

No.1. NEW COMPLETE ADVENTURE STORY PAPER

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LONG, COMPLETE
ADVENTURE
STORY.

By
LEWIS BIRD.



**A
THRILLING
MOMENT**

(See page 10.)

NO. 1.

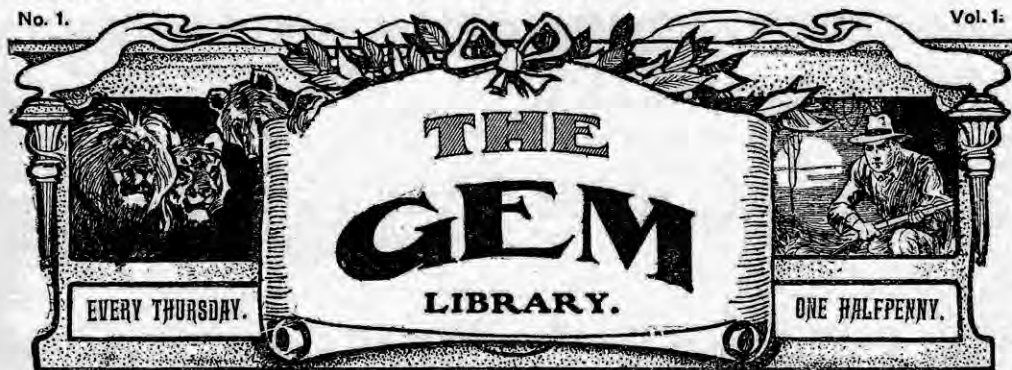
VOL. I.

THE BRAVE OLD
TEETH HUNG ON
WITH THE DEADLY,
TENACIOUS BULL-
DOG GRIP WHICH
NOTHING BUT
DEATH CAN PART.

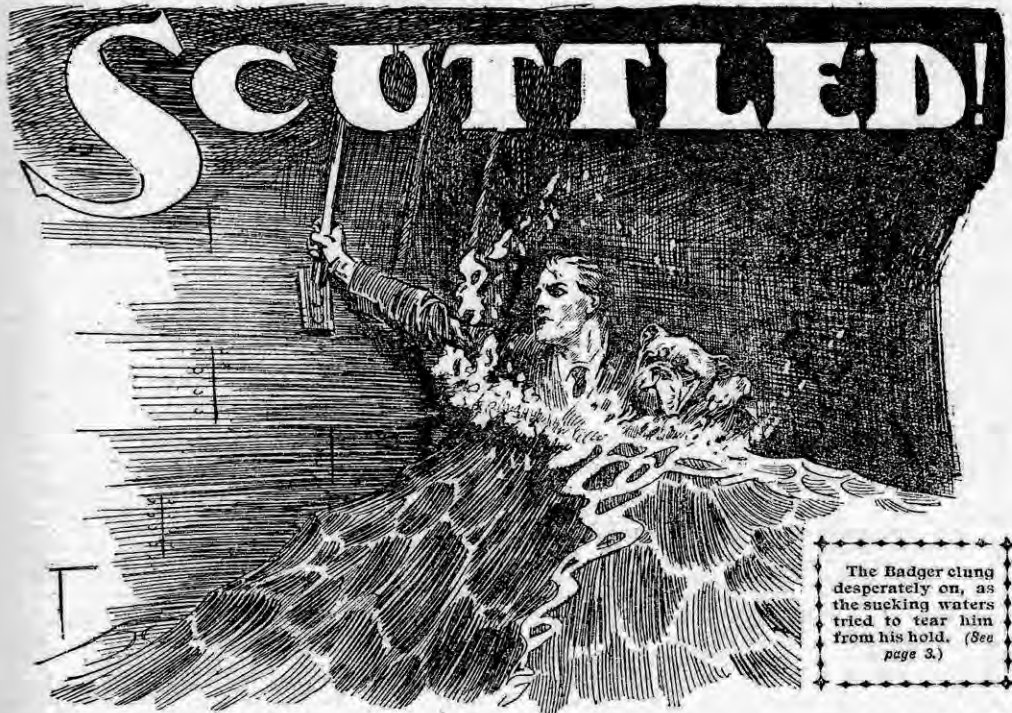
INTRODUCE THIS NEW STORY-BOOK TO YOUR FRIENDS!

No. 1.

Vol. 1.



A STORY FOR EVERYONE, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!



The Badger clung desperately on, as the sucking waters tried to tear him from his hold. (See page 3.)

A Splendid Long, Complete Tale of Adventure. By LEWIS BIRD.

CHAPTER 1.

Late—A Fishing Expedition, and What Came of It—Blown Out to Sea.

"GREAT Scott, old man! We're late!" Edric St. Orme, more commonly known as the Badger, groaned dismally, and snatched up a towel to dry himself.

It was the fag-end of a drowsy, oppressive summer's afternoon. The sea rolled in lazily on to the hot white sand five yards from where he stood, and from far away behind the ridge of the rising upland the school-bell was clanging wrathfully.

Murphy Logan came shooting in headlong on the top of a wave, and flopped on the beach, like a disgruntled starfish.

"Begorrah, an' there's little doubt ov that same. Even if Oi was to turn up at roll-call in me little birthday suit Oi shouldn't be there in time!"

"It means five hundred lines apiece, and a jawing into the bargain," said the Badger. "Logs, you're an ass! I told you we'd no time to bathe."

Logan, otherwise Logs, grinned expansively, scratched his head, and dabbled his toes in the water.

"Sure, Oi've no luck this term at all! 'Twas only last night Oi was caught near fighting in dormitory, and a week ago that rotter Chaiks reported me to the Head for foolin' in Stink's class, an' him joggling at a defunct bunny wid a bit ov a pocket-knife all the time."

"What shall we do?" said the Badger, who was the more practical of the two. "We're booked up for five hundred,

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One Halfpenny.

so we may as well have our moneysworth. There's close on three hours till tea. May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Don't sit there like a half-boiled lobster, you idiot! Say something!"

The Irishman grinned, and splashed water over a slumbering bulldog which was their common property, and was dozing quietly by his clothes.

As a prize dog it was an utter failure, but as a dog pure and simple it—well, there was a lot of it—an enormously powerful lump of good-nature, with the most ugly, humorous face it is well possible to conceive. With a fine disregard of sex, he was called Venus, and answered to that name when he felt so inclined. He grunted lazily as a fresh shower of salt water descended on his squat muzzle, and flickered a stumpy tail as a sign of peace.

"Venus, yez mass of iniquity," said Logs, "phwat shall we be doin' wid our little lonesomes? Kape the tail ov yez still, or Oi'll be fixin' a crab on to the ind ov it!"

The Badger, who had struggled into his clothes without bothering about more drying, suddenly gave vent to a subdued war-whoop and executed a sand-dance.

"Logs, look! Not there, you blinking Irishman, but to the other end of the beach—over there by the piles. Old Sandy has left his boat. Let's go and do a bit of fishing."

Logs eyed him critically.

"At times, my Badger, there are some glimmerings ov sense in your—phwat is it Chnks calls ut?—your grey matter, maning your thick head! We shall fish."

In a trice he had slipped on his flannels, and the two went racing along the sand, Venus lumbering behind them, showing a large expanse of pink tongue by way of protest. The boat was lying just above water-line, and to untie her painter and get her afloat was the work of a minute.

"Plenty of bait," said the Badger, poking his nose into an unsavoury-looking pail. "Come on, Venus, old man. In with you!" And Venus was dropped, panting, on to the bottom boards.

They each took an oar, and rowed leisurely out to the fishing-grounds some half-mile from the shore. The luck of the novice was with them from the start; and though Sandy, the most experienced fisherman on that stretch of coast, had toiled for six long hours, and caught a meagre half-dozen, and given it up in disgust, the two boys were soon hauling up the pollock at a fine rate.

So absorbed were they in their sport that they not only forgot all about their prospective troubles at school, but also about a very much more important matter—the tide, which runs very strongly at that part of the coast. Moreover, as dusk approached, heavy thunder-clouds were banking up shorewards, and had they looked, even they could not have failed to see that there was very heavy weather coming up fast.

The Badger had just hauled in a fine four-pounder, and dropped it floundering in the stern of the boat, when, for the second time, the wind bore faintly down to them the clang of the bell in the school clock-tower.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped, and dropped line, fish, and all.

"Logs, for goodness' sake, chuck that, and listen!"

Logs sat up, even his cheery, happy-go-lucky temperament

aght at the mess they were in.

The tide had swept them out a good mile beyond the point where they had started fishing, and was ebbing more strongly every moment. To row back against it would take a good couple of hours, even if they could do so at all, for the boat was a heavy one. Moreover, Logs had had a good deal of experience of the wild weather on the stormy West Irish coast, and a glance at the sky was enough to convince him that there would soon be worse than the tide alone to contend with.

"My sainted aunt!" said the Badger. "We shan't get back before lock-up—let alone evening prep, and tea!"

"She may be a mighty respectable old lady," answered Logs, with rather a sickly grin, "but wid phwat Oi know ov weather signs, we shall be lucky and thankful if we get back at all—unless, maybe, from the other side of the Channel! Oi'm tellin' yez, Badger, we're in a fix, an' our best chance is to try an' round the point there for shelter. That's a storm comin' up yonder, an' before we're half of the way to the beach we shall be in the thick ov it, wid the sea running steep and nasty. Get that bit ov a mast up whilst Oi take a couple of reefs in the sail. There's a draught comin' already, and we may just slip round before the worst ov ut breaks."

As he said, the sea to windward already showed dark ruffled splashes where a gust disturbed its surface; and Logs, stumbling amongst the catch, was tying and knotting in feverish haste with practised fingers. Just as the first of the breeze caught them up went the double-reefed sail, and the boat heeled over, and began slipping through the water as Logs sprang aft and seized tiller and sheet.

"Get you down amongst the fish in the bottom, Badger, and keep ready to do as I tell yez, an' do ut quick!"

The Badger, now thoroughly scared, nodded grimly.

The headland which Logan was trying to round lay a mile or so to the westward of them. If they could once work round it in time it would break the force of the wind, and the tide would also be easier under its lee.

He kept the boat's head well up for it, now and again casting uneasy glances behind him. The sea was still calm, but the distance between the swells was growing greater by imperceptible degrees, and the tide was setting them further and further out.

There came a lull, and the sail flapped idly against the mast, whilst from astern there was a dull, moaning sound. Then, with a rush and a howl, the thunderstorm burst, and wind and sea rose as by magic.

It was only a summer storm, without the fierce weight of the bitter winter winds; but it would have tested the skill of a couple of tried men to hold the boat anywhere near her course.

Logan gave a warning cry.

"Sit her up, Badger! Sit up on the weather-rail, and hang on to the—on to that rope there. Begobs, but we're shifting now!"

The water spouted up in two hissing arches of foam on either bow, and the boat heeled nearly gunwale under. Logs kept her on her course as long as he dared, but the risk was too great to prolong it.

"We'll never make the point!" he bawled. "She's taking in water now! I must ease her off!"

The Badger nodded, and Logs lifted her skilfully over the next half-dozen angry waves. Almost mechanically the Badger started baling as soon as she rode on a more even keel, and Venus, soaked and shivering, whimpered amongst the dead whiting.

Both boys were badly scared by now, but they kept cool; and Logan, who knew more than a little about open-boat handling, dodged her over the shoulder of the biggest waves, stealing a little bit to the westward whenever he got the chance.

Willingly would they have taken a thousand lines apiece, and a licking thrown in, to be back in their comfortable study. In ten minutes they were soaked from head to foot, and though the wind was warm it chilled them to the bone as it drove through their sodden flannels.

The Badger glanced astern as a huge, breaking wave came racing after them high overhead. As the boat lifted and lurched to it he fancied that he caught a glimpse of a waving lantern on the beach; and, though his ears may have deceived him, he could have sworn that he heard a faint cry borne on the rush of the wind. Then the darkness snapped down, and blotted everything out in a blinding rainstorm.

CHAPTER 2.

A Terrible Experience—Run Down—The Rescue.

LOGAN shifted his cramped arm on the tiller, and took a turn with the sheet round a cleat by the stern thwart. He was stiff and bone weary, and his eyes were red-rimming from peering into the darkness ahead.

"Can I give you a hand, old man?" shouted the Badger.

"I'll manage, if you'll just tell me what to do."

Logs shook his head.

"Sea's too high!" he snapped. "You'd have her

broadened to inside five minutes. Look out!"

A big grey-green wave came chasing them from out of the

pitch darkness astern.

Badger saw a ghostlike gleam of white foam, and it broke partially inboard, starting him baling again for dear life for the twentieth time since the storm burst. Venus, half drowned, whimpered painfully from beneath a thwart. They were running nearly before the wind now, straight out to sea. There was no alternative.

Another dreary hour went by, and at last Logan bent forward and shouted:

"It must be getting on for ten or eleven o'clock. Another hour and we shall be driving into the thick of the Channel traffic at this rate. Wish I knew how the currents set here. Is there any grub? I'm starving."

"Nothing but the whiting. We can't eat it raw."

The Badger shuddered at the idea, though he, too, was frightfully hungry, and the salt spray had given him a racking thirst.

"Better throw 'em overboard," bawled Logs, after a pause. "We shall be slipping on 'em and smashing ourselves up if we don't. Keep two or three, though, in case of accidents."

"Was that a light ahead there?" said the Badger excitedly. "There, over there to the right!"

Logan peered under the sail.

"By Jove, yes, you're right! There it is again! It's—Great Scott, it's a steamer, and she's heading right down on to us on a slant! Passenger boat, too; look at her port-holes. She'll swamp us if we don't look out."

One of the swift Boulogne boats, bustling home at a good twenty knots, and making light of the summer storm, loomed up with startling rapidity, bearing straight down on them as near as they could judge, and for a breathless five minutes the two boys stared at her, frightened pretty well out of their wits.

Then, just as destruction seemed unavoidable, the distance between her shining portholes widened out, showing that she was passing them broadside to broadside. So near was she that they could make out the officer in glistening oilskins on her bridge, and see people passing and repassing in black silhouette against the deck cabin windows with their electric lights.

Then, quickly as she had closed up with them, she flashed away astern.

"Now look out for it! Hang on like grim death!" bawled Logan at the top of his lungs, as the steamer's wash rushed up to meet them.

The Badger felt the boat's nose lift to a black wall of water, and with a crash she was half through, half over it.

Another, and yet a third wall followed in quick succession, and she came through the last full up to the thwarts and wallowing heavily. The Badger seized the bucket and baled savagely. It was touch and go, and he knew it.

He was still at it, with a back almost at breaking strain, when he was conscious of a more abysmal darkness, a hoarse shouting somewhere overhead, and a yell from Logan, who had been peering to windward. Then—

Crash! and he was in the water, struggling for his life. Something bumped alongside him. It was Venus, and he grabbed the poor dog's collar, striking out with his free arm.

The send of a big wave lifted him and swept him upwards and onwards. He saw something intensely black and solid-looking, and grabbed just as the wave swept from under him. His knee struck something hard with painful force, but he clung desperately, with set, locked jaws as the sucking waters tried to tear him from his hold.

But for a kind of shelf on which his knee rested and took part of the strain off his arm, he would inevitably have been wrenched away at once. As it was, though he felt himself slipping, he hung on for just the few extra seconds which separated life from death.

Again the waters lifted him, and this time two strong, sinewy arms grabbed him by wrist and elbow and drew him over the rail, still clinging to a half-strangled and nearly drowned dog. His rescuer, with a jerk and a heave dragged them clear and dropped them sprawling on a wet, slippery deck, just as a hoarse shouting from the Pe'sie for'ard announced that there, too, a rescue had been effected.

Then came a confusion of lights, and the Badger felt that someone was pouring a fiery-hot liquid down his throat. It made him choke and splutter, and with an effort he sat up, feeling not a little sick, for he had swallowed a goodish quantity of water.

"Where's Logs?" he gasped, after a struggle to regain his breath.

"Your mate? He's all right!" said a voice behind him.

"Narrow squeak, though. You'd better come to my cabin; and—er—if you'd just leave go of that dog's collar, there's a chance that he may survive slow strangulation. That's better; come on. Lean on my shoulder. I'll come back for faithful Fido in a minute."

Only half-conscious, and leaning heavily on the arm flung round him, he staggered along the roiling deck to a small, white-painted deckhouse aft. An oil lamp, smelling vilely, swung in gimbals from a beam overhead, and there were three bunk sofas. On the after one a dripping figure sat huddled up, whilst a burly man, in oilskins also, streaming with water, bent over the bunk.

The figure was Logan's. He had an enormous bump on his forehead, and was bleeding from a nasty gash in his cheek, looking very white and a bit shaken, but otherwise unhurt.

"Hallo, Badger!" he said faintly, with a twisted grin. "They told me you were all serene. Near squeak, wasn't it?"

The tall man returned at this moment with a sodden bundle, which the lamplight revealed to be a very water-logged Venus. He glanced from one to other of them keenly, and gave a low whistle of surprise.

"There's faithful Fido," he said, putting the dog down by the Badger's side. "Now, you two, sit tight till I come back. You want some grub inside you and some hot grog." And with that he was gone, taking the man in oilskins with him.

In a few moments he returned with a basin of rather greasy-looking soup, and two steaming tumblers which

emitted a rather sickly kind of smell. However, he forced it down them, even Venus having a couple of teaspoonfuls, and on top of that the soup, and they began to feel considerably better.

"More up to form now—ch!" he said, glancing at them shrewdly. "Now, what on earth were you two doing out in an open boat on a wild night like this? It's a miracle you aren't both dead as a pair of drowned rats at this moment."

"Was it you who grabbed me, sir?" asked the Badger.

The man nodded.

"Something of that sort. I was having a smoke, and wondering what the weather was going to turn to, when you came floundering up alongside on the top of a wave like a new kind of merman, and clutched at the mizzen chains. How you managed to hang on I don't know. Not born to be drowned, I suppose. Anyway, I grabbed hold of you and Fido, and here we are. The other ruffian was hanging out from one of the bowsprit shrouds, like a limp rag on washing day, and the third mate yanked him in. You'd both better roll up in those blankets now, and get a sleep. So-long!" And he slammed the door behind him and slid the catch.

They were both, as a matter of fact, so exhausted that they dropped off where they lay without a word, and slept till past noon of the next day.

CHAPTER 3.

Dorien—Off to the Brazils—Captain Frole of the Westward.

LOGAN was the first to wake. He stretched himself, groaned, and rubbed his head. His first idea was that it was time for early school, and that he was late.

He nipped off the bunk on to the floor, and at that moment a big sea lifted the vessel's stern, and he slid across to the far side of the deckhouse, and came down sitting hard, with a jar which shook recollection into him.

He gazed round about, bewildered. Sunlight was streaming in through two small square windows in front of him. The cabin was a fair-sized one, eight or nine feet square, with good head room, its walls a rather dingy, white-painted panelled wood. In the midst was an oilcloth covered table clamped to the floor. Round three sides ran bunks, with lockers beneath. On the fourth was a door. Oilskins and other gear swung pendulum wise from a row of iron pegs, and in racks of netting over the bunks there was a litter of nondescript articles, from a hairbrush and an old pipe to a bundle of signalling flags and a Kodak camera.

He had just completed his survey and scrambled to his feet, when the door opened, and their visitor of the previous night entered, followed by a very dirty-looking man, whom he addressed indifferently as cooky or doctor, balancing a couple of bowls of hot coffee, and their now dry clothes slung over his arm.

These he deposited on the table in a heap, and beat a retreat, leaving the tall man with them alone.

"Morning!" said the latter cheerily. "Feeling better, I see. By the way, I s'pose I ought to introduce myself. My name's Dorien—Maxwell Dorien, and this is the barque Westward, Captain Frole, outward bound to Braganza and other Brazil ports with a job line of cargo; and now, if you're well enough, who the dickens may you be? It doesn't need a Scotland Yard detective to tell that you're a Fatlander, anyway."

Logan grinned expansively, and told all there was to tell.

"The deuce you did!" said Dorien, as he finished the account of the boat trip. "Then all I can say is, youngster, you've had your fist on the tiller of a sailing craft before now. I used to be a pretty decent hand at it myself once." He checked suddenly. "But I don't think I should have cared to bring an open boat through last night's dirt for amusement."

He bent over the still snoring Badger, and Venus opened one eye and growled suspiciously.

"Now, Fido, that's shockin' ungrateful," he said, with a laugh. "Didn't I save your lily-white neck last night? Powerful-looking chap. What do you call him?" he asked over his shoulder.

"Venus," said Logan.

"Venus? Oh, ah! Yes, Venus, I always thought that—well, never mind. Here, Venus, old man, come and make friends. You're so abominably ugly, you must be a good sort."

Venus looked at Logs askance, and allowed the stranger to tickle his ear, and just then the Badger woke up and called out "Adsum! Here, sir!"

Dorien laughed outright.

"You're a precious long way from 'here,' my son, in your sense of the word. As a matter of fact, we shall be abreast of Cherbourg on the French coast in another couple of hours

if this wind holds. She's a slow old pig of a boat, but we're driving through it at no end of a pace."

"Oh!" said the Badger weakly. "By Jove, sir, I—I never thanked you for pulling me out! I'm sure I—I—"

"Rot! That's all right, youngster. A young ruffian like you was born to be hung. And you'd probably have scrambled up, anyway. But the fact remains you're in a deuce of a fix. As far as I can see you'll have to stick the voyage out to the Brazils. Old man Frole can't turn back, even if he would. He's a skindrift sort of an old chap, too. He'll be wanting you to work out your passages, and grumble the whole time, unless I can prove to him that it will be worth his while to be civil."

"By the way, forgive my asking, but I suppose your people could make it worth his while—say, a matter of five-and-twenty pounds for the two of you?"

Logan flushed a little, and looked uneasy. An Irish landlord is not overburdened with wealth as a rule; but the Badger came to the rescue.

"Oh, yes; my father's got pots of money! My name's St. Orme."

"The Devonshire lot?"

The Badger nodded, rather afraid he might be suspected of swaggering.

"Lucky young cub!" said Dorian. "There won't be any bother about that part, then. Only thing is, how are we to let them know? The Westward doesn't carry any new-fangled Marconi installation, and our first port of call is Braganza. We must just chance speaking a homeward-bound ship. It's the only way. Now, you two slip into your things whilst I go and soft-sawder old man Frole."

The Badger looked at Logs, and Logs looked at the Badger and winked suggestively.

"Brazil! Oh, golly! No prep., and a jolly long holiday! What larks!" And the Badger, despite the gravity of seventeen years, indulged in a sand-dance barefooted on the deck-house linoleum, till a sudden lurch landed him against the sharp edge of a locker door.

In five minutes they had borrowed Dorian's hairbrush and were on deck.

"Heap good egg, Dorian," said the Badger.

"He shud have been born in Oireland," said Logan emphatically.

They found their new friend sucking an empty pipe on the lee side of the deckhouse.

"I've seen old man Frole," he said. "He was a bit stuffy, and grouched more than a little till I told him your governor was a bloated millionaire, St. Orme; then he changed his tune, and wanted to stick up the passage-money to something like liner rates. Eventually I beat him down to thirty pounds to be paid by cable at Braganza. You are to mess in the cabin with the rest of us. I'm a passenger myself, you know; wanted to get out on the cheap."

"You can dig in with me in the deckhouse; we can camp out on deck when we've made a day or two's more sothing. And he swears he'll speak the first homeward-bound ship he can."

Dorian's tone was light and offhand, but there was evidently something which puzzled him about his interview with Captain Frole. However, he said no more about the matter then, but took them forward and explained to them the use and meaning of the various ropes and rigging.

Later, when the skipper—or the "old man," as he was usually called—came on deck, they were formally introduced to him.

He was a shifty-eyed, wizened little bit of a man, with a sour and uneasy kind of manner—the kind of man who would cringe or bully, whichever seemed most likely to pay best. He was a bit shaky, and nervous, too, and smelt strongly of gin; but he made an evident effort to be civil to the boys whilst Dorian's eye was upon him.

"Pleasing sort of specimen, isn't he?" said the latter, as the skipper went stumping forward.

"O'd not kape him as a pet, meself," said Logan; "an' O've kept ferrets, and liked 'em, too!"

Dorian laughed.

"Anything for a quiet life. I should keep on the right side of him, if I were you, though. He's a spiteful little brute, and could make things nasty if he chose."

On the third day the gale blew itself out; but they picked up the north-east trades and went bowling along on their long slant across the Atlantic. The voyage was one long delight to the boys, and they and Dorian became fast friends, calling each other by their shorter names.

The third mate, too, turned out a first-rate chap, and under his guidance they picked up a considerable knowledge of rough-and-ready seamanship, and by the time they were below the twentieth parallel they could go aloft and lay out along a spar and reef and furl as well as any ordinary seaman.

Of captain Frole they saw surprisingly little. He was

mostly either below sucking at the small end of a gin-bottle, or standing moodily on the poop-deck, evidently disinclined for conversation.

As often as not he would appear at table surly and thick of speech, whilst twice, for three whole days, he never showed up at all.

"If I hadn't been hard up and in want of a cheap passage," said Dorian one day, "I'm hanged if I'd have shipped on the Westward, knowing what I do now. I could make a better sailorman out of an old dunnage-sack than Frole will ever be even when he's sober. He'd be no more good in an emergency than old Venus there. Besides"—he lowered his voice—"I can't help thinking there's something fishy about him."

Yet, for all his communicativeness, neither the Badger nor Logs had ever heard Dorian let drop so much as a hint of his own plans or ultimate destination. That he had in his cabin, which they shared, a plentiful supply of sporting rifles, and a gun or two, they knew, as a matter of course. And once he had told them that he had a lot of stores stowed in the after-hold. But he said no more, and they instinctively avoided asking questions. He was not the type of man one would ask questions of, especially about his own private concerns.

CHAPTER 4.

The Scene in the Cabin—What Logs and the Badger Saw—The Plot to Scuttle the Westward—Dorian's Story.

THEY had run out of the north-east trades, and were working their way slowly through the hated region of calms just north of the line, and though they had sighted several homeward-bound ships, they had not been able to speak one. Apart from this—their one source of anxiety—the two youngsters were enjoying themselves hugely.

"Jolly sight better than a stuffy class-room and special prep. for exams," said the Badger reflectively, as he leant over the rail one night.

"O'm wid yez there," answered Logs. "Phwat's 'aillin' Dorian these last few days? I've seen 'im eyeing old man Frole like a cat watchin' a mouse—an' a pretty grim cat at that."

The Badger nodded.

"I saw something else," he said, in a low voice. "Dorian was down in the cabin last night, and Frole was conversin' freely with his gin-bottle; but Dorian didn't try and stop him as he did before; he just sat there laughing and chatting and sucking at his pipe as if the two of them were as thick as thieves."

"Dorian didn't know I saw him, though, and every now and then, when Frole wasn't looking, Dorian shot a glance at the old man as if he wouldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole. I've an idea he was trying to pump him about something. I know he suspects the skipper of being up to some game or other."

"You've bit ut, me boy!" answered Logs. "He was lettin' him fool round with his bottle in the hopes he'd get talkative. He's no use for Frole, and that's a fact, any more than Venus has, who grows whenever he comes near. H't, now! Begobs, they're at it again!"

Through the open cabin skylight came the sound of subdued voices, and now and again a laugh from Dorian.

With no intent of eavesdropping, but by common consent they stole aft and peeped in.

The captain was sitting, nodding, on the semi-circular lockers which ran round the table right in the ship's stern. He was evidently drowsy, and not a little maudlin. Dorian, smoking his pipe, was seated a little way from him, talking away cheerily enough, but glancing at Frole every now and again out of the corners of his eyes, and they could see that he was impatient, suspicious, and puzzled all in one.

Presently he rose to his feet and knocked the ashes of his pipe out against his boot-heel. Then he yawned and stretched himself, as though he, too, were drowsy.

"Well, captain," he said, "I fancy it's about time I turned in. Shall we have a final glass, and go to bed—eh?"

Frole pushed the bottle across and nodded sleepily. Dorian poured out a stiff peg for the captain and a small one for himself, and filled the glasses two-thirds of the way up with water. As he filled the captain's the Badger gave a little gasp; he could have sworn that he saw something slip from Dorian's hand into the tumbler.

The skipper stretched out a shaky arm, groped for his glass uncertainly, and gulped down the contents.

Dorian sipped his with his eyes on Frole, and then set it back on the table almost untasted. The captain nodded twice, gurgled an inarticulate sentence, and collapsed in a heap on the locker cushions.

Still Dorian did not move, but stood, motionless as a

statue, watching him for a good three minutes, till a heavy stertorous breathing seemed to reassure him. He stooped and felt the man's pulse; then sprang up alert, and moved swiftly round the table.

The lazaretto lay immediately beneath the cabin, and was reached by a trapdoor in the floor of the latter. In an instant he had the trap opened and had lowered himself into the dank hole; there came the faint scratching of a match and a sudden glimmer of light; then that, too, disappeared. The two youngsters looked on apprehensively in breathless excitement.

Five minutes passed—ten minutes—a quarter of an hour, and then at last Dorian emerged, candle in hand. He glanced at the man on the locker, snuffed out the candle, and thrust it in his pocket.

His face was white under the sun-tan, and his eyes were blazing. He stooped, replaced the trap noiselessly, and equally noiselessly shook his clenched fist at the sleeper's head. Then he left the cabin, closing the door softly behind him. Almost before the boys realised it, he had gained the deck, and was standing beside them.

"Oh, you saw, did you?" he snapped drily. "Perhaps it's just as well you did. You'll have to help, and I should have told you to-morrow, or the day after, at the latest. Come into the deckhouse; it's not safe to talk here."

"We didn't exactly mean to watch," explained the Badger, "only we couldn't help wondering what you and Frole were—"

"That's all right, youngster!" said Dorian. "Curiosity may not be exactly a virtue, but it's a deuced handy thing to have a fair share of, I can tell you, and you'll see as much for yourself before long."

All three of them retired to the deckhouse; but Dorian was not satisfied even then till he'd seen who was at the wheel.

"It's all right," he said, in a low voice; "it's only Dutchy the Swede, and he can barely understand English. Shut that door!"

"Now, then, for my yarn. We've seen a good bit of one another in the last few weeks, youngsters, and I know I can rely on you both to play the straight game, and keep your heads cool."

"I stood by you when you came on board promiscuous-like, and you've got to stand by me now."

"Here's the long and short of it. Frole intends to scuttle the ship. She's not meant to get into Braganza, or any other port. She's meant to go down, and Frole's been squared to see that she does. She's insured up to her eyes, and her owners are looking to reap a nice fat dividend from her worthless old hull out of the underwriters' pockets. I can tell you how it's to be done, and why; and what's more, I can make a scoundrel who has done me and mine the greatest injury one man can do another, squeal for it, and I shall."

The Badger and Logs looked at one another, and at the speaker in wide-eyed surprise, and in spite of the gravity of the situation the Patlander grinned delightedly.

"Badger, me son," he said, with a mixture of awe and glee, "ain't yez glad ye came? I'm feeling grand."

Dorian smiled grimly and approvingly at the spirit which prompted the remark, but at the same time he administered a cold douche.

"Don't be a young fool! You ain't dealing in fairy-tales or yarns with the hero dancing on the burning deck, but with hard facts which may cost you your worthless neck."

"Begobhs, I'm listenin'!" said Logs.

Dorian sat for a moment with his chin on his fist, puffing hard at his pipe, and frowning.

"Look here, you imps," he said at last, "I'm old enough to be your father, and I'm not a talking man, but I've got to tell you a bit of private history to make things clear."

"The ruffian who owns this line rejoices in the name of Meredith. He's a big shipowner and a millionaire, and what not, and that includes the fact that he's one of the biggest swindlers on the face of the earth. Five years ago he ruined my poor old governor—fleece him of every cent he'd got, barring a beggarly hundred a year pension—just in the same way that he has fleeced thousands of other people, and left them to starve or rot. It broke my governor up, and the poor old chap, who'd been accustomed to his little luxuries, pined away and died. I was away abroad at the time, and I dare say I'd been the usual kind of pig of a son to him, taking all I could get without so much as a thank you, and grousing if I was expected to do anything in return."

"I came back too late, found the poor old man dead, and the poorer by fifty thousand pounds which this skunk Meredith had got out of him by a barefaced swindle."

"I've knocked about sufficiently to believe in justice rather than law, so I just took justice into my own hands,

and laid for Meredith myself, instead of wasting money in getting lawyer men to do it for me."

"Meredith got scared—he had need to be—gave out that his health was bad, and quitted on one of his own ships for Brazil."

"He knew I was pretty broke for ready cash, and thought that I couldn't, or wouldn't, follow him. I bought a hunter's outfit and a cheap trip on this boat. I didn't know it was one of his at the time, or I wouldn't have trusted my life on it. And I don't mind telling you, boys, that by the time I was through, I was looking into the end of the last few fivers I owned in the world."

"Now, I knew two things—one, the Estancia to which he has retired in terror of his fat carcass; secondly, that there's fine 'gator-hunting in the swamps back of an island called Majarcoa, which is on the road to him, so to speak. And I suspected a third thing, and that is that amongst his financial web was a pretty little scheme for stirring up a revolution in the back end of French Guiana, the border of which is some hundred miles from his bolt-hole."

"Till two nights ago my plan was to pile up a few hundred dollars trapping and shooting, and lay him by the heels under this revolution business. But two nights ago I learnt, first, that he owned this derelict, worm-eaten barque; and, secondly, that he knew I was on board. Meredith can pay his spies, and keeps 'em on the jump."

"Old Frole let the facts slip out whilst he was playing with his gin-bottle."

"Now, that started me thinking, and the more I thought, the less I liked it, and so I made up my mind, little as it was to my taste, to waste some time on old man Frole."

"I don't like using low-down methods, but he was sly—deuced sly—and I've a respect for my hide, and a burning desire to cry quits with Meredith. So yesterday I complained of tummy-ache, and had a free run of the medicine-chest, found what I wanted, and this evening, when I'd got him to talk as much as he would, I gave him a dose of opiate in his grog, and nipped down below."

"He had let out some muddled sentences about insurance and other things, till, putting two and two together, I made out that he had every intention of scuttling the ship amongst the outer sand bars of the Amazon, and incidentally leaving you two and my honourable self to the enjoyment of a watery grave."

"Then I gave him the opiate, and as you saw, went on an exploration trip of my own."

"Old man Frole is not quite the fool I took him for. You remember that he's been down below for two and three days at a time. Well, he used those days of seclusion for all they were worth."

"He'd an auger and a few tools stowed away in the lazaretto, and he's bored right through the ship's skin in no less than a dozen places beneath the lazaretto floor—good-sized holes, too. Of course, as he bored them, he plugged 'em."

"But a one-armed man could knock those pegs out inside a quarter of an hour without perspiring."

"What he means to do is to touch a bank somewhere at the mouth of the Amazon, enough to jar the old barque a bit, and kick up a scare, then he'll run her off into deep water, knock out his plugs, and let the Southern Atlantic in wholesale."

"The crew are a rotten crowd—Frole's seen to that. There'll be a rush for the boats—sinking ship and all that kind of thing—hands running away from her like rats, and a boating picnic to one of the outlying islands or to Para, as like as not; but we shall have been left behind. Nice little scheme, isn't it, and most mightily convenient for Meredith, who pockets a fat insurance and gets rid of me at one stroke."

"Of course, Frole will get rid of you two at the same time, for you might prove awkward witnesses if questions were asked."

The Badger and Logs listened wide-eyed. "What shall we do?" asked the former. "Go and smack his head and put him in handcuffs. There are a pair in the port locker—I've seen 'em."

Dorian shook his head. "Might be satisfying to the feelings, but it wouldn't help much. I've a heap better plan than that."

"I've been going over in my head any likely men there might be. We shall want a couple. Now, I'll bet my last dollar that the third mate isn't half a bad chap at bottom. He yanked one of you out of the bowsprit shrouds, remember; and I dare say I can find one more reliable chap if I can just show him that his interest lies in chucking Frole and sticking to us."

"We five ought to manage all right. The first and second mates are no good, and they'll stick to Frole anyway, for the sake of their tickets."

"You know the dinghy we carry astern? Well, bit by bit you two pups have got to provision her up without anybody seeing you, in case of emergencies.

"Then, when the critical moment comes, and old man Frole pops out of his companion-way screaming that we're badly sprung and down by the stern—as we shall be, for she'll take in a deuce of a lot of water through those holes.

"There'll be a scramble for the boats, but you two and the third mate and one more, if we can get him, will stick by me aft, and, if need be, I'll shoot the first chap of their crowd who tries to lay a finger on the dinghy.

"The moment they're off we must tow or back the old barque stern foremost on to a bank, and then plug the holes and pump her dry. I'll have the plugs ready.

"Then, as soon as we can, we'll sail her off, and run her up to a sheltered little spot I know of behind Majarcoa Island.

"She'll be as safe and snug as houses there, and anyone might hunt for her for a couple of years, and never find her.

"Then we leave the third mate and his pal in charge, and work inland through the swamps, shooting as we go. I reckon we ought to make in all a thousand dollars between us in skins.

"When we've traded those off, we'll just drop in unexpectedly on that old scoundrel Meredith one fine morning at breakfast-time, and—well, you can leave the rest of the programme to me.

"We shall have the barque hidden away with evidence of scuttling and foul play, and we can twist Meredith's tail till he howls. Savvy?"

"When's it coming off?" asked the Badger breathlessly.

"You've hit the weak spot in our plan, youngster," said Dorian. "It's sure to be at night, probably to-morrow or the next night, judging from our position. I'll get a squirt at the chart to-morrow, and I'll be able to fix it then.

"Meanwhile, we'd better turn in and get what sleep we can. And mind you see to the dinghy, in case we want her."

CHAPTER 5.

Scuttled—The Rush for the Boats—Dorian Takes the Upper Hand.

A PITCH-DARK night, and a sullen, rolling sea. Down in the cabin Frole was stiffening his nerves with a forefinger peg. For two hours since the change of the watch he had been on deck flurrying the man at the wheel by constant alterations of course, and scaring the first officer by repeated allusions to the dangerous and shifting character of the Amazon banks, and bidding him be extra careful, as the night was inky black.

The watch on deck were in a sullen, listless mood, and had they caught sight of Frole's white, strained face and shifty hand as he replenished his glass, they would have been pretty well scared to death into the bargain.

In the deckhouse, Dorian, Badger, and Logs sat waiting anxiously. There was an ominous bulge in the jacket pocket of the former, and the two boys each had a heavy belying-pin by their sides. On the table before them a Waterbury watch ticked noisily.

"Might be any moment now," said Dorian grimly. "I've given Morris and the other chap the tip, and the— By Jove, he's done it!"

There was a dull thud, and a crash, and the deck planking seemed to leap beneath them.

The Badger was shot off the locker, and Venus was flung against the leg of the table.

At the same instant there rose a babel of yells and hoarse cries from the watch on deck.

"Come on, boys!" cried Dorian; and, bursting open the door, raced aft with them just at his heels.

As they did so Captain Frole came scrambling up the companion-way, shouting at the top of his voice, and abusing the mate and the man at the wheel, the look-outs, and everyone else, in vitriolic terms.

To give him his due, now that he was screwed up to the pitch, it was a very creditable piece of acting, and anyone not in the know would have sworn that the skipper was an enraged and justly-furious man, raving at the carelessness of his subordinates which had endangered his ship and his reputation.

The first mate, whose watch it was, horror-struck at what he thought must be due to some mistake of his own, was running madly about the deck roaring orders to a bewildered and frightened crew.

Then there came a new outcry:

"She's down by the stern! She settling fast!"

Captain Frole, who had again dived below, returned in frantic haste.

"You mate there, order away the boats! She's ripped the sternpost out of her, and its your infernal clumsiness that's done the mischief! Sharp now with those boats! Rip the covers off them, and chuck in some stores and water-breakers, you others. She won't last another five minutes!"

Two dark forms slid aft to where the three were waiting—Morris, the third mate, and an A.B. called Andrews. The mate had an iron bar; the seaman his case-knife. Dorian nodded and watched grimly whilst the scared crew hacked and ripped at the canvas boatcovers.

Suddenly the Badger felt Dorian's right arm tighten. Captain Frole had just passed in front of a decklight, which showed him up clearly. He was deadly pale, and looking furtively this way and that, evidently searching for someone.

"He's heeled the snake!" said Dorian, in a low tone. "See that revolver sticking out of his pocket; that's for my benefit, I expect. He's a bit more thorough than I reckoned on; I'll have to read him a lesson."

One boat was in the water by this time, but the falls of the other jammed, and immediately there was a race for the dinghy aft. Dorian waved to the others to keep back, and stepped forward into the light alone, his hand resting on his pocket. The leaders of the rush stopped for an instant, seeing him, and in that instant Dorian whipped out his revolver.

"Get back for'ard and clear those falls, you rats! If a man tries to touch that dinghy I'll shoot!" he said sternly.

The foremost men backed, and through them Captain Frole thrust his way, evidently half mad with nervous excitement.

"Stand aside there, you!" he cried thickly. "I'm captain of this ship, and if you disobey me I'll put a bullet through you!" And he thrust forward an arm.

Crack! Dorian didn't even seem to have taken aim; but the captain spun round with an oath, and clapped his left hand to his shoulder, whilst his revolver dropped with a clatter on the deck-planks.

"Get for'ard and clear those falls! They're only jammed; a jerk will free them, if one of you has a glimmering of sense left!" said Dorian again, as though nothing had happened.

Then, stepping forward, he picked up the fallen revolver by the barrel and tossed it over the rail into the sea.

"I thought you might need a lesson, so I was ready for you," he said to the captain coldly. "Hadm't you better be going? She's making water fast. I and the other passengers prefer the dinghy."

Frole groaned, cast one malignant look at him, and then as the Westward gave an ugly lurch, staggered forward, still holding his arm.

"Where's the third mate?" yelled someone.

"He's all right; got away in the first boat!" answered a voice.

The falls freed and squeaked, and the remainder of the crew swarmed down them.

"Shove off—shove off for your lives!" yelled a badly-scared, ordinary seaman from the bow thwart, and the second boat had pushed frantically clear and was swallowed up in the darkness as they rose to a big roller; though for the next few moments they could be heard shouting and calling to the first boat through the night.

But the five left on board had no time to stop and listen, for the barque was beyond all question badly down by the stern, and at every heave they could hear an ominous sucking gurgle as the water shifted in her.

"Now, mate," called Dorian sharply, "you're skipper for the time being; you know what you've got to do, so give us our orders."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said the mate cheerily, glancing at the water astern to try and judge how the bank lay. "We'll manage without having to tow, with the wind where it is now," he said; and then bawled out a string of orders, which his willing crew of four obeyed at the jump.

The knowledge which the Badger and Logs had picked up during the voyage stood them in good stead now. Yards were swung this way and that, sails backed, and still the string of orders were barked out in quick succession, the mate working frantically at the wheel, now this way now that, with his face to the stern.

Presently he gave a yell, and the planking heaved gently beneath his feet. The Westward had taken the bank stern foremost. A thin cheer went up from her meagre crew, and Dorian dived below with a mallet and some formidable-looking hard wood-pegs, whilst the water she had taken in rushed with a thunderous gurgling, down into the bilges for'ard, as her stern wriggled higher on to the bank.

For the next hour there came from below hollow sounds of incessant hammering, and at last Dorian emerged, grimy

and soaked from head to foot, with a bleeding scar on his left wrist.

"Sound as a drum and well caulked, every one of them!" he cried; and he hurled the mallet into the scuppers. "How's the weather, Mr. Mate?"

"Weather's all right, sir; and, so far as I can make out, it wants three hours of high-water."

"Does it? Well, we must float her off at the top of the tide and pump her out afterwards. The weight of water in her bows now ought to make her slide off as though she were on the slips. Now, we'd better take a spell and some grub, because goodness knows when we'll get another chance."

CHAPTER 6.

Safely Hidden—Good-bye to the Westward—The Land of Mosquitoes—The First Camp.

AT high water, by the aid of a light breeze, the Westward shifted slightly and uneasily, and finally slid off on to a level keel. Then came a stretch of deadly fatiguing work as her small crew manned the old-fashioned hand-pumps, and turned the Atlantic water back to its more proper place.

Hour after hour they went at it, till first one and then another dropped off with fatigue. Finally they had to work for three-minute spells, unable to hang on longer. At last, just as dawn was breaking, there came the welcome squelching, sucking sound which told them that the pumps were worked dry. Dorian kept himself awake by an exercise of iron will, and staggered to the wheel, keeping the Westward, just before the wind, which was light, luckily enough.

But the other four, dead beat, slept where they had dropped beside the pumps. Mosquitoes buzzed round them in clouds, big stinging flies settled on noses and eyelids, but not an inch did they budge till three hours later. Then a cold sluice-down and a meal put new life into them. All around as far as they could see the water was a muddy yellow, though they were a good eighty miles from the nearest land.

"The out-sourings of the Amazon River," said Dorian sleepily. "Mr. Mate, short-handed as you are, could you manage to house some of the upper gear, so that we shan't be so conspicuous from a distance in case of a passing steamer?"

"Ay ay, sir!" said Morris. "We'll manage that; though we couldn't do it if there was weather about. But you'll be wanting a spell yourself, sir; you get down below."

"Spell be hanged! You get that gear off her; and when that's done, and not before, I'll think about a rest."

By noon her topmasts had been housed, giving her a curiously stunted appearance; but diminishing the distance at which she would be visible by nearly half. And, under a light spread of canvas, Morris, at the wheel, was coaxing her across the Amazon drift and heading her up for Majaroca Island.

Beneath the deck-house table Dorian, with a half-gnawed sandwich in one hand, and purple rings of fatigue round his eyes, seemed tunelessly; in a state half way between sleep and a collapse.

For two hot, steamy, sunlit days the Westward waddled northward and westward through the muddy-yellow waters, rounded a jutting cape, and nosed her way in behind the island. Here, with Morris at the wheel and Dorian conning from the fore cross-tree, she dodged up the unnamed and uncharted river, which has its origin in the inland swamps beyond, Logs, the Badger, and Andrews handling such canvas as she could afford to carry.

Six miles up the river she dropped anchor between two wooded headlands, which completely screened her from observation, and the work of getting off the hatches was begun. Dorian's stores were routed out first; ammunition-cases, a double fly, rot-proof tent of green canvas, cooking gear, a small medicine-chest, and a case of carbolic, and salt for curing skins.

These were neatly stowed in the dinghy, which was dropped astern and hauled alongside. Then Dorian proposed a farewell meal, to which all hands sat down, in the cabin, and for which the lazaretto stores were recklessly drawn on.

"Now," said he, addressing Morris and Andrews, "you two chaps have stuck by us splendidly, and we've pulled the fat out of the fire. This is my plan. I told you at the time that if we managed to yank the old Westward here it would be worth a hundred pounds each in your breeches-pockets, but that you'd have to wait for it, and that meanwhile you could laze off—live on the fat of the land and take a holiday.

"If ever two men earned their money you two have. I suppose you've heard of Meredith—the owner of this line? Of course you have, and, for all his thumping and ostentatious charity, I dare say you've heard other kinds of stories as well.

"Frole, the little rat, was Meredith's hired thug. Meredith told him to scuttle the ship, and Frole did so when he thought it was safe. Meredith had insured her and her cargo—so I have found—for thirty-five thousand pounds. Frole will report her as a total loss, and his scared crowd of wharfside loafers will back him up.

"Meredith will rub his hands and chuckle and pouch his dollars. That's where we come in. We've got the ship safe and sound, and stowed away where neither Meredith nor anyone else can find her, and we can make him disgorge, That's my affair.

"But if we left her with no one on board we might risk losing our money. Therefore, you and Andrews must stay by her, and I'll take you both on at ten pounds a month each, in addition to your hundred. Whilst these two youngsters and I go and hunt up Meredith, you can just sit about and fish and shoot. There's a leaky old Berthon boat under the davits for'ard, I noticed. You can patch her up for getting about in, for we shall want the dinghy, and inside of three months we shall be back to fetch you. How does that strike you?"

Morris grinned.

"The man who'd refuse double wages, a hundred quid, an' nothing to do, doesn't live in my skin, sir, and I can speak for Andrews, too. We'll look after the old barque all right, never you worry; an' if you could spare us one of your guns an' a few shells to shoot parrots, and sich like with, why, so much the better.

"I can spare you a couple easily. We shall have to travel light ourselves. And now, as I want to make an early start, we'll just turn to and run out the kedge anchor in case of mishap, and so to bed."

An hour after dawn the following day the trio, with Venus and a multifarious pile of stores, rowed leisurely up stream, whilst Andrews and Morris stood on the ship's rail and waved them good luck.

As the sun rose and the river mist cleared a gentle sea breeze sprang up, which helped them nicely.

Logs took the tiller and the sheet, whilst Dorian and Badger restowed their cargo to trim the boat better, and Dorian oiled all the rifles afresh, showing the youngsters their mechanism and lock action. Their armament consisted of three Martini expresses, with ivory-tipped foresights, two rather dilapidated shot-guns for birds, and a revolver apiece, of the same calibre as the rifles.

"You youngsters have got to learn to shoot straight and quick," said Dorian. "Skins fetch a fair price, and it is absolutely necessary for us to have funds. Directly we strike an inhabited stretch of country we shall need horses, and, above all, this is the land of bribes. If you want anything done you've got to pay for it. If you ride a decent animal and have silver to jingle in your pockets, you are a 'caballero,' a man of distinction, and treated as such. If you haven't you'll get neither food nor civility, and are looked upon with suspicion.

"Our united wealth at present consists of an outfit and a few five-pound notes, which I managed to scrape out of the wreck, and that isn't much. So we've got to make all we can by trapping and hunting, and I give us a couple of months. This is an untouched corner of country, and, as I happen to know, swarms with skins worth lifting from their original owners' backs."

Towards dusk they emerged on to a broad, shallow lake of considerable extent, dotted with innumerable islands, and here the breeze left them, and they were compelled to take to their oars again.

But with the falling of the breeze their troubles came thickly upon them, for, with a low, droning war-song, the mosquitoes swooped down on them in clouds and myriads, the big fighting swamp mosquito only one degree less to be dreaded than his cousin of the Arctic tundra, the tiger mosquito.

They settled on them in grey clouds, till neither hands nor faces were visible. They swarmed on eyes and ears and nostrils, and, though a vigorous slap slew thousands, other thousands came on undaunted and replaced them.

They scratched themselves till they bled, they slapped till they were sore, they plunged their fevered and swollen heads and hands in the water, yet not for an instant did they get peace, and the worst sufferer of all was poor Venus.

His tough hide was no more proof against those long, poisoned, probe-like trunks than their own skin. He howled and whimpered and snapped, but without avail, and he "swelled visibly."

In spite of their own sufferings and their sympathy for him, they couldn't help laughing. In half an hour, even a

naturalist could never have mistaken him for a bulldog. If he resembled anything at all it would have been a three-days' old hippopotamus.

He was practically just one large hump, supported on four legs, which looked unnaturally short.

But matters were becoming really serious. The swamp mosquito induces a kind of fever which, if prolonged, may even make people slightly delirious.

Already their hands and arms were so puffed that they could no longer grip the oars properly with their fingers, and their eyes could only open like narrow slits.

"We must get out of this somehow," gasped Dorian. "Pull for the nearest island; it's our one chance. We must make a green wood fire and sit in the smoke reek."

There was a small wooded island, low-lying, and shrouded in mist half-way up the trees, some half-mile away on their right, and to this they pulled frantically.

Leaping out when they were still some yards from the shore, they dragged the boat through a break in the mangroves, and, seizing a couple of axes, hacked and forced their way through the undergrowth till they reached slightly rising and drier ground.

Here, selecting an open space, they quickly built a fire of green boughs, with some wood-chips beneath to start the blaze, and set light to it. In a few moments dense volumes of reeking smoke began to pour out, and, choking and spluttering, coughing, with streaming eyes and half-suffocated, they sat in the eddies of the smoke, and found peace.

"Begobs," gasped Logs, "if ever anyone had told me that I shud have sat wid me head in a fire like this, an' bin pleased to do ut, I'd have called him a variegated liar, so long as he was a small man!"

Venus, also appreciating the advantages of the smoke, crept in close to the fire, and blinked a bulgy eye at them.

And there they camped for the night, taking it in turn to throw on fresh boughs.

CHAPTER 7.

The Badger Sees Some "Logs"—The Anaconda—in Terrible Straits—Venus to the Rescue—Saved!

THE Badger was the first to wake the next morning. He felt horribly stiff and sore, and his fingers and arms were throbbing and useless. He looked round him wonderingly, and burst into a hoarse cackle of laughter. Dorian and Logs were both still wrapped in their sleeping bags, but their faces and hands were visible, and both were puffed up like boxing-gloves, and the skin strained so tight it looked as if it would burst at a touch.

As for Logs's truly Hibernian nose, it was no more than a blob between two enormous bulging cheeks, whilst his eyes were reduced to slits. The Badger laughed again, though the process was for some reason extremely painful, and woke Logs by heaving a half-charred stick at him. The latter looked at his assailant and blinked, screwed up his eyes, and blinked again, and emitted a curious sort of croak, which ended in a grimace, and a groan of pain.

He explained later that the croak was really a laugh, and that the sight of the Badger tickled him to death.

Then Dorian rose, and they all three sat staring at one another, trying to intimate by grunts and gestures what a perfectly disgusting exhibition the other chap was.

"Proize pigs!" gurgled Logs indistinctly. "You'd be turned out of a cattle show as a freak!" mumbled the Badger, with puffed and swollen lips. "Let's go and cool off in the water."

The sun was well above the mists, and the cool sea breeze had driven away the pest of flies and mosquitoes, so they were able to bathe in comparative comfort, though they had to rip the legs of their trousers half-way up before they could get them over their swollen knees and ankles.

"Don't get too far out," cautioned Dorian; "this place is teeming with 'gator. I heard them grunting all round last night."

As the mist rose they could see another and much larger island, five miles away, and on this they determined to establish a permanent camp for a week or so.

It was a big island, nearly two miles long, and a third of a mile broad at its widest point, and they pitched camp in a snugly-sheltered clearing on a patch of high ground above the level of the mists.

Having made everything trim and shipshape, they hauled the dinghy on to a little sandy beach, and lazed through the drowsy afternoon heat, gazing out on the lake, whilst Dorian smoked, and gave them valuable hints on game-shooting and skinning and curing.

Suddenly the Badger said:

"I say, just look there! Where on earth does all that drift wood come from? Just look at those logs! There must be hundreds of them."

Dorian laughed.

"You blessed little innocent! If you were to go foolin' round with those logs, there'd be no more Badger, except in the form of a highly-appreciated animal food! I've been watching those—er—logs for this hour past, and at a rough computation they're worth close on twelve hundred Mexican dollars, for half of 'em run over twelve feet, and some, I fancy, run up to nearer fifteen."

"Begobs," said Logs, "I wouldn't have thought timber cud have bin so dear, hereabouts, anyway!"

Dorian grinned.

"Timber, you mutton-headed Patlander! Those are 'gator—aligator, if that helps you! Five dollars a skin of five foot, and an extra dollar for every foot on top of that. I ought to know, seeing that I put in two years as a hunter through the Everglades, and have fed with the Seminole bucks, which is more than most men can say."

"Those logs of yours were what I came out for partly. I knew the place was thick with them, and I knew the market price, and, what's more, I was broke—I can tell you this much—and, Meredith apart, this was the mainstay of my scheme. If a man could afford a small cutter or schooner to run up from Para or Braganza once every six months, there's anywhere between five and six thousand pounds to be made out of this one lake alone, and there are twenty or thirty more like it in this forgotten corner of the world."

The price out here is, roughly, a dollar a foot run of skin, and when it gets home it's turned into dinky little cigar-cases and dressing-bags, and goodness knows what else; and, the supply being not over plentiful, the price keeps steady.

"We'll begin our hunting to-night, and I'll show you boys a trick or two; but we must wait till dark, and the moon won't rise till ten, or thereabouts, which will give us a clear three hours. Besides, I've seen egret about whilst we've been sitting here—plume egret, the bird whose long feathers the womenfolk at home pay such a deuce of a lot for to stick in their hats. Bless 'em!"

Logs and the Badger were as keen as mustard for their first experience, but it was a long time to wait for darkness, and they determined to have another bathe, and try and cool down the inflammation of the mosquito bites. Dorian knocked out his pipe carefully, treading the ashes into the earth, for in a densely overgrown country a stray spark may mean a forest fire and a horrible death, or, at best, the loss of equipment and stores, and starvation, and followed them leisurely down to the water's edge.

All of a sudden he checked by the side of a shrub, not unlike a blue gum-tree, with a half-suppressed cry, pulled off some of the leaves, crushed them in his hand, and sniffed at them. They exuded a resinous, turpentine kind of gum, for the leaves themselves were thick and spongy, and had a strong aromatic smell.

"Look here, you chaps!" he called quickly. "I've found something that'll be worth a deuce of a lot to us, unless I'm mistaken."

"An' phwat may that be?" asked Logs, turning.

"Sniff!" answered Dorian, holding out his hand.

"Begobs, 'tis a bit of a eucalyptus-tree!" said Logs, applying his snub nose, and bearing in mind a faint glimmering of botany classes under Chalks.

Dorian shook his head.

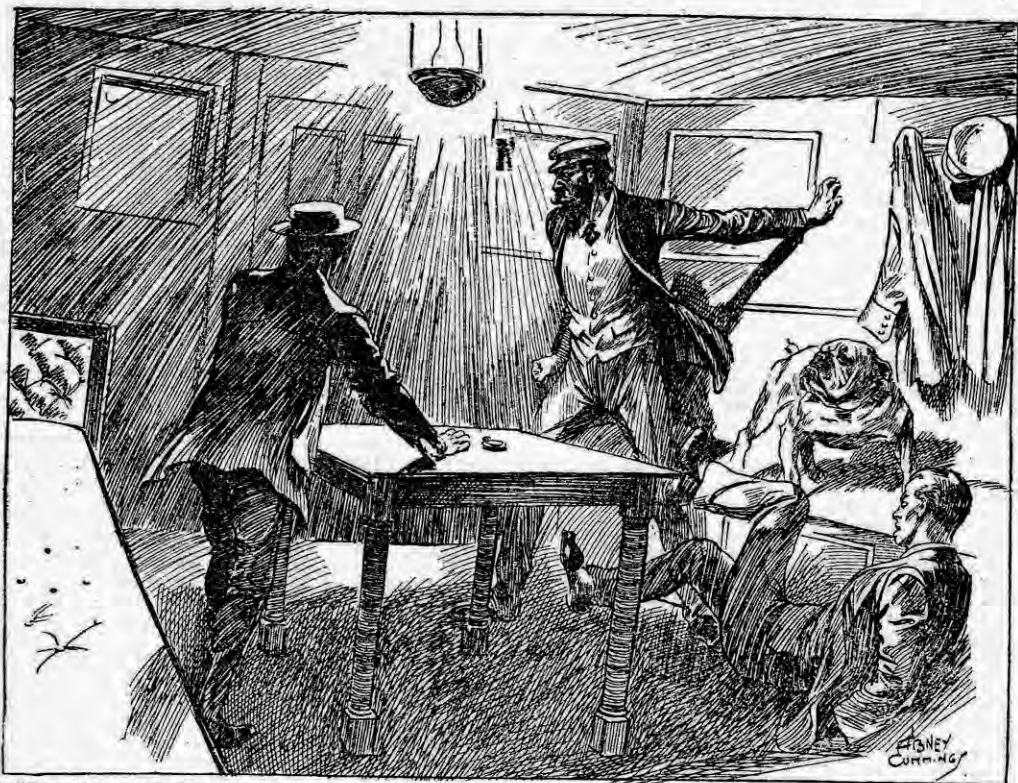
"You might have been further off. It's not eucalyptus, but it's something uncommon like it. I don't know what kind of crackjaw name they give it, but I do know that a mosquito has no particular use for it. Trot back to camp, old man, and bring a bottle of some sort, will you? We'll keep some handy. Oh, and by the way, you might bring one of the Martin's along."

"Right-oh!" said Logs, and went off at a lope. Meanwhile, the Badger strolled on down to the beach by himself, with Venus plodding slowly behind, grunting with disgust at being roused from his noonday nap.

The white sand of the beach and the sunlit water beyond looked very enticing, especially as his skin was still puffy and feverish, so he tore off his clothes, and, wading in, started to swim leisurely, keeping fairly close to the shore, mindful of the floating "logs," whilst Venus, who, like most bulldogs, rarely went into the water except in cases of dire necessity, amused himself by growling and pawing at the curious horseshoe crabs, with long, spiky tails, which were scuttling about on the hot sand.

The water was delicious, and the Badger, lounging about in it like a young porpoise, turned on his back and floated, wondering what on earth was keeping the others so long. At the same time he used his eyes, for he had no wish to run into collision with an alligator.

It is perfectly true that, unless wounded, or frightened out of its wits, the average alligator won't deliberately go for a man—in fact, if he can, he will scurry away as fast as



"The scoundrel might wreck the boat any moment now," said Dorian grimly. "I've given Morris and the other chaps the tip, and the—By Jove, he's done it!" See page 6.

possible, unlike his cousin, the crocodile. Still, it's not a chance that everyone would care to gamble on, and the Badger had a wholesome respect for wearing his own hide as long as he possibly could.

He had been in the water a quarter of an hour or so, and was floating with arms outstretched, thinking curiously of that other swim—so long ago it seemed, when he had heard the school bell clanging for roll call. He was even drawing mental pictures of a hot, stuffy class-room and that sickening kind of feeling that comes over a chap when he knows he's neglected prep, and the master's in a bad temper, when a sudden ripple of water against his cheek made him turn his head and look round.

At first he could see nothing in particular, for the glare of the sun was right in his eyes.

Then, all of a sudden, he caught a glimpse of what looked for a moment like a moving snag.

He gazed at it, fascinated. It was raised above the lake surface some eighteen inches, and was worn smooth at the upper end, but it grew quickly larger and larger, and seemed to swell.

Floating on his back, his range of vision was naturally limited, his eye being nearly flush with the water, and the perspective was all out of the true.

Just then, however, another ripple washed against his face and over his mouth, and he saw that from behind the snag a long, fan-like wake was spreading out.

Then in a flash he realised that the snag was moving, and moving fast, and that he was in deadly peril, though he didn't stop to guess at the precise kind of danger.

He was over on his side and sprinting for all he was worth with a powerful over-arm stroke that had won him many a pewter in his school races.

He could give most youngsters of his age fifteen yards in a hundred and a licking, but the unknown terror behind him was sending up a low wave, just where its neck breasted the surface, four or five inches high, and travelling three feet to his two.

He tried to dodge, but his unknown enemy could turn and twist with twenty times the ease, and gained in consequence. It was ten yards behind him—five, and still he was a long way from the shore.

An unknown danger is always more terrible than a known one, and though the Badger was as plucky as they make 'em, he let up a groan of despair. It was like a horrible nightmare. The water seemed to clog his movements. He lashed out desperately with a powerful leg drive; but he was scared, and badly scared, and got hustled in his strokes, not allowing himself his full glide.

Something hard and scaly touched his ankle. He thrilled convulsively, and spurted once more, gaining a matter of a couple of yards, but the gain was only momentary. With a swish and a rush his pursuer was on him again, and again he felt the horrible, harsh rasp of scales against his skin, and his left leg was pressed down by a heavy, sinewy mass.

His breath was coming in short gasps, for he was badly winded, but he struggled on gamely, half blind with fatigue and the rush of water past his face.

He had an instinctive feeling that if once that evil-looking raised head drew level with his chest, his last chance was gone.

It was up to his knee, and shooting along apparently without effort. He caught the glitter of a cold, dull, grey eye, leaden, but malignant. Suddenly the eye disappeared below a swirl of water, and before he had completed his second stroke, a horrible, driving blow struck him on the leg with the force of a battering ram. Had it been anything but a glancing blow, there would have been a quick and disastrous ending. As it was the shock numbed his leg, and almost unconsciously he gave a yell of despair which rang across the lake.

Dorian and Logs heard it as they stood squashing the aromatic leaves into the mouth of the bottle.

"Howly saints!" said Logs, and let the bottle slip through his fingers.

Dorian said nothing, but grabbed his rifle and tore down to

NEXT THURSDAY: A Tale of Adventure in North Canada.

"ON THE TRAIL OF THE GRIZZLY."

the beach. He saw the Badger's head a dozen yards from shore, and two feet from it another head and a sinewy, muscular neck swirling through the water, jerked up the rifle, and fired. The blunt-nosed skull writhed, and the surface of the lake twenty feet astern was lashed into white foam.

The next instant the Badger, swimming for his life, was scrambling up the beach, and five yards behind him came a giant thirty-foot anaconda—the most terrible water snake in existence—shot through the neck, but still full of vitality and intent on its prey.

Dorien jerked down the lever, throwing the empty shell clear, and tried to close it again with a snap, and a faulty cartridge jammed in the breach.

The Badger was ten yards up the beach, but his strength was spent, and he fell exhausted, and the anaconda's foremost coils were almost abreast of him.

Dorien, helpless, clutched his rifle and sprang forward, but betwixt him and the prostrate Badger shot a streak of brindle-dappled white. A furious growl, and Venus had flung himself straight at the writhing coils. Already they had encircled the Badger's ankle, but at the grip of the sharp, white teeth they relaxed, shuddering, and the thirty-foot mass of muscle and sinew bunched itself up in a knot to do battle with this new antagonist.

Dorien struggled frantically with the jammed cartridge, tearing his nails to the quick, and the Badger, dazed and exhausted, crawled clear, not comprehending his sudden release.

Meanwhile, the brave old teeth hung on with the deadly, tenacious bulldog grip which nothing but death can part.

A heavy coil squirmed up and wound round the dog's loins like the tentacle of some giant octopus. Yet still the white teeth held, and a low, defiant growl answered the sickening pressure as they bit their way to the bone.

Then, with a whoop and a rush, Logs flew past, case-knife in hand.

"The tail," yelled Dorien, still tearing at the jammed cartridge—"the tail, you fool, or you'll kill the dog!"

Logs heard, but had no time to answer. The keen steel shone through tail muscle and backbone. Another stab, and the constricting muscles were severed. A horrible shuddering passed through the reptile's length, as Venus, with a yelp of pain, dropped with a broken rib beside it.

By which time Dorien had torn out the cartridge, and pumping another into the chamber, fired again straight through the heavy skull at pointblank range. The head jumped and squirmed automatically on the sand with the force of the bullet's impact, and the Badger dragged himself into a sitting position.

Without a word, though grey in the face from exhaustion, he crawled over to Venus, and laid the poor old dog's head on his knee.

Venus looked up, licked his hand, and with a little moan of pain and a wag of an abbreviated stump, collapsed.

"By Jove, that was a narrow squeak, old chap!" said Dorien. "My confounded cartridge came near busting up the whole show. If it hadn't been for Venus and old Logs here, you'd have been pulp by this time, young 'un!"

The Badger looked up with rather a sickly smile, and then went off in a dead faint.

CHAPTER 8.

'Gator Shooting—An Awful Struggle—Logs In Trouble—The Death of the Giant.

"YOU'VE room for eight cartridges," said Dorien, in a whisper. "Long ones; the short aren't much use for night shooting. Press the spring aside and shove. That's it!"

The Badger nodded, and worked away, pumping shells into the magazine. A wash and a full meal had cured him of his fright, and he was feeling more himself again.

Dorien stood up and looked round about him. It was a dark night, and such mist as there was hung high, five to six feet above the lake.

"Come along," he said, in a low voice. "Logs, bring the lantern, and keep it well covered. Gently now; we don't want to advertise the fact that we're around."

In single file they crept down to the boat and shoved off. Logs was in the stern, paddling with a single oar in the stern becket.

The Badger, amidships, sat silent and alert with a six-foot pole, at the end of which was an improvised gaff, and Dorien himself on the bow thwart, gazing intently forward, his rifle across his knees.

Poor old Venus, with a crushed rib, had been left rolled in the blankets, with a plaster on his side, to guard the camp. Presently Dorien held up his hand as a signal to Logs to stop paddling.

"Come along, Badger," he whispered. "Keep as quiet as you can, and help me bind that lantern on my forehead. Gently, now. That's it. I want it so that it will throw the light straight ahead. You, Logs, if my hand moves to the right, turn her to the right; if the other way, of course, to the left. If I hold it straight up, that means you're to stop. And, above all, don't let the oar creak against the becket. Badger, directly you hear me fire, and Logs has come up to the spot, just grab all you know with the gaff and haul. If the animal's stone dead, he'll float; if he's only badly hit, he'll try and sink, and you must gaff him and polish him off with your revolver—outside the boat, mind. Don't play the fool trick, as a guide of mine did once, and heft a live 'gator into the boat and then shoot him. He shot him right enough, but he blew a hole in the bottom of the boat, and we had to swim for a long quarter of a mile, shoving a water-logged punt in front of us. Now, then, keep still. Shove her off, Logs."

They paddled silently over the dead calm of the lake for a quarter of a mile. Then Dorien's hand shot out to the right, and Logs promptly headed the dinghy in that direction. As he did so he bent forward and touched the Badger on the shoulder.

"Begobs, look there!" he whispered. "Shure, there's an old gentleman enjoyin' his after-dinner cigar."

The Badger looked, and, right enough—far away ahead, straight in the path of the rays of the red-glowing cigar, on Dorien's forehead—was the butt-end of a red-glowing cigar, level with the lake surface. Even whilst the Badger was wondering what this might mean there came a sharp crack from the Martini and a scutter of phosphorescent foam from where the cigar-end had been a minute before. The bullseye cast a pale, sickly, uncertain sort of light across the water, and in the midst of its rays a dull-white object floated.

"Paddle, you young ass!" cried Dorien testily over his shoulder. "There are three more away to the right of us."

Then, and not till then, the Badger realised that the floating white lump was a dead alligator's stomach, and got his gaff and a piece of line ready.

The alligator sleeps on the surface of the water, generally close to the deep shadow of an overhanging bank, and when a light strikes on his eye—for he always keeps one eye open when asleep—the light is refracted, and glows a dull, luminous red—exactly like a well-smoked cigar-end.

That is the hunter's one point of aim. A couple of inches under or over it, and he might as well go out with a pea-shooter. For the first would be a clean miss, and the second would ricochet over the water, and at best inflict a glancing blow on the reptile's well-armoured head, which would cause it to sink at once practically unharmed.

The one vital spot is the eye itself, an object rather smaller than a postage-stamp, and on a dark night—the only time when this kind of shooting can be effectively carried out—it is practically impossible to even guess the range; everything depends on extreme accuracy of shooting.

Logs paddled the boat up to the floating monster, and Dorien gave it a precautionary dig with the butt of his rifle. It was quite dead, however; and after passing a rope round it under the stunted forearms and just aft of the hind legs, they managed to sway him on board.

"By Jove!" said Dorien, who had placed his lantern on the bottom boards. "He's a beauty! Fourteen feet if he's an inch! Come on, boys; two more like that, and we shall have all the boat can hold for this trip."

Logs veered off to the right, and Dorien, with his lantern once more on his forehead, swept the water in front of them this way and that. The Badger, watching carefully, saw several small, dull-red, angry-looking eyes just afloat, but Dorien neglected them, selecting in the end a mark which promised a big addition to the bag.

Whether it was fifty yards away or a hundred and fifty not one of them could tell, and the boat crept steadily nearer and nearer. The Badger could see Dorien nestling down to the rifle-stock, and could even catch a glimmer of white where the light glanced on the ivory foresight.

Then crack again, and a tremendous floundering told the tale of an alligator hard hit, yet still full of fight and native cunning.

Logs paddled manfully, Dorien directing him by signals; but by the time they had reached the spot the water, though blood-stained, was calm again.

"Gaff him, Badger—gaff him!" whispered Dorien. "Strike hard!"

The Badger slid the gaff down to its full stretch, felt the pole grate against the hard, corrugated side skin, and jerked the hook upwards. The next instant he had some vague notion that either the end of the world had come, or that a cyclone had broken loose.

All reptiles are hard to kill, but the hardest of all is a full-grown alligator. You may shoot him through the head and through the spine again and again, and yet nine times out of ten he will live for an hour or more.

This particular one was badly hit, with, as they found afterwards, a heavy bullet lodged in his brain. Yet, no sooner did he feel the prick of the iron than he was off like a shot, dragging the boat sideways, and nearly wrenching the Badger's arm from its socket.

The latter hung on like grim death, bracing his knees against the dinghy's side, trying all he knew to pull the big brute to the surface, whilst the alligator on his side was doing his best to swim to the bottom, and make for a hiding-place among the mangrove-roots. Dorien, seeing how things were going, laid down his rifle, and went to the Badger's assistance.

"Give me the gaff!" he said quickly. "I'm stronger than you, and can hold him better. You take the rope, and make a noose in it. Logs, you sit the boat up on the other side. Now, then, Badger, when I haul slip the noose well back over his head and jerk it tight. Look out for his jaws, though. He'll snap like blazes, and it's good-bye to your arm if he gets hold. Are you ready? Now!"

Logs flung himself to the far side of the dinghy, and as he did so he could hear Dorien's muscles strain and crack, and could see the powerful shoulders hunch themselves with the effort. The water on that side of the dinghy was lashed into a wild smother of foam, and a dark, writhing, gnarled mass broke the surface.

"Now! Quick!" gasped Dorien again.

The Badger, holding the noose wide, made a dart, but old man 'gator was too quick for him. There was a horrible snapping of evil yellow fangs, and Logs caught a glimpse of a yawning, cavernous mouth, and the Badger whirled the noose back empty just in time. Again and again he tried, and each time those snapping jaws foiled him, whilst the dinghy rocked and swayed from side to side.

"I can't hang on much longer!" groaned Dorien, who was dripping with perspiration.

"Half a jiffy!" panted the Badger, and made a final effort. This time the noose cleared the jaws, slid down to the back of the hideous skull, and jerked tight. "I've got him!" gasped the Badger; and, holding the rope with his left hand, grabbed for the revolver with his right, and fired point-blank.

The bullet struck one of the horny projections at the base of the skull, chipped it off neatly, and went droning away into the darkness. For all the effect it had, the Badger might as well have fired at the Dreadnought's armoured steel belt.

"Get him through the spine!" cried Dorien. "It's your own chance!"

The Badger took careful aim at the shining, dark back not three feet away, and pumped in another bullet. This time the shot went home between the horny ridges, and the great jaws snapped as the backbone was severed, and a shuddering grunt told that the bullet had done its work. Even then the weight was so great that they could not get him aboard by themselves.

The Badger, paying out his rope, got to the far side of the dinghy, and Logs, joining in the struggle, endeavoured to pass another rope round the body just by the hind legs.

"That's it!" grunted Dorien. And even as he spoke there came a resounding thwack. The heavy tail, with a convulsive effort, flashed up, and caught Logs a terrific blow on the side of the ear, knocking him head-over-heels into the bottom of the boat.

He picked himself up, saying impolite things with fluency; and Dorien and the Badger, seeing that he was not seriously hurt, as they had at first feared, roared with laughter.

Eventually, after ten minutes' hard manoeuvring and work, they managed to get the carcass on board, and, having done so, stood staring in amazement, for, with his snout crushed up into the extreme bow, his tail—on which Logs kept a watchful eye—overhung the stern two or three feet. Dorien gave a low whistle of surprise.

"Boys," he said, "I've shot alligators in most places, and the biggest one I've ever seen or heard of was only a trifle over sixteen feet; but if this chap don't go a full twenty, I'll—I'll eat my hat!"

Further shooting for the night was out of the question, for in the struggle of getting the giant aboard they had made enough noise and clatter to scare every alligator for a mile round.

Moreover, the weight of their spoil was so great that the dinghy had a bare two inches of free board amidships, and they were compelled to move with caution. As it was, it took them nearly an hour to regain the beach below the camp; and as the dinghy's bows grated on the sand the water came in behind them, and she settled gently by the stern. Nor could they raise her or pull her up till they had hauled both alligators out on to the shore.

"Pretty good for one night's work—eh?" said Dorien, as they stood looking at their spoil after an early breakfast. He pulled out a small folding rule which he had unearthed from their belongings, and ran it over the bodies. "Fourteen feet five!" he cried. "And eighteen, twenty—by Jove!—twenty-one feet nine; and I'll bet there isn't as big a specimen in all the museums of the world! Badger, we'll have to make a careful round skin of that chap. He ought to be worth anywhere between eighty and a hundred pounds to us. He'll never be turned into cigar-cases; you can bet your boots on that! We shall have half the naturalists in Europe quarrelling for him. Perfect specimen, too. Wonder how many hundred years old he may be? Come on, youngsters; we'll wade in with the skinning at once, and then you shall have a bit of 'gator steak for lunch. Jolly good tackle it is, too, so you needn't grin till you've tried it."

Logs and the Badger grinned, and the work of skinning commenced in earnest. By the time they had finished it was close on noon.

"Now for 'gator steak!" said Dorien, as the last of the skins was pegged down; and with his knife he cut off half a dozen inch-thick slices from the semi-transparent, white flesh of the tail, which they broiled over the fire.

It proved delicious eating; very tender, and not unlike chicken to taste.

CHAPTER 9.

The Badger's Nightmare—The Closing In of the Agaz Braves—Prisoners—On the March.

THREE days later, after some splendid shooting, they camped on one of the islands dotted about the river. They reached camp late in the evening, dog-tired after a long day's hunting and skinning; too tired almost to eat, and after a mouthful or so they flung themselves down on their blankets and were fast asleep before they had drawn half a dozen full breaths.

The night was dark, but not pitch black, for a rim of moon showed a sickly gleam behind a ragged bit of cloud, and the wind moaned faintly through the cypress overhead. Venus, curled up by the remnants of the camp-fire, snored and grunted contentedly, and down below on the sandy beach the horseshoe crabs scuttled to and fro with a dry, rustling sound.

But the Badger, for all that he was dog-tired—perhaps for that very reason—slept uneasily. Twice he woke with a nightmare-like feeling of terror; his mind seemed weighed down by some hidden danger. All through the current of his dreams he was struggling, fighting, wrestling for dear life with some great black, overpowering object, which surrounded him and closed down on him with irresistible pressure.

The second time he woke he was bathed from head to foot in a cold perspiration. He rose, shook himself, and, annoyed at what he considered his own idiocy, got himself a drink of water and strolled down to the beach, staring out across the lake, his body showing up in strong silhouette against the glowing embers of the camp-fire.

For full ten minutes he stood there, thinking in a confused sort of way of a hundred different things. Then, sleep overcoming him again, he turned slowly, and retraced his steps to his blanket. Two minutes later he was once more sound asleep, and this time he did not dream at all.

But far away over the water, in the deeper shadows of the lake-shore, a hundred pair of eyes had watched his every movement, and a hundred dark, agile forms had crouched motionless; whilst he had stood betwixt them and the fire, gazing straight at the very spot where they lay hidden.

By the time he had returned to his blankets and drawn twenty heavy breaths, there were two score Agaz braves in the water, swimming steadily in single file at ten-foot intervals. From each man's head stuck a tall, single black feather, slanted backwards from the forehead; beneath which gleamed sullen, fierce eyes. They swam with long, powerful strokes, yet noiselessly, keeping low in the water and scarcely making so much as a ripple, and each man carried his weapon in his teeth.

Others lined the shore, watching their progress and keeping a keen look-out on that redly-glowing speck two miles away, which was the camp-fire of the intruders. They were half way across, those two score men, keeping their distance between man and man to an inch. Silent, swift, and deadly cruel; their eyes agleam at the thought of the struggle to come.

Soon they were a hundred yards from the shore, and still not a sign of life or movement in the camp. At fifty yards there came, low and clear, the call of a night bird. Instantly every second man in the line turned to the right, and spread out in new formation parallel to the island shore; the odd men repeated the movement to the left.

The change of formation was stealthy, silent, and orderly. What had been a single file in line ahead became a long strung-out line at right angles to the original one, which swept on, each man abreast of his neighbour, and each man with his weapons between his teeth.

An Agaz brave learns the meaning of the word discipline, or dies. Again the moon showed for a moment from behind the clouds. But now the dark heads were hidden in the deep mangrove shadows; all save one, which showed in the red, glittering reflection of the dying camp-fire.

The Badger, sleeping uneasily and full of vague alarms, opened an eye and saw it, staring at it dreamily.

"Precious big 'gator," he mumbled, dozing off again; and neither head nor saw anything again till a low, warning growl brought him to his feet with a bound, and set him groping for his rifle.

A dark figure flitted through the gloom from one trunk to another.

"Who's there?" he challenged.

The answer was a light throwing spear, which ripped his shirt and stuck quivering in a fallen branch behind him. He threw up the rifle and fired. There was a hollow moan and the sound of a heavy fall.

"Dorien, Logs!" he shouted.

But before they could free themselves from their blankets, or he could fire again, the Agaz rush was on them. Dorien's revolver snapped viciously thrice, as, hampered by his sleeping-bag, he fired propped on one elbow. But the rush came from all quarters at once, and a heavy blow on the head from behind stretched him senseless.

Logs had clubbed one of the shot-guns with both chambers empty, and brought down one man; smashing the forearm of another with the return blow. Then a deftly-thrown bolas—a stretch of raw hide with rounded weights at either end—twined snakelike round his legs just on a level with his knees, and he came down in a heap.

The Badger was still on his feet and struggling desperately, but a sinewy, bronze arm was crooked under his chin from behind, and a sinewy, bare knee shot up into the small of his back, and he, too, went down with an agonising twinge of the spine.

There was one more combatant, however, still undefeated, and that was Venus. Even as the Badger fell, his assailant came lumbering down on top of him with Venus's powerful jaws locked in the calf of his leg, and, try as they would, they could not force them apart until a heavy blow with the flat of a broad-bladed spear had stunned him.

Deft hands roped them tightly with raw-hide thongs, and they were lifted up and flung into the dinghy. The voice of someone in command was issuing sharp orders in Spanish. Dorien alone of the three understood them; but his head was reeling so from the force of the blow, that he but dimly understood. In fact, he was barely conscious.

"There are none dead?" queried the voice. "It is good!" So the orders went: "If they be all white men, they and theirs, with all their belongings—more especially their belongings—and any arms and papers, are to be taken to headquarters. See that they are placed in the boat with our own wounded. The dead one—two? Bueno! They can be left. If the boat is overloaded certain of you must carry these cases and skins, swimming."

As in a dream, Dorien heard a harsh, guttural question in dialect which he could not understand, but the answer was in Spanish.

"The dog? Run a spear through him? But no; the order runs, all property. A dog is property—is it not so? Therefore, son of a fool, he goes with the other white trash!"

Half suffocated, blinded by a splitting headache, and fuming with rage, Dorien was conscious that the boat had been shoved off and was being rowed towards the mainland; whilst all around there was the faint, rhythmic splash, and the deep breathing of men swimming. Some of the men were evidently tired; for a four-mile swim and a rough-and-tumble scrap in between by way of a rest, is a pretty trying ordeal.

He was utterly helpless, unable to move hand or foot, and in a sour, bitter temper. Badger and Logs were at the far end of the boat; so he could not even find out what sort of case they were in. Presently he heard a faint whispering, and something warm licked his cheek. It was poor old Venus just recovering himself. After one or two licks the sturdy old dog realised the presence of his enemies, and a low muzzling in his throat announced the fact.

"Quiet, old man!" said Dorien, in a warning whisper; and the licking process began again.

A mad idea flashed across Dorien's mind of coaxing the dog to gnaw through his bonds, but he gave it up as hopeless; the fact was certain to be discovered the moment the dinghy reached the shore, and he would only be bound again more tightly, for he was in no condition to put up a fight.

Their progress was of necessity very slow; for amidships the boat had a bare inch of free board, and the swimmers were tiring. Still, the shore was made at last, and they were bundled out and lunged down unceremoniously near a fire, where sentries guarded them watchfully. At dawn the Badger stirred uneasily, tried to stretch himself, and gave a sharp exclamation of pain as his cramped limbs felt the bite of the tight thongs, and a sudden realisation of what had happened came back to him.

Dorien and Logs were already awake and whispering to one another.

"Hallo, old man!" said Dorien faintly. "I say, look here, you two, this is all my fault, and I'd just like to tell you how infernally sorry I am to have dragged you into it. I'll say it now, for goodness knows what may happen to us in the course of the next few hours; something deuced unpleasant, anyhow, I'm afraid."

He didn't use the word which was uppermost in his mind—which was "torture." The Brazilian Indian on the war-path is the most bestially and ingeniously cruel thing walking the earth on two legs. An Apache is a mere amateur in cruelty compared to him; a Chinaman a dilettante artist. Where they leave off, the Indian of Brazil is only at the beginning of his resources; a fact which Dorien was painfully aware of.

"If I hadn't been so cocksure that this particular corner of the world was uninhabited, we should never have got into this mess," he continued. "One of us could have come sentry-go at night-time, and if we had seen the beggars coming we could have given 'em a warm time of it. With three rifles and plenty of ammunition, there's not one of them that would ever have set foot on that island alive. I can't tell you youngsters how I blame myself."

"Rats!" said the Badger tersely. "If I'd kept my eyes open a bit I'd have seen the brutes! My Christian aunt! Look at old Venus! He's got a bump the size of a hen's egg on his 'nut!'"

Poor Venus, securely tied to a tree-trunk a few yards away, was eyeing them disconsolately, with the left side of his head rising in a dome worthy of a philosopher's forehead.

"I can tell you one thing," said Dorien. "I overheard a chap last night say that we were to be taken to headquarters, because we wore white men; though where headquarters may happen to be I haven't a notion. Moreover, all our goods and chattels were to be brought along. They were most particular about that; so much so that when the boat was chock full up half a dozen of the fellows were made to swim the whole distance with heavy bundles of our things lashed on to their heads."

"There was some talk, too, of papers. By Jove! I've got it! There are always revolutions and insurrections going on all along the border. These beggars are in the pay of one side or the other; heard the sound of our firing as soon as we moved up to this end of the lake, and swooped down on us, thinking we were revolutionary spies, and—"

An Agaz brave came stalking up to them, and prodded them contemptuously with a bare foot.

"All right; ye shall pay for that!" growled Logs.

The Indian grunted and turned away, and another one came stalking up with some food in a bowl and a gourd full of water. He thrust these down by them, and loosened their hands whilst they ate, but he kept well out of reach of a sudden grab, and held his big spear in readiness for any emergency.

The Badger, having had his share, which came last, signed to the man to let him give some that he had purposely left in the bowl to Venus. The Indian scowled, apparently not understanding. At last, however, by repeated pointing and gesticulations, the Badger managed to explain. The Indian's eyes opened wide, and he gave a guttural exclamation; he was evidently surprised. It was clear to him that this was a new type of white man; for a Spaniard is naturally cruel to animals, and would certainly not bother about a dog when he was in such straits himself.

But though he nodded, it was very clear that he had no intention whatever of going near Venus himself; the latter's reputation for holding powers had evidently spread. At last he allowed the Badger to wriggle and crawl over to Venus and feed him; though he watched him, lynx-eyed, all the time with an ever-ready spear.

Two hours later they were on the march through a swampy but gradually rising country, strongly guarded.

CHAPTER 10.

A Strange Building—Dorien Meets Meredith—£75,000—A Flattering Report.

A BIG, ochre-coloured estancia stood on a high bluff at the end of a long rise of upland. It was not merely a country place, but had also been built for defence.

Round all four sides ran a massive wall of hardened adobe, twenty feet high, and apparently of great thickness. At each corner was a turret, and on each turret Dorien's keen eyes detected a machine-gun, so placed that it could rake two fronts of the wall.

In the centre front was a strong gate big enough for six men to ride through abreast. Other entrance there was none—none that they could see, at any rate—and loopholes along the upper tiers took the place of windows. Of the central building nothing was to be seen but the roofs.

The place was clearly impregnable to anything but heavy gun-fire, and the surrounding country was the worst conceivable for artillery—so bad as to be well-nigh impassable.

They had had the building in view for the past three hours' marching, and the first glimpse of it had been sufficient to warn them that they were approaching their destination.

"It seems to me," said Dorien, "that, whoever the gentleman yonder may be, he is a man who lives in troublous times, and likes to be prepared. Now, I can imagine a man like—"

He checked himself suddenly, and a little later they marched through the big entrance gates, which closed behind them with a clang.

For two long hours they were kept standing in the big, arid courtyard in the broiling sun, and beside them stood their Indian guards, motionless as bronze statues.

At the end of that time a small man in a gorgeous uniform as many hued as a parakeet's, and clanking an enormous sword behind him, came out of the house and eyed them up and down.

"His Excellency will see these fellows," he said in Spanish to a group of stately-looking men, presumably soldiers, who were lounging about the entrance-gate smoking cigarettes interminably.

"Search them for arms, and then escort them round to the patio. You can loosen those cords, but if they show the slightest resistance, shoot them down!"

Four of the men still smoking took up their rifles, fixed bayonets, and indicated to their prisoners with a prod from the butt-end that they might as well be moving. The gorgeously-arrayed officer strutted ahead.

They rounded an angle of the house, and straightway found themselves in a miniature paradise—a huge, open-air palm-garden, in which gaily-plumaged birds flitted from tree to tree; a cool, splashing fountain played in a large, marble basin amidst the greenery, and goldfish swam lazily round and round.

Under a magnificent pineapple-palm in a shady corner were some long, lounge, cane chairs, a table on which were some beautifully-cut glass wine-decanter, in which the ice trickled pleasantly, and plates of assorted fruits; another table littered with papers and official-looking documents stood a little way off.

In one of the lounge chairs, with his back towards them, was seated a big, heavily-built man, smoking an uncommonly good cigar—to judge by the smell of it. Another man, who had the air of a secretary, was gathering up some papers, and took his departure on their approach. The big man half turned:

"Bring forward the prisoners, captain! You found no papers?"

"None, Excellency!" said he of the gorgeous uniform, saluting.

The Badger felt Dorien give a sudden start as the big man spoke, and the next instant they were prodded and hustled before him.

He was very fat, with a flabby, pendulous chin, and cunning grey eyes, deep sunk in his head. A clever face, in a coarse, unscrupulous kind of fashion, but the man himself was unhealthy-looking and shifty to a degree.

His eyes swept over them carelessly enough until they rested on Dorien; then a sudden hard gleam came into them—a gleam full of malice and cunning, not unmixed with fear.

Dorien was smiling grimly. The fat man took a revolver ostentatiously from his pocket, and laid it within easy reach beside a plate of fruit, at the same time signing to the captain to withdraw his men out of earshot, but to keep within call.

"What nationality are you?" he asked.

"For the first time in my life I am ashamed to say English," answered Dorien pleasantly, "seeing that you, Mr. Meredith, are English also, and a disgrace to any nation."

The fat man's hand crept towards his pistol, but he withdrew it.

"So," he said, "you claim to be English, do you? You have proofs, I suppose? But that matters not, for your insults I take as arising from ignorance!" he continued loftily. For the rest, you may be English or not. In any case, you are spies, that's what you are, and that's what you shall all be treated as. The amount of spying and corruption along the border is inconceivable, and now I am in authority here I am determined to put it down with a firm hand. The new Government shall be pure and above all such measures. You will be shot at sundown against the wall yonder. There is no need to say any more. Good-evening! At least you will sleep soundly, senors."

The captain and his guard came hurrying forward, but Dorien, still smiling, did not budge.

"Upon my soul, Meredith," he exclaimed, with a short laugh, "I didn't do you justice. I knew you were a consummate scoundrel, but honestly I didn't give you credit for enough pluck to dabble in murder. Of course, from your point of view it would be deucedly convenient to get me planted out there by the wall. I say from your point of view. I should add, so far as you know. As a matter of fact, though, I am willing to admit you can murder the lot of us if you desire. If you do you will be done up for ever. You will never own another ship as long as you live, and Lloyd's agents will ferret you out and have you clapped in jug for a dose of penal servitude before you're hung for murder. Insurance frauds aren't a bit popular just now—Put that pistol down, you fool! Your hands as shaky as a jelly, and it'll go off. Oh, you won't bag me; you're too bad a shot. But you might hit the poll parrot gentleman by mistake. It would be a thousand pities to spoil a specimen like that."

The fat man's face was a livid grey. For the second time he laid the pistol down.

"What do you mean?" he asked harshly. "If you're trying to trick me I'll not shoot you; I'll hand you over to the Indians to be dealt with."

"I believe you would if you dared!" assented Dorien. "What I mean in plain English is that next time you want to insure a rotten old hulk for ten times her value, don't entrust the job to a fool of a skipper whose favourite toy is the small end of a gin-bottle. He scuttled the Westward, right enough; but unfortunately I and a few others plugged the holes and brought her in safe and sound."

Meredith sprang from his chair.

"It's a lie—a lie! She sank off the Amazon banks, and never came into port. Frole and most of the crew were picked up the next day."

"I didn't say I was fool enough to take her into Braganza," said Dorien. "I merely said I had brought her into—well, we won't mention names just now—safe and sound, with all her dummy cargo in her hull, and several"

THE COVER OF NEXT THURSDAY'S "GEM." LOOK FOR IT.

A STRIKING INCIDENT FROM
"ON THE TRAIL OF THE GRIZZLY."

neatly-plugged holes in her skin under the lazzaretto. I thought I'd call in on you before turning her over to Lloyds, and have a chat. I may add, that if I'm not back safe and sound in three months, the—er—people with whom I left her have orders to hand her over to Lloyds' agents. You're fairly glib at figures; figure on that."

He helped himself to a peach, and the little captain sprang forward.

"Go away," bellowed Meredith, "and take your scarecrows with you!"

The captain sprang back again as if he'd been shot, and retired. The fat man sat scowling awhile.

"You can't find her," said Dorien savagely. "I've taken good care of that. Even if you did you can't claim her without my personal and verbal order. You see, I knew I had a slippery customer to deal with."

"What are your terms, Mr. Dorien?" said Meredith hoarsely. "I—you see—hang it, man, what are your terms?"

"Glad you've suddenly remembered my name!" answered Dorien. "Let me see. Seven years ago you swindled my father out of fifty thousand pounds; add another fifteen thousand for interest; that makes sixty-five thousand. You will notice I am not charging you compound interest. Then there are expenses. I've had to pay the—er—people in whose hands she is—at least, I promised them payment on your behalf—and, of course, the amount increases with each week's delay. Say, another five thousand. Then there are these two gentlemen, who helped in the salvage work, and who suffered considerable nervous wear and tear at the hands of your Indians."

Logs guffawed, and the Badger touched him on the shin.

"I don't want to stick it in too heavily. Say, five thousand more—personal inconvenience, and all that. That makes, let me see, seventy-five thousand, isn't it? And Lloyds must be refunded any payments they have made on the Westward's account."

"Good heavens, man, are you mad?" groaned Meredith. "Sane as anything, I assure you."

"You'll ruin me with your preposterous demands."

"I don't care a toss of a button if I do!" answered Dorien pleasantly. "Anyway, I sha'n't. You're worth well over three-quarters of a million this minute, and you're sure to pouch some more out of this revolutionary business."

Meredith stretched out a shaking hand towards the bell.

"I will give you drafts on my bankers for that amount," Dorien shook his head.

"Not by a long way, dear man! You will send us down to the nearest port. Braganza will do. You've agents there, and you will supply bearers for all our skins and

trophies. Within a month of my receiving a cable from my own bank in London that you have deposited with them seventy-five thousand pounds to my account, the Westward shall be brought into Braganza Harbour and formally made over to your people.

"In that case, of course, you'll be bound to refund Lloyds, and you can explain matters any way you like. You're a better hand at lying than anyone else I know. Now, if you please, we'll have a rest, a bath, and some dinner. I'm not in the least afraid of your poisoning the coffee, because to try to would be to cut your own throat. You will prepare for our departure in the morning."

Six weeks later to a day the Westward, mysteriously re-appearing from nowhere, sailed into the rather difficult entrance of Braganza Harbour, and three days after that Dorien, the Badger, and Logo were homeward bound on a fine, ocean-going steamer, with Venus mounting guard over a huge pile of packing-cases not yet stowed below, containing their trophies, and, above all, the giant anaconda skin.

Suddenly Dorien, who was glancing at a paper, burst out laughing.

"My hat, listen to this, you two: 'Owing to a marvelous act of gallantry on the part of three of the passengers and a remnant of her crew, the Westward, a fine vessel, which belongs to Messrs. Meredith, and which was reported a total loss in a terrific storm off the mouth of the Amazon some months back, was saved after a most heroic struggle, though blown hundreds of miles out of her course. Her tiny crew, undaunted, stuck to their posts, and eventually succeeded in navigating her back to Braganza, her port of destination, where she arrived the day before yesterday.'"

"Mr. Meredith, the head of the firm, has given to passengers and crew alike the most magnificent rewards, amounting, we understand, to several thousands of pounds."

"The ship was heavily insured, and Lloyds have been duly notified of her safety by cable. Amongst the survivors was a valuable bulldog, whose owner refused a well-known citizen an offer of a hundred pounds for him yesterday at the Rio do Ono Hotel."

"Well I'm hanged!" said the Badger.

"You were a sight nearer being shot old man!" said Dorien. "Come on, Logs, come and see our goods and chattels stowed, and relieve your bandy-legged, hundred pound beauty from guard."

"Get off it, Venus, and go and chew a biscuit for'ard!"

THE END.

(Next Thursday, "On the Trail of the Grizzly," a long, complete story of adventure in North Canada, by Nat Barr. Please order your copy of THE GEM in advance.)



Stormpoint

A School Tale.

By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

CHAPTER 1.

Introduces the Boys of Stormpoint College.

"GOAL!"

And five hundred excited lads roared out the magic word; for that goal had won the match for the boys of Stormpoint College. The hero of that goal was Rex Allingham, a fair lad with calm grey eyes; rather slightly built, though very wiry.

"Good old Rex! Shoulder him!" howled one of his chums. "Let's show him off to the ladies! There goes the whistle!"

And there went Rex. To be made a hero of by being carried shoulder-high was bad enough, but the charming suggestion of being shown off to the lady spectators, of whom

there were many on the field, was rather more than even Rex's calm cheek could endure, so he sped towards the hedge at a pace that had given his side the goal, and he went through that hedge like a chased rabbit. A few scratches were preferable to the other alternative; but as his peril was not yet over, he bolted towards the college.

The porter was not in his room, so Rex sought shelter there. That worthy's name was Parker, and as he was enormously fat, the boys naturally called him Porker. It made him mad; but most things those boys did had that effect. He hated boys in general, and the boys of Stormpoint in particular. It is only fair to say they gave him good cause, for there was no love lost between them. Had Porker been in his room, it is quite certain that Rex could never have entered it, and as he heard the shouts of his pursuers coming that way, he glanced around for a hiding-place.

Standing against the wall was a large clothes-press, in which Porker kept his crockery, and the top of this

NEXT THURSDAY: A Tale of Adventure in North Canada.

"ON THE TRAIL OF THE GRIZZLY."

afforded Rex a splendid hiding-place. Springing on the chair which was beside it, Rex clambered up with the agility of a monkey; then he lay flat, and waited for results. They were disastrous!

He had scarcely taken up his position when Porker himself waddled into the room with his tea-tray, on which was a pile of muffins that gave the impression they would have been more than sufficient for three porters; but Porker knew what he could manage.

"Now for a nice little tea!" he muttered, licking his lips, and speaking aloud, a habit of his, acquired, probably, through spending so much of his time alone. "A muffin is a comforting thing, provided it's piping hot, and has plenty of butter on it. These is both, and—"

"I say, Porker," bawled a lad, flinging the door open with a crash, "have you seen Rex Allingham?"

"No, I ain't; and, what's more, I don't want to! Go away!"

"But has he come into the college?"

"No!" howled Porker. "Go and drown yourselves, else I'll come and do it for you!"

"Crums!" exclaimed Rex's particular chum, a strongly-built lad named Jim Fisher. "You are surely not going to wolf all those muffins, Porker?"

"See here, Jim Fisher, I don't want any of your impudence; and, what's more, I won't have it!"

"You will have something worse than that happen to you if you yaffle up that little lot. The doctor will have to buy you a new waistbelt, Porker!" declared Jim. "Why, you are fatter than Cocky!"

"Bust me, will—"

"It's not necessary, Porker. If those muffins don't do the trick, I shall be surprised. It would be rather a lark to make a large hen-coop for him; then feed him up with Morley's food for cattle, and see how fat we—"

"Ay-tishoo! Ay-ay-tishoo!"

There were six inches of dust on that china cupboard, and it made Rex sneeze. That sneeze, of course, gave him away; but it did much worse for him than that.

"Oh, you wicked dandy!" exclaimed Jim. "You said Rex was not here, and there he is!"

"Come down, you varmint!" howled Porker, springing to his feet, and shaking his fist at Rex. "Oh, you precious varmint! Will you come down?"

Now, Rex was rather a favourite with the masters, because he was so clever, but there was not a master in the great college who could have asserted he was obedient. Nevertheless, he obeyed Porker immediately, and came down; for the porter had scarcely given the command when Rex gave another violent sneeze, and came down in a manner neither intended by himself, nor anticipated by Porker. Rex said afterwards that it must have been the law of gravity. At any rate, his weight or movements on the top of that movable china-cupboard was more than it could stand. It toppled forwards, and then came down with the most awful crash. So did Rex.

The cupboard caught Porker in the back, and sent him flying into the fireplace. Rex was pitched on the table, and he sat on Porker's pile of muffins; tea flowed round him, because he smashed the pot, and china clattered on the floor. If any lad had taken a coke-hammer and started breaking china against Rex, that worthy would have romped home an easy winner; steam-hammers could not have broken it so quickly.

One mighty roar of laughter drowned Porker's yells; then those boys were silent, for Dr. Andale, the head of the college, entered the porter's room in cap and gown. He was a tall, handsome man, with rather a stern face, and he had a commanding way with him that his scholars were likely to remember all their lives, yet no truthful and honest boy could help liking him.

It took a good deal to surprise the doctor, but he looked surprised now, as Rex gazed calmly at him.

"Boy," cried the doctor, "what is the cause of this?"

"Dust, sir! Ay-tishoo!"

"Do stop that noise, Parker!" cried the doctor.

"I'm burnt! Woohoo! I'm burnt above a bit!"

"If you are burnt, that noise will not relieve your pain."

Rex Allingham, I command you to tell me what has happened!"

"Ay-tishoo! I have fallen—ay-tishoo—so has the cupboard, if you please, sir."

If the doctor was pleased, his face certainly did not show it.

"All my crocks!" hooted Porker. "I had forty pieces!"

"You've got more than that now," observed Jim. "I should say you have got forty thousand pieces."

"Silence, boy!" commanded the doctor. "How dare you joke about such a disgraceful matter? I am awaiting your explanation, Allingham!"

"Very sorry, sir. Little—in fact—er—rather big accident."

He hid on cupboard—the top of it, you know, sir; and it—well, it fell; so did I. I dropped on Porker's muffins."

Here Rex rose to his feet, standing on the table in his extremely muddy football boots. Then, notwithstanding the doctor's presence, a roar of laughter burst forth, for the wreckage of the muffins adhered to his football knickers. Rex clawed them off, gazed calmly at them, then shook his head.

"Your muffins, Porker!" he murmured.

"And this 'ere's the way I'm treated!" hooted Porker. "Not only am I insulted by being called Porker, but my tea is spoiled." Not feeling very well, and fancying a little muffin—

"I wonder how much he would fancy when he does feel well?" Jim observed. "I should say about a waggon-load."

"Poor old Porker is burnt!" growled Bob Bouncer. He was another of Rex's friends, and a fearfully troublesome boy. He was fat, stolid, and very seldom smiled.

"I won't be called Porker!" hooted that worthy.

Now, Dr. Andale knew perfectly well that he would always be called Porker by the boys; in fact, the masters frequently called him that when speaking of him. However, the doctor considered it necessary to reprove his pupil.

"I wish you would call Parker by his proper name, Bouncer. I have told you of that before. These nicknames are ridiculous and annoying. I should take no notice of them, Porker."

Another roar of laughter burst forth, and even Bob smiled. The doctor quickly corrected himself; but it was no good. He had addressed the angry man as Porker in error, and there was no getting out of it.

"As I say, Parker—" he continued.

"I made sure you called him Porker, sir," said Bob.

"How dare you interrupt me, boy, when I am speaking!"

"I was only correcting you, sir, in—"

"I assure you that I do not need your correction."

"Perhaps you are right, sir, and did say Parker. You may have spoken rather broad. Old Seaslug says I speak broad sometimes. What are you fellows guffawing at now?"

Bob had inadvertently given one of his masters his nickname in the doctor's presence, and Bob actually did not notice what a fearful error he had made. The doctor did, though.

"Write a thousand lines, Bouncer!"

"I wonder what that's for?" murmured Bob.

"It is for daring to speak of your master in the disrespectful manner in which you did."

"Quite a slip, sir. I meant Mr. Salmon. You see, we call him old Seaslug for the sake of brevity. Besides, Salmon is such a funny name for a man. Seaslug seems to—er—be sorter more affectionate, and as they are both fish—"

"That's where it comes in!" muttered Porker. "Boys can insult me with impunity, but they get punished when they call a master out of his name."

"There is a difference, Parker—"

"Quite right that time, sir," said Bob approvingly.

The doctor tried to quell him with a glance, and continued:

"There is a difference, Parker—"

"Right again!" muttered the daring Bob.

"Masters must be treated with respect. However, as you state that you made a slip in speaking of your master in that manner, Bouncer, and as I know you are a thoroughly truthful lad, I shall remit the lines."

"See, you chaps!" exclaimed Bob. "As I tell you, you always get justice from the doc. It mayn't be pleasant sort of justice. You see, he made a slip with Parker, the same as I did with poor old Seaslug, and he naturally says to himself, if I give Bob Bouncer a thousand lines for his slip, he ought to give me a thousand lines for my slip—"

"You had better be careful, Bouncer!" said the doctor.

Bob thought so, too, so he said no more, and looked perfectly serious, while the boys laughed at his daring; and Rex, who had descended from the table, tried to sneak out of the room unobserved; but the doctor was too quick for him.

"Come back, Allingham!" he cried. "I scarcely know how to deal with this matter!"

"If I might suggest a way, sir," said Rex. "I think if I were to buy Porker some new crocks, and give him—say, half-a-crown to soothe his feelings for having got burnt, it would be very satisfactory to all parties concerned. At least, I know it would be quite satisfactory to me."

"I will speak to Trehearn, and instruct him to deal with the case," said Dr. Andale, leaving the room.

"Well, I don't quite care for that arrangement!" exclaimed Rex. "Still, there is your half-crown, Porker. Let me know what your new crocks cost, and I will pay for them. Come on, you chaps, and—er—Porker!"

"What is it?" snarled that worthy, pocketing the coin. He never refused money when it was offered to him, though

it was not very often offered, because he was so disliked by the boys.

Hal Trehearn was captain of the college. He was a nice young fellow of seventeen, although he looked considerably older. Rex kept out of his way till the tea-bell went; then he received a peremptory message that he was to go at once to the captain's study.

"Now, what have you got to say for yourself?" demanded the captain. "Oh, you need not look so innocent! You know perfectly well what you are here for."

"Just an accident."

"Nonsense! How could it be an accident getting on the top of Porker's cupboard?"

"The doctor does not like him called that, Hal," observed Rex, with a view to changing the conversation. "I fancy he would be annoyed with you if he heard."

"Do you really? Consider your next half-holiday is stopped!"

"Oh, I say, give us a task, Hal! Old Seaslug stopped last Saturday, and—"

"Does the doctor like you calling Mr. Salmon by that ridiculous name?"

"Well, no! Bob referred to him as Seaslug, and the doc. was quite nasty. It was this way—"

"Never mind about that. Translate the fifth chapter of the second book of Caesar without the aid of a crib, and if you bring it to me before next half-holiday, I won't gate you."

"You're a brack! But, I say, Hal, I suppose the first chapter of the first book wouldn't do?"

"Why?"

"Because I did that one for Seaslug, and he forgot to ask for it."

"I have a good mind to give you a couple of chapters for your cheek! Be off with you, and just you do what I tell you! And I say, Rex, that was a grand goal you got. It won the match, too. I'm very glad. You played a remarkably good game."

These few words from one so competent to judge, took off

the sting of the task, and Rex was perfectly satisfied with the result of the interview, but he did not feel quite so satisfied when Jardon, who was the worst bully in the college, collared him and dragged him into his study.

Jardon was a thick-set young fellow, noted for his strength and bullying. He was in the Fifth Form, and the small boys dreaded him.

"Here, get my tea, you little brute!" he exclaimed. "I'm not your fag, Jardon, and I'm just going to get my own tea."

"Are you really?" exclaimed Jardon, locking the door, and placing the key in his pocket. "What an extremely interesting piece of news! I trust you will enjoy it; but, my dear child, do be sure you do not eat too much. Fancy how sad it would be for your dear mamma if she had to bury her meek-faced little boy! I feel quite sure you will excuse me for troubling you to make me some hot buttered toast. I should be extremely sorry to have to punish you in any way, but if it is not hot and nicely made, I will make it hot with cayenne pepper, and stuff it down your throat till you choke."

"All right, Jardon. I'll look after that. Shall I cut the bread?"

"No, thank you, little boy. I don't care for your grimy paws. You shall make the toast. There is the first slice, and there is a plate to put it on; if it is not hot, you will be. By the way, you rascally little cheat, you got that goal off side."

"Think so, Jardon?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon! Have I trodden on your foot! How careless of me! See if I have got a halfpenny for you."

"There's no necessity for that," observed Rex. "I wouldn't like you to run yourself short. I say, Jardon, do you want me to make this toast for you?" added Rex, rising and facing him, as the bully gave him a vicious kick.

(Another instalment of this splendid school tale in next Thursday's GEM.)



How do you do?

GREETING!

To you, my bonnie Scots lads and lassies.

To you, of gallant little Wales.

To you, smiling wearers of the dear little Shamrock.

To you, Britishers all, here in our tight little Island and across the seas.

WHO TO WRITE TO: The EDITOR, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, who will be pleased to hear from you.

To this greeting let me add the wish that you may never be without a gem, for THE GEM is the gem of complete story papers, in point of value and quality.

The long, complete tale of adventure which will be found in each Thursday's issue will be chosen with the utmost care; and while thoroughly interesting, even absorbing, will never contain anything but clean and healthy reading matter. I lay emphasis on this point, for I know that many people are liable to judge a publication merely by its price.

They think and believe a halfpenny story paper must be of the blood-and-thunder type. They're wrong—quite wrong!—so far as THE GEM is concerned. THE GEM is a high-class story paper at a small price.

Priced at sixpence, it would be read and appreciated by many who disdain the humble halfpenny. But at sixpence it will only be read by comparatively few. At one halfpenny it will be read and enjoyed by tens of thousands.

This is what I want, for it pleases me far more to know that the paper I am editing is in the hands of the million rather than limited to those who have sixpences galore. I look to my readers—boys and girls, old and young alike—to defend THE GEM from the attacks and unfair remarks of those ignorant of its contents, and the best way to do this is to politely hand your copy, when finished with, to its libeller. I have no fear that, once read, it will fail to convince any fair-minded person that they have made a mistake.

THE GEM is published, in the first place, for boys and young men. Parents should also read it. It is quite possible that they will not only approve of it for the younger members of the family, but will also themselves be interested in the complete tales of adventure.

Now for next Thursday's issue. "On the Trail of the Grizzly" is the title of the story; and here is a short note from the author, NAT BARR:

Dear Mister Editor,—I guess you've struck it good and fine when you ask if I've had adventures; and as my name's not George Washington, you can kind of reckon that I'll draw a true bead for you every time. It's not my fault that I've got a scalp to grow hair on, for I've been up against wild beasts in pretty near every corner of this earth.

See here, though. I don't calculate to go bossing through these yarns as a top-hole hero. I just reckon to write 'em for you, and whether it's me or some other chap that the story hangs on to, I guess, don't matter to you or your readers. All I ask you to do is, freeze to the idea that they're true, so I'd reckon if I was you to let it go at that.—Yours,

NAT BARR.

You can tell from this that "On the Trail of the Grizzly" is bound to be a good yarn, and you might ask your news-agent to reserve you a copy of THE GEM. By the way, will you drop me a postcard, saying what you think of No. 1?

THE EDITOR.

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