Tom Merry and Ferrers Locke, Detective!

THE GEM LIBRARY

1d.

(NEW SERIES.)

30-5-08

THE DETECTIVE'S PUPILS.

A GRAND TALE OF TOM MERRY

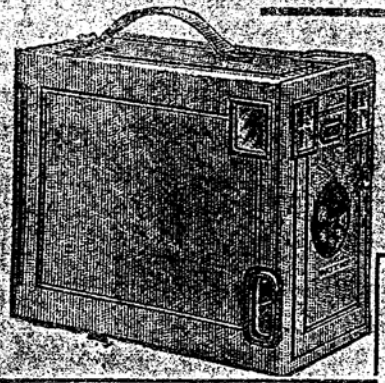
BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.



NO. 16. VOL. 1.

"I greet you as a Brother Professional," said the Detective very gravely.

FOUR WONDERFUL BARGAINS



£2 2s. Camera and Outfit for 10/3.

SEND ONLY 9d. We send this magnificent Plate Camera, complete with outfit and book of instructions, to any address on receipt of 9d. deposit and upon payment of the last of 20 payments of **6d.** each, making a total of **10/3** in all. A handsome present is given free. Postage of Camera, 7d. extra. Cash with order price only **10/3**. **Description:** This perfect Camera is guaranteed made in London of hard wood and covered with warranted leatherette, with leather handle for carrying. Fittings are heavily nickelled. Lense very fine quality, rapid. Shutter worked for portraits or snapshots. Four stops, two brilliant finders, one for upright and one for taking pictures. **Outfit** consists of 6 packet of dry plates, packet developer, packet of gold toning and fixing, packet fixing salts, packet P.O.P., well-made wooden printing frame, two dishes, rubber tongs, and packet of mounts. Send to-day, as the number is limited. Cheaper quality Camera, usual price, 15/6, our price **6/6** cash, **7/-** instalments, same terms.





WORTH £2 2s. SEND ONLY 6d.



We send either of these magnificent Watches complete with Chain on receipt of **6d. Deposit** and upon payment of the last of 16 payments of **6d.** each, making a total of **8/6** in all. A handsomely chased, gold-finished, adjustable Pencil is given free. Postage and insurance of either Watch, 3d. extra. Foreign and Colonial orders, postage 1/- extra. Cash with order **8/3**. These Watches are genuine 18-ct. goldcased, jewelled movements, and perfect timekeepers. Guaranteed 10 years. Gent's massive full-size Chronograph Stop Watches. Ladies' usual size and beautifully finished. Upwards of 6,000 testimonials are open to inspection at our offices. Send deposit to-day or you may be too late, as we have only a limited quantity for sale at this price. Money returned in full if goods are not exactly as represented.

8/3

A 50/- Pair of Field Glasses (including Case), 8/-

We will send a pair of these magnificent Race, Marine, or Field Glasses, complete with an Imperial Russian Leather Case, on receipt of **8d. Deposit** and upon the last of 16 weekly payments of **6d.** each, making a total of **8/6** in all. A handsome present will be given free. Cash-with-order price only 8/-. Postage 6d. extra. **Description:** These handsome Race Marine, or Field Glasses are fitted with very clear, powerful lenses, with nickel eyeshades and slides, 20 miles range. As used in all late wars. Covered with Imperial Russian Leather, and sling case to match.

12/6 BOOTS 8/-.

Send Only 6d.

Just as an advertisement for our Boot Dept. we send a splendid pair of Ladies' or Gent's Boots or Shoes to any address on receipt of 6d. deposit and upon the last of 16 weekly payments of 6d. each, making a total of **8/6** in all. A handsome present is given FREE. Cash-with-order price only **8/-** Postage 6d. extra.

You can have either black or brown Boots or Shoes. Ladies may have lace or button, as preferred.

Send now, as the number is limited.

When writing please state clearly exactly which Bargain you require.

KEW TRADING ASSOCIATION, LTD. (Dept. 44), KEW.

A GENUINE LEVER SIMULATION

GOLD WATCH FREE FOR SKILL. Send No Money.

N	O	N	L	O	D
N	E	D	E	U	D
N	L	U	E	D	I

In this diagram you see three lines divided into sections, with a letter in each section. The letters have to be so arranged that each line spells the name of a well-known city. A MAGNIFICENT WATCH (Lady's or Gent's) will be sent entirely free of charge, providing you are correct and conform to our one condition. REMEMBER—it costs you nothing to try. Send your attempt on a sheet of paper, together with a stamped addressed envelope, so that we may tell you if correct. Address IMPERIAL SUPPLY CO. (Dept. 2), 42, Junction Road, London N.

FACTORY TO RIDER

Despatched direct to anyone on Ten Days' Free Trial and approval.



Established 21 years.

Coventry Cycles. *Warranted five to fifteen years;* best tyres, coasters, variable speed gears, and all latest improvements; 63 new models.

From £3 10s. Packed free and carriage paid. Old machines taken in exchange. Thousands of testimonials from delighted customers. **Shop-soiled** and second-hand Cycles, all makes, as good as new, from 30s. Great Clearance Sale.

TRADE TERMS to a few riders in each district who apply immediately. Save dealers' profits. Write or call at once for our large **Free Art Catalogue** and *special offer* on sample machine.

MEAD CYCLE CO. (Dept. 193A), 91-95, Paradise St., LIVERPOOL.

London: *59, Charing Cross Road.* Manchester: *167, Deansgate.*
Glasgow: *168, Buchanan Street.* Newcastle: *23, New Bridge Street.*

SIMPLY TO GET IT ON THE MARKET.

5,000 genuine ½-plate, or 2½ by 2½, CAMERAS ABSOLUTELY FREE to all sending 9 stamps for samples of our famous Photographic Materials. Catalogue Free.—Hackett's Works, July Rd., Liverpool, E.



MOUSTACHE

A nice manly moustache positively grows in a few days at any age by using "MOUSTA," the only Guaranteed Moustache-Forcer. Also like magic on the smoothest faces. Boys become men. **Remember**—We Guarantee to **return your money** in full (including postage expenses) if not **entirely successful**, so that if you receive no benefit you are not one penny out of pocket. Box sent (in plain wrapper) for 6d. stamps. Do not delay, but send at once to—

J. A. DIXON & Co., 42, Junction Road, London N.

Rudge-Whitworth Britain's Best Bicycle



75 Models from £3 15 6 to £14 12 0 Cash.

From 7/- per Month

A BANK OF ENGLAND NOTE is an undoubted security. The Ten Years' Guarantee given with each Rudge-Whitworth is also a "gilt-edged security."

The vast resources of the largest firm of cycle makers in the world substantiate the guarantee, and in the improbable event of ANY part of the machine being defective, the guarantee will be instantly adhered to.

Our Art Catalogue of 64 pages will be sent post free on application. All Rudge-Whitworths sent packing and carriage paid.

RUDGE-WHITWORTH, LTD. (Dept. 331) COVENTRY.
LONDON: 230, Tottenham Court Rd., 160, Regent St., 23, Holborn Viaduct.

ROYAL AJAX

WITH CLINCHER TYRES.



EASIEST MONTHLY PAYMENTS.

CARRIAGE PAID.

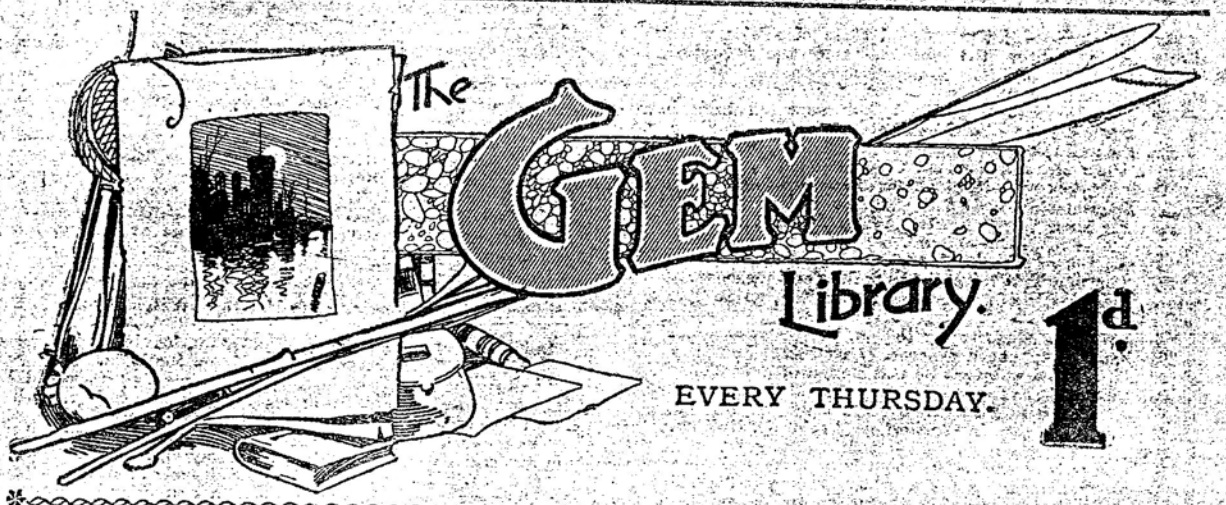
Wonderful Second-hand Bargains.

Write to-day for our Magnificent ART CATALOGUE, post free

Best & Cheapest Firm.

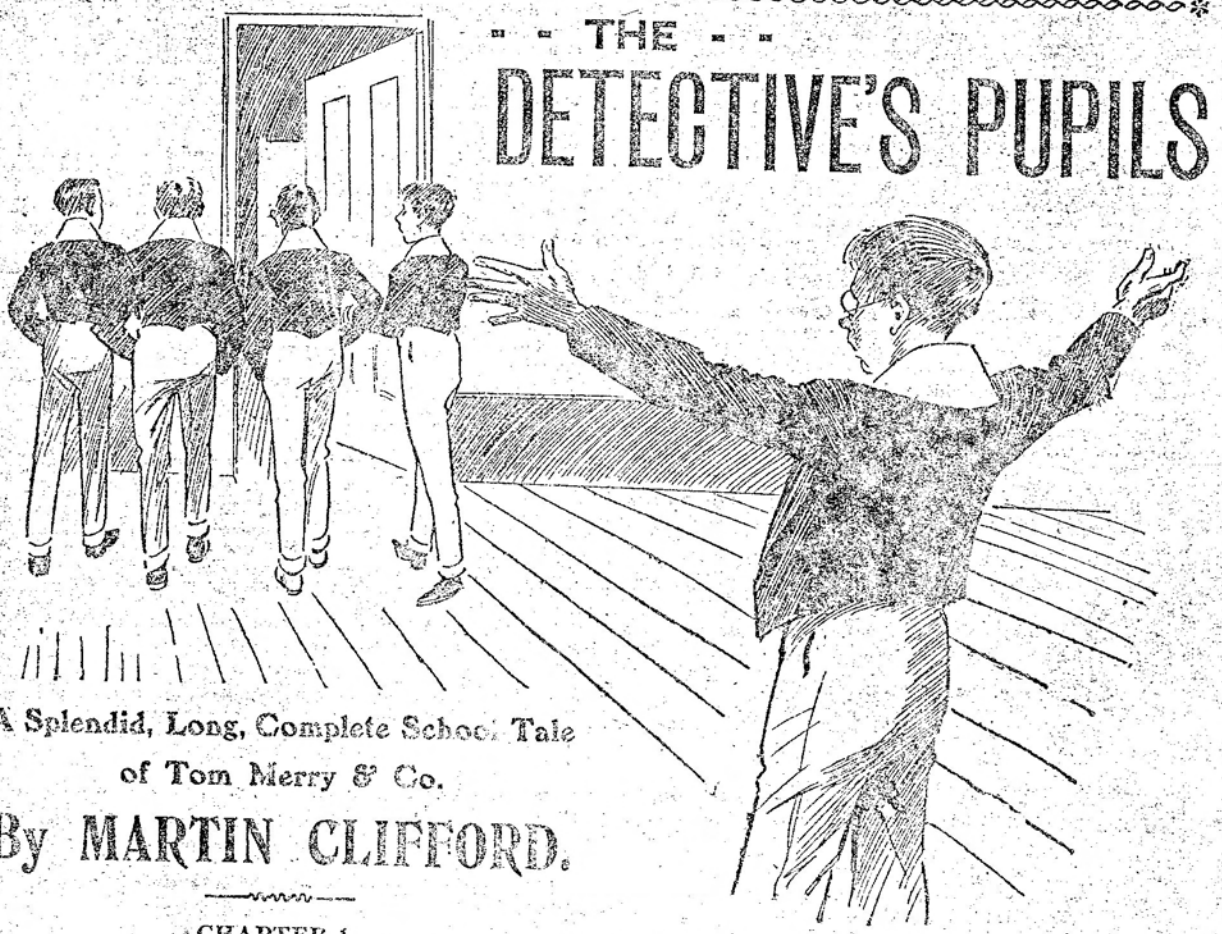
BRITISH CYCLE MFG. CO. (1901), LTD.
(Dept. J.C.), 1 & 3, Berry Street, Liverpool.

NEXT THURSDAY: A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY!



Complete Stories for Everyone, and Every Story a Gem!

- - THE - - DETECTIVE'S PUPILS



A Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
A Really Good Idea!

THERE was an unusual quiet in the junior common-room in the School House at St. Jim's. As a rule, that room was far from quiet in the evening. Fellows who wished to indulge in reading, or chess, or any other reposeful relaxation, generally went to their studies. In the common-room the endless buzz of conversation, and the occasional horse-play, would have distracted them too much. But just now the room was quiet; so quiet, that a stranger entering it might have imagined that he had wandered into the prefect's room by mistake.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the chums of the Shell, were sitting bolt upright, with expressions of extremely good behaviour on their faces. Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, of Study No. 6 in the School House, were equally circumspect. D'Arcy was furtively smoothing out a slight wrinkle in his beautifully-creased trousers, but otherwise the chums of Study No. 6 were quite still and quiet.

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

The explanation of the unusual state of affairs was quite simple. Mr. Railton, the housemaster of the School House, had just come in, and he was about to address a few words to the juniors of his house.

The School House boys liked and respected their housemaster too much to offer him the slightest interruption, and in fact the stillness became almost painful, so determined were they to show Mr. Railton that they intended to listen to him with the greatest respect, although it was after school hours.

The housemaster smiled slightly as he looked round the room. He knew what an effort that stillness must have cost the juniors of the School House.

"Boys!"

The housemaster's voice was very deep and pleasant. There was a general stir of extra special attention, so to speak, as he broke the silence.

"I have a few words to say to you."

The juniors exchanged glances. One thing that they liked about Mr. Railton was that he was a man of his word. When he said that he had a few words to say, he did not mean to follow that remark up with a lengthy speech.

"We are now fairly in the summer," said Mr. Railton. "It is now the time when outdoor excursions may be made with both pleasure and profit. I should be glad to see the boys of my house taking up some outdoor pursuit which, besides affording healthy exercise in the fresh air, would have the effect of training the eye and the faculties of observation."

The juniors looked relieved.

They had expected a lecture at the very least, and had resolved to endure it with patience and respect, to show that they were ready to "back up old Railton," as they would have expressed it, although he chose to rag them.

There was a "pleased surprise," to use a poetical expression, upon many faces now in the common-room of the School House.

"Now," resumed Mr. Railton, "there are many pursuits that would have these beneficial results, and I should like to see my boys taking up one or another of them in real earnest. There is botany, for instance."

"Good!" murmured Digby, who was a member of the Merry Hobby Club, and a distinguished botanist in hobby club circles.

"If you cared to take up botany in earnest, Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form, would be happy to render you every assistance in his power," said Mr. Railton. "Then there is butterfly and moth collecting."

There were some audible snifs.

"Bug hunting" did not appeal to the majority of the juniors of the School House.

"Or, perhaps," said Mr. Railton, "some boy present can suggest another pursuit, which would combine the advantages I have enumerated."

There was a slight buzz.

Some of the boys had ideas, but they were diffident about proposing them in the presence of the housemaster.

But there was at least one junior present who had never been troubled by any considerations of diffidence.

It was Skimpole of the Shell.

Herbert Skimpole, the brainy man of the School House, was an amateur Socialist and several other things, and he had all sorts of ideas; or, as Blake put it, he was several varieties of an ass.

Skimpole made a step forward. Skimpole's weedy form, his huge forehead and spectacles, were well known to the housemaster. Skimpole had lately made himself very prominent with some of his ideas. Mr. Railton looked at him enquiringly.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "He's going to propose that the fellows take up Socialism as a hobby."

Manners and Lowther chuckled.

"Well, Skimpole?" said the housemaster. "You wish to speak?"

"Yes, sir," said Skimpole. "I have a suggestion to make, if you care to hear it."

"Make it, by all means."

"There is a pursuit which trains the faculties of observation, sharpens the wits, and induces habits of reflection and consideration," said Skimpole. "I am not alluding to botany or bug hunting, sir, but to detective work."

"To what?"

"Detective work, sir. I have lately made some essays in that direction myself, with some success. I can recommend the training of a detective to sharpen the wits and train the faculties of——"

"My dear boy——"

"I think it's a really good idea, sir. We could take it up as a hobby, and carry it on in the open air. Unfortunately there are never any crimes committed at this school, but we could get up some sham crime to be detected——"

Mr. Railton smiled.

"There is something in what you say, Skimpole," he said.

"Oh, yes, sir. I have thought it out."

Mr. Railton rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Does this idea recommend itself to you other boys?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir," exclaimed Tom Merry, and there was a general murmur of approval. The idea had caught on at once among the School House juniors.

"Very well, I will think over this," said Mr. Railton. "It comes as a slight surprise to me, but there is certainly something in the suggestion. But, as you know, while Mr. Lathom would help you in botanical pursuits, and Mr. Linton would gladly lend you his aid in butterfly collecting, it will not be easy to obtain the aid of a professional detective to instruct you in the branches of his art."

"Ferrers Locke might help, sir," exclaimed Tom Merry, remembering the famous detective to whom he had on more than one occasion rendered valuable assistance.

Mr. Railton smiled again.

"I am afraid that Mr. Locke is too busy a man," he replied. "However, I shall speak to the Head about it, and refer to the matter later."

And Mr. Railton left the common-room, leaving it in a buzz of talk. Tom Merry slapped Skimpole on the back.

"Jolly good idea, Skimmy," he exclaimed. "It would be great fun if we all took up detective work as a hobby, with a chap like Ferrers Locke to show us the ropes."

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Do you know, deah boys, I wathah fancy myself as a detective."

"Oh, yes, it's a good idea," said Skimpole modestly. "All my ideas are good. It was owing to my superior brain-power that I took up Socialism, and as your minds grow more enlightened, you will come to see the great truths of that sacred cause as I do. Socialism, my friends, is the salvation of the down-trodden millions—the sun-burst of day after long centuries of darkness and oppression, the——"

But Skimpole suddenly found himself without an audience.

Meanwhile, Mr. Railton had walked away to the Head's study. He knocked and entered, and found Dr. Holmes with a letter in his hand, and a pleased expression upon his face.

"Ah, it is you, Railton? I have just had a letter from an old acquaintance of ours—Mr. Locke."

The housemaster started.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, he is taking a short holiday, and intends to spend it in the country, in the neighbourhood of Rylcombe, and so we shall see something of him here."

"A curious coincidence," said Mr. Railton. "I was just thinking of Ferrers Locke."

"How is that?"

The housemaster explained what had passed in the common-room, and the suggestion of Skimpole. The Head smiled.

"It is not at all a bad idea, Mr. Railton," he said. "Whether Ferrers Locke would care to lend his aid I cannot say, but he is a kind-hearted fellow, and always likes boyish society, so I think it is very probable—especially as he is a friend of Merry's. I think the idea a really very good one, and I hope something will come of it."

CHAPTER 2.

Ferrers Locke Arrives.

TOM MERRY, Manners, and Lowther came out of the School House, and crossed the quadrangle towards the gates. Morning school was over on the day following the scene in the common-room. The Terrible Three were looking somewhat eager, and evidently were in expectation of something; and from the way they hurried down to the gate after dinner, it might have been guessed that what they expected was a new arrival at the school of someone they would be glad to see.

Figgins & Co. came out of the New House about the same time, and met the Terrible Three en route. Figgins the long-limbed, Fatty Wynn the short and plump, and Kerr the canny Scot, planted themselves in the path of the chums of the Shell, and Figgins held up his hand.

"Halt!"

"Halt it is," said Tom Merry, with a good-natured smile. "What's on?"

"What about the next meeting of St. Jim's Parliament?" said Figgins.

"Oh, that's over for a bit," said Tom Merry. "Keeping on at the same wheeze might suit you New House chaps, but we School House fellows want something new, you know."

Figgins grunted.

"I suppose that means that you've got a new idea on, fathead?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, yes, something like that."

"What is it?"

"I'm afraid it would be a bit above the comprehension of you New House kids," said Tom Merry, shaking his head.

Figgins's eyes glinted. Fellows of the rival houses at St. Jim's seldom met without mutual chipping, which sometimes proceeded to more active warfare.

"Look here, Tom Merry——"

"Haven't time. Come on, kids."

"What's the row?"

"There isn't any row, excepting that which you are making with your sweet voice," said Monty Lowther.

"But——"

"Can't stop, Figgy," said Tom Merry. "There's Blake yonder. Go and bore him."

And the Terrible Three walked on. Figgins & Co. looked strongly inclined to commit assault and battery upon the spot, but they refrained. They were curious, and it occurred to Figgins that he might get information from Blake.

The chums of Study No. 6 had just come out of the School House, and they too were going down towards the gate. Figgins & Co. bore down upon them with agreeable smiles, in quest of information.

"Hullo, Blake," said Figgins, in a very friendly way. "Anything on?"

"Yes," said Blake. "I've got something on, Figgy."

"What is it?"

"My hat."

Figgins smiled feebly. But Kerr, the Scottish partner in the Co., was always ready with a Roland for an Oliver. He stared at Blake's topper for a moment with an extremely critical expression, and then asked:

"Do you call that thing a hat, Blake?"

Blake turned red.

"What the dickens do you mean, Kerr? It's a better hat than anything you ever sport, and chance it. You give seven and six, and make 'em last a whole term."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally considah that these New House boundahs have no wight to cwiticise anybody's personal attire. There is not much doubt that the School House is the best dwessed house at St. Jim's."

"Here, come on!" said Herries. "We want to be on the spot, you know. Tom Merry is at the gate already."

"What's on?" demanded Figgins. "What the dickens are you making a mystery about?"

"My dear chap, don't be curious," said Blake loftily. "I wouldn't mind explaining, but curiosity is a great failing in little boys, and you must learn to restrain it. Come on, chaps. We can't waste time talking to these New House wasters."

"Yaas, wathah! It is always my endeavah to make my circ. of acquaintances quite select, not to say swaggah, and so I weally must ask you to excuse me, Figgins."

And the chums of Study No. 6 marched on, leaving Figgins & Co. mystified and exasperated. Figgins stared after them.

"There's something on," he said. "What is it, I wonder? It must be something good, or they wouldn't have put off St. Jim's Parliament on account of it."

"Hallo, here's another School House ass heading for the gates!" said Kerr. "It's Skimpole the Socialist. Let's ask him."

"Good! Hallo, Skimmy! I want to ask you something."

"Certainly," said Skimpole, stopping. "Is it a question about Socialism? If so, I shall be pleased to explain to you at full length the whole of the principles of——"

"My hat! I don't think we should be pleased," murmured Fatty Wynn.

"No, thanks," said Figgins hastily. "It isn't Socialism."

"Ah, perhaps you have become curious to know more about Determinism than I was able to tell you in my speech the other day," said Skimpole. "I could give you a brief outline of the ethics of Determinism in about half an hour, and afterwards I would go into the subject more deeply, and explain——'

"My dear chap, I'm not at all curious on the subject of Determinism or any other silly rot," said Figgins politely. "But there's something on in the School House, and it looks to me as if it's up against the New House. Now, what is it? As a true Socialist, you ought to be willing to explain anything to anybody."

"I really don't know anything that is going on just now, Figgins, excepting the new detective idea," said Skimpole.

Figgins pricked up his ears.

"What's that?"

"Oh, the School House juniors are going to take up amateur detective work as a summer outdoor pastime," said Skimpole. "It was my suggestion. Railton thought of botany and bug-hunting, but I put him up to something better. Ferrers Locke is coming down to St. Jim's to-day, on a visit to the Head, and we're going to try to get him to take us in hand a little. Of course, I mean to take the other fellows in hand, and I shall help him to do so. I have studied detective work so deeply that I probably know as much on the subject as Ferrers Locke himself."

"Yes, I consider that very probable," said Figgins sarcastically. "Is Ferrers Locke expected now?"

"Yes, we're going to meet him at the gate. He may be here any minute, I think, according to what Tom Merry said."

"I see. I think we'll meet him, too," said Figgins. "Come on, kids. Ferrers Locke's an old friend of ours, and he'll be glad to see us."

"Not at all," explained Skimpole. "This is a School House idea."

"Rats!"

"It's no good you coming to the gate."

Figgins made a sign to Kerr. Two pairs of hands seized Skimpole, and he was bumped down upon the grass in a sitting posture. Figgins & Co. walked on towards the gate, and joined the juniors there.

Tom Merry looked at him.

"Hallo! Want anything, Figgins?"

"Yes," said Figgins airily; "I'm looking for an old friend to arrive."

"Bai Jove, are you weally, Figgins?" said D'Arcy. "So are we, you know. What an extwaordinawy coincidence, deah boy."

Blake looked at the chief of the New House juniors suspiciously.

"Whom are you waiting for, Figgy?"

"Chap named Locke," said Figgins—"Ferrers Locke."

"Why, you cheeky kid, that's whom we're waiting for."

"Is it really?" said Figgins, with a look of great astonishment. "Then I can only remark, with Gussy, that it's really an extraordinary coincidence."

"Yaas, wathah. I——"

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"Here he comes!"

There was a sound of wheels in the road. The ancient hack from Rylcombe rolled up to the School gates, and stopped. It could not go on without driving over the juniors collected there. A handsome, clear-cut face with a pair of very keen eyes looked out of the hack—a thoughtful face, that was immediately lighted up with a smile, as the eyes fell upon the waiting juniors.

Ferrers Locke sprang out.

"Did you know I was coming?" he asked, as he shook hands with Tom Merry.

"Yes; Mr. Railton told us, sir," said Tom Merry. "He knew we should be glad to see you. You don't mind us waiting for you like this, do you?"

The famous detective laughed.

"My dear lad, it is an honour I appreciate. All my old friends here, I see—Blake, D'Arcy, Figgins, Kerr—shake hands, all of you!"

It was a pleasant meeting. The detective was unaffectedly glad to see the boys again, and they were glad to see him. The hack rolled back to Rylcombe, and Ferrers Locke walked across the quadrangle towards the Principal's house in the midst of the triumphant juniors, who formed a sort of guard of honour.

"It's jolly to see you here again, sir," said Tom Merry. "I hope you are staying a long time."

"I'm staying a week near Rylcombe," said the detective. "I shall see you fellows once or twice, I dare say. Hallo, who is this?"

It was Skimpole. He had recovered from the shock of his handling by Figgins & Co., and had joined the knot of juniors.

"You don't remember me, sir?" he said. "That is rather curious, as we are both really in the same line of business."

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"Yes, I remember you now. You were playing the amateur detective the last time I came down to St. Jim's."

"That is correct," said Skimpole, "though really I can hardly be classed as an amateur, Mr. Locke, having made so deep and complete a study of the art."

"Then I suppose I must greet you as a brother professional," said Ferrers Locke, shaking hands gravely with Skimpole.

The juniors laughed, but Skimpole remained quite grave. The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's was not blessed with a sense of humour.

"Exactly, sir. My efforts have not been what I can call heartily appreciated by the fellows here, but I have done my best. Of late I have been too busy with Socialist propaganda work to pay much attention to detective pursuits, but I am now going in for detective work as a relaxation."

"I wish you every success."

"I say, wing off, Skimpole, old chap. You are a wathah widiculous ass, you know."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"I shall see you presently, boys," said Ferrers Locke; and he entered the Head's house, and the door closed behind him.

"He's a jolly good fellow," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You're right, Merry," said Figgins. "I think it's a good idea for the juniors to take up investigation as a hobby, if Ferrers Locke will lend his aid, and I don't mind helping you School House kids a bit in the difficult parts."

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Right you are, Figgy," said Tom Merry, laughing. "House rows are off while Ferrers Locke is here; and if he'll take us under his wing, we'll go into this together."

"Good!"

"Yaas, that is wathah a good ideah, Tom Mewwy. I was about to suggest it myself."

CHAPTER 3.

Real Hospitality!

FERRERS LOCKE spent the afternoon at St. Jim's. The detective was a student in his leisure hours, and there was a grand old library at St. Jim's, where the famous investigator spent what to him was a most pleasant afternoon. When school was over, he came out to see the cricket practice in the golden May afternoon, and cheered heartily at the fine hits made by Tom Merry and Blake at the wicket. Tom Merry, looking very flushed and handsome after the cricket, walked back to the School House with the detective, his bat under his arm.

"How is the cricket getting on, Tom?" Ferrers Locke asked, with a smile.

"Ripping, sir," said Tom Merry. "I don't know whether we shall beat Figgins's eleven in the junior house match, though. Figgins is a demon bowler. But the united eleven is pretty certain to carry off most of the out matches."

"Good!"

Tom Merry glanced up at the thoughtful, clear-cut face beside him.

"Has Mr. Railton spoken to you about the new idea, sir?" Ferrers Locke's face broke into a smile.

"Yes. It seems that you youngsters are ambitious of showing what you can do in the investigating line."

"Don't you think it's a good idea, sir?"

"Yes, I do," said Ferrers Locke, at once. "There is nothing like it for training the observation, and inculcating reflection and accuracy of judgment. I shall be very pleased to do what I can to set you on the right path."

Tom Merry's eyes glistened.

"That's very kind of you, sir."

"Not at all."

"We shall all be jolly glad of your assistance. If you didn't take it up, the idea would probably fizzle out," Tom Merry remarked.

"We must have a little talk about it," the detective observed thoughtfully.

"If you would care to come and have tea in the study, sir——"

Ferrers Locke smiled genially.

"I should be delighted, Merry."

"Then I'll tell the chaps. We'll have Study No. 6, and Figgins & Co. to tea, and have a good chat. It can be explained to the other fellows afterwards. We shall be rather crowded, but you don't mind that, do you, sir? My study is one of the largest of the junior studies at St. Jim's. It's in the new wing, you know, that was built at the time I came here, and the rooms are much larger than in the old building. You don't mind a bit of a crowd."

"Not a bit."

"We'll get up a jolly good feed, too," said Tom Merry, with a gleam of anticipation in his eyes. "Is there anything you particularly fancy, Mr. Locke, that you would like to have at tea?"

"I think not," said Ferrers Locke gravely. "I am quite willing to leave that to your judgment, Tom. I know you will treat me well."

"I shall get Fatty Wynn, of the New House, to help," explained Tom Merry. "He's a regular connoisseur, and he knows what's what when it comes to buying grub, and he's a jolly good cook, too. What time would suit you best, sir?"

"Absolutely any time, Merry. The Head dines at seven, and I have promised to dine with him, so——"

"You wouldn't be able to make a good dinner if you had a good tea at six," Tom Merry observed anxiously.

"But I don't want to make a good dinner," said Ferrers Locke, with a smile. "I would rather make a good tea in your study."

The hero of the Shell beamed.

"Then we'll have a really ripping spread!" he exclaimed. "It's very kind of you to come, Mr. Locke, and I can promise you that you shall enjoy it."

The detective smilingly assented, and went into the house, and Tom Merry hurried off to speak to his chums upon the important topic. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were soon deep in consultation.

"We shall have to get up something really decent," said Manners. "We don't have a visit from a chap like Ferrers Locke every day. We'll take Blake and Figgins and the rest into it, and have a regular ripper of a spread. I say——"

Manners paused, wrinkling his brows thoughtfully. His chums looked at him inquiringly.

"I say, would it be possible to get hold of some of that ripping pudding that they make for the Head's table? It's half-pay pudding, I think they call it, and Mrs. Mimms makes it herself, and it's pretty nearly as good as Christmas pudding. It would be jolly to have some."

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

"How could we get hold of it?"

"A raid on the larder."

The hero of the Shell shook his head.

"Won't work. At any other time; but we can't risk having a row when Ferrers Locke is here, you know."

"I suppose not; but it's a pity."

"After all, we can get up a good spread. There's Figgins coming off with his bat; let's go and speak to him."

Figgins received the news of the coming feed very cordially. So did the Co. They entered into the spirit of the thing with great zest.

"I'll help you do the shopping," said Fatty Wynn, beaming. "May as well get along to the tuckshop now, so as to lose no time."

"Good. Come along."

"Hallo! Whither bound?" exclaimed Blake, coming off the field and encountering the knot of juniors. "Anybody going to stand a feed? If so, I'm on."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "I wouldn't refuse a feed from anybody just now. I'm famished."

"Yaas, wathah! I am weally a little peckish myself, deah boys."

"Ferrers Locke is coming to tea in our study," Tom Merry explained. "We want all you fellows to come, and to contribute to the feed if you come. It's a whip round, you see, to raise a feed in honour of a distinguished guest."

"We'll come, kid."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we'd better go in a body to the tuckshop, and lay out the tin, as much as we can raise," said Tom Merry.

"Good idea."

"I say, I'll ask Mrs. Mimms for some of that ripping pudding she makes for the Head," said Digby. "She always has a lot cold in the larder, and cold pudding is all right."

Fatty Wynn pricked up his ears.

"What's that about pudding, Dig? Always has a lot of cold pudding in the larder My hat, it makes me wish I were a School House kid. Does she lock the larder?"

"Blessed if I know."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Blake. "There's Fatty on the track of the pudding already. But it's no good asking Mrs. Mimms, Dig; she wouldn't come up to the scratch. Besides, we're all in funds, and we can stand a good feed."

"Yaas, wathah! I had a fivah fwom my governah yesterday, deah boys, and I am willin' to blue any amount in honah of our wespected fwiend Fewwahs Locke."

The juniors poured into the school shop. Mrs. Taggles greeted such a bevy of her best customers with an expansive smile. The shopping was done carefully and scientifically under the superintendence of Fatty Wynn. Fatty Wynn was an ideal shopper in providing a feed. It was of no use trying to work off stale tarts or eggs that had once been fresh upon Fatty Wynn. He knew what was what, and had no hesitation in saying so.

Quite a heap of excellent good things were piled up by the juniors, and the bill came to a considerable sum; but among ten juniors the individual amounts were not excessive. In a very satisfied mood the juniors left the tuckshop, laden with the provisions.

The purchases were conveyed to Tom Merry's study. It was getting towards six o'clock, at which hour Ferrers Locke was to turn up in the study, so there was no time to be lost. Fatty Wynn commenced operations with a frying-pan immediately, and a savoury smell of frying bacon filled the study. Tom Merry looked over the supply of crockery with a dissatisfied eye.

"You chaps will have to go to your studies and fetch all the crockery you have," he remarked. "It's no good eleven fellows trying to have tea out of three cups, one of them cracked and rather rocky. Knives and forks, too. And I say, if you can scare up any serviettes they'll be an advantage. We want to make a decent show before a distinguished visitor."

"Yaas, wathah."

"And buck up."

The juniors did buck up. In a remarkably short space of time supplies of the various articles required were gathered in from various quarters. A nice white tablecloth, borrowed—without the formality of asking permission—from Kildare's study, made the table look really neat and inviting, and an extremely assorted array of cups and saucers were arranged upon it.

Tom Merry looked at the table and nodded approval.

"Jolly good," he said. "There are precious few studies that could turn out a tea-table like that, even in the Fifth and Sixth. But I say, I don't think we'd better have the jam in a soap-dish, though."

Manners, who was arranging the jam, stared.

"We always have it in the same dish," he said. "It's a jolly good dish."

"Yes, I know; but it's not quite the thing when you've got a distinguished visitor," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "Of course, among ourselves a soap-dish is as good as

any other dish, so long as it's clean; but you must consider appearances a bit in dealing with visitors."

"Well, Ferrers Locke wouldn't like any humbug, you know," Blake remarked.

"It's not humbug to have jam in a jam-dish instead of in a soap-dish," said Tom Merry, rather warmly. "I'm not a fellow to think of putting on side, I hope."

"Yaas, wathah! Undah the circs., Blake, I weally think Tom Mewwy is wight in wegardin' a jam-dish as the more appwopwiate of the two."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Blake, "If there's a jam-dish let's have a jam-dish."

"But there isn't," said Manners.

Tom Merry scratched his curly head.

"No, that's the difficulty," he agreed. "But I really must bar the soap-dish. We get used to these things, but a visitor from London may be more particular."

"What about leaving the jam-pot itself on the table instead? It's rather a nobby little white jar."

"Oh, no; it would look as if we hadn't got a jam-dish," said Tom Merry decidedly.

"Well, we haven't."

"That's got nothing to do with it. I say, there's a very good jam-dish in Darrel's study, and he's not there now; I saw him go out with Kildare. One of you cut along and borrow it."

"I will go with pleasuah," said Arthur Augustus. "If Dawwel happens to be there I will ask his permish, and I have no doubt that, as one gentleman to anothah, he will lend me his jam-dish."

"Or else give you a thick ear for your cheek," remarked Lowther. "But go, by all means, and bring it back if you can with you—the jam-dish, I mean, not the thick ear."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Oh, buzz off, kid!" said Tom Merry. "There's no time for talking. Ferrers Locke may be here any moment now. I said six."

"Oh, wewy well; I'll wun like anythin'."

And D'Arcy hurried out of the study. Blake threw up the window to its fullest extent.

"I rather think it's a mistake to cook in the studies in the summer," he remarked. "This room's jolly hot, and there's a smell of frying bacon that you could cut with a knife. Wave the door to and fro, Dig, and clear it a bit before Mr. Locke comes."

"Right you are," said Dig.

"The bacon's done jolly well," said Fatty Wynn. "I've poached three dozen eggs; they'll do for a start, anyway."

"Let the fire down now."

"Better swamp some water on it," said Herries, seizing a jug. "That will put it out and make it cooler."

Tom Merry seized his arm and stopped him just in time.

"You dangerous lunatic! A nice smother you would make."

"Well, it's jolly warm here."

"Ass! You'll suffocate us. You'll soon get cool. Put your head out of the window."

"You're making a lot of draught with that door, Dig," Manners remarked.

"That's what I'm trying to do," said Digby, who had the handle of the door in his grasp, and was pulling and pushing the door to and fro to fan the room. "I—hallo!"

There was a sudden sharp exclamation outside.

Dig was whisking the door shut again while he was speaking, and it came into contact with a gentleman who was just entering the study.

"Oh!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You banged it into somebody. You ass, it's Mr. Locke!"

Dig whisked the door open in utter dismay.

Ferrers Locke stood there, looking somewhat surprised. He had caught the door upon his hand, fortunately, as it slammed on him, and had saved himself from what might have been a hard knock. He smiled at the dismayed juniors.

"Hallo! Is this the way you usually greet a visitor?"

"Awfully sorry, sir," stammered Digby, turning very red. "I didn't know you were there. I was trying to make the room cooler."

Ferrers Locke laughed good-humouredly.

"That's all right; there's no harm done."

"I might have caught you on the boko," said Dig. "I'm awfully sorry."

"That's all right; don't worry. I hope I have come at the right time," said the detective, as he came in.

"Just right," said Tom Merry. "Everything's ready, and the tea is rather ripping, sir, although I say it. The room is rather crowded, I know——"

"The more the merrier," said Ferrers Locke.

Tom Merry looked relieved.

"Yes, sir; that's what we thought. Will you sit near the fire?"

"Well, I'd rather sit near the window."

"Certainly; here's the visitor's chair—I mean, will you take this chair," said Tom Merry hastily. "You'll find it comfy."

"Thank you."

Ferrers Locke sat down. The detective was one of the most observant men in existence, but apparently he did not notice Lowther slide the soap-dish containing the jam out of sight behind a loaf.

Eleven plates were soon served with eggs and bacon. Plenty of room was left for Ferrers Locke, but certainly the juniors had very little space to spare. Some of them were at the table, others had plates on their knees, and Figgins took his on the window sill. There was a smile of contentment upon the face of Ferrers Locke, which went far to reassure his anxious hosts. In his hospitable anxiety, in fact, Tom Merry had forgotten Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the meal was commencing when the swell of the School House suddenly reminded his friends of his existence.

There was a hasty patter of feet in the corridor, and Arthur Augustus burst into the study. He ran right into Herries, and upset his plate over his knees. Herries jumped up with a howl, as bacon gravy and poached eggs ran down his trousers.

"You ass!" he roared. "What the——"

"Wescue, deah boys!"

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Tom Merry, rising hastily. "What do you mean by bolting into the study like that, you young ass?"

"I've got the jam-dish——"

"The what?"

"The jam-dish! There wasn't one in Dawwel's study, aftah all, so I bowwowed one fwom Knox, and Knox came in and found me bowwowing it!"

"You—you!"

"So I wan like anythin', and I'm afwaid he's after me!" said Arthur Augustus, recovering his breath a little.

"Look what you've done to my trousers!"

"I am sowwy, Hewwies!"

"You young ass!" said Tom Merry. "What do you mean by——"

"Here's the jam-dish!" said Arthur Augustus, planking it down in the middle of the table. "You can get the jam out of the soap-dish now before Mr. Locke comes, Mannahs. Bai Jove! is that Mr. Locke? Pway excuse me, my dear sir! I did not know you had awwived."

"Look at my trousers!"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"They're spoiled!"

"Weally, I'm extwemely sowwy to cause damage to any gentleman's twousahs, but you ought not to make a fuss on occasion like this, Hewwies."

The door was hurled open at this moment, and the angry face of Knox, the prefect, glared into the study.

"Where's that young scoundrel, D'Arcy?"

"I am here, Knox, but I uttahly wefuse to be alluded to as a scoundwel."

"Where's my jam-dish?" demanded Knox, becoming a little less truculent as he saw that he had a considerable force to deal with. Prefect as he was, the assembled company would have thought nothing of throwing him out if he had come in for vengeance, and he was well aware of that fact.

Ferrers Locke rose to his feet.

"Come," he said, in his genial way, "there is no need to lose one's temper about a trifle. D'Arcy will——"

Knox started and turned red.

"Oh, it's all right!" he said. "I didn't know you were here, sir. I don't mind about the jam-dish. It was that young rotter's cheek in whisking it off under my nose."

"I am willin' to apologise, as one gentleman to another!"

"Then I am sure that will settle it quite satisfactorily," said Ferrers Locke, laughing.

"It's all right," said Knox.

And he withdrew, leaving the jam-dish where it lay.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy commenced to ladle the jam into it. The Terrible Three looked daggers at him, but he did not observe it. Ferrers Locke applied himself to his knife and fork, and apparently noticed nothing.

CHAPTER 4.

The Detective's Pupils.

FERRERS LOCKE made a good tea in Tom Merry's study. The fare was really good, and Fatty Wynn was as good a chef as could be desired. The tea was ripping, and Ferrers Locke did it justice, much to the delight of the juniors. The proof of the pudding, of course, is in the eating, and the fact that Ferrers Locke ate a good meal showed that the juniors had not failed to properly provide for their distinguished visitor. In fact, they would gladly have seen the detective clear the table, and various tempting delicacies were pressed upon him from all sides till he laughingly declined to touch another morsel.

"Just one more tart!" said Tom Merry, persuasively.

"No, thank you, Tom!"

"A cream puff, then!" said Fatty Wynn.

"No, thanks!"

"I can wecommend these biscuits," said Arthur Augustus. "If you twy one with sugah on it, Mr. Locke, I am sure you will like it."

The detective laughed.

"No, I really think I am quite satisfied, thank you!"

"Well, then, here's the dessert!" said Figgins.

Ferrers Locke accepted an orange.

"And now, he said, "as I shall have to leave you soon, we had better have our little chat, my lads!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah! You may be suah, sir, that we shall listen to everythin' you say with the gweatest wespect."

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"Good! Now I understand that you are all anxious to become amateur detectives, as a new and original mode of physical and mental training."

"Don't you think it's a good idea, sir?"

"Yes, certainly!" said Ferrers Locke, heartily. "Certainly, the habit of taking note of things and of learning to concentrate the attention is a valuable one to acquire, and must be very useful to you in after life."

"That's what we thought, sir, and the Head seems to approve."

"He does approve?"

"Yaas, wathah! The Head is a weally sensible old gentleman!"

"It beats bug hunting, anyway," said Figgins. "If you'd give us a few points, sir, we'd soon show what we could do in the amateur detective line."

"I shall be happy to do so. I shall consider myself your instructor upon this matter while I am down here for my holiday," smiled Ferrers Locke. "It will be an amusement to me, too. Now, of course, before a detective can really get to work and show what he can do, a crime must be committed."

"Yaas, wathah! I suppose there will have to be a cwime, but nobody evah commits a cwime at this coll.," said D'Arcy, in a rather aggrieved tone.

"Not a real crime. That is not at all necessary," said Ferrers Locke. "A sham crime will serve the purpose."

"Yaas, it would weally cause too much bothah to have a weal murdah!"

"I think we can stop short of murder, too!" laughed Ferrers Locke. "Something a great deal less thrilling will serve our purpose."

The juniors listened with great attention.

"Suppose," said Ferrers Locke, thoughtfully, "suppose one of you takes the part of the supposed criminal, and the rest set to work to detect him when the supposed crime is committed. For instance, there could be a robbery. A cricket bat, or something of the sort could be stolen, and then you set to work to track down the perpetrator."

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Good!" said Tom Merry, with sparkling eyes. "One of us could do the boning, and the rest could track him down."

"That is the idea."

"But if we know which one is the criminal——"

"You need not know."

"Then how shall we arrange——"

"In this way. There are ten of you here. In the first place I think you ten can take the matter into your hands, and if the idea proves a success, you can let the other fellows into it as you please."

"Yes, that's a good idea!"

"You will put ten slips into a bag, then—nine white and one black, and draw one each. The fellow who draws that black slip is to commit the crime."

"Good!"

"He will, of course, be deprived of the opportunity of figuring as a detective, but he will have equal opportunities of showing his ability by eluding the investigations of nine crime investigators."

"What a ripping wheeze!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "It will work like a charm. Then the criminal will remain quite unknown to the rest. It might be any one of us."

"Exactly."

"And if we let the other fellows into the thing, we can tell them just as much as we know ourselves," Tom Merry remarked.

"We couldn't very well tell them more," agreed Lowther.

"I think it's a wippin' ideah, and I wathah hope that I shall be selected as the cwiminal, as I weally think I could baffle all you chaps."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

Ferrers Locke looked at his watch.

"I am afraid I must leave you now," he remarked, rising to his feet. "The Head will be expecting me. You can carry out the idea as I have suggested it to you, and, in case of any difficulty you have only to speak to me. I shall be staying for a week at River Cottage, outside Rylcombe, and you will always be welcome there."

"Thank you very much, sir!"

"You are vewy kind, Mr. Locke. I weally wathah fancy myself as a detective, and I think it extremely pwob. that I shall take it up as a pwofession when I gwow up," said Arthur Augustus. "If you have woom for an assistant, I might start with you in town in a few years' time, sir."

"We shall see!" said Ferrers Locke, laughing.

And he took his leave of Tom Merry & Co.

He left the juniors in a great state of excitement. The detective's suggestion was regarded with great favour by all, and, although they were all anxious to show what they could do as amateur detectives, not one would have been disappointed at drawing the black slip from the bag. There was something very exciting in the idea of pitting oneself singly against nine amateur man hunters.

"Ferrers Locke is a jolly sensible chap!" said Lowther. "We'll carry out his idea exactly as he put it. I'll cut up ten slips of paper."

"Here, let that 'Magnet' alone!" exclaimed Manners. "I haven't finished reading it yet, and I keep my copies anyway."

"Oh, all right! I'll tear a leaf out of this book!"

"You villain! That's my 'Chess Openings'!"

"Look here, Manners, you're a jolly lot too particular about your old things. I suppose I shall have to tear a page out of my lexicon."

"Here's an old letter, ass!" said Figgins, throwing one on the table. "You can cut that up, and ink one of the pieces black, and there you are."

Monty Lowther sliced up the letter with his penknife. As he was thus engaged, and as Tom Merry sought for a bag to contain the slips, the door of the study opened, and the large head and spectacles of Skimpole looked in

"Hallo, Tom Merry. I've just looked in——"

"I can see that much, Skimmy. Would you mind looking out again? We're busy."

"I hear that Ferrers Locke has been here——"

"He's been and gone; now, if you'll follow his example——"

"I don't think I ought to be left out of this," said Skimpole. "As a Socialist I am entitled to a share in everything that's going. You are getting up some amateur detective wheeze, and that's just my strong point. I am on in this scene."

"Oh, very well," said Tom Merry, good-naturedly. "Make eleven slips instead of ten, Monty, and let Skimmy come in."

"Right you are."

"But what's the wheeze?" asked Skimpole, coming into the study. "Better tell it to me before you go any further, and I have no doubt I can suggest improvements."

Tom Merry concisely explained the scheme.

"Good," said Skimpole. "I thought I could suggest some improvements. Now——"

Tom Merry seized the amateur Socialist-Determinist-detective by the throat, and backed him up against the door, against which he gently tapped his head. Skimpole stared at him in blank amazement.

"What's the matter, Tom Merry?"

"Nothing. Only if you suggest any improvements in Ferrers Locke's ideas, you will get it where the chicken got the chopper—in the neck."

"But really——"

"Cheese it! We're willing to let you into this thing, on condition that you don't talk," said Tom Merry severely. "If you start jawing out you go."

"That is rather unreasonable——"

"Dry up, then."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Dwy up, deah boy. Pway dwy up and wemain dwied up. The way that fellow goes on talking amazes me. He never leaves off. He goes on like a gwamophone. I weally get a vewy tired feelin'——"

"You're about as bad yourself," grunted Lowther. "You run on as if you were wound up."

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye and stared at Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Oh, ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off. I wegard your wemarks as distinctly impertinent. If I have to speak at length to you fellows, it is because you are silly asses, and want a lot of explainin' to. With Skimpole it's quite different. He talks piffle."

"Well, you ought to be a judge of piffle, as you chatter such a lot of it," said Lowther. "These slips are ready. Where's the bag?"

"Weally——"

"Cheese it, now," said Tom Merry. "We're busy. Here's the bag. Shake it well up."

Lowther put the slips into the bag, and it was shaken up.

"Now, then, take your turns," said Tom Merry.

Each of the juniors in turn drew a slip from the bag, and turned his back to examine, so as to keep its nature secret from the rest.

The bag was soon emptied.

"Now, that's settled," said Tom Merry. "Whichever one is the giddy criminal is to keep it dark."

"I shall take gweat care of that, Tom Mewwy."

"What?"

"I say I shall take gweat care to keep it dark."

"You—you ass! You've drawn the black slip!"

"Bai Jove, you must be a thought-weadah, Tom Mewwy. How did you guess that?" asked Arthur Augustus, in astonishment.

"You young ass!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an ass!"

"You've given it away!"

"Nothin' of the sort. On the contwawy, I distinctly stated that I should keep it dark," said D'Arcy

"Shove them into the bag again," said Tom Merry. "We shall have to do it all over again, that's all."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Shove them in."

"I should weally pwefer——"

"Never mind what you would prefer, Gussy. You've given the secret away, and so it will have to be done over again."

"Oh, vewy well!"

The slips were shaken up in the bag again, and again the juniors drew them out one by one.

D'Arcy looked disappointed. It was easy to see that it was not he who had drawn the black slip.

"Now, that's done," said Tom Merry. "The next thing is to perpetrate the robbery and detect it. Gentlemen, the meeting is dissolved."

Fatty Wynn glanced at the table.

"Well, as all the grub's gone, we may as well bunk," he remarked. "Come on, Figgy."

And the amateur detectives separated.

When he was alone, Jack Blake drew an inky slip of paper from his pocket and regarded it with much satisfaction.

CHAPTER 5.

In the Stilly Night.

FIGGINS gave Fatty Wynn a thump on the back.

"What are you looking so thoughtful about, Fatty?"

The Falstaff of the New House came with a start out of a brown study.

"I was just thinking, Figgy——"

"About the detective wheeze?"

"Oh, no; about something those School House bounders were saying."

"Well, what was it, Fatty?"

"About Mrs. Mimms and her half-pay pudding. You know what ripping ones she makes, and we've all tasted them. They say she always has a lot cold in the larder in the School House."

Figgins laughed.

"Well, she won't give you any, Fatty; so you may as well give up thinking about it," he remarked.

Fatty Wynn sighed.

"No; but I can't help thinking about it, Figgy."

"I'm thinking about the detective wheeze," said Kerr, joining them; "and most of the fellows are doing the same, too. Pratt and Harris and French and Jimson are all taking up the idea, and they're waiting for a crime to be committed to start hunting down the criminal."

"It's the same in the School House," grinned Figgins. "The wheeze has caught on like wildfire. Hallo, Pratt!"

"Hallo!" said Pratt, of the Fourth, coming up. "Have you heard of anything being stolen yet, Figgy?"

"Not yet."

"Is one of you fellows the chap selected to commit the crime?"

"That's telling."

"I think you might let a fellow in your House know," said Pratt persuasively. "Besides, I wouldn't let it go any further."

"Rats!" said Figgins & Co. together; and they strolled away, leaving Pratt in a very dissatisfied frame of mind.

The secret was being well kept. It was soon known that neither D'Arcy nor Skimpole was the chosen one; but whom the chosen one might happen to be was a deep mystery—as also was what form his depredations might take when he commenced as a criminal.

The Terrible Three, and the chums of No. 6, were plied with questions, to all of which they turned a deaf ear.

"Go and eat coke!" was Blake's invariable reply; and Tom Merry answered to much the same effect.

The juniors prowled about, looking for some signs of a crime, and waiting to hear the news of one; but for that evening they were disappointed.

The criminal seemed to be in no hurry to get to work.

Bedtime came, and both Houses sought their sleeping quarters, and the matter was dismissed from most minds for the night.

But not from all. Some of the more ardent of the detectives lay awake, thinking the matter out, and watching one another.

In the Fourth Form dormitory in the New House, the great Figgins lay watching the glimmer of the starlight upon the high heavens, when a faint sound from another bed caught his wakeful ear.

Figgins gave a start. He knew that the sound was made by someone creeping cautiously out of bed.

"My only hat!" murmured Figgins. "That's Wynn's bed. What's he getting up for? Great pip, I'm on the track!"

Figgins lay still with beating heart, and listened.

By turning his head slightly he was able to get a glimpse of Fatty Wynn's bed out of the corner of his eye, and in the dim light of the dormitory he saw Fatty Wynn slowly and silently bundling into his clothes.

Figgins suppressed a chuckle. There was no further doubt in his mind now. Fatty Wynn was the selected criminal, and he was about to commit the crime which was to set all the amateur detectives of St. Jim's on the trail.

"Jolly glad I was awake," murmured Figgins. "Fatty has kept the secret jolly well. I was rather inclined to suspect Tom Merry or Blake, as a matter of fact. I should have thought that Fatty would give it away. Jolly artful card. He hasn't given a sign that he's the giddy criminal!"

There was a whisper in the darkness.

"You fellows awake?"

Figgins lay still as a mouse. Fatty Wynn evidently only whispered to discover whether he was watched. Satisfied that the juniors were all fast asleep, Fatty Wynn crossed to the door and left the dormitory. The door closed with a slight noise, and Figgins started up in bed.

Where Wynn was going he had not the faintest idea, and he did not wish to lose track of him. To bundle on some indispensable garments and a pair of thick rubber shoes did not take Figgins more than a few seconds. Then he hurried to the door and left the dormitory on the track of Fatty Wynn.

"Now, where will he go, I wonder? By Jove!"

Figgins heard the sound of a window cautiously opened in the darkness below. He gave a silent chuckle.

"The young bounder's going to the School House, by Jove!"

He groped his way downstairs. True enough, the hall window was just being shut from the outside. Fatty Wynn had left the New House.

Figgins waited a few moments, and then cautiously re-opened the window, climbed on the sill, and dropped into the quadrangle.

He was greatly excited now. That Fatty Wynn was the criminal, and that he was going to perpetrate the sham crime in the School House, seemed certain to Figgins. It was certainly a bold idea on the amateur burglar's part, as it would lead the detectives to suppose that the sham criminal was a School House boy.

Figgins caught a glimpse of Fatty Wynn in the starlight crossing to the School House. He followed him quickly, and took cover under one of the shadowy elms near the house to watch him, curious to see his further proceedings.

Fatty Wynn climbed into the deep recess of the hall window of the School House, and there was a gleam of steel in the light. Then a click, and the window was open. The amateur cracksman had picked the fastening from the outside, and the way into the rival House lay open to him.

"My hat!" murmured Figgins. "I'll bet he tampered with that fastening while he was in the School House this evening."

Fatty Wynn was surprising his chief. The plump form of the Welsh partner in the Co. disappeared into the house, and Figgins crossed rapidly to the window.

Fatty Wynn had shut it from the inside, but it was not fastened again. Naturally enough the amateur burglar wished to leave his way open for a rapid retreat in case of necessity. Figgins pushed the window open, and entered, closing it behind him.

Within the house the darkness was thick.

Figgins paused, wondering which way to turn, and listening for a sound. The sham crime would, in all probability, be committed in one of the junior studies, and in that case Fatty Wynn would have gone upstairs.

Figgins listened intently for a sound.

Creak!

He started, and his eyes gleamed with satisfaction. The faint creak came from above, and was certainly made by someone moving on the stairs or in the corridor there.

Figgins, silent in his rubber shoes, stole towards the stairs, and went up them cautiously, listening as he went with all his ears.

He uttered a muttered exclamation as he bumped against the balustrade at a turn of the great staircase.

There was a faint sound in the darkness above, and Figgins bit his lip, as he knew that the sound had been heard.

The amateur burglar must have taken the alarm!

It was of no use now expecting him to carry out the sham crime; undoubtedly he would postpone it, and seek only to make his escape.

That, of course, it was Figgins's business to prevent.

Having tracked down the criminal so far, he did not intend

to let him escape, and if he were caught in the act it was really as good as if the crime had been committed.

Figgins groped his way quickly on.

There was a footfall before him, and a form loomed dimly upward. Figgins grasped it, and just as he grasped it, he was himself seized by a strong pair of hands.

"Got him!" gasped Figgins.

"Got him!" exclaimed a well known voice.

And Figgins gasped again, this time with astonishment. For it was not the voice of Fatty Wynn!

It was the voice of Tom Merry!

The next moment Figgins was on his back on the floor, with the hero of the Shell sitting on his chest.

CHAPTER 6.

Two on the Track!

"Ow!"

"Got him!"

"Ow wow! Lemme gerrup!"

"Who is it?"

"It's me," gasped Figgins, breathlessly and ungrammatically. "Let me get up, you ass! Are you Tom Merry?"

"Yes, rather."

"Well, get off my chest."

"I've got you."

"I know you have, and I've got you, for that matter. And now let me get up, you screaming idiot."

"I don't mind letting you get up," said Tom Merry. "But it's got to be clearly understood that I've got you."

"Ass!"

"You can call me any names you like. One expects to be called names by a captured burglar," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

The New House junior gasped.

"By a what?"

"A captured burglar."

"You shrieking idiot. I'm not a burglar."

"No good trying to get out of it, Figgy. You're the amateur cracksman, and I'm your giddy captor. I rather suspected that it was a New House chap who had drawn the black slip," went on Tom Merry. "None of the School House fellows show a sign of being the chosen one, and I'm pretty keen. I thought that it was a New House chap, and lo and behold, here you are!"

"I'm not the criminal."

"Rats!"

"I tell you I'm not. I came here as a detective."

Tom Merry started. Something in Figgins's tone told him that the chief of the New House Co. was not "rotting."

"Is that honest Injun, Figgy?"

"Yes, you ass!"

"You didn't draw the black slip?"

"No."

"And you're not the giddy criminal?"

"Of course not, fathead!"

"Then I've been taken in, and I've had all my trouble for nothing," said Tom Merry wrathfully. "What are you doing in this house at this time of night if you're not a beastly burglar?"

"I'm tracking him."

"Tracking him, are you? Then you know who he is?"

"Certainly!"

Figgins rose to his feet as the hero of the Shell released him. He was pretty sore, and extremely disappointed at having captured the wrong party. He wondered where Fatty Wynn was.

"Then it is one of the New House kids," exclaimed Tom Merry. "You couldn't be here tracking a School House chap, unless you came on spec, and you have said that you know whom it is."

Figgins bit his lip. He had certainly given that much away to the chief of the Terrible Three.

"Well, you see——"

"Yes, I see," chuckled Tom Merry. "It's either Fatty Wynn or Kerr, and the bounder has come to this house, and you're on his track."

"You can't expect me to tell you."

"Oh, no, I don't want you to; I've deduced that much for myself," said Tom Merry. "I'm going to hunt for the giddy criminal myself, and I'll jolly soon run him to earth."

"So am I," said Figgins. "I'll back myself against you, any day."

"You ought to be getting back to your own house, Figgins."

"What for?" demanded Figgins.

"Well, suppose any master was to wake up and find you here——"

"Suppose one were to wake up and find you out of your dormitory?"

"That's my business."

"Well, and the other's my business."

"That's all very well, but in a respectable house like this we bar New House bounders," said Tom Merry. "I really think you ought to travel."

"And leave you my burglar? Likely!"

"Well, I'm bound to have him, anyway!"

"I'll jolly well see that you don't! I'm going to capture that burglar, or there will be a row," said Figgins emphatically.

"Now, look here, Figgins——"

"'Nuff said! I'm not going to leave this house without my prisoner!"

"You'll either go quietly, or you'll go on your neck," said Tom Merry darkly. "I'm not going to have my investigations spoiled by you blundering around at the same time."

"Same here. You had better go back to your dormitory——"

"Well, of all the cheek!"

"Well, I'm not going. I——"

"Do you want to be chucked out?"

"Yes," said Figgins defiantly. "I do want to be chucked out, Tom Merry—if you can chuck me out!"

"I'll jolly soon——"

"Hush!"

Figgins laid a hand on Tom Merry's arm. There was a sound in the corridor. The two juniors almost held their breath. In their excitement they had unconsciously raised their voices, and it was quite possible that their words had reached other ears. If a master found them abroad at that hour of the night, the plea that they were pursuing their investigations as amateur detectives was not likely to save them from condign punishment.

"Hush!" whispered Figgins. "Did you hear anything?"

"Yes," breathed Tom Merry. "I'll swear it was a footstep."

"I can't hear anything now."

"Neither can I."

"Then it can't be a master. He wouldn't be lying low like that—and he'd have a light, too. No reason why a master should grope about in the dark."

"You're right!"

The two juniors trembled with excitement. If the individual they had heard was not a master, there was no doubt as to whom it was.

"It's the giddy burglar!" whispered Figgins.

"I didn't know he came upstairs," murmured Tom Merry doubtfully. "You saw him come into the School House, didn't you?"

"Yes, he came in by the hall window."

"How long ago?"

"About a minute before I collared you."

"Then he never came upstairs," whispered Tom Merry. "I was here some time watching. I heard a sound below which I suppose was the chap opening the window. Well, after that I was on the alert, and nobody came upstairs till you did."

"Then this can't be the burglar."

Tom Merry chuckled softly.

"No! I've hit it!"

"What do you think, then?"

"It's another amateur detective on the prowl."

Figgins suppressed a chuckle.

"My hat! I wonder who it is. If Fatty Wynn didn't come upstairs——"

"Was it Fatty Wynn?"

Figgins could have bitten his tongue out. He had given the secret away now!

"Oh, rats!" he growled. "Yes, it was Fatty Wynn. He slipped out of his bed without knowing that I was awake, and came over here, and I followed him."

"I say, Figgy——"

"Hang it! I oughtn't to have let that out!"

"Yes, you're not much of a detective," agreed Tom Merry.

Figgins grunted.

"But I say, Figgy, we'll go into this together if you like," said Tom Merry. "What do you say? It's no good our punching one another's heads while the giddy burglar escapes. Let's stick together for the occasion."

"Well, I'm agreeable to that."

"Then it's a go."

"Now, if you're certain Fatty didn't come upstairs, he must be downstairs," said Figgins, in a whisper.

"That's splendid, Figgins. If you deduce things like that, and do it all in your head, you'd soon knock Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake into fits."

"Oh, don't be funny! I was going to say that as he's downstairs we'd better go in search of him."

"Good! I'm ready!"

"I wish I knew who it was prowling about in the corridor," muttered Figgins, peering through the darkness. "I suppose it can only be one of the amateur detectives. That ass Manners perhaps, or that silly cuckoo Lowther!"

ANSWERS

NEXT THURSDAY: A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY.

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Figgins?"

"Rats! Get downstairs!"

"I—ow! My only Panama aunt! What's that?"

It was a sudden yell from Tom Merry, and it was echoed by Figgins. From the darkness there came suddenly a whiz of water, and water splashed over the heads and faces of the amateur detectives, and ran down their jackets and shirts.

"What the——"

"Who the——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a subdued laugh in the gloom, and there was a sound of receding footsteps.

Tom Merry screwed the water out of his eyes with his knuckles.

"Who was that?" he gasped.

"Blessed if I know! I know I'm soaked!" growled Figgins. "Either the burglar or a rival detective. I wish I had him within reach of my fist, that's all. I'd make him sit up for this little joke."

"Hark!"

From below came the sound of a gently-closing window.

Figgins gave a jump.

"That's Fatty Wynn going! We've lost him!"

"After him!" panted Tom Merry. "The agreement was that the burglar should steal something, and if we run him down in the quad he'll have it on him."

"Right-ho, come on!"

They scuttled down the stairs.

The window was closed but not fastened.

Figgins tore it open and jumped out.

Tom Merry was following, when a stern voice rang through the gloom.

"Who is that? Stop at once!"

CHAPTER 7.

Caught!

TOM MERRY gave a gasp of dismay.

"Hook it, Figgy!" he whispered. "I'm collared!"

Figgins hesitated under the window. He did not like to desert Tom Merry at that moment. He had heard the sharp order, and recognised the voice of Mr. Railton, the housemaster of the School House.

The involuntary yell of the juniors when the water splashed over them in the darkness had evidently awakened the housemaster.

"I say, can't you get out, Merry?" whispered Figgins hurriedly.

"No good. He'd wait for me to come in."

"I suppose he would. Look here, I'm going to stay, and stick it out with you."

"Cut off, Figgy!"

"No, I'll stay."

"Don't be an ass!" whispered Tom Merry. "Hook it! He'll be here in a moment. You can't do me any good, and it's more serious to be out of your own House at this hour than merely out of the dormitory."

Figgins realised that this was the truth.

"Well, I'll hook it, then," he murmured. "Good luck!"

And Figgins darted away.

Tom Merry closed the window and fastened it, and turned to face the housemaster, who was coming quickly downstairs.

A candle glimmered in the housemaster's hand. He held it up and looked at Tom Merry with a very stern glance.

"Is that you, Merry?"

"Yes, sir," said the hero of the Shell, in his meekest tone.

"Was it you who called out a minute ago?"

"I called out, sir."

"What are you doing out of your dormitory at this hour."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"You were about to go into the quadrangle, Merry," said Mr. Railton. "I heard you close the window as I came down. You were going out?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry reluctantly.

"Merry, is it possible that you were going to break bounds at this hour of the night? That you——"

Tom Merry turned red.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"I am glad to hear that, Merry. I know there are some of the so-called Smart Set at St. Jim's who think it very clever and manly to slip out of the house at night, but I should be greatly surprised to learn that you were of the number."

"Nothing of the kind, sir."

"I believe you. But what are you doing out of your dormitory?"

"I was doing no harm, sir."

"That is no explanation. Tell me at once what this means?"

"Well, sir, if you please——"

"Come, go on!"

"Well, sir, I was tracking the burglar.

Mr. Railton started, and quickly shifted the candlestick from his right hand to his left, and looked round into the gloom.

"So you mean to say that there is a burglar in the house, Merry, and you have kept me talking all this time without telling me?"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Only an amateur burglar, sir."

"An amateur burglar, Merry? I don't understand you."

"The fact is, sir, it's part of the—the new training. There is to be a robbery committed, and we're to discover the robber."

Mr. Railton comprehended.

"Oh, I see! And that is why you are out of bed. You are looking for the amateur cracksman," he said, with a slight smile.

"Yes, sir."

"But you must know that you are not allowed to break the rules of the school in this way, Merry. This kind of thing must be done by daylight only. I will excuse you this time, but you must understand that if you leave your dormitory again after lights out you will be punished severely. Dear me! You are all wet! How did you come into this state?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"I—I think somebody must have thrown some water over me, sir."

The housemaster could not help laughing.

"Yes, I think so, too!" he exclaimed. "Go to your dormitory at once, and dry yourself, and get into bed, and don't leave your bed again to-night."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry meekly.

And he descended the stairs, followed by the housemaster.

Mr. Railton stood at his door till he had seen Tom Merry enter the Shell dormitory, and then he went into his own room.

He would not have returned to bed so quietly had he known what happened the moment Tom Merry had closed the dormitory door.

Tom stepped into his own quarters unsuspiciously, and pushed the door shut, and the next moment a strong pair of hands dragged him over, and he went down upon the floor with a bump and a gasp.

"What the——"

"You, you, you bounder!" said the voice of Lowther, in a tone of great satisfaction. "Now hand over the cricket-bat."

"Monty Lowther!"

"Yes, that's me! Where's the cricket-bat?"

"Are you off your rocker? What cricket-bat?"

"The one you have stolen."

"You must be dotty. Let me get up."

"Not until you have handed over the loot."

"The loot! Oh, you ass! Do you take me for the burglar?" demanded Tom Merry, comprehending the error Monty Lowther had fallen into at last.

Lowther chuckled

"Do I? Well, I think I do, rather! I was awake when you left the dormitory, and I got out of bed to wait for you to return. Now I've got you!"

"Look here, you ass——"

"I've got you, Tommy, my son. Where's the cricket-bat?"

"What the dickens do you mean by jabbering about a cricket-bat?" exclaimed Tom Merry, wriggling spasmodically under the weight of Lowther.

"Well, Ferrers Locke suggested a cricket-bat as the article to be stolen; but if the loot's in any other form, I don't mind. Anyway, hand it over!"

"You unutterable ass!"

"Are you going to hand over the loot, you enterprising burglar, or shall I bang your head on the floor?" demanded Lowther.

"I've got no loot. I tell you——"

Lowther fastened a strong grip in Tom Merry's curly hair.

"Then bang goes your napper."

"Hold on! I tell you——"

"Where's the loot?"

"I haven't—ow!"

Tom Merry's head went with a smart tap on the hard floor of the dormitory. He gave a gasp, and Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Now then, Tommy, hand over the loot! That's only a warning of what's to come, you know, if you don't hand over the giddy loot."

"You shrieking fathead, I'm not the burglar!"

"Won't wash!"

"I went out on the track as a detective, idiot!"

"Look here, is that honest Injun?"

"Honour bright."

"What a beastly sell!" growled Lowther, rising to his feet. "Did you have any luck? What makes you so beastly wet?"

"Somebody chucked water over me."

"Ha, ha! The burglar?"

"No, another detective, I think. It wasn't you or Manners?"

"Manners is fast asleep in bed, and I've been here all the time."

"Then it must have been one of the rotters belonging to Study No. 6. Blake, I expect. I thought I knew his cackle."

Tom Merry explained the incidents of his burglar-hunt as he rubbed himself dry with a towel.

Lowther gave a whistle.

"And who was the chap Figgy was tracking?" he asked.

"Fatty Wynn—I mean, that's a secret!"

"Ha, ha! Well, there's three of us in the secret now, and to-morrow I suppose Fatty will be cornered and made to own up?"

"Well, yes; I suppose we shall manage it between us," said Tom Merry. "There'll be three of us to share the credit; but Blake will be dead out of it, that's one comfort. Let's get to bed."

The chums of the Shell were quickly in bed and sleeping; but Figgins had not found it so easy to return to the arms of Morpheus, as we shall see.

CHAPTER 8.

Deadwood Bill.

FIGGINS ran swiftly across the quadrangle after leaving Tom Merry. He was anxious to get again on the track of Fatty Wynn. But the Welsh partner in the Co. had vanished. There was no sign of him in the quadrangle, and as Figgins reached the window of the New House, the gleam of the stars on the glass showed that it was closed.

Figgins halted with a breath of dismay.

Fatty Wynn had gone in, and, doubtless, returned to the dormitory; and, of course, he would have fastened the window behind him.

For the first time Figgins realised that he was shut out.

With a faint hope that Fatty Wynn might have neglected to fasten the window, Figgins tried it with his hand. But it would not move. Fatty Wynn had evidently been careful not to leave such a trace as an unfastened window behind him.

"My only hat!"

Figgins gave a low, prolonged whistle.

He was shut out.

He had been so careful to conceal his tracking from Fatty Wynn that there was not the slightest chance of the Welsh junior knowing that he was out of the New House. If Fatty had heard any suspicious sounds while in the School House, he would naturally think they had been made by School House fellows.

Would he miss Figgins from his bed when he re-entered the dormitory?

It was not likely. The dormitory was dark, and the junior would go straight to his bed and turn in, in all probability.

"My only hat!" said Figgins, in dismay. "This is a go, and no mistake!"

He was shut out of his house, and had no means of entering. He had the choice of waking the house, or of waiting in the quadrangle till morning. Waking the house meant inviting punishment—and severe punishment. Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, was not so kind-hearted as Mr. Railton. He would visit severe punishment upon any junior outside his house at such an hour of the night. Figgins knew that, and he gave up the idea of knocking up the house as soon as it crossed his mind.

He thought of throwing stones up to the dormitory window, but abandoned that idea also. Fatty Wynn would be the only junior awake there, and to call upon him for help was too humiliating to the amateur detective who had set out to track him down.

Figgins could imagine how Wynn would chuckle when he learned that Figgins had been tracking him, and had been shut out of his house in consequence. The laugh would be up against the amateur detective, and the story would get all over the school.

That was clearly impossible.

"By Jove, I shall have to stay out all night!" muttered Figgins. "It's a nice warm night, and I don't mind that so much, so long as it's not spotted in the morning. I wonder if I could climb up this water-pipe, though, and get into a study window?"

Figgins looked up at a water-pipe that ran close by one of the Sixth Form study windows. He cocked his head thoughtfully and considered.

"That's Sefton's study," he murmured. "I could get in, I think—but what then? Beastly habit of the Sixth Formers, having a bed-room and study combined. Otherwise—but it wouldn't do for Sefton to catch me. I should catch something, too, if that beastly bully found me getting in at his window. I—my hat! The window's open!"

Figgins stared at the window in amazement. He noticed now what he had not observed at first; that the lower sash of the window was up.

If the window had been a little open at the top there would have been nothing remarkable in it. But for the lower half to be wide open pointed unmistakably to one thing—that Sefton was not in the study.

Figgins jumped to conclusions at once.

Sefton was a leading member of the so-called "smart set" at St. Jim's, and Figgins knew that on more than one occasion he had paid surreptitious visits to the Golden Pig in Rylcombe, where he had the valuable acquaintance of a set of sporting gentlemen. It was just like Sefton to go down to the public-house after dark, and Figgins had very little doubt that that was what had occurred now. Sefton had used the water-pipe which Figgins was thinking of using for an ascent, for the purpose of descending from his room into the quad.

Figgins grinned as this dawned upon his mind.

"My hat! What a screaming joke to go in and shut the window!" he murmured. "It would be a lesson to Sefty about going to public-houses in the middle of the night, and disgracing the school."

The junior looked round quickly.

The hour was late, and if Sefton were really absent, he might be returning at any moment. But as yet the quad was dark and deserted.

Figgins stepped to the thick pipe and took a firm grip upon it, and drew himself from the ground.

Whether Sefton were absent or not, this was Figgy's only chance of getting into the house without giving the alarm, and he did not mean to lose it.

The climb was easy enough to an athetic junior like Figgins. In less than a minute he had his knee on the narrow window-sill and was peering into the open window of the room.

The bed was back in an alcove, and he could not see whether it was occupied or not, and he had to risk it.

As quietly as he could he climbed into the room and stepped on the carpet—and as he did so, he knocked against a chair, and sent it with a clatter to the wall.

Figgins held his breath.

If there were a sleeper in the room that sound could not have failed to awaken him. But no movement came from the bed.

The junior breathed freely.

He stepped closer to the bed and looked at it. It was untenanted, and had evidently not been slept in. Sefton was absent.

Figgins chuckled as he turned to the window again and pulled down the sash. As he did so he glanced out, and caught sight of a dark figure running across the quad towards the house.

"Sefton, by Jove!"

The figure halted under the window.

Figgins wondered if Sefton had seen him climbing the pipe. He undoubtedly saw that the window was closed. What thoughts were passing in the Sixth Former's mind Figgins could not guess; but he awaited developments.

A couple of minutes passed, and then a head rose into view outside the window.

Sefton had climbed the water-pipe. He peered at the closed window, resting one elbow on the sill. It was not easy to get on the sill when the window was closed down, and the senior hung in a very uncomfortable position while he tried to make out what was in the room, through the glass.

Figgins grinned. He had stepped back into the shadow of the bookcase, fumbling in his pocket as he did so. His hand came out with a steel-handled penknife in it.

Sefton glared in at the closed window, and listened nervously. Finally he tried to raise the sash. This was not easy from outside, but he succeeded at last, and it was slowly pushed up.

Sefton's head and shoulders came in at the window.

"Is anybody there?"

The senior's voice was nervous and husky.

Figgins did not make a sound. He stood motionless in the deep shadow.

"Is anybody there?"

Still dead silence.

Sefton climbed further in at the window. He had probably seen Figgins climbing the pipe, and was fearful of encountering a burglar.

He dropped upon his feet inside the room with a grunt of relief.

"Hands up!"

The words came from Figgins in a deep bass growl, quite unrecognisable as the voice of the chief of the famous Co.

Sefton started convulsively and stared round him.

Figgins's hand was levelled, and the steel-handled penknife was in it, and Sefton could just catch the dark outlines of a form and the glimmer of steel, and he had not the slightest doubt that he was facing a burglar and a levelled revolver.

"Hands up!" rapped out Figgins.

The ridiculous command would have put Sefton on his guard if he had had a little more nerve. The "Hands up!" was a reminiscence of some blood-curdling American fiction Figgins had lately read, and he was rather pleased with this opportunity of working it off, as it were.

"I—I—please don't shoot!" said Sefton, in trembling tones. "P-p-p-please don't shoot!"

"Hands up, you scallywag!" growled Figgins, still in the style of Deadwood Bill. "If you don't elevate them hands, stranger, I calculate I shall plug you right in the—the—the pulsometer!"

Sefton put his hands up in the air. They were trembling so



Fatty Wynn was an ideal shopper in providing a feed. And as the juniors left the tuck shop it was obvious he knew what was what.

that Figgins could see them wagging in the gloom as Sefton held them up.

"Where do you keep your pile?" growled Figgins. "Hand over the ducats, stranger. You hear me talk!"

"I—I haven't any ducats," stammered Sefton. "We—we don't use ducats in England. It's—it's a foreign coin."

Figgins nearly burst out laughing.

"Well," he growled, "I guess I kin raise some spondulics in this hyer shebang, stranger. Just you keep still, and keep your hands above your head till I come back. You hear me?"

"Yes, yes."

"Mind, if you put down your hands or make a sound I'll come back and fill you up so full of holes you'll pass for a colander."

"I—I—I'll remember."

And Figgins, alias Deadwood Bill, passed out of the room and closed the door. The next moment he heard the key turned in the lock. Sefton had taken the first opportunity of placing a locked door between himself and the midnight marauder.

Figgins chuckled. He bent down and put his mouth to the keyhole.

"I say, Sefton!"

There was a gasp of astonishment inside the study.

"Who—who—who is that?"

"Never mind who it is," said Figgins, disguising his voice. "What I want to know is, how many sorts of an ass do you call yourself?"

"Who is it?"

"Oh, Deadwood Bill!"

"You—you—is this a j-j-j-joke?"

"Yes," said Figgins, mimicking, "it's a j-j-j-joke. Rather a good j-j-j-joke, don't you think so, Sefty?"

And Figgins dashed away as he heard the key turning in the lock again. Sefton looked out into the corridor with a furious face; but Figgins was gone.

Chuckling softly to himself Figgins entered the Fourth Form dormitory. Silence and stillness reigned there. He crossed quickly to Fatty Wynn's bed. The Welsh partner in the Co. lay there, fast asleep, with a smile of contentment and a smudge of pudding upon his plump face.

Figgins grunted.

"He's been on the gorge again! I might have guessed that he would bone something to eat! But, by Jove, how am I to recover the stolen property, and show it up to Ferrers Locke, if that young cormorant has eaten it?"

It was a puzzle Figgins was too sleepy to answer then. He tumbled into bed, and was the last of the amateur detectives of St. Jim's to go to sleep that night.

CHAPTER 9.

Missing Property.

"WHERE'S my bat?"

Tom Merry asked that question as he looked round his study after dinner the following day.

"Blessed if I know," said Manners. "Why don't you remember where you put your things?"

"I do remember," said Tom Merry warmly. "I left it standing in this corner."

"Then look in the corner."

"I have looked, but it isn't there."

"Then probably you put it somewhere else," said Monty Lowther. "Unless," he went on sarcastically—"unless there was a burglar last night and he boned your cricket bat."

Tom Merry gave a jump.

"My bat! You've hit it!"

"Hit what?" asked Lowther, staring at him.

"There was a burglar—a sham burglar, of course. You remember Ferrers Locke suggested a cricket bat as the article to be stolen. The giddy criminal has been at work in this study."

The chums of the Shell were interested at once.

The bat was not in the study, and Tom Merry was certain that he had left it there, so the explanation seemed to be the only possible one. Manners had heard all about the happenings of the previous night, and knew that Fatty Wynn had been in the School House, but the secret was being kept from Study No. 6. The Terrible Three intended to share among themselves the honour of tracking down the amateur burglar.

"But I thought you said Fatty Wynn didn't come upstairs," Manners remarked.

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"I certainly thought he didn't," he replied. "He might have slipped up, I suppose, when I was jawing to Figgins."

"In that case it might have been Fatty who chucked the water over you."

"It might have been."

"Then he has got the bat," said Lowther. "The question is to track him down and get it back. It's no good telling Ferrers Locke that we've discovered the criminal without having clear proofs to offer."

"Certainly not. And he's coming to-day, after school, for us to report progress," said Tom Merry. "We must have the criminal brought to justice by then."

"Luckily it's a half-holiday, and we have time to work in," said Manners thoughtfully. "But, I say—are you certain that Figgins wasn't rotting? He may have been stuffing you with a yarn, and may have been the burglar himself."

"Oh, no, he said honour bright," said Tom Merry confidently. "Besides, I had my eye on him all the time he was in the School House. It was somebody else."

"Then we've got to track down Fatty Wynn. Come along!"

"Hallo!" said Blake, coming out of No. 6 as they passed the door. "You seem to be in high spirits? Have there been any enterprising burglars at work?"

"Yes; my bat has been boned."

"Ah, good! Now's our chance to distinguish ourselves. Have you got a clue to the desperado?"

"That's telling," said Tom Merry loftily.

Blake laughed genially.

"Oh, I'm not asking for information," he said. "It's each fellow on his own in this case, and the successful bounder reports to Ferrers Locke this afternoon. I shouldn't wonder if the burglar remains undiscovered."

"Not likely!" said Lowther.

"H'm, so you've got a clue. Hallo, Gussy, wherefore this excitement?" exclaimed Blake, turning aside as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came running upstairs.

"I have heard news, deah boys."

"Get it off your chest, then."

"There was a burglary in the School House last night."

"How do you know?" asked Tom Merry curiously. "I've only just missed my cricket bat."

"I'm not talking about any old cwicket bat," said D'Arcy. "There has been a burglary below-stairs, in the housekeepah's quartahs."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "That's interesting. The burglar has been making a clean sweep. What has he taken?"

"A pudding has been taken from the lardah. I have just heard it fwom hearin' Kildare speak to Dawwel on the subject. The house-dame has complained to Mr. Wailton, and he has told the pwefects to look into the mattah."

Tom Merry whistled.

"By Jove, that's rotten. The ass ought to have kept off that sort of thing."

"You see, the lardah was locked, and the burglah busted it open with a meat-axe, and bwoke the beastly lock," said D'Arcy. "Then he scoffed the pudding. It was goin' it wathah stwong, wasn't it?"

"By Jove, yes!"

"My word!" said Digby. "I rather fancy I can guess who the burglar was. There's only one chap at St. Jim's who would think of burgling a pudding."

"Yaas, wathah! It was Fatty Wynn."

The Terrible Three made a simultaneous grimace. It was not pleasant to have their clue become common property like this.

Blake was looking amazed. He seemed to be more surprised than the others at the news of the raiding of the larder.

"I say, there's some mistake about this," he exclaimed. "It can't have been Fatty Wynn who burgled the larder."

The others stared at him.

"Why not?" said Herries. "It is just his mark. If he took anything he would take something to eat."

"Yes, but——"

"But what, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus.

Blake pursed his lips and was silent. He had the best of reasons for believing that Fatty Wynn was not the selected burglar, as he had the black slip of paper still in his pocket. He was distinctly puzzled.

"As a matter of fact," said Tom Merry, "we were already on the track of Fatty Wynn. I was up last night, and I know that Wynn was in the house."

Jack Blake started.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes. The rotter soused a lot of water over me in the dark——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle, Blake; it wasn't very funny," said Tom Merry. "The secret seems to be getting out now, doesn't it? All of us here know that Fatty Wynn is the burglar, and Figgins knows it too, so of the original eleven, only Kerr and Skimpole don't know the culprit——"

"Hold on," said Blake. "I never said I thought that Fatty Wynn was the burglar."

"But I tell you he was in the house last night."

"He may have come prowling round as a detective."

"Then who was the burglar?"

"That's what's got to be found out."

And Blake put his hands in his pockets and walked away whistling.

CHAPTER 10.
Figgins Scores.

"MERRY!"

The Terrible Three stopped at the sound of Mr. Railton's voice. The housemaster was looking very grave.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"When I found you out of your dormitory last night, Merry, I pardoned you a thoughtless frolic," said Mr. Railton. "I have since heard of an occurrence that cannot be passed over so lightly. The larder downstairs was raided last night, and a pudding taken away. The lock was actually broken. Were you guilty of this?"

"No, sir."

"This sort of thing is more than a joke," said the housemaster. "I am afraid it will be necessary to punish the culprit. But I need only your word that you were not the guilty party. I know you would not tell an untruth. There was evidently someone else out of bed last night. You may go."

The chums of the Shell looked decidedly uncomfortable as they walked on.

"Looks as if there is going to be a fuss," remarked Lowther. "Fatty Wynn might have had more sense, really. We shall have to be careful not to give him away. Luckily, Railton seems to have no idea that it might have been a New House chap."

"Yes, that's lucky. Ferrers Locke will keep it dark, too, when we tell him—as we must when we have the proofs of Fatty's guilt."

"How are we going to get them?" asked Manners. "My belief is that Fatty will have bolted the pudding."

"That's it," said Lowther; "and how the deuce is a detective to follow up clues if the criminal has swallowed them all?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, unless he bolted the whole pudding last night, he won't have had a chance to-day, for Figgins has been watching him like a cat watching a mouse."

"Good! Then there's a chance yet."

The chums went out into the quadrangle. The first person they saw was Figgins crossing the quadrangle, with his eyes fixed straight ahead. The Terrible Three followed his glance, and caught sight of Fatty Wynn, hurriedly leaving the gates of St. Jim's with a parcel under his arm.

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled.

"By Jove! do you see that?" he muttered.

"Figgy is on the track."

"And so are we. Come on!"

The chums of the Shell hurried after Figgins. But they were nearly a minute behind the New House junior in reaching the gate, and when they looked out into the road, both Figgins and Fatty Wynn had disappeared.

Monty Lowther gave a grunt of disappointment.

"Lost them!"

The chums went up and down the lane, looking into the trees on either side, but the two New House juniors had vanished.

They were not far away, though quite out of sight. Fatty Wynn had plunged into the trees immediately on leaving the school grounds, and he hurried down towards the river with a grin of satisfaction on his face.

"I've done them," he murmured. "Figgy has been watching me about all day like a cat, but I've dodged him at last. Now I shall be able to have a feed in peace."

The Falstaff of the New House settled down under a shady tree on the bank of the wide, gleaming river, and placing his parcel on his knees, proceeded to unfold the paper.

Half a large pudding was revealed. The other half had been bolted by Fatty Wynn the previous night, immediately after

the burglary, but since then he had had no opportunity of tasting his treasure undiscovered.

Fatty plunged the knife into the pudding. The next moment he gave a startled yelp, as a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

"Got you!"

Fatty Wynn looked up with a gasp into the grinning face of Figgins.

"Figgins!"

"That's me," said Figgins placidly. "And I've caught you. I was on your track last night, my son, and I nearly had you then."

"You—you were?"

"Exactly. Now I've tracked you down, and discovered you in possession of the stolen property. I knew you had boned something to eat, and I've heard all about the missing pudding. Thou art the man."

"Oh, don't rot. I'm awfully hungry."

Figgins chuckled.

"Well, you may gorge half of it," said he. "Leave half, and that will do to show up to Ferrers Locke. You'll be ill if you eat it all, anyway."

"Oh, no; there isn't much here."

"About three pounds, I suppose."

"Well, that isn't much when a chap's really hungry, and it's getting near tea-time, and we have nothing but some saveloys and cheese and a cake for tea."

"Oh, wire in!" said Figgins. "You can go on till I say 'when.'"

On the principle that half a loaf was better than none, Fatty Wynn "wired into" the pudding, and it disappeared at an amazing rate under his attack.

Figgins said "when" ruthlessly, and the fat boy of the New House, with a sigh, wrapped up the remains of the pudding, and Figgins marched him off to the school. At the gates of St. Jim's he encountered the Terrible Three. In a moment the chums of the Shell were round the New House juniors.

"Got him!" shouted Lowther.

Figgins glared at them.

"Got whom?" he exclaimed. "What are you talking about, Monty Lowther? This is my burglar, and I've captured him."

"That's all very well——" began Lowther hotly.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Oh, it's all right!" he exclaimed. "We must play the game. Figgins has captured the burglar. He was only a little ahead of us, but there it is! It's no good growling."

"Just what I said," assented Figgins. "When Mr. Locke comes——"

"Hallo, boys!"

It was the voice of Ferrers Locke, who was entering the gates as Figgins spoke. The juniors turned round quickly and raised their caps.

"Good-afternoon, sir," said Figgins affably. "We're all ready to make the report, sir."

"Indeed?" said Ferrers Locke. "I shall be glad to hear it. I have promised Mr. Railton that he shall hear it, too, as he is interested; so all of you come to his study."

And the detective walked on and entered the School House. Monty Lowther gave a low whistle.

"I say, we can't tell the yarn before Railton," he remarked. "He's in a wax about that pudding, you know."

"Oh, he'll be upon his honour," said Tom Merry confidently. "As a matter of fact, this will be a good opportunity for Fatty to own up without getting into a row. Come on."

CHAPTER 11.

Two of Them!

FERRERS LOCKE was standing in Mr. Railton's study, talking to the housemaster, when the amateur detectives of St. Jim's presented themselves in a body. They were all there but Skimpole, who was following up a clue in a distant quarter. The detective greeted the juniors with a pleasant smile as they came in. Figgins was at the side of Fatty Wynn, who carried a small parcel in his hand. Blake had a cricket-bat under his arm, and a rather curious grin on his face.

"Well, my lads," said Ferrers Locke, with a smile, "I am ready to hear your report. You may speak freely before Mr. Railton."

"Certainly," said the housemaster, with a smile. "I shall make it a point to forget anything I hear on the present occasion, if it tells against any of the boys present."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom Merry. "We carried out your suggestion, Mr. Locke. There were eleven slips put into a bag, and one of us drew the black one. That one had to act the part of a burglar, and commit the robbery. It was done, and the crime has been detected. I may say that most of us were on the track, but Figgins captured the burglar."

"Figgins!" exclaimed Blake hotly. "What do you mean, Tom Merry? Figgins hasn't captured the burglar!"

"Yes, he has."

"And I tell you he hasn't! How do you make it out?"

"Fatty Wynn was the burglar."

"Fatty Wynn?"

"Yes. He burgled the larder and scoffed a pudding."

Mr. Railton's brow grew stern for a moment.

"So that was you, sir?" he said, looking at Fatty Wynn.

"Yes, sir," said Fatty meekly. "It was part of the game, sir. I thought I ought to make the burglary as near the real thing as possible."

"I am afraid you went too far. Nothing of that sort must occur again."

"Oh, no, sir."

"I say!" almost shouted Blake. "There's an idiotic mistake somewhere. What's all this piffle about Fatty Wynn and a pudding? I don't care if he scoffed all the puddings that ever pudded. I was the real burglar!"

"What!"

"I was the real original article. I drew the black slip, and I burgled Tom Merry's cricket-bat."

And Blake bumped the bat on the floor with a noise which left no doubt upon the subject.

Ferrers Locke looked puzzled.

"There is evidently a mistake somewhere," he said. "You said you drew the black slip, Blake. Where is it?"

"Here it is, sir."

Blake drew the slip from his waistcoat pocket and handed it to the detective. Ferrers Locke took it, and looked at Fatty Wynn.

"And you drew a black slip, Wynn?"

"Certainly, sir. Here it is."

Fatty Wynn handed over an inky slip of paper. There was a general exclamation among the juniors.

"Then there were two slips," said Ferrers Locke, laughing, "and two burglars."

Every eye turned accusingly on Monty Lowther.

"You fearful ass!" muttered Blake angrily. "You did that!"

"It was all Gussy's fault," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Yes, it was," growled Lowther. "It went all right the first time, but we had to do it over again because you played the giddy ox. I had some ink on my fingers, and I suppose that's how it happened."

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"Never mind," he said. "There has been rather a bungle in some respects this time, but the next attempt will show an improvement, I hope. But one word; all future efforts must be made in the daylight. No more burglaries, and no contravention of the rules of the college. That must be distinctly understood."

"Certainly, sir," said the amateur detectives.

And they filed out of the study. Blake bumped the cricket-bat into Tom Merry's ribs.

"There's your bat!" he remarked.

"Ow!—you ass!"

The juniors went their way. The moment he was outside the School House, Fatty Wynn opened his little parcel and finished the pudding. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the only one who lingered in the corridor. There was a thoughtful frown upon the face of the School House swell. Ten minutes later, the door of the housemaster's study opened, and Ferrers Locke came out. D'Arcy stepped to meet him.

"Pway, Mr. Locke——"

The detective stopped with a good-humoured smile.

"Well, D'Arcy?"

"I have been weflectin' on this detective business, sir," said D'Arcy, "and I have come to the conclusion that I am weally cut out for the pwofession. What is wequired for a detective is a fellow of tact and judgment, and these are my stwong points. I have turned the mattah ovah in my mind, and wesolved to offah you my services as an assistant."

The detective smiled.

"I shall obtain the permish of my governah, of course," said Arthur Augustus, "and I shall be able to join you in town as soon as I have pwepared a suitable wardwobe. What do you think of the ideah, Mr. Locke?"

"It is a good one in some respects," said Ferrers Locke gravely. "But your talents would be thrown away in the detective profession. You must not forget that you will one day be required to take your seat in the House of Lords. A fellow of your intellect will be exactly in his proper place there, and that is what you must look forward to, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, wathah!" said the swell of the School House thoughtfully. "I had ovahlooked that important mattah. Pewwaps I had bettah wemain an amataur in the detective line."

"Yes," agreed Ferrers Locke; "perhaps you had."

And, needless to say, D'Arcy did!

THE END.

(A splendid double-length tale of Tom Merry next week. Please order your copy of "THE GEM" LIBRARY in advance. Price One Penny.)

The Second Long Complete Tale. **Grand New Series.**



"THE VENGEANCE OF THE BEY!"

The Adventures of ALAN WAYWARD.

CHAPTER 1.
"That Urbane Old Turk."

"I COME to take my leave, Excellency," said Angus Hamilton, the British Consul at Van, as he advanced down the audience-hall and greeted, with a somewhat stiff bow, the bobbing, wizened face of Hadir, Bey of Bitlis.

"It is most gracious of you," replied Hadir, as he motioned to an attendant to bring coffee. "It is then, unhappily, true, this rumour that has reached me of your departure? After the pleasant relations that have distinguished our intercourse, I shall indeed miss you!"

For all that he was fairly seasoned in the civilities of the East, Angus Hamilton was more than a little staggered by so stupendous a perversion of the truth; for, during his five years residence in Van, his official duties had kept him in a constant state of thwarting, and being thwarted by, the wily governor of Bitlis.

Moreover, recent events had placed them in a more or less active, if unexpressed, personal hostility, since they had both been rivals for the hand of the pretty Irish widow, Mrs. Adair, whom Alan Wayward and the Sheikh Jelaluddin had rescued from the clutches of Kasim, the bandit of the Sipan Dagh.

And to add to the tension between them, the unscrupulous Turk had twice tried to forward his suit by the primeval process of capturing the lady, whose release had only been effected, with many disagreeable consequences to the bey, after much trouble.

But though amazed by the bey's cool impudence, Hamilton was too well versed in Oriental sociabilities to show it.

"You are most kind," he said genially. "I shall, myself, think with regret of you; and so, I am sure, will my wife."

"Your wife?" echoed Hadir. "You are then about to be married? Let me offer my congratulations!"

"A thousand thanks," replied Hamilton. "Yes, I am about to be married—in fact, the ceremony is fixed for Monday next, and we start at once for my new post at Trieste, on the Adriatic."

"And the lady?" purred the bey. "May one be permitted——"

"Oh, I think you have met her!" said Hamilton, in his most gracious tone. "Mrs. Adair, you know."

"A charming woman," said Hadir, without so much as a blink. "I congratulate you again. The news intensifies my sorrow at your departure."

"I am afraid," said Hamilton, with a sudden change of tone, "that I must cloud our last interview with some unpleasant official business. You will remember that I was obliged to forward an official report to my ambassador at Stamboul over that unfortunate affair when an Englishman, Alan Wayward, was kept a prisoner in your castle. They seem to have taken quite a serious view of it at Yildiz, and my courier this morning brought me orders to personally hand to you the Padischah's firman, recommending you to lay down your office here, and take up the function of vali at Julamerik. I am really inconsolable over it."

"Julamerik!" echoed the bey, in accents of pleased surprise, which left nothing to be divined of the rage at his heart over this unexpected degradation. "How charming! It is but half a day's march from my summer residence on Mount Arnos. And as vali, I shall enjoy a little repose, after my strenuous work in this province."

"I am delighted that you are pleased," said Hamilton, rising to take his leave. "Well," he gasped, as he rejoined his dragoman outside, "that urbane old Turk takes the cake!"

"If Hadir be urbane," said his dragoman drily, "he plots mischief."

And indeed, at that moment, there was no more angry a man in all Asia than Hadir Bey. For a long half-hour after the consul had left him he sat on his divan, with face contorted and nails dug into his palms, cursing Alan Wayward and the sheikh, cursing Hamilton Effendi and all Englishmen, cursing the Padischah and his own ill-luck, till, words failing to satisfy the tempestuous impotence of his rage, he flung his favourite pipe to the ground and danced on it in a frenzy, till a splinter of the bowl piercing his slipper sent him back to his divan with a jump and a yelp.

By the time he had caressed his wounded foot enough, his rage had simmered down into a seething desire for vengeance. And for the next two hours suitors for justice pleaded in vain for an audience, while the bey sat squatting with his chin in his hands, brooding over plan after plan by which he might get even with those who had baffled him.

What aggravated him more than anything was the fact that all those he particularly wanted to get at were gathered together in Hamilton's house at Van. Faithful to his sworn word to the Sheikh Jelaluddin, he had sent Mrs. Adair by safe escort thither, and he gnashed his teeth as he thought what a fool he had been to send her to the arms of his rival.

His spies had brought him word that Sifaze, the runaway slave-girl, was there also, and that Alan Wayward and the sheikh had arrived the previous evening at the Consulate on a pressing invitation from Mrs. Adair herself, to attend the wedding.

And Hadir Bey's experience of Alan and the sheikh was sufficient to make him wary of tackling them anywhere; so that the problem of tackling them, as well as the ex-consul and his betrothed, was one that taxed all his imagination. But he was an ingenious and crafty individual, and in the game of casting far a net unseen he had few equals between the Bosphorus and Pekin.

At the expiration of two hours, a smile of satisfied cunning was wreathing his lips, and, sending an officer to dismiss all suitors, he shambled off to his private apartment, and summoned his confidential slave—a Nubian mute, of huge stature and most repulsive ugliness.

"Get thee to the Bingol Dagh," he said, as he sealed a

letter. "In the heights above Changeri, where Idrin had his palace, thou shalt find Black Mourad, him who used to be chief of the captains of Mustapha, the slave-merchant of Foliat. There hath he made himself a nest in the mountains, and taken to himself Mustapha's wives and all his goods, and, with the greater part of the merchant's following, defies the government and preys on the caravans. Thou shalt run day and night, and pause not, and deliver this letter into the hands of Black Mourad himself, and bear me back his answer."

The mute salaamed, and a few minutes later was speeding northward, while the bey, with many a silent chuckle, arrayed himself for a visit of ceremony, and was driven to the quays, where he took his barge of state and was rowed swiftly towards Van.

"His Excellency the Bey of Bitlis!" announced the consul's servant, throwing wide the door before the resplendent Hadir.

"Oh, the impudence of him!" murmured Mrs. Adair to Alan Wayward; while Hamilton and the sheikh exchanged a swift glance, and two Turkish officers from the garrison of Erzingan rose and stiffly saluted.

They had all seen Hadir Bey in various and trying circumstances, but they had never seen him so completely at his ease, so genially a-bubble with good-fellowship, as he appeared now.

"Ah, you English!" he said, playfully wagging a heavily-jewelled finger at Hamilton. "You move so quickly, and do everything so much in one gasp, that we poor, slow Turks have no time to collect our wits. So I have had to take the pleasure of finishing our conversation by running after you."

"Delighted to see you, anyhow," said Hamilton cheerily. "I think you know everyone here, so we need not stand on ceremony. What can I do for you, bey?"

"I am a man who bears no grudges," said the bey, with a deprecatory smile and a bow that included, in one superb gesture, Alan and the sheikh, Hamilton and his betrothed. "Yet in the little differences that have once or twice arisen between us, I am obliged to recognise that I have appeared in a favourable light neither in the beginning nor the end. And now that I go to seek a well-earned repose at Julamerik, I should be inconsolable to think that I leave behind me so many good people with a bad impression. So I come to ask you, gentlemen, to join me at dinner to-morrow night, that we may eat and drink together, and part with the memory of a jovial evening blotting out all past disagreeableness. You will come, effendi—n'est-ce-pas—and you, Mr. Wayward; and you, sheikh? And if you gentlemen"—turning to the officers—"will join us, it will make our pleasure more perfect!"

"Sure, and what have I done?" murmured Mrs. Adair.

"Alas!" said Hadir, with a profound bow. "It is to be what you call a bachelor supper, to feast the gallant effendi."

"Faith, and it's a funny kind of bachelor you are!" said Mrs. Adair, irrepressibly.

As the bey had unfolded his invitation, not a doubt existed in the minds of his hearers that he projected some treachery. But when he included the officers, and evaded Mrs. Adair's oblique request, even the sheikh was moved to a feeling of remorse at having so ill-judged him. For they knew well that if treachery were his object he would never dare to carry it out with such inconvenient witnesses as members of the staff from the army corps at Erzingan.

"We shall be delighted," said Hamilton cordially; and the others echoed his sentiment.

"Then that is understood," chirped the bey, his face wrinkled with smiles. "To-morrow, Tuesday night, you will all join me at dinner at seven o'clock?"

"When he lays himself out for it," remarked Hamilton, as from the verandah they watched the bey regain his boat, "that urbane old Turk can make himself remarkably agreeable; and they say he's got the best chef outside of Paris!"

Nor did Hadir Bey, when the next evening came, belie either his new-found reputation, nor that of his cook. And so well did he succeed in entertaining his guests that, by midnight, they were unanimously of the opinion that he was the best host and the most forgiving soul in Asia Minor. No one knew better than Hadir Bey when he had an audience fairly in hand and brimful of sympathy.

"Come," he cried, when the last chimes of the midnight hour had died away; "I will show you what you have never seen in your lives!"

He turned to a slave and whispered some directions, and then led his guests through the palace into a small room, giving on to a wide verandah, which overlooked a wild and savage garden. The moon was nearly full, and the garden, flooded with the soft light, showed up as clearly as against the daylight. On all sides it was walled around, and divided into sections by double rows of iron bars and beams. Trees of all kinds grew there, and shrubs and tall grasses. In the centre it was cut by a deep defile, through which a torrent splashed in a hundred cascades.

As they looked from the dark wall running at right angles to the verandah where they stood, form after slinking form came crouching, stretching, leaping, snarling, into the avenues formed by the double rows of iron bars, till the moonlight flashed pallidly against an ever-moving multitude of tigers, lions, leopards, panthers, pumas, bears.

"Hoo! The beautiful beasts!" said the sheikh.

"What a hunt if they got loose!" murmured Alan, with gleaming eyes.

"Wait," said the bey, with a smile; "you will see something very curious!"

As he spoke, down the lines between each row of double bars a negro ran, igniting with a flaming brand the torches set at intervals.

For a moment, finding themselves encircled on all sides by the flames, the wild beasts fled roaring back to their dens. But finding these closed and belching forth fire from the waving torches of slaves within, they commenced racing round and round their several enclosures, till the sight of the slaves, running also between the double rows of bars, seemed to vitalise their attention and give meaning to their pace.

In five minutes between sixty and seventy beasts were padding stealthily alongside the dozen slaves hunting them; now hurling themselves at the stout iron bars with a terrific roar, now standing up and jabbing through a clutching paw with an angry snarl. It was a sinister, yet fascinating scene. But of all those looking on it, none seemed to enjoy it so much as Hadir Bey, who was chuckling with evident enjoyment as his guests hung over the verandah rail, twenty feet above the wild beasts.

"What's the little joke, Excellency?" asked Hamilton, catching the sound of the bey's mirth.

"He, he, he!" sniggered Hadir. "It occurred to me that if I was, like the late Idrin Pacha, always to live up to the sad reputation bestowed on me, how very much I could surprise you all—and enjoy the placid memory of a vengeance entirely sated!"

"We should be a tough lot to throw to the beasts, bey!" laughed Alan, quite at his ease.

"You think so?" grinned Hadir. "You shall see; and have an experience. Do not move."

As he spoke, he had stepped back and pushed a lever on the wall; and, before his guests could realise what had happened, the part of the verandah on which they were had glided in grooved beams a good twelve feet out, and was hanging directly over the snarling, roaring, racing beasts in the garden beneath.

"That is only the commencement," said the bey, still with his most pleasant smile, as his guests swung round and faced him across the abyss. "The real thrill comes only if I touch this lever—so—and the raft on which you are sinks inch by inch—so—till no one can hear your cries for the great roaring of the beasts, who, if you go down far enough, will leap up and pull you into the arena."

"Excellency," shouted one of the Turkish captains, as the raft sank down to a good six feet beneath the level of the verandah, and a leopard, springing, missed its edge by a paw's-breadth, "this little joke of yours has gone far enough. If it goes further, I shall have acute indigestion!"

But it evidently was going further, for inch by inch, with a slow regularity of motion, the planks were still sinking. Neither the officers nor Hamilton were tall enough to see the bey, but Alan and the sheikh, from their great height, had a full view of his face, and gathered from its expression of anxiety and terror, as he strained and tugged in vain at the jammed lever, that he had taken on more than he could execute.

Yet, meanwhile, the beasts were gathering below, and the raft was sinking in spite of all Hadir's efforts. Never designed for such a weight, the machinery was not equal to lifting the raft with its freight of five persons, and it seemed as if they were inevitably doomed.

"Good heavens!" cried Hamilton, as a puma clawed at the frail bridge and Alan booted it off. "Do you think he could have devised this treachery?"

"It's an accident," said Alan; "and a jolly uncomfortable one! But there's no doubt that the bey is as frightened as a man well can be. His rotten machinery won't work, and, with the best intentions in the world, he's sending his beastly menagerie a thundering fine cold supper! Ugh, you brute; be patient!" This last as a leopard sprang upward, its snarling maw a foot from Alan's leg, its claws fixed in the woodwork. But a well-directed kick sent it also howling earthward. Yet still the raft descended.

"What the dickens is Hadir doing?" said Hamilton, wiping the beaded sweat from his brow. "Why doesn't he get the cages open and the beaters up with those torches?"

"The cages are open, effendi," said the sheikh calmly; "and behold the cunning of Hadir."

He pointed in the direction of the cages, whence there poured into the garden a flock of lambs and kids, bleating plaintively over their disturbed slumbers. On the instant, the roaring beneath the bridge was hushed, and, one by one, the great beasts drew away, creeping on their now terrified prey. And at the same moment, down from the verandah above, a couple of ropes were flung, and Hadir's face, green with terror, peered over.

"Dash me, if he isn't counting us!" said one of the officers.

"Well, he ought to be feeling a little solicitous about the tally," grinned the other.

"Do not wait!" screamed Hadir, as he hurled over three more ropes. "Hold tight; the slaves will haul you up!"

There was a roar and the hurtling of a tiger's heavy body through the air, as the five men swung into the open. But "Stripes" was a second too late, and the legs of the climbers showed a remarkable agility in tucking themselves aloft, knees beneath the chin.

In two minutes they stood safely on the verandah, looking at Hadir, who was trembling like a leaf, while the perspiration ran down his yellow cheeks like oil down parchment.

"Oh, my friends!" he gasped. "What a fearful predicament! The machinery was not powerful enough to lift you up. If you had been devoured, I should never have forgiven myself!"

"All's well that ends well!" said Hamilton. "But if you have a brandy-and-soda going, bey, I shall feel the better for it. You promised us a thrill, and, by Jove, we've had it!"

"You see, I had the contrivance made to amuse myself," explained the bey, as he led the way inside, "by feeding the beasts, and making them jump for it. And I did not mean to let it down more than a foot. But it ran away with your weight, and, even when the lifting lever was on, continued to sink."

"Excellency," said one of the officers, "you owe us a revenge for this. We, the hunted, should turn the hunters. You ought to turn some of those beasts loose, and organise a chase for us."

"You anticipate me," said the bey. "It was the last surprise I was reserving for you. I have two splendid wild-boars, very savage, very swift. I propose to have them transferred in cages to-morrow to the mountains above Kotur, in the region of the Ala Dagh, and on Thursday to let them loose and hunt them. If you will all join me, we shall have a royal chase, beginning at dawn on Thursday morning, and lunching in the mountains, where I will send a tent and the provisions, and where, if Hamilton Effendi will permit me, I will make amends for my seeming discourtesy to his betrothed yesterday, by asking Mrs. Adair to preside at our feast."

"She will be delighted, I'm certain," said Hamilton.

"Then I may count on you all?" asked Hadir genially.

"I should rather think so," said Alan. "A boar-hunt is just the thing I'd like to have a hand in."

"Then I will call for you at Van on Thursday, an hour before dawn," said the bey, as he bade his visitors good-bye; "and we will ride out together to the rendezvous."

He stood watching them till their voices faded in the distance, then he turned and entered his private apartments, to find awaiting him his Nubian mute, who, with an eloquent gesture, pointed to a door leading to an ante-room.

"Black Mourad has come?" asked Hadir Bey.

The mute nodded, and withdrew, and for a moment Hadir stood as if irresolute.

"Ugh!" he said at last, with a shudder. "It is better so! If they had been devoured, my own accursed soldiers would have flung me after them. Moreover, with the other plan, I shall enjoy a more protracted pleasure, and at no risk."

For a long two hours he sat closeted with Black Mourad, and when the bandit, departing in the early hours of the morning, left grinning by the secret door giving on to the back of the palace, he led with him a pack-mule, bearing two heavy sacks of gold; while Hadir Bey, squatted on a divan, rubbed his birdlike hands, and blinked the yellow lids of his monkey-eyes in a rapture of anticipated delight.

CHAPTER 2.

The Boar, the Breakfast, and the Brigand.

IT was a merry cavalcade that gathered on the hillside above Kotur in the April dawnlight of the following Thursday. The forest was green with the first fresh verdure of spring, the air was electric with a gentle breeze that was crisp with the snow of the peaks, and scented with the faint, dry odour of the pines.

"We will leave our horses here," said Hadir, dismounting, "where the servants can tend them, while erecting the tent. What would Mrs. Adair like to do—to wait here, or follow the hunt?"

"Oh, faith, I'm going to follow the hunt!" cried the Irishwoman.

"You're not afraid?" said the bey, in evident admiration.

"Afraid!" she echoed. "Did you ever hear of a Sligo woman who was afraid of a pig?"

"Then you must have your saddle changed to a pack-pony," said the bey, "for the ground is too rough for a horse."

"When are you loosing the—er—pigs?" asked Alan.

"Ugh!" grunted the bey. "You also think them little pigs! Take care, my friend, that you do not twist their tails! They have not eaten since Tuesday, and are very savage. One was turned loose two hours ago, and the other an hour later from another spot, for I feared lest they should fight, being turned loose together. Moreover, we shall have more fun in taking up their spoor with the dogs. And the piqueurs are already in front, ready to loose the hounds, when you will."

"You will do well, Mr. Alan," he added, "to tie up that noble wolfhound. He is faster than the heavier dogs, and if he gets in first, he will almost surely be ripped up."

"Oh, Clok can take care of himself!" said Alan. "He's tackled a bear on his little own before to-day; and, in any case, I'll see that he doesn't get in front too far."

"As you will," said the bey, with an eloquent shrug.

They rode forward to join the piqueurs, who stood chattering excitedly on a glade farther up the hill.

"Behold, Excellency!" cried their chief, as Hadir advanced. "The little one, who was brought in but a month ago, has gone home to Ararat, whence he came. Straight as an arrow he fled when we released him. And, following him to a ridge, we marked his passage, as he crashed through the brushwood, nor turned to right or left, fleeing with all his speed."

"Ye are kitchen scullions and no piqueurs!" cried Hadir angrily. "Ye should have placed a cordon on the ridge to frighten him back. Have ye let the other go also?"

"Nay; but with him we profited by experience," answered the piqueur, "turning him many times, till he rushed into the forest that goes towards Meshoor. And there he roams now, for to the east he cannot go because of the river, nor can he climb the cliffs northward, nor descend the precipices westward. Wherefore, your Excellency shall surely find him there."

"Then we shall have good sport," said the bey, turning to his guests, "for he is a big brute, and fully grown."

"Loose the dogs!" he cried to the piqueurs. "And see that ye keep your lines well extended and your eyes and ears open, in case he should try and break through on some side track."

Clok was already on the scent, urged on by Alan and the sheikh, the former armed with a short stabbing spear and a formidable hunting-knife, the latter despising all weapons but his steel-shod staff. The rest of the party, besides carrying spear and knife, were accompanied by piqueurs bearing carbines. It was in vain that Hamilton tried to persuade Alan to take a bearer and carbine.

"No fear!" replied Alan. "It's the hand-to-hand business that constitutes the sport for me! A good tussle, with a spice of risk in it, is worth any amount of your beastly breech-loaders! To sit safely at a distance and take a pot-shot on a certain sight against a brute that hasn't a chance of getting back at you, always struck me as a misnomer for sport. I'd as soon take part in the tame-fowl battue they call sport at home."

"But they are then mad, your friends!" cried one of the officers, as Alan and the sheikh swung ahead after Clok, who had forged forward in front of the six great Danish hounds that constituted Hadir's pack; while Mrs. Adair, with Hamilton running at her stirrup, guided her pony in and out among the trees, in a futile attempt to keep up with them.

"All Englishmen are mad!" panted Hadir. "And as for the sheikh, do not all men say that he is a prophet?"

"To attack a boar with one dog and a spear! Hoo!" grunted the captain from Erzingan. "That is your Englishman all over. He does not care what he gets up against; he just runs at it. And, sapristi, it is wonderful how often they win through."

"Being a mere Turk," laughed his comrade, "I shall stay behind the dogs."

The boar had evidently gone far and fast; but Alan and the sheikh were hard as nails, and as fleet and tireless as the grey mountain goats, and they were far ahead of the rest of the party, when they caught sight of the huge beast forcing his way through a thicket, his great lumpy shoulders crashing down the young trees as if they had been matchwood.

Clok, lifting his head, gave tongue in a deep-throated bay, that was taken up far behind by the hoarse replies of the boarhounds; and as if the sound lent him a fresh fury of energy, the hunted beast in front charged up the hill,



Alan Wayward tip-toed softly to the tapestry, and, pushing it aside, stole in upon the sleeping Turk.

and leaving the thicket and breasting a precipitous ascent, plunged into a gorge beyond.

"Save thy breath!" said the sheikh, suddenly dropping into a long swinging walk. "The gorge hath no outlet, and our quarry must turn to bay at the head thereof. And thou wilt need all thy force to smite that chest of his."

"I'll get him under the eye," said Alan, as they entered the gorge, and he restrained Clok's impatience.

"Hoo! Stand firm!" cried the sheikh, as a sound of rending trees was followed by a fierce, short grunting. "He scenteth the trap, and returneth!"

"Heel, Clok! Heel!" Alan shouted.

The wolfhound, a-quiver in every limb, obeyed sullenly, its red tongue panting against its great white fangs.

"By Jove, he's a monster!" said Alan, as the boar next instant burst into the glade where they were standing, stopped dead, and backed slowly against a great boulder, its ruff bristling, his wicked little eyes blood-flecked and angry, its head swaying low, waiting the chance to rip open the enemy with one shoulder-swung up-cut of its cruel tusks. "Keep your hand on Clok's collar, sheikh," said Alan, as he gripped his spear, and eyed the furious, hunted monster fifteen yards away.

The sheikh nodded, his eyes gleaming. He loved a good fight, on level terms or at long odds, at any time; but of all things that made his heart rejoice, it was to see his beloved disciple take on a desperate encounter, in which all the risk was against him, with that air of easy, business-like assurance

Alan, with his spear in rest, strode forward till he was within five yards of the monster's heaving shoulders. Then with one spring he had cleared twelve feet, landed crouching, and driven forward his spear in a deadly lunge at the beast's eye.

It was a good and true blow, and had nearly proved fatal. But quick and surprising though it was, the cunning, unwinking eye of the boar had been quicker, and as the steel drove forward it had swung its head aside, so that the blade instead of striking beneath the eye severed the ball at the outside corner, and ploughed a great gash along the bone to the ear.

Before Alan could recover his spear to thrust again, the half-blinded brute, with a hoarse grunt of rage, charged down on him. In the narrow space in which they were there was no room to jump aside, and Alan, putting on his best sprint, fled down the glade, the boar thundering at his heels. A less swift runner had been assuredly overtaken, for the gallop of the maddened, vengeful beast was fast as that of any racer.

Staight down towards the sheikh Alan raced, gaining a foot in every stride, and gathering his spear in his hand. Then, at two paces from the sheikh, he braced back and halted, throwing himself round, with spear poised to thrust. And at the same instant Clok, breaking loose from Jelaluddin's grasp, passed his master swift as the shadow of a crow's flight, and hurled himself straight at the boar's throat, just as Alan's arm lunged out in a blow that carried all his weight. But Clok's assault had caused the beast to swerve, and the blow Alan had aimed between and above the eyes struck the boar in the flank, and by the force of its violent swerving dragged Alan full length forward on the ground.

Grunting and further maddened by this new wound, the boar, regardless of Clok's worrying teeth, turned and charged on Alan. For a moment it seemed that nothing could save him from being gored by those terrible tusks. But the sheikh was as nimble of foot as he was alert of mind, and as the beast, seeing nothing but its victim, was within two paces of him, Jelaluddin, dropping on one knee, drove the steel-point of his trusty staff fair and square into the boar's uninjured eye.

Frenzied with pain, the brute turned round and round, tearing at the ground, and striving to beat Clok off by pounding him against the rock. But Clok hung on, worrying deeper and deeper; and Alan, drawing his hunting-knife, and creeping warily nearer and nearer, watched his opportunity, and with a driving, upward sweep sent the twelve inches of needle-pointed, razor-edged steel crashing through ribs and muscle fairly home into the heart.

"Hoo!" grunted the sheikh, as two minutes later they sat looking on the dead beast. "It was a very gallant fight."

"Which would have ended very badly for me," said Alan, "if it had not been for your timely aid."

"It is a very useful staff," said the sheikh whimsically. "But that last blow of thine would have surely slain the beast, had not the faithful hound turned him aside."

"I don't call that fair!" cried Mrs. Adair, as, accompanied by Hamilton she rode into the glade. "Which of you monsters killed the poor thing?"

"We all had a hand in it," laughed Alan.

"Like your confounded luck!" growled Hamilton. "Here come the boarhounds and our Turkish friends, waddling along between a precipice and an apoplexy."

"Did I not tell thee!" said the captain, with a grimace at his comrade, when the sheikh had recounted the manner of the boar's death.

"Ho, ho!" cried Hadir, with his most effusive smile. "Ye are hunters indeed! I never thought the men lived who could outpace my boarhounds, or run as ye have run this last two hours. And what a coup de grace! And with but one dog! Hoo! Young man, I beg thy leave to keep the head, that I may have it mounted on a silver shield, whereon shall be inscribed the record of this hunt."

"Delighted to let you do the shield part of it, bey," said Alan, "and so join you in presenting the trophy to Mrs. Adair."

"Naturally, it is that it may hang where that lady may ever recall this day that I ask it," said the bey; and the suggestion of double meaning that filtered into his voice, though escaping the others, brought the sheikh's cold, unfathomable eyes into sudden scrutiny of Hadir's face.

He drew Alan and Hamilton aside, as the party, at the bey's invitation, prepared to descend to the pavilion for breakfast.

"I mistrust our host," he said quietly. "Some plot is working in his crafty mind. Moreover, my staff hath thrice twitched in my fingers, which is ever a sign that others shall soon handle it, and that my hands shall presently be bound. Wherefore, if he propose any further hunting, go not, but remain with the officers from Erzingan."

"I'm not feeling particularly easy about him myself," replied Hamilton. "But I have my revolver, and at the first sign of treachery I'll draw on him at sight, and chance it. This buttered mood of his is beginning to get a touch of rancidness about it."

"I expect he's only playing up to get reinstated at Bitlis," said Alan. "He daren't give himself away before these officers. He's far too fond of his scraggy old neck. Think of the blue funk he was in last night."

"He is very crafty," said the sheikh, "and I feel the grinning of his soul, nor can he make his eyes meet my gaze. Yet, though I have searched my brain, I cannot divine in what net he hopeth to entoil us."

"In a mare's nest, probably," laughed Alan.

"If thy wit were as apt as thy tongue, thou wouldst be wiser than thy years," retorted the sheikh drily. "Moreover, what I may not see for myself, I see most plainly for thee, beholding thee, and that soon, bound and raging, and fasting from all food."

"Then will I make a right good meal now," answered Alan.

"Inshallah!" snapped the sheikh gloomily.

But even his forebodings evaporated before the sight of the spread awaiting them in the tent in a shady glade above Kotur. The bey had evidently spared no pains to make his breakfast of farewell outvie even his bachelor supper.

"If I have done him wrong," the sheikh whispered to Alan, whose eyes were roaming contentedly over the laden board, "behold, thou shalt fast, and make amends for me."

They all sat facing the entrance of the tent, with its view over Kotur of a vista of green valleys, bounded in the far distance by the silver glimmer of the waters of Lake Urumiah. Mrs. Adair sat at the pacha's right, with the captain from Erzingan at her other hand, who in turn had for neighbour the sheikh, while to the left of the pacha, Hamilton, Alan, and the other officer sat.

"You'll be spoiling Clok," said Alan, as Hadir Bey for the twentieth time threw a plateful of dainties to the dog.

"The noble hound!" purred Hadir. "I have never before seen a dog that would tackle alone a boar at bay." And he flung it again a couple of juicy cutlets.

But as if Clok had heard his master's objection, he left the cutlets unnoticed, and stood suddenly alert, with ears pricked forward, and a low mutter in his throat.

"Nay, heed not thy master!" cried Hadir, throwing another cutlet. "Good meat never spoilt good dog-like thee."

Clok's only answer was a sudden bristling of the ruff, and a savage bay that rang from echo to echo of the hillside. Alan sprang to his feet, his keen eyes sweeping the hillside below them; but Clok, with one bound, was over the table, and had hurled himself on the shoulders of a man creeping under the free way at the rear of the tent. As though the howl of the hound's victim were a signal, the tent seemed to grow suddenly alive with Nubians and Arabs, who, springing from under the free way, leapt in groups of four or five on to the astounded guests.

At the first rush, Hamilton had drawn his revolver and pointed it straight at the bey. But his hand was knocked up, at the same time as he saw the bey himself suddenly seized, and with his head enveloped in a sheepskin, and a cord slipped over his elbows, dragged backwards and outside the tent. The two officers and Mrs. Adair followed in the instant. The sheikh, laying about him with his staff, was tripped up and overwhelmed by ten great Nubians, his staff wrenched away, and, with his hands and feet securely bound, was hauled out after his host.

Hamilton meanwhile had emptied his revolver, and was now standing on the table, hurling with deadly dexterity plates, decanters, bottles, and knives at the crowd raging about him; and cheered by the sight of Alan, who, tackled by ten negroes, had throttled two in the first rush, cracked the skulls of two others by bashing their heads together,

SANDOW'S BOOK FREE!

Just published, a new book showing how Sandow won Health and Fame, beautifully illustrated, and explaining how every man and woman can obtain robust health and perfect development by exercise.

SPECIAL OFFER.

To every reader who writes at once a copy of this book will be sent free.

Address: No. 17, SANDOW HALL, BURLEIGH STREET, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

and, unable to reach his battle-axe, which with the other arms had been piled outside the tent, had seized one negro by the ankles, and was using him as a flail. As the sheikh fell, Alan succeeded in sweeping his tacklers aside, and rushed to the aid of Hamilton, who was being hard pressed. Hurling his human club into the thick of the crowd, he snatched a sword from the body of one of the men Hamilton had shot, and charged home. Before the fury of his onset and the wide, deadly sweep of his sword the Nubians for a moment drew back.

"It's Black Mourad's gang from Bingol Dagh!" panted Alan, as he backed against the table. "We've only a second, Hamilton, so be slippy. I'm going to pretend to stumble and turn the table over. You jump and bolt for the entrance. They've not touched the horses yet. Mount Hadir's, and ride like greased lightning for Hassein's place, and trail these brutes down. I'll cover your escape. Here they come! Off you get!"

He lurched backward as he spoke, and the table, jerking under the impact, seemed to be the cause of Hamilton's wild leap. Next moment the consul was outside the tent and racing for the horses. A roar went up from the brigands in the tent, who hurled themselves in pursuit, only to be brought up sharp, as Alan, stretching wide his arms, lifted the table bodily up and dashed it in their faces. But the effort overbalanced him, and before he could recover twenty men had piled upon him, bearing him to the ground, and a smack from a rifle-butt on the side of the head sent him suddenly to sleep.

When he recovered consciousness, he was bound hand and foot and gagged, and lying tied across a mule. In a circle round him, halted in a deep defile, he could see the forms of the bey, the sheikh, and the two officers, similarly bound, and Mrs. Adair and Sifaze, who had rejoined her mistress, sitting bound in a litter. But of Hamilton there was no sign. And it was apparent from the leader's words that he had got clean away.

"That Ingeliz dog of a consul," Black Mourad was saying to his fellows, "will raise the country around us. We shall have Hassein's people at our heels, and the soldiery from Erzingan, and the zaptiehs from Bitlis. Wherefore, we will separate. You, Rusuf, will take ten men and bear the officers to Arib Dagh, and treat for their ransom. I myself will take Hadir Bey for I have old accounts to settle with him. You, Melir, will take the rest of the prisoners to the place you know of, where I will rejoin you later."

Then, Mrs. Adair and Sifaze being transferred to one covered mule-cart, and the sheikh and Alan thrown into another, the parties moved on their several ways, and the flap of the covering being let down, neither Alan nor the sheikh could divine even the direction in which they were travelling.

CHAPTER 3.

Mirame Goes Hawking.

"HI!" cried Mirame, Princess of the Haideranli, as the grey falcon she had loosed from her wrist rose in the air, outdistancing the older hawk her father had started at the same moment, and swooped, swift as an arrow, on the heron six hundred yards away. "He is faster than thine, my father, and as sure in his swoop."

Hassein nodded, but made no answer. His gaze had suddenly quitted the flight of the falcons, and was fixed on the long slope of shale, where the Ala Dagh ran down to meet the lower spurs of the ridge above Meshoor. Mirame's bright eyes followed the direction of her father's gaze, and the whole troop, consisting of some forty-five captains, reined back their horses, and sat like statues, searching the shimmer of the haze that lay still on the lower slopes.

The aged chieftain of the Haideranli—a clan that, wedged in between the Russian, Persian, and Turkish frontiers, had guarded its independence for two thousand years—turned to the two falconers at his elbow.

"Recover the birds," he said. "We ride down the slopes towards Meshoor."

"What makest thou, my daughter," he added, turning to Mirame, "of the specks that move down there."

"It is a mounted Ingeliz," said Mirame, in a tone of conviction; "for he wears a white suit and a pith helmet, and after him run Nubians. I can distinguish their yellow turbans, and their faces rise dark from their tunics."

"Twenty-two of them," added one of the officers.

"I will teach the black dogs to hunt in my territory!" said Hassein. "Fedrov, take thou twenty men, and spur through the woods. Gain the rear of those Nubians, while I ride forward, and see what this incursion means."

Fedrov and his twenty cavaliers swept down through the forest, backs erect, bridles loose, and at full gallop, as easy and unconcerned of the breakneck ground as if they had been cantering gently on the flat.

"It is Hamilton Effendi of Van!" cried Mirame, who, with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, had kept pace with her father, as he had led the charge straight down the hill.

"After them, and drive them on, Fedrov!" commanded Hassein to his officers, as the Nubians halted on sighting his approach, and fled back down the hill. "Let none escape!"

Hamilton it was, and in distressful condition. He had had a hard fight to win his way through the pursuit, for though he had gained the bey's horse, by the time he had thrown a bridle over it, and was in the act of saddling, half a dozen of the brigands had raced up. He had only time to slip loose a stirrup-leather, with the iron attached, and leap to the charger's back, before they were on him. But a stirrup-iron, with four feet of stout leather behind it for swinging purchase, is a formidable weapon at close quarters, especially when wielded by a desperate man from the vantage height of a horse's back. The Nubians, despite the traditional thickness of their skulls, went down before it like corn beneath a sickle, and though Hamilton got two nasty flesh wounds from their glancing swords, he won through. He bound his wounds as best he might, while galloping for all he was worth, with a horde of the brigands in pursuit. But the loss of blood had more than once made him near to fainting, and by the time he had covered the thirty odd miles that lay between the interrupted breakfast and Hassein's relieving charge, he was almost as near foundering as was the gallant horse who had borne him so well.

But Hamilton came of a stark stock, and in soul and skin was tough as an old sea-boot. His story was soon told, and Hassein's brow grew dark as he heard it, while the face of his daughter alternately paled in fear and flushed in wrath.

"We will ride to the rescue of my Lord Alan, O my father!" she cried.

Hassein hesitated a moment, then shrugged his shoulders.

"As thou wilt," he said, "though I like not that thou shouldst play the man in acts of war. Yet," he added, with a grim smile, "I would fain that thy hand should release him who hath twice borne help to thee, for verily my cheeks tingle still with the memory of the royal gift he made of the ransom thou didst deliver so disdainfully."

"I see your captains have collared those blackguards who were after me," said Hamilton. "What do you intend doing with them?"

"Justice," said Hassein laconically; and he made a sign to one of his falconers.

They rode forward to meet the joined forces of the captains, who were driving before them the disarmed Nubians.

"We ride after Black Mourad," he said, addressing the former, "who hath the English lord, Alan, prisoner, and others also. Thou, Fedrov, will wait here till Nalik come with cord. Then thou wilt see that all the twenty-two of them are hung in a row, on the borders of my territory above Kotur; and about the neck of each of these ruffians thou shalt attach a writing, saying simply, 'By the justice of Hassein this man died thus, because he violated the territory of the Haideranli in an act of brigandage.'"

He swept on with his troop, with Mirame and Hamilton at either hand, and quite heedless of the wailing and moaning that followed him. Guided by the consul, it was easy enough for the hillmen, expert in every form of woodcraft, to take up the traces of Mourad's gang from the trampling round the raided tent. The trail followed the long spur of the mountain which skirts the valley east of Van till it reached the ruins of Mahmudish, overlooking the swift torrent that rolls between the slopes of Arnos and the gorges of Areb Tagh. Here the tracks separated, one crossing and recrossing the stream towards Julamerik, as if purposely to blind the trail, and finally being lost altogether. The other, however, kept on towards Mount Arnos, and bore all the signs of a hasty and recent passage.

"Follow—follow!" cried Hassein, as some of his officers reined in, discussing the significance of the lost trail southward. "We will return later to that."

He urged his horse forward amid the giant pines, the whole cavalcade riding as silent as ghosts across the thick carpet of pine-needles. After half an hour's ride, rounding a great shoulder of the hill, they clattered full tilt into an encampment of the ten men Mourad had sent on with the two officers, the Nubians sitting at their ease round their bound captives, and enjoying the remnants they had raided from Hadir's tent. The surprise was complete, and, though the brigands sprang to their arms, they were sabred to a man before a shot was fired.

The officers, released from their gags and bonds, speedily cleared up the mystery of the lost trail.

"Black Mourad, with a good sixty followers," explained one, "is to follow the course of the stream, down the

valley of the Buhtan, and fall in a sudden onslaught on Hadir Bey's caravan. The slaves were discussing this plan, as thou didst surprise them. It is rumoured that Hadir takes much gold to Julamerik, and his caravan, with all his household and his goods, should reach there to-night. And with Mourad went Hadir himself, the English lady and her servant, and the great Englishman who slew the boar, and his companion the sheikh. If you will, we will ride with you."

"You are welcome," said Hassein.

Down the gorge, beneath the black pines, they took their way, and, dividing forces at the river, one half kept the right bank, while the other half followed the left. Nor were they long before they came upon the tracks, lost up-stream, only, however, to lose them again as they came to a ford, where the trail left by Mourad's men was merged in, and indistinguishable from, the heavy tracks left by Hadir's caravan. But indefatigable Hassein would hear no counsel of delay.

"I will not return home," he said, "till that young man be found and released."

"Yet," said one of the officers, "the brigands would scarcely venture to attack a caravan, so well armed and guarded as Hadir's would be, in open daylight, on the high road."

"I know not," replied Hassein, urging on his horse; "but I intend to make sure."

"Behold, a runner!" cried Fedrov, who had rejoined the troop below the ruins of Mahmudieh. "We may get some news from him."

"Whence comest thou?" demanded Hassein, as the runner was surrounded and led up to the chieftain.

"From Hadir, Vali of Julamerik," was the unexpected answer.

"For one more lie," snapped Hassein, "thou losest thy tongue! Hadir is captive to Black Mourad."

"I lie not," replied the man. "It is true that Hadir was captive to that foul brigand; but while his guards ate, he loosened himself from his bonds, and, gliding unperceived into the woods, escaped; and even now he is with his caravan at Julamerik, and hath sent me with messages to Van and Bitlis, to demand troops of the governors there, who shall release others, friends of his, whom also Mourad made captive."

"By Heaven, I see it all now!" growled Hamilton. "That weazel-brain of his hatched out the scheme. He is in league with Mourad, and, with him, prepared this villainy to obtain possession of Mrs. Adair, and wreak his vengeance for his lost position on Alan, Jelaluddin, and myself."

"Thou art sure of this?" murmured Mirame, to whom the remark had been made.

"I'd stake my life on it," said Hamilton. "Moreover, the sheikh suspected him all along."

"Then keep thy counsel," whispered the girl. "I know my father. He will not quit the object he has in view, and will follow Mourad now till he learns for certain that the prisoners are not there."

"Which way went Mourad?" asked Hassein.

"When the vali escaped," answered the runner, "the brigands were travelling by the lower gorges westward of Mount Arnos, and Hadir thinks they will wait the night, and then, travelling by the bank of the Tigris, gain Changeri and their fastness in the Bingol Dagh."

"Then thither we will go after them," said Hassein, in a tone that invited no argument.

"Thou hast enough, with forty swords, to master a herd of sixty slaves," said Mirame, in a voice that had suddenly become remarkably tired and listless. "Give me, therefore, an escort of ten, that I may return to Ala Dagh. And if these two gentlemen of Erzingan will honour me with their company, I will do my best to amend the outrage they suffered in the territory of the Haideranli."

For a moment Hassein gazed at her in wonder. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Thou—tired!" he said, in chilling irony. "But as thou wilt. Fedrov and nine men escort the Lady Mirame. And you, gentlemen"—turning to the two officers—"will you ride with me, or will ye to the welcome awaiting you in my castle on the Ala Dagh?"

"Another day we will ride with thee," said the senior of the officers; "but to-day we may not refuse the honour the Lady Mirame confers on us."

"It is well!" said Hassein, with an irony he scarcely took the trouble to veil. He was never over fond of Turks, and the officers of the garrison at Erzingan he was accustomed to refer to as "those downey Frenchy dandies." "See that thou dost not loiter, Mirame; and thou, Fedrov, keep sharp thy eyes. There may be bands of these brigands scattered about."

Mirame, with her little troop, watched him lead his forty swords at a gallop down the gorge, and then turned to Fedrov and the two Turkish officers with her most engaging smile.

"Gentlemen," she said, "I am afraid I have obtained your services under false pretences. I ride not yet to Ala Dagh, but to Julamerik. This tale of Hadir's seems to me all false, and designed, indeed, to the end it has achieved, in turning my father from the pursuit on to some blind trail. With my Haideranli I should have no fear in visiting that wolf in his own house. Yet I would fain see his face when he looks on you and the Effendi Hamilton. Moreover, if it be necessary to make him prisoner, your uniforms will save my father from much correspondence—a thing that ever puts him in ill-humour."

"So we ride to Hadir!" laughed one of the officers, grimly enough. "And if your surmise be correct, Lady Mirame, be assured he shall not go unpunished."

"That I will see to," said Mirame haughtily.

But Hadir was too old a rat to be caught in a trap, whose setting gleamed so sharply. Long before the troop reached Julamerik, the vali's spies had brough in news of its coming and its composition, and it was a Hadir almost weeping with joyous relief that greeted Hamilton and the two officers, and grew exultant over the tale of Hassein's pursuit. Nor did he so much as show surprise when Mirame begged to be allowed to pay her respects to his mother, and Hamilton showed a distinct curiosity to be shown over the vali's new residence. But though Mirame thus visited the harem, and Hamilton scrutinised every corner of the selamlik, while the officers interrogated various zaptiehs, not a trace could be any of them find of the missing captives, nor glean a word or sign to confirm their suspicions.

Dissatisfied and unconvinced, they were forced at last to make their adieux, Hadir, ironically obsequious, begging them to stay, and allow him to send a messenger to Hassein, praying him to pass by Julamerik on his return with the released captives.

"Thou art too kind!" mocked Mirame in reply. "Yet I pray thee trouble not. When Hassein rides, he rides not in vain. And, perchance, he will visit thee, ere thou thinkest." And, leaving Hadir somewhat perturbed by this ambiguous prediction, she rode slowly away, taking the main road, that would lead her west of Mount Arnos, and into the route followed by her father.

Hadir grinned exultantly, as he marked the path they had pursued, and ordered his horse to be saddled.

But his grin had been far otherwise, could his sight have overtaken the troop, as they swung out of the main road, and pushed in between the trees, threading the forest that spread its green verdure over the round flank of Mount Arnos.

"That fox thinketh he hath outwitted us," said Mirame; "but he knoweth not that I learned from his women that he hath his hill residence on the slopes overlooking the headwaters of the Buhtan. Thither we ride, for, if he could go down the stream to Julamerik, so also could he send up stream. And it is in my heart that we shall find news of my lord Alan in that hill palace."

But, though they rode fast and hard, they were travelling along the curve of an arc, while Hadir was galloping along its base. And when they reached the walled palace, it was to find it alive with guards, its gates shut, and its turrets mounted, and all admission sternly refused. It was in vain the Turkish officers cajoled or threatened.

"Our consigne is formal," said the officer of the gate. "No one is to enter without the signed authority of the vali. If ye would seek him, ye must go to Julamerik."

"Wilt thou, at least, bear a message from me to thy prisoners?" asked Mirame cunningly.

"Thou talkest in parables, lady!" said the officer. "I have no prisoners!"

Mirame gritted her pearly teeth together, and withdrew, baffled and puzzled.

"Perhaps, after all," suggested Fedrov, "Hadir is not such a scoundrel as we think."

"Behold the proof!" cried Mirame triumphantly, as, bounding round the angle of the wall, Clok came running up, leaping at her hand, and whining and with many an eloquent glance to the great walls, and many a short, imperious yelp, told, as plainly as dog-language can, that his master was there within.

"Take pencil and paper," Mirame said, turning to Hamilton, "and write in thy English tongue. This shalt thou say: 'From Mirame to her lord, Alan. Greeting. I send this by thy faithful hound, which, perchance, shall find thee. Having but a few gentlemen with me, I have traced thee hither, despite Hadir's lying deceit, to find the gate shut and the walls armed. I ride to return with thy regiment, and pull Hadir's palace about his ears, till I find thee!'"

Slashing off a length of her scarf, she wrapped the missive in its alternate folds of green, crimson, and gold, and knotted it round Clok's massive, studded collar.

"Go, good dog!" she cried. "Find him—seek him! And a whole lamb stuffed with chestnuts shalt thou have!"

Clok bounded off through the gathering darkness, and Mirame dashed eastward with her troop, towards the road by which they had come from Kotur. But, once out of sight of the palace, and beyond hearing of the derisive cheers that had followed them, she reined in her horse.

"Fedrov," she said, "here I intend to remain till night falls. Send thou thy fleetest horse to Ala Dagh, and bring me hither the regiment of my lord Alan. Rifles let them bear, and scaling ladders. When it is dark, we will return to the outskirts of the forest, and watch the castle, lest under cover of the night that crafty fox, Hadir, bears his prisoners to another hiding-place."

And so, for many hours, Mirame kept vigil for her lord.

CHAPTER 4.

Clok Proves an Expert Postman.

THE western windows of Hadir Bey's summer residence overlooked a delightful garden, gay with flowers, green swards, and fountains, shaded by giant cedars, and by a hundred avenues of acacia and laburnum and flowering passion-vines that spread like an open fan from the central window of the terrace. It was of great extent, and, enclosed all round by a thirty-foot wall, formed the park where the ladies of the household might take their walks in perfect seclusion, for there was neither entrance nor exit from it, save by the verandah that gave directly into the harem.

At the extreme south-western angle of this garden rose a small pavilion of white marble, whose heavy oaken door, with its great bolts, and its window with its screen of bars, had gained it the name of the "Pavilion of Penance," it being the resort reserved by the genial Turk for such of his wives who, from time to time, indulged in nagging, or in other vapours destructive of the peace in his household.

But Hadir's women-folk were at present lodged in Julamerik; and, at the moment when Mirame was despatching her messenger to the Ala Dagh, the bey had entered the pavilion, and was smiling sardonically into the faces of Alan Wayward and the sheikh, who, bound and gagged, lay at some distance from each other on the tiled floor. The two had been borne thither, as Mirame had divined, up the headwaters of the Buhtan River, Mrs. Adair and Sifaze preceding them; while the waggons in which they had journeyed to the river had been driven off on a blind trail westward by Mourad and his gang.

"He laughs best who laughs last!" Hadir chuckled, after he had feasted his eyes with the sight before him. "Your friend, Hassein, I have sent on a wild-goose chase to the Bingol Dagh; Hamilton Effendi is my prisoner at Julamerik. None know that ye are my honoured guests!"

"What have you done with Mrs. Adair, you treacherous dog?" growled Alan inarticulately through the scarf muffling him.

"The lady is safely bestowed in my harem," said the bey pleasantly. "And to-morrow, when the necessary formalities have been concluded, I shall make her my wife! And this time, my poor friends, ye will not be able to do what you call 'shove your oar in.'

"I have suffered much from you both," he went on, his mocking, courteous tone suddenly charged with a rasping, snarling bitterness; "and, by the beard of the Prophet, ye are going to pay for it, pain for pain, piastre for piastre! Once ye broke into my harem, and took away the Ingeliz lady; for that ye shall suffer the bastinado. Once, again, ye plotted against me and made me prisoner, and, by torture of famine and beating, made me again release the lady the wit of my lieutenant had recaptured. For that ye shall also suffer hunger and thirst, not for three, but for seven days, and be flogged with rods thereafter. Many of my men also ye slew, and because of thou, dog of an Ingeliz, am I degraded from being a bey, and sent to this accursed spot as a vali. Wherefore, ye also shall be degraded, and for the rest of your lives, with shaven heads and beards, and blackened faces and bodies, ye shall work in chains as slaves quarrying stone, and whippings and small food shall be your fare!

"Moreover, since ye did make me pay even five thousand pounds for a little bread and the freedom of a slave, so shall ye taste no food nor drink, not even after seven days, till each of you has paid a like sum! Wherefore, in your turn also, reflect thereon!" he concluded, with an exultant laugh.

Then, shambling away, he departed, cackling, and drew to the door, and shot its heavy bolts.

For a good quarter of an hour the two lay as Hadir had left them, fearing that he might suddenly return. But the silence without remaining unbroken, Alan suddenly sat up, slipped his arms from his bonds, and removing the gag, laughed silently at the sheikh, who was similarly engaged.

"I was awaiting thy signal to arise and spring on him," he said.

"Thou didst not, as I, see the guard without," answered the sheikh.

"It's a bit of luck that he didn't examine our bonds," laughed Alan.

"His eye was full of the vanity of his evil," said the sheikh contemptuously. "Also, I think he lied when he said that Hamilton Effendi was prisoner, else how had Hassein news of our plight?"

"We're in a tough hole, anyhow!" said Alan gloomily. "I've no doubt that he's managed to put old Hassein off the scent, and if he keeps him off it, I'm jiggered if I know how we're to escape from this!"

"Hast thou so faint a heart?" jeered the sheikh. "Verily, I rejoiced to hear that he had turned aside the old grey falcon. For, of a truth, Hassein would well enjoy abasing thy pride a little, after thou hast twice humbled him in releasing his daughter, and a third time shamed him by spurning the ransom offered. Yet, wouldst thou really win his daughter for wife, no better means thou hast for exalting thyself in his eyes than to show thou art a better man than he in the looking after that which most pertaineth to his honour to look to himself."

"Speak plainly, oh, wisdom!" said Alan. "I cannot divine how Hassein's honour is concerned in this."

"Thou son of emptiness!" snapped the sheikh. "Wilt thy wit ever be as a sucked orange? Dost thou not see that seized by brigands on Hassein's soil? Wherefore, it pertains Kotur being in the jurisdiction of the Haideranli, we were much to the dignity of that chieftain to vindicate his authority and punish the evildoers, while pledging himself to our rescue."

"That I see well enough," replied Alan. "But where do we come in?"

The sheikh sniffed, and sought his snuffbox, only to spend a few minutes in earnest imprecations on the robbers who had relieved him of that indispensable treasure.

"Thou art more stupid than a hungry camel with a heavy burden!" growled the sheikh. "Is it not most patent that I, a man of much wisdom, and thou, girded with strength, even as a buffalo, may not accept help from Hassein in a stress to which we have come by our own lack of observation? But rather ought we to devise a means of seizing Hadir, and bearing him to Hassein ourselves, say to him: 'Lo, as we ate in peace under the cover of thy shield, this man's paid brigands, violating thy territory, fell on us. Wherefore, we have taken him from the midst of his armed men, and brought him to thee, that thou mayst exercise thy justice on him. So men shall not say that Hassein grows old and sleepy, and needeth a son-in-law to guard his dignity.'"

"Oh, deep in craft art thou, my father!" cried Alan joyously. "And if thou canst but devise the means, great shall be thy reputation among the Haideranli!"

"Much thou thinkest of my reputation!" jibed the sheikh. "It is the honour thou shalt gain with Mirame's father that maketh thy heart rejoice! Nevertheless, if thy muscle can bend an iron bar, as it can loosen a knot, we may yet devise the plan by which Hadir shall see Hassein ere the dawn!"

It had been by the simple outward pressure of his great muscles that Alan had loosened his bonds. Often, in the mountains, he had been bound by the sheikh, and for hours practised the swelling and the straining of wrists and arms and legs, till he had become so expert that no shackles could hold him. And when the brigands had bound him, he had lain inert, indrawing all his breath, and restraining each tendon and muscle into its smallest compass. Then, during the journey, he had little by little forced the bonds loose, till, when he was thrown into the Pavilion of Penance, it had taken him but one great effort to slacken them so far that he could free one wrist. So he had released the sheikh, and been in turn freed himself. Yet, they were too cunning and versed in danger to leave their bonds loose; and so, awaiting the visit of Hadir, they had prepared the thongs about their wrists and legs and elbows, in the semblance of knots, all of which were false, and required but a shake to throw off.

"The muscle is all right," said Alan, showing a biceps like a leg of mutton, and a forearm rounded with great rippling ridges that tapered to a wrist strong and flexible as Damascus steel.

"Then get thee to the window," said the sheikh, "and, without noise, bend the two centre bars of that grating, till they spring from their sockets! So, we shall have a way of escape and a weapon withal."

The iron bars, moulded into the wall, had been designed to baffle the weak arms of pampered women, and offered no more resistance to the long, slow pull Alan bore on them than a young larch might offer to the trunk of an old elephant.

"If all be as easy as that," said Alan, grinning, as he laid the two-inch three-foot bars down, "we have a soft job

before us! Hallo! What's all that corrobborree about?" he exclaimed, as a sudden shouting arose at the end of the garden, followed by a swift snarl, a sharp exclamation of warning, and the patter of many feet.

The garden was in the densest darkness, even such glimmer of light as came from the stars being intercepted by the heavy shade of the cedars and avenues.

"Be ready with both bonds and bars!" whispered the sheikh, as the sounds came nearer.

Then a sudden bay, clear and silvery, rent the silence, and a great form leapt at the open space in the window.

"It's Clok!" Alan almost shouted, as the great hound leapt on him, licking at his face.

"Behold! A message in the Haideranli colours, round his collar!" said the sheikh. "Take it and thrust the dog forth, and replace the bars before they find him here, and he reveals the window!"

Alan obeyed, silently and swiftly.

"Heel, old boy," he whispered, as he let Clok down—"heel and wait! On guard!"

The dog slunk off to the rear of the pavilion; and Alan, replacing the bars, slipped into his bonds, just as half a dozen slaves, with torches, rushed up, led by Hadir Bey himself.

For Clok had thrown discretion to the winds in his new duty as postman, and taking advantage of a postern gate that opened to admit a messenger, he had glided through, evaded the clout aimed at him by the sentinel, and, bolting into the palace, had taken refuge in the first room he had seen open. This was no other than Hadir's private apartment, and the door from it into the harem being open, Clok proceeded full tilt on his journey, till, reaching the verandah overlooking the garden, he was confronted by Hadir, who, furious at the clamour that had interrupted his interview with Mrs. Adair, came running out, sword in hand.

Clok narrowly missed getting his ear lopped, but he whisked aside from the descending sword in time, took a nip, en passant, from Hadir's skinny calf that sent the bey somersaulting, and, with a leap over the verandah-rail, had gained the garden, and picked up his master's trail before the pursuit had gathered Hadir to his feet.

"There he is!" shouted one of the guards, catching sight of Clok, as he crept round the pavilion.

"Rout him out!" shrieked Hadir, hopping along after them. "Rout him into a corner, and lasso him! Hurt him not, for he is a good dog, and I would keep him!"

But Clok was not one to be lassoed at ease. Before the pursuers could approach him he had darted, snapping, among their legs, and was in full flight down the darkness of the garden.

Hot-foot after him a dozen of the guards swept, while Hadir, with two torch-bearers, stood by the pavilion. The flare from the resined brands flung a ruddy glow into the interior, and Alan, defying caution, opened the missive, read its contents, and whispered the news to the sheikh.

"Hoo!" said the sheikh. "Had I had a wife like that, I would have restored the empire of Saladin!"

"Why not escape now?" whispered Alan. "In this confusion none would notice us. I could drop through the window, fell the guards, and trip up Hadir, while thou wast following me. Then, shouldering Hadir, we could dash for the verandah, and so through to the gates and liberty."

"It is too rash," objected the sheikh. "Beyond the harem and Hadir's apartment we should find the gallery full of soldiers, and all my plan would be upset."

"Thou hast not yet told me thy plan," murmured Alan.

"The bey had much gold at Bitlis," said the sheikh; "and I learnt yesterday that it was all borne to Julamerik. Yet it is sure that he will not keep it there, but will bring it here, where he hath secret dungeons none but he knows of. Also, from the presence of all these soldiers here, do I divine that he hath brought the gold already here, and only awaits the night to store it in his vaults. This, then, is my plan. To lie still here, nor excite any suspicion. Then at midnight, when the old fox steals down to store his gold, to creep forth, and follow him to the vaults. Thus we can seize him, unbeknown to any. Then thou shalt attack the wall with the iron bar, and loosen the stones, and make us a way out, whence we shall bear Hadir, too, and so come to the rescue Mirame bringeth."

"It is a good plan," said Alan, "but it depends much on chance, for we know not the way to the dungeons, and may easily mistime our going out."

"Chance is the opportunity of Allah," said the sheikh calmly, seeking the hundredth time for his snuffbox, "and therefore will it fight against that treacherous man."

"Hist! He's coming in!" whispered Alan. And drawing himself away, he fixed his bonds and lay down, just as the bolts shot back, and the bey, accompanied by the torch-bearers, entered the room.

"Remove the gag from the Ingeliz!" he ordered. And as one of the torch-bearers obeyed, he turned to Alan. "That accursed dog of thine ruineth my garden," he snarled. "He hath found his way hither, nor can my men catch him. Therefore, whistle thou to him, that he may come and be taken without hurt."

"I'll see you at your place of destination first!" said Alan angrily. "Am I a traitor and a liar like thee to cozen my faithful hound to his ill?"

"Then shall he die!" snarled the bey. "For if I may not capture him, I will have him shot."

"Shoot him, and be roasted!" growled Alan. "He were better dead than to be servant to such as thee, thou perjurer to thy own salt!"

"Silence, dog, or I will slit thy tongue!" shrieked Hadir, livid with wrath at being so flouted before his slaves. Then, turning to one of the torch-bearers, he ordered: "Get thee to the lieutenant of the guard, and bid him shoot the hound!"

But Clok mocked at the succeeding volley, as he had mocked at the throwing of ropes, and Alan laughed loud and long, as a sudden torrent of screams and curses followed the roar of the rifles, and testified to bullets that had found a billet among the hunters themselves. The bey, dancing with rage, snatched the brand from the torch-bearer and ran at Alan, waving the flaming, twisted hemp aloft, bent on dashing it in his laughing, mocking face. But he had made not more than two strides, when Clok leapt through the open door clean on to his back, dashing him face forward on the dropping torch, and leaping over him to his master's side, there to crouch panting and snarling, its great teeth bared, its eyes red and savage.

With his beard half burnt off, and an angry burn along one cheek, the bey, still gripping the torch, beat a retreat on the door, and gazed with furious eyes on Alan's shaking form.

"Thou Ingeliz dog!" he gasped, in tones suffocated with rage. "Thou and thy accursed hound shall be flayed by inches for this! Ho, guards!" he shouted; and as a dozen men ran up, he pointed to the sheikh. "Bear that man to the dungeons beneath the harem. One of you go to my room, and bear me the keys. For thee," he snarled, turning at the door towards Alan, as the guards bore out the unresisting sheikh, who had in passing bent one glance full of eloquence and rendezvous on his comrade in misfortune—"for thee, thou shalt lie in bonds this night, and roast at dawn!"

Then he went out, the bolts were shot to, and the procession moved across the garden, to halt in the black shadows beneath the verandah.

Alan, peering through the window, could distinguish nothing but the moving of the torches. But he heard the grinding of the ponderous locks, then a silence, then a re-shooting of the bolts.

Then the lights flickered a moment on the verandah, were dashed out, and darkness and silence reigned.

CHAPTER 5.

The Dungeons of the Bey.

"IT seems to me, doggie, that this is where we come in," said Alan Wayward, as he crouched, with his head on Clok's, in a thick shrubbery near the end of the terrace.

He had waited in the pavilion till every light in the palace had been extinguished, and no sound but the distant murmur of the sentries disturbed the silence. Then he had removed the bars again, let Clok down, and, after a tight squeeze, passed through himself. With a bar in each hand, he had made the tour of the garden, keeping close crouched in the shadows of the walls, lest Hadir should have left any spy about.

Several hours had gone by before any sign of life electrified his patient vigil. Then down the steps that led from the verandah there came the gentle patter of shuffling, slippered feet, and a small lantern flashed a soft spot of light through the shadows at the foot of the steps, wavered past Alan's face hidden behind the screen of bushes, and settled on the heavy-studded door that led into the dungeons.

Next moment, Hadir Bey, followed by two slaves, each of whom was staggering under a bulging sack of hide, tiptoed to the door, and paused, listening.

"Put thy sack down, Saling," whispered the bey, "and steal quietly to the pavilion. Listen if that accursed Ingeliz sleep. Yet wake not the dog, or thy head shall pay for it."

The slave obeyed, and it was at that moment that Alan had confided his opinion to the wolfhound. But even as he did so he paused. It had been his intention to jump out, fell the slave, and seize Hadir, then stalk the other slave as he returned. But it occurred to him suddenly that it might better suit the sheikh's plan and sense of retribution

if he let Hadir first store his gold, and so learnt the place of its hiding. So he lay still, his hand fast on Clok's quivering muzzle, and watched.

"They sleep!" reported Saling, gliding like a shadow to Hadir's side.

"How knowest thou?" snapped Hadir suspiciously.

"I heard them snoring, Excellency," lied the slave, so glibly that Alan barely restrained a chuckle.

"A man may feign sleep yet snore," growled Hadir.

"Yet not so a dog, Excellency," protested the slave artistically.

"Thou speakest reason," assented Hadir, in a note of relief. "Lift thy sack and follow me."

It was evident that he had taken precautions to well grease both lock and bolts, for they glided back noiselessly beneath his nimble fingers, revealing a dark cavity with many steps descending.

Bidding Clok lie still, Alan stole forward, and peered through the fringe of bushes. He could follow their progress by the twinkling of the light, till they paused before a great funnel, like a coal-shoot.

"Lay thy sacks there," said the bey. "We will return and bring all before we empty any."

Nine more journeys they made to and fro before their task was completed. Then Hadir, accompanying the slaves to the bottom of the steps, paused, and with one hand resting on the wall, waved them upward.

"Get thou, Saling," he said, his rasping voice easily audible to Alan, "to the outside, and there, shut gently the door, and stand on guard till I come. And thou, Yusuf, mount with him, and when the door is shut, slip to the bolt on the inside, and stay also on guard, till I encase the gold."

The two slaves salaamed and mounted the broad stairs together. But they had not advanced two steps when suddenly, as Hadir pulled on a lever, the steps fled away from before them, and they were precipitated into a black abyss, their shrill cries immediately stifled by the reappearance of the stairway, in response to Hadir's sudden release of the lever.

For a moment Alan rested, mute with horror, gazing at the lamp-illumined face of Hadir, who, with head cocked to one side, looked like some sinister bird brooding over its prey. Before he could move, Hadir had withdrawn to the far end of the cave, and placing his lamp on the ground, lifted one of the sacks, and inserting its mouth into the felt-lined shoot, slowly shook out its ill-gotten contents.

The rippling clink of the stream of round, golden coins seemed to afford him a particular satisfaction, to judge by the leisurely, loving way he manipulated the current. Sack followed sack, till thirteen had been emptied, and his claw-like fingers were caressing the covering of the glittering, running heap of the fourteenth. And so absorbed had he become, that he had no ears for any sound but the metallic, rich, true tinkling of the golden cascade, no instinct even of the presence of anyone but himself.

Yet from the moment he had lifted the second sack, Alan had begun to worm his way forward, Clok padding after him, noiseless as any weasel.

It was a perilous task, for the bey was armed to the teeth, a naked scimitar lying by his lamp, and his belt a-bristle wih revolvers and daggers, and Alan was convinced that Hadir would shoot on sight. But the dungeon, save for the small circle of light round the bey, was black as a coal-seam; and Alan crept down the twelve steps, face foremost, lying full length on his stomach, and advancing by inches. The bey was at the tenth sack, and fairly hypnotised, by the time Alan had reached the bottom, and gathered himself, crouching against the wall. He followed the line of the rock, his sandals making no sound on the damp earth, and the noise of Clok's excited breathing covered by the tinkling and the tumbling of the coins, and the incessant, fevered mutter of the bey as he computed the tally of his horde.

But as Hadir lifted the fourteenth sack to the funnel, Alan was not two paces behind him, and stealing nearer, nearer.

The bey's long fingers were squeezing the hide dry as Alan's hands fell on him, and with one deft movement swept his belt clear of weapons, and swung him facing round.

For a long minute Hadir Bey gazed into the grim countenance overshadowing him, his own face white and rigid, his eyes staring, his mouth agape, like a man waking with a gasp out of a trance, and suddenly petrified. Then, with the squeal of a trapped rat, he squatted to earth so suddenly that, despite the strength of his grip, Alan found himself clasping only the air. Next moment Hadir, with a deft kick, had extinguished the lamp, made a prodigious bound sideways, and was racing for the stairs.

But his knowledge of the place was of no avail against the alert eyes of Clok, and the wolfhound, at a word from Alan, had fled like a flash to the entrance, and as Hadir reached it greeted him with an angry snarl and a sudden baring of his fangs, while Alan, pounding along behind, shot forth his hand in a blind grab. But, with every nerve strung by terror, the bey was alert as a ferret. He wriggled past the descending hand, writhed round, and darting between Alan's legs, fled round the dungeon, panting and giving vent every now and again to a shrill, whistling squeal. In vain Alan sprinted after him; in vain flung himself again and again forward in what he thought was a sure tackling hold. Hadir seemed to be made of quick-silver, and to vanish from the beaten air of that grabbing hand with the cunning and dexterity of a moonbeam.

Again and again Alan thought of calling Clok from the post of guard where he had left the hound; but his soul revolted from being beaten in a running match by this wizened, wicked, wee bey, with his wrinkled monkey face, shrivelled, ridiculous shanks, and prominent pot-paunch. He gritted his teeth, and set himself sardonically to run him down, as, in his boyhood days, he remembered to have run down a particularly scraggy cockerel in a Devonshire paddock. So ceasing from grabbing, he just pounded on two paces behind the terror-sweated bey, turning as he turned, never decreasing or increasing the distance between them, sure that presently this man of many pleasures and few restraints must sink exhausted in his tracks, with never an ounce of pace and not much more than a paroxysm of breath left in him.

But Hadir Bey had not fought the Russians for nothing. If he fled, it was because he feared for his gold and the vengeance of the great man pursuing him. But while he fled he also thought, and thought hard. Nor had he any difficulty in divining Alan's tactics, and in appreciating all the force of their irrefutable logic.

That, if the race lasted long enough, he would be run down like any fox, and helplessly at his enemy's mercy, he knew only too well; and while Clok guarded the steps, hope that way was garnished with fangs. But even the fox has its burrow; and, as Hadir felt his last store of force eking out, a sudden inspiration came to him.

He had passed the steps to the accompaniment of the wolf-hound's muttered snap, and was labouring along the wall by which Alan had crept to surprise, when the inspiration came, and his soul grinned with delight as he gathered his forces to obey it.

Alan, padding along behind, saw him suddenly quit the wall and dart towards the spot where the gold-funnel was, with its great, open mouth yawning upwards. Then, with never a pause in his jerky stride, the bey leapt forward, flung out his hands, and, with a squeal of triumphant mockery, shot head foremost down the shoot, where his gold had preceded him, Alan's hand glancing futilely off his stockinged, vanishing heel.

For a moment the young Englishman could hardly believe his eyes; but, grown accustomed now to the darkness, one glance around sufficed to prove that the bey was not in the dungeon. He flung himself to the ground, and groping round for the lamp, found it and lit it, and turned its feeble ray down the wide funnel. But beyond a yellow glint far below, it showed him nothing; save that it was all too narrow for his broad shoulders. It was futile to rage and fume, yet he wasted a good two minutes in apostrophising the folly and the vanity that had led him to leave one second's chance to an opponent so crafty and versed in ruses as was the bey.

"He'll have some secret way out from that gold-cellar," he reflected at last. "And if he gets out first and raises the guards, I shall be potted like a rabbit down here."

As if in echo of his thoughts, a derisive laugh came cackling from the top of the steps, and he looked up in time to see the face of Hadir grinning through the few inches of free-way that lay between the lintel and the nearly-closed door.

"He, he, Alan Wayward!" sniggered the bey. "Thy days are doomed for thee—aye, and for thy sheikh, too, who lies in a cavern near to thee. Thou shalt moulder there, and thy dog, surviving longest, shall raven on thy carcass. For he who has the secret of Hadir's gold dies with it. Adieu!"

Then, as Clok bounded up the steps, the door slammed-to, the key clicked in the lock, the bolts were shot, and Alan stared over the soft radiance of the lamp into the puzzled, inquiring eyes of the wolfhound.

CHAPTER 6.
In the Night Watches.

"REPINING is the part of fools, but the disciple of wisdom maketh haste to repair his errors."

The words, low, grave, placid, seemed to float out of the blackness of the vault, and to sound in Alan's ears as if spoken at his elbow.

A quarter of an hour had passed since the door had clanged-to on him like a fiat of doom; and he had sunk on to the steps and, with his knees hunched up and his face in his hands, abandoned himself to a kind of mental see-saw,

in which he rose from the depths of a morose retrospect into the darkness of the gloomiest anticipations.

The words were so apt to his mood that it never occurred to him that they were more than the echo of his own self-reproach; and he did not even trouble to look up, but sat on, immobile and brooding, till a rousing buffet under the ear sent him staggering to his feet, and he found himself gazing into the face of the Sheikh Jelaluddin.

"Thou!" he gasped, rubbing his ear with one hand and knuckling his bewildered eyes with the other. "Thou!"

"Who else, moon-calf?" snapped the sheikh. "Twice didst I whisper to thee, but thou madest no answer, and I even thought thee wounded, till I saw that large face of thine set in the image of nothingness it wears when thou thinkest on the Lady Mirame. So, feeling assured that thou wert thinking of her rather than of thy duty to me, I took some pains to smite wisdom into thy thick skull."

"Well, if you call wisdom a thick ear," said Alan ruefully, "I'm in a fair way to be a Solomon! But I'm so jolly pleased to see you that I almost could turn the other cheek!"

"Nay, one sufficeth for the nonce," said the sheikh complacently. "Thou didst err, my son, in tarrying with that fox. Yet verily I enjoyed the sight, nor did I think he could last one round more, when—as much to thy surprise, I warrant, as to mine—he took to earth down the chimney, where he poured his gold. It was a crafty move, and, in truth, his descent raised him much in my estimation."

"But where were you?" exclaimed Alan. "And how on earth did you get out? I thought you locked in some dungeon beyond the walls."

"Even so," assented the sheikh. "But not being a moon-calf, no sooner was I left alone than I feared for thy folly remaining without guidance. Therefore, instead of repining like a chuckle-headed frog, I cast about for a means to quit my prison and come to thy aid."

"But where was the prison?" Alan cried.

"Where thou hadst found it," replied the sheikh crossly, "if thou hadst taken thy courage in thy hands and looked. Even in that far corner, where the door hangs gaping. The fools had clamped the hinges into the rock. And though it was very dark, it was also very damp; wherefore it came to me that perchance the rock was not so impenetrable as Hadir thought. Some time I took to find where the hinges lay; and, trying the rock round about, I perceived that it was much eaten and mouldering to the nails. Now, by the blessing of Allah, those accursed dogs who stole my snuff-box overlooked the dagger that lay concealed in my bosom. So, by working patiently for many hours, I dug away the rock around the staples of the door, and was about to burst it open, when, through the crevices, I saw first Hadir and his slaves, then thee pursuing Hadir, and waited, curious to watch the end, which, coming otherwise than I expected, I delayed no longer, but pushed the door aside and found thee mooning."

"In good truth, thou shamest me in courage as in craft," said Alan ruefully.

"There is much merit in a truthful mind," said the sheikh. "Yet I would fain know what thou hast done with the slaves of Hadir who brought the gold-sacks; for I heard them scream in sudden fear, and as suddenly grow silent."

"They are down there," said Alan, pointing to the floor. And he explained to the sheikh how Hadir had disposed of the witnesses of his wealth.

"We will even see where leads the pitfall," said the sheikh. "Hold thy light aloft, while I find the lever of which thou speakest; and bid Clok come down from his post of danger."

The lever gave readily to the sheikh's powerful hand, and, as the light flashed down the opening chasm, the forms of the Nubians were plainly visible, some ten feet below. And they soon made it apparent that they were more frightened than hurt, for they vied with each other in howling for mercy and swearing fidelity by all their gods; even going the length of suggesting that, if their lives might be spared, they would willingly be made mutes.

"If ye cease not that monkey-jabber," cried the sheikh angrily, "I will shut the stone on ye again, and ye shall die of hunger, as Hadir destined ye to die!"

They gazed at him dumbly, more astounded by his presence than by his threat.

But when Alan, bending forward, thrust down his arms, it needed no second invitation to make them hasten. Being both big men, it was easy work for one to shove the other up while Alan hauled, and for the two on the top to then pull up the one left.

The sheikh restored the lever to its place, and eyed the slaves sternly.

"For a little while," he said, "ye are delivered from death. Therefore, lest death overtake thee, speak the truth. Why did Hadir thrust ye there?"

"Perchance he chose us because we were condemned in any case to die by the bowstring," answered the Nubian Hadir had named Yusuf, "because we connived at the escape of a girl in the harem, whose lover, a Georgian, tempted us with much money."

"Ye did well," said the sheikh; "for, verily, Hadir hath more wives than he hath hairs on his bald pate. Will ye altogether escape death, and seek your fortune in the land to the south?"

"What must we do for that?" asked Yusuf, with gleaming eyes.

"Show unto us the way out," replied the sheikh promptly. "Then lead us to the lodging where the Ingeliz lady is; and, moreover, show to us where Hadir sleeps."

"For the two last, that we can do," said Yusuf; "but as to the first, we know no way save by the door there."

"Know ye where ye can find rope?" asked the sheikh.

"Assuredly," answered Yusuf; "provided we were outside this dungeon."

"Then work, ye slaves!" cried the sheikh, pointing to the two iron bars that Alan had brought from the pavilion, and left lying at the top of the steps. "Seize those bars, and loosen the stones round the staple of the door. Yet, make no noise, and loiter not."

The slaves worked with a will, and the stones, roughly mortared, soon yielded to the pointed iron, till the space of a foot was cleared three-parts round the framework of the door.

"Enough!" said the sheikh. Then, turning to Alan, added: "Behold, my son, how wit can further strength. Get now thy hands about the door and force it, lintel and all, outward; yet warily, that it may not waken that fox from the sleep of his false security."

Alan bent his back to the task, and beneath his great strength the door yielded inch by inch, the hinges carrying away the stone to which they were clamped.

In a few more minutes they were breathing the fresh air, and gazing into the shadowed vistas of the garden.

"I counted six sacks but now," said the sheikh, restraining his companions. "Let us descend, and bear them to the pavilion, for it were a grievous pity to leave them there for harem slaves."

They laded the Nubians with two sacks each, and, Alan and the sheikh bearing one apiece, they crept out into the garden, and gained the deserted pavilion.

"Lay the sacks by the wall," said the sheikh. "Now, hearken, Yusuf. Get thee quickly and find a long piece of stout cord, twice the height of the wall, and then return. Thy life and fortune go with thee."

Yusuf sped away, and after a few moments returned with a coil of thick rope. To an end of this the sheikh fastened one of the window-bars, and with a dexterous heave sent it well over the heavy coping that topped the wall. A long, steady tug satisfied him that the rope was securely anchored.

"Thou wilt mount the rope," he said, turning to Yusuf again; "and, once on the top of the wall, let it down on the other side. While we thus hold this end, thou wilt slide down, and make fast the other to some convenient tree. So, whatever happens, we shall have our ladder. Where stableth Hadir his horses?"

"In a compound on the north side of the palace," grinned Yusuf, whose quick wit jumped to the sheikh's plan. "Moreover, my brother is horse-guard to-night, and he loveth not the bey."

"If they brother be not cursed, he will certainly be saved," said the sheikh piously. "Nevertheless, tell him not our secret; but, in the name of Hadir, bid him deliver thee six horses and three pack-mules; and tell him that on his discretion and his choice lieth liberty and much gold for himself; and for earnest thereof, take two pieces from the sack at thy feet, and give him one."

"I go," said Yusuf, after promptly obeying the behest.

"And when thou returnest, cry not out, nor whistle," said the sheikh; "but gently pull on the rope."

Yusuf gained the other side without accident, and sped away into the night.

For a moment the sheikh reflected, then looked from the Nubian to Alan.

"Stay thou here, my son," he said to the latter. "It is not meet that thou goest to seek the Ingeliz lady and that maid of hers that ever sigheth after thee. Guard thou the rope, and wait my return."

"Rats!" growled Alan. "Yet, have it as thou wilt."

Like ghosts, the sheikh and the Nubian vanished into the shadows of the long avenues, flitting from tree to tree, and, mounting the verandah with noiseless steps, halted outside the central, shuttered window.

Three times Jelaluddin tapped, following each tap by a gentle scratching; then paused, and listened to the subdued murmur of voices that came from within.

"Who is there?" came in a whisper presently through the latticed shutters.

"I, Jelaluddin the sheikh," whispered back the prophet. "Open and come forth, for the way of escape is prepared."

Very gently and tentatively the shutters' bars were thrust back and the lattice pulled inwards, revealing the pale faces of Mrs. Adair and Sifaze, sister to Abdullah and Selim, who had rejoined her mistress.

"Are you sure it is safe?" murmured Mrs. Adair anxiously.

"Thinkest thou I come hither to argue, woman?" snapped the sheikh, so sharply that Mrs. Adair almost tumbled out of the high window into his arms. He caught her in time, and, hissing a stern warning of silence into her ear, placed her to the ground, and lifted out Sifaze. Then, drawing to the shutters, he stole with them down the verandah steps, and along the garden, back to the wall where Alan waited. "Now, for Hadir!" he said grimly, beckoning to Alan, on whose arm Mrs. Adair was clinging, shivering.

"The ladies must first be put in safety," said Alan. "Yusuf has signalled that the horses are here. I am keen as thou to trap that fox; yet it may well be that he will bring a hornet's nest about our ears. And if we have to fight our way through, we shall lose all if the ladies rest here."

"Inshallah!" said the sheikh philosophically. "Yet, if the ladies must go first, let the gold go also. So shall we gain still more time."

Sifaze shinned up the rope like any sailor; and Mrs. Adair followed suit. Then sending Saling aloft to the coping with a length of rope, the six bags of gold were passed up one after the other, and let down to the other side, where Yusuf promptly laded them on to the pack-mules.

"Bid him draw off into the shadow of the woods and wait us there!" hissed the sheikh. And Saling, repeating the order, clambered down to him.

"Now lead us to Hadir's room," continued Jelaluddin. "And thou, my son, bid Clok stay here on guard."

Saling led the way, and after threading the garden mounted the verandah; and, passing Mrs. Adair's late room, paused at a low door at the far end. With a grin that seemed to present the backs of his eyeballs, he produced a key from his vest, and fitted it softly in the lock.

"He knew not," he whispered, "that Saling was once locksmith to the caliph."

The lock glided noiselessly back beneath his cunning manipulations, and Alan and the sheikh followed him up a dark, spiral staircase that gave on to a wide hall, where, beneath the glimmer of a red lamp, a giant eunuch lay, stretched like any watchdog, half-asleep.

Swift and silent as the shadow of a bird's wing, they flitted across the intervening space, and just as the guard raised himself, alert, on his elbow, the iron bar the sheikh was gripping fell on his skull, and he lay back again—this time sound asleep.

"There was but that way," whispered the sheikh, as he deftly gagged the man with his own turban, and bound him hand and foot with his own sash; "for all their tribe are gifted with the power of clamour of many devils. Lead on, Saling, to Hadir's room."

Saling pointed eloquently to a heavy curtain, not ten paces distant.

"There he sleeps," he said. "Of door there is none; for the guard thou didst smite was his door."

They tip-toed softly to the tapestry, and, pushing it aside, stole in.

The bey was sleeping the sleep of the unjust, his mouth open in a gentle snore, his face as placid and contented as if he was dreaming of his horde of gold, and a new fat province to grind, and all undisturbed by any care for the ones he believed so safely entombed below.

Silently Alan and the sheikh passed to either side of the bed, beckoning to Saling to rest at the foot. Then the sheikh, stooping, picked up a heavily-braided slipper, and, doubling it into four folds, suddenly nipped Hadir Bey's jaws agape, and rammed the extending gag well home. At the same moment, Alan's hands fell like steel vices round the bey's elbows and chest, while Saling's grip fastened round the spasmodic kicking of his ankles.

The bey had naturally awakened at the first tingling grip of the sheikh's fingers on his jaw. But he was not at all sure that he had. The dim light floating in from the silent hall, showed him plainly enough the face of Saling, who, of course, was in the oubliette beneath the dungeon staircase; showing also the grim faces of Alan and the sheikh, who equally, of course, were safely incarcerated thirty feet below. The bey tried to shake off the nightmare, but only encountered the suffocating pressure round his chest. He tried to call out, but his mouth seemed full of fur and beads, and no sound issued from his lips. Then he saw the sheikh bend forward, throw off his covering, and bind him tightly round the wrists and knees and ankles.

Next moment a rug was thrown round him, and he felt himself swung head downwards over Alan's shoulder, and he realised that this was no nightmare; but a dreadful, horrible reality. The grave had given up its dead, and they were taking him to his account. He writhed once, and then lay very still, thinking harder than he had ever thought before. Down through the garden they led him, and halted beneath the rising moon at the foot of the wall, against which they propped him.

At a sign from the sheikh, Saling swarmed up the rope, and let down the noosed end of the one that had served to hoist the gold. Hadir looked from Alan to the sheikh, with a gesture of the whole face and form that as plainly as any words begged for speech.

"Thou wouldst speak," said the sheikh; "thou shalt. Yet if thou raisest thy voice above a whisper, this bar shall crack thy skull like an egg-shell." And he plucked the gag from Hadir's mouth with one hand, as he poised the bar with the other.

For a moment the bey could not control his tongue to speech. The terror of the unknown was on him, and there was that in the sheikh's face that seemed to vitiate all his best arguments in advance. But he pulled himself together, and discarding all pretty phrases, came at once to the point.

"I will make peace with ye, and pay ransom," he gasped.

"Thou hast no money!" said the sheikh. "And thy peace is foresworn."

"Yea, but I have money," urged the bey eagerly. "In the dungeon where the Ingeliz was, I have six sacks of gold, in each sack is a thousand pounds."

"Say thou hadst six sacks," replied the sheikh. "For already it is laden on the mules that await us behind the walls."

The bey groaned; but he swallowed his rage and grief, and returned feverishly to the attack.

"I have even six more in the secret vault," he said. "Take that, and let me go!"

"Thou hast even fourteen more," said the sheikh drily; "and the secret of the vault is known to us. But that is also confiscate, as also is the store of precious stones in the chest behind the stonework of the chimney down which thy gold is poured."

"Thou hast a devil and ten other devils!" howled the bey, unable longer to convey his fury.

But the expression of it, at least, was cut off, as the sheikh nipped him by the jaw again, and inserted the expansive gag.

Then Saling and Alan passed up the rope, hoisted Clok and the bey up, and let them down the other side. The sheikh mounted after them, and, drawing up both ends of the rope, made fast the anchor to the coping, slid down, and with an artful jerk released the rope.

Two minutes later the bey, bound between two sacks of gold, across the flat saddle of a mule, was being hurried down the mountain slopes eastward, to be handed over to the justice of Hassein.

CHAPTER 7.

The Heart of a Woman.

THE vigil of Mirame and her little band had been, meanwhile, taxed in a way she had little anticipated, and had it not been for the hawk-like watchfulness of her Haideranli captains, it would have ended in disaster, sudden and irretrievable.

For Black Mourad had inherited with the goods of his late master, Mustapha, a double portion of that accomplished rascal's perfidious cunning. To keep no faith with friend or foe, was as the axiom of his existence. He had been willing enough to take Hadir's gold, and do his dirty work for the same. But on quitting the bey's palace, he had learned that Hadir was transferring his goods and treasure to Julamerik, and resolved that when he had hoodwinked the bey, he would also relieve him of his more valuable possessions. In pursuance of his plan, he had scattered spies along the route from Julamerik to Mount Arnos, and when he had taken leave of Hadir, had made a detour, sent on a few men with mule-carts to carry on the blind trail, and, with fifty of his most trusted followers, had himself ridden up the waterway of a mountain stream, to a plateau high above the bey's summer residence. Here, during the first portion of the night, he had lain in ambush, received the reports of the transfer of Hadir's treasure, and was waiting the hour before dawn to lead an assault on the palace, when a spy came hurrying up with the news of Mirame's picket in the woods. This messenger was followed, at short intervals, by three others, one of whom related the pursuit of Hassein along the blind trail, another recording the discovery of the slain guards who had had charge of the two officers, while the third brought the news of the

justice done by Hassein on the twenty-two ruffians who had pursued Hamilton.

The blow was a severe one to the robber chief—thirty-two of his best men put hors-de-combat in one day, without counting the three that fell to Hamilton's revolver in the tent, and the round dozen maimed by Alan's smiting. Black Mourad, listening to the tale of disaster, felt the desire of Hadir's gold give way in his raging heart to a lust of vengeance against Hassein and all his clan. For Black Mourad had served Mustapha, and there were few guerilla captains more skilled than he in the artifices of surprise and mountain warfare. Within ten minutes of receiving the news, he had sworn each one of his men by a terrible oath to the slaying of Hassein and the dragging of his daughter to their fastness in Bingol Dagh. Then, breaking camp, he had divided his men into three troops, and was creeping down beneath the gloomy pine forests on to Mirame's unconscious little troop.

But the captains of the Haideranli were not men to drowse at their posts, when their beloved princess was under the safeguard of their swords. And ten minutes before Mourad's three columns were within striking distance, their presence had been signalled, and the scouts had fallen back to join in the hurried council Mirame was holding with Fedrov and Hamilton and the two Turks.

"Lady Mirame," said Fedrov, "the chieftain entrusted thy safety to me. Our horses are of the best, and well rested. Let us ride to meet our reinforcements. It is folly for us to stand against fifty sharpshooters."

"It is wise counsel," said Hamilton.

"It is the only counsel," assented the senior of the Turkish officers. "Therefore, O Fedrov, ride thou on with the Lady Mirame. I and my comrade will stay in the rear, and hold back those dogs of Mourad."

"Ye are brave men," said Mirame, with a flash of her eyes. "But if Mirame, with thirteen gallant captains were to flee before even a hundred slaves, it would be to fling herself upon her dagger."

She looked round on them, with a smile of superb confidence.

"As we may not flee," she continued, "we will all stay. Yet, for our better security, it is my counsel that we fall back across the stream, and seek the shelter behind the great written stones of Mahmudish. For there ye will have some cover against Mourad's guns, and, moreover, our reinforcements, when they come, shall see us."

So, silently, and with bridles held taut against all champing of bits, the little cavalcade retreated through the forest on the stream, and crossing it, drew into the shadow of the mounds and graved boulders that marked the site of Mahmudish, twenty yards behind the further bank. From various coigns of vantage, the captains commanded a full view of the stream, which, bathed in moonlight, shone like silver against the black background of the pines.

Mourad's men were not long in picking up the trail, and following it to the borders of the stream. And once there, it required but one glance along the bleak hillside stretching away from the opposite bank, to convince Mourad that his quarry had taken to the ruins, rising, dark and forbidding, before him. He was too wily a strategist to send his men to act as a target-practice across that patch of moonlight. So, dismounting them, and leaving the tethered horses in charge of a guard, he ordered them into a wide extended line. At his given signal, they crept forward on their stomachs, worming quick as snakes across the broken ground, and taking to the water.

The revolvers of Mirame's little troop barked steadily, and before Mourad's men had gained the opposite bank, a dozen of their companions were rolling over and over to the rapids below. But once on shore, the broken nature of the ground afforded ample cover, and the brigands crept from rock to rock, converging towards a huge boulder that, perched on a high knoll, commanded a view of the ruins. Here and there an exposed arm or thigh had drawn a bullet; but Mourad had thirty solid men by the time he gained the shelter of the boulder, and looked down on the little band who had now fallen back into a circle of stones around the chieftainess of the Haideranli. Black Mourad gazed exultantly on what he thought the doomed band, and for a long minute fixed his wolfish eyes on the regal beauty of Mirame, as, erect and defiant, she stood by her horse, under the golden glow of the moon.

"Lay down your guns!" he commanded. "Ye will charge altogether, with scimitar and dagger. The men ye shall slay; but the woman ye shall capture alive, and bring her to me."

For Mourad, though savage and of passionate temper, was very careful of his skin, and did not risk it, save when compelled for his own safety.

At his word his men had broken cover, and rushed down the slope towards the little band.

Fedrov held his fire till they were almost at the breastwork. None of them had more than two chambers left loaded, and some not more than one. But in the close rush the execution of the thirteen revolvers was deadly, and as a dozen of the foremost fell back dead or wounded, their followers wavered.

"Have at them!" cried Mirame. And like arrows from a bow the captains leapt the parapet of stones, and charged on the shaken line.

But good swordsmen though they were, Mourad's mongrels were hard biters, and had the odds at two to one. For a moment it seemed that the impetuosity of the captains would sweep the field. But Mourad's thundering voice rallied his men, and inch by inch they won back their lost ground, and forced the gallant little band steadily back on the walls. Then Mirame, seeing their stress, searching the horizon in vain for the awaited regiment she had summoned, felt the fever of battle tingling in her veins, and all the fierce, untameable pride of a long line of warriors rioted in her heart. Bending over the breastwork, she snatched a scimitar from the nerveless hand of a slain Nubian, vaulted on her horse, and setting him at the parapet, leapt it, and spurred on the foe. Into the thick of them she rode, smiting right and left, whilst high and clear as a blast from a bugle, rose her voice in the battle-cry of the clan.

"Hi-hoo! Hoo-ha-hai!" The magic of it seemed to electrify the hard-pressed captains, and, fighting like demons, they swept back the Nubians, and reformed in a circle round their chieftainess, and catching the fine temper of her spirit, thundered out again their war-cry.

And as the Nubians, reforming in their turn, raged down on them, from beyond the stream, the "Hi-hoo! Hoo-ha-hai!" came pealing back, in a voice that brought the warm blood tingling to Mirame's face.

Mourad heard it, too, and turning, cursed in wrath, and fear, and blank amazement.

For riding full tilt through the stream, came the captives he had left with Hadir.

It had been with no little wonder that Alan and the sheikh, heading their party towards the road to Ala Dagh, had surprised the guard left by Mourad over the horses. And no less was their delight to find slung across a packmule their particular beloved weapons.

"I feel a man again!" had cried Alan, as he threw his huge battle-axe aloft and caught it as it fell.

"And verily my staff almost consoleth me for my snuff-box," said the sheikh, as he methodically laid the stout oak over the shoulders of the guard, and broke the stubbornness of his tongue to speech.

"The Lady Mirame!" growled Alan, as the man jerked out his news. "Black Mourad attacks the Lady Mirame!" And he spurred his horse forward.

"Slowly, my son!" said the sheikh. "First bind and gag the slave, while I loosen their horses, and drive them stampeding home. Then must we place this Ingeliz lady in safety, and Hadir and the gold."

"There is a cave by here, my lord," said Yusuf. "There we can be hidden till the fight be over."

"Lead on!" said the sheikh tersely.

Yusuf headed up the stream, and in five minutes the party was safely ensconced in a spacious cavern, while Mourad's horses were careering westward at something like twelve miles an hour.

It was as Alan and the sheikh approached the stream again, that the war-cry of the Haideranli reached their ears, and evoked Alan's cheer in reply.

Across the stream they raced, Alan ducking his head as the contents of Mourad's rifle sang past his ear. And Mourad had no time to shoot again, before the battle-axe of the young giant was shearing its way among the surprised Nubians. It was a terrific onslaught, and the sheikh, smiting right and left, did almost as much execution with his trusty staff as Alan effected with his razor-edged blade. The Nubians, surprised and ignorant of the force that was attacking them, flung down their weapons, and howled for mercy. And Mourad, speechless with rage and bewilderment, seeing the day lost, and all his band destroyed, tore at his beard, and cursed his fetishes, and, gliding from his post, fled down the course of the stream, nor paused till he reached Julamerik.

"Thou hast escaped, my lord!" said Mirame, almost regretfully, as she greeted Alan. "And to bring to me in my great stress the aid I thought to bring to thee."

"Even so!" said the sheikh, turning from embracing fervently the younger of the Turkish officers, who had presented him with his snuffbox found among the slain guards. "Even so, lady!" He paused again for another pinch. "Moreover, we bring to thee the arch-traitor, whose evil machinations have violated the territory of thy father, and imperilled thy own safety."

He gave a long, shrill cry, and punctuated his emotions with another pinch of snuff.

"I bade Saling and Yusuf ride down when they heard me hoot," he explained, in answer to Alan's look of inquiry. "And behold they come!"

"You will see," said Alan, turning to Hamilton, "that we did not leave Mrs. Adair behind."

But Hamilton was not there. He had recognised his betrothed, as the party advanced towards the river, and was already half-way on the road to meet her.

"O ye wonderful men!" cried Mirame, as she recognised Hadir, lashed between two sacks of gold. "How did ye compass it?"

"From the midst of his palace, surrounded by two hundred soldiers, we took him," chanted the sheikh. "Him and his captives, and his gold, we bore forth on the horses from his own stable, using, therefore, such wisdom as Allah hath given me, and the strength and valour of my disciple whom thou lovest."

"And by the Prophet," cried one of the Turkish officers, "the lady might have chosen worse! For he is a gallant youth, and when I get back to Erzingan, I will toast him and his lady-betrothed before a thousand of the best officers in the Padischah's army."

"Lady," urged Fedrov, "I would beg thee no longer to tempt destiny. Twice my ears have caught the clatter of sabre and stirrup-iron. It may well be that Hadir's men have discovered his abduction, and ride after us. There is no honour to be gained in fighting against soldiers who ride to the rescue of their vali."

"To horse!" cried Mirame. "And let us push on while we may."

With Hadir between Saling and Yusuf, and the brigand prisoners driven on in front, the cavalcade took the road again, sweeping on at a steady trot. Leaving Kotur far to the right, they clattered through the pebbled street of Erchek, and along the valley lands that rose gradually into the lower slopes of Ala Dagh. They rode steadily, drawing rein for nothing, and careless of the plaints of the prisoners, and the shrieking wrath of Hadir. For as they had mounted the uplands towards Erchek, they had seen, far to the rear, a full company of the bey's zaptiehs in hot pursuit, and seen, too, that they themselves were identified.

For a time they had laughed at the pursuit, for each yard brought them nearer to their own territory, where every village would spring to arms, and pour out its hardy mountaineers. But little by little their horses flagged, saddle-galled and weary with the preceding day's work and the long night's watch. And they were yet a good six miles from the nearest Haideranli village, when a scattered volley from Hadir's riders flung the dust around the horses' heels.

"Cast loose the slaves of Mourad!" cried Fedrov. "That will delay the pursuit at least a little."

"Loose them not!" ordered Mirame sharply. "Not one man shall go free. But all will I take to my father's justice."

"Then, ride thou on, lady!" said Fedrov, with a shrug. "And I and my comrades will stay behind and hold the road."

"Ride on! Ride on!" cried Mirame. "See you not the dust-cloud sweeping down from Arjish? It is either our laggard reinforcements, or my father returning from his fruitless quest."

"That will suffice to stop them firing," said the sheikh, as he flung a written paper in the road.

"What hast thou done?" asked Mirame sharply.

"But written, 'At the next shot fired, Hadir sheds an ear,'" replied the sheikh, scooping at his snuff-box.

"Hi-hoo!" yelled Alan, waving his battle-axe aloft.

And "Hi-hoo! Hoo-ha-hai!" came thundering back in reply, as Hassein, dust-stained and haggard of face, whirled with his forty captains round a great scarp of rock, and rattled to a halt twenty paces from his daughter's troop.

Motionless and frowning he heard Fedrov's terse, soldierly recital, and the sheikh's irrepressible running commentary thereon. His eyes gleamed coldly on Hadir, and the trembling slaves of Mourad, to rest with a sort of grudging admiration on the strong, radiant face of Alan, and the flushed, happy face of his daughter.

"Kismet!" he muttered. "I thank thee, young man, for thy timely aid. And since thou art captain of the Haideranli, I bid thee lead on my daughter to my castle, while Fedrov sees to the safe bestowal of Hadir and these dogs of Mourad's. But, thou, draw not rein; the sheikh will accompany thee, and Hamilton Effendi with his betrothed. And as thou passest through Kunduk, rouse the clans, and send them hither, while I will hold that swarm of Hadir's in check."

"I obey," said Alan, saluting, and riding forward.

And, as Hassein waited proudly for the men of Hadir, Alan Wayward obeyed so with his behest, that even the sheikh was hard put to it to keep him and Mirame in sight, as they galloped side by side up the wooded slopes to Kunduk. And once, indeed, he lost them altogether, as they rounded a great cliff. So that Mirame, divining, with that remarkable power a woman has, that they were alone, leant forward over her horse's shoulder till her face grew through the dusk close to the face of Alan, and asked softly:

"Am I forgiven?"

And all that the sheikh saw, as he clattered noisily up behind, and drew in rein again, was Mirame's horse careering riderless homeward, and Mirame herself seated on Alan's saddle-bow, steadying herself with one arm round his neck, and the other round his waist.

"He shied at a shadow," said Alan laconically, as the sheikh spurred alongside; "and as I caught the Lady Mirame from falling, the horse bolted."

"Verily, a most discreet and complaisant beast!" said the sheikh drily, with a glance that drew a blush and a laugh from Mirame.

"A wise man may learn much from such a beast," growled Alan. "Wherefore, ride thou forward, and wake the village yonder with the war-cry."

And the sheikh was so amazed by this ready response, that without demur, he obeyed.

* * * * * * *

It was three days later that Hassein, making high feast, gathered into his great banquet-hall all his notables and captains to do honour to the nuptials of Hamilton Effendi and Mrs. Adair, who that morning had been wedded by the British chaplain before the new consul at Van.

And Hadir Bey witnessed the wedding and the festival. Yet not as an honoured guest, but from the middle of the great courtyard, where for three days he had been tied to a stake, beneath an open tent, sitting surrounded by his six bags of gold, and wine and dainty dishes piled with fruit and tempting meats, all out of reach of his parched and hungry mouth.

"Only so," had advised the sheikh, "shall he learn to control his appetite, in looking on the things he desires and may not have. Moreover, being greatly humbled by the consciousness that all men know his littleness, no more will he err in remembering overmuch the days of his vanity."

Hassein had found the counsel good, and ordered it so.

And Hadir had justified the wisdom of the sheikh. For as the festivities drew to an end, the rancour and the pride in his heart, and all his covetousness, gave way to a great affliction of spirit. And he bowed his head, and vowed to Allah that he would amend his ways, and live a life of justice and restraint. Nor did anyone notice that as Mrs. Hamilton withdrew to prepare for her voyage, she glided away into the courtyard, and under the tent where Hadir sat, and, bending forward, severed his bonds, and thrust into his trembling hands a flagon of wine and a dish of dainty meats.

"Go," she murmured, "while all men are engaged. Sifaze stands at the gate, with a swift horse ready saddled, and the guard hath lowered the drawbridge. Go quickly, and the good God guard you from further evil!"

The bey looked for one moment into her face, then, falling forward, kissed the hem of her wedding-robe, feeling the lust of vengeance glide like a mantle from his heart. Then humbled, and conscious of a strange sense of freedom, he stole away without a word, and mounting the horse Sifaze held for him, rode homewards, praising Allah for the goodness of the woman he had coveted, and who had given him new liberty and refreshment.

Nor was it till the ex-consul and his wife were making their final farewells, that the absence of the bey was remarked, and Mrs. Hamilton, between laughter and unshed tears, recounted the part she had played, and coaxed Hassein's frown to a smile, with her cunning Irish ways.

But the sheikh shook his head, and took prodigious pinches of snuff.

"Verily," he said, with a sigh, as the couple made their way to the gates, "the heart of woman is an extravagance of Allah; and no man may reason thereon, for her instinct turneth his wisdom to folly."

"Come, my son!" he added, with sudden energy, poking his staff in Alan's ribs. "Come speedily, ere the graciousness of the daughter of Hassein turn thee, too, from the paths of discipline. For we part even now to resume our way along the road to Bagdad."

So Alan, obedient to his word, perforce followed him. Nevertheless, this time the guerdon of his farewell was more than a single rose. And Sifaze, witnessing it, crept away and wept.

THE END.

(Next week, "D'Arcy's Misadventures," a splendid double-length tale of Tom Merry & Co. Please order your copy of "The Gem" in advance.)



TEMPEST HEADLAND

The Only New and Original School Tale.

By S. CLARKE HOOK.

Cyril's Home.

"Stupid little brute!" he muttered. "How dare he bleed all over my clothes like that? I'll punch his head for him, when——"

"Snigg!" cried the doctor, turning round.

"Yes, sir!"

"Come into my study immediately."

And Snigg had to go.

The doctor bound up Venus' head, then told him to sit down.

"Your action, my lad," he exclaimed, "certainly saved your comrade's life. Probably it saved mine as well; I am only grieved that you should have been injured."

"Dat don't matter a bit, sah; so long as you weren't hurt. Yah, yah, yah! Funny ting 'bout Mopps. Yah, yah, yah! Dat man is always getting in de way when he's not wanted; still, I 'spect he's not to be blamed entirely."

"I scarcely know what to say to you, Snigg," said the doctor.

"Well, sir, it's very hard on me. I believe one of my suits is completely ruined——"

"Boy, do you dare to think about your clothes when you have very nearly caused the death of one of your comrades?"

"Well, sir, it was quite an accident."

"Remain where you are! Come this way, my lads. The carriage is waiting for you, Conway. Your mother sent it some time back, so we must not keep it waiting. Are you sure you feel well enough to travel, Venus?"

"Yes, sah! Dere ain't anyting de matter wid me."

"Well, good-bye, my lads!" said the doctor, shaking hands with both. "I trust, and quite think you will both have a most enjoyable holiday."

Then they took leave of the kind-hearted doctor, and were soon on their way to Cyril's home.

Venus thoroughly enjoyed that drive. The day was as brilliant as it well could be, and it was something to look forward to spending the holidays with his chum. He spoke principally about the place, and asked his chum innumerable questions concerning it.

"Oh, it's not at all a bad sort of place, Venus," observed Cyril. "You are sure to like it all right, though you may find it a bit formal at the start. The servants are very decent, and as they like me, they are sure to like you."

"Den dere's more dan one servant?"

"Why, yes! There would be rather too much for one servant to do there."

"I shall be able to gib a bit ob help."

"Ha, ha! I expect you will be of great help when we get together. But here we are."

"It's a mighty pretty place, too," observed Venus. "M'yes, I shall like dis all right. Nice and quiet, and——"

"Oh, you cuckoo! That's the lodge. We don't live there. Now, this is the carriage drive; it's about a mile long, but it won't take us long to get down it. We shall be in time for lunch. That's the house, you can see it through the trees."

"Golly!"

"Don't you like it?"

"Seem to be most afraid ob it. Why, you can't use all dat mighty big place."

"Well, you see, there are a lot of servants. Then we have a good many guests at times. There's the river, flowing out of the lake; there's some fine fish in that, but you will find out all about that before you are much older."

The carriage drew up at the front door of the fine old mansion, and Cyril sprang out, while the door was opened by a footman, with whom Cyril shook hands.

"Come on, you image," cried Cyril. "Jim won't bite you. Show him into the drawing-room, Jim, while I go to speak to my mother. He's Mr. Snowy White Adonis Venus, and he's a particular friend of mine."

Then Cyril raced up the stairs.

"Will you step this way, sir?" exclaimed James.

"Golly!" gasped Venus. "De man is calling me sah. Say, old hoss, I'm only a nigger."

"I noticed that, sir. Master Cyril said you were a friend of his. Step this way, please."

Venus rubbed his boots for about a minute, then walked on tip-toe over the thick hall carpet, but when he entered the drawing-room his jaws gaped open.

"I tink I had better go to de kitchen or some oder place. I don't tink Cyril's moder will care for me walking ober dis carpet."

"Master Cyril's orders, sir. Will you please take a seat?"

"Golly! Ain't dis mighty wonderful!" gasped Venus, gazing around the sumptuous apartment. "Neber saw anyting like it. Why, some ob de chairs are gold, and de oders—well, I wouldn't dare sit down on dose chairs. Might spoil dem. Ain't dis mighty wonderful, and Cyril don't seem to tink anyting ob it. Neber eben wiped his boots before he went up de stairs. Woohooh! What's dat? Why, de clock is playing tunes to me. Must be a sort ob chime. What mighty fine flowers, too. I know dat Mrs. Conway won't hab a nigger. Golly! Here she comes."

A tall, handsome lady entered the room. She was dressed in black silk, and she looked much younger than Venus had anticipated Cyril's mother would be.

She greeted Venus with a smile, and offered her hand, while Venus stood gazing at her in speechless amazement.

"Don't 'spect you are Cyril's moder, ma'am?"

"Indeed I am, Venus. He has told me how you saved his life this morning—probably the doctor's life as well, and——"

"Golly! De boy neber told me dat you were as beautiful as all dis!" gasped Venus.

"That's not a compliment, mother," laughed Cyril. "He means what he says. Shake hands with my mother, you owl!"

"Shoo! De black might come off. I tink you had better send me into de kitchen, Cyril. Dis ain't really de sort ob place for me."

"Nonsense, Venus!" exclaimed Mrs. Conway. "You are my son's friend, so that you would naturally be mine, and the fact that you saved his life——"

"Dere wasn't anyting in dat matter, ma'am."

"Ah, but I know there was, my dear lad. Now, you are not to call me ma'am. You are to be just as friendly with me as you are with Cyril. I want you both to thoroughly enjoy your holidays, and the only way to do that is to make yourselves quite at home. But you must both be starving. Just show him his bed-room, Cyril, and I will order lunch."

Venus was rather quiet during the meal. He was quite unaccustomed to all that splendour; but Cyril and his mother soon made him at home, and Mrs. Conway questioned him as to his past life.

"Can't remember it at all," observed Venus, shaking his head. "De first ting I can remember is being on a vessel, den I was in de sea, and after dat I was in de college. But you dunno what a good friend Cyril has been to me. We'm 'most always togeder, and he don't mind going about wid a nigger a bit."



How do you do?

WHOM TO WRITE TO: The Editor, "GEM" Library, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, who will be pleased to hear from you.

"D'ARCY'S MISADVENTURES."

Next Thursday's "Gem" will contain a Splendid Double-Length Tale of TOM MERRY, also a New Story of Circus Life entitled "JOE," by S. Clarke Hook.

The Editor.

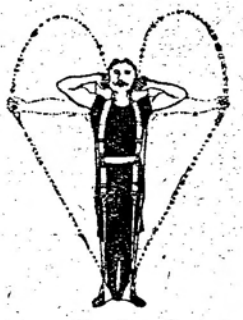
(To be concluded next Thursday, when "JOE," A New Tale of Circus Life, by S. Clarke Hook, will commence.)

THE SANDELL-GRAY FIGURE TRAINER.

Unique Apparatus, Scientific in Construction and Movement, for Making the Body Erect, Graceful, and Symmetrical by a Few Weeks' Use. Attaches Direct to User's Body. No Wall or other Supports Necessary. FOR BOTH SEXES, from Childhood to Old Age.

THE MOST NOTABLE INVENTION IN PHYSICAL APPLIANCES FOR THE LAST FIFTY YEARS. PATENTED AND TRADE MARKED IN TEN COUNTRIES.

A Tall, Straight, Symmetrical, and Graceful Figure is the outcome of correct light Exercise. The Sandell-Gray Figure Trainer is the result of 15 years of close study of the Human Frame, and in this unique apparatus is carefully thought out the only true basis from which all bodily and organic improvement can be derived. It has been ascertained beyond dispute that the essence of True Exercise is Bodily Resistance, a fact which, strange to say, has been completely overlooked by the Leading Exponents of Physical Culture. Every ounce of resistance created by the human body means stored-up physical energy.



For Arms, Shoulders, Chest, &c.

The user of a Sandell-Gray Figure Trainer creates all his own resistance by bringing his body into direct opposition with the apparatus. **It being attached to the user's body**, it is the most perfect Body Developing Apparatus extant, and by no other method can a straight, symmetrical, and well-set figure be obtained. The Sandell-Gray Figure Trainer attaches by the Feet, Shoulders, and Waist, and is the only physical appliance out of 500 varieties selling in all parts of the World that complies with this imperative requirement. After a few weeks' use of the **Sandell-Gray Figure Trainer** you actually appear taller.

When exercising with an appliance attached to the wall, the amount of bodily resistance created is comparatively small. It is the wall that gets the most of it.

In spite of vastly increased attention given nowadays to physical culture, the modern civilised man and woman often exhibit marked signs of physical deterioration. WHY? The first reason is up to now the *absence of any real intelligent method.* The kind of work advocated so much of late years by "strong men" or "weight-lifters," by whom one is advised to make supreme efforts to pull a wall down by means of cords attached thereto, or to indiscriminately juggle with dumb-bells, clubs, and such-like, is harmful, excepting perhaps to the "*Survival of the fittest.*"

With the Sandell-Gray every muscle in the entire body is correctly and gently exercised at one and the same time in different ways by different exercises, consequently every separate movement tends to make the body *as a whole* more physically perfect, supple, and graceful. The principle of self-attachment, so simple, yet so scientifically important, is the principal feature of a series of patents in the principal Countries of the World.

Presented to every purchaser of a Sandell-Gray is a course of selected movements adapted to his or her physical needs. These movements comprise a period of three months' instruction, and, carried out with trifling care and patience, will create a really remarkable and striking improvement in the Carriage, Deportment, Figure, and Health of the user.

FOUR DAYS' FREE TRIAL.

The Price of the **Sandell-Gray Figure Trainer** is 15s., together with 3 months' course of individual instruction, but the apparatus complete will be sent with a preliminary series of Four Lessons on Four Days' ABSOLUTELY FREE TRIAL to any genuine applicant on receipt of a deposit of 2s. 6d. as evidence of good faith. You will be surprised at the benefit you will receive, even in so short a period; but in the remote chance of your feeling for any reason dissatisfied with the results, kindly send back the machine, when your money will be returned in full. Fill up the Coupon and post to us to-day. Applications are attended to in rotation of receipt.

FREE. A THREE MONTHS' COURSE OF INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION GIVEN TO EVERY PURCHASER.

Please send me on trial one Sandell-Gray Figure Trainer, for which I enclose P.O. for 2s.-6d. If at the end of four days I am dissatisfied with it, I am to send it back, and all money paid by me is to be returned; or upon making a second payment of 3s. 6d. (at the end of four days), and three consecutive monthly payments of 3s., the apparatus becomes my entire property.

Name .....

Address .....

.....

The Sandell-Gray Figure Trainer, Ltd. (Dept. 13), **5, Wells Street, London, W.**

THE "NEW WONDER."

1S.

20 FREE GIFTS.



A BARGAIN NOVELTY!

THE "NEW WONDER."



Telescope Compass, Reading Glass, Magnifying Glass, Field Glass, Opera Glass, and Mirror, all 7 articles combined! Send 1s. (and 4d. for packing and postage) and, as an advertisement, we will send by return post, with the "New Wonder," all the following 20 Free Gifts: Nickel Pen and Pencil Case, Metal Pencil Sharpener, Six Pencils, Metal Box Pen Nibs, Leather-covered Pen-wiper, Rubber Eraser in Nickel Case, Pocket Book, 12-inch Folding Rule, and neat case to keep all in, and 6 choice view Postcards. Send to-day a postcard or letter for our gratis and post free Illustrated Catalogue of thousands of other "Bargain Novelties by Post."—PAIN BROS. (Dept. 90M), Presents House, Hastings, Eng.



A CYCLE for 1/-

DEPOSIT & 1/- WEEKLY.

As an advertisement we will send to first 1,000 applicants our **£8 8s. 0d.** "ROYAL EMBLEM" CYCLE for **1s. DEPOSIT**, and on last payment of 8½ weeks at **1s.**, making £4 5s. A HANDSOME PRESENT IS SENT FREE. Write for Illustrated Catalogue. £3 15s. 0d. Cash Price.

ROYAL EMBLEM CYCLE DEPOT (C30), GREAT YARMOUTH.

2/- DEPOSIT



We send this High-Grade Free-Wheel Cycle, Mudguards and Tools, fully guaranteed, to any address on receipt of **2s. DEPOSIT**, and upon payment of the last of 22 monthly payments of 5s., making total £5 12s. Cash Price, £5 5s. Sent on approval. Cycles from 50s. Write for Catalogue.

ERSKINE CYCLE CO., Walthamstow, London.

HANDSOME MEN are those who are slightly sunburnt. Sunbrowne gives this tint. Detection impossible. Guaranteed genuine. Post free (plain cover) 1/04. Sunbrowne Laboratories, 82, Ethelbert Road, Wimbledon.



POUNDS I SAVE YOU POUNDS

Not pence—not shillings—but POUNDS—and you can select any bike you like to supply on easy terms at the same SWIFT, COVENTRY CHALLENGE, HUMBER, ROVER, PROGRESS, PREMIER, TRIUMPH, CENTAUR, and SUNGER Cycles pounds cheaper than the Makers or their local Agents. RUDGE, WHITWORTH from £3 15s. Cash. Sent on approval. 12 Years' Guarantee.

A High-Grade Coventry Cycle £3 12s. Cash, or 5s. Monthly.

WRITE FOR LISTS NOW.

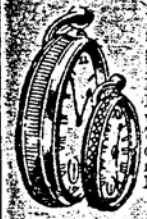
Edw. O'Brien, Ltd

Prompt Delivery

THE WORLD'S LARGEST CYCLE DEALER, Dept. 145, COVENTRY

FREE! ALL PRIZES! FREE!

SEND NO MONEY. WE TRUST YOU.



We give you **FREE ANY PRIZE** on our grand list for selling or using our Beautiful Postcards. You can gain Phonographs, Ladies' or Gent's size Watches, Musical Instruments, Silver Hall-Marked Umbrellas, Rifles, Footballs, Silverware, Cutlery, Cricket Bats, Real Diamond Rings, Cameras, etc., etc. Send us a postcard with your full name and address, and we will send you 72 of our famous Penny Pictorial Cards. Sell or use the cards within 28 days at one penny each, and we will reward you according to our list a grand **Free Prize. It need not cost you one Penny of your own money. Write at once. Don't delay.**

ACTE & CO.

(Dept. A4), 85, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

THE BUFFALO AIR RIFLE

Shoots death-dealing bullets with terrific force, killing Birds and Rabbits easily at long range. Round shot, darts, or slugs used. Send for list. LARGEST STOCK IN THE WORLD.



4/6 each; post free.

Frank Clarke, Crown Gun Works, **66, Gt. Charles St., Birmingham**

MUSCLE! STRENGTH!

How I doubled my strength in 3 months. An interesting system of physical culture by **Max Sterling**, who, after testing a number of systems, discovered one of his own by which he doubled his strength in three months. The system, together with the **art of weight lifting**, post free 6 stamps (foreign stamps accepted). **Medals given for good development.** (Mention paper.)—**J. LILBURN, 45, Shields Road, Newcastle-on-Tyne.**



FREE TO EVERYONE

Just as a huge advertisement you can have a Nickel Silver Watch, or any other present you wish to select from our Catalogue, FREE for selling 72 Beautiful Coloured Glossy Surface Pictorial Postcards, at One Penny each, within 28 days. You can sell them amongst your friends in a few minutes. Write at once—a postcard will do.

IRISH PICTORIAL CARD CO., Maylor-Street, CORK.

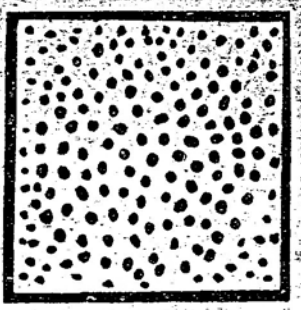
VENTRILOQUISM.—How to acquire this wonderful art. Success certain. Never fails. With Comical Dialogues, &c. Post paid, 6d. stamps (halfpenny ones preferred). Catalogue Free.—**IRONMONGER, Great Bookseller, ILKESTON.**

Be sure and mention this paper when communicating with advertisers.

£110 PRIZE CONTEST.

NO ENTRANCE FEE.

CAN YOU COUNT THE DOTS?



We will pay **£50 in Cash** to those sending us the correct answer. We will also give 200 special prizes, ranging in value up to half-a-guinea, to those who send correct answers. If more than one competitor sends correct answer, the cash will be divided. SEND NO MONEY. THIS IS A FREE CONTEST. There is only one easy condition which need cost you nothing, and about which you will hear all particulars on receipt of your solution. Count the Dots carefully, and send your answer at once. This is a genuine and interesting puzzle, but it is not so easy as it looks. Do not delay, but do it NOW, and enclose a stamped addressed envelope for our reply.

H. RUSSELL & CO.

(DEPT. G.L.),

11 & 12, Southampton Buildings, Holborn, London, W.C.

A GENUINE LEVER SIMULATION

GOLD WATCH FREE FOR SKILL

3	15	18	11	8	21	12	12

Each of the above spells the name of a great seaport in the United Kingdom. We have used figures instead of letters; letter A being No. 1, B No. 2, C No. 3, and so on.

SEND NO MONEY.

Competitors are required to send a 1d. stamp and their solution on a sheet of paper, with their full name and address clearly written underneath (all who fail to do this will be promptly disqualified). We will send a beautiful simulation Gold Watch (good timekeeper) to every lady and gentleman who sends a correct solution to this puzzle, and complies with our one condition. IT COSTS YOU NOTHING TO TRY.

F. R. IRONMONGER CO. (Dept. 25), **Station Road, ILKESTON.**

NOW ON SALE!

Four New Issues of THE 'BOYS' FRIEND' 3D. LIBRARY

No. 51:

EXPELLED FROM HIS SCHOOL.

A Grand School Tale, by CHARLES J. MANSFORD.

No. 52:

STRONGBOLD THE GLADIATOR.

A Thrilling Tale of Romance and Adventure, by HENRY ST. JOHN.

No. 53:

CHUMS OF WYCLIFFE.

A Splendid NEW School Story, by JACK NORTH.

No. 54:

TILLER AND TIDEWAY.

A Thrilling NEW Tale of Sexton Blake, Detective.

Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. Subscription rates: Inland, 6s. 6d. per annum; 3s. 3d. for six months. Canada, 6s. 6d. per annum; 3s. 3d. for six months. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand, Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd. Sole Agents for South Africa, Messrs. Central News Agency, Ltd. Sole Agents for India, China, Straits Settlements, Japan, etc., Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Saturday, March 28th, 1908.