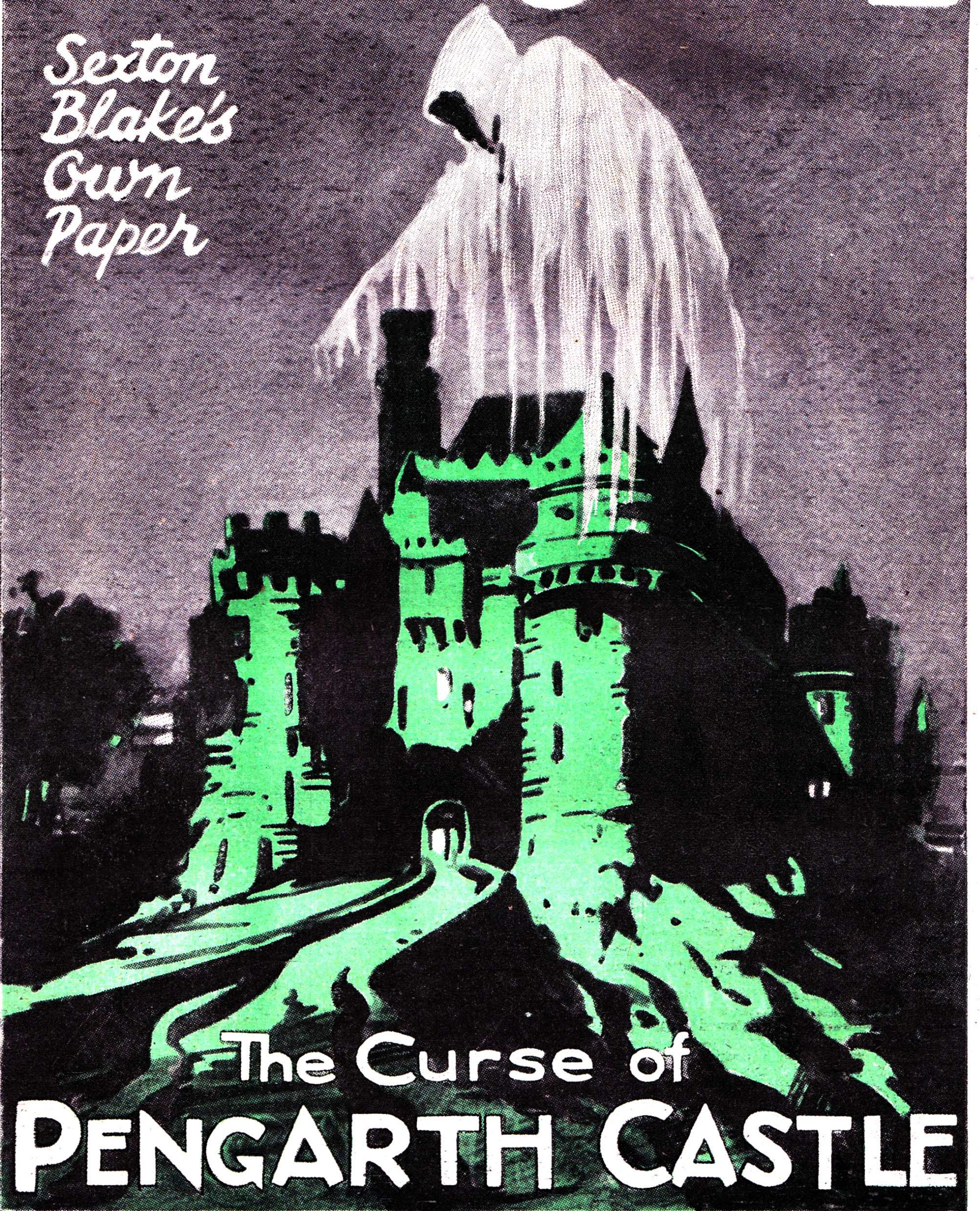


356 THEATRES

have shown the "CAPTAIN BLOOD" film. Have you seen it? And have you read Sabatini's Own Story of the film, in this paper?

THE UNION JACK 2 ^D

*Sexton
Blake's
Own
Paper*



The Curse of **PENGARTH CASTLE**

SEXTON BLAKE and WALDO the Wonder-Man!
IN A MAGNIFICENT DETECTIVE MYSTERY STORY.

Captain Blood



BY RAFAEL SABATINI

CONDEMNED to the slavery of the West Indian sugar plantations for a crime he did not commit, Peter Blood, a physician of the little Somersetshire town of Bridgewater, is sent to Barbadoes, and there bought for £10 by the brutal Colonel Bishop.

A Spanish galleon, the *Cinco Llagas*, which comes to raid the island, is captured by Peter Blood and his comrades, and the crew and commander captured. They sail away from Barbadoes and release the Spaniards near the island of Hispaniola.

The original intention of Peter Blood—now Captain Blood—was to make his way back to Europe, but circumstances compelled him to remain with the crew and become, with them, "Brethren of the Coast"—in short, pirates.

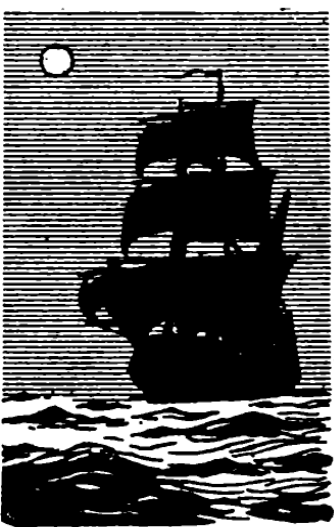
He re-names the ship "*Arabella*"—after *Arabella Bishop*, the daughter of the slavedriver who bought him for £10 and for whom he has a now hopeless affection, and puts in at *Tortuga*, the pirates' haven.

Here he is approached by a man named *Levasseur*, the captain of a French privateer, who proposes that they form a partnership with the object of raiding the city of *Maracaybo*, and as a preliminary make a cruise so that they can "acquire" additional ships for the enterprise. Blood agrees to this partnership.

Before sailing, *Levasseur* receives a note from *Mlle. d'Ogeron*, the daughter of the Governor of *Tortuga*, appealing for his help. She is being sent to Europe in a Dutch brig, the *Jongvrouw*, in her brother's charge, for she is in love with *Levasseur*, and her father intends to separate them.

The brig has already started, and, before the arranged time of his and Blood's sailing, *Levasseur* sets off in pursuit, against the wishes of his crew, and in spite of the fact that the French and English are at peace with the Dutch.

WITHIN the hour the *Arabella* and *La Foudre* were beating out to sea together. Without understanding the change of plan involved, Captain Blood, nevertheless, accepted it, and weighed anchor before the appointed time upon perceiving his associate to do so.



All day the Dutch brig was in sight, though by evening she had dwindled to the merest speck on the northern horizon. The course prescribed for Blood and *Levasseur* lay eastward along the northern shores of *Hispaniola*. To that course the *Arabella* continued to hold steadily throughout the night, with the result that when day broke again she was alone. *La Foudre*, under cover of the darkness, had struck away to the north-east with every rag of canvas on her yards.

Cahusac had attempted yet again to protest against this.

"The devil take you!" *Levasseur* had answered him. "A ship's a ship, be she Dutch or Spanish, and ships are our present need. That will suffice for the men."

His lieutenant said no more. But from his glimpse of the letter, knowing that a girl and not a ship was his cap-

tain's real objective, he gloomily shook his head as he rolled away on his bowed legs to give the necessary orders.

Dawn found *La Foudre* close on the Dutchman's heels, not a mile astern, and the sight of her very evidently flustered the *Jongvrouw*. No doubt *Mademoiselle's* brother, recognising *Levasseur's* ship, would be responsible for the Dutch uneasiness. They saw the *Jongvrouw* crowding canvas in a futile endeavour to outsail them, whereupon they stood off to starboard and raced on until they were in a position whence they could send a warning shot across her bow. The *Jongvrouw* veered, showed them her rudder, and opened fire with her sternchasers. The small shot went whistling through *La Foudre's* shrouds with some slight damage to her canvas. Followed a brief running fight in the course of which the Dutchman let fly a broadside.

Five minutes after that they were board and board, the *Jongvrouw* held tight in the clutches of *La Foudre's* grapnels, and the buccaneers pouring noisily into her waist.

The Dutchman's master, purple in the face, stood forward to beard the pirate, followed closely by an elegant, pale-faced young gentleman in whom *Levasseur* recognised his brother-in-law elect.

"Captain *Levasseur*, this is an outrage for which you shall be made to answer. What do you seek aboard my ship?"

"At first I sought only that which belongs to me, something of which I am being robbed. But since you chose war and opened fire on me with some damage to my ship and loss of life to five of my men, why war it is, and your ship a prize of war."

From the quarter-rail *Mademoiselle d'Ogeron* looked down with glowing eyes in breathless wonder upon her well-beloved hero. Gloriously heroic he seemed as he stood towering there, masterful, audacious, beautiful. He saw her, and with a glad shout sprang towards her. The Dutch master got in his way with hands upheld to arrest his progress.

Levasseur did not stay to argue with him; he was too impatient to reach his mistress. He swung the poleaxe that he carried, and the Dutchman went down in blood with a cloven skull. The eager lover stepped across the body and came on, his countenance joyously alight.

But *Mademoiselle* was shrinking now, in horror. She was a girl upon the threshold of glorious womanhood, of a fine height and nobly moulded, with heavy coils of glossy black hair above and about a face that was of the colour of old ivory. Her countenance was cast in lines of arrogance, stressed by the low lids of her full dark eyes.

In a bound her well-beloved was beside her. Flinging away his bloody poleaxe, he opened wide his arms to enfold her. But she still shrank even within his embrace, which would not be denied; a look of dread had come to temper the normal arrogance of her almost perfect face.

"Mine, mine at last, and in spite of all!" he cried exultantly, theatrically, truly heroic.

But she, endeavouring to thrust him back, her hands against his breast, could only falter:

"Why, why did you kill him?"

He laughed, as a hero should; and answered her heroically, with the tolerance of a god for the mortal to whom he condescends:

"He stood between us. Let his death be a symbol, a warning. Let all who would stand between us mark it and beware."

It was so splendidly terrific, the gesture of it was so broad and fine, and his magnetism so compelling, that she cast her silly tremors and yielded herself freely, intoxicated, to his fond embrace. Thereafter he swung her to his shoulder, and, stepping with ease beneath that burden, bore her in a sort of triumph, lustily cheered by his men, to the deck of his own ship. Her inconsiderate brother might have ruined that romantic scene but for the watchful *Cahusac*, who quietly tripped him up, and then trussed him like a fowl.

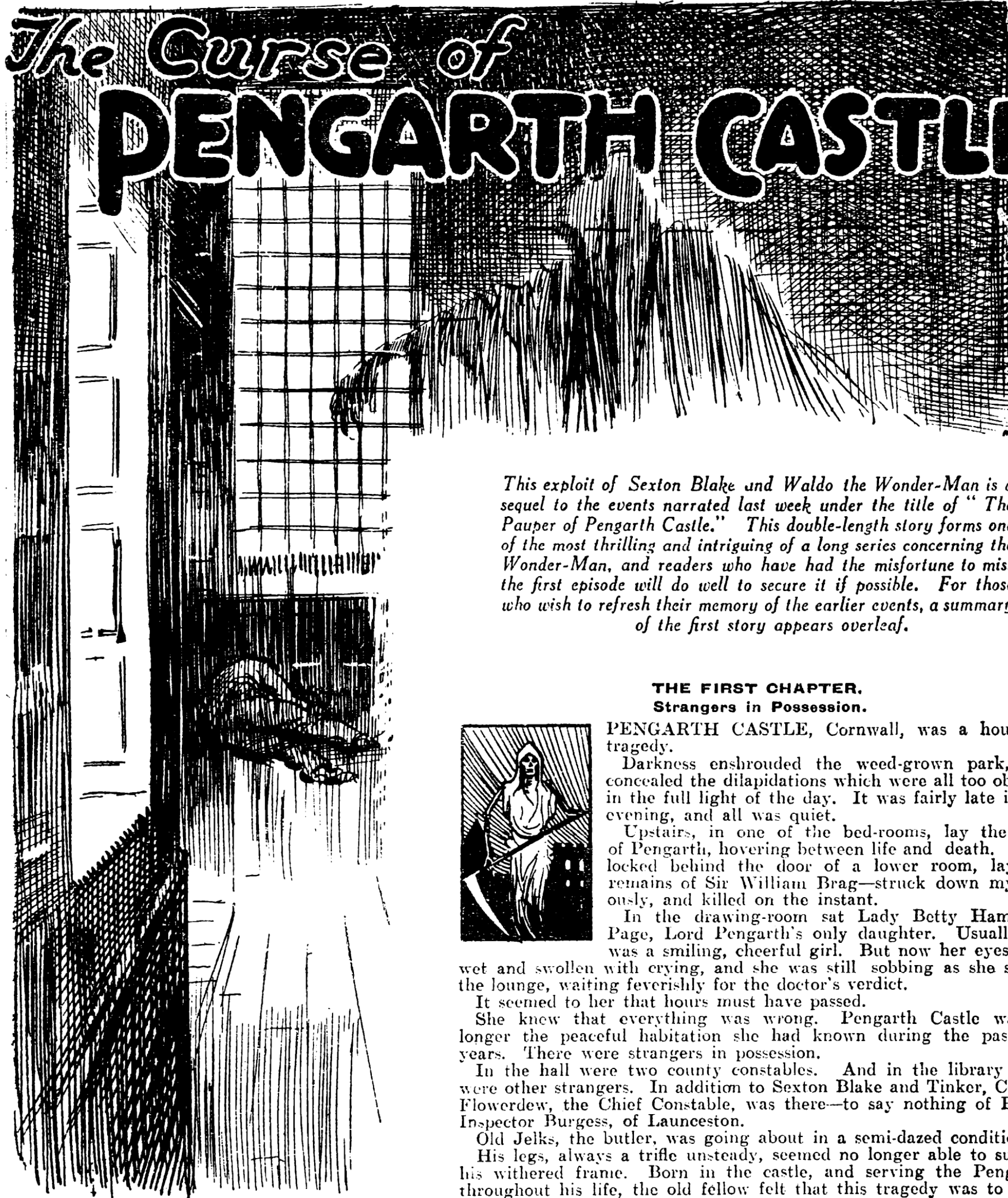
Thereafter, what time the captain languished in his lady's smile within the cabin, *Cahusac* was dealing with the spoils of war. The Dutch crew was ordered into the longboat, and bidden go to the devil. Fortunately, as they numbered fewer than thirty, the longboat, though perilously overcrowded, could yet contain them. Next, *Cahusac* having inspected the cargo, put a quartermaster and a score of men aboard the *Jongvrouw*, and left her to follow *La Foudre*, which he now headed south for the *Leeward Islands*.

Cahusac was disposed to be ill-humoured. The risk they had run in taking the Dutch brig and doing violence to members of the family of the Governor of *Tortuga*, was out of all proportion to the value of their prize. He said so sullenly to *Levasseur*.

"You'll keep that opinion to yourself," the captain answered him. "Don't think I am the man to thrust my neck into a noose without knowing how I am going to take it out again. I shall send an offer of terms to the Governor of *Tortuga* that he will be forced to accept. Set a course for the *Virgen Magra*. We'll go ashore and settle things from there. And tell them to fetch that milk-sop *Ogeron* to the cabin."

(Continued on page 25.)

The Curse of PENGARTH CASTLE



This exploit of Sexton Blake and Waldo the Wonder-Man is a sequel to the events narrated last week under the title of "The Pauper of Pengarth Castle." This double-length story forms one of the most thrilling and intriguing of a long series concerning the Wonder-Man, and readers who have had the misfortune to miss the first episode will do well to secure it if possible. For those who wish to refresh their memory of the earlier events, a summary of the first story appears overleaf.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Strangers in Possession.



PENGARTH CASTLE, Cornwall, was a house of tragedy.

Darkness enshrouded the weed-grown park, and concealed the dilapidations which were all too obvious in the full light of the day. It was fairly late in the evening, and all was quiet.

Upstairs, in one of the bed-rooms, lay the Earl of Pengarth, hovering between life and death. And, locked behind the door of a lower room, lay the remains of Sir William Brag—struck down mysteriously, and killed on the instant.

In the drawing-room sat Lady Betty Hamilton-Page, Lord Pengarth's only daughter. Usually she was a smiling, cheerful girl. But now her eyes were wet and swollen with crying, and she was still sobbing as she sat on the lounge, waiting feverishly for the doctor's verdict.

It seemed to her that hours must have passed.

She knew that everything was wrong. Pengarth Castle was no longer the peaceful habitation she had known during the past few years. There were strangers in possession.

In the hall were two county constables. And in the library there were other strangers. In addition to Sexton Blake and Tinker, Colonel Flowerdew, the Chief Constable, was there—to say nothing of Police-Inspector Burgess, of Launceston.

Old Jelks, the butler, was going about in a semi-dazed condition.

His legs, always a trifle unsteady, seemed no longer able to support his withered frame. Born in the castle, and serving the Pengarths throughout his life, the old fellow felt that this tragedy was to mean the end of all things.

It had come so suddenly—so unexpectedly.

Jelks and his wife were the only servants in this entire mansion. Poverty-stricken for years, Lord Pengarth had been unable to retain any other servants beyond these two. They had fulfilled the simple needs of his lordship and Lady Betty. For the girl was motherless and true to her father. It had meant loneliness and solitude remaining at Pengarth Castle. But she had never once complained.

And now it seemed that her father was to be carried off. She was momentarily expecting the doctor to come and announce that the old man had breathed his last.

He had been carried upstairs unconscious—the victim of a sudden stroke. And the girl's horror was further increased by the almost certain knowledge that her father was guilty of the murder of Sir William Brag. Her position was a dreadful one.

All her instincts urged her to hope for her father's recovery. In spite of his gruff manner, his bursts of temper, he was a dear old chap, and the thought of losing him filled Lady Betty with dumb misery.

But yet—wouldn't it be better?

She shrank from the thought. But it came back again and again. What if her father recovered? The problem, instead of being solved, would be intensified a thousandfold. For he would be obliged to stand

NOTE.—The names of all the characters in this and other Sexton Blake stories are purely fictitious, and are not intended to refer to any living persons.

in the dock, to answer the most dreadful charge of all.

Murder!

The girl shuddered and prayed that her agony would soon be lessened. If she only knew, one way or the other! The suspense was beginning to tell on her, and her nerves were becoming ragged.

The door opened softly, and old Jelks appeared.

"Yes?" asked Lady Betty quickly.

"Yes, Jelks?"

"Dr. Stacey would like—" began Jelks quaveringly.

"Bring him in, Jelks—please bring him in!" exclaimed the girl. "I must know something—I must!"

Jelks retired, and a moment later a stout, grey-haired old gentleman entered. He had known Lady Betty since childhood. He had attended to her in all her childish illnesses.

"Oh, Dr. Stacey—please tell me!" exclaimed Lady Betty, as she approached him. "What news have you brought?"

"Calm yourself, child—I have the best news," replied the doctor gently. "Your father is unconscious, but his iron frame will, I believe, withstand this shock. He may recover his senses at any time now."

"You—you mean he will be well?"

"No, I don't mean that," replied the old doctor. "It will be many weeks before your father can walk again. It is possible, indeed, that he may never be able to use his legs any more. But that he will gradually recover I am convinced."

Lady Betty looked at him with dumb horror in her eyes.

"You are thinking of something else?" he asked softly. "Yes, child, I know, without you telling me. But I cannot believe it—I cannot possibly believe it! Your father never struck that blow!"

"But—if he did?"

"In that case the situation becomes terrible beyond expression!" said the doctor gravely. "But you must not allow such ideas to have any place in your mind, child! Good gracious! Can you think a dreadful thing like that of your own father?"

"Please, doctor—please don't scold me!" sobbed the girl. "I don't know what to think! But you—you know what happened! You know my father threatened Sir William Brag this morning, and—"

"I know one thing which inspires me with confidence," interrupted Dr. Stacey quietly. "Mr. Sexton Blake is here, and he has confided to me that he believes your father to be innocent. We can only wait, Lady Betty—wait and see what the night brings forth."

Colonel Flowerdew, the chief constable, was not only looking grave, but intensely troubled.

"You were here, Mr. Blake, and nothing could have been more fortunate than that," he was saying. "I think it will be better for all concerned if you tell us precisely what happened. All the details. And then possibly we may be able to gather some inkling as to the origin of this dreadful tragedy."

Sexton Blake, the famous criminologist, nodded.

"Yes, that is a good suggestion," he admitted. "We have talked at random—merely discussing the aspects of the tragedy. No doubt it will help Inspector Burgess if I give him a full account of what has happened from this morning onwards."

"That's the idea, Mr. Blake," said Inspector Burgess, nodding. "Nothing like having it all clear. If you don't

THE PAUPER OF PENGARTH CASTLE

—a summary of the events which preceded those of the present story.

RUPERT WALDO, the freakishly-strong, sportsmanlike crook, is motoring in Cornwall, when he is the means of saving from death or injury a girl cyclist. She is Lady Betty Hamilton-Page, the daughter of Lord Pengarth, and she invites her rescuer to return to Pengarth Castle with her and receive the thanks of her father.

Waldo, on the impulse of the moment, introduces himself as Sexton Blake, and under that name is received at the castle and entertained by the earl.

Lady Betty's father proves to be a curious personage. He has been the victim of a crafty lawyer named Simon Slingsby, who has defrauded him out of the title to Pengarth Castle, and sold the property to a new-rich knight named Sir William Brag. Lord Pengarth, however, refuses to give up possession, and intends to repel the invader by force of arms if necessary.

The butler at the castle, Jelks, knows Sexton Blake by sight, and realises that Waldo is an impostor. He telegraphs to the detective to this effect, and Blake later arrives at the castle.

Meantime, Waldo has encouraged the earl in his attitude, and the new proprietor has been turned away. Waldo, when exposed by Blake, cheerfully admits his imposture, and supposedly takes his departure. It is not unlikely, however, that he conceals himself somewhere in the disused part of the castle.

Sir William Brag, having been refused admission, returns at night, intending to force his way in. Lord Pengarth hears the noise of his entry, and goes out. There is a scream. When Blake arrives on the spot, it is to find Sir William Brag dead. The earl has an apoplectic stroke, and is himself at death's door.

It looks exceedingly like murder, and the finger of suspicion is pointed at the Earl of Pengarth.

mind, I'll make a few notes while we're talking."

The little party in the library were looking grave. Even Tinker wore an expression of solemnity which was foreign to his cheerful disposition. But this tragic evening had left its mark.

"My first knowledge of the case begins with last night," said Sexton Blake, as he lighted a fresh cigarette. "I was in London—at home in my Baker Street chambers. A telegram came from Jelks, Lord Pengarth's butler. He informed me that somebody was staying under this roof and using my name."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the colonel.

Neither he nor the inspector had heard anything about this aspect of the affair, and they were both surprised.

"Tinker and I came down by the night train," continued Sexton Blake. "We arrived this morning, and drove over from Launceston."

"And who was this man—this masquerader?"

"You will be astonished when I tell you," said Blake. "He was quite undisguised, and he made no attempt to impersonate me. He was Rupert Waldo—also known as the Wonder-Man."

"Waldo!" echoed Inspector Burgess, aghast.

"Yet I do not think he is really connected with this tragedy," said Sexton Blake. "I have an idea that it was merely a whim of his to masquerade under my name. It had happened by chance. In yesterday's gale, Waldo saved Lady Betty from a falling tree, and thus gained access to the castle. By using my name, his welcome, it appears, was even more cordial. He took his departure the instant I unmasked him."

"But, good heavens!" ejaculated the colonel. "Couldn't you detain the rascal?"

"If you had ever attempted to detain Waldo, Colonel Flowerdew, you would not ask me that question," said Blake. "I could not have detained him against his will, even if I had had half a dozen helpers. His strength is colossal—his agility startling in the extreme. Sometimes Waldo hardly seems to be human."

"I have heard that he is a hard nut," commented the inspector.

"However, we need not discuss him now," went on Blake. "I am convinced, at least, that he is not connected with the murder. You may, or may not, know that Lord Pengarth has been living in the direst poverty for some years—the culminating point arriving to-day. For Pengarth Castle has been

sold over his head, and was purchased by Sir William Brag—the man who now lies dead."

"It looks very significant," growled the chief constable.

"This morning Sir William arrived to take possession of his new property," continued Blake. "There was no question about the legality of his ownership. He had purchased the property through Mr. Simon Slingsby, Lord Pengarth's lawyer. And he brought the title-deeds with him, and all the necessary documents to prove his claim. Curiously enough, those documents were not upon him when he was found dead."

"You think he came to the castle this evening without them?"

"It certainly appears so, colonel," said Blake. "Well, during the earlier visit, Sir William was refused admittance, and Lord Pengarth plainly told him that if he returned he stood in peril of being shot."

"It grows worse and worse!" growled the colonel.

"Lord Pengarth had an unreasoning hatred against Sir William Brag," said Sexton Blake. "For, after all, Sir William had bought the property in good faith. The real viper, in the earl's mind, is undoubtedly Simon Slingsby. I am personally convinced that Slingsby has robbed Lord Pengarth right and left over a period of many years—until, indeed, he has almost converted him into a pauper."

"Slingsby is a rogue," growled the chief constable. "I have known it for years. But he is clever—he always acts within the law."

"It was so in this case," said Sexton Blake. "He betrayed Lord Pengarth basely, and the earl did not realise his true position until it was too late. But he swore that he would never leave Pengarth Castle. A Pengarth has lived here for eight hundred years, and it was the earl's boast that no outsider would ever set foot in the castle as its owner."

"Significant!" muttered Colonel Flowerdew.

"Admittedly," agreed Blake. "Lord Pengarth was telling me the story of the old family curse. There is a Sacred Cross, it seems, and the legend runs that if that cross was ever lost misfortune would dog the Pengarths until they were forced to abandon the castle to the invader. That cross was stolen in a burglary sixteen or seventeen years ago, and the ill-fortunes of the family started at about that date."

"But that's all rubbish, surely?" asked Inspector Burgess.

"It may possibly be a coincidence,"

said Sexton Blake. "But the fact remains—and it is certainly rather curious. Well, this trouble came to a head today, for Lord Pengarth refused to acknowledge Sir William's claims, and sent him away."

"And Sir William returned this evening, and broke in?"

"That is obvious," said Blake. "He gained admittance by one of the numerous small windows—after having cut through three iron bars. So Sir William was obviously determined—and, after all, there was nothing to prevent him breaking into his own house. He was acting within the law. His plan, no doubt, was to confront Lord Pengarth, and to order him to leave."

The chief constable nodded slowly.

"We are left in no doubt as to what happened after that!" he exclaimed. "Lord Pengarth met the intruder, was infuriated, and struck him down. A most distressing affair, gentlemen. I am almost hoping that Lord Pengarth will die, and thus escape the dreadful ordeal which must otherwise inevitably follow."

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Waldo Listens.



"THE facts fit in perfectly—there is no other possible way of looking at them," said Inspector Burgess. "I think you told me, Mr. Blake, that you were with Lord Pengarth in the library a few minutes before the tragedy?"

"Yes."

"And he left the library, alone, to fetch an antique he was to show you?"

"Exactly."

"Then, of course, the case becomes clearer and clearer," said the inspector. "Possibly Lord Pengarth heard a noise, went to look into it, and found Sir William getting through the window. One blow must have sufficed to cause that dreadful wound."

"We found Sir William lying dead on the floor," put in Tinker. "Lord Pengarth was standing over him. He said something about having heard a scream—and that looked as though somebody else had committed the murder. But the poor old chap went into a fit, and collapsed before we could ask him any questions."

"You don't think that this Waldo—" began the colonel.

"It is, of course, possible," admitted Blake, "but very unlikely. Waldo had no motive for the crime. He is not the type of man to commit an unnecessary murder—indeed, he has always hesitated at any kind of violence. It is not incorrect to say that his crimes have invariably been characterised by gentlemanly conduct. No, I do not think Waldo had a hand in this."

"But the title-deeds?" put in Inspector Burgess. "I can hardly imagine Sir William getting into the castle without them. He would naturally carry the documents, in order to prove his claim."

"That is one of the knotty points which we must attempt to solve," said Sexton Blake quietly. "So far, I have only made a very cursory examination of the body, and I have not even examined the corridor. As soon as you have finished with me, gentlemen, I shall be glad if you will let me pursue a few investigations."

Colonel Flowerdew nodded.

"By all means, Mr. Blake. We shall

be only too delighted!" he exclaimed. "Eh, Burgess? We should be foolish to deny ourselves the services of such an expert. And if there is any possible hope that Lord Pengarth is innocent, nobody will be more delighted than myself. I have known him for years—a fine old fellow! To-night's tragic events fill me with dismay."

Inspector Burgess, bluff and stolid, felt that Sexton Blake's investigations would be rather unnecessary. There was no question whatever about the earl's guilt. From first to last the case was obvious.

Lord Pengarth had threatened Sir William, had even told him that if he came back he would be shot. In his grim determination to retain possession of the castle, the old die-hard had allowed his fury to get the better of him.

Sexton Blake's evidence alone would be enough to convince any jury.

Lord Pengarth had left the library, and two minutes later there had been a scream. And both Blake and Tinker had found his lordship standing over the stricken body of his enemy. It was as clear as daylight.

Moreover, there was no other possible culprit.

Jelks could be ruled out, since he did not possess sufficient strength—and hadn't been anywhere near the spot, in any case. Waldo was an elusive character, and there was no motive in him killing Sir William Brag. So he could be easily ruled out, too.

With Lord Pengarth it was quite different.

The motive was there without looking for it. The very fact that he had suffered a stroke was significant. Overcome by the horror of his action, he had collapsed—as Dr. Stacey had warned him he would collapse if he excited himself too greatly.

Upon the whole, Colonel Flowerdew was hoping that his lordship would pass peacefully away without recovering consciousness. The problem would thus be solved. There would be a brief scandal, but nothing more. If, on the other hand, the Earl of Pengarth recovered, the results would be distressing for all concerned.

So far, the tragedy was unknown to the outside world. Tinker had informed Inspector Burgess, and he, in turn, had communicated with the chief constable. They had told nobody else—except Dr. Stacey. So there were no inquisitive reporters hurrying to the scene. Pengarth Castle contained its own tragedy, and those outside were in ignorance.

Sexton Blake was allowed to go at last. The inspector had gained all the information he needed—he had gleaned every fact. And now, in his opinion, there was nothing further to be done.

On the morrow, of course, there would be an inquest, and the facts would be made public. But until then no action could be taken. As for investigating, the inspector considered that there was nothing to investigate.

Blake and Tinker were about to retire to the drawing-room, when Lady Betty came into the library with Dr. Stacey. They heard that Lord Pengarth would recover.

"Is there any hope, Mr. Blake?" pleaded the girl. "I am sure my father didn't do it. And yet—and yet—"

"My advice, Lady Betty, is for you

to set your mind at rest as much as possible," put in Sexton Blake gently. "Lord Pengarth will recover, and the conviction is upon me that this crime was committed by some other hand."

"Please prove it, Mr. Blake," said the girl breathlessly.

But both Colonel Flowerdew and Inspector Burgess gravely shook their heads.

Pengarth Castle was a great, rambling pile, with only a tiny section of it inhabited. The north wing and the west wing were empty and deserted—damp, chilly places, where long corridors ranged, and where endless rooms were slowly falling into decay. For many years they had been neglected, and a considerable portion of the castle was falling into ruin.

The villagers round about declared that ghosts walked the old empty wings—that gruesome spectres were to be seen at the hour of midnight. But such tales, of course, were only to be expected.

It must be admitted, however, that a dim figure lurked spectrally in one of the corridors of the north wing. In one respect, however, this ghost was a novelty—for it paced up and down, enjoying a cigarette.

Furthermore, it was distinctly solid, being no less a person than Rupert Waldo himself.

As Blake had suspected all along, the Wonder-Man had not left the castle after his denouncement. Instead, he had simply made his way to the disused wings, and there had become lost in the wilderness of empty rooms and corridors. It would have been like searching for a needle in a haystack to look for him. And Waldo was elusive enough in any ordinary setting.

And Waldo, it seemed, knew more about this affair than anybody else.

He certainly had a full knowledge as to what had happened to Sir William Brag's documents. They were now in Waldo's own hands, and he was putting them back into his own pocket after a lengthy inspection by the light of his electric torch.

"Decidedly interesting," he murmured complacently. "I can't possibly go away from this place with things in their present stage of development. It goes against the grain."

He was his usual cool self. But how was it that he possessed these documents—which had certainly been upon Sir William Brag at the moment of his death—and which had been missing when Sexton Blake found Lord Pengarth standing over the body?

Was Waldo the murderer?

If the possession of these deeds indicated anything, he certainly was. It proved, at all events, that he not only knew about the murder, but had been present even before Lord Pengarth himself had arrived.

He paced up and down the dark corridor, thinking deeply. The gloominess of his surroundings—the eerie nature of this place—had no effect upon him whatever. Waldo's nerves were of iron.

He had taken an interest in Lord Pengarth ever since their first meeting the previous afternoon.

The old earl's steadfast stand had filled Waldo with admiration—for it was an affair after his own heart. Events had developed in a very different manner from what he had expected, but this only increased his interest.

In the first place, Blake had butted in. It was deucedly queer how Blake always butted into his affairs! Waldo simply couldn't start anything without Sexton Blake haunting him. There was something uncanny about it. But he realised that in this particular instance

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2:

it was his own doing. For had he masqueraded under any other name than that of Blake, the famous Baker Street criminologist might never have come to Cornwall at all.

"Oh, well, these things are probably sent to try us," decided Waldo calmly. "I don't mind Blake's presence a bit—it gives the affair an added piquancy. But I think I ought to come in somewhere. If I can't make something for myself out of all these ingredients, it's high time I gave up the profession and started poultry-farming."

And Waldo could already see a way in which he could line his pockets. But he was not entirely selfish. His heart was large—as he had proved on many occasions—and if he could help somebody else at the same time, why not?

Besides, there was a certain spice about the decision he had taken which amused his whimsical nature. However, before anything could be done, it was necessary to learn a few definite facts.

He made his way calmly towards the inhabited part of the castle. He did this openly, and when he arrived in the vicinity of the library he was as collected as ever.

The corridor was empty, and behind the heavy library door he could hear voices. He listened. The prospect of being caught never worried him. In the matter of escape his natural gifts had never failed him.

To any normal ear only a blur of voices would have been distinguishable. But Rupert Waldo's hearing was amazing acute. Like all his other faculties, it was highly, abnormally, developed. He could hear Sexton Blake's words without any difficulty.

"My advice, Lady Betty, is for you to set your mind at rest as soon as possible," Blake was saying. "Lord Pengarth will recover, and the conviction is upon me that this crime was committed by some other hand."

"Please prove it, Mr. Blake," came Lady Betty's voice.

"You can be sure that I shall use every effort," said Sexton Blake. "If there is any way of unmasking the truth, I will do so. I wish I could make a definite statement, but at the moment it is not possible."

Waldo nodded to himself.

"There's no mistake about it, Blake's a cute beggar!" he murmured. "He knows all the time that old Pengarth didn't do it. I hope he doesn't suspect me! Surely Blake wouldn't think such unkind things about an old pal?"

He crept away, satisfied. He had learned the main thing he wanted to know—that the Earl of Pengarth would recover. His course was now decided, and he left the castle silently and mysteriously.

Waldo had made up his mind, and that meant he was going to act.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Waldo's Way.



MR. SIMON SLINGSBY sat in his study hunched up in an easy chair. It was rather chilly this evening, but the crafty old lawyer did not allow himself the luxury of a fire. His miserly spirit rebelled at the idea.

His house stood on the outskirts of Launceston—an old-fashioned, gaunt-looking house, characteristic of its master.

For Slingsby, the lawyer, was a tall, narrow-shouldered man, with lean cheeks, deeply-sunken eyes, and a sallow complexion. When in solitude, there was something almost repulsive about him.

His clients never saw this phase of his character, though.

With them he was always smooth-tongued, his smile was benevolent, and his plausibility irreproachable. Yet, in spite of his care to maintain an appearance of kindness, he was well known in Launceston as being "an old devil."

At the present moment he was thinking about Sir William Brag.

Apparently, everything had gone well. Acting upon his—Slingsby's—advice, Sir William Brag had gone to Pengarth Castle to force an entry. True, the four men who had accompanied Sir William had returned, and one of them had reported that he had heard a scream.

But Slingsby took little notice of this. The carl, no doubt, had shouted out in rage at the sight of the intruder. And Sir William was now in possession. It was just as well the unfortunate affair was over.

It had been a worrying time.

Slingsby had drained the old peer to the last penny, and as a final blow he had sold the castle over his head, and had received a huge sum from Sir William Brag in payment. The cunning old lawyer had "wangled" the mortgages in such a way that Pengarth Castle had virtually become his own property before he had passed it on to the now deceased Sir William.

The transaction had only been finally completed that very day, and Sir William's cheque for the main payment reposed in Simon Slingsby's safe. The thought was a comforting one.

There had been a great deal of trouble—Lord Pengarth's obstinacy, Sir William's anger. It was just as well the affair was over.

Without warning, the window shot up, and a lithe form slipped over the sill, and sat there. The heavy curtains had been parted by the newcomer, and Mr. Slingsby stared at him with blank fright.

"Mr. Slingsby?" said Waldo pleasantly. "Yes, without any question! If I may say so, Mr. Slingsby, you have 'lawyer' written over every inch of your unpleasant features."

Rupert Waldo closed the window and stepped into the room with as much assurance as though he had just been announced in the usual manner. Mr. Simon Slingsby looked at him with growing alarm.

"Who—who are you?" he panted huskily.

"Names are of no account, surely?" smiled Waldo. "I am here on urgent business, and let that be sufficient. You may not be aware of it, Mr. Slingsby, but you and I are now about to have a cheery little heart-to-heart talk."

The lawyer was startled beyond measure. True, this intruder had no appearance of a footpad, and his smooth manner was reassuring. He was obviously a gentleman. But his unique method of entry left Mr. Slingsby in no doubt as to his motive.

"You—you rascal!" gasped the lawyer. "You have come here to rob me!"

"Exactly!" said Waldo. "How you do guess things!"

"But you sha'n't—you sha'n't!" shouted Slingsby.

"That, of course, remains to be seen," commented Waldo. "And why this little exhibition of your vocal powers,

Mr. Slingsby? Surely we can do without these animal effects?"

Very coolly he grasped Mr. Slingsby as the latter was about to make a dash for the door. The lawyer felt that he was in the grip of a gorilla. Without any apparent effort, Waldo forced him down into a chair, and while he held him there with one leg and arm he placed another hand over his victim's mouth.

"Now, Mr. Slingsby, surely we can talk quietly," he suggested. "I don't like doing this sort of thing, but unless you keep quiet I shall be compelled to bind you and improvise a temporary gag. How about it? Do we talk quietly, as one gentleman to another, or must you force my hand?"

Slingsby was quivering from head to foot with fear.

He nodded, and Waldo released his hand. Then he moved over to a chair and sat down.

"We might as well be comfortable," he said evenly. "Now, Mr. Slingsby, understand, I have your word that you will not make any outcry. As a gentleman, you would naturally keep the bargain. But as I know you to be several kinds of a tyke, I shall be well on my guard. And the next time I am compelled to silence you I may not be quite so gentle."

The lawyer breathed hard, his fear increasing.

"What—what do you want?" he asked huskily.

"All sorts of things," replied Waldo. "But, first of all, let me give you a little piece of news. Sir William Brag is unfortunately no more. He has been murdered."

"Murdered!" gasped Slingsby, slinking with horror.

"Unfortunately, he met with disaster within Pengarth Castle," said Waldo. "I have now come here to make you sign a few signatures, and pleasant little things of that sort."

He took the documents from his pocket, and Slingsby eyed him fearfully.

Waldo turned the parchments over leisurely.

"In glancing over these title-deeds, it strikes me that something is radically wrong," he commented, with a business-like air. "In the first place, Sir William Brag is not the owner of Pengarth Castle, and never has been. That somewhat moth-eaten pile is the sole property of the Earl of Pengarth."

"You are mad!" panted Slingsby, aghast.

"I have had it brought to my knowledge that for years you have been indulging in consistent robbery," continued the Wonder-Man. "You have betrayed your best client, and have reduced him to poverty. All this is now going to be changed."

"I—I don't understand you!"

"Possibly not; but you soon will," smiled Waldo. "I don't usually go about performing these little acts of restitution, but this time I couldn't resist the temptation. In passing, I might as well observe that I have a strong inclination to wring your neck, but I will be firm and resist it."

"What do you mean? I have been robbing Lord Pengarth?" asked Slingsby, recovering some of his composure. "You are talking insanely! You come here, without knowing any of the facts—"

"Whether I know any facts or not, one look at your face is sufficient," interrupted Waldo complacently. "Seldom have I seen such a crooked visage. It positively fills me with repulsion. Forgive me for being so frank, Mr. Slingsby, but I told you that

this was going to be a heart-to-heart talk."

"I'll have the police on you—"

"Now, this is a mere waste of time," put in Waldo. "Come, Mr. Slingsby, you know as well as I do that you have been robbing that unfortunate old man. There are two things that you must do. Firstly, you must alter these deeds so that Pengarth Castle becomes the Earl's property once more; and secondly, you must hand me Sir William Brag's cheque which he gave you in payment of the estate. That has got to be torn up."

"Fool! Madman!" gasped Slingsby. "I will do nothing—nothing!"

"That's a pity," replied Waldo. "There's nothing I hate worse than violence, but unless I get what I want I use it. Come, Mr. Slingsby, it will be quite simple. A few documents, renouncing your ownership or title to Pengarth Castle and the surrounding estates. I am well aware that you are reaping a rich income from property which really belongs to Lord Pengarth. All that is now going to be changed, as I have said."

Slingsby laughed harshly and shrilly.

"I will sign nothing!" he declared. "In any case, my signature would be useless without witnesses—"

"That is a minor detail," interrupted Waldo. "When it comes to the actual signatures, we will see about the witnesses. In the meantime, you will prepare the documents according to my directions. And attempt no trickery. I have a passing knowledge of the law, and I shall see that you leave no loop-hole for yourself."

"And I refuse—point-blank!" snarled the lawyer. "Lord Pengarth has no claim on me! He can fight it out in the Courts if he chooses—"

"That, as you know, is impossible, as Lord Pengarth has no money for fighting purposes," interrupted Waldo. "Furthermore, you have gained everything so completely under your control that he would have no hope. My methods are more drastic, but they save a lot of trouble."

Slingsby sat there, quivering. Guilt was written over every inch of him. But, although he was cornered, he would never admit the fact.

"I will not be brow-beaten and forced into such a mad compact!" he exclaimed fiercely. "You can do your worst! I am at your mercy, but you will never get me to put my signature to anything!"

Waldo reached over to a heavy bronze statuette. Carelessly he took it in both his hands and bent it as though it were made of putty. Slingsby watched, scared out of his wits. Such an exhibition of sheer abnormal strength was an eye-opener. That statuette could never have been as much as distorted by any ordinary man, but Waldo calmly bent it until it snapped in two.

"I don't want to treat you like that, Mr. Slingsby, but you can see how things are fixed," he said smoothly. "Now then, about those documents."

Simon Slingsby panted for breath. He started screaming, but in a second Waldo was upon him. And when the lawyer felt that vice-like grip, and saw the grim, deadly light in Waldo's eyes, he knuckled under.

For the next hour Waldo rather enjoyed himself. At the end of that time he instructed Slingsby to sound the bell. Slingsby did so, and his eyes glittered.

But Waldo took out a long, dangerous-looking knife. He carefully pressed this against Slingsby's side as they sat close together.



Without warning the window shot up, and a lithe form slipped over the sill. Mr. Slingsby stared at the newcomer in blank fright. "Mr. Slingsby?" queried Waldo, pleasantly. (Page 6.)

"Remember," he murmured, "I shall not hesitate if you force me!"

The lawyer was on the point of fainting with fear. A moment later his housekeeper entered.

"Ah!" said Waldo smoothly. "Mr. Slingsby desires your signature to one or two documents as a witness. You will please be good enough to sign as I direct."

"Yes, Mrs. Raikes, it is quite right!" panted Slingsby, who had felt a sudden pressure of the knife. "This gentleman will direct you where to sign."

The housekeeper, rather astonished—for she had certainly not admitted this visitor—appended her signature to various documents, immediately following Slingsby's own signature.

"That will do, thank you, Mrs. Raikes!" said Waldo pleasantly. "You have been most obliging."

He handed the astonished woman a ten-shilling note, and she departed, flustered.

"And now, old friend, what about the key of the safe?" suggested Waldo. "What, you object? I am afraid it means more trouble."

He grasped Slingsby as he would grasp a child, swiftly bound his hands behind him, and gagged him with his own duster. Then, going through his pockets, he selected a bunch of keys.

A few minutes later the safe was open, and Waldo not only found Sir William Brag's cheque, which he tore up, but he was gratified to discover a totally unexpected hoard. He had anticipated riches within that safe, but they far exceeded his expectations.

Then he departed, leaving Mr. Slingsby to get free as best he could. Waldo was light-hearted and cheery,

although his pockets were heavy. He was more than pleased with himself.

"I must admit that I have been singularly smart this time," he told himself. "Congratulations, old boy! And if it comes to that, nobody but a gentleman of my profession could tackle this sort of work!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. The Clue!



MEANWHILE, Sexton Blake was getting down to some real work.

While Inspector Burgess and the chief constable were talking in the library, gravely discussing what was to be done with regard to Lord Pengarth's arrest, Blake was busy.

He and Tinker were in the passage where the murder had taken place.

"I don't see that there's much to be done, sir," remarked Tinker. "Of course, if Lord Pengarth didn't commit the murder—"

"Hold that light, Tinker, and not quite so much talk!" interrupted Blake. "We are here for facts, not theorising. This is the spot where the murder was committed, and there ought to be some clues if we only know how to look for them. There is quite a lot of dust on this floor."

Tinker played the light steadily.

"I'm afraid it's stirred up too much, sir," he said, "Don't forget we've all been here, including Inspector Burgess and the colonel. There's only a confusion of marks."

Tinker was right.

Examining the floor, there was nothing to be seen, except faint traces of dust, disturbed in every possible manner. This particular passage was not used in the ordinary way. The floor was of stone, and the walls were bare and grim-looking.

Blake and Tinker were close against the window which the unfortunate Sir William had forced open. At this spot he had met his end. Someone had sprung upon him, and had killed him with one tremendous blow—presumably with a stick or a club.

Lord Pengarth's own stick could easily have dealt the blow; but Blake had examined it without finding any trace. It was possible that none remained, but not probable.

And if the earl had not committed the deed, who had? Certainly not Rupert Waldo.

Blake took the light from Tinker, and moved farther on. And here he met with more success.

"It has apparently been taken for granted that the murderer came from the direction of the inhabited section of the house," remarked Blake. "But there is no certainty of that. This passage leads directly into the deserted west wing, and, therefore, it has scarcely ever been used. Beyond this point, indeed, we may expect to find untouched ground. It may possibly reward us with something of an enlightening nature."

They had hardly walked four yards before Blake halted. Here, farther down the passage, and well beyond the fatal window, the dust of the floor was practically undisturbed. No ordinary eye could detect anything. But Blake's trained vision was not deceived.

"Hallo, Tinker! Look at this!" he murmured. "By Jove, this is interesting!"

Blake was bending down low over the floor. He played the light closely, so that it was directed upon one certain spot. Tinker could certainly see a kind of smudge, but it didn't mean much to him. He could not recognise anything distinctive.

"What is it, sir?" he asked keenly.

"A footprint, young 'un."

"Yes; but whose?"

"That is a question I should like the answer to," said Blake. "If you will look closely you will notice one or two very interesting details. In the first place, it is an impression of a naked foot."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Tinker.

He wondered why he hadn't seen it before. For now that it was pointed out to him, he could see that Sexton Blake was right. What had been a mere blur, now became something of distinct shape. That imprint had certainly been caused by a naked human foot. It was astonishing how simple it became once it was explained.

"Yes, it's exactly as you say, sir," went on Tinker. "But what did you mean—in the first place? You speak as though there's something else."

"And there is, Tinker. What do you think of that toe-mark?"

"You mean that smudge made by the big toe?"

"Yes."

"Well, it looks a little more distinct than the rest," said Tinker.

"I'm very much afraid, young 'un, that you are going backwards instead of forwards," sighed Sexton Blake. "You have missed the point altogether. The mark of that big toe is a surprising distance from the rest of the imprint. In other words, it means that the owner of this foot possesses a splayed toe."

Tinker stared, and gave added attention to the mark on the floor.

"A splayed toe, gov'nor?" he repeated. "But that's like niggers have out in the tropics, where they don't wear any boots."

"Precisely!" agreed Blake. "Perhaps you are not quite hopeless, after all. But I am not implying that this footprint was made by a nigger, as you may possibly imagine. I am merely remarking that it is rather strange that we should find such a thing here in Pengarth Castle."

"It's jolly rummy!" said Tinker, nodding.

And it was undoubtedly strange. The person who had made that footprint was in the habit of going about barefooted, and had indulged that habit for years, in all probability. Nothing else could explain the wide nature of the big toe.

Passing farther down the passage, Blake and Tinker found one or two other traces. But afterwards, in the deserted corridors of the west wing, they lost all trace of the marks.

"Well, we have discovered one thing, at least," said Sexton Blake. "Somebody has been along this passage with bare feet, and I don't think we are making a wild guess when we set that somebody down as the murderer. Before we proceed with this investigation any further, Tinker, I have an unpleasant task to perform."

Tinker looked grave.

"You're going to have a look at the body?" he suggested.

"Yes," said Blake. "The police have given me permission, and I might as well get it over as quickly as possible. So far I have had practically no opportunity, and such an examination is all-important."

Blake lost no time.

He and Tinker went back to the inhabited section of the castle, and found one of the rural constables guarding the room of death. He looked a bit scared when Sexton Blake announced that he wished to go in alone. Blake entered, and the door closed.

"It's more than my nerves could stand, anyway!" remarked the policeman, turning his ruddy face towards

Tinker. "A queer business this, young gent."

"Yes," said Tinker. "And it looks like being queerer, too."

"I hear as his lordship is gettin' better," went on the constable. "Likely he'll be recovered consciousness by now. I think the inspector has been anxious, too. Wants to get a confession."

"Don't you believe it," said Tinker. "He'll get no confession from Lord Pengarth—because he didn't do it. But I'm glad to hear he's getting better. It makes things a bit more cheery."

The constable shook his head gloomily.

"There ain't no doubt about it, sir," he said. "Inspector Burgess ain't fooled, an' he knows. He says that his lordship killed the poor gent, and that's good enough for me."

"I don't like to cast any doubts upon the inspector's brain power, but between you and me, he's a little bit slow," remarked Tinker. "Just you wait until Mr. Blake has finished, then you'll get a surprise."

Sexton Blake, in the meantime, was making his examination.

At first he discovered nothing that could possibly be called a clue. The unfortunate Sir William had been felled by a single blow—a devastating thrust which had caught him in the middle of the forehead, causing instantaneous death.

He had been found lying in the passage with the Earl of Pengarth standing over him. And if the earl's heavy stick had not caused that wound, then something equally heavy must have been used.

Blake could find no trace of the instrument on the wound itself. It had been a clean, direct hit. And that blow had been so swift that the weapon probably bore no traces. Yet, concluded Blake, it seemed strange that such could be the case, for the skin was deeply gashed, and blood must have sprung out in the split fraction of a second.

He turned his attention to other things.

When Blake made an examination it was thorough. He left nothing undone. And at last his persistence was rewarded. He not only found a clue, but a powerful, telling clue of the first importance.

In that moment he knew, absolutely for certain, that Lord Pengarth was guiltless; and this fresh item of evidence was also conclusive that Rupert Waldo had had no hand in the killing.

Yet the clue itself was simple.

Examining the dead man's hands, Blake discovered that the right fingers were rigidly gripped. And as Blake was pursuing his inquiry he extracted four hairs from those rigid fingers.

Very carefully he placed the hairs in a little box and slipped the latter into his waistcoat-pocket. He was looking more keen than ever. But the rest of his examination proved futile.

However, he was not disappointed. He had met with far greater success than he had hoped for. Passing out of the death chamber, he relocked it, and handed the key to the constable on duty. Jelks was hovering near, and the old butler was looking awful. There was a haggard, hunted expression in his eyes, and he seemed on the point of a collapse. Blake glanced at him sharply.

"You had better go to bed, Jelks," he said. "This strain is proving too much for you."

The old butler trembled.

"I'm thinking about the master, sir," he muttered. "They're all sayin' that he killed Sir William. It's not true, sir. They oughtn't to believe it. His lordship never did it."

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"Do you know who did?" asked Blake curiously.

"I, sir?" asked Jelks, aghast. "What should I know, sir?"

He walked off unsteadily, and Tinker came up to his master.

"Anything fresh, gov'nor?" he murmured.

"Well, yes," replied Blake softly. "One thing is certain, at all events. The murder was committed by a man with naked feet and a rough, unkempt, red-dish-brown beard."

Tinker stared at his master blankly.

"Then—then it wasn't Lord Pengarth at all?" he asked. "But how do you know, sir?"

"Never mind how I know," replied Blake. "Come, Tinker; we are just going into the west wing again, and our search may be fruitful."

It was fruitful, but not in the way Sexton Blake anticipated.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. All Done by Kindness!



SOMETHING moved near the castle wall. The night was growing old now, and the blackness was intense. Pengarth Castle stood out against the skyline, grim and rugged. For the most part it was in total darkness, and only one or two dim lights shone from the mullioned windows of the inhabited section.

The greater part of the castle was in a state of pitch darkness.

The something which moved passed beneath a high tree—a great giant which had stood there for well over a century. What was this object which lurked in the dense blackness? Not a man, surely? For it swung itself up into the tree with the panther-like agility of a forest beast.

Hand-over-hand, with extraordinary ease, the figure climbed to the topmost branch. It was almost uncanny to watch. But then, Rupert Waldo was always fascinating when he was performing one of his daring stunts.

There were none to watch on this occasion.

The man was more agile than a gorilla. Astonishingly enough, by the time he reached his high perch he was as calm and cool as though he had never exerted himself. His breathing was regular and even, and in no way strained. Such exertion had practically no effect upon Waldo's startling stamina.

"Everything seems to be nice and quiet," he murmured. "Now, I wonder what I'd better do? Go off somewhere for a little snooze, or act at once? It might not be a bad idea to ascertain how things are going inside."

He glanced down at the lighted windows, for in this high tree he was above the level of the roof.

"It's rather a nuisance, having to gain entry and exit by this manner," he told himself. "But for Blake I should have had a smooth time of it. However, I'm rather glad I took the job on. It's panning out splendidly. One of the nicest little affairs I've ever handled."

Selecting a strong, supple branch, he climbed out upon it, swung, and at the right moment he released his grip, thrusting himself outwards at the same moment.

The Wonder-Man swung from the branch to the parapet of the building

in one clean jump. He landed perfectly, and stood there, recovering his balance.

He did this as a mere matter of course, never seeming to realise that his leap had been of a death-defying character. Possessing no nerves, this aspect of the case had never occurred to him.

But Waldo had really taken his life into his hands. One tiny slip, and he would have missed his mark, and would have gone hurtling down to the stone pathway below.

"So far so good!" he murmured. "Sounds like the villain in the play, but it comes rather apt at the moment. Now we shall have to see about making a re-entry."

He lowered himself over the parapet, clinging to the face of the building like a fly. If Waldo had chosen, he could have made a fortune for himself in the United States by climbing skyscrapers. There wasn't a man in the world who could have touched him at this particular line of business.

And his present task was all the more difficult because it was essayed in the darkness.

Feeling for niches with his toes and fingers, he gradually crept lower. And at length he stood upon a window-ledge, and felt carefully with his fingers. The window, old and decayed, opened with very little pressure. Waldo slipped in, and found himself in a deserted corridor.

He went along this, reached some stairs, and passed down. He was soon on the ground floor, and he paused, irresolute. Down this corridor he could see an electric-torch gleaming, and he could hear low voices.

"So I am honoured with company," he murmured. "My old friends, Blake and Tinker, too! Shall I allow this opportunity to slip by? Assuredly not."

And, instead of making efforts to conceal himself, or to flee, he strolled calmly forward and met Blake and Tinker face to face.

"So we meet again—eh?" smiled Waldo, looking into the torchlight. "I saw you down this corridor, Blake, so I thought I'd have a few words. Better than coming into the other part of the castle. We can talk quietly here without any fear of interruption."

Blake regarded the Wonder-Man warily.

"You seem particularly pleased with yourself, Waldo," he said, in a replica of Waldo's own cool manner. "What's your exact scheme? What do you hope to gain by prowling about these deserted quarters of the castle?"

"Nothing whatever," replied Waldo. "It may seem strange to you, Blake, but the idea of personal gain did not occur to me. However, luck has come my way, but we needn't go into details about that."

"What have you been up to, you beggar?" demanded Tinker.

"Harsh words from such young lips," said Waldo, shocked. "Come, Tinker, have I ever treated you badly that you should be so cruel? And, whatever my shortcomings, I have never yet descended to begging."

"My hat! You're a caution!" grinned Tinker.

"Ah, that's better!" said Waldo pleasantly. "Let us smile, for I can assure you that everything in the garden is lovely, or it will be when Lord Pengarth has had a few gardeners on the job for a week or two."

The Wonder-Man's bantering tone was characteristic of him.

It was generally impossible to tell whether he was serious or not. He

made a fine art of this assumed carelessness. And Blake had good reason to know that Waldo was generally in his grimmest mood when he appeared to be in his lightest.

"Look here, Waldo! We'll be straight," said Blake. "I know very well that I can't capture you single-handed, and you know that I wouldn't shoot you down in cold blood. But if you have no motive in this night prowling of yours, what in Heaven's name are you doing it for?"

"Spoken like a man," said Waldo. "Well, we'll get down to business. The police don't suspect me, do they? They have got it into their thick heads that Lord Pengarth is the murderer."

"Well, what about it?"

"Lord Pengarth is not the murderer. I can tell you that straight away," continued Waldo. "You see, Blake, I am even ready to help you in your little investigation. There's no end to my generosity. All the same, I'll be obliged if you'll refrain from asking me to give a personal account to the police. They may not understand my motives as you do. Besides, it's such a nuisance having the bother of breaking handcuffs, and all that sort of thing."

Blake could hardly help smiling.

"Perhaps you'll tell me what you know?" he suggested.

"Not only with pleasure but with eagerness," said Waldo smoothly. "I know this much, at all events. Sir William Brag was lying dead in the passage a full minute before Lord Pengarth arrived on the scene."

"How do you know this?"

"Because I was with the dead man before the earl appeared."

"You don't mean to tell me you—"

"Come, Blake," protested Waldo; "don't be unkind! Don't think such unwarrantable things of me. I may be several kinds of a rogue—you see, I admit it freely—but I am no murderer."

"You are too previous, Waldo," said Blake grimly. "I was not going to accuse you of the murder, because I know that you did not commit the crime. I was going to ask you if you saw the murderer."

"Unfortunately, no," said Waldo. "I was just too late for that interesting item. I heard the scream and I heard a scurry of feet. But when I arrived on the spot Sir William was quite alone. I seized the opportunity to act with my usual quick-witted agility. In short, I went through Sir William's pockets."

"You—you ghou!" growled Tinker, startled.

"You misjudge me," said the Wonder-Man, shaking his head. "I only wished to obtain certain documents which the dead man had been carrying in his breast-pocket. I may say I obtained them, and I have since put them to good account."

"What in the world are you doing, Waldo?" asked Blake. "What is the meaning of all this activity on your part? If you are not out for personal gain, wouldn't it be better not to interfere?"

"I regret that you should use such a term in reference to my good offices," said Waldo sadly. "But the fact is, I'm acting on the square. I know that it will hit you sideways, but it remains a fact. And, what is more, I am particularly anxious to see Lord Pengarth at once."

"Your impudence is unbounded!"

"It is not impudence, Blake," said Waldo quietly. "I have a very good reason. Honour bright, old man, I wish to see Lord Pengarth urgently—vitaly. You can take my word for it that I have no wrong intentions."

Blake shook his head.

"It amazes me, Waldo, why you don't change your tactics, and utilise your wonderful ability to good purpose!" he exclaimed. "Now and again you come out with something decent, and then you drop back into your bad habits. What is your game this time?"

"It is the excitement of it that appeals to me, Blake. You can't expect anything else after so many years," replied the Wonder-Man. "But about Lord Pengarth. Will it be possible for me to see him?"

"Your request is an extraordinary one," said Blake, frowning. "But for your assurance that I could take your word, I would never consider the matter. Even now, I do not know whether it is possible."

"Has the old chap recovered consciousness?"

"Yes; but he must not be disturbed."

"I shall not disturb him—I shall bring him happiness," said Waldo quietly. "It may seem strange to you, Blake, but I have taken a liking to old Pengarth—and his story rather knocked me. So I've been working on his behalf."

"You have been to Simon Slingsby?" asked Blake keenly.

"No good trying to keep anything from you!" growled Waldo. "I might as well admit it—and I must see Lord Pengarth at once!"

Sexton Blake only hesitated for another moment.

"Come with me," he said shortly.

Waldo made no comment, but there was an expression in his eyes which clearly told that he was grateful. There was nothing unusual in this "fraternising" between detective and crook. Sexton Blake and Rupert Waldo usually conversed as though they were old friends.

Somehow, it was almost impossible to regard Waldo as a dangerous criminal. He had such an air of open straightforwardness about him that even Tinker was sometimes deceived. It was small wonder that Waldo was about the cleverest confidence man in existence!

Sexton Blake led the way to a deserted staircase, and they mounted. By this means they got to the upper floor of the inhabited section. And within a few moments they were outside Lord Pengarth's door.

"Wait!" said Blake softly.

He entered and found the room empty, except for the patient. Many candles burned, and the Earl of Pengarth was propped up in bed, pale, drawn, and ill. But he was fully conscious, and his eyes kindled slightly when Blake appeared.

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Blake," he murmured. "Betty has gone out for a moment—to fetch me a drop of port, that is, if the doctor will permit. I don't like being alone. I cannot help seeing that huddled form. They think I killed poor Brag, don't they?"

"Do not upset yourself, Lord Pengarth."

"But I didn't, Mr. Blake—he was killed before I arrived on the spot!" exclaimed the old earl tensely. "I want you to prove that—I want you to establish my innocence."

"One moment, Lord Pengarth," said Blake softly.

He went to the door, and beckoned Waldo and Tinker to enter. Lady Betty appeared at the same moment, carrying a glass of port on a tray. She gazed open-eyed at the Wonder-Man.

"If you will please leave us, Lady Betty—" began Blake.

"Not at all!" interrupted Waldo. "Lady Betty, I shall be honoured if you remain. What I have to say to your

father concerns you quite as much as it concerns him."

She was too surprised to answer, but Blake said no more. They all entered the sick-room.

"What's all this—what's all this?" demanded the earl, with a slight return of his old manner. "Gad! Am I to be disturbed by a whole regiment? Can't I be decently ill without this invasion?"

"First of all, Lord Pengarth, I wish to tell you that I shall be able to establish your innocence almost at once," said Blake quietly.

"Oh, Mr. Blake!" ejaculated Lady Betty, clasping her hands.

"Good!" growled his lordship. "That's a fine piece of news, Mr. Blake! I'm glad you stayed here—upon my soul I am! But what's this man doing here? Bless my life! It's the fellow who came here at first—masquerading as you, Mr. Blake."

"Pray let me apologise for disturbing you, Lord Pengarth," said Waldo quietly. "But I happen to have some of your property in my possession, and I wish to return it to you."

Lord Pengarth, in spite of his weakness, tried to sit up.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated. "Then you did try some of your thieving tricks? You infernal rascal—"

"You misjudge me," interrupted Waldo. "While I was under your roof, Lord Pengarth, I respected your hospitality—even though I was a rank impostor. This property of yours has been missing for years—and that is why I am more than ever delighted to restore it."

He placed a number of documents on the bed.

"What are these?" demanded the old earl. "Papers—legal documents! Take the accursed things away! Haven't I seen enough of them? Haven't they brought me ruin?"

"But this time they have brought you fortune," put in Waldo smilingly. "You will find them quite in order. Mr. Simon Slingsby has had a revulsion of feeling, and, after due consideration, he has decided to restore everything of yours that he has filched. You will find that these documents legally give you back full titles and ownership of Pengarth Castle, Pengarth Park, and the rich farmlands surrounding this district. In other words, Lord Pengarth, you are practically restored to your former position of affluence."

Lord Pengarth was stunned—he was in no condition to receive such a surprise as this. Even Sexton Blake was startled. And Lady Betty stood there, pale with excitement. It seemed that she was listening to some wild fairy tale.

"Is this true, Waldo?" asked Blake quietly. "Heaven forgive you if you have deceived Lord Pengarth!"

"While admitting that I am a past-master in the art of deception, I have practised nothing of that nature this time," replied Waldo calmly. "I am grateful to you, Lord Pengarth," he added, "for having given me the opportunity of interviewing Mr. Simon Slingsby. I can assure you it was a most enjoyable hour."

"Has Slingsby agreed to this?" panted his lordship.

Waldo smiled.

"Well, I can hardly say that he agreed to the affair, but he certainly signed these deeds, and they are duly witnessed," replied the Wonder-Man. "Let him bring what legal action he chooses, he will lose the case. This property is now yours, Lord Pengarth. It is just a case of poetic justice. Slingsby robbed you—and I have robbed Slingsby. It has all been done by sheer kindness."

Blake pursed his lips. He was in a delicate position. He turned aside, feeling that it would be far better for him to be officially ignorant of this transaction. That it was morally right there could be no question. And as Sexton Blake was not concerned, he thought it better to remain in ignorance.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. A Self-Confessed Burglar.



THE Earl of Pengarth clasped Waldo's hand.

"I cannot thank you for what you have done," he said quietly. "They call you a criminal, but I cannot regard you as such. Yet you have proved that you are accustomed to such work—by your visit to Simon Slingsby."

"There is something else, Lord Pengarth," said Waldo. "And I fancy it is something which places Slingsby entirely in your hands, and brands him for all time as a criminal far worse than myself. I would rather starve in the gutter than be a man like Simon Slingsby."

"What are you referring to?" asked his lordship.

"If it is as I think, the rascally reptile will have no chance of claiming restitution," replied Waldo. "And you, for your part, will be able to take legal proceedings, if you think it advisable—if you consider that this method of mine is not quite—well, the thing."

He pulled out a velvet bag from his pocket. This he emptied on to the coverlet, and a number of jewels fell out—a diamond necklace, rings, brooches, a wonderful pearl bracelet. And there was something else, too—something which Lord Pengarth seized upon with a hoarse cry.

"The cross!" he panted. "The Pengarth cross!"

He clutched it to him, and Lady Betty bent over the bed.

"Dad," she breathed, "please, dad! You mustn't excite yourself—"

"Child, child!" broke in her father. "Don't you see? It's the Pengarth cross! It means the end of the Curse—the end of the Pengarth ill fortunes!"

The girl was white with excitement and joy.

"And it means also that I can now freely acknowledge Waldo's work," put in Sexton Blake, turning. "That cross was stolen sixteen or seventeen years ago, Lord Pengarth, and it has remained in Slingsby's possession ever since. If you wish, it is within your power to send him to penal servitude."

"He shall go!" vowed Lord Pengarth grimly.

"Do you recognise these trinkets?" asked Waldo.

"Recognise them?" repeated the earl. "Why, yes! They are my poor wife's jewels. They were stolen at the same time as the cross. So Slingsby was the thief! The cur—the villainous viper!"

"He must have taken them on purpose, so that he could work on your feelings regarding the curse," said Sexton Blake. "That, undoubtedly, was his scheme. If all these facts come out, Lord Pengarth, there is not the slightest doubt that you will win—both in a civil court and in a criminal court. I am not sure that it would not be better to let things rest as they are, and thus avoid all scandal and publicity."

(Continued on page 19.)

The CURSE of PENGARTH CASTLE

(Continued from page 10.)

"Perhaps you are right—perhaps you are right!" agreed the earl. "Gad, I am feeling better already! I shall be out within a week—out! Eh, Betty? We'll have the old place renovated—tuned up and trimmed! As for you, sir," he added, turning to Waldo. "If I attempt to thank you for what you have done I shall make a mess of it. You're a fine fellow, by gad! And if they call you a crook in my hearing I shall have something to say!"

Waldo chuckled.

"You have no occasion to thank me, Lord Pengarth," he replied. "And please don't think that I go about doing good wherever I can. Quite the opposite! But Slingsby instilled me with fury, and it was purely for my own pleasure that I went to him and obtained his signature to these documents and rifled his safe. Somehow I don't think he'll have the audacity to take any action."

He bowed and moved away.

"And now," he added, "I'll make my departure, if you'll excuse me. I have some other business on hand which cannot wait."

He walked to the door; but Sexton Blake was out in the passage in advance of him, and Tinker came close behind. Tinker closed the door, leaving father and daughter alone.

"What you have done is quite straight?" asked Blake. "I mean those documents are in order?"

"They are, as far as I humanly know," replied the Wonder-Man.

"Of course, you realise that the chief constable is downstairs?" went on Blake. "And you further realise that it is my plain duty to hand you over into his keeping? The fact that you have performed this generous action to Lord Pengarth in no way affects the position."

Waldo smiled.

"Yes, Blake, you're right," he agreed. "And, after all, I stand before you a self-confessed burglar, for I have told you that I rifled Simon Slingsby's safe. But you won't hand me over on that charge, surely?"

"There are many other charges against you, Waldo."

"Really? I'd quite forgotten them," chuckled the Wonder-Man. "But perhaps you are right; I won't argue. And I know for a fact that the police are anxious to see me."

"It would be against all my principles if I gave you permission to walk out," went on Blake sternly. "What you have done for Lord Pengarth is praiseworthy, but I must ask you to accompany me downstairs. My one duty is to hand you over to justice."

Waldo looked surprised for a moment, then his eyes twinkled.

"Why, of course!" he chuckled. "Anything you like, Blake. And I wouldn't dream of keeping you from your duty. Right you are, old man; lead the way. Tinker, stand behind and watch the lamb go to his slaughter!"

Colonel Flowerdew was still in the library with Inspector Burgess. They had both worked themselves into a state of sheer despondency by this time. In their own minds they had already seen



Selecting a strong, supple branch, Waldo climbed out, swung, and at the right moment released his grip. He landed perfectly in one clean jump. (Page 9.)

the Earl of Pengarth in the dock, they had heard him sentenced, and the unfortunate peer was already hanged.

At this stage Sexton Blake entered to live things up.

"Colonel, I have a prisoner for you," said Blake crisply. "This man is Waldo. I found him in the deserted west wing, and, very properly, he has submitted to capture. It is your responsibility."

The chief-constable sprang up, startled.

"Waldo!" he ejaculated, looking at the Wonder-Man askance.

"Pray don't disturb yourself!" said Waldo. "I'm quite harmless. I've no intention of smashing up the happy home. Blake says that I must submit to arrest. So what else is to be done? Only do get it over quickly, won't you?"

Inspector Burgess came forward, full of importance.

"What do you know about this murder?" he demanded sternly.

"Nothing!" replied Waldo. "Blake, you might tell the inspector that I'm quite guiltless in that respect. I don't want such a charge—"

"I bring no charge against Waldo whatever," said Blake, turning to the inspector. "I merely know that he is a wanted man, and I formally hand him over. It is for you to deal with him as you think fit. I suggest— Well, perhaps it is not my province to make suggestions."

The inspector pulled out his handcuffs.

"I arrest you, Rupert Waldo, and you will be taken to Launceston police-station without delay. The full charge will be made against you to-morrow. Colonel Flowerdew, sir, will you be good enough to call the two constables?"

"Yes, yes, to be sure!" ejaculated the

colonel. "You'll need two! This man is dangerous; he's got to be well looked after."

And so, five minutes later, Waldo was marched out of Pengarth Castle in the firm grip of two burly policemen. He had already uttered a cheery good-bye to Sexton Blake, and the chief-constable and Inspector Burgess were in a fine flutter.

"It was the only thing to do, sir; we couldn't keep him here," said the inspector. "Very smart of you, Mr. Blake, to capture the fellow! I can't understand it. I've always understood that he's practically invincible."

Blake smiled.

"Waldo is a peculiar man," he replied. "He will sometimes walk headlong into danger, and he seems quite indifferent to his fate. In the present instance, as you have seen, he has departed in the care of those constables with a light heart."

A few minutes later Blake and Tinker were alone.

"Ten minutes, gov'nor?" asked Tinker carelessly.

"Probably a quarter of an hour, but not longer," replied Blake. "Well, Tinker, we've done our duty, haven't we? If Waldo escapes from the constables, that's their look-out, not ours."

Tinker grinned.

"I can't help it, gov'nor—I like the beggar!" he exclaimed. "And you must say he's acted like a sport over this Slingsby affair. I say, wouldn't it have been worth quids to see that meeting?"

"Yes, I have no doubt that Mr. Slingsby went through a very trying ordeal," agreed Sexton Blake. "But there is one thing that rather puzzles me. Surely Waldo hasn't done all this

out of sheer good-heartedness? It was hardly like him to give up jewellery worth thousands of pounds."

"He's taken a liking to Lord Pengarth, gov'nor—and there's no telling what Waldo will do, anyhow! He's the queerest bird we've ever come across," replied Tinker. "One of these days we shall find him conducting the service at some church or other."

At this moment there was an excited hammering on the great door, and Blake himself went and opened it. As he had expected, the two constables were outside, hot, flustered, and filled with intense alarm.

"He's escaped, sir!" gasped one of them.

"Escaped!" echoed Tinker, aghast.

"What's that?" shouted the inspector, hurrying up. "You dolts! You haven't let him go, have you? Two men like you—and you couldn't keep hold of—"

"We couldn't help it, sir!" panted one of the men. "We hadn't got to the bottom of the drive before he got out of his handcuffs—"

"Ridiculous!" stormed the inspector. "I put them on myself!"

"I dunno about that, sir; he got out of 'em all right!" said the policeman stolidly. "Fair took us by surprise, too! He caught Joe on the side of the head and knocked him into the ditch! And before I could look round the beggar was gone! Clean gone, sir—there wasn't no sign of him! Vanished like a bloomin' ghost!"

"Bless my soul and body!" ejaculated the chief constable.

Sexton Blake sighed, and shook his head.

"Oh, well, it can't be helped," he said regretfully. "It is not the first time that Waldo has eluded the police. But it is a great pity, seeing that we had him so nicely."

The unfortunate constables were roundly "told off" by the indignant inspector, and Sexton Blake and Tinker walked off in the middle of it. They were both looking duly concerned.

"Well, gov'nor, that's that!" said Tinker softly.

And although Blake didn't exactly wink, Tinker was fairly certain that he saw the flicker of an eyelid.

"Now to work again!" said Sexton Blake. "We have had this interlude, Tinker, and it has been an interruption, but we cannot allow it to interfere with

our task. The main thing is to get hold of the murderer of Sir William Brag."

"But the position's altogether better, isn't it, sir?" asked Tinker cheerily, as they went back to the west wing. "I mean, Lord Pengarth is heaps better than he was, and his fortunes have been restored—"

"I'm not quite so sure about that," interrupted Blake thoughtfully. "Those documents must be carefully examined before we can say anything for certain. But Waldo is hardly the man to do anything in a slipshod way."

"In any case, Slingsby won't dare to do anything—he'll be afraid of running his head into a noose," said Tinker. "What about those jewels, sir? They were stolen, and the police know all about it. It won't be very nice for Slingsby if it comes out that they were found in his safe."

"No; I rather fancy he will keep very quiet," replied Blake. "He has evidently been piling up an enormous fortune. A man like that, living in a comparatively small way, is sometimes fabulously rich."

"But what on earth does he want it for?" asked Tinker. "If he only lives in a small way, what good is all that money to him?"

"What good were those jewels in his safe?" retorted Blake. "They have reposed there for seventeen years—untouched, except for an occasional examination, perhaps. Slingsby took them when he took the Cross, and that piece of work was accomplished. I have no doubt, in order that he could afterwards play upon Lord Pengarth's mind regarding the Curse. But the whole evidently proves that Slingsby is a miser—a man who hoards money, and makes money, for the mere sake of gloating over it."

"Well, I'm blessed if I can understand it!" growled Tinker. "Chaps like that don't deserve to live—especially when they swindle other people so that they can add to their rotten store! Fancy! Making Lord Pengarth a pauper, and raking in his income, and doing nothing with it! The man must be mad!"

"He has undoubtedly got a kink," agreed Blake. "But this conversation is not carrying us any further, Tinker. There is still the problem of Sir William Brag's death before us. Until that is cleared up, our host is in a grave position."

"But the police don't still suspect him, gov'nor?"

"Make no mistake, Tinker, both Colonel Flowerdew and Inspector Burgess are convinced that Lord Pengarth is the murderer. They are extremely sorry for him, of course, but they mean to arrest him as soon as he is well enough."

"But you won't let 'em?"

"I shall certainly not; but it doesn't please me to pass on my information just yet," said Blake. "It will be far more satisfactory if I can hand them the murderer himself. And I think I shall be able to do that before the night is out."

Tinker stared.

"Which reminds me, gov'nor," he said. "How the dickens do you know that the murderer has got a ginger beard?"

"It is childishly simple," explained Sexton Blake, as they walked slowly along the deserted corridor. "While examining the body, I found a few hairs clutched in the right hand. It needed no expert to place them as hairs from the human chin—in short, hairs from the beard."

"Oh!" said Tinker slowly. "That's pretty conclusive, isn't it? Lord Pengarth hasn't got a beard, and his moustache is grizzled. Even the old inspector ought to sit up when you tell him that!"

"I have no doubt he will."

"I suppose poor old Sir William saw the blow coming, and made a wild grab at his murderer," continued Tinker thoughtfully. "He didn't get him, but he just managed to clutch a bit of his beard! Is that how you figure it out, sir?"

"Naturally," replied the great detective. "You are singularly adept, Tinker, at stating the obvious. Let us bring our facts into line. We know that the murderer is bare-footed, and that he has a beard. We know that he escaped into this wing of the building. So there is more than a chance that we shall locate him if we search long enough."

"He's probably cleared off by this time, sir."

"That is unlikely," put in Blake. "There has been no such character seen in this district. And a man with bare feet, and splayed toes, to say nothing of a ragged auburn beard, would have been very conspicuous. He is in the castle, concealed somewhere. You must remember that there is sufficient room in these deserted wings to harbour a score, without anybody being a word the wiser."

Tinker went with his master, more eager than ever. Who was this strange, grotesque creature they were after? How long had he lurked in the castle, and why was he there?

As Blake penetrated farther into the deserted wing, he held his hand ready on his revolver, for he had sufficient evidence to know that this bare-footed unknown was a dangerous fellow to come across.

Occasionally they saw a smudgy footprint in the dust, but in the main there was very little trail to follow. The search resolved itself into a careful, diligent examination.

Every barren apartment was searched, every cupboard and recess was examined. It seemed as though they would never succeed. The whole place was dank with age, and there was a smell of dampness and mildew in every hole and corner.

This search, in the middle of the night, was grim and tedious.

Tinker's high spirits left him after the first hour of it. He became jumpy

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and tense. At any moment he expected to see some misshapen figure leap out at him from the darkness. And he found it impossible to forget how Sir William Brag had been struck down before he could lift a hand to help himself.

And then, at last, Sexton Blake paused upon entering a low, arched doorway. Beyond lay a kind of crypt, grim and mysterious. It was one of the most ancient parts of the castle, and brought up memories of olden times. But it was something else which caused Blake to halt and sniff the air.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

What Sexton Blake Found at Pengarth.



TINKER paused, too, and he caught some of the criminologist's tension. The smell of mildew had so long been in his nostrils that he now hardly noticed it. But, seeing that Blake was sniffing, he did the same.

"Hallo!" he murmured. "Smells a bit queer, sir!"

"Be careful, Tinker! Look out for yourself!" muttered Blake. "There may be no danger, but we must be on our guard."

As they advanced into the crypt there was a distinct change in the atmosphere. Instead of dampness and mildew, they could smell a queer conglomeration of scents—unpleasant, in the main. But, without any doubt, the predominant odour was that of onions.

If this crypt was deserted, as all the other places were deserted, how was it that the fresh smell of raw onions was in the air? Not only that, but other foodstuffs—stale and old. Blake couldn't be sure of it, but he even fancied that he caught an indefinable whiff of stale tobacco.

They advanced cautiously. Tinker still had that feeling that something would leap on him from the shadows. But he steeled himself, and kept his senses fully on the alert.

But at length the crypt was fully examined, and it proved to be as empty as any of the other deserted chambers.

"Well, it's nothing but a swindle!" grunted Tinker. "I thought we were going to find something."

"We have found something," said Sexton Blake. "What do you think of this, Tinker?"

He flashed his light on a portion of the wall. At first glance it seemed like the rest of the old stonework. But then Tinker could see finger-marks—particularly in a certain place. They were of long-standing, and it was clear that hands had been pressed upon this part of the wall countless times. There had been no attempt to keep it secret.

Blake pressed on the spot where the disfigurement was most noticeable, and a section of the wall moved back at once. It was a door. At some remote period it had probably been a secret door, but years of careless handling had rendered the secret visible to all.

Another chamber lay beyond, and now the odour of stale onions was even more distinct. With a sudden movement, Blake strode into the inner chamber, with Tinker at his heels.

From the shadows there was a sudden movement.

Some object leapt, and Tinker gasped.

"Look out!" roared Blake. "Quick, Tinker! Hold him!"

Tinker caught a flash of the figure as it leapt at his master. He saw an unkempt face, with staring eyes. He saw a ragged form, and an upraised arm which held a formidable knotted stick.

With a shout, Tinker threw himself forward. As the stick descended he diverted it, and thus saved Blake from an injury which might have been a broken arm. The next second a fearful fight was in progress.

The stick had been knocked out of the creature's grip. And now, bare-handed, he flung himself at Blake. From the rear, Tinker did everything he could. The torch fell with a clatter and snapped out.

And in the darkness the fight went on.

It was a gruesome, uncanny business. Twice Blake was nearly bitten, and at last he was compelled to place his hands round the throat of the unknown and hold them there. Then, with his knees on the man's chest, he shouted for Tinker to hold the prisoner's lashing feet.

Somehow Tinker succeeded, and, when both he and Blake were nearly exhausted, the fight came to an end. Their captive lay on the floor breathing pantingly, but subdued.

"A light, Tinker!" exclaimed Blake grimly. "I'm afraid my torch is out of action, but you've got one. Switch it on!"

Somehow Tinker managed to pull his torch out. He pressed the switch, and a ray of light fell upon the prisoner. Both Blake and Tinker stared with repulsion.

The figure was evidently a madman—a gibbering idiot. His eyes were staring, he showed his teeth, and almost foamed at the mouth. He had unkempt hair, and a ragged, auburn beard.

Altogether, he was an ugly customer. He was attired in a ragged, tattered suit, and he wore no shoes or stockings. Even now he had plenty of fight left in him, for at the first relaxation of Blake's grip, the creature sought to struggle free.

But he was held, and the next task was to render him incapable of further mischief. Cords were placed round his wrists, and he was rolled face downwards. Further cords were tied round his ankles, and his legs were bent back and secured in this position. Escape was out of the question.

"My goodness!" panted Tinker. "Thank goodness that's over, sir! I thought he was going to kill you that time!"

"Thanks, Tinker, for doing what you did," said Blake quietly. "In spite of all my precautions, the fellow was a shade too quick for me. Any careless action on our part, and one of us would certainly have been brained."

They rose to their feet, feeling the strain of that fight. But one satisfaction filled them both. The murderer of Sir William Brag was laid by the heels, and the shadow over Lord Pengarth was dissipated for ever.

An examination of the chamber proved interesting.

Strictly speaking, there were two—a second inner room leading out of this one. They were furnished in a kind of way. One was a sitting-room, and the other a bed-room. The bed was a small, single iron bedstead, and the blankets and sheets, at least, were scrupulously clean.

And the "living-room," although shockingly untidy, bore traces of having been turned out with a fair amount of regularity. The occupant of these queer

apartments was much more dirty and untidy than his living quarters. But how was it that this creature lived here?

"Do you think he's always been mad, sir?" asked Tinker, after a while.

"There can be no question of that," replied Blake. "Just look at his head—the shape of it. Furthermore, he's unable to utter any intelligible sounds. The poor beggar ought to be in proper care—not left to himself in this state of solitude."

"He seems to have been looked after all right, sir," said Tinker. "But who ever would have thought of this explanation?"

Blake had picked up the heavy, knotted stick, and was examining it. He nodded grimly once or twice.

"There is no need to look far here, Tinker," he remarked. "There is enough evidence on this stick to convict the fellow a dozen times. Have a look at it for yourself."

Tinker looked, and shivered slightly.

"It's awful, sir!" he muttered. "That's blood, isn't it? I say, he must have given Sir William a terrible smash. But why? What on earth could have possessed him?"

"I can think of nothing else but a frenzy—a sudden mania," replied Blake. "He can certainly have had no grudge against Sir William, for the latter was practically a stranger. This is the sequence of events, as we now know it. Sir William entered by the window, and this demented creature happened to be in that particular passage."

"And Sir William shrieked out at the sight of him, eh?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Blake. "He was startled and frightened. It may have been his scream, indeed, which precipitated the madman's attack. In his distorted way he thought that he had to silence that noise, so he struck. And one blow was sufficient."

"Then he bunked, and Waldo came along—"

"Am I telling this, Tinker, or are you?" asked Blake tartly.

"Sorry, sir!"

"Then Waldo came along," resumed Blake. "He took in the situation at a glance, picked Sir William's pocket for those documents, and went. Then, all within the space of a single minute, Lord Pengarth arrived on the scene, and stood over the dead man. And that's how we found him."

"It only shows you, gov'nor, that circumstantial evidence is jolly weak," said Tinker, shaking his head. "Why, it looked as black as thunder against Lord Pengarth. I don't wonder the police took it for granted that he was guilty, and made no close examination."

"Nothing should ever be taken for granted, Tinker, particularly by the police," said Blake. "If there had been a smart Scotland Yard man at work here, there would have been nothing taken for granted!"

"We ought to have had old Lennard on the job, sir!" grinned Tinker. "I can just picture him solemnly telling us that Lord Pengarth—"

"Hush! I heard something!"

Tinker glanced at the doorway, and they both stood rigid.

"Put the light out, and step behind here!" murmured Blake, indicating a recess. "I have been half expecting something of the kind, and I rather fancy I know who is coming."

The light was switched off, and they both stood waiting. Faintly the sounds of shuffling footsteps made themselves heard. Then the reflection of a flickering light came gradually into view.

"Tom!" came a quavering voice. "Tom! Are you there? Why don't you come when I call you?"

"Jelks!" whispered Tinker, with an inaudible whistle.

Blake said nothing, and a moment later old Jelks came into the inner chamber, holding an old-fashioned storm-lantern. He paused, staring dumbly at the bound figure on the floor. The madman was now uttering all sorts of strange, guttural sounds, mingled with a kind of whimper.

"What's happened to ye, Tom?" gasped Jelks, setting the lantern down, and kneeling. "Who's done—"

He broke off, and staggered to his feet again as Tinker's torchlight flashed out and he caught sight of the pair.

"Mr. Blake!" muttered the old butler, aghast. "Then, then you know?"

"Why didn't you tell me about this at the very beginning, Jelks?" demanded Blake sternly. "Why didn't you tell Inspector Burgess? Don't you realise that you are harbouring a murderer, and that you have laid yourself open to a grave charge?"

Jelks panted for breath.

"I—I didn't know, sir!" he exclaimed. "An' I was that worried an' troubled that I was near off my head."

The old man's distress was so great that Blake could not remain stern.

"This—this unfortunate is your son, Jelks?" he asked.

"How did you know, sir?" moaned Jelks miserably.

"I didn't know—I merely guessed," replied Sexton Blake. "Your attitude has been very significant, too. You could hardly have kept such a secret unless the relationship was a close one. But that is no excuse Jelks; you ought to have told the police the very instant they arrived!"

"But—but I didn't know, sir!" panted Jelks. "Leastways, I wasn't certain, Mr. Blake—"

"Come, Jelks, that won't do!" broke in Blake. "You knew well enough. At all events, your suspicions were so strong that you could have had no real doubt in your mind. As it is, you have placed yourself in an awkward position, and I cannot answer for what attitude the police will take."

Old Jelks was almost a ghost of his usual self. His anxiety and anguish of the past few hours had reduced him to a nervous wreck, and this culminating incident bereft him of all self-control. He sank down upon one of the chairs, and sobbed convulsively.

Blake and Tinker waited, rather uncomfortable.

"Come, come, this won't do!" murmured Blake gently. "You need not be afraid, Jelks; the police won't arrest you. You have done wrong, but your fault was not so very great."

"My son, sir!" muttered Jelks brokenly. "To think that it was he who struck down poor Sir William! It's broke me all up, sir. I'll never be right again—never, as long as I live! My son—a murderer!"

"You are in no way responsible for your son's actions—particularly as he is not responsible for them himself," said Sexton Blake. "The mistake was in keeping the unhappy man in this extraordinary asylum. What does it mean, Jelks? You must give an explanation."

"I will, sir—I will!" panted Jelks, trying to control himself. "I always thought that poor Tom was harmless. He has been, sir, for years—nigh on thirty years now!" he added slowly. "Never harmed a fly, sir; never hit as much as a kitten! Why, Tom was like a baby, sir!"

"He has never caused you any trouble?"

"Never, sir—not one day of it!" said Jelks earnestly. "The last thing I thought was that he could harm

anybody. And when I guessed it, sir, I was struck all of a heap. Poor Martha is crying her eyes out. She don't know what to do. 'It's all your fault,' she says. An' she swears that the police will take us away to prison, an' that maybe poor Tom will be hanged."

"Your son will not be hanged, and neither you nor your wife will go to prison, Jelks," replied Blake quietly. "If you tell me that your son has always been harmless, then you are not so much to blame, perhaps."

"Harmless ain't the word, sir," said the butler, recovering under Blake's reassuring tone. "Many's the time I've left him alone with the missus' cat, an' he's never done a thing to harm it. An' he's always been shy, too—wouldn't come out and show himself. I can't make it out, sir; it's a mystery to me."

"I am no brain specialist, Jelks, but I can well imagine something snapping in your son's poor, demented brain," said the detective. "And when that moment arrived—perhaps it was caused by Sir William's scream when he caught sight of your son—he hit out blindly. I do not blame the poor fellow. He is more to be pitied than anything else. But again we come to the point, Jelks. What is he doing here?"

"Tom's lived here, sir, for ten years," said Jelks brokenly.

"Ten years!" ejaculated Tinker.

"Ay, sir, all of that—mebbe more," replied Jelks. "I've almost lost count."

"And you and your wife have looked after him?"

"Every day, sir—yes, day and night!" replied the butler. "Looked after him as though he were a child of five or six. He didn't mind this loneliness, and being by himself. Tom liked it, poor wretch! It was what he wanted."

"And does Lord Pengarth know?"

"Bless you, sir, no!" ejaculated Jelks. "Neither does Lady Betty. All this time, sir, an' they've never guessed a thing—never had reason to."

"Has he always been demented?"

"Always, sir, since he was born," replied Jelks, shaking his head sadly. "A rare blow it was to me an' the wife. We never had any other child, sir. Just Tom. He was in an asylum until—"

"Until you could no longer afford to keep him there?"

Jelks hung his head.

"In a way, that's right, sir," he admitted. "But Tom escaped—the asylum frightened him. He was always afraid of strangers. Poor boy, he only longed to be near mother and me. And when he escaped, and came here one night—he wasn't so mad that he didn't know the way—we took him in, and thought of all these empty rooms."

"Yes, I quite understand!"

"The master wasn't paying us so much wages, then, sir—things was already going bad. And by the looks of it, they were going to get worse—which, as you know, sir, they did. And those asylum fees were terrible, sir; took all we had to spare, and more. So we kept Tom here, thinking that nobody would know, and that no harm would be done. There wasn't nothing wrong in that Mr. Blake, was there?"

"As you saw it at the time, possibly not; but as events have turned out, it is scarcely necessary for me to say what I think, Jelks. The life of Sir William Brag is the penalty for your rashness. But I don't blame you. I understand your position, and sympathise with you."

Jelks rocked himself miserably.

"And to think it was me, sir, that brought you down here!" he muttered. "Not that that makes much difference; the police would have found out."

"Opinions differ," said Tinker. "If the police had been left to themselves, Lord Pengarth would have been accused of the murder, and taken away."

"Never, young sir—never!" vowed Jelks. "I was going to speak. In fact, me and Martha had already decided to tell everything in the morning."

"Well, it makes very little difference," said Sexton Blake. "Tinker, I wish you'd go and fetch Inspector Burgess and those constables. This poor creature must be removed without delay."

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. Exit Mister Slingsby.



COLONEL FLOWER-DEU puffed his cheeks out, and was staggered.

"The work of a lunatic—Jelks' son!" he repeated blankly. "Bless my soul and body! What an extraordinary affair! And what a relief, Mr. Blake! I thought it was the work of Lord Pengarth himself—"

may I be forgiven!"

"I am afraid Inspector Burgess took too much for granted," said Sexton Blake. "The circumstances looked ugly, I will admit, but it is always unwise to accept facts at their face value. A little close scrutiny may reveal all sorts of unsuspected flaws."

"You've proved that, Mr. Blake!" declared the chief constable. "By gad, you have! I don't mind admitting, sir, that I was a bit sceptical about your methods. But not now, sir."

They were in the library, and the unhappy murderer had already been carried off in the care of the police, Inspector Burgess himself in charge this time.

For there was no reason for him to remain.

The mystery was solved, and there would be nothing now, except an inquest. Blake, of course, would give his evidence, and it would be a purely formal affair. Sir William had died as the result of an unfortunate meeting with a madman. Lord Pengarth's quarrel with Sir William would never be even mentioned, since it was not relevant to the case.

In was in the small hours of the morning, but nobody in Pengarth Castle had even thought of going to bed. The old earl himself was making extraordinary progress—so much so that the doctor was staggered.

He had declared that the old earl would be in bed for weeks. But by all appearances he would be out again within a few days. Waldo's recent visit had a great deal to do with this rapid change for the better.

For at last Lord Pengarth's mind was at rest.

No longer was he in danger of being turned out of his castle. The Pengarth curse was dead, and it seemed that a time of well-earned happiness lay ahead.

The change in Lady Betty, too, was remarkable.

Her old colour had returned, and the sparkle was once more apparent in her eyes. Her final happiness was assured when she learned that her father was safe from being accused of the murder.

"I am sure that we have to thank you for this, Mr. Blake," she said quietly. "I don't know what we should have done without you. And poor Jelks—he won't get into trouble with the police, will he?"

"Well, I am afraid Colonel Flowerdew is very cross with him, but no doubt the affair will blow over," said Sexton Blake. "But, remarkably enough, it seems to me that you and your father must thank Waldo more than anybody else."

At this moment there came a loud jangling and clanging of the bell. It was so startling and so unexpected, that Lady Betty clutched at Sexton Blake's sleeve.

"Who can that be?" she murmured.

"Slingsby, I'll bet!" murmured Tinker.

"Oh, it can't be—it can't be!" muttered the girl. "He can't come here—he wouldn't dare!"

"Let me answer the bell," said Sexton Blake quietly.

He went to the door, leaving Tinker and Lady Betty standing in the great hall, which was only illuminated in the one corner. It was a place of shadows and great spaces.

Blake passed into the lobby, shot the bolts of the great door, and flung it open. A man came pushing past him—a lean-shouldered individual with sunken eyes, and maddened, feverish expression.

"One moment, sir—" began Blake.

"Out of my way!" snarled the newcomer. "Where's Lord Pengarth? Where is he, I say? By Heaven, I mean to see him! I've been victimised by a rogue—a scoundrel!"

Mr. Simon Slingsby burst right through into the hall, and came to a halt as Lady Betty faced him.

"What do you want, Mr. Slingsby?" she asked defiantly.

"Where's your father?" snarled the lawyer. "I've come here to see him, and I won't be denied. I've been robbed—robbed of tens of thousands! Do you hear me? All my money! Gold—gold! Notes—bundles of them! I've been robbed!"

Slingsby was nearly off his head with rage and anguish.

"Do you expect to find your property here, Mr. Slingsby?" asked Lady Betty coldly. "I am amazed that you should come to Pengarth Castle. And who are you to talk of robbers?"

"I know that the man came here—he told me so!" raved the frenzied lawyer. "I should have come earlier, only I was bound—bound and gagged! My fool of a housekeeper went to bed, and I could make nobody hear!"

"I'm glad you had a nice time of it!" said Tinker bluntly.

"This man—this burgling hound—made me sign some preposterous documents!" went on Slingsby feverishly. "I want them back—I mean to have them back! They are worthless!"

"Not so worthless as you would have me believe, Mr. Slingsby," put in Lady Betty. "And if they are so valueless, why are you so frantic to get them back?"

The lawyer recoiled, shaking with passion.

"That was a nasty one, wasn't it?" asked Tinker. "I don't want to butt in, Mr. Slingsby, but if you take my advice you'll get out of here while you're safe."

But Simon Slingsby had come for trouble, and he was going to get it!

"What's this—what's this?"

Colonel Flowerdew came out of the library, and faced Simon Slingsby with a grim frown. The lawyer recoiled again. He knew, at the first glimpse, that he was facing the chief constable.

"I—I didn't know you were here, sir!" panted Simon Slingsby. "I am glad—very glad! I appeal to you in this matter!"

"Oh, you do?" growled the colonel,



The butler paused, staring dumbly at the bound figure on the floor. The madman was now uttering all sorts of strange guttural sounds, mingled with a kind of whimper. (Page 22.)

eyeing him coldly "What's this you're saying about documents, or something?"

"A man came into my house, held me up and robbed me!" babbled out the lawyer. "He forced me to sign documents, which make over the Pengarth estates to Lord Pengarth—the castle, the park, and tens of thousands of acres, the entire estate! This—this accursed criminal made me sign these documents under threat of death!"

"And are they valid?" demanded the chief constable.

"Yes, of course they are!" raved Slingsby. "I'm a lawyer—I ought to know!"

"Then why did you tell me they were valueless?" put in Lady Betty quietly.

Slingsby started violently.

"I—I was mistaken!" he stuttered. "I must have them back! Unless I get them I will have the whole matter threshed out in court!"

"Indeed, sir!" put in Sexton Blake. "Do you dare to stand there and suggest that you would enter a court of justice and swear that these Pengarth estates are your own property?"

"They are mine—mine!"

"They are my father's, and you know it!" exclaimed Lady Betty. "You robbed them from him, and now that he has got them back, you talk of going to law! You wouldn't dare!"

"I rather fancy you are right, Lady Betty," said Colonel Flowerdew. "Mr. Slingsby, the sooner you leave Pengarth Castle the better! You will get nothing here!"

"But I tell you—"

"One moment, Mr. Slingsby!" interrupted Sexton Blake. "Perhaps you are aware that the Pengarth Cross has been

recovered—to say nothing of some jewellery which has been missing for seventeen years?"

Simon Slingsby turned as pale as chalk. Until that moment he had completely overlooked this seemingly trivial aspect of the case. His mind had been obsessed by the greater loss—a loss which amounted to hundreds of thousands. He had given no thought to the few paltry trinkets which Waldo had taken from his safe—although he seemed to set great store on the bundles of notes and gold which had mysteriously vanished.

But Blake's words hit Slingsby fairly amidships. Blake had suspected that Slingsby had forgotten those jewels, and this little reminder was timely. They had been in his safe! Proof positive that he was a common thief! Even though that burglary had been committed seventeen years before, it made no difference—he was still liable to penal servitude.

"I—I—I—"

The lawyer found coherent speech impossible.

"Don't you think you had better go, Mr. Slingsby?" said Sexton Blake. "There is another little thing I would like to remind you of. About seven years ago there was a rather unpleasant case in Bodmin. A small estate in that town was in the hands of a certain lawyer, and but for a hitch at the last moment that lawyer would have robbed the estate of every penny it possessed—"

"I—I will go!" muttered Slingsby hoarsely.

"If you wish, I will accept Lord Pengarth's commission to look into his financial affairs," continued Sexton

Blake smoothly. "This work is quite in my line, Mr. Slingsby, since it involves a great amount of investigation and detective inquiry. Shall I look into the Pengarth affairs, and find out exactly why his lordship's finances have fallen so lamentably during the past decade? Or do you think it would be better to let matters stand as they are? I leave it entirely to you—you can have your choice."

The lawyer was defeated, and he knew it.

Without a word he stumbled to the door, pulled it open, and passed out into the night. He had received such a shock as he had never anticipated.

One thing was absolutely obvious.

He was afraid—mortally afraid of an investigation!

He would rather let matters stand as they were, with Lord Pengarth in full possession of his property, than lift a finger to make further protest. He had gone—a self-confessed swindler.

And soon afterwards, Sexton Blake had a few words with Lady Betty.

"Well, your troubles are now over, I think," smiled the detective. "You need have no further fear of Simon Slingsby. If, by any chance, he does become active, I earnestly request you to call upon me, Lady Betty."

"I will, Mr. Blake, although I don't think it will be necessary," replied the girl. "Without your help, I think we should have given way to despair. And it was owing to you that Slingsby admitted defeat."

"He was compelled to admit defeat," replied Blake. "He knows that a careful inquiry would spell his own ruin. The one fact of those jewels is enough to land him in prison."

"Why didn't you let him go there, sir?" put in Tinker.

"Because his teeth are drawn now and he can do no further harm," said Sexton Blake. "And don't you think that Lord Pengarth has suffered enough, without the trial and worry of a public inquiry? By letting Slingsby go, a beaten man and a physical wreck, all further investigation is rendered unnecessary. It was the simplest way, and I think Lord Pengarth will be the first to admit that it was the best. If the police care to take up the case, that, of course, is their affair. But, somehow, I don't think they will."

"There's one thing I've been puzzling about, sir," said Tinker thoughtfully. "I wonder how much Waldo raked in for himself out of this job?"

"I wonder!" mused Blake.

THE NINTH CHAPTER. The Monetary Misery of a Miser.



RUPERT WALDO wasn't so far off as many supposed.

In point of fact, he was in Pengarth Castle itself, and for a full hour he had been thoroughly enjoying himself. With his usual audacity he had dodged back after eluding the police, and had calmly entered the castle.

In that great place of deep shadows and endless recesses and passages, he had found hiding in plenty.

And Waldo had been taking an active interest in all the proceedings. He hadn't seen any reason why he should

ANOTHER £4,450 WON!

RESULT of 'FAR & NEAR' COMPETITION.

In this competition no competitor submitted a correct solution of the fifteen sets of puzzle-pictures. The First Prize of £10 a Week for Life or £4,000 cash down has therefore been awarded to:

MRS. E. C. BULBICK,
"Trentham,"
Victoria Avenue,
Westgate-on-Sea, Kent,
whose effort, containing five errors, came nearest to correct.

The Second Prize of £300 has been awarded to:

Frederick Wills, 12, St. John's Road,
Croydon, Surrey,
whose solution came next, with six errors.

The Third Prize of £200 has been awarded to:

Major W. J. Stomm, Grove Hill,
Harrow-on-the-Hill,
whose solution contained twelve errors.

SPECIAL NEWSAGENT'S PRIZE.
—Mrs. E. C. Bulbick, the First Prize winner in this competition, procured her copies from Mr. J. Pointer, of 4, Station Terrace, Westgate-on-Sea, who therefore receives the £50 offered.

The Correct Solution was published in our issue dated May 2nd, page 19.

be left out at the "death." He had done so much in this affair that he wanted to see it completely through. And so he had been dodging about from place to place, listening.

He knew all about Jelks' unfortunate son; he had heard Slingsby arrive, and had listened to their ensuing conversation. And it had pleased the Wonder-Man beyond measure when Simon had been sent off with his tail between his legs.

There really seemed very little else to wait for.

But before going Waldo performed one last act of audacity. He made his way upstairs, noiselessly entered the sick room, and approached the Earl of Pengarth's bed. His lordship was awake.

"Just popped in to have a last word, Lord Pengarth," said Waldo softly. "In case you don't know it, I've brought you the latest news."

"Gad!" ejaculated the old peer. "What now? They told me you had been arrested, and I called them a lot of dunderheaded fools! Slingsby is the man they ought to arrest—not you!"

"Naturally. I agree," smiled Waldo. "However, it's just as well, perhaps, that Slingsby should slink off. He's lost all his power, and you've nothing further to fear, Lord Pengarth. I don't suppose I shall see you again, so I'll say good-bye. If I've been able to help you at all, I am glad!"

"You're a wonderful fellow!" declared Lord Pengarth firmly.

"Don't have any false impression; I'm only a crook, after all," said Waldo. "But if people think that all crooks are brutes and heartless curs, they're wrong. And now and again I like to prove it. That's all, Lord Pengarth. I must stick up for my profession sometimes, you know."

He slipped out of the room, leaving

his lordship staring. And outside, Waldo ran bang into the arms of Sexton Blake and Tinker.

"What, again?" chuckled the Wonder-Man. "We're always meeting, aren't we?"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Tinker. "He's here again!"

"Can't get rid of me, can you?" grinned Waldo. "That's all right! I'm going for good now. Had to find out the latest news. So long, Blake! We'll meet again one of these fine days."

"I've no doubt we shall," said Sexton Blake.

Waldo was gone before they could follow his movements. He vanished into one of the dark corridors, and any attempt to chase him would be worse than futile.

The Wonder-Man got out of a window, climbed down the face of the building in the most reckless, haphazard fashion, and arrived on the terrace. He was feeling supremely happy.

Through him Pengarth was restored, and he was satisfied. It had been his whim to help the old peer in his trouble, and he had not left until his work was accomplished.

Wonderful Waldo!

A daring, relentless enemy, but a good friend, too. And his supreme happiness was not entirely due to his good work on Lord Pengarth's behalf.

He had not failed to obtain a few pickings for himself.

Reaching the end of the drive, he plunged into the dense bushes, and switched on a small torch. And there, hidden by the bracken, lay two or three small parcels.

But they weren't quite so valueless as they seemed.

Waldo opened the first one, and removed at least a dozen canvas bags. Each one was enormously heavy.

"Gold!" murmured Waldo, with satisfaction. "I am glad that Mr. Slingsby's a miser. This hoarding proclivity of his comes in very useful. It's a foolish thing to keep so much cash about the place. One of these days he'll be sorry for his carelessness. I haven't counted this money, but at a rough estimate, I reckon there's a thousand pounds in each bag."

He opened another parcel, and brought to light some neat, well-packed little bundles. And these proved to be Treasury-notes. They were tightly packed, and represented a big sum. Waldo stuffed them into his pockets, and chuckled while he was doing so.

"Ten thousand, at least," Waldo told himself. "Well, it's Slingsby's loss and my gain. So who cares? Ye gods! Was ever a man such a fool? To stuff his sardine-tin of a safe with bags of gold and bundles of notes! I wonder where I can find a few more misers? You can't get away from it, there's nothing so handy as ready money. It beats every other form of loot that I've ever known. And when you know you're robbing a pretty dirty kind of toad, it makes it all the sweeter!"

Waldo strolled out of the park, contented.

Upon the whole, he hadn't done so badly. He considered that his chance meeting with Lady Betty had borne excellent fruit. Everybody was pleased—everybody, that is, with the sole exception of Simon Slingsby.

But who cares a toss about the monetary misery of misers?

THE END.

WALDO AT WEMBLEY!
COMING SOON—LOOK out for it!



Captain Blood

by Rafael Sabatini

(Continued from page 2.)

Levasseur went back to the adoring lady.

Thither, too, the lady's brother was presently conducted. The captain rose to receive him, bending his stalwart height to avoid striking the cabin roof with his head. Mademoiselle rose, too.

"Why this?" she asked Levasseur, pointing to her brother's pinioned wrists—the remains of Cahusac's precautions.

"I deplore it," said he. "I desire it to end. Let M. d'Ogeron give me his parole—"

"I give you nothing!" flashed the white-faced youth, who did not lack for spirit.

"You see." Levasseur shrugged his deep regret; and Mademoiselle turned, protesting, to her brother.

"Henri, this is foolish! You are not behaving as my friend. You—"

"Little fool!" her brother answered her—and the "little" was out of place; she was the taller of the twain. "Little fool, do you think I should be acting as your friend to make terms with this blackguard pirate?"

"Steady, my young cockerel!" Levasseur laughed. But his laugh was not nice.

"Don't you perceive your wicked folly in the harm it has brought already? Lives have been lost—men have died—that this monster might overtake you. And don't you yet realise where you stand—in the power of this beast, of this cur, born in a kennel and bred in thieving and murder?"

He might have said more but that Levasseur struck him across the mouth. Levasseur, you see, cared as little as another to hear the truth about himself.

Mademoiselle suppressed a scream, as the youth staggered back under the

blow. He came to rest against a bulkhead, and leaned there with bleeding lips. But his spirit was unquenched, and there was a ghastly smile on his white face as his eyes sought his sister's.

"You see," he said simply. "He strikes a man whose hands are bound."

The simple words, and more than the words, their tone of ineffable disdain, aroused the passion that never slumbered deeply in Levasseur.

"And what should you do, puppy, if your hands were unbound?" He took his prisoner by the breast of his doublet and shook him. "Answer me! What should you do? Tchah! You empty windbag! You—!" And then came a torrent of words unknown to Mademoiselle, yet of whose foulness her intuitions made her conscious.

With blanched cheeks she stood by the cabin table, and cried out to Levasseur to stop. To obey her, he opened the door, and flung her brother through it.

"Put that rubbish under hatches until I call for it again," he roared, and shut the door.

Composing himself, he turned to the girl again with a deprecatory smile. But no smile answered him from her set face. She had seen her beloved hero's nature in curl-papers, as it were, and she found the spectacle disgusting and terrifying.

It recalled the brutal slaughter of the Dutch captain, and suddenly she realised that what her brother had just said of this man was no more than true. Fear growing to panic was written on her face as she stood there leaning for support against the table.

"Why, sweetheart, what is this?" Levasseur moved towards her. She recoiled before him. There was a smile on his face, a glitter in his eyes that fetched her heart into her throat.

He caught her, as she reached the uttermost limits of the cabin, seized her in his long arms, and pulled her to him.

"No, no!" she panted.

"Yes, yes!" he mocked her, and his mockery was the most terrible thing of all. He crushed her to him brutally, deliberately hurtful because she resisted,

and kissed her whilst she writhed in his embrace. Then, his passion mounting, he grew angry and stripped off the last rag of hero's mask that still may have hung upon his face.

"Little fool, did you not hear your brother say that you are in my power? Remember it, and remember that of your own free will you came! I am not the man with whom a woman can play fast and loose. So get sense, my girl, and accept what you have invited."

He kissed her again almost contemptuously, and flung her off.

"No more scowls," he said. "You'll be sorry else."

Someone knocked.

Cursing the interruption, Levasseur strode off to open. Cahusac stood before him. The Breton's face was grave. He came to report that they had sprung a leak between wind and water, the consequence of damage sustained from one of the Dutchman's shots.

In alarm Levasseur went off with him. The leakage was not serious so long as the weather kept fine; but should a storm overtake them it might speedily become so. A man was slung overboard to make a partial stoppage with a sailcloth, and the pumps were got to work.

Ahead of them a low cloud showed on the horizon, which Cahusac pronounced one of the northernmost of the Virgin Islands.

"We must run for shelter there, and carcen her," said Levasseur. "I do not trust this oppressive heat. A storm may catch us before we make land."

"A storm or something else," said Cahusac grimly. "Have you noticed that?"

He pointed away to starboard. Levasseur looked, and caught his breath. Two ships that at the distance seemed of considerable burden were heading towards them some five miles away.

"If they follow us what is to happen?" demanded Cahusac.

"We'll fight, whether we're in case to do so or not!" swore Levasseur.

"Counsels of despair." Cahusac was contemptuous. To mark it he spat upon the deck. "This comes of going to sea with a lovesick madman. Now, keep your temper, captain, for the hands will



ANOTHER CONFEDERATION STORY!

Next week's yarn will carry us a stage farther in the exciting events that are taking place in the wilds of Santa Costa and the hinterland of its South American jungle.

Professor Reece's republic of crooks is a thing of the past. Scaton Blake has helped to win it back for the forces of law and order, and Reece himself has been captured and carried off by Fan Too, his Chinese rival for the presidency of the Criminals' Confederation.

Nevertheless, Blake is after Reece also, and he will not swerve from his quest. Therefore, with his faithful little band he goes after him—

INTO THE UNKNOWN!

What strange adventures befall them there you don't know—yet! What you do know is that these tales of the Confederation mightily appeal to you, so get next week's issue, whatever else you leave undone!

If you're forgetful, cut this out and paste it in your hat!

be at the end of theirs if we have trouble as a result of this Dutchman business."

For the remainder of that day Levasseur's thoughts were of anything but love. He remained on deck, his eyes now upon the land, now upon those two slowly gaining ships.

To run for the open could avail him nothing, and in his leaky condition would provide an additional danger. He must stand at bay and fight. And then, towards evening, when within three miles of shore and when he was about to give the order to strip for battle, he almost fainted from relief to hear a voice from the crow's-nest above announce that the larger of the two ships was the Arabella. Her companion was presumably a prize.

But the pessimism of Cahusac abated nothing.

"That is but the lesser evil," he growled. "What will Blood say about this Dutchman?"

"Let him say what he pleases." Levasseur laughed in the immensity of his relief.

"And what about the children of the Governor of Tortuga?"

"He must not know."

"He'll come to know in the end."

"Ay, but by then, morbleu, the matter will be settled. I shall have made my peace with the governor. I tell you I know the way to compel Ogeron to come to terms."

Presently the four vessels lay to off the northern coast of La Virgen Magra, a narrow little island arid and treeless, some twelve miles by three, uninhabited save by birds and turtles, and unproductive of anything but salt, of which there were considerable ponds to the south.

Levasseur put off in a boat, accompanied by Cahusac and two other officers, and went to visit Captain Blood aboard the Arabella.

"Our brief separation has been mighty profitable," was Captain Blood's greeting. "It's a busy morning we've both had." He was in high good-humour as he led the way to the great cabin for a rendering of accounts.

The tall ship that accompanied the Arabella was a Spanish vessel of twenty-six guns, the Santiago, from Puerto Rico, with a hundred and twenty thousand weight of cacao, forty thousand pieces of eight, and the value of ten thousand more in jewels.

A rich capture, of which two-fifths, under the articles, went to Levasseur and his crew. Of the money and jewels a division was made on the spot. The cacao, it was agreed, should be taken to Tortuga to be sold.

Then it was the turn of Levasseur, and

RESULT OF FOOTBALL COMPETITION No. 19.

Matches played, Saturday, May 2nd, 1925.

£300 WON.

In this contest five competitors correctly forecast the results of all the matches on the coupon. The Prize of £300 has therefore been divided among the following:

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black grew the brow of Captain Blood as the Frenchman's tale was unfolded. At the end he roundly expressed his disapproval.

The Dutch were a friendly people whom it was a folly to alienate, particularly for so paltry a matter as these hides and tobacco, which at most would fetch a bare twenty thousand pieces.

But Levasseur answered him, as he had answered Cahusac, that a ship was a ship, and it was ships they needed against their projected enterprise. Perhaps because things had gone well with him that day, Blood ended by shrugging the matter aside.

Thereupon Levasseur proposed that the Arabella and her prize should return to Tortuga, there to unload the cacao, and enlist the further adventurers that could now be shipped. Levasseur meanwhile would effect certain necessary repairs, and then, proceeding south, await his admiral at Saltatudos, an island conveniently situated in the latitude 11 deg. 11 min. north—for their enterprise against Maracaybo.

To Levasseur's relief, Captain Blood not only agreed, but pronounced himself ready to set sail at once.

No sooner had the Arabella departed than Levasseur brought his ships into the lagoon, and set his crew to work upon the erection of temporary quarters ashore for himself, his men, and his enforced guests during the careening and repairing of La Foudre.

At sunset that evening the wind freshened; it grew to a gale, and from that to such a hurricane that Levasseur was thankful to find himself ashore and his ships in safe shelter. He wondered

a little how it might be faring with Captain Blood out there at the mercy of that terrific storm; but he did not permit concern to trouble him unduly.

IN the glory of the following morn-

The Ransom.



ing, sparkling and clear after the storm, with an invigorating briny tang in the air from the salt-ponds on the south of the island, a curious scene was played on the beach of the Virgen Magra, at the foot of a ridge of bleached dunes, beside the spread of sail from which Levasseur had improvised a tent.

Enthroned upon an empty cask sat the French filibuster to transact important busi-

ness: the business of making himself safe with the Governor of Tortuga.

A guard of honour of a half-dozen officers hung about him; five of them were rude boucan-hunters, in stained jerkins and leather breeches; the sixth was Cahusac.

Before him, guarded by two half-naked negroes stood young d'Ogeron, in frilled shirt and satin small-clothes and fine shoes of Cordovan leather. He was stripped of doublet, and his hands were tied behind him.

The young gentleman's comely face was haggard. Near at hand, and also under guard, but unopinioned, Mademoiselle, his sister, sat hunched upon a hillock of sand. She was very pale, and it was in vain that she sought to veil in a mask of arrogance the fears by which she was assailed.

Levasseur addressed himself to M. d'Ogeron. He spoke at long length. In the end:

"I trust, monsieur," said he, with mock suavity, "that I have made myself quite clear. So that there may be no misunderstandings, I will recapitulate. Your ransom is fixed at twenty thousand pieces of eight, and you shall have liberty on parole to go to Tortuga to collect it.

"In fact, I shall provide the means to convey you thither, and you shall have a month in which to come and go. Meanwhile, your sister remains with me as a hostage. Your father should not consider such a sum excessive as the price of his son's liberty and to provide a dowry for his daughter. Indeed, if anything, I am too modest, pardi! M. d'Ogeron is reputed a wealthy man."

M. d'Ogeron the younger raised his head and looked the captain boldly in the face.

"I refuse—utterly and absolutely, do you understand? So do your worst and be hanged for a filthy pirate without decency and without honour."

"But what words!" laughed Levasseur. "What heat and what foolishness! You have not considered the alternative. When you do, you will not persist in your refusal. You will not do that in any case. We have spurs for the reluctant. And I warn you against giving me your parole under stress, and afterwards playing me false. I shall know how to find and punish you. Meanwhile, remember your sister's honour is in

FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE the dates and places where the splendid Vitagraph Film of "Captain Blood" is showing will be announced here week by week. Don't miss this double opportunity—READ THE STORY; SEE THE FILM. It is showing at the following places, commencing on the dates indicated.

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New Malden	Picture Theatre
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From Monday, June 22nd.

Hayes, Middlesex Regent

Guernsey	St. Julian's
Hulme	Crescent
Gosta Green	Delicia
Sheffield	Victory
Louth	Playhouse
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From Wednesday, June 24th.

Dunoon Picture House

Is it in YOUR district yet? If not, it will be later. Watch this space for dates and places.

pawn to me. Should you forget to return with the dowry, you will not consider it unreasonable that I forget to marry her."

Levasseur's smiling eyes, intent upon the young man's face, saw the horror that crept into his glance. M. d'Ogeron cast a wild glance at Mademoiselle, and observed the grey-despair that had almost stamped the beauty from her face.

Disgust and fury swept across his countenance.

"No, you dog! A thousand times, no!"

"You are foolish to persist." Levasseur spoke without anger, with a coldly mocking regret. His fingers had been busy tying knots in a length of whipcord. He held it up.

"You know this? It is a rosary of pain that has wrought the conversion of many a stubborn heretic. It is capable of screwing the eyes out of a man's head by way of helping him to see reason. As you please."

He flung the length of knotted cord to one of the negroes, who in an instant made it fast about the prisoner's brows. Then between cord and cranium the black inserted a short length of metal, round and slender as a pipe-stem. That done he rolled his eyes towards Levasseur, awaiting the captain's signal.

Levasseur considered his victim, and beheld him tense and braced, his haggard face of a leaden hue, beads of perspiration glinting on his pallid brow just beneath the whipcord.

Mademoiselle cried out, and would have risen; but her guards restrained her, and she sank down again, moaning.

"I beg that you will spare yourself and your sister," said the captain, "by being reasonable. What after all is the sum I have named? To your wealthy father a bagatelle. I repeat, I have been too modest. But since I have said twenty thousand pieces of eight, twenty thousand pieces it shall be."

"And for what, if you please, have you said twenty thousand pieces of eight?"

In execrable French, but in a voice that was crisp and pleasant, seeming to echo some of the mockery that had invested Levasseur's, that question floated over their heads.

Startled, Levasseur and his officers looked up and round.

On the crest of the dunes behind them, in sharp silhouette against the deep cobalt of the sky, they beheld a tall, lean figure, scrupulously dressed in black with silver lace, a crimson ostrich plume curled about the broad brim of his hat affording the only touch of colour. Under that hat was the tawny face of Captain Blood.

Levasseur gathered himself up with an oath of amazement. He had conceived Captain Blood by now well below the horizon, on his way to Tortuga, assuming him to have been so fortunate as to have weathered last night's storm.

Launching himself upon the yielding sand, into which he sank to the level of the calves of his fine boots of Spanish leather, Captain Blood came sliding erect to the beach. He was followed by Wolverstone, and a dozen others. As he came to a standstill, he doffed his hat, with a flourish, to the lady. Then he turned to Levasseur.

"Good-morning, my captain," said he, and proceeded to explain his presence. "It was last night's hurricane compelled our return. We had no choice but to ride before it with stripped poles, and it drove us back the way we had gone. Moreover—as the devil would have it!—the Santiago sprang her mainmast; and

so I was glad to put into a cove on the west of the island a couple of miles away, and we've walked across to stretch our legs, and to give you good-day. But who are these?" And he designated the man and the woman.

Cahusac shrugged his shoulders, and tossed his long arms to heaven.

"Voilà!" said he, pregnantly, to the firmament.

Levasseur gnawed his lip, and changed colour. But he controlled himself to answer civilly:

"As you see, two prisoners."

"Ah! Washed ashore in last night's gale, eh?"

"Not so." Levasseur contained himself with difficulty before that irony. "They were in the Dutch brig."

"I don't remember that you mentioned them before."

"I did not. They are prisoners of my own—a personal matter. They are French."

"French!" Captain Blood's light eyes stabbed at Levasseur, then at the prisoners.

M. d'Ogeron stood tense and braced as before, but the grey horror had left his face. Hope had leapt within him at this interruption, obviously as little expected by his tormentor as by himself. His sister, moved by a similar intuition, was leaning forward with parted lips and gaping eyes.

Captain Blood fingered his lip, and frowned thoughtfully upon Levasseur.

"Yesterday you surprised me by making war upon the friendly Dutch. But now it seems that not even your own countrymen are safe from you."

"Have I not said that these—that this is a matter personal to me?"

"Ah! And their names?"

Captain Blood's crisp, authoritative, faintly disdainful manner stirred Levasseur's quick anger. The blood crept slowly back into his blanched face, and his glance grew in insolence, almost in menace. Meanwhile, the prisoner answered for him.

"I am Henri d'Ogeron, and this is my sister."

"D'Ogeron?" Captain Blood stared. "Are you related by chance to my good friend the Governor of Tortuga?"

"He is my father."

Levasseur swung aside with an imprecation. In Captain Blood, amazement for the moment quenched every other emotion.

"The saints preserve us now! Are you quite mad, Levasseur? First, you molest the Dutch, who are our friends; next you take prisoners two persons that are French, your own countrymen; and now, faith, they're no less than the children of the Governor of Tortuga, which is the one safe place of shelter that we enjoy in these islands."

Levasseur broke in angrily.

"Must I tell you again that it is a matter personal to me? I make myself alone responsible to the Governor of Tortuga."

"And the twenty thousand pieces of eight? Is that also a matter personal to you?"

"It is."

"Now I don't agree with you at all." Captain Blood sat down on the cask that Levasseur had lately occupied, and looked up blandly. "I may inform you, to save time, that I heard the entire proposal that you made to this lady and this gentleman, and I'll also remind you that we sail under articles that admit no ambiguities. You have fixed their ransom at twenty thousand pieces of eight. That sum then belongs to your crews and mine in the proportions by the articles established. You'll hardly wish to dispute it. But what is far more

grave is that you have concealed from me this part of the prizes taken on your last cruise, and for such an offence as that the articles provide certain penalties that are something severe in character."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Levasseur unpleasantly. Then added: "If you dislike my conduct we can dissolve the association."

"That is my intention. But we'll dissolve it when and in the manner that I choose, and that will be as soon as you have satisfied the articles under which we sailed upon this cruise."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll be as short as I can," said Captain Blood. "I'll waive for the moment the unseemliness of making war upon the Dutch, of taking French prisoners, and of provoking the anger of the Governor of Tortuga. I'll accept the situation as I find it. Yourself you've fixed the ransom of this couple at twenty thousand pieces, and as I gather, the lady is to be your perquisite. But why should she be your perquisite more than another's, seeing that she belongs by the articles to all of us, as a prize of war?"

Black as thunder grew the brow of Levasseur.

"However," added Captain Blood, "I'll not dispute her to you if you are prepared to buy her."

"Buy her?"

"At the price you have set upon her."

Levasseur contained his rage, that he might reason with the Irishman.

"That is the ransom of the man. It is to be paid for him by the Governor of Tortuga."

"No, no. Ye've parcelled the twain together—very oddly, I confess. Ye've set their value at twenty thousand pieces, and for that sum you may have them, since you desire it; but you'll pay for them the twenty thousand pieces that are ultimately to come to you as the ransom of one and the dowry of the other; and that sum shall be divided among our crews. So that you do that, it is conceivable that our followers may take a lenient view of your breach of the articles we jointly signed."

Levasseur laughed savagely.

"Ah ca! Credieu! The good jest!"

"I quite agree with you," said Captain Blood.

To Levasseur the jest lay in that Captain Blood, with no more than a dozen followers, should come there attempting to hector him who had a hundred men within easy call. But it seemed that he had left out of his reckoning something which his opponent had counted in. For as, laughing still, Levasseur swung to his officers, he saw that which choked the laughter in his throat.

Captain Blood had shrewdly played upon the cupidity that was the paramount inspiration of those adventurers. And Levasseur now read clearly on their faces how completely they adopted Captain Blood's suggestion that all must participate in the ransom which their leader had thought to appropriate to himself.

It gave the gaudy ruffian pause, and whilst in his heart he cursed those followers of his, who could be faithful only to their greed, he perceived—and only just in time—that he had best tread warily.

"You misunderstand," he said, swallowing his rage. "The ransom is for division, when it comes. The girl, meanwhile, is mine on that understanding."

"Good!" grunted Cahusac. "On that understanding all arranges itself."

"You think so?" said Captain Blood. "But if M. d'Ogeron should refuse to pay the ransom? What then?" He laughed, and got lazily to his feet. "No, no. If Captain Levasseur is meanwhile to keep the girl as he proposes, then let him pay this ransom, and be his the risk if it should afterwards not be forthcoming."

"That's it," cried one of Levasseur's officers.

And Cahusac added:

"It's reasonable, that! Captain Blood is right. It is in the articles."

"What is in the articles, you fools?" Levasseur was in danger of losing his head. "Sacre Dieu! Where do you suppose that I have twenty thousand pieces? My whole share of the prizes of this cruise does not come to half that sum. I'll be your debtor until I've earned it. Will that content you?"

All things considered, there is not a doubt that it would have done so, had not Captain Blood intended otherwise.

"And if you should die before you have earned it? Ours is a calling fraught with risks, my captain."

"Curse you!" Levasseur flung upon him livid with fury. "Will nothing satisfy you?"

"Oh, but yes. Twenty thousand pieces of eight for immediate division."

"I haven't got it."

"Then let someone buy the prisoners who has."

"And who do you suppose has it if I have not?"

"I have," said Captain Blood.

"You have!" Levasseur's mouth fell open. "You—you want the girl?"

"Why not? And I exceed you in gallantry in that I will make sacrifices to obtain her, and in honesty in that I am ready to pay for what I want."

Levasseur stared at him foolishly agape. Behind him pressed his officers, gaping also.

Captain Blood sat down again on the cask, and drew from an inner pocket of his doublet a little leather bag.

"I am glad to be able to resolve a difficulty that at one moment seemed insoluble." And under the bulging eyes of Levasseur and his officers, he untied the mouth of the bag and rolled into his left palm four or five pearls each of the size of a sparrow's egg. There were twenty such in the bag, the very pick of those taken in that raid upon the pearl fleet. "You boast a knowledge of pearls, Cahusac. At what do you value this?"

The Breton took between coarse finger

and thumb the proffered lustrous, delicately iridescent sphere, his shrewd eyes appraising it.

"A thousand pieces," he answered shortly.

"It will fetch rather more in Tortuga or Jamaica," said Captain Blood, "and twice as much in Europe. But I'll accept your valuation. They are almost of a size, as you can see. Here are twelve, representing twelve thousand pieces of eight, which is La Foudre's share of three-fifths of the prize, as provided by the articles. For the eight thousand pieces that go to the Arabella, I make myself responsible to my own men. And now, Wolverstone, if you please, will you take my property aboard the Arabella." He stood up again, indicating the prisoners.

"Ah, no!" Levasseur threw wide the floodgates of his fury. "Ah, that no, by example! You shall not take her."

He would have sprung upon Captain Blood, who stood aloof, alert, tight-lipped, and watchful. But it was one of Levasseur's own officers who hindered him.

(Next week—The Duel for Mlle d'Ogeron, and its consequences. This story is getting more fascinating every week—don't you think so?)



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