding citizens. There was not a man in the whole section who would willingly tackle him single-handed. And it was on record that once when the cowboy crackers from the cattle belt had ridden in on their bi-monthly spree, to spend their money and paint the town a lurid crimson, he had stood off five of them, unaided, for half an hour in the main street, rather than allow his authority to be disputed.

The small party of refugees from Tortuga, including Jim and Mike Langton, had come in nearly a week before anything definite had happened. Their news at first had caused a disturbance not unlike a panic. Nevertheless, they had been hospitably received, and billeted amongst the inhabitants. As day after day passed by uneventfully, the warning they had brought began first of all to be disregarded, and then gradually forgotten.

The lapse of time, however, had enabled Jim to heal up, and Mike Langton to shake off his malacia, and they, the Little Sheriff, and the two plume-hunters held several long and earnest conversations, the upshot of which was that if no rising took place in the next four days, an expedition was to start out with the object of capturing White and Johnson, if possible, alive, and at their own special request Jim and Mike and the two plume-hunters were amongst the number selected.

It was on the evening of the third of the four days that the trouble began unexpectedly, as is generally the way. Jim and Mike were sitting on the step of the house where they were temporarily staying, smoking, and watching the sunset, when they noticed a little way down the sandy road a couple of niggers start quarrelling—or, at any rate, seeming to quarrel—and as they lurched and swayed first one way and then the other, they jostled a white man who was passing.

Instantly the latter raised a switch which he was carrying, and lashed out at them indiscriminately. Before he could turn, or raise his hand again, the two niggers, loosing one another, sprang at him like wild cats.

Jim and Mike leapt to their feet to rush to his assistance.

"Quick, man—quick!" roared Mike. "One of the brutes has got a razor out."

There was a flash of steel as the man's black arm flung out, and then quite suddenly he stood rigid for a second, and collapsed in a heap on the soft sand as a rifle cracked sharply, and at the far end of the street they saw the figure of the Little Sheriff standing motionless as a rock in the middle of the roadway, his cheek still nestled against the stock of his rifle.

It had all taken place so quickly that a haze of blue smoke still hung round the muzzle.

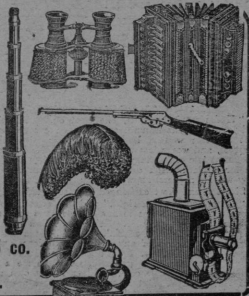
(Another long instalment next week.)

FREE FOR SELLING 12 BEAUTIFUL XMAS CARDS AT 1d. EACH.



As an advertisement we give every reader of this paper a splendid present absolutely FREE simply for selling 12 Cards at 1d. each. (Gold-mounted, Embossed Folders, Glossy, etc.) Our up-to-date Prize List contains hundreds of different kinds of free gifts for everyone, including Ladies' and Gents' Gold & Silver Watches, Ostich Feathers, Furs, Cycles, Telescopes, Chains, Rings, Accordeons, Cinemas, Gramophones, Air Guns, Engines, Toys, etc., etc. All you need do is send us your name and address (a postcard will do) and we will send you a selection of Lovely cards to sell or use at 1d. each. When you send the money obtained and we will immediately forward gift chosen according to the Grand List we send you. Start Early. Send a postcard now to—

THE ROYAL CARD CO.
(DEPT. 8),
KEW, LONDON.



HOW TO GET—AND KEEP—"FOOTBALL FIT."

By THE SKIPPER.

This is a very serious question for all football players, and, as I promised last week, I am here giving you a few hints in that direction, which, carefully followed, will prove of great value.

First and foremost, skipping. That is the thing to get you fit, and keep you fit.

SKIPPING EXERCISE.

For General Fitness and Good for the Wind.

Get, borrow, or steal, your sister's skipping rope, and after your morning tub do the following:

- (1) Imitate the action of running while skipping, keeping the feet close to the ground, fifty times.
- (2) The same, only bringing the knees as high as you can, thirty times.
- (3) Both feet together, and lift simultaneously, twenty times.

DRIBBLING EXERCISE.

On the ground, place a number of flower pots upside down, in four lines of eight pots, leaving just enough room to pass between. Get a tennis ball; now start at the first row and dribble the ball between the flower pots up and down the rows, taking care not to touch the pots with either the ball or your feet, slowly at first, then faster. This teaches one to control the ball.

HEADING EXERCISE.

Many boys (and men) are weak at heading. How often at professional matches one has admired a pretty piece of head-work.

By the following method I became quite expert.

Purchase a large rubber ball (the kind baby usually plays with). Then find a nice smooth piece of wall; one side of the house will do. Having done this, throw the ball against the wall, catching the rebound on your head (on each corner of the forehead, using the body from the waist to send the ball back) not using the head as if it were a hammer and the neck the handle; this only causes headache and does not send the ball far. Try and keep the ball from touching the ground, using your head, and occasionally, feet. Get three or four fellows to have a light football in the playground or field, and practise heading to one another; always try to send the ball to a given spot, for merely sending the ball into the air is of no use to your side.

SHOOTING EXERCISE.

Using the same ball as for heading, and an empty box. Place the box on the ground, the open end towards you. Now try to kick the ball from different angles and distances into the box. First, with the ball stationary; when you can do this fairly easily from various angles, you can combine the flower pots by placing them about and dribbling through them before shooting. When shooting, remember to use that part of the foot known as the arch (that is between the ankle and where the toes begin) keeping the toes pointed down; do not lift the toes, or you will lift the ball.

N.B.—Practise both left and right foot.

SEXTON BLAKE, WU LING, DR. HUXTON RYMER NEXT WEEK.

I am very pleased to tell you that I have another splendid 40,000-word yarn—introducing Wu Ling and Dr. Huxton Rymer, as well as Sexton Blake, Tinker, and Pedro. The title is "The Yellow Octopus," and the plot deals with the attempt by Wu Ling to seize certain states in America, the revolution that follows, and the dramatic manner Sexton Blake puts a stop to it.

THE SKIPPER.