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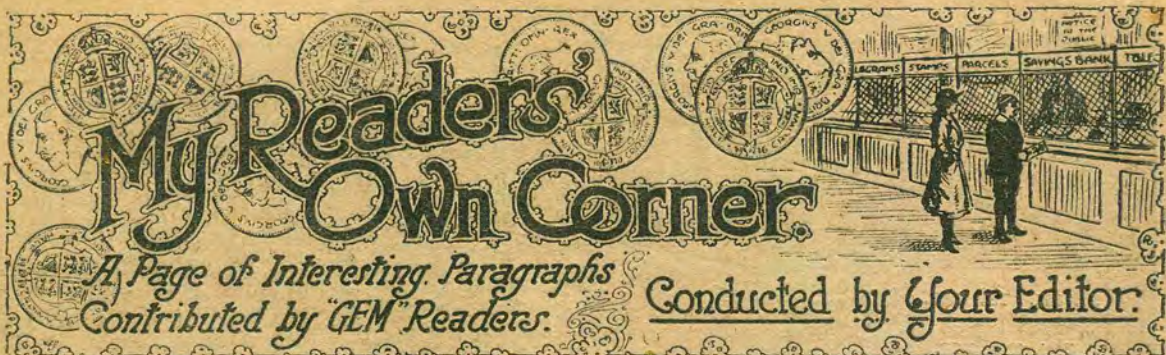
No. 658. Vol. XVIII.

Sept. 18th, 1920.



RESCUED BY A HUMAN LADDER!

(A Thrilling Scene in this week's Grand Complete School Story.)



NOTE.—Half-a-crown will be awarded to the sender of every paragraph published on this page.

AN INTERESTING BIRD.

The red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*), sometimes called the butcher bird, arrives in the South of England about May, and leaves in September. The handsome cockbird, distinguished by its grey head and red back, waits patiently on a tree or telegraph-wire for prospective prey. Suddenly he throws himself into the air at a passing insect. He is partial to beetles and wasps, and he beats along a hedgerow for mice or small birds, which he will impale on a sharp thorn or barbed wire before killing. The shrike is shot by gamekeepers because it kills the young pheasants. It is a coward at heart, and will sometimes fly before the attack of a couple of little whitethroats. The nest of the shrike is large and unridy, composed of grass, roots, moss, and hair. The birds lay four or six eggs, which vary in colour—sometimes white, grey, or buff, or a salmon-pink ground with red or grey spots at the thicker end. The shrike measures about seven inches.—H. Trask, 49, Vivarage Street Yeovil, Somerset.

A HINT.

"Some praise the birds and some the sky,
 And some go mad on apple-pie,
 And others like a picnic stunt,
 Or up the river in a punt.
 But I, a simple youth, we'll say,
 Have but one hope from day to day,
 And that's to read the good old GEM.
 The essence of the best of them."
 —F. Jordan, Little Brickhill Manor,
 Bletchley, Bucks.

THE HORSEFLY.

An English tourist, travelling in the Highlands, was in need of some fishing-bait. Approaching a Scotch girl he asked her if she could obtain some horsefly for him. The girl stared without answering. "Why," exclaimed the tourist, "have you never seen a horsefly?" "No," replied the girl, "but I've seen a coo jump over the dyke."—William Gilson, 3, Comely Green Place, Edinburgh.

NICKNAMES.

Nobody who is really popular escapes having a nickname. Generally the term springs from his right cognomen, or it is based on some peculiarity of face or

character, or both. The Iron Duke was "Old Nosey"; Lord Brougham was styled "Beelzebub." There was a joke made out of this nobleman's title. The latter was "Brougham and Vaux," and, of course, the wags of his day spoke of him as "Lord Brougham and Walks." Peel was called "Spinning Jenny"; the Duke of Cleveland was "Niffy Naffy"; Lord Goderich was called "The Imp"; Lord Russell was "Pie and Thimble."—A. Lentzner, care of B. Lentzner, Box 370, Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, South Africa.

SOUTH AFRICA.

English readers who expect to find lions and tigers roaming freely in South Africa are likely to be disappointed. The place is not as wild as some think. You do not meet cannibals at every turn. Fever risks are inconsiderable. South Africa is as civilised as any other country of the world. It has vast towns, universities, and Parliament Houses second to none. Durban, Cape Town, and East London are among the beauty spots. South Africa is a great agricultural country—a rich and fertile land which, in days to come, will, without doubt, be the foremost in the world.—J. R. Schein, 16, Market Avenue, Benoni, Transvaal, South Africa.

THE LAUGHING PLANT.

This plant is found in Arabia, and is so called because of the effect it has on those people who eat its seeds. The plant is of moderate size, with bright yellow flowers and velvety pods, each of which contains two or three little bean-like seeds. The seeds are dried and ground to powder, which, when taken, has the strangest effect on individuals who try the experiment. They dance and shout and roar with laughter. The spell lasts an hour, and the partaker has no subsequent recollection of the antics he has performed.—Miss G. R. Jones, 125, Grenfell Road, Maidenhead, Berks.

THE POEM.

Poet: "Let me tell you, sir, that poem cost me a week's hard labour." Editor: (who has read it): "Is that all? If I had had the passing of the sentence you would have got a month!"—Hugh Millen, 36, Annallee Street, Belfast.

THE BIRD OF DEATH.

In New Guinea there is a bird bearing this ominous name. People bitten by this bird are immediately seized by maddening pains which rapidly extend to every part of the body. The Bird of Death is greatly feared, for even more serious symptoms result from a bite, and victims have been known to suffer loss of sight and lockjaw.—A Reader, 112, Herschell Street, Everton, Liverpool.

EGGS.

The queerest egg I ever saw was a duck's egg, which was no larger than that of a robin. It came out of a full-sized duck's egg that had been served up for breakfast. Right in the middle of the large egg was found this little one, which, when opened, was discovered to be perfectly white with no yolk at all. A thin shell covered it of the same colour as the big egg. W. Webber, Blaenau Ffarm, Llanhilleth, nr. Newport, Mon.

CHELTENHAM.

Cheltenham has been named the "Garden Town of England." It is supposed to be the best health resort in England, and the famous "Cheltenham waters," which are obtained at the Town Hall at 2d. per glass, are exceptionally good for people with poor health. "The Promenade" is one of the best walks in the town, and in the centre is "Neptune's Lair," a beautiful fountain which is decorated with ferns and flowers.—James W. Paveley, 175, Upper Street, Islington, London, N. 1.

A CRUET.

A soldier awoke from consciousness in a hospital. "What's this on my chest?" he asked the nurse. "A mustard-plaster—you had pneumonia." "What is this on my feet?" "Salt-bags—you've had frost-bite." Well, what's this on my head? "Vinegar," replied the nurse: "you have suffered from brain-fever." A soldier looked up from the next bed and said: "Hang a pepper-box on his nose and he'll be a bloomin' cruet!"—A. L. S. Skingle, 56, Dulwich Road, Herne Hill, S.E. 24.

Contributions are invited from readers of the "GEM" for publication on this page. Anything will do, so long as it is interesting, short, and concise—a good joke, a description of a holiday, a bright idea for increasing the popularity of the "Gem," a good anecdote. "Pars" should not be more than three hundred words long—the shorter the better. They can be sent in on a postcard. Address all contributions to The Editor, The "Gem" Library, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and mark them "Readers' Own Corner."



A Grand New Football Serial.

By **PAUL MASTERS.**

Synopsis of First Chapters.

JIMMY RENTON, a brilliant footballer and a keen all-round sportsman, is compelled to leave St. Clive's owing to the fallen fortunes of his father. Jimmy calls at the office of the "Burchester Times," a provincial paper, with a view to obtaining a position on the staff. He chums up at once with a youth named Billy Desmond, but falls foul of another member of the staff—a tout named Rayner, whom Jimmy recognises as the son of the man who swindled his father and brought about the downfall of the business. Rayner is about to punish Jimmy Renton for "cheek."

(Now read on.)

Put to the Test.

"**S**TAND back, Rayner!" said Billy Desmond, rising from his seat at the typewriter. "You can't start scrapping here. The chief will be in at any minute!"

Luke Rayner scowled and hesitated. "If this cheeky young cub cares to apologise—" he began.

"Apologise be hanged!" said Jimmy Renton.

The fact that he was face to face with the son of the unscrupulous partner who had swindled his father in business goaded Jimmy to fury. He hadn't the slightest intention of apologising to Rayner, despite the fact that the latter towered over him like a giant, and possessed an unquestionable advantage in weight and reach.

"Very well!" snarled Rayner. "If you won't apologise you must take the consequences!"

And he aimed a savage blow with his right at Jimmy Renton's face.

Jimmy was a fighting-man as well as a footballer, and his knowledge of ring-craft stood him in good stead. He

promptly ducked and side-stepped, and Rayner's clenched fist went crashing against the wall.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Serves you jolly well right!" growled Billy Desmond. "You forced a quarrel on this kid, and you'll have only yourself to blame if he wipes up the floor with you!"

For a moment Rayner stood nursing his injured fist. Then he fairly hurled himself at Jimmy Renton, hitting out right and left.

Jimmy stood his ground, and met the attack unflinchingly.

Out of a whole shower of blows only two got home—one on Jimmy's jaw and another on his chest. And neither of these blows had sufficient force behind it to secure a knock-out.

Billy Desmond looked on anxiously. He liked the look of Jimmy Renton, and he didn't wish to see him flogged by Rayner. And all the time he kept one eye on the door, fearful lest Mr. Wilberforce, the editor, should come in and find a brawl in progress.

Rayner continued to hit, though not with a great deal of success. And Jimmy Renton waited until his opponent had expended nearly all his energy. Then, judging that the time had come for him to go in and win, he dropped his defensive tactics, and launched a fierce attack.

Biff! Thud! Biff! Thud!

Right and left, left and right, Jimmy Renton's fists shot out. And Rayner was completely baffled by the fierceness and unexpectedness of it all. He continued to hit out, but his fists merely sawed the air. And meanwhile Jimmy Renton was doing a lot of damage. He drove his man round and round the room, to the detriment of the furniture.

Chairs were knocked flying, the waste-paper-basket was overturned, and the scene was one of wild confusion.

Billy Desmond was grinning now. He was no longer anxious on Jimmy Renton's account. Jimmy was proving that he could keep his end up, and to spare.

"Good man!" chortled Billy Desmond. "Give him beans!"

Jimmy Renton shot out his left, straight from the shoulder, and Rayner reeled backwards. And then Jimmy dashed in with an upper-cut which lifted his opponent clean off his feet, and caused him to measure his length on the floor.

Then the door opened, and a stern-faced man of middle age stepped into the office. He was Mr. Wilberforce, the editor of the "Burchester Times." And he was amazed to see one member of his staff grovelling on his back, and another member—Billy Desmond—dancing a hornpipe; whilst a third individual, whom Mr. Wilberforce didn't know, was standing over Luke Rayner, and exclaiming:

"Get up and have some more!"

For a moment the editor stood petrified, unable to move or speak. When he did find his voice it resembled the rumble of thunder.

"What does this mean?"

Jimmy Renton promptly dropped his hands to his sides. Billy Desmond's hornpipe was broken off abruptly in the middle, and he resumed his seat at the typewriter, with an expression on his face which seemed to say: "That's fairly done it!" And Luke Rayner rose sullenly to his feet.

There was no reply to the editor's question. He repeated it.

Finding that neither Rayner nor Billy Desmond seemed willing to throw any light on the situation, Jimmy Renton spoke up.

"I've just given Rayner a licking, sir."

"So it seems," said the editor dryly. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 658.

"And what right have you, sir, an outsider, to come into my office and cause a disturbance?"

Jimmy Renton flushed.

"My uncle—" he began.

"What, in thunder, has your uncle got to do with it?"

"My uncle's given me a letter of introduction to you, sir. He hopes that you'll be able to find me a job on the staff."

Mr. Wilberforce gave a grunt.

"When I am in need of a fighting-editor," he said, "I'll advertise for one!"

Jimmy Renton said nothing. He felt conscious of having made a very unfortunate start. It was hardly likely that the editor would give him an engagement in the light of what had happened.

But Jimmy had a loyal friend near at hand.

"It wasn't Renton's fault, sir," said Billy Desmond. "He was forced into the quarrel."

"Oh, I see!"

The editor's keen glance lighted upon Rayner, who looked decidedly uncomfortable.

"So you, Rayner, were responsible for this unseemly brawl? This is not the first occasion that you have turned this office into a bear-garden. I warn you, here and now, that if there is a repetition of such conduct you will be given a week's notice!"

Rayner scowled, but said nothing.

The editor turned to Jimmy Renton.

"Follow me into my private room," he said.

Jimmy obeyed. And as he went Billy Desmond threw him a glance of friendly encouragement.

In the editor's sanctum Jimmy handed over the letter of introduction.

Mr. Wilberforce seated himself in his revolving-chair, and perused the missive. Then he turned to Jimmy.

"Your uncle, Renton," he said, "occupied this room and this chair for the space of fifteen years. He was the most capable editor the 'Burchester Times' has ever had—in fact, he built up the paper."

"So I've heard, sir," said Jimmy.

"I trust, Renton, that it is your ambition to—er—follow in your uncle's footsteps—to aspire to the editorship of the paper?"

"I'm afraid it isn't, sir," replied Jimmy frankly.

Mr. Wilberforce frowned.

"Am I to understand, Renton, that your ambitions—if any—lie in another channel?"

"That's so, sir. My greatest ambition at the moment is to become a first-class footballer. But, as that seems to be impossible, I must chuck the idea, and try to earn my own living in some other way."

"You are keen on journalistic work?"

"Not keen enough to want to become an editor, sir. All the same, I shall be ever so grateful if you can find me a job on the staff."

Mr. Wilberforce reflected for a few moments. Then he jerked out a sort of catechism.

"Can you write shorthand?"

"Yes, sir."

"What speed?"

"A hundred and eighty words a minute, sir."

"Can you type?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fifty words a minute?"

"I've never timed myself, sir; but I fancy I can do that."

"We'll see," said the editor. "Here's a notebook and pencil. I'm going to

dictate to you the leading article in to-day's paper. Ready?"

Jimmy nodded. And the next moment his pencil was racing over the pages of the notebook.

Mr. Wilberforce dictated at an almost breathless speed; but Jimmy Renton, who had been well coached in shorthand at St. Clive's, found no difficulty in keeping pace with him.

"You've got all that down?" said the editor, when he had finished.

"Yes, sir."

"Good! Now go, and transcribe it on to the typewriter."

Jimmy proceeded to the outer office, and borrowed Billy Desmond's machine. His fingers fairly flew over the keys, and he completed his task in record time. Then he gathered up the typewritten pages and took them in to the editor.

Mr. Wilberforce was astonished at the accuracy and rapidity with which Jimmy Renton had accomplished his task. But he betrayed no trace of astonishment in his expression.

"You'll do," he said. "I can offer you a reporter's job, at fifty shillings a week to commence. Is that satisfactory?"

"Quite, sir!" said Jimmy Renton.

"Will you be ready to start to-morrow?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Very well! We'll regard that as settled. If there's anything you want to know, Desmond will put you wise."

And the editor waved his hand towards the door, to signify that the interview was at an end.

Jimmy Renton was smiling as he emerged into the outer office.

"What luck?" inquired Billy Desmond.

"I've been given a reporter's job."

"Splendid!"

"But I've never done any reporting in my life, and I'm afraid I shall come a cropper."

"Not you! All you've got to do is to attend the various functions in Burchester—the mothers' meetings, the latest theatrical shows, and so forth."

"And report all the speeches?"

"All that are worth reporting. You'll find that not many words of wisdom are uttered in this one-eyed show. I'll come round with you to-morrow, if you like, and show you the ropes."

"Thanks awfully!"

During this conversation Rayner had been favouring Jimmy Renton with a savage glare.

"What salary are you getting?" he demanded.

"I don't see that that's any business of yours," said Jimmy.

"I insist upon knowing!" growled Rayner. "You might be getting more than me, and if that's the case I shall raise Cain about it!"

"Well, if you insist upon knowing, I suppose I'd better satisfy your curiosity," said Jimmy. "I'm getting two thousand a year, free of income-tax."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Billy Desmond. Rayner clenched his hands with fury. And if looks could have killed, Jimmy Renton would have expired on the spot.

"You—you—" spluttered Rayner.

Ignoring his foe, Jimmy Renton turned to Billy Desmond.

"Cheerio!" he said. "I'm going to get some grub and hunt for some digs. See you in the morning."

And the newly-engaged reporter on the staff of the "Burchester Times" stepped out of the office, leaving Billy Desmond chuckling and Luke Rayner fuming.

Jimmy Fills the Breach.

AFTER a substantial meal at the Imperial Cafe, which was situated next door to the newspaper office, Jimmy Renton set out in quest of lodgings. He would fain have put up at one of the hotels, but funds would not run to it; he was obliged to content himself with a bed-sitting-room in a quiet little house on the outskirts of the town.

Jimmy was feeling much happier now than he had felt earlier in the day, when he had said good-bye to his friends at St. Clive's. He had secured a job—not a very remunerative one, but it would enable him to make his way without being a burden to his parents.

It was in quite a cheerful mood that Jimmy dashed off a letter to his father, and to Tony Harcourt of St. Clive's, acquainting them with his good fortune.

Having despatched his letters, Jimmy made an exhaustive tour of Burchester and the surrounding district, and he picked up quite a lot of information which would stand him in good stead on the morrow, when he set out with notebook and pencil to do his first day's work for the "Burchester Times."

That evening Jimmy went to the local theatre, and he had the enterprise to write up a detailed report of the play.

When he handed in the report to the editor on arriving at the office next morning, Mr. Wilberforce congratulated him on his initiative, and on the quality of his work.

"When you get into the swing of this, Renton," he said, "I'm sure you'll like the life. And you may, after all, develop an ambition to become an editor."

But Jimmy replied that he didn't regard it as at all likely. His heart and soul were still in football.

When Jimmy went into the outer office he found Billy Desmond waiting for him, with his hat and coat on.

"You'll have to do my job to-day, Rayner," said Billy. "I'm going to take Renton round and show him the ropes."

"You're goin' to sneak a day off, you mean!" growled Rayner. "It's like your cheek!"

"Nice, genial sort of merchant, isn't he?" said Billy Desmond, turning to Jimmy. "Come along! Let's tear ourselves away from his charming society."

In spite of the fact that his heart wasn't in his job, Jimmy Renton thoroughly enjoyed his first day's work.

Billy Desmond escorted him here, there, and everywhere, and it was surprising what a number of interesting, and sometimes exciting, things there were to be seen.

By lunch-time, Jimmy's notebook was crammed with reports.

"Good work!" said Billy Desmond. "If you go on at this rate, Jimmy, you'll be filling the paper on your own every week! You're an energetic cove, and no mistake. What do you say to some grub? Here's a place that's noted for the quality of its grilled kippers!"

Jimmy Renton laughed, and followed his companion into a quiet little restaurant. He had not known Billy Desmond long, but a warm attachment had sprung up between them—an attachment which seemed likely to develop into a lasting friendship.

"What's the programme for this afternoon?" inquired Jimmy, when lunch had been disposed of.

"Do you think you could report a footer-match?"

"I'd sooner play in one."

"You're keen on footer?"

"Mad—crazy keen!"

"Same here! I turn out for Burchester United when the spirit moves

me. The United are playing this afternoon, by the way, against Winton Old Boys. But, of course, they won't stand an earthly!"

"Who—the United, or Winton?"

"The United. They've got a good defence, but a weak forward-line—except when I'm playing!" added Billy Desmond modestly.

"And is this the match we're going to see?"

"Yes. If you'll do a half-column report of it that'll complete our day's work."

"Does Rayner play footer?" asked Jimmy Renton, at length.

Billy Desmond nodded.

"To give the devil his due," he said, "there isn't a finer winger in Burchester. Rayner's hot stuff. When he cares to keep himself in condition there isn't a back who can stop him. It's the dream of his life to play for one of the big clubs later on."

"It's the dream of my life, too," said Jimmy.

Billy Desmond stared across the table at his chum.

"You don't mean to say so?" he ejaculated.

"I've got the football fever badly," said Jimmy. "I may grow out of it in time, but I don't think I shall. The game's got me absolutely in its grip."

"By Jove! Did you play for St. Clive's First Eleven?"

"Yes."

"Then you must be the real goods. St. Clive's are always spoken of as a hot side."

After further conversation Billy Desmond rose to his feet.

"Time we staggered along to the ground," he said. "They kick off in half an hour."

Having settled their bills, Jimmy Renton and his companion made their way to the Burchester ground.

"Being Press representatives," said Billy Desmond, "we're privileged to go into the dressing-room. Come on!"

In the dressing-room a number of young fellows were changing into football garb. And one of them—a short, stocky individual—was scowling and letting off steam.

"What's wrong, Evans?" inquired Billy Desmond.

Evans was the skipper of the Burchester United team, and he turned to his questioner with a snort of exasperation.

"We're a man short!" he growled. "Harper hasn't turned up. The silly chump's sprained his ankle, or broken his back, or something of the sort."

"Rough luck!"

"It's no use asking you to turn out, I suppose, Billy?"

"I'd play like a shot," was the reply, "but I'm on duty."

"Thought as much."

Billy Desmond turned suddenly to Jimmy Renton.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't play, Jimmy," he said, "if you're prepared to run the risk of the editor getting to hear of it."

Jimmy's eyes sparkled.

"I'd simply love to play!" he said.

"But what about reporting the match?"

"I'll see to that."

"You're a sport!"

The skipper of Burchester United looked Jimmy Renton up and down, as if taking stock of him.

"Are you a good player?" he asked.

"My dear fellow," interposed Billy Desmond, "Jimmy's played for St. Clive's First Eleven! You couldn't have a better testimonial than that."

The skipper's face brightened.

"That's fine!" he said. "Will you turn out for us, kid?"

"Yes, rather!" said Jimmy.

"There will be the dickens of a row if the editor gets to know," said Billy Desmond. "So you'd better play under an assumed name. How would Bertie Boggins do?"

Jimmy laughed.

"I think I'll be Jack Brown," he said.

"All serene."

The necessary arrangements having been completed, Jimmy Renton donned the red-and-white jersey of Burchester United.

It did not occur to him that he was neglecting his duty—that the risk he ran was a very serious one.

If Mr. Wilberforce came to hear of this exploit the consequences would be anything but pleasant for Jimmy Renton. Billy Desmond was keenly alive to this fact, but Jimmy wasn't. All he could think about at that moment was the fact that his services had been accepted—that he was to play at outside-left for Burchester United.

Only the day before Jimmy had been doubtful if he would ever kick a ball again. Those doubts were now set at rest. And when Evans led his men on to the field none felt in better trim than the new recruit, Jimmy Renton.

A goodly crowd had assembled to see the game. But Jimmy was not a sufferer from stage fright. He was used to crowds.

After a brief interval the Winton Old Boys sprinted on to the field. They were a big, bustling side, and they looked as if they meant business.

When the teams lined up Jimmy Renton found that his partner on the wing was Evans, the skipper.

"Have you got a good turn of speed, kid?" asked Evans.

Jimmy replied that he could do the hundred yards in less than eleven seconds.

"In that case," said the skipper, "I'll see that my passes are put well forward every time."

Then the whistle sounded, and the ball was set in motion.

For quite a long time the United were not in the picture.

Winton Old Boys pressed at the outset, and they continued their pressure until, twenty minutes from the start, their centre-forward netted a fine goal.

Up to this stage Jimmy Renton had not kicked the ball, and he was beginning to wonder if he would ever get a chance of doing so when Evans sent him away.

"Go along, Jimmy!"

It was Billy Desmond's voice, from the touchline. Jimmy Renton heard it, but he needed no incentive. He was speeding over the ground like a hare.

When he came within shooting distance Jimmy prepared to pass the

ball. And then he saw that there was no one to pass to. He had left the rest of the forwards far behind.

"Don't wait—shoot!" rapped out the United supporters.

And Jimmy shot.

The goalie flung himself at the incoming leather, but he was the fraction of a second too late. The ball evaded his frantic clutch and crashed into the net.

"Goal!"

Notebook in hand, Billy Desmond recorded his chum's success, at the same time murmuring something to the effect that that was the stuff to give the troops.

Stimulated by that equalising goal, the United played up valiantly. But they were unable to add to their success, and half-time arrived with the score one all.

"Good man!" said Billy Desmond approvingly as Jimmy Renton came off. "You're worth your weight in chocolate walnuts! I knew you must be pretty good, having played for St. Clive's; but you're more than good, Jimmy—you're simply stunning!"

"Flattery, thy name is Desmond!" said Jimmy, laughing.

"If you play in the second half like you played in the first, the United will simply romp home!" said Billy Desmond.

"I suppose you're saying nice things about me in your report?"

"Not about you—about Jack Brown."

"Splendid!"

"Wilberforce will never suspect," said Billy Desmond. "Hallo! The whistle's gone. You'd better return to the fray."

In the second half Jimmy Renton thoroughly enjoyed himself—up to a point. Thanks to a clever pass from Evans, he was able to put the United in front, the goalie having no chance whatever with his scorching shot.

The United retained their lead up till ten minutes from the end. And then Jimmy Renton became aware of the fact that Billy Desmond was beckoning to him frantically.

Jimmy stopped short in his stride, vaguely wondering what was wrong.

And then he saw a stout, middle-aged gentleman pushing his way through the crowd.

A moment later and the stout gentleman came snorting on to the field of play.

Jimmy Renton uttered an exclamation of dismay.

For the intruder was the last person in the world that Jimmy wished to see at that moment. It was Mr. Wilberforce, the editor of the "Burchester Times"!

(A splendid, long instalment of this grand new football serial in next Wednesday's "Gem" Library.)

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CHAPTER 1. A Cry for Help!

"MERRY!" The master of the Shell rapped out the name sharply and angrily.

Tom Merry started.

"Ye-es, sir?" he stammered.

"You were whispering to Lowther!"

"I—I—"

"A few minutes ago you were whispering to Mahners!"

"I—I—" stammered Tom.

Some of the juniors in the Form-room grinned. There was no doubt about the fact; the Terrible Three certainly had been exchanging busy whispers in class that morning. And Mr. Linton was annoyed.

"You will inform me at once what you were whispering about!" exclaimed the master of the Shell.

"Oh!"

"At once, sir!" rapped out Mr. Linton.

Tom Merry hesitated. All the Shell were looking at him, most of them grinning. The juniors suspected that the Terrible Three had been concocting some "jape" of which they did not care to inform Mr. Linton, and the master of the Shell had the same suspicion in his mind.

"I—I—" stammered Tom Merry. "I—I had a letter from Levison this morning, sir—"

"Well?" snapped Mr. Linton.

"You—you know Levison of the Fourth and his minor are away from St. Jim's now, sir—"

"I am perfectly aware of the fact, Merry. I do not see why a letter from Ernest Levison should draw your whole attention away from your lessons!" said Mr. Linton sarcastically.

"It—it's a bit exciting, sir—"

"What?"

"You—you see, sir—"

"I do not see, Merry."

"Levison's been through a fearful time since he left St. Jim's, sir. He has been followed by an old enemy of his father—a man from Alaska named Dirk Power, who tried to kill him and Frank—"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Linton.

"And—and he wants some of us fellows to join him, sir, if the Head will let us—"

Tom Merry was interrupted.

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There was a tap on the Form-room door, it opened, and Toby, the page, looked in.

"Master Merry is wanted in the 'Ead's study, sir," announced Toby.

"Indeed! You may go at once, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry quitted his place, and left the Form-room. He left a rather excited Form behind him, and Mr. Linton had some difficulty in getting the attention of the Shell back to Latin verses.

Tom hurried to Dr. Holmes' study. He wondered whether this sudden summons had anything to do with the Levisons.

The Head was standing by the telephone, the receiver in his hand, when the junior entered his study.

His face was very grave.

"Ernest Levison wishes to speak to you on the telephone, Merry," said the Head quietly. "That is why I have sent for you. He is speaking from Rock-haven, and is waiting for you."

He handed the receiver to the junior.

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom.

The junior placed the receiver to his ear, and spoke quickly into the transmitter.

"Levison, are you there?"

"Is that you, Tom Merry?" It was the voice of Levison of the Fourth that answered over the wires.

"Yes, yes!"

"You got my letter this morning, Tom?"

"Yes. Are you still safe?" breathed Tom Merry.

"For the present, yes. Frank and I joined my father here—by the skin of our teeth. The mater and Doris are in a safe place at present—not here. Tom!" The junior's voice was shaking a little. Tom Merry could guess the strain under which he was labouring.

"Tom, I don't know whether that madman, Dirk Power, knows that we are here—we haven't seen him so far since we eluded him at Lantham—but—but I'm in fear every moment of seeing his evil face. To-morrow morning a steam-yacht will be here to take us to sea—"

"To sea?" repeated Tom.

"Yes. Father thinks we can get clear away here; it's a lonely place. The yacht will pick us up a mile out of the village. Unless that mad villain Power is a magician, he can't stop us in the time. Will you come?"

"I—I—" began Tom.

"We're going to Alaska, by way of Panama," hurried on Levison. "I can't tell you everything now. It was in Alaska that Dirk Power became my father's enemy. He believes that it was my father who left him among the Indians on the Yukon, where he was tortured; but, on the spot, father hopes to get proofs of his innocence. It's the only way to save all our lives. I'll tell you more when I see you, if you can come. For Heaven's sake, come if you can, with some of the fellows. With you with us I shall feel safer about Frank. You don't know what we've been through. I haven't closed my eyes for three nights."

"I—I understand. I'd come like a shot if I can get away—"

"Ask the Head. We shall be safer—or at least safer—in a party. But as it stands we may be taken off our guard any minute and murdered. It's as bad as that, Tom. Suppose you and Lowther and Manners, and two or three other chaps, came—" Levison broke off huskily. "But I've no right to ask you. Why should you risk your lives—"

"Never mind about that! We'll be glad to come if we can!"

"You three and D'Arcy and Figgins and Fatty Wynn, if you'd care to. There's room for six of you on the yacht easily. Oh, Tom, if you'd only come—" The voice trailed off.

Tom Merry felt a catch in his throat. Levison, usually so cool and self-reliant, was evidently very nearly at the end of his tether.

"Ask the Head, Tom. My father will speak to him, too; he's here. Speak to the Head, and then put him on to speak to my father."

"I will, old chap!"

Tom Merry turned quickly to the Head. His face was ablaze with excitement.

"Dr. Holmes—"

"Well, Merry?" said the Head quietly. His look and tone told the junior that the kind old Head knew how the matter stood.

Tom hurriedly explained, and the Head took the receiver. For some minutes he spoke quietly to Mr. Levison over the wires. Then he turned to the eager junior.

"You wish to go, Merry?"

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"Oh, sir!" gasped Tom. "Yes—yes! If you'll let us, sir—"

"The answer must be given at once," said the Head. He knitted his brows. "In the circumstances I think I am justified in letting you take the risk—the responsibility is mine. If you and your friends care to go to help your schoolfellow in this peril, I give you permission. You may tell Levison so."

Tom caught the receiver eagerly. "Levison! We're coming!" he breathed. "We'll join you at Rockhaven to-day!"

He heard a gasp of relief.

"Thanks—thanks, Tom! That's done me good! Get to Rockhaven as quick as you can. Follow the path along the beach west to the caves. You'll find us there. I'd stay here and meet you, but—but—"

"Don't! We'll join you at the caves! Good-bye, old chap!"

"Good-bye, Tom! God bless you!" came almost in a whisper.

Tom Merry hung up the receiver.

CHAPTER 2.

The Spy!

"Y AAS, wathath!"

That was the reply of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, when the question was put to him.

There was no hesitation about it. And the answers of the other fellows Levison had named were equally unhesitating. Figgins and Fatty Wynn, of the New House, were equally eager to go; Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, declared that, anyhow, they wouldn't have let Tom Merry go without them.

Had more than six of the juniors been asked, Tom Merry could have led a little army of St. Jim's fellows to the help of Levison of the Fourth. It was perhaps fortunate that the fellows were in class, or Tom would have been overwhelmed with offers.

Black and Herries and Digby certainly would have wanted to accompany D'Arcy; Kerr and Redfern would have wanted to back up Tom Merry. Clive and Cardew, of the Fourth, could scarcely have been denied, but it happened that they were away from St. Jim's—Cardew having gone home on account of his grandfather's illness, with Clive to keep him company. And a host of other fellows would have proffered their services—if they had had the chance.

But the juniors named by Levison were called out of their Forms to give their decision, and they gave it—in the affirmative. That was all.

And then there was a hurried departure, while the rest of St. Jim's remained in the class-rooms.

"Just a bag each," said Tom Merry. "No time for more. We can get some more things later—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"No time for talk now, Gussy!" said Figgins.

"But we shall wequiah a twunk each at least—"

"Bosh!" said Fatty Wynn. "We can do with a bag each, and, of course, a lunch-basket in the train—"

"We can do without a lunch-basket, Wynn," said D'Arcy severely. "But we shall wequiah a change of clobber—"

"Shall I take my camera?" asked Manners thoughtfully.

"Bother your camera!" said Monty Lowther. "When do we start, Tom?"

"Five minutes!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Bai Jove! Then there's no time for you fellows to waste in talkin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I shall

have to go without a twunk if we start in five minutes, Tom Mewwy."

"You'll have to go without a twunk anyhow, fathead!"

"Weally, you know—"

Tom Merry did not wait to listen. He rushed away to pack his bag, and the other fellows followed his example. Even Arthur Augustus, stately and leisurely as he generally was, rose to the occasion, and was ready when Tom Merry & Co. started. The Head's car was snorting on the drive to take them to the station.

"Jump in!" called out Tom Merry; and Arthur Augustus came speeding out of the School House, bag in hand, just in time to pile into the big car after the rest.

As the car sped down the road to Rylcombe, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass watchfully in all directions.

"What the thump are you looking for?" asked Figgins.

"I was thinkin' of that mad wuffian Dirk Powah—"

"He's not here, fathead!"

"It had occurred to me, deah boy, that he might be watchin' the school, in case Levison communicated with us, to get on his twack again—"

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"D'Arcy's right—it's possible! Keep your eyes open!"

"Look at that chap!" muttered Lowther.

A man—a stranger to the St. Jim's fellows—was leaning against a tree by the roadside. He stepped out into the road as the car passed, and the juniors saw him clearly in the sunlight. His dark, foreign-looking face was disfigured by a hideous scar that ran from his temple to his chin. His greenish eyes glittered at the car for a moment as it swept by.

"That's not Dirk Power," said Tom. "Levison's sent me his description in his letter—a fellow with a copper-coloured face and black eyes—not scarred like that chap. But that man was watching us."

"He's following on a bike," said Manners, looking back.

"Put it on, chauffeur!" breathed Tom.

The juniors' hearts were beating now. The scarred man was following the car as fast as he could drive the pedals, and there was little doubt that he was a spy in the employ of Dirk Power. But the car soon dropped the cyclist, and dashed up to the station. Tom Merry & Co. crowded out, and ran into the building, and took their tickets for Rockhaven hurriedly. They were in the train before the cyclist could get near the station, and they breathed more freely when it rolled out with them towards Wayland Junction.

"Change at Wayland for Rockhaven," said Lowther. "I wonder—"

He did not finish. The same thought was in the minds of all the juniors—was the spy still on their track?

At the junction there was five minutes to wait for the Rockhaven train. It was just as the St. Jim's party were entering it, that a scarred face looked in over the barrier upon the platform. The Spanish-looking man grinned, his scar wrinkling up hideously.

Tom Merry sank back into his seat as the train rushed out of Wayland towards the sea. The spy had watched them, he knew the destination of the train. Did he know—or guess—that they were going to join the Levisons? He could not know; but he might guess. And Dirk Power, baffled and at a loss, would not leave a chance untried.

Tom's heart was heavy. They were

going to help the hunted man. But were they bringing him fresh peril?

The train clanged on.

"Rockhaven!" said Figgins at last.

Tom Merry & Co. left the train hurriedly. They did not linger in the station. But as they hurried away their eyes were well about them. The spy had been left behind at Wayland; they knew that. But if he had communicated with the man from Alaska—

Tom Merry feared every moment to see the coppery face, the burning black eyes of the half-insane avenger of whom Levison had told him in his letter; but to his deep relief there was no sign of Dirk Power. The juniors hurried out of Rockhaven by the path along the shore.

CHAPTER 3.

The Shadow of Death!

"Father!"

Ernest Levison stood in the mouth of the cave, on the rocky shore a mile from the fishing-village. He was looking along the path that ran by the cliff; on his left the sea broke on a shingly beach with a dull murmur. In the distance a sail or two glanced on the sea; but closer inshore the waters were deserted—as solitary as the beach. Within the cave, behind Levison of the Fourth, a worn-faced man sat on a boulder, his hand, holding a revolver, resting on his knee. Frank Levison lay on a pile of rugs on the rocky floor of the cave.

Mr. Levison started as his elder son spoke, and his hand rose hurriedly, the revolver in his grip. His pale face twitched.

"Ernest, is it he?"

He rose unsteadily.

Deep anxiety and haunting fear had told upon the man. His nerves were in a twitter.

"No, no! It's Tom Merry—he's coming."

Mr. Levison gave a gasp of relief.

"Oh, I feared—I feared—"

"Dirk Power cannot find us here," said Levison soothingly. "He is off the track, father. Now our friends are coming."

"Thank Heaven!"

There was a tramp of feet on the shingle.

"Tom Merry!"

"Levison, old chap!"

They gripped hands.

"It's good of you to come!" muttered Levison. "I know I oughtn't to have asked you; but—but—" He made a gesture towards Frank, fast asleep on the rugs, and his father, leaning against the rock and breathing hard. "It's our lives that are at stake, Tom, and—and you see the state my poor father is in. And Frank's only a kid!"

Tom Merry nodded.

He could understand that it was chiefly upon Ernest Levison that the burden fell, and how anxious he was to have some of his friends about him in those hours of terrible peril and incessant anxiety.

"We're glad to come, old fellow," said Tom quietly. "The Head is going to tell our people about it—that will be all right. With a crowd of us here, that villain Power will have less chance to get at you. You're camping here?"

"Yes—in hiding!" said Levison bitterly.

"But—the police—"

Levison shook his head.

"The police cannot protect us from a madman who is ready to throw away his life for his revenge," he said. "And—and—" He hesitated. "Until my father can prove his innocence—you

understand? The man is mad, but he believes that he has been wronged. For ten years he was a prisoner of the Indians in the frozen North; he was tortured when he attempted to escape. He believes that it was my father who betrayed him into the hands of the savages, to rob him of his share in the gold-mine. His brain is turned; but he is cunning, clever, remorseless! He is quite master of himself, except on one point—revenge upon my father and upon all his family. And he is rich; he has spent money like water in hunting us down, but—

"And your father was innocent?"

Levison flushed.

"He has told me so; but he cannot prove it yet—neither, I think, would the mad wretch listen to him. He will find the proofs in Alaska—at least, he hopes so. It is true that Power was made a prisoner by the Indians, and that my father, believing him dead, took possession of the gold-mine in which they were partners many years ago. But—but he had never planned it, as Power believes—"

Mr. Levison came up to the group.

"You may believe that, my boys," he said, his lips twitching. "Dirk Power was my partner in the old days on the Klondyke—we found the gold-mine together. We had many disputes; we were partners, not friends. But I never wronged him—I swear it!"

"We believe you, sir—every word," said Tom.

"I can find the proofs in Alaska—proofs that will convince even that mad wretch," said Mr. Levison brokenly. "Heaven grant that we may have time before—Ah!"

He broke off suddenly.

Crack! A bullet spattered upon the rock a few inches from Mr. Levison's head.

"Good heavens!"

"Into the cave!" panted Levison.

Crack!

The rifle rang again as they rushed into the shelter of the cave.

Crack, crack!

The bullets splintered the rock at the mouth of the cavern. Frank Levison sprang up with a cry.

Tom Merry & Co. crowded into the cave, their hearts beating hard.

They had looked for peril when they had joined the Levisons; but they had

hardly expected it so soon, or so openly. They had taken their lives into their hands now.

Levison of the Fourth picked up a rifle from a corner of the cave. His eyes glittered as he grasped it. His nerve, at least, was equal to the strain. Tom Merry peered out cautiously.

A puff of smoke was rising above the rocks in the distance.

A face showed for a moment over a rock. He caught a glimpse of a coppery visage, with burning black eyes.

"Dirk Power!" muttered Levison, at his elbow.

The face disappeared the next moment. Crack!

The man from Alaska was firing again.

"If he comes—" muttered Tom.

Levison's jaw set grimly.

"If he comes I shall shoot him dead at sight!" he answered between his teeth. "It is his life or ours. He has found us!"

"We were watched," muttered Tom. "A Spanish-looking man, with a scarred face, spied on us as we left the school, and—"

"A few hours more would have saved us!" muttered Levison. "At sunset the yacht will be here. We're to go off in the motor-boat—it's hidden in the cove yonder. But we can't start till we get the signal. And in the meantime—"

He broke off, watching.

"The villain will never venture to rush a crowd of us," said Wynn. "We're safe in the cave."

It seemed so.

The hours of waiting wore away, and nothing was seen of Dirk Power, though it was assured that the man from Alaska was still watching from a distance, finger on trigger.

They were heavy hours to the party in the cave.

The watch was vigilant and incessant; but the beach and the cliffs were deserted; no footstep broke the silence of the lonely shore.

It was with deep relief that the watchers saw the shadows lengthening at last.

Levison raised his hand suddenly.

"Hark!"

It was a dull, echoing boom—the sound of a gun at sea. Mr. Levison started up, his eyes flashing.

"The signal!" he exclaimed.

"We've got to chance it now," muttered Levison. "We've got to make a rush for the boat—"

"The yacht is waiting," said Mr. Levison. He peered from the cave into the thickening shadows of the shore. "The motor-boat is close at hand. Come!"

"Look out!" screamed Frank suddenly.

The fog had stepped from the cave. He sprang back, dragging back his father.

"What—"

"Back—back! The rock—it's coming!" panted Frank.

There was a whirring, grinding sound above. The juniors, back in the mouth of the cave looked up, with thumping hearts. They understood. The madman had climbed the cliff above and loosened the huge rock, which was crashing down to crush them.

One minute of tense, fearful anxiety, while the grinding and crashing of the falling rock deafened them. Then—Crash, crash!

Splinters of rock beat upon them as the huge mass crashed at the mouth of the cave, shutting off the light. The cave was filled with echoing, deafening sound. Sudden darkness rushed on them.

"Good heavens!"

A terrible silence followed the crash

of the rock. Faintly, from the distance above, came the echo of a wild laugh.

CHAPTER 4.

The Flight to Sea!

TOM MERRY was the first to recover.

His face was white; the terrible peril, so narrowly escaped, had shaken him. Had the rock fallen as they left the cave, at that moment they would have been lying, crushed and shapeless, under its mass. Only a few feet had intervened between them and a fearful death.

But there was not an instant to be lost. "Come!" panted Tom. "He will be here soon to see what has happened to us. Come, while there's time!"

The great rock shut up the mouth of the cave, leaving only an opening a couple of feet wide on one side. Through that opening the party hurried. In the thickening dusk they ran down to the cove.

Minutes were precious now—before the madman descended the cliff to ascertain whether his victims had perished. At every moment they feared to hear the ring of his rifle behind them and the whiz of a bullet.

But there was time!

"Jump in!"

The motor throbbed.

The motor-boat, concealed under an overhanging ledge of rock in the little cove, had escaped the eyes of the man from Alaska. Tom Merry & Co. crowded into it. Mr. Levison, older and more collected now than the juniors had expected to see him, handled the little craft well. But the minutes were passing—and each minute was fraught with fearful peril. The boat was in motion at last, gliding down the cove to the murmuring sea.

"Off at last!" breathed Levison.

The darkness was thickening.

"Listen!" muttered Tom.

On the receding shore footsteps rang on the shingle. They heard a yell of rage from the distant shadows.

"He knows!" said Levison.

Crack, crack, crack!

The rifle rang from the shadows. The madman was firing wildly, at random almost. He could hear the throb of the motor-boat as it fled seaward; in the darkness he was firing at the sound. A bullet whistled over the heads of the juniors. On one side, and then the other, the bullets splashed up the water.

But the boat fled on swiftly. The reports grew duller in the distance; the flashes of the rifle died in the darkness.

Round the motor-boat now the sea was curling.

"There's the yacht!"

Lights gleamed on the sea. A hoarse voice shouted, hailing the boat. Mr. Levison shouted back.

The shape of the steam-yacht loomed up in the shadows. From the distant shore, faint and far off, the impotent rifle was still ringing.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathed hard as he trod the deck of the yacht. "I am glad to be out of that, Tom Mewwy."

"Thank Heaven, we're clear!" breathed Levison.

"Safe at last!"

"Full steam ahead!" was the signal from the bridge.

Tom Merry looked back.

The shores of old England were hidden in the darkness, and only the great cliff above the cave loomed up, grim and shadowy. From behind a bank of clouds the moon sailed out, and the darkness gave place to light. High against the moonlit sky soared the great cliff, and

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on the summit, as it receded, Tom caught a glimpse of a figure black against the sky.

"Give me your glasses, Gussy!"

"Heah you are, deah boy!"

Tom Merry put the glasses up. The cliff, and the figure upon it, rushed into nearer view in the clear moonlight.

It was Dirk Power who stood on the cliff, on the perilous verge, and he was shaking his clenched fist in impotent rage as the yacht steamed on.

The clouds rolled over the moon again, and darkness swallowed up the scene.

Tom Merry lowered the glasses.

The figure on the cliff was gone from his sight, but it remained in his memory, haunting him for many a long day.

Was the fierce pursuit over at last? On the wide waste of waters were they safe from the hate of the mad avenger? It seemed so, and yet—and yet—

The wide Atlantic rolled round the yacht.

Old England lay far astern. Round the little steamer, as she fled westward, lay the waste of the great waters.

Day followed day, and only sea and sky met the eyes of the voyagers—sea and sky and distant sails, and occasionally the smoke of a steamer.

The juniors were used to the sea by that time. They were beginning to enjoy the voyage.

But in Tom Merry's mind remained the picture of that threatening figure, of the clenched, impotent fist shaken after the fleeing yacht. And in all his waking hours Tom Merry's eyes were on the sea, watching—watching. And he knew that the same fear was in Levison's mind as he watched the sea—the fear that the madman was still in pursuit, and that he would be seen again in the midst of the great waters.

CHAPTER 5.

The Searchlight on the Sea!

"LOOK!" Levison caught Tom Merry's arm almost convulsively as he breathed the word.

It was night—deep, dusky night on the waters.

A warm southern night, with stars that glittered in the sky like points of fire. The Azores lay far astern of the yacht now, as she sped to the south-west on the long run to Panama. In the days that had passed Tom Merry & Co. had fallen into their places aboard. St. Jim's seemed very far off to them now.

They liked the yacht and the crew, and bluff, bronzed old Captain Corcoran. The captain was an old friend of Mr. Levison's, and he knew the whole story, and Tom Merry had noted the rugged old seaman's kindness to the nerve-shattered man who was fleeing for his life. He had noted, too, that the captain was frequently scanning the sea through the bridge binoculars, and he had wondered whether Captain Corcoran shared his belief that the man from Alaska was not yet done with.

The yacht was steaming on at a good speed under the glimmering stars, and Tom Merry had come on deck to enjoy the coolness of the sea breeze. In spite of the stars the night was dark, a dim haze lay over the water.

"Look, the light!"

Tom Merry started as Levison caught his arm.

"What—"

"Look!"

From the dusk of the night a sudden ray of light came from the sea—a long white arm of light that looked as if it came up from the bosom of the ocean.

Tom Merry blinked at it, dazzled.

The light, sharply-defined against the darkness, cut the night like a knife, spreading out fan-like as it lengthened.

"A searchlight!" muttered Tom.

Levison's grip unconsciously closed on his arm tightly, like the grip of a vice.

"Dirk Power!" he breathed.

"Impossible!"

"I tell you it's he! We are pursued again—here, in the heart of the Atlantic!"

"But—"

"I tell you I know it!" groaned Levison. "What is to happen now?"

Tom Merry was silent.

Was it possible? He watched the searchlight with throbbing heart.

The bar of light was moving round from its invisible centre, sweeping the sea in a circle, searching.

Over the dark waters the edge of the light was approaching the yacht. They were within its radius when it reached them.

There was a mutter of voices from the bridge. Tom Merry glanced up at the captain.

Captain Corcoran was staring steadily towards the strange light that had shot up from the sea.

A whisper of voices ran through the yacht. There was a gathering of footsteps on the deck.

All eyes were turned on the searchlight, sweeping round slowly in its circle, creeping towards the yacht like the tentacle of some strange and terrible animal feeling for its victim in the darkness.

Tom Merry heard a suppressed groan beside him. He turned. It was Mr. Levison. With both hands clutching the rail, the hunted man stared at the light, and in his ghastly face Tom read his fear—the fear that it was his old enemy who was searching the sea for him.

"It is he!"

Tom heard the words breathed faintly by his side.

"It's impossible!" muttered Lowther in Tom's ear. "How could he? Do you think it's Dirk Power, Tom?"

Tom Merry did not answer.

He did not know, but he felt that it was the man from Alaska. The speed of the yacht had increased. She was leaping onward like a live thing to escape from the circle before the tip of the light-beam touched her. Captain Corcoran had evidently signalled to the engine-room for full steam ahead. Did he believe, then, that the unseen vessel from which the searchlight proceeded held the man from Alaska?

Slowly, slowly but surely, the searchlight crept round in its relentless circle.

The throb of the engines shook the little craft as the yacht leaped and foamed onward.

What was the vessel from which the searchlight came? She was invisible. Nothing could be seen but that terrible arm of light stretching out towards them, searching for them, feeling for them! Was it not some cruiser? Yet why should a warship, of whatever nation, be searching the lonely sea in the heart of the Atlantic in the dusky southern night? It was no cruiser. It was the enemy—the enemy who, eluded in England, was following them across the waves of the ocean.

Tom Merry felt that it was so, and his heart thrilled with painful excitement as he watched the light.

For he realised that discovery meant danger, probably death. Behind the searchlight was the vessel from which it came. Behind it were guns. He knew it! Were the man's resources endless, then? Was he throwing away a fortune

in his relentless pursuit of the man whom he hated so relentlessly.

The light crept on.

Round the circle, nearer and nearer to the fleeing yacht, closer and closer it crept!

The yacht was almost on the verge of the circle it was following. But the approaching light was close now, terribly close! And if the yacht was within the radius when the light swept round and touched her track discovery was certain, and then—

Closer and closer. The juniors scarcely breathed. The yacht heaved and throbbed with the effort of the engines.

A dozen yards away now, and the extremity of the light was level with the yacht. Another second—

Like a hunted animal leaping into safety the yacht fled on beyond the circle.

The searchlight swept round astern.

Tom Merry panted with relief.

The searchlight lay on the sea behind the yacht—on the wake she left behind her in the waters—but it did not reach the fleeing craft. They were beyond its revealing power. Round it went—passing farther and farther from the craft it had barely missed.

Tom heard a dry sob beside him. Levison sprang to his father, and caught him as he reeled.

"Father!"

"Saved!" muttered Mr. Levison.

The junior helped him down to his cabin. Tom Merry and his comrades still watched the sea. Distant now, the searchlight still played on the ocean—sinking deeper and deeper into the distance.

The peril was passed. But for how long? What was the dawn to bring?

CHAPTER 6.

Tracked!

DAWN flushed up on the wide Atlantic.

There had been little sleep on the yacht for the remainder of the night. The enemy was on the track—all knew it—and there was deep though suppressed excitement on board. The searchlight had told the fugitives that they were hunted on the sea; and dawn was awaited with eagerness mingled with dread.

What was the dawn to reveal? For all knew that the pursuing vessel must be a swifter steamer than the yacht; she had not been far off in the night, and evidently had already gained the start made by the yacht in this strange race for life or death. If the pursuer was in sight at dawn, what hope was there?

What hope? The juniors asked themselves the question with a thrill at their hearts. Was it to be a fight for life on the yacht—a desperate struggle between themselves and Dirk Power and his associates. For it was clear that the gold of the man from Alaska had been freely spent in gathering a desperate crew to follow his bidding. What gang of desperadoes was there on board the steamer that had searched the sea for them in the hours of darkness?

Tom Merry, as he came on deck in the morning, noted that the whole crew were mustered there, and that they were armed. Captain Corcoran had evidently explained the affair to the seamen, and the men were prepared to back up their skipper if it came to a struggle. But Tom's heart sank at the thought. The seamen were brave and devoted—there was not one on board who would not fight to the last—but he knew that the pursuer must be armed with guns. Dirk Power would not neglect such an advantage.

tage. And a few shells across the water would sink the yacht helplessly; the seamen's rifles would avail little against such an attack.

Tom scanned the sea with anxious eyes.

The morning was misty; the sun glimmered red and angry through a heavy haze.

Tom was glad of it; it rendered the pursuit more difficult. He was aware, too, that the course of the yacht had changed. She was speeding more to the northward.

"Dirk Power knows!" It was Levison beside him who spoke. "He must have guessed that we're heading for the Panama Canal; and he may keep on and miss us. That's why the course is changed, Tom."

"You think he knows that your father is bound for Alaska?"

"He guesses, at least," Levison shuddered. "He is a demon, that man; his powers seem almost uncanny! And yet he is mad—mad!"

The juniors were all on deck now. Even Fatty Wynn had forgotten his breakfast.

Through the mist the sun glimmered crimson. Away to the northward the mist was thicker; southward it cleared. It was in that direction that all eyes were turned. From that direction pursuit would come, if Dirk Power had not been thrown off the track by the change of course during the night.

Mr. Levison came up with a telescope under his arm. The juniors watched him as he swept the sea. They saw him start and fidget.

"Father!" muttered Levison.

Mr. Levison gave him a ghastly look. "What—what have you seen?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"A steamer—that is all!" muttered Mr. Levison. "It—it may not be—"

"There are plenty of steamers in these seas," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, glancing at his comrades.

Tom Merry nodded.

"But—" said Figgins.

"We shall soon see."

Captain Corcoran was watching the strange craft through the bridge binoculars. He signalled to the engine-room, and rapped out a word to the quartermaster.

The yacht's course changed a little, to keep the stranger dead astern. Enemy or not, the captain was running no risks.

The smoke of the steamer could be seen from the deck; but, so far, the vessel could be made out only with the aid of the glasses. Tom Merry looked through D'Arcy's binoculars; he made out the steamer, small in the distance, with torrents of smoke pouring from her funnels.

"She's burning plenty of coal, anyhow," he said.

Mr. Levison's eye was on the telescope again.

He shivered.

"Her course is changed a little to keep in a direct line with us," he whispered. Levison set his teeth.

The yacht again changed her course a little—a couple of points—and the next minute the telescope revealed that the steamer had followed suit. There could be no further doubt now. It was pursuit.

A thrill ran through the juniors.

"She's comin' up hand over hand!" muttered D'Arcy, as the smoke-stack thickened against the misty sky. "They've got their glasses on us; they have seen us."

"No doubt about that," said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins drew a deep breath.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 658

"It's going to be a fight, then," he said.

"Bai Jove!"

"Let them come!" muttered Manners. "There's plenty of us here to give them a reception."

The captain called out sharply from the bridge. A seaman came along the deck with rifles to hand out to the juniors. Tom Merry felt his heart beat as he slipped a bandolier over his shoulder. It was to be a fight, then!

The steamer could be seen now. She was burning coal recklessly; the smoke from her funnels was like a pall against the sky over and behind her. Closer and closer came the pursuit.

All eyes were on the steamer, under the misty sky.

"Look!" muttered Figgins suddenly.

A puff of white smoke rose from the steamer.

"A gun!"

"Bai Jove! It's a gun!" breathed D'Arcy.

"Piracy on the high seas!" said Manners, with a faint smile, though his face was white.

The report of the gun floated faintly from the distance. They did not see the shell fall; it was too far. But the steamer was coming up now, hand over fist. The yacht was throbbing on under full steam; but the pursuer had at least four knots to the good in point of speed.

The juniors could make out the steamer now clearly, and moving figures on her deck. Behind her the smoke, in a black mass, swept down the horizon. Another puff of smoke!

"Closer this time!" muttered Levison.

Boom!

The report of the heavy gun rolled in a thousand echoes over the sea.

Crash!

The shell plunged into the sea astern of the yacht.

The water rose in a terrific spattering. The yacht raced on.

"Closer that time!" said Tom Merry grimly.

Boom! Boom!

The heavy gun spoke again and again from the racing steamer behind, and the shells splashed and crashed in the water round the fleeing yacht.

CHAPTER 7.

Under Fire!

BOOM!

Boom!

Tom Merry clenched his hands helplessly, furiously.

The gunner on the pursuing steamer had the range now, and the last shell had passed within a yard of the yacht's counter, and plunged into the sea ahead of the fugitive.

Through the glasses, Tom Merry could see the gunner beside the gun; it was the scarred Spaniard who had spied on the juniors when they left St. Jim's.

Close by him was the copper-faced man from Alaska—Dirk Power—his eyes fixed on the fugitive yacht.

"And we're helpless!" muttered Lowther savagely.

Tom Merry gave a bitter laugh.

"Helpless—at their mercy!" he said, between his teeth. "They'll finish with us out of rifle-range—effective range, anyhow—but I'm going to try."

"Yaas, wathah!" muttered D'Arcy.

Tom Merry put his rifle to his shoulder; but in the leaping of the yacht it was not easy to take aim, and the distance was great. Another shell hurtled over the sea, and it passed clean over the yacht, fortunately without striking, and vanished into the waves ahead. But it barely missed a funnel.

And it was clear that this could not last.

Crack!

Tom Merry pulled trigger at last.

The juniors anxiously watched the result of the shot. They saw the wide-brimmed hat spin from the head of the man from Alaska. It was luck as much as good shooting, at the distance.

"Bai Jove! He's hit!" shouted Arthur Augustus, waving his eyeglasses in wild excitement.

Tom shook his head.

Boom! Crash!

The shell spun over the yacht, carrying away a spar, and exploding. The little vessel shook from stem to stern with the shock. Still fortune favoured the hunted fugitives—so far, no one was hit by the flying fragments.

"But the next!" muttered Figgins.

There was tense silence. The next shell was pretty certain to pitch fairly into the yacht, and that would be the end. Tom Merry looked at the captain. He stood like a bronze statue on the bridge, immovable, his eyes fixed ahead. Did he still hope?

Tom Merry followed the direction of Captain Corcoran's fixed stare. Ahead of the yacht, as she raced northward, was the heavy bank of mist; the juniors, watching astern, had not observed it before, but they understood the captain's manoeuvre now. Round the yacht the mist was growing thick, and but a little distance now ahead lay the foggy bank of it, and, once in the bank, they were safe from the gun of the pursuer. There was still hope.

"Oh!" muttered Tom, catching his breath. "There's a chance left! Look, you fellows!"

The yacht was racing hard for the bank of thick mist that hung low over the sea, blotting out the waves from sight. Was there time yet? Tom Merry gasped and spluttered as the yacht raced into the fog-bank. Mist was in his eyes, in his ears; he gasped for breath. But, as if a curtain had fallen, the pursuing steamer vanished from sight, blotted out by the fog.

Boom! Boom!

Dully, heavily, in the distance boomed the gun; but the shells were flying wide. The instant the fog enveloped the yacht the course had changed, and the fugitive sped on a new tack, leaving Dirk Power and his gunner to guesswork.

The shells screamed and whistled through the fog, bursting in the misty sea far from the intended victims.

Boom! Boom!

Tom Merry panted.

"We've beaten them! Beaten them!"

A tremulous cheer broke from the St. Jim's juniors.

In the fog behind them the pursuer was feeling his way, baffled and powerless to track them down. The gun still boomed at intervals, sending random shells through the mist. Onward, at full speed, the yacht fled, and the booming died into silence behind.

Silence, save for the roar of the engines. Silence from the pursuer, baffled in the mist.

Was the man from Alaska still feeling his way in the fog, groping to and fro for the victims that had eluded him once more? They did not know; they cared little. They had escaped him again, and long miles of misty water lay between them and their relentless enemy.

When the fog-bank was dropped behind at last the yacht sped on, but she no longer headed for Panama. That Dirk Power divined her destination was

(Continued on page 12.)



1. Tom Merry caught the receiver eagerly. "Levison! We're coming!" he shouted. "We'll join you at Rockhaven to-day!" He heard a gasp of relief. (See chapter 1.)

2. There was a whirling sound above. The juniors looked up, with thumping hearts. The madman had climbed the cliff, and loosed the huge rock to crush them. (See chapter 3.)

3. Boom! The report of a heavy gun rolled in a thousand echoes over the sea. Crash! The shell plunged into the sea astern of the yacht. (See chapter 6.)

certain now, and it was probable that he would steam on to the canal now that he had lost the track. And it was by a wide and circuitous route that the yacht approached at last the Caribbean Sea, coming down by the Gulf of Mexico instead of by the usual direct route. And nothing more had been seen of the man from Alaska when Tom Merry & Co. set their eyes upon the great waterway through the isthmus of Central America.

CHAPTER 8. Sunk at Sea!

PANAMA at last!

The first stage of the terrible journey was over; but it was with anxiety in their hearts that Tom Merry & Co. entered the great canal. Before them lay the passage of the pierced isthmus, and then the wide Pacific Ocean, with its new perils. Of Dirk Power and his movements they knew nothing, except the certainty that he was still seeking them. Had the man from Alaska been left behind, searching for them in vain in the Atlantic or the West Indian seas? Or had he passed the Panama Canal, to lie in wait for them in the Gulf of Panama or the wide Pacific?

They could not tell; they only knew that the relentless ruffian would not abandon the chase. But in the canal they had nothing to fear from him; in the crowded seas he could not venture upon piracy. But when the Panama Canal was left behind, and the yacht glided on by the many islands of the Gulf of Panama, on the western side of the continent, Tom Merry & Co. watched the sea with vigilant eyes.

But the Gulf of Panama was left behind, and the yacht continued on her course north-west, with the Central American sierras against the eastern sky. Under sunny skies, and amid blue waters, the juniors almost forgot the tragedy of the voyage. Frank Levison's pale face regained its old colour as the danger seemed to grow more remote. Levison of the Fourth looked more at his ease. Even Mr. Levison moved with a lighter step, and spoke in more cheerful tones.

"After all, Power cannot be certain that we are heading for Alaska," Mr. Levison spoke in his cabin, in the drowsy heat of the tropical afternoon. The juniors were gathered round a large chart of North and South America that lay on the table. "He may have guessed it, but he cannot be sure. Possibly he has not even passed the Panama Canal—probably he has not thought of pursuing us into the Pacific."

He spoke hopefully rather than confidently; it was evident that the wish was father to the thought.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fanned himself gently.

Tropical heat lay on the Pacific Ocean; hardly a breeze stirred. The engines throbbed without ceasing.

Through the portholes, in the distance to the starboard, loomed up the sierras, black against the blue sky, white-capped.

"It will be wathah a change from this when we get to Alaska," remarked Arthur Augustus, as Mr. Levison bent over the chart, examining it, tracing the yacht's course. "I undahstand that Alaska is wathah Arctic in climate. I suppose we shall put in somewhah for outfits—"

"At San Francisco," said Levison.

"Frisco!" said Frank, with a smile. "We shall have some days there, to get in supplies. We shan't see much

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of California, though. But if that villain were not after us—"

"Hallo! What's up?" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly.

The speed of the yacht had suddenly increased, and her course was abruptly changed.

The juniors looked at one another with startled faces.

Was it the enemy again, under the sunny skies of the Pacific?

"Come on!" muttered Figgins.

They ran quickly on deck.

North-west by north lay the American coast; the mountains that towered against the sky now were the sierras of Mexico. In the shimmering sea here and there a rocky island rose. The yacht was turned from her old course, and was heading directly towards the distant land. Every moment the cloud-capped sierras floated into nearer view.

Mr. Levison ran towards the bridge.

"Captain—"

The skipper did not speak; he pointed. A black volume of smoke poured from the funnels of a steamer that cut the yacht off from the open sea. It had shot into view from behind an island, and was scarcely two miles from the yacht now, panting in pursuit. D'Arcy gave a cry:

"It's the steamah!"

"Dirk Power's steamer!" said Frank Levison, catching his brother's arm, his face suddenly pale.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Frank," muttered Levison. "We're not taken yet."

Mr. Levison's face was white as chalk; his eyes had a haunted look as he fixed them on the steamer. He knew now that Dirk Power had passed first through the canal, and had been lying in wait in the Pacific. By what uncanny skill or good fortune had he succeeded in intercepting the yacht? But the question was useless. Like a bloodhound the mad avenger was on the track of his prey, relentless to the very death.

"Why don't they fire?" muttered Figgins.

No gun sounded from the steamer.

But it was not needed.

She was within two miles now, and coming on fast, gaining on the throbbing yacht with every plunge of her forefoot through the creaming waters.

Dirk Power's victim was almost within his grasp.

Through the glasses the copper face of the man from Alaska could be seen watching from the bridge of the steamer. Tom Merry thought he could even detect the cruel smile curling his lips, revealing the flash of the white teeth.

"But why are we heading for shore?" muttered Lowther. "If we run on those cliffs—"

"The only chance, I suppose," Levison set his lips. "We can't escape by sea—there's no fog to help us here. But—"

Was it the captain's intention to run ashore? The closer the land came the more clearly the juniors saw the beetling line of cliffs that fronted the ocean. Even if the yacht were beached in safety the pursuers would land, and the great cliffs cut off the fugitives from flight inland. Was that what the captain meant? Or—

Mr. Levison found his voice.

"Captain, we are lost, then?"

The skipper looked down grimly from the bridge. His sun-tanned face was unmoved.

"Courage!" he said.

"But—"

"Wait! I know these seas like a book," said Captain Corcoran quietly. "Dirk Power does not—cannot! Leave me to deal with him."

The hunted man sank back against the rail, breathing faintly. His eyes never left the pursuer.

Again the yacht's course changed abruptly—from due north she swung to north-east, and sped on faster than before, the land seeming to rush to meet her. The course of the steamer altered immediately, and she clung to the track like a hound. Tom Merry clenched his hands.

"Is he mad?" he muttered hoarsely. "Can we afford to give away ground now?"

The skipper's manoeuvre had lost the fugitives half a mile.

For the pursuer was cutting across diagonally, saving a great distance. If the captain had intended to turn north-east, why had he steamed north at the first—the sudden turn giving the enemy a chance to cut across and overhaul him? Was he out of his senses?

Dirk Power seemed to think so. The steamer was so close now that the juniors could make him out on the bridge, and could see his copper face twisted in a cruel laugh.

Tom Merry looked at the captain. Captain Corcoran stood unmoved, rapping out now and then a word to the quartermaster.

Tom looked astern.

The steamer was coming up hand over hand. Several dark faces could be seen on her decks now. A rifle squibbed off, and the bullet flew by the yacht's funnel. Between the two ships a creamy white glimmer lay on the blue waters. What it was Tom Merry did not know—he gave it little attention.

The yacht slowed down.

"Are we stopping?" shouted Lowther. "Is the skipper mad? What—"

"Look!" screamed Frank Levison.

He pointed astern.

The steamer, coming on at full speed, seemed to be swooping down on her prey like a vulture, when suddenly, as if a giant's blow had struck her from under the waves, she crumpled up, with a crash, an echoing explosion, and a mad hissing of steam.

"Struck, by thunder!" shouted the seamen.

"She's struck!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's a reef. Oh, I understand now!"

But most of the juniors did not comprehend yet. They gazed at the pursuer with eyes wide with wonder.

"Don't you see?" panted Tom. "That's why we turned suddenly off our course. The captain knew there was a submerged reef."

"A submerged reef!" muttered Levison. "I—I saw the cream on the water."

Tom Merry's eyes danced.

"The captain knew—and he knew they'd cut across direct towards us. We passed round the reef, you see? And they came direct on it as they cut across after us!"

"Hurrah!"

It was clear enough.

Captain Corcoran, with the enemy at his very heels, had led them into a deadly trap. His knowledge of the Pacific reefs had stood him in good stead.

Dirk Power's steamer had struck the submerged reef, hidden, with its rocky fangs, six or seven feet below water—struck it at full speed, with fearful results.

The vessel had fairly split its hull on the hidden rocks, and the water was swamping in. In two minutes she was stern down, sinking deep.

The juniors watched as if fascinated.

Wild and hurried figures were visible on the sinking wreck, over which the waves of the Pacific were already washing.

Captain Corcoran gave one glance—it



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was all he needed—at the sinking steamer astern.

The yacht changed her course again, passing a mile from the wreck of her way to the open sea once more.

A dozen glasses were turned on the wreck. Mr. Levison scarcely breathed as he watched her through the telescope.

Tom Merry's eyes were glued to the binoculars.

He saw a boat plump into the sea; he saw a wild crowd fighting for places in her—among them the copper-faced man from Alaska and the scarred Spaniard.

D'Arcy touched his arm.

"We—we're leavin' them to drown, Tom Mewwy!"

His eyes met Tom's for a moment. Tom's lips set.

"It's their own business, Gussy! We couldn't go near them; they're armed. They would fire on us! Would you want Levison to get near that mad villain, who would shoot him dead if he could?"

"You are wight, deah boy."

"We should all have been murdered by this time if the captain had not led them on the reef!" said Tom. "Dirk Power has run into the trap—into the fate he meant for us. Let him take his chance."

D'Arcy nodded without speaking.

"They have a boat," said Levison. "That villain will escape—and the shore is near. Can you see him in the boat, Tom?"

Tom Merry gazed at the wreck.

The boat was pulling away, with five or six men in her. Others, crowded on the sinking hulk, brandished their fists and yelled; the sound of their fierce cries was wafted across the sea to the yacht.

"He's in the boat!" said Tom.

The yacht rushed on. With a last plunge the wrecked steamer settled down by the reef, and the boat, floating alone on the sea, vanished from sight. Ernest Levison drew a deep, deep breath, and his eyes glittered. The mad avenger was left behind at last—at last!

CHAPTER 9.

At San Francisco—A Night Alarm!

"THE Golden Gate!" said Tom Merry.

It was San Francisco at last. Swift and uneventful had been the run up the coast from the spot where Dirk Power's steamer had gone to the bottom of the Pacific. Whether the madman from Alaska lived, or whether he had perished, the fugitives could not

be sure; but they believed that he had survived. But he was left behind—if he lived he had landed on the Mexican coast, many a long hundred miles behind—and the yachtsmen had gained the time they needed. There had been no sign of pursuit as they steamed on by the Californian coast; they felt sure that they had dropped the pursuer at last, and their hearts were lighter.

The grim shadow of peril seemed to be lifted now, if it was not gone. That they were done with the madman they could not believe; but for the present, at least, they felt that they were safe from him. And it was with keen interest that they found themselves at the famous Golden Gate—entering the wonderful city of the Pacific. San Francisco—the "Frisco" of many a wild romance—lay before them. No longer the wild, swash-buckling city of the old gold days; but the vast centre of continental commerce.

The juniors gazed about them with undying interest as the yacht drew on to the wharf.

They were glad enough to set their feet on dry land once more.

There was much to be done at San Francisco, where supplies were to be

taken in for the journey to the frozen Yukon. Mr. Levison and the captain were likely to be busy for some days.

Tom Merry & Co. landed with Mr. Levison, and their quarters were taken up at a sky-scraper hotel near the harbour.

Tom Merry scanned the faces, of many nationalities, that passed the hotel windows—the thought of the copper-faced man from Alaska in his mind. Where was Dirk Power?

The rooms were taken high up in the crowded hotel—of which storey on storey rose against the sky. The lift—the elevator, as it was called there—carried them up to their quarters. They slept soundly the first night in San Francisco.

After breakfast the next morning Mr. Levison had to leave them. But he was in an anxious mood. Far away as he believed Dirk Power to be, the dread of him still haunted the hunted man.

"You will not want to remain indoors all day," he said. "But if you go out, do not separate, and keep to the crowded streets. I trust my sons to you, Merry."

"We shall be safe together, sir" said Tom.

"I believe so. But take every care," "Rely upon us."

And Mr. Levison left them.

Gladly enough would the juniors have explored the recesses of the city of the Golden Gate; but it was not to be. They left the hotel in a party, and did not separate as they walked in the crowded streets. And their eyes were well about them, not only for the strange sights on every side, but for the possible sight of an enemy.

In the evening Mr. Levison rejoined them at the hotel. He was pale and agitated.

He seemed to breathe more freely at the sight of Levison and Frank.

"You are safe, at least!" he muttered. "Has anything happened?"

"I have been followed to-day!" said Mr. Levison briefly.

"Followed?"

"Yes; a half-breed—a Mexican—has been dogging my steps! It—it may be nothing—some pickpocket of the city—but—"

"You have not seen—him?"

"No; he cannot be here. But—"

Mr. Levison's voice faltered.

"It's impossible," said Tom Merry. "He could not know that we intended to put in at San Francisco."

Mr. Levison shook his head.

"No; but he may have spies here—spies everywhere, for all I know. He knew we might put in here for supplies. The Mexican half-breed may be one of his men, on the watch for us, with a description to guide him. But—" He broke off.

"He cannot harm us in a crowded hotel," said Levison. "We are safe from him here."

"True. But I shall hurry through the preparations I have to make. We must leave San Francisco as quickly as possible. The dread of him haunts me every moment of the day and night."

During dinner Mr. Levison's glance wandered several times to the glass doors at the end of the dining-room.

Once Tom Merry saw him start, and Tom's glance went quickly to the door. A waiter was entering. But in the hall outside Tom caught a glimpse, for a second, of a dusky face; of two keen black eyes glittering into the room. It was gone the next moment.

But he smiled. In the city of the Golden Gate there were thousands of dusky half-breeds, and this was but one of them. And the man did not reappear.

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At an early hour the lift carried the juniors up and up, through storey after storey, to their rooms.

Four rooms in the front of the hotel, communicating, had been taken for the party; Mr. Levison was determined that they should all remain together, night as well as day. And before he retired to his own room Mr. Levison made a round, examining each door to make sure that it was locked and bolted. It seemed a thousand to one that Dirk Power could not be in San Francisco; but the hunted man left nothing to chance.

The roar of the city was still in their ears when they turned in. Tom Merry, and Manners and Lowther had one room; the door into the next being left ajar; the door on the corridor locked and bolted. The Terrible Three of St. Jim's sank into slumber; but their slumber was light. Perhaps the city's ceaseless hum, after the long silence of the sea, disturbed Tom Merry a little. Several times he awakened, and when he slept it was to dream of the evil, coppery face of Dirk Power.

He woke again, and started. The hum of the streets, rising to the windows, was a little subdued now; the hour was late. In the darkness Tom Merry heard a sound, and he sat up in bed.

"You fellows awake?"

Only deep breathing from the other beds answered him. Manners and Lowther were fast asleep.

Tom Merry listened.

And as he listened there came to his ears a faint creak, and the low sound of a hand that tried the lock of the door outside.

CHAPTER 10.

"Fire!"

TOM MERRY'S heart throbbed.

He strained his ears to listen, but for a few moments the beating of his heart seemed to deafen him. He calmed himself with an effort.

He was not mistaken. A hand without was trying the door on the corridor. The handle was softly turned; but he heard it.

He stepped out of bed quietly.

He hesitated to awaken his comrades. Possibly, probably, it was only some guest at the hotel who had mistaken the room. The sound ceased. Tom's hand was on the electric light switch, but he paused. He moved, on tiptoe, closer to the door and listened.

Silence without. But a whispering voice came to him from one of the beds. It was Monty Lowther's voice.

"That you, Tom?"

"Yes," whispered Tom. "Quiet! There's somebody outside."

Lowther joined him quietly. They listened together, and there was a faint shuffle of feet from without. Then, softly but distinctly, the door-handle was tried again.

"It's locked!" breathed Lowther. "But—"

Tom Merry stepped closer to the door, and spoke in firm tones:

"Who is there?"

He heard a hasty breath without. His voice had startled the intruder, whoever he was, who lurked outside the door.

But a reply came the next moment, in a voice with a nasal twang to it:

"I guess I'm looking for my room, but the light won't turn on. Is this Number 240?"

Tom Merry breathed more freely. It was only some guest at the hotel in search of his room, after all.

"No," he answered.

"What's your number?"

"Number 242," said Tom Merry. "Number 240 will be farther down the

corridor, to the right." He spoke through the keyhole.

"You're sure?"

"Quite!"

"I guess I'm sorry I disturbed you, sonny!" Tom's voice had doubtless betrayed that it was a boy speaking in the room. "I reckon I know you now. You're the party of youngsters staying here, hay?"

"Yes."

"I guess I saw you downstairs. Waal, I'm sorry I've woke you up."

"All right!" said Tom.

"Good-night, sonny!"

Faint footsteps passed away.

"It's all serene," whispered Monty Lowther. "I dare say the fellow's had too much whisky at the bar, and can't find his room. I—I was afraid for a minute that it was—was—"

"So was I," said Tom. "It's all right. Let's get back to bed. Hallo! Is that you, Levison?" A figure, half-dressed, stood in the communicating doorway of the adjoining room.

"Yes. What's the row?"

"Only a man mistaken the room. He's gone now."

"I'm not so sure," muttered Levison anxiously. "Suppose—suppose it was someone who wanted to make sure which were our rooms? He's got that out of you; I heard what you said."

Tom Merry started a little.

"But it's all right," he said. "Nobody could force an entrance here without awakening the whole hotel."

"Yes, that's so."

"Safe as houses!" said Lowther.

"I—I know."

But Levison seemed still uneasy. He listened for some time before he went to bed, but there was no sound from without. He seemed relieved at last, and returned to his bed to sleep. But for some time Tom Merry remained awake, sleep refusing to visit his eyelids. There came no sound again, no touch on the door. Surely the incident had been a chance one, and could not mean that their relentless enemy had tracked them down once more? But the thought would not leave Tom's mind, and it was some time later that he dropped into a doze.

In his sleep the thought of the copper-faced man haunted him. He dreamed of him as he had seen him on the summit of the cliff against the moonlight, shaking his fist at the fleeing yacht, and again as he had seen him on the steamer, his lips wrinkled in a cruel grin. It seemed to him, in the grip of nightmare, that he could not breathe, that a weight was upon him, and the evil copper face grinning at him. He caught his breath, he tried to cry out, and woke!

He started up!

For the moment he fancied that he still was dreaming, for the choking of the dream was not wholly a dream. He gasped for breath, and it was smoke that he breathed.

Smoke!

Tom Merry rubbed his eyes.

Was he dreaming still?

He leaped from the bed with a cry. The room was thick with smoke. It was the smoke oppressing his lungs that had awakened him.

"Wake up!"

He shouted the words.

"Wake, wake! Fire!"

Fire!

He knew it could be nothing else. There was fire—fire close at hand, and the smoke of it was filling the communicating rooms as it rolled in under the doors and through the keyholes from the corridor.

"Fire!"

"Good heavens!"

"Wake up!"

In a moment the juniors were astir and bundling out of their beds, throwing on any clothes that came to hand. Mr. Levison came hurrying from his room, half-dressed. There were sounds below now. The alarm was spreading in the vast hotel. Somewhere a great bell began to clang.

"Fire, fire!"

"Calm yourselves, my boys!" Mr. Levison was calm. "Keep with me. The hotel is on fire. Come! Don't stop to finish dressing!"

He did not speak what was in his mind, the terrible suspicion that this was one more blow from his enemy.

He strode to the door on the corridor, and unlocked it, and pushed back the bolt, the juniors close behind him. He pulled at the door, but it did not open.

"Father—"

"It—it seems to be jammed," Mr. Levison's lips were white. "The door will not open. Try in the next room, Ernest."

The juniors rushed into the adjoining room. But the outer door there was fast, and the doors of the two other rooms that gave on the corridor were fast, too. Each door had been secured on the outside, how, they did not know. But the fact was evident enough. And the smoke was thickening round them.

"Trapped!" muttered Mr. Levison, through his white lips.

"Trapped!" repeated Tom Merry. He dragged at the door savagely, but it did not yield. A wire, perhaps, from the handle to a screw in the doorpost held it. It had been easy enough for the enemy to effect as much in the deserted corridor in the silence of the night. Doubtless it was that which Tom had interrupted when he spoke through the door to the man outside. And the work had been left to a later hour. And now they were trapped. The doors were fast, and outside the fire was gaining a firmer and firmer hold on the building. From where they stood they could hear the roar of flame in the lift-shaft.

Levison dragged the blind from the window.

There was a roar from the street, the roar of many voices. On a sea of up-turned faces played the light of dancing flames.

From the next window came a burst of blaze—the room next to Tom Merry's, which was the end room of the four. Levison gritted his teeth when he saw it. Dirk Power, or one of his myrmidons, it mattered little, had found his task easy. In that room, taken by the incendiary for the night, the fire had been started, after the juniors' doors had been secured outside. Mingled with the smell of burning was the unmistakable odour of petrol. Doubtless the corridor outside the rooms was drenched with the inflammable oil, and after setting the match to his devilish work the incendiary had gone quietly down the stairs to safety, leaving his victims in the heart of a furnace.

"Trapped!"

Levison turned back into the room. Crash, crash!

Tom Merry, with a heavy chair in his grip, was beating on the door to the corridor. His comrades, seizing whatever weapon they could lay hands on, rushed to help him.

Crash!

They were fighting for their lives now. Under the doors crept tongues of flame as well as thick, oily smoke.

Crash, crash!

The door split in pieces, and Tom Merry sprang back with a groan of despair.

The way was open, but it was too late!

Through the gap in the door he looked into a furnace of flame. The staircase, the lift-shaft, were seething with it. The corridor ran with blaze. Long, yellow tongues of it licked into the room through the burst door. To step out was death. Already burning gaps showed in the floor of the corridor.

"We are lost!"

The juniors crowded to the windows.

"Help, help!"

From below a roar of voices, far, far below. A roar, many-voiced, from the swarming crowd in the fire-lit street. But there was no help, there was no rescue. Dirk Power's dastardly work was done. The fire was creeping on his victims. Already its burning breath, scorched their cheeks. Still wildly, despairingly, they shouted from the windows:

"Help, help!"

CHAPTER 11.

In the Grip of the Fire!

"I S there no help?"

Tom Merry groaned out the words.

Flames were licking round the rooms now from the blazing corridor, the heat was terrible. Perspiration was thick on the smoke-grimed faces of the trapped juniors. Was there no help?

The smoke thickened. Even leaning from the windows they felt choked, throttled. Frank Levison, half-fainting, clung to his brother. Mr. Levison bowed his head upon his hands. He had given up hope. But there was a cry from D'Arcy as he caught Tom Merry by the arm.

"Look!"

"The firemen at last!" breathed Tom.

He shook Mr. Levison by the shoulder. The man looked up, with a haggard, ghastly face. Tom pointed to the street.

"There's a chance; the fire-escape is coming!" he panted.

"Help, help!"

They stared from the windows, high over the street, the smoke pouring out round them as they clustered there. A fresh roar from the crowd below greeted the coming of the fire-escape.

The long ladder was reared against the hotel front. The juniors watched it as if fascinated, as it swung and swayed towards them. Was there hope, even now, with the fiery furnace raging behind them?

There was a dull roar within the building, and a mass of flame and sparks soared to the dark sky. A floor had fallen and the staircase had collapsed. The whole huge building trembled. The juniors shuddered as they realised that at any moment their own footing might go.

"Courage, dear boys!"

D'Arcy breathed the words faintly. His face was calm, red with the heat and blackened with smoke as it was.

"Help!"

The long ladder swayed to the window and rested, but a groan burst from the juniors as it touched the wall, for it was short of the window—short by many feet. Three firemen were swarming up the ladder, one after another. But it was hopeless. They could not reach the window.

Splash, splash!

The hose was pouring water into the flames. It hissed and sizzled as it fell, but only the spray reached the parched faces at the high windows. But the spouting streams of water made little impression on the fire. It was too late. Within the huge building a furnace raged—with a deep, sullen roar.

The leading fireman had stopped at the

top of the ladder, gazing upward. Tom Merry leaned out, looking down.

Within a few feet was safety, if he could reach it. But it was beyond reach. The gap was too wide. He glanced round wildly into the room. A rope of the bedclothes was in his mind. It would not reach far, but it would reach the ladder. But the beds were all ablaze—the fire had crept close now.

Hope had dawned in his breast, only to be dashed away at the last moment.

The ladder was there, but he could not reach it, and Tom Merry set his teeth hard. It was death—death now. He read his own despair in the haggard faces of his comrades.

"Help!"

Frank Levison was still calling faintly. The others were silent—silent in grim, stony despair.

A roar from below! A loud cheer, that boomed up from the street far beneath the window.

"What is it?"

"Look!" breathed Figgins.

The fireman at the top of the ladder had cramped himself against the wall under the window. The next man was coming up—climbing on his shoulders.

The juniors held their breath as they watched.

It was a last, desperate attempt of the gallant firemen to save their lives. It was a human ladder that was to reach to the window. The crowd below was silent now, watching with bated breath, for all knew that the brave fellows were taking their lives in their hands—facing fearful death for the sake of their duty. Tom Merry & Co. gazed, speechless. The second fireman had climbed on the shoulders of the first. The third man gave help from below. Far, far under them, at the foot of the ladder, four firemen held a sheet extended, to catch them if they fell. It was all they could do to help.

"Heaven help them—and us!" breathed Mr. Levison.

The second fireman was rising higher on the shoulders of his comrade, slowly, steadily, his hands on the wall, up-reaching.

Would he reach the window?

It seemed an age, but it was only minutes, before the two powerful hands gripped the window-sill, the gallant fellow's head still below it.

He shouted. The roar of the fire drowned his voice, but the juniors understood.

"Frank first!" breathed Tom Merry.

"No, no!"

Tom Merry gave one glance behind him. The flames were scorching his clothes; he knew it could not be many minutes now before the end came—the fearful end! The third fireman, was climbing up now over the other two. Active as a cat, he reached the window, and his head and shoulders were thrust in. A coil of rope was over his arm. A moment more and he was inside and Tom thrust Frank towards him.

"Father first!" panted the fag.

But he was not heeded.

The rope looped under his arms, it was knotted there in a slip-knot. The dizzy fag swung from the window, and as he swept over the height his senses fled. Down he went on the rope, and the fireman with the hose, on the middle of the ladder, received him. He cast loose the noose, and bore the fainting fag on his shoulder to the ground.

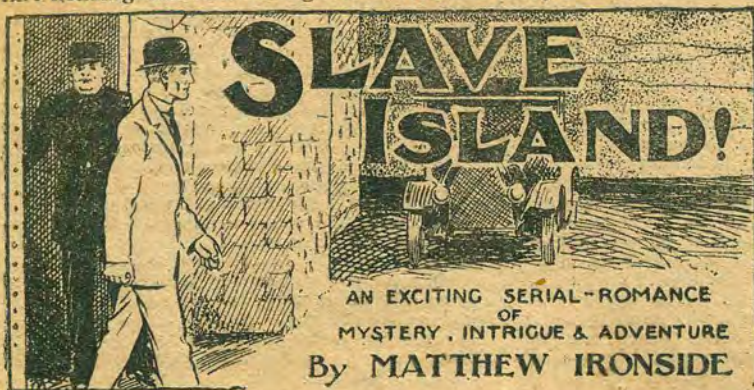
Before he had reached the ground the noose was round D'Arcy, and he was swung from the window in his turn.

A loud cheer rang from below.

(Continued on page 18.)

THE GEM LIBRARY. No. 658.

Start Reading this Astounding New Adventure Story To-day!



The Fight in the Garden—Kidnapped—Sensation and Mystery!

THROUGH the gates of Bleakmoor Convict Prison, strode Jasper Standish, a free man at last, having been imprisoned ten long, weary years.

Ten years ago Richard Harmer, a clerk in the office in which Standish worked, committed a forgery. Standish, being down on his luck, took the crime upon his shoulders on the agreement that Harmer would Standish's wife, who was a consumptive, and his baby girl on a long sea-voyage for the invalid's benefit, and also gave her ten thousand pounds into the bargain.

Standish went to prison, and Harmer broke the agreement, which resulted in the death of Mrs. Standish—the fate of the child being unknown.

Standish, now a millionaire by his father's death, is out for a deadly revenge on Harmer.

Whilst in prison he had learnt from a fellow-convict, Peter van Lardent, of Slave Island, owned by Hans Meppel, a Dutchman, and to this man, accompanied by Peter van Lardent, he went.

An agreement was made between Standish and Hans Meppel for the kidnapping of Harmer's son Dick, and for his being made a slave on the island.

Dick Harmer arrived home from school on his holidays, to find his father lying senseless in the drive leading to the house. Whilst bending over him Dick was suddenly grasped by unseen hands.

In spite of being less than sixteen years of age, Dick Harmer was no weakling.

If the truth be told, he had shone at athletics at school more than at his studies, and cricket, football, rowing, and swimming had hardened his muscles and given him a strength that many a man might have envied.

Apart from the conviction that his unknown assailant meant to strangle him, he felt certain that the man and his companions were responsible for his father's alarming condition, and he was filled with a fierce rage. He fought like a madman.

He flung himself to one side, and, before his adversary could recover, bounded to his feet.

At that moment the light of an electric torch flashed out of the darkness and fell full upon Dick Harmer's enemy as he rushed for him.

The lad had just time to see that he was a brown man, whom he took to be a Malay. Then, as he met the fellow's rush with a straight left, that landed between his eyes and knocked him head-over-heels, Dick saw three other ill-clad men of apparently the same nationality leaping towards him from out of the gloom.

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He had nothing he could use as a weapon; but met them gamely with his fists. He struck out left and right, sending two of them to the gravel. The third man, however, flung his little brown arms about him and grappled with him.

On to a flower-bed Dick and the brown man staggered. The boy felt his clothing tearing, and realised in a dim kind of way that one of his shirt-cuffs had been wrenched half off, and was flapping limply about his wrist.

He sent his opponent flying with a cross-buttock, and turned to run towards the house, meaning to seek help if the foreigners dared to remain in the garden. But another of the Malays—they were to prove to be that—who had picked himself up, took a flying leap, and, landing upon Dick's back, brought him heavily down upon his face.

Though he was half-stunned by the fall, the boy tried to squirm about and throw off the sinuous body that was on top of him. Before he could do so, however, one of the others clapped a drug-soaked cloth over his mouth and nostrils, and contrived to hold it there despite his desperate struggles.

Dick's senses reeled. The sickly odour of the drug, whatever it was, flew dizzily to his brain. A great blackness descended upon him, and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

The moment his struggles ceased the drug-saturated cloth was removed from his face, and one of the Malays picked him bodily up in his arms. Then the four marauders hastened away through the shrubs and bushes beside the drive until they reached the railings surrounding the garden.

In the twinkling of an eye one of them hoisted himself over into the road, and, turning, received Dick's limp figure from the man who had been carrying him.

A closed car stood in the shadows beneath some near-by trees, and, as the other Malays followed the first, Dick was rushed across the road and thrust into the darkness of its interior.

The ponderous, muffled figure seated at the driving-wheel stirred itself. It was that of a giant of a man with a long, grey-tinged beard that reached nearly to his waist.

He craned his head, peering through the gloom.

"You fellas," he said, in the dialect of the Torres—"you fellas, you gotta the boy?"

Grunts of assent answered him, and, as the last of the Malays leapt in after the unconscious Dick, the man started the car, and drove away at a swift pace.

"Vell," he muttered—and the voice was that of Hans Meppel, the owner of Slave Island—"ve haf hung apout here

ef'ry night for a week, put ve haf him at last!"

He laughed to himself.

"Dot gardener whom I drinks stood little 'tinks what he led his young master in for when he told me he vas due home from his school almost any day, and't it?" he muttered. "Life-long slavery for the son of the man who sent him—Jasper Standish—to ten years' unjust slavery. An eye for an eye, t'ey say, und he it is taking! Jah! It iss a beautiful revenge, mein friendt, put one you vill haf to pay for even more t'an you tink!"

He increased the speed of the car, relying upon the powerful headlights to avoid disaster, though he cursed the darkness of the night now that it had answered its purpose.

As for Dick, his hands and ankles had been securely bound by the Malays who were with him in the car, though as yet he naturally knew nothing of this; for he still lay like a log under the influence of the drug.

A rough gag was thrust between his teeth and secured there by a twisted handkerchief; and for hour upon hour the car continued on its way, only slowing down when it passed through some town or village.

At last Dick began to regain his senses, and when he opened his eyes and found himself in darkness, his first impression was that he was in bed in his dormitory at school. This, however, was quickly dispelled when he tried to move his hands and found that his wrists were bound behind his back.

Memory flashed into his brain, dazed though it remained from the effects of the drug that had been administered to him.

He recalled how he had found his father lying either unconscious or dead in the drive, and his fight with the men who had evil, brown faces, and such strong, cruel fingers.

In sudden indignation and rage he struggled madly to free himself. He realised as he did so that he was in a swiftly-moving motor-car, and wondered at the same time why on earth he had been kidnapped, and whom his abductors could be.

A stinging blow in the face from an open hand warned him that, at least for the present, it would be as well to lie still, and he ceased to wrench at the cords about his wrists, and lay thinking.

He was the prey of the keenest anxiety as he thought of his father.

To him it seemed that the car was never going to stop. The steady, gliding movement, as it reeled off mile after mile, and the heaviness left by the drug caused his lids to droop. He jerked himself into wakefulness several times, but finally succumbed, and his head sank on his breast as he fell into a deep sleep.

He was awakened several hours later by the sudden stopping of the motor, and knew, as he opened his eyes and saw the grey light of dawn stealing in at the windows, that he must have slumbered for a long period of time.

Next he became conscious of a roaring sound in his ears—a sound which seemed vaguely familiar—and he realised that it was made by the sea.

The fresh breath of the ocean entered his nostrils, and he saw that the automobile had stopped on a sandy beach.

He was carried by a Malay right down to the edge of the water, but not before he had seen the bearded giant, who had been driving and wore goggles, and taken a good look at his surroundings, which he recognised.

"Bude, in Cornwall!" he thought; for he and his father had spent a summer

holiday here two years previously. "My hat! But we have come some distance during the night! And what have they brought me here for, and what do they intend doing with me?"

He was not left long in doubt.

A longboat, tossed by the rollers from the broad Atlantic, came running into the beach. She was manned by two more evil-looking Malays, and was evidently here to receive him and his captors. A white man, who looked like a Dutchman or a German, sat in the stern. He jumped out, and took charge of the car.

Dick was then flung unceremoniously in, and his captors, including the man in goggles, followed hastily, and the latter gunted out an order to lose no time in pushing off.

It was plain that he feared being seen by someone from the low stretch of town at their backs. It was revealed as the dawn broadened, with its brown-clad bunkers of the golf-course, which flanks the beach. But in the glimpse Dick caught of it, as the boat was run back into the sea by the sailors, it was as yet quite deserted, so it was useless to hope for help from anyone there.

Over the choppy waves the boat was propelled until, far out to sea, they arrived under the bows of a dirty steamer of the "tramp" class.

As the boat was rowed round to its side, an accommodation-ladder was lowered, and Dick was carried by one of the Malays up it and on board.

From what he saw as he was carried across the deck towards the companion-way, the vessel was manned exclusively by brown men like his abductors, and there were signs that she had full steam up.

He was taken down to an evil-smelling cabin, and flung into a bunk there. He listened while the Malay who had carried him quitted the cabin and slammed and locked the door. Then he commenced to mouth at the gag and tear at his bonds, as he had done in the car.

For ten minutes or so he persisted in his task, but at the end of that time was forced to desist, as the door was unlocked and opened, and he heard footsteps crossing to his bunk.

He received a surprise then. A man leant over him and peered down into his face, and Dick saw that he was not only a white man and immaculately dressed in yachting attire, but apparently an Englishman; and this last impression was confirmed as he spoke.

"So you are Richard Harmer's son!" the man said, his thin lips twisting into a cruel smile. "I wonder, if you had been allowed to grow up in the civilised world, if you would have developed into as black-hearted a scoundrel?"

Dick's eyes flashed as they looked back into the cold, mocking ones above him. He longed to tell the stranger that his father was no scoundrel, but one of the best men who ever lived; for the lad had always found him that. But the gag prevented his speaking, and the next moment the white man had drawn back from the bunk, and Dick heard him and whoever had brought him to the cabin leave it and relock the door.

Again he struggled with his bonds, but the Malays had not bungled in their work, and it seemed to him that the more he wrenched at the cords about his wrists the tighter they grew. At last he lay back exhausted, and tried to account for the extraordinary things that had happened to him.

Strive as he would, however, no explanation would come to him. The whole adventure was like some wild flight of fiction, and, but for the

excruciating pain he was suffering from his chafed and bleeding wrists, and the choking gag that was making it so difficult for him to breathe, he could have taken it to be all some fantastic dream from which he must soon awake.

Ah! The vessel had weighed anchor and was on the move. As she gained speed, Dick lay wondering whether she was bound with him.

He shook his head. His brain was in too chaotic a state just now to grapple with the maze of mystery. He fell to thinking again of his father, and would have been much relieved could he have known that Richard Harmer was at the moment seated in his study in company with a detective from Scotland Yard.

Richard Harmer had been merely stunned when Dick had come upon him lying on the gravel of the drive.

The owner of the fine old house in Essex had come out into the garden to smoke a cigar and think over the hopeless financial position into which ill-fortune had plunged him, and, at some distance from the house, he had heard a stealthy step in the bushes beside the path he was traversing.

He had called out to know who was there, and grew suspicious that the owner of the football was up to no good when he received no reply.

He happened to have an electric torch in his pocket, and, whipping it out and flashing its light before him, Richard Harmer sprang into the shrubs.

To his astonishment he found himself face to face with a powerful Malay, dressed partially in his native costume and partially in European attire.

Dick's father was possessed of plenty of presence of mind, and, before the brown man could elude him, he leapt upon him, seized him by the arms in a powerful grip, and shouted lustily for help.

He thought then that the man was meditating breaking into the house to steal, and meant to hand him over to the police as a suspicious character.

Scarcely had his first cry left his lips, however, than he was attacked from behind, and found himself struggling in the midst of three other Malays. In a scuffling heap all of them fell to the drive, and then a blow over the temple from a sandbag silenced Richard Harmer's calls for assistance, and rendered him unconscious.

He was found soon after Dick had been overpowered and carried away. A postman, coming towards the house with the last delivery, fell over him, and, of course, gave the alarm.

Richard Harmer shrugged his shoulders, and at first thought little of the affair. But with the coming of the local police, who searched the scene of the struggle for possible clues by which the brown men might be traced, a startling discovery was made.

The inspector who was with the constables found a cuff-link, upon which were engraved the initials "R. H." Thinking it belonged to Mr. Harmer, he had taken it to the house, and, with a cry of horror, Richard Harmer had recognised it as belonging to his son.

This was the beginning of such a mystery and sensation as Essex, and even London, had not known for many a long month.

"SCHOOLBOY KIDNAPPED BY MALAYS!"

"MYSTERY OF AN ESSEX GARDEN!"

"STRANGE ABDUCTION!"

and suchlike headings appeared in all the morning newspapers, and by that

time the police of the United Kingdom had Dick's description and those of his abductors, as far as his father could give them, and were straining every nerve to trace him and explain the baffling problem his spiriting away had set them.

For inquiries at the lad's school had, of course, disclosed the fact that he had left that day for home; whilst the porter at the local railway-station remembered having seen him arrive, and there was no doubt that the mysterious intruders in the garden of Inverbreathy Grange had made off with him.

The detective from Scotland Yard, after receiving all the details from the lad's father, shook his head in complete puzzlement, as hosts of others were doing in London and elsewhere, as they read the account of the outrage in the news-sheets.

Only one man—Jasper Standish—would have understood, and, if he had cared to do so, could have explained the tangled mystery.

But he, together with the missing Dick, was on a dirty tramp-steamer that had long since drawn out of sight of the shores of England.

He was bent on making sure that his terrible vengeance was carried out.

Slave Island—A Startling Discovery—The Girl and the Overseer—The Blow!

FOR a period that had seemed to Dick Harmer like an eternity, the vessel upon which he had been made a prisoner had continued her voyage.

He had lost count of time, but he judged that it must be many weeks that he had been afloat, and during the whole time he had been kept a close captive in the stuffy cabin, though his hands and feet had been freed within a few hours of his being brought aboard, and the gag taken from his mouth. It had been a huge and seemingly everlasting nightmare to him.

He had begun to lose all hope of escape before the ship reached her destination, wherever that might be. The porthole—the one means of light entering the cabin—was far too small for him to squirm his well-developed body through, and the door was not left unlocked for a moment.

The little money he had had with him when he had arrived at Beech Marshes had been left in his possession, and he had attempted to bribe the Malay who daily brought him food to tell him why he had been abducted, and where he was being taken.

The fellow's eyes had glinted with greed as they gazed upon the coins, but he had shaken his head and stubbornly refused to satisfy the lad's curiosity. Then, at last, the day arrived when the vessel reached the end of her long trip, and the prisoner began to wonder what next was to be his lot.

As she slowed down he heard her fog-horn insistently hooting, and presently heavy footfalls sounded outside the door of the cabin.

It was flung open, and three powerful Malays entered, followed by Hans Meppel and Jasper Standish. It was he, of course, who had stooped over Dick after he had first been brought to the ship, and spoken of his father as a "black-hearted scoundrel." The lad's arms were seized by the brown men, and, without a word, they hustled him from the cabin and up the companion-ladder on to the deck.

He saw it would be of little use to resist against such giant gaolers, so he decided to go quietly, and await his opportunity.

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After the gloom he had been accustomed to for so long, he was momentarily blinded by the hot sunlight that blazed down upon him, and stood between his guards dazedly blinking.

Then, as he grew accustomed to the brighter light and looked about him, he saw on all sides save one a vast expanse of bright-blue sky and blue-green sea, and knew instinctively that he was in the tropics.

The exception to the wastes of sky and water lay directly ahead of the vessel, and took the form of a long range of mighty barren rocks that towered themselves fully a hundred feet heavenwards. And, as Dick stared at them, a remarkable thing happened.

As though in response to the ship's fog-horn, which was still making the air hideous, a giant portion of the rock before the vessel's bows swung round on a pivot, leaving a gap through which the vessel could easily pass, and forming a rough archway.

This huge door in the rocks—it was nothing more nor less—was obviously worked by means of powerful hidden mechanism. As the ship steamed into the channel it left between the rocks, the mass of stone swung back into place with a resounding crash, and Dick guessed that all sign of its existence was lost again, as before.

Hans Meppel, who was standing near with Standish, gave a guttural laugh at the expression of surprise on his companion's stern face.

"Welcome to Slave Island, mynheer!" he said.

Slave Island! Dick caught the words, and asked himself what they could mean? To what manner of place had he been brought?

"Jove!" he thought. "But they shall find I'll give them some trouble!" Unconsciously his eyes flashed, and he drew a deep breath. He was British to the backbone, and the stout Dutchman and the others should learn that people of his birthplace did not take kindly to anything that signified a stealing of their freedom!

His thoughts did not dwell for long on the possibilities Hans Meppel's words conjured up. He soon became too impressed and interested in his surroundings.

The ship was now in a kind of short canal that wound its way through the heart of the rocks, and as it steamed round a sharp bend in their formation a goodly-sized dock came into view, and, beyond, the fringe of a strange, poisonously-green land.

Dick's eyes opened wide in wonder. The place was an island, of course, but from the sea no one would have suspected that it was anything but a cluster of rocks.

The vessel was berthed beside the dock, and Dick's guards hurried him ashore. He was pushed from the landing-stage up a sandy slope and through the brilliant green creepers beyond, somewhere in which a snake was hissing viciously as though disturbed.

Reaching the top of the rising ground more of the marvellous land came into view, and before him stretched mile upon mile of tall, waving banana-trees, intersected with little iron-roofed shacks. He was urged on into the plantation, Hans Meppel and Jasper Standish following, and his suspicion that the words "Slave Island" could be taken literally was then confirmed.

Men and women, boys and lads of every age, and apparently of every

nationality, worked at cutting the fruit, and amongst them lazed burly men in white ducks, who principally were typical Dutchmen, and all of whom were armed with heavy whips. But a greater surprise was in store for the lad.

They came to a clearing in the plantation in the centre which rose a range of rocks similar to those that shut off the land from the sea, and as Dick glanced at them he uttered a cry of amazement.

For their shape was roughly that of an enormous Sphinx! But that was not all. They were the same rocks he had heard his grandfather speak about on the island to which he had sailed a second time, never to return.

Could it mean that, quite by chance, his abductors had brought him to the very island that now belonged to his father, but which had been lost to his family for so long? And, if so, had the men who had stolen it, or come upon it by chance, found the rich silver mines that lay somewhere upon it?

Dick was forced on past the giant rocks, but memory of them was only thrust from his mind by seeing the first of many examples of the cruelty and despotism that reigned on the island.

The next instant his attention was drawn to an aged negro with snow-white hair who, obviously ill, had suddenly stopped work and sunk down with exhaustion. An overseer, who had been standing near, strode over to him and, to Dick's amazement, started to belabour him with his formidable whip.

As Dick started in horror at the brutal scene, he saw a slender white girl of about his own age throw aside the knife she had been working with and spring forward. She clutched at the overseer's wrist, arresting perhaps the doleful savage blow with which the man was torturing the fallen negro.

"Oh, please—please don't!" the girl cried piteously, and she spoke in English. "He is old and ill! I will do his work as well as my own if you will stop!"

Before the overseer could make any response, Hans Meppel, who had witnessed the touching little episode, went swaggering forward.

"Ach! What iss t'is? Insubordination—eh?" he thundered, snatching the whip from the hands of the overseer and the girl. "Donnervetter, but I vill teach yon sense, you Engleesh minx!"

The whip went up and hissed through the air, striking the girl a vicious blow across the shoulders. She screamed with pain, and her distress caused Dick to "see red." All the British pluck in him was roused, and his blood boiled at the sight as Hans Meppel beat the girl to her knees with the heavy thong, and lashed at her with fiendish cruelty.

"You cur!"

It seemed at that moment that Dick had gone suddenly mad with rage. And, possessed with almost superhuman strength, he gave a sudden and unexpected twist that freed him from the Malays who had been holding him, and bounded forward. Heedless of the consequences to himself, he drove both his clenched fists into the Dutchman's bearded face. The blows were terrific ones. Meppel gave a curious grunt, and a moment later he fell sideways, and hit the ground with a resounding bump, and lay there gasping.

(Another instalment of this grand new serial in next Wednesday's "GEM" Library.)

FLEEING FROM FATE!

(Continued from page 15.)

One after another the juniors were swung from the window, and received by the fireman on the ladder, and borne down.

Tom passed the noose round Mr. Levison, who had fainted as he lay half out of the window, and was insensible. There was not a second to spare. Tom had his way, and it was Mr. Levison who swung down to the men on the ladder.

The rope whirled back.

"Now!"

Tom Merry swung from the window, scorched, dazed, hardly conscious of the fearful space over which he swung. Like one in a dream, he felt himself received by strong hands, and freed from the rope.

Lowther's grasp was on his arm the next moment.

"Tom, Tom! Thank Heaven!"

Tom Merry leaned for a moment, exhausted, on his chum. Then his dizzy glance swept upward. He was thinking of the fireman who had saved him. Could the gallant man save himself? He was swinging from the window. There was a rush down the long ladder, a roar of cheering from the crowd.

It was drowned the next moment by a louder roar, as the front of the hotel collapsed inwards, and the ladder itself reeled into the burning ruins. But the ladder was clear when it fell, and Tom Merry gasped with relief. Manners pressed his hand.

"All safe, Tom!"

"Thank Heaven!"

Tom Merry reeled, and a fireman's arm caught him as he fell.

Tom Merry's eyes opened again in his bunk in the state-room on board the yacht. Levison was at his bedside.

The motion under him told Tom that he was on the sea. His eyes turned to a porthole. In the distance San Francisco was vanishing from sight.

"We are at sea?"

Levison nodded.

"Yes. We sailed at dawn——"

"But——"

"We shall put in at Vancouver for the rest of the supplies we need for the Yukon. "How do you feel now, Tom?"

"All serene. I shall be all right. And all the other fellows?"

"All safe! You had to be carried to the yacht," said Levison. "Thank Heaven we escaped with our lives! Dirk Power is left behind in San Francisco, but——"

"He will follow us to the Yukon!" muttered Tom Merry.

"I know it! Heaven knows what still lies before us!" said Levison, in a low voice. "Tom, I—I'm sorry I've dragged you into this. If—if you'd rather turn back——" he faltered.

But Tom Merry shook his head.

"We're with you to the end!" he said quietly.

Levison's face lighted up.

"I knew it!" he muttered. "But—— but what will the end be?"

Tom Merry did not reply. It was a question that time alone could answer. And he wondered.

THE END.

(Another of these grand complete stories in next Wednesday's "GEM," entitled, "For His Father's Sake!" Don't miss it!)

2nd WEEK OF OUR MAGNIFICENT NEW COMPETITION.

GRAND CASH PRIZE CONTEST FOR READERS OF THE
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THIS WEEK WE ANNOUNCE A VERY NOVEL
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On the right you will find six puzzle-pictures, and each of these has the last two or three letters of the word represented.

What you have to do is to fill in, IN INK, the letters which you think should go before those we publish.

For instance, Picture No. 7 has the letters "IPE," and when the correct letter is supplied, which in this case is P, the word is revealed. The same thing applies to the other pictures.

This competition will run for eight weeks, and there will be six more sets of pictures for you to solve.

DO NOT SEND IN YOUR EFFORTS NOW.

FULL INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE GIVEN AS TO HOW
YOUR EFFORTS ARE TO BE SENT TO US.

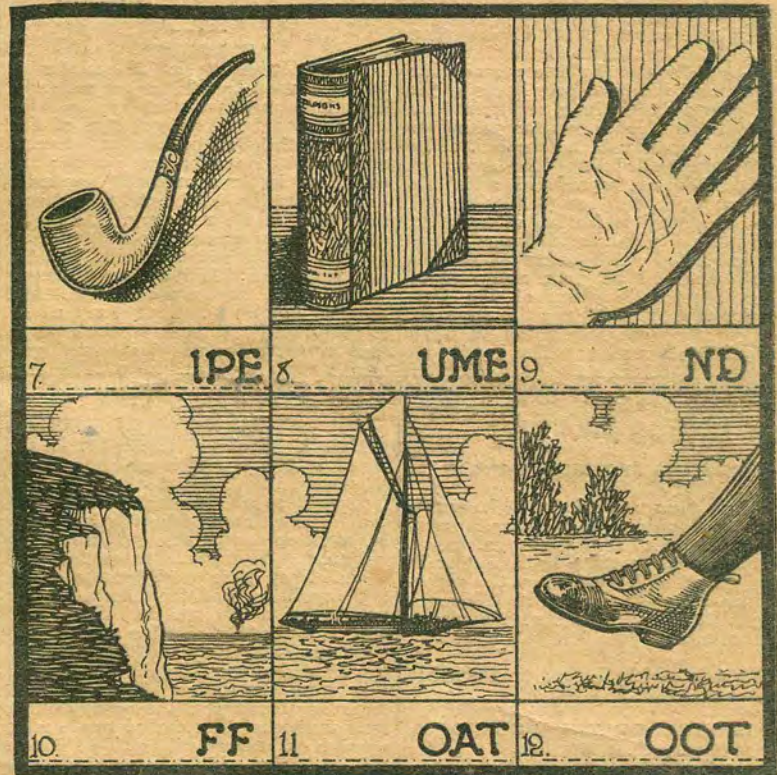
The First Prize of 10/- a week for one year will be awarded to the sender of the eight sets of pictures which bear solutions identical with the list now locked in the Editors safe, and other prizes to the competitors sending in the least number of mistakes.

Competitors must bear in mind that the Editor's decision must be accepted as final and binding, and entries are only accepted on this express understanding.

You may send as many complete sets of eight as you please, but each must be submitted on a coupon taken from the "GEM," and when the time comes for sending in, sets must be made up separately.

START TO WORK NOW, BUT DO NOT SEND YOUR
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Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.



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All applications for Advertisement Space in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Dept., UNION JACK SERIES, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.



The Editor's Chat.



Note:—Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Address: Editor, The "Gem," The Electric House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S BUMPER NUMBER.

Next Wednesday's issue of the GEM Library will be again a real "Bumper Number"—our third in succession. With our two grand new serials, another of Martin Clifford's splendid series of really thrilling schoolboy adventure stories, and above all the third portion of the GEM Grand Free Illustrated Football Annual. The first two parts of this Gift Annual will be in your hands by the time you read these lines, and from them you will be able to see for yourselves that the Annual will be the best of its kind ever published. The scores of photographs are reproduced with the greatest care, and, coupled with the mass of up-to-date football information, they make the completed Annual a tip-top illustrated guide to 1920-1921 football. Please tell all your chums about these Bumper Numbers of the GEM Library if they don't take the paper in, so that they can secure the Football Annual for themselves. The issues containing Parts 1 and 2 can be obtained at the newsagents'.

The title of Martin Clifford's great story for next Wednesday is

"FOR HIS FATHER'S SAKE!"

and it is in no way inferior to its immediate predecessors in thrilling interest and excitement. Like a true son, Ernest Layson elects to stand by his father in his hour of trial, even when the opportunity for escape offers itself. This is a story that no fiction-lover should on any account miss.

The two serials in our next number are, of course,

"RENTON OF THE ROVERS!"

By Paul Masters,

—a magnificent new football series—and

"SLAVE ISLAND!"

By Matthew Ironside,

a really original and thrilling adventure story. Either of these stories will challenge comparison with any story at present being published by any paper on the market. As one of the letters in my postbag this morning put it: "If you want the right stuff, keep your eye on the GEM!"

BLUSHING.

A correspondent in Manchester is taking a small trouble far too seriously. If he goes on this way he will find himself unfitted for the big things of life. It is only that he blushes when he meets strangers. He asks me whether he should go in for a course of treatment to overcome the habit, but I do not consider this at all necessary. He might ask the doctor whether he wants toning up, but for the rest he should just try and forget self. It is self-consciousness which is at the root of the mischief. And he must not worry. That is my advice to "Anxious." If he does his utmost to conquer nerves he will find himself getting stronger and more self-confident every day.

THE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE.

There is plenty of this spirit in the world to-day, but it is seldom possible to gratify it. A friend of mine wrote last week about the desires of himself and his two chums. The trio had much in common with the "Three Musketeers." They were ready for anything. They were fresh from a camping expedition, and they wanted a sea voyage for a few months. They were experts at peeling potatoes and chasing the bully-beef. They would have joined the Navy, but as soldiers in the Reserve they were barred from this course. I hope they found what they were looking for. Just what they needed was to meet a tough old skipper with a ship about to sail for foreign parts, who required three more men to make up his company. That would have suited them right enough. Perhaps the chance did come along.

THE C. P.'s. IN INDIA

If time flies on leaden wings anywhere it does in India in the summer, according to a correspondent. He says that if the Companion Papers were easier to obtain in the East it would be a great aid to the poor, hot, perspiring English boys, who hardly know how to pass the time in the hot weather. "All-I" can say is that if my friends in India will take the trouble to order the papers they will get them sure enough.

CORRESPONDENCE.

H. E. Savage, jun., 107, St. Luke's Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, would like to hear from readers abroad interested in stamp-collecting.—C. Denby, 19, Kangaroo Street, Manly, Sydney, Australia, would like to hear from readers anywhere.—Best thanks to Charlie Douglas of West Midland, Western Australia, for his splendid letter. When he wrote he was just off to see the Australian cruiser which fixed the Emden off Cocos Island.

A READER OF THE GEM.

A correspondent at Halifax tells me that he has been a reader of the GEM for years past. When in France he asked in his letters home for a copy of the paper to be put in every parcel. "Martin Clifford is a genius. How can he compile a totally different story each week is really past understanding." My chum tells me that recently he has reorganised his old troop of Scouts, and the members all read the yarns.

Your Editor

ARE YOU SHORT?

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