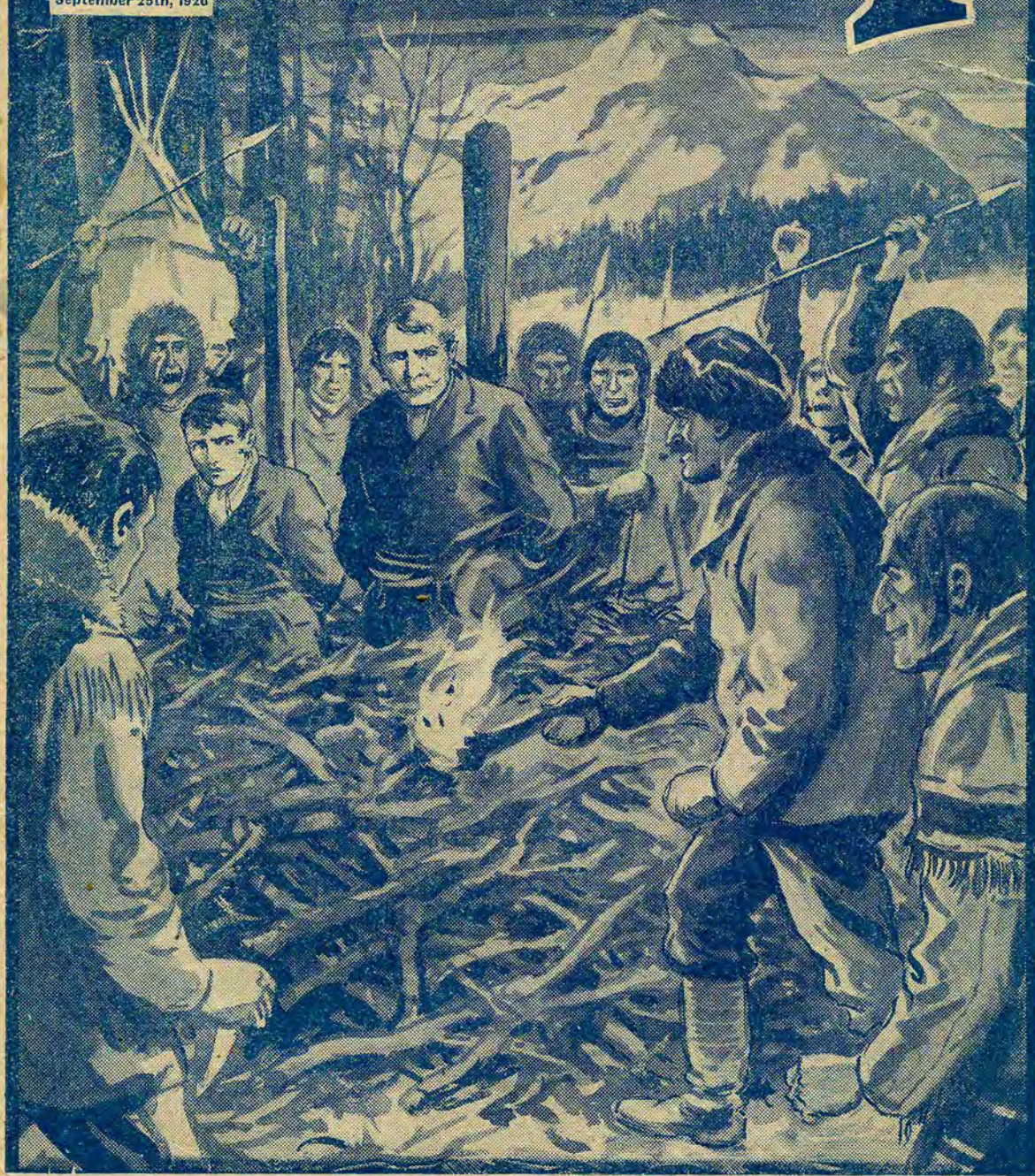


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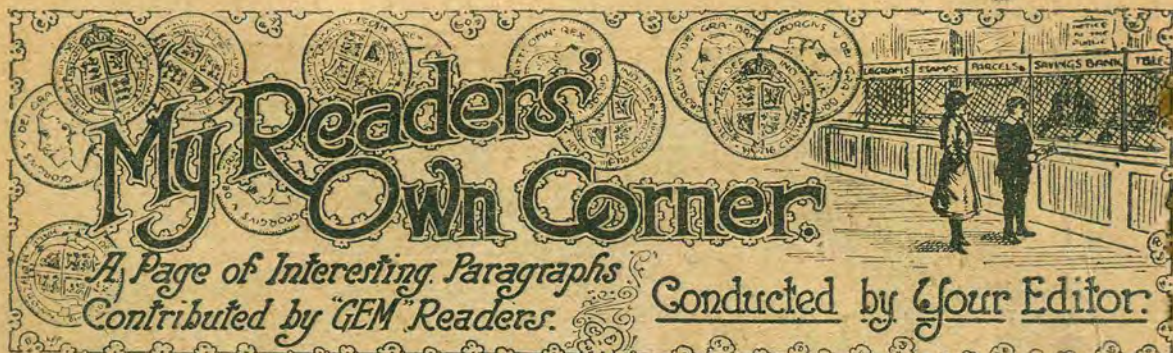
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September 25th, 1920



BOUND TO THE STAKE—AND IN THE MADMAN'S POWER!

(A Terrible Moment for the Levisons! See the Thrilling Complete Story inside.)



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

ENGLEFIELD GREEN.

This is one of the prettiest spots in Surrey. It is situated on a high hill at the edge of Windsor Great Park, and close by is Virginia Water, with its shady lanes and beautiful lake. Staines is in the neighbourhood, ideal for boating, and the picturesque heather-covered country round Ascot is not far distant. From Cooper's Hill, hard by, the view is splendid, and it inspired Sir John Denham to write his poem, "The Thames." The poet Shelley lived for a time in a pretty cottage about a mile from Englefield Green.—G. Hart, 59, St. Jude's Road, Englefield Green, Surrey.

SILKWORKS.

There is any amount of interest to be found in keeping silkworms. The eggs can be obtained cheaply. These should be kept in a large box at an even temperature. They usually hatch in May, and there must be mulberry or lettuce leaves ready. The silkworm eats nothing for the first twenty-four hours. The skin is black at first, but changes to yellow. In July the cocoon is spun. The silkworm chrysalis should be placed in a sugar-bag and hung on the wall. After a fortnight the silk may be unwound. At the end of a few weeks the chrysalis turns into a white moth, which lays eggs and dies, its duty done.—J. M. Coombs, 78, Grove Park, Denmark Hill, S.E. 5.

ANYTHING TO OBLIGE!

Policeman: "I've been watching you, and your conduct is a bit suspicious. You will have to accompany me to the station."

Musician: "Right-ho! What will you sing?"—H. Mount, 103, Penton Place, Walworth, S.E. 17.

THAT TROUT.

There died not long since a Crown trout with a history. It was caught by the son of an engine-driver, who made a pet of it. That was eleven years since. The engine-driver transferred the fish to the tank of his locomotive, and it lived in three different engines in its time. It would take food from the hand, and when a pail was dropped into the tank to take it out the trout saw what was wished, and would flop into the bucket

straightaway. Occasionally, the man took his pet home with him, and the last time he did so a fatal accident occurred, for the trout was poisoned through a box of matches falling into the water. It was much lamented by all its railway friends. It had travelled thousands of miles in the tanks, and its residence in engine tanks had brought it much fame. It was a beautifully-spotted specimen. Report says it will be stuffed, and placed in a museum.—Sidney Spring, 51, Caddington Road, Cricklewood, N.W. 2.

A DIFFERENCE!

A lady, looking out of a railway-carriage, hurriedly inquired "Is it raining, porter?" "No, ma'am," replied the official; "it's raining water!"—C. MacInnes, 120, Scotland Street, Glasgow, S.S.

HIS MISTAKE!

A gentleman in a cafe asked the person sitting next to him if he would be so good as to pass the mustard. "Sir," said the man, "do you mistake me for a waiter?" "No, sir," was the reply; "I mistook you for a gentleman!"—A. Smith, 34, West Ashton Street, Salford.

FRETWORK.

Many fretworkers have found that the wood upon which they have been working is bent, and have not been able to straighten it out again. The warping is caused by damp, of course, and a never-failing method to correct the mischief is the following: Hold the warped piece of wood and steam it over a kettle. This will cause the wood to contract and resume its original shape. Then place the wood on a flat surface under a heavy weight, and let it remain for some hours. If still slightly bent, repeat the process. All fretwork should be kept in a dry, airy place.—John C. Tweedale, 50, Clarke Street, Rochdale, Lancs.

FEEDING THE DUCKS!

A North Country cricket player always went to the wicket with a great deal of gusto, and kept the field waiting while he fussed about and made an elaborate block. One day he spent more time than usual over these proceedings, till suddenly an indignant spectator called out: "What are you doin', guv'nor? Diggin' for worms to feed your ducks?"—R. W. Ashworth, 28, St. Hilda's Road, Old Trafford, Manchester.

GOLDEN MOTTOES!

For the vain man: "Win gold and wear it." The generous man: "Win gold and share it." The miser: "Win gold and spare it." The profligate: "Win gold and spend it." The broker: "Win gold and lend it." The fool: "Win gold and end it." The gambler: "Win gold and lose it." The sailor: "Win gold and cruise it." The wise man: "Win gold and use it."—A. Nichols, 89, Albert Street, Barrow-in-Furness.

A BIT OF HISTORY.

All GEM readers know of that popular weekly "Answers," but I ask how many of them know how it originated? Well, it first appeared as a little paper of these measurements: Length across top, 3½in.; depth, 4½in. The copy from which I am able to extract this information had the title "Answers to Correspondents." It looks almost the same as the "Answers" of to-day, excepting its size, only it just gets straight to business. The front page is devoted to Answers to Correspondents. After the title appear the words, "Every Object Under the Sun," and underneath "No. 1. (Entered at Stationers' Hall) June 2nd 1888. European Postage 1½d. Price 1d." The pages are divided into three columns, the middle one of the first page containing the "Contents." These consist of "How Do You Do?" "Ass Drawing Water," "A Living Clock," etc. The rest of the paper was devoted to describing the twenty-nine articles which make up the contents. Only the second page varies from this rule, having the most important article in the paper, which gives good advice for correspondence. The whole paper is in one piece.—Edward Smith, 8, Woodland Road, Seaforth, near Liverpool.

A GOOD TRY!

Inspector going down the class: "Well, my boy, what is your name?"

Scholar: "Sam, sir."

"You should say 'Samuel,'" said the inspector. Turning to another boy:

"What is your name?"

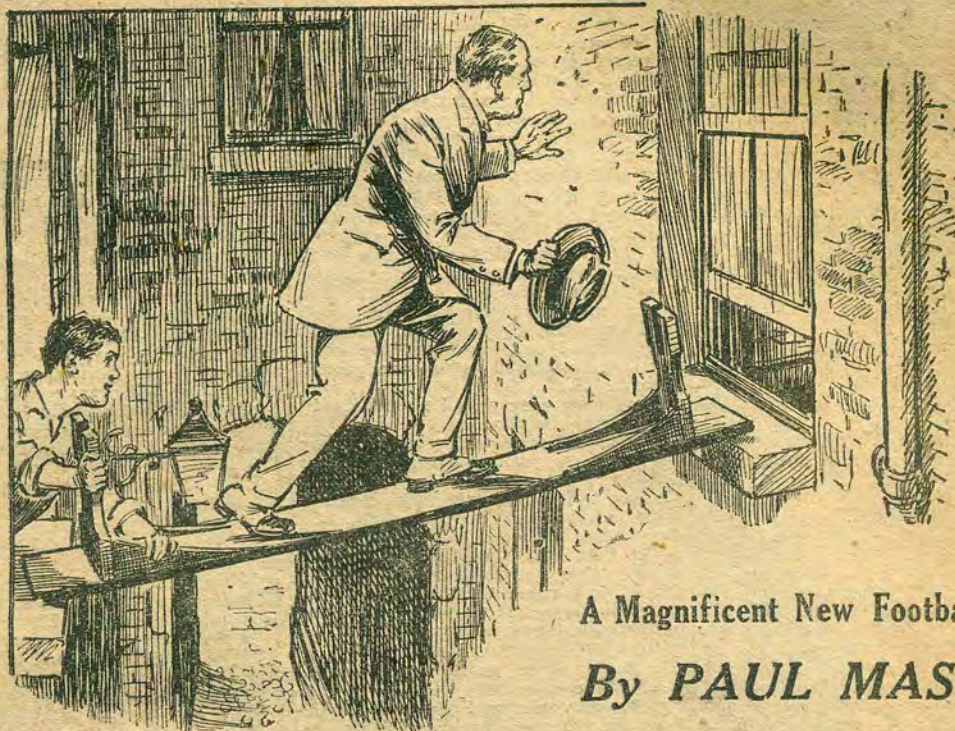
"Dan, sir."

Inspector: "You should say 'Daniel.' And what is your name?" the official asked a third boy, who promptly answered "Billuel, sir!"

—Albert Norris, 32, Watton Road, Hitchen, Herts.

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."

RENTON OF THE ROVERS!



A Magnificent New Football Serial.

By PAUL MASTERS.

READ THIS FIRST.

JIMMY RENTON, a keen footballer, is compelled to leave St. Clive's owing to the failure of his father in business. Jimmy obtains a situation as a reporter on the staff of the "Burchester Times." At the newspaper office he meets

BILLY DESMOND, a sterling, good-natured fellow, and

LUKE RAYNER, a detestable cad, with whom Jimmy comes to blows.

Accompanied by Billy Desmond, Jimmy sets out to report a local football match between Burchester United and Winton Old Boys. The United are a man short, and Jimmy undertakes to fill the breach. He gives a dazzling display on the wing, but ten minutes from the end the match is interrupted by Mr. Wilberforce, Jimmy Renton's "chief," who comes snorting on to the field of play.

(Now read on.)

Running the Gauntlet.

"STOP!" exclaimed Mr. Wilberforce. It was a dramatic moment.

The game was held up, and the editor was the cynosure of all eyes. The players, the referee, and the linesmen were glaring at him; and the crowd which thronged the ropes shouted to the intruder to keep off the grass. They were furious to think that the game had been interrupted at such an exciting stage, with Burchester United leading by two goals to one, and only ten minutes to go.

Headless of the storm of protest which had arisen, Mr. Wilberforce strode up to Jimmy Renton, who was looking—and feeling—decidedly uncomfortable.

"Is this what you call doing your duty, Renton?" demanded the angry editor.

"I—I—"

"What are you doing here?"

This struck Jimmy as being rather a superfluous question. Any ass could see that he was playing football, he reflected.

"I came along to report the match, sir," he said.

"D'you call this reporting it?"

"Ahem!"

"When I engage a reporter on my staff," said Mr. Wilberforce grimly, "I expect him to stick to his job—not to fritter away his afternoons playing football! Now, I suppose, I sha'n't get a report of this game at all?"

"Oh, yes, you will, sir!" said Jimmy. "Billy Desmond's on the touchline, taking notes."

Mr. Wilberforce gave a snort.

"You will return to the office with me at once, Renton!"

Jimmy looked alarmed.

"I—I say, sir," he exclaimed, "there's only ten minutes to go! If you'll be good enough to wait until it's all over, I'll come along."

But this arrangement didn't appeal to Mr. Wilberforce in the least.

"You will come now, Renton!" he said sternly.

"Oh crumbs!"

By this time the attitude of the crowd had become most menacing. And the hostile shouts which arose would have intimidated a good many people. But Mr. Wilberforce didn't turn a hair.

Evans, the United skipper, came up to the editor.

The burly footballer knew that Mr. Wilberforce was the controller of the local "rag," and a member of the town council. But he was no respecter of persons.

"Run away and pick flowers," he said gruffly, "or you'll get hurt!"

Mr. Wilberforce frowned.

"How dare you address me in that disrespectful manner!" he exclaimed. "Are you aware of my identity?"

"I'm aware that you're a champion idiot, to come barging on to the field like this!" growled Evans. "If you want to speak to this kid you can wait till afterwards. You've no cause to slate him, anyway. He turned up on the ground with the fixed intention of reporting the match, but as we were a man short I persuaded him to play for us. He's played up like a Trojan, too!"

"I don't want to hear about the achievements of a youth who has no right to be playing football at all!" snapped Mr. Wilberforce. "Renton will come with me at once!"

"Stay where you are, kid," said Evans. "Don't take any notice of this old buffer."

Jimmy hesitated.

"Either you leave this ground at once, or you leave my employ, Renton!" said the editor.

That settled it.

To be thrown out of work would be a very serious matter indeed for Jimmy Renton, since good jobs were not as plentiful as blackberries.

Jimmy turned to the United skipper. "You see how I'm fixed," he said.

"I'm sorry, but I must go."

Evans looked grim.

"I warn you, Mr. Wilberforce," he said, "that if you attempt to take this kid away the crowd will get right out of hand. They're warming up already. Hark at 'em!"

From the touchline came shouts of:

"Leave that kid alone!"

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"Get off the field!"
 "Do your duty, ref, or we'll do it for you."

The referee stepped up to Mr. Wilberforce.

"You hear them?" he said. "They mean business!"

"Bah!" said the editor scornfully. "Come, Renton!"

When the crowd saw what was happening—that the star forward of Surchester United had been induced to leave the field by Mr. Wilberforce—they fairly ran riot.

Lumps of turf and other missiles came hurtling through the air; and Mr. Wilberforce emitted a howl of anguish as a clod of earth smote him under the chin.

"We shall have to hustle, sir!" panted Jimmy Renton. "Unless we can give the crowd the slip somehow you'll stand a pretty good chance of being torn limb from limb!"

The editor and his companion ran the gauntlet of a perfect deluge of missiles as they headed for the ropes. And a number of hooligans began to resort to stone-throwing.

Mr. Wilberforce dived under the ropes, and found himself hemmed in by a threatening throng.

"Here he is!"

"Here's the kill-sport!"

"Mob him!"

"Pulverise him!"

Billy Desmond was standing near at hand. He thrust his notebook into his pocket, and dashed to the editor's assistance.

Mr. Wilberforce would certainly have received a very rough handling had not Jimmy Renton and Billy Desmond ranged themselves on either side of him and protected him from the onslaughts of the crowd.

Fortunately, Billy Desmond knew of a short cut; and the editor, panting and breathless, and muddy and dishevelled, was hustled to the exit.

"Quick!" panted Jimmy Renton. "We're not out of the wood yet. There's a score of hooligans following up behind!"

Standing just outside the exit was a solitary taxi.

Jimmy Renton and his chum bundled the editor into the vehicle, and then clambered in themselves.

Billy Desmond instructed the driver to proceed to the newspaper office, and the taxi moved off—in the nick of time, as it happened.

Mr. Wilberforce lay back against the upholstery, pumping in breath.

"Oh dear!" he gasped. "What an appalling experience!"

"If I may say so, sir," said Billy Desmond, "it was silly of you to insist upon Renton leaving the ground when he had been doing so well, and winning the admiration of the crowd. If we hadn't got you away when we did you'd have been an ambulance case!"

"I am grateful to you both for your assistance," said the editor. "At the same time, you must clearly understand, Renton, that you are not to play football at a time when you should be on duty. I shall overlook your offence on this occasion. But if there is a repetition of it I shall be compelled to give you marching orders! I am determined to have no slackers on my staff!"

Jimmy Renton flushed. If there was one thing he resented more than any other it was to be called a slacker.

"I don't see that any great harm was done, sir, by my playing for the United," he said.

Mr. Wilberforce frowned.

"You neglected your duty, Renton,"

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he said sternly. "And no man may shirk his allotted work, as the poet says."

"Bless the poet!" growled Billy Desmond.

"What did you say, Desmond?" demanded the editor sharply.

"Here we are!" said Billy evasively, as the taxi rumbled to a halt outside the newspaper office.

The trio alighted from the vehicle. And, after settling with the driver, Mr. Wilberforce hurried away to get a much-needed wash and brush-up. Ten minutes later he was seated in the editorial chair, busy with scissors and paste.

Jimmy Renton and Billy Desmond proceeded to the office in which they worked.

Luke Rayner, Jimmy's newly-found enemy, was lounging against the mantelpiece smoking a cigarette. The two chums ignored his existence.

"It was awfully bad luck, Jimmy," said Billy Desmond, "that the chief should have turned up on the ground when he did."

"I was enjoying myself no end, too!" said Jimmy ruefully.

"And the United were winning! They were actually putting it across Winton Old Boys!"

"The Old Boys may have forced a draw in the last ten minutes," said Jimmy.

"If they did," said Billy Desmond grimly, "the crowd will be thirsting for the editor's gore! Shouldn't be surprised if they came round to this office on a window-smashing campaign!"

Jimmy Renton looked startled.

"They'd never go so far as that, surely?" he said.

"My dear man, you've no idea what the Burchester mob can do when they're roused! There was an election here a few years ago, and by the time it was all over there wasn't a sound pane of glass in the old town!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"If that's the case, let's hope the United have won. I've no superfluous affection for old Wilberforce, but I don't want to see him permanently bedridden."

Rayner had been listening with considerable curiosity to this conversation.

"So you've been playing for Burchester United, Renton?" he said enviously.

"Yes."

"I suppose you bribed their skipper to give you a game?"

Jimmy frowned.

"That's enough!" he said sharply.

"Did Wilberforce spot you on the ground?" inquired Rayner.

"He did."

"And what did he say?"

"Mind your own business!"

"Did he, by gum! Then he was quite right. You ought to have been minding your own business instead of playing footer. I suppose you let the United down horribly?"

"On the contrary," chimed in Billy Desmond, "Jimmy Renton was the star turn—the man of the moment. He played a sparkling game, and, if I'm anything of a prophet, he'll be turning out for one of the big League teams some day."

Rayner scowled darkly. It was his own ambition to become a professional in first-class football, and he considered, in his colossal cheek, that he was streets ahead of Jimmy Renton as a footballer, although he had never seen Jimmy play. Rayner had instinctively hated Jimmy as soon as he had set eyes on him. And that hatred was growing in intensity. The mean-souled fellow who now stood puffing at his cigarette and scowling would not have scrupled to do Jimmy Renton an injury.

"It's a wonder the chief didn't sack you for neglect of duty!" he said.

"Yes, it's rather surprising, isn't it?" said Jimmy. "You'd love to see me fired out, wouldn't you?"

"I should!" said Rayner vehemently.

"Well, I'm afraid you'll be unlucky," said Jimmy.

But Luke Rayner had already resolved that if ever he had an opportunity of bringing Jimmy Renton's downfall, and getting him sacked from his job, he would grasp that opportunity with both hands.

Taken by Storm.

BURCHESTER UNITED played on with only ten men after the sensational retirement of Jimmy Renton.

The crowd fervently hoped that the United would be able to retain their lead of two goals to one. But the absence of Jimmy Renton completely disorganised the forward line.

In the closing stages of the game the home team went all to pieces.

Winton Old Boys, on the other hand, played up keenly—almost desperately. And two minutes from the end their centre-forward sent the leather crashing into the net.

"Goal!"

The visiting side had equalised, and Burchester United had been robbed of victory—thanks to Mr. Wilberforce, the editor of the local paper.

To say that the spectators were furious was to put it mildly. They raved and they jumped, and the air was thick with recriminations.

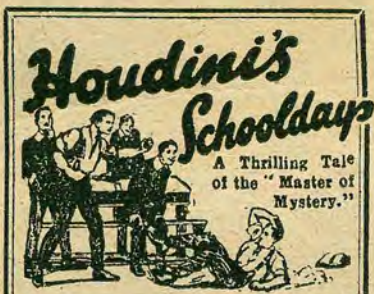
Had Jimmy Renton remained on the field the United would have won. There could be no question about that.

Mr. Wilberforce was far and away the most unpopular man in Burchester at that moment.

"What right had he to interfere?" everybody was asking. "Why couldn't he have left Jimmy Renton alone just for ten minutes, until the game was over and won?"

It was a very angry crowd indeed that passed out at the turnstiles.

"Come along, boys!" shouted a big, brawny young fellow, who wore a multi-coloured muffler round his neck. "Let's go an' have a few words with Wilberforce!"



All The Fun of the Film

2 Grand NEW Features!

Opening chapters of the early life of Harry Houdini, the Handcuff King and famous film hero, and the funniest front page of Comic Pictures ever produced. Big attractions no one should miss. See this week's issue of

MERRY & BRIGHT

Out on Thursday. Price 1½d.

"'Ear, 'ear!"
"We'll tackle 'im at 'is orfis!"
"Bring some ammunition along, mates!"

The big, brawny fellow was Bob Lee, generally known as "The Terror." He was the leader of the wild spirits of Burchester, and he was a red-hot supporter of the local team.

Whenever the United won the Terror was generally to be found in the saloon-bar of the Dun Cow, or the White Horse, or the Blue Boar. In these delectable haunts he entertained a noisy crew of friends, and kept high revel until a late hour.

But whenever the United lost, or only drew, the Terror—who was by way of being a Bolshevik—went round smashing things. And sometimes he vented his wrath on the referee, or on one of the players who had been below form. On one occasion he had been heavily fined at the local police-court for tying a referee in a sack and leaving him stranded in the dressing-room. On the whole the Terror was not exactly the sort of person who one would care to encounter on a dark night.

He meant business now as he raised his hand aloft and signalled to the gang of young hooligans who usually enlisted under his banner.

"Fall in an' foller me!" he shouted. The effect was magical.

At least a score of louts lined up behind the Terror, who strode away in the direction of the newspaper office, where he intended to have a few words, as he expressed it, with Mr. Wilberforce. The "few words" seemed likely to take the form of brickbats rather than verbal utterances.

As the clamorous procession surged down the High Street its numbers increased.

Other riotous youths joined forces with the main party, and the majority of them carried sticks and turfs.

Burchester boasted one police-sergeant and a couple of constables.

To do these men credit, they always stuck to their posts when outbreaks of this sort occurred. And on this occasion they did their best to check the advancing mob. But they might just as well have attempted to check the flow of a mighty torrent.

The Terror and his confederates meant business, and they were not going to be put off their stroke by three men in uniform.

The sergeant and constables were swept rudely aside by the oncoming stream of humanity.

"What's their little game?" panted one of the constables.

"They're goin' to smash up Wilberforce's place," said the sergeant. "We could get help from the outlyin' stations, but I doubt if it would arrive in time. Afraid we must let things take their course, an' trust to luck that there will be no broken heads."

"We can warn Wilberforce," said the other constable.

"No time!" said the sergeant briefly. Meanwhile, in the office of the local paper, Mr. Wilberforce was hard at work, blissfully unconscious of his danger.

In the outer office a couple of typewriters, manned by Jimmy Renton and Billy Desmond, were clicking away at such a rate as to make sparks fly.

A third typewriter, at which Luke Rayner was seated, was not in action. Rayner was engaged in conning a racing paper. He believed in doing as little work as possible, and the only occasions on which he got on with his job was when the eagle eye of the editor was upon him.

Jimmy Renton looked up at length from his machine.

"Seems to be an unholy row in the street," he remarked.

Billy Desmond rose to his feet and crossed over to the window. He peered down into the street below, and an expression of alarm came over his face.

"Anything wrong?" inquired Jimmy Renton.

"I should say so! There's a horde of hooligans down below! Sounds rather melodramatic, I know, but it's a fact. They're out for scalps. The United must have failed to pull off the match."

"By Jove!"

From the street below came ominous shouts.

"Where's Wilberforce?"

"Out with 'im!"

"He spoils the match!"

"An' we'll spoil the shape of 'is chivvy!"

The editor promptly stepped into the outer office. He saw Jimmy Renton and Billy Desmond wrestling with a fairly large cupboard.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

"We're going to barricade the door, sir, if there's time!" replied Jimmy.

"Excellent! I'll give you a hand!"

Luke Rayner, who was not of the stuff of which heroes are made, was pacing up and down in a state of great agitation. He had a yellow streak in him, and he was terrified at the thought of what might happen if the mob came surging into the building.

Ignoring the cowardly Rayner, the editor assisted Jimmy Renton and Billy Desmond to convey the cupboard downstairs to the main entrance—the editorial offices being situated on the first floor.

Fortunately, the crowd had not yet attempted to enter the building. But as soon as they heard the barricade planted against the front door their suspicions became aroused, and the Terror, turning to his confederates, exclaimed:

"Rush the place, boys!"

A number of roughs made a combined charge at the door, which refused to budge.

They charged again, and the door yielded a little. But Jimmy Renton and Billy Desmond supplemented the barricade by a stout oaken desk, and it was impossible for the hooligans to force an entry.

"Now we must barricade the back door, and the sooner the better!" panted Billy Desmond.

The editor and his two assistants set to work with a will, and another cupboard was conveyed to the back entrance and heaved into position against the door—just in the nick of time as it happened, for half a dozen of the Terror's followers arrived shortly afterwards at the back of the building.

"Good!" muttered Jimmy Renton. "You're safe now, sir—for the time being, at any rate."

"I think," said Mr. Wilberforce slowly, "that I ought to study the safety of the members of my staff, and give myself up."

"Nonsense, sir!" said Jimmy Renton, leading the way upstairs.

"In their present state of insanity the mob would give you a fearfully rough handling, sir!" said Billy Desmond.

"I think you're quite right, sir," whined Rayner, who was cowering in a corner. "What's the use of staying here? They're bound to ferret you out sooner or later!"

"Dry up, you worm!" muttered Jimmy Renton fiercely.

Judging by the sounds which came up from below, the members of the little garrison upstairs could tell that desperate efforts were being made by the

mob to force an entry into the building. It was now only a matter of moments before these efforts proved successful.

But during that breathless interval of suspense Jimmy Renton had a sudden brain-wave.

The buildings on that side of the High Street were very close together. A distance of only a few feet separated the side-windows of the editorial office from the side-windows of the adjoining premises. And this gave Jimmy Renton his idea.

In the office was a long form on which callers usually sat while waiting to see the editor. Jimmy Renton promptly pounced upon it.

"What are you going to do with that form, Renton?" asked Mr. Wilberforce in surprise.

"Push it through one of the side windows till it reaches the window opposite," said Jimmy.

"But what on earth—?"

"It's your only way of escape, sir. Give me a hand, Billy!"

The form was thrust through the window and across the intervening space, until the far end of it was made secure on the sill of the window opposite.

"Now, sir!" said Jimmy Renton quickly. "It's perfectly safe, and we'll hang on to it at this end."

Mr. Wilberforce did not hesitate. He clambered through the window, and set foot on the form.

Below him was a narrow alley-way, and had the editor fallen the next issue of his paper would have contained his own obituary notice.

But he did not fall. He walked straight across until he reached the opposite window, through which he disappeared. The angry mob in the street were not in a position to see the manner and method of his escape.

At that moment there was a terrific commotion down below.

One of the barricades had given way, and there was a stampede of approaching footsteps on the stairs.

"Just in time!" muttered Jimmy Renton. "Drag the form back—quick!"

The form was whisked back into the office, and Jimmy Renton and Billy Desmond dropped on to it, panting from their strenuous exertions.

And then the door was thrown open, and the Terror dashed in, with his followers at his heels. He darted a quick glance at the two fellows seated on the form; then he rushed into the editor's private sanctum.

It was empty!

With a muttered imprecation the Terror returned to the outer office.

"Gorn!" he said dramatically. "He ain't here, after all. We've took all this trouble for nothin'."

Jimmy Renton smiled upon the speaker.

For some moments the Terror stood gnawing his lip in reflection. He was undecided whether to wait for Mr. Wilberforce or not, and finally he came to the conclusion that Billy Desmond was right—that he had done quite enough damage already. So he rapped out a sullen command, and the raiders went clattering down the stairs and out into the street.

Within a very short time the mob dispersed, and Burchester High Street presented its normal appearance.

The situation had been saved, and so had Mr. Wilberforce—thanks to Jimmy Renton!

(There will be another grand installment of this magnificent new football serial next week.)



FOR HIS FATHER'S SAKE!

A Grand Long, Complete Story of the
Thrilling Adventures of a party of
Schoolboys from St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

The Midnight Flight!

TOM MERRY could not sleep. It was night, deep and dark; a chill wind from the north whistled in the deserted streets of Vancouver.

In the dimness of the room Tom could hear the steady breathing of his comrades, deep in slumber.

A ray of starlight glimmered in at the window, and fell on the faces of Manners and Lowther, near him, sleeping peacefully. Farther, in the shadow, were Figgins and D'Arcy and Fatty Wynn, and Levison major and minor. Tom Merry spoke in a whisper.

"You fellows asleep?"

There was no answer.

But in the silence there came the sound of a movement in the adjoining room.

Mr. Levison was there; and the movement showed that the hunted man was not sleeping.

Tom Merry sat up in bed, drawing the blankets round him; the night was cold. He could not sleep.

It was his first night in Canada, and perhaps the strangeness of his surroundings had something to do with it.

Perhaps it was the shadow of danger—unseen, but ever present.

That day the party had landed from the yacht which had brought them from far-off England; and at dawn on the morrow they were to start for the North-West. Their way lay through the mountains to the frozen banks of the Yukon.

Tom Merry, as he sat in the darkness, was thinking of that strange and perilous voyage, and the grim pursuit of Dirk Power—of the terrible perils that dogged them step by step. Dirk Power had been left behind in San Francisco. That he would follow was certain; but he could not be at Vancouver yet. The fugitives had a breathing-space. Yet—

Tom Merry turned out of bed at last.

The thought of the madman was in his mind—the copper-faced man from Alaska, who had been driven half-insane by his suffering as a prisoner among the Indians of the Yukon. Half-insane, with the cunning of insanity, and more than the determination of a sane man. Where was Dirk Power at that moment?

In the shadows, Tom Merry seemed to see the coppery face, the burning eyes, threatening him.

He shivered.

Surely the man was far away—many a long mile south of the Canadian border. Yet Tom's nerves quivered with a sense of peril near.

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He stepped to the window.

It looked out on a wide street, with tram-lines; silent now and deserted. The starlight glimmered there, ghostly.

Tom gave a sudden start.

Across the street, close by a light-standard, a shadowy form caught his eyes—the figure of a man, standing motionless, his eyes fixed upon the hotel.

It was not Dirk Power; Tom Merry would have known the Alaskan at a glance, even at that distance.

But the man was watching the building.

As Tom gazed at him the watcher moved and crossed the street, coming directly towards the hotel. He disappeared under the wooden balcony beneath Tom's window.

The junior's heart beat fast.

He opened the window softly, and stepped out on the balcony without a sound.

From the silence below came a faint murmur of voices. Tom Merry leaned over the wooden balustrade, straining his ears.

He caught one word:

"Levison!"

That word came clearly out of the faint whispering below. He drew back quickly as the black figure emerged into sight again. But the man did not look up; he crossed the street rapidly, turned a corner, and disappeared. A door closed softly below.

Tom Merry did not hesitate a moment.

He re-entered the room, and stepped quickly to the door that communicated with Mr. Levison's room, and tapped.

He heard a sudden gasping breath in the adjoining apartment. The door opened quickly.

Mr. Levison, fully-dressed, appeared before Tom's eyes. His face was pale and worn. He had not slept.

"What—what is it?" The hunted man's voice was shaking. "You are not asleep, my boy—what is it?"

"We're being watched, Mr. Levison," said Tom Merry quietly.

Mr. Levison started.

"Watched! Impossible! Dirk Power is hundreds of miles away—"

"He may have associates here," said Tom. "He may have used the telegraph—or the telephone—"

"It is possible! What have you seen?"

Tom Merry explained quickly:

"A man was watching from across the street—he came over and spoke to someone in the hotel—the porter, perhaps—"

"But—"

"He mentioned your name, sir. I heard it."

Mr. Levison pressed his hand to his brow:

"That leaves no doubt," he said. "We are watched, then. Dirk Power has friends here, and he has communicated with them somehow!" He shivered. "Wake your friends, my boy—we shall not wait till dawn. We may elude them yet. We shall at least be gone before Dirk Power can arrive in Vancouver!"

"But the car will not be here till dawn, sir—"

"I will go down now and telephone for it to come as quickly as possible. We must not lose an instant!"

"Very well, sir!"

Mr. Levison quitted his room, and Tom Merry called softly to his comrades to awaken them.

"What's the row?" asked Levison, springing from bed at the first call. "Is it—is it Dirk Power?"

"Up with you!" said Tom. "Mr. Levison's getting the car round now, and we've got to start as soon as it comes!"

"Bai Jove! Without waitin' for mornin', deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy drowsily.

"Yes, yes!"

"Wight-ho!"

"We'll be ready jolly soon," said Figgins. "Buck up, Fatty!"

"I'm bucking up!" yawned Fatty Wynn. "We shall have to get off without breakfast—I suppose we shall have some grub in the car?"

"Never mind grub now!" growled Monty Lowther. "Hallo, I can hear them moving downstairs!"

There were footsteps below, and a murmur of sleepy voices. The juniors dressed quickly and packed their bags—they had done little unpacking so far. Tom Merry uttered an exclamation as there came the snort of an automobile in the street outside.

"It's the car!"

Mr. Levison opened the door.

"Come!"

"We're ready, sir!"

The juniors followed him downstairs. A sleepy porter was stacking the baggage on the big car. The chauffeur blinked curiously at the party as he sat at his wheel. Round them, as they crowded into the car, the city was sleeping. Mr. Levison spoke in a low voice to the chauffeur; the car began to hum. A dark figure came running across the street as the car moved along the tram-lines.

It was the spy.

The man leaped back from the way of the car. Tom Merry glanced round as the big automobile swept on—the man was standing in the middle of the street, staring after them. A minute more and

he was lost to sight, as the car rushed on into the dimness of the night.

CHAPTER 2. Arrested!

EASTWARD, over the Rocky Mountains, came a pale flush in the sky.

It was the herald of dawn.

Tom Merry & Co., crowded in the big car, were half-asleep. Only Mr. Levison sat upright, sleepless, with restless eyes.

For mile on mile the big car had hummed on through the night northward, ever northward.

Once more the wild flight had begun—the flight from the mad avenger. Many times Mr. Levison gazed back along the shadowy road, searching. But the road was deserted. There was no sign of pursuit. The spy had been thrown off the track.

More than once the chauffeur had changed his route at a word from Mr. Levison, winding like a hunted animal to throw a possible pursuer off the trail.

Many a long mile lay between them and the city on the Pacific when the first faint flush of dawn appeared in the sky. By hilly roads, with sharp gradients, and never a pause, the great automobile fled through the night. Tom Merry looked out in the dawn as the light strengthened. A gleam of water was on his right. It was the Lillooet Lake, though he did not know it.

He glanced along the road ahead.

Against the pale sky buildings rose into view, and Mr. Levison, following his glance, said quietly:

"Lake Crossing! We stop there, and leave the car."

The sun could be seen now, gleaming from the east. The new day was awakening on the hills and valleys of British Columbia.

Levison uttered a sudden exclamation.

"The road's watched, father!"

"What?"

"Look!"

A mounted man in uniform sat his horse motionless in the centre of the road. He did not move as the big car came rushing down towards him.

Mr. Levison panted.

"But—Ah!" His face cleared. "It is a police-officer. We have nothing to fear from him!"

"He's going to stop the car!" said Manners.

All eyes in the car were fixed upon the mounted policeman ahead. He raised a hand as the car drew nearer, and the driver jammed on his brakes. It was a signal to stop.

Behind the horseman two constables appeared in sight from a building, with carbines in their hands.

"Halt!"

The car clanged to a stop.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another. It was impossible that a man in the uniform of the Canadian Mounted Police could have any dealings with Dirk Power and his gang. Yet what did it mean?

The horseman rode up to the side of the halted car. He saluted stiffly.

"What does this mean, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Levison. "Why are you stopping my car?"

"You are from Vancouver?"

"Yes."

"You must have left soon after midnight?"

"That is so."

"Your name?"

"Levison."

"I thought so," was the grim rejoinder. "I am Inspector Forester. You will alight here."

"But—but why?" panted Mr. Levison.

"Orders have been telephoned through

from Vancouver to stop your car," said the inspector briefly. "What is in this baggage?"

"Our supplies for a journey to the Yukon."

The inspector smiled grimly.

"If that is the case you have nothing to fear. But step down."

"But—but—Mr. Levison breathed hard—"we are in haste—"

"Very likely!"

"Has anything happened at Vancouver since we left?" exclaimed Ernest Levison.

The inspector gave him a curious glance.

"Since you left, probably not," he answered dryly. "But last night there was a bank robbery in Vancouver—"

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Levison.

"Every police-office in the section has been warned by telephone to watch for your car and stop it. We were warned two hours ago."

"Good heavens!"

"A—a bank robbery!" stammered Tom Merry. "You—you can't possibly imagine that we had anything to do with that."

"Bai Jove!"

"I have my duty to do," said the inspector dryly. "Every road out of Vancouver has been watched for your car, and I guess those orders were not telephoned from headquarters for nothing. But if you are innocent you have nothing to fear but a brief detention."

"But—but we are in haste."

The inspector smiled ironically. The black despair in Mr. Levison's face had not escaped his keen eyes. He had little doubt—or, rather, none—that he had the bank robber under his hand.

"A brief detention!" muttered Mr. Levison, with white lips. "But in that time—" He broke off.

"It's only a mistake, father," whispered Levison. "It will be set right. It will be found out soon—"

Mr. Levison gave his son a ghastly look.

"It is not a mistake," he said hoarsely. "It is a trick. Dirk Power's spy has done this."

"Father!"

"We are delayed. We have nothing to fear from the police when they learn the truth. But in the interval Dirk Power will be here. His agent is carrying out his orders."

"But—but how—" gasped Tom Merry.

Mr. Levison clenched his hands.

"He is using even the law, even the police for his purpose!" he muttered. "He is a demon incarnate, and we are lost!"

"We—we mayn't be detained long, father," muttered Frank. "The police will soon find out—"

"Step down!" rapped out the inspector.

Mr. Levison turned a haggard face towards him.

"Listen to me!" he said. "I am in haste. I am pressed for time. A deadly enemy is following me, and this false charge is a trick to delay me, and gain him time—"

The inspector shrugged his shoulders.

"You make what statement you please later," he said. "At present you will step down and accompany me."

"I tell you—"

"Force will be used if you do not obey!"

Mr. Levison suppressed a groan, and stepped from the car. The juniors followed him in silence.

They felt that Mr. Levison was right, that it was the hand of Dirk Power that had thus reached out to them from afar. The flight was stopped, and every hour

that was lost brought the mad avenger nearer.

But there was no help. Resistance was impossible, even if they had thought of attempting it.

A constable entered the seat beside the chauffeur, and the car was driven away under his direction, with the baggage still on it.

Mr. Levison walked heavily by the side of the inspector, followed by Tom Merry & Co., through a gateway by the road into a yard before a large, frame-built house. The gate closed heavily behind them as soon as they were inside.

"What place is this?" exclaimed Tom Merry, catching his breath.

The inspector glanced at him.

"The calaboose!" he answered briefly.

There was a grim sound as a huge iron key turned. The gate was locked behind them, and they were prisoners.

Prisoners!

And every hour was precious. Every hour their deadly enemy was drawing nearer, nearer, as fast as the reckless expenditure of lavish gold could bring them.

They had escaped him on the Atlantic, on the Pacific, at San Francisco. Was it only to fall into his hands almost at their wild journey's end? The half-mad avenger, with all the cunning of the insane, with more than the determination of a sane man, was drawing nearer with every minute that passed, and, with a cunning that was almost fiendish, he was using even the law to delay them in their flight! The grinding of the iron key in the lock was like a knell of doom to their ears.

CHAPTER 3.

The Enemy at Hand!

FREE at last!

The sun was sinking down towards the Pacific, the shadows of the hills lengthened over Lake Lillooet.

The dreary day was past.

But they were free.

For a whole weary day they had been prisoners within the lumber walls of the calaboose at Lake Crossing, detained on suspicion. The Canadian inspector had done only his duty; they did not blame him. But the day, which should have seen them across the lake and well on their way to the Fraser River, en route for the North-West, was gone.

It was at sundown that the news came through on the telephone from Vancouver. The juniors hardly knew the details, but they knew that false information had been given to the police in the city on the coast, and that now the truth was known.

They were free!

Mr. Levison had passed the day sunk almost in despair, dreading at every moment to hear the tread of his enemy, to see the coppery face and the burning eyes of the man from Alaska. But Dirk Power had not come—the delay had not been long enough for that. As the juniors saw their baggage stacked into the canoes that were to take them across the lake they wondered how far distant their enemy was. The car had been dismissed; on the other side of the lake horses were waiting for them. Mr. Levison pushed on the preparations for departure feverishly, but the Kootenay Indians who manned the canoes were slow and heavy. But at last the waters of the lake flowed beneath them.

"Off at last!" said Levison of the Fourth, with a deep breath of relief.

The Indians paddled out over the dark lake.

Tom Merry & Co., sitting in the canoes
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among their baggage, looked back at the shore they were leaving.

Lights glimmered from the little town. "Hark!" muttered Figgins.

He held up his hand.

From the single street of the lake-side town came the snort and roar of a powerful automobile.

Two great lights, like flashing eyes, darted through the gloom, and stopped, as it seemed, almost on the verge of the lake.

"A car!" whispered Levison.

The juniors watched with strained eyes. Was it Dirk Power? Was he so close behind them?

A faint buzzing of voices came on the wind across the waters as they widened behind the canoes.

Crack!

A flash of fire came through the gloom, and the report of a revolver. A bullet skimmed over the waters of the lake.

Mr. Levison caught his breath.

"Dirk Power!"

Crack!

It was the madman! He had arrived too late—only by minutes—and he was firing wildly, blindly, into the darkness of the lake.

The Indians rested on their paddles and stared back. Mr. Levison shouted to them furiously.

The canoes glided on again.

There was another shot, faint and distant now. Then silence.

The St. Jim's fellows looked at one another with pale faces.

"Bai Jove, that was a close shave!" murmured D'Arcy.

"He will follow!" whispered Frank Levison. "He will follow!"

The canoes glided on through the thickening darkness.

No sound came to the ears of the fugitives now, save the dash of the paddles and the lapping of the waters of the lake.

A silver gleam fell upon the waters as the moon glided out from a bank of clouds.

It showed them the dark pines and firs on the farther side of the lake for which they were heading.

"Faster! Faster!" breathed Mr. Levison.

The paddles dashed unceasingly.

As they neared the land Mr. Levison peered ahead anxiously in the gloom.

"The guide and the horses should be here," he said. "They had orders to be here in the morning, and to wait for us if we were delayed."

A faint sound came through the silence from the shore.

"I can hear horses, sir," said D'Arcy.

"They're there!" said Tom Merry.

"A group of them, by a cabin—"

"Thank Heaven!" muttered Mr. Levison.

The canoes ran into the reeds. There was a sound of horses in the gloom under the trees—a jingling of bridle and stirrup. A dusky figure came forward, peering.

"Monsieur—"

"I am here!" said Mr. Levison. A lantern gleamed out, showing the dark face and piercing black eyes of a half-breed. "You are Leronge, the guide that—"

"C'est moi! Gaston Leronge, monsieur," answered the North-West half-breed, eyeing Mr. Levison curiously.

"Good!"

Mr. Levison cast a quick look back across the lake. The waters glimmered in the moonlight. There was no sign of a canoe or a boat—no sign as yet of pursuit.

He breathed more freely.

Dirk Power was not far behind, and he would not lose a moment. But the

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fugitives had a start. The way to the North-West lay open before them.

"Lose no time!" said Mr. Levison. "We have horses for all, and two mules for the baggage. Leronge will guide us up the Fraser Valley."

In a very short time the juniors were mounted.

With Gaston Leronge in the lead, the party pushed by on along the trail in the darkness under the heavy timber.

Hardly a word was spoken as they rode. The sure-footed Canadian horses trod on stealthily in the darkness of the rough trail.

Leronge rode ahead without a word, Mr. Levison close behind, and Tom Merry & Co. following. A Kootenay Indian led the pack-mules. Deep silence lay round them as they rode.

Through the hours of darkness they pushed on, fatigued, but uncomplaining. Tom Merry had unpacked his rifle and loaded it, and he held it across his saddle as he rode. Leronge had given it a curious look, and Tom had received another from the black eyes of the guide, but the man made no comment.

"Dawn!" said Manners at last.

"Bai Jove, I'm gettin' tired!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Mr. Levison glanced back.

"We cannot halt yet," he said.

"You know this country, father?" asked Levison of the Fourth.

Mr. Levison smiled faintly.

"It is familiar country to me," he said.

"I spent many years here and on the Yukon long ago. Push on!"

Only the steady trot of the horses broke the silence for some time as the sun rose higher over the firs and cedars. As the daylight strengthened the juniors cast many glances backwards. The trail before them ran through a long, wide canyon of the Cascade Mountains, with no habitation in sight. Mr. Levison was avoiding the beaten paths—Leronge had his instructions. What had happened at Lake Crossing had warned him. Even in the wild sections of the Canadian West the telephone-wire stretches; it had served Dirk Power already, and it might serve him again. And the hunted man knew that Power had confederates in this region, and that spies were probably watching for the fugitives. But on that lonely trail through the Cascade Range there was at least no danger of spies.

The horses' hoofs rang on hard rocks now.

Tom Merry looked back along the rocky trail sinking away behind them. He halted on a rocky ridge and opened his binoculars, which he had brought ashore from the yacht at Vancouver.

For mile on mile the declivity lay behind, and the powerful glasses showed him long reaches of the trail.

He uttered a sudden exclamation.

"What do you see?" exclaimed Mr. Levison, pulling in his horse.

"A horseman!" answered Tom Merry, with the binoculars steadily to his eyes. "A horseman with a dark face, like copper—"

"Dirk Power!"

Mr. Levison panted out the name.

Leronge wheeled his horse; the Kootenay with the pack-mules stopped. Mr. Levison was white.

Tom Merry's lips set grimly.

"It is Dirk Power," he said, "and he is following our trail. In a few minutes you will see him without the glasses."

"Push on!"

"Stop!" said Tom Merry quietly.

"The man has a powerful horse, and we are going at the pace of the pack-mules. We cannot distance him unless we leave the mules behind with our baggage."

"We cannot—"

Tom shook his head.

"Push on, the rest of you," he said. "No need to lose time. You stay with me, Monty, and hold my horse."

"What—?" began Mr. Levison.

Tom Merry slipped from his horse, rifle in hand. His blue eyes were gleaming under his knitted brows.

"I am going to stop him," he said quietly.

"But—but—"

"He will soon be within easy range—"

"He will kill you!" panted Mr. Levison.

"He will not get near enough. You have seen me shoot, sir," said Tom Merry. "I am going to stop him. Ride on, and I will follow!"

"Betrah leave it to me, Tom Mewwy," murmured D'Arcy.

"Ride on!"

Mr. Levison hesitated a moment or two, his lips twitching. Then he gave the signal to the rest to ride on. The party pushed on over the ridge, and Tom Merry and Monty Lowther remained among the sassafras. Lowther's face was a little pale, but he did not speak. He held the two horses in the cover of the pines and sassafras on the ridge. Tom Merry lay on the rocks at full length, his hat on the back of his head, his rifle stretched out before him. He waited.

His face was calm, his eyes steady.

The ring of hoofs came to his ears; in the distance the horseman was seen galloping. The sun glimmered on the coppery face of the man from Alaska as he came on at a gallop.

Still Tom Merry waited.

Louder rang the hoofs on the rocks; the madman was near enough for Tom to make out every feature of the cruel, coppery face.

"Tom!" breathed Lowther.

Crack!

Tom Merry pulled trigger.

The rocks and the pines flung back the report in a thousand echoes.

The galloping horseman stopped suddenly; the horse reared back, and went rolling over on the rocks. Dirk Power leaped clear barely in time to avoid being crushed under the stricken animal. A minute more and the horse lay still.

Tom Merry sprang up.

"Come on, Monty!"

The juniors mounted hastily, and rode after their companions. In the distance down the trail the man from Alaska stood beside his dead horse, and shook his fist in impotent fury, pouring out a torrent of curses—curses that the juniors did not hear as they galloped on the rocky trail.

CHAPTER 4.

The Traitor!

"THE Stickeen River!" said Mr. Levison.

In the setting sun the horsemen rode out of the forest upon the rugged, rocky bank.

Many days had passed since Tom Merry had shot down the madman's horse in the canyon of the Cascade Range, and the party had pushed on without a pause.

They camped at night for brief repose, taking the trail again at dawn, and that, with a brief rest at noon, was all.

The rough life had fatigued the St. Jim's juniors at first, but it was invigorating them now.

They were sun-browned, wind-bitten; they rode hard, and breathed deep; they slept rolled in blankets on rough ground; they rode and tramped for hours with-

out exhaustion. Even Mr. Levison was changed. The twittering nerves were still; his face was harder, firmer; his eyes had a steadier light. He was once more in the surroundings of his earlier adventurous days—in the wild regions where he had sought for gold and found a fortune—and the old scenes, the rough life, the keen mountain air braced him and strengthened him.

By forest-trail and prairie, by river and creek, the party had pushed on, winding their way to the North-West through trackless expanses, leaving no trace that the cunningest tracker could have followed.

Dirk Power, it seemed, had been shaken off at last.

Since he had been left on foot in the Cascade Mountains Tom Merry & Co. had seen nothing of the Alaskan.

Doubtless he was still seeking them; but he was seeking without a trace.

The party was reduced now; the Kootenay had left them on the Fraser River, and one of the pack-mules had been drowned in fording a creek. The baggage was reduced; they were travelling light. Their rifles provided many of their meals from the game in the forests.

Gaston Leronge, their guide to the Yukon, was still with them—silent, almost morose as ever. He spoke no English—at all events, the juniors never heard him use that tongue. Mr. Levison talked with him in French when it was necessary to speak; but he was taciturn, and he answered little. But his keen black eyes often roved over the party questioningly. Sometimes it seemed to Levison that he was listening, though why he should listen to a language he did not understand was a mystery.

The party halted on the bank of the Stickeen, far, far to the north of the Fraser Valley. They were now fairly in the boundless, unsettled North-West territory of British Columbia, and close upon their destination—the frozen wastes of the Yukon. There were chips of ice in the waters of the Stickeen as it flowed past between its high, wooded banks.

"We halt here for the night," said Mr. Levison.

"Bai Jove! I'm wathah glad of that!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I say, Tom Mewwy, this is wathah a change fwom St. Jim's and Sussex."

"Yes, rather!" said Tom, with a smile.

"Are you awfully tired, Figgy?"

"Not so tired as you are, Gussy!" answered Figgins grimly.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Jolly hungry, if you come to that!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm glad you potted that antelope way back, Tom Merry. It means a jolly good supper. Lots of sticks here for a fire. Pile in!"

"Fatty's cook," said Figgins, with a grin. "Fancy you're back in the old study at St. Jim's, Fatty, and give us a good feed."

"This is going to beat anything we ever had at St. Jim's," said Fatty Wynn. "I've got a good appetite here, I can tell you. I think I shall settle in Canada when I'm a man. You enjoy your grub in this air."

Some of the juniors gathered brushwood for the camp-fire, while others drew water from the stream, or staked out the horses.

Leronge staked out his own horse and the pack-mule, and then helped in the camping.

The weather was fine, though cold, and the campers were to sleep in their blankets and rugs on beds of leaves.

"This is all right," remarked Frank Levison, as he started on his venison-

steak. "Your cooking is Al, Fatty; better than the guide's."

"I should jolly well say so!" said Fatty Wynn emphatically.

"Pass it this way, old top!" said Manners.

"Here you are—lots to cut and come again!" said the cheerful Fatty. "I say, I'm enjoying this trip—or I should, anyhow, if it wasn't for that man villain after us. I suppose he's somewhere behind even now." And Fatty waved a plump hand towards the dark forest southward.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"I think we've shaken off Dirk Power at last," said Monty Lowther. "Don't you think so, Mr. Levison?"

Mr. Levison's brows clouded at the name.

"I hope so," he replied. "I have questioned a great many Indians at the villages we have passed, and have talked with some white trappers, but have been unable to hear anything of the man. I hope—I believe—that he is still far away. But he seems to have unbounded money, and he will spend it like water to reach us. We are not safe from him yet."

The half-breed, who was sitting on a log by the fire, gnawing a venison-cut, glanced up at his master.

It was only a momentary glance, but it was quick and searching. Levison of the Fourth had his eyes upon the guide, and he noted it, and his eyes met the half-breed's. Leronge dropped his glance to the fire.

"But when shall we be safe from him, father?" muttered Frank.

"Soon, I hope," said Mr. Levison.

"When we reach the village of the Indian chief Thunder-Face, across the border in Alaska. I shall have proofs of my innocence. Dirk Power believes that I betrayed him into the hands of the Indians, who kept him a prisoner for ten years, and tortured him when he strove to escape. He is half-mad. But when I have the proofs—"

"Will he heed them?" muttered Levison.

"He will—he must!"

The half-breed guide rose and lounged away from the fire. Levison's keen eyes followed him.

Supper was over, and Mr. Levison threw fresh logs upon the fire.

"Sleep now," he said. "We start at dawn."

"But the watch—"

"Leronge keeps the first watch. Turn into your blankets."

Mr. Levison rolled himself in his blanket, with his feet to the fire, and the juniors followed his example. Gaston Leronge stood at a little distance, half-hidden by shadow, leaning on his rifle.

Ernest Levison raised his head a little and glanced at the guide. He did not sleep. An hour passed, and Levison's eyes were still open.

Leronge moved, lounging a little nearer to the dark trees that shadowed the camp by the bank of the Stickeen. Levison turned a little, and touched Tom Merry on the shoulder. Tom awakened with a start.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"Listen to me, Tom. You've noticed the guide?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of him?"

Tom Merry rubbed his eyes. He was quite awake now.

"I don't like his looks much," he said. "I suppose he's all right. Your father pays him well for his services."

"I don't trust him!" muttered Levison. "He's supposed to speak no

English—he's a French half-breed—but I'm certain that he often listens when we speak, especially when Dirk Power is mentioned. I noticed him when my father mentioned Power just before we turned in."

Tom Merry started.

"You think the man knows Dirk Power?"

"He may have known him—Dirk Power was many years in this wilderness—or he may only know that he is rich, and would pay anything that was asked to get on my father's track."

"But Leronge does not know—"

"If he understands English he knows the whole story from what he has heard of our talk."

"True!" said Tom Merry.

"If he should betray us!" whispered Levison uneasily.

"But Dirk Power is far from here."

"How do we know?"

"Dash it all, Levison!" muttered Tom. He started abruptly. "Where is he? Where is Leronge?"

Levison looked round quickly.

The shadowy form of the guide had vanished. Gaston Leronge had disappeared into the blackness of the forest.

CHAPTER 5.

Face to Face!

TOM MERRY sprang to his feet.

The fire had died down, and only a dim glimmer came from the embers—a dull glimmer of red. Darkness wrapped the banks of the Stickeen. Through the dark came the dull murmur of the waters among the rocks. Tom kicked the fire together hastily, and a blaze shot up.

The light danced on the camp, on the river, on the dark pines and firs. Gaston Leronge was nowhere to be seen. Tom's rifle was in his hand. The thought of treachery was in his mind, and he half-expected to hear a shot ring out under the blackness of the forest. But there was no sound save the sough of the wind in the pines, and the faint murmur of the Stickeen.

"The horses!" muttered Levison.

Tom stared round him.

The horses and the pack-mule had been staked out by the river in reach of the water. The cut trail-ropes sprawled on the bank; the animals were gone.

"Gone!" exclaimed Tom.

Levison gritted his teeth.

"I was right—the guide— Father, wake up!"

Mr. Levison started from sleep, and threw aside his blankets. He rose on his elbow.

"Ernest, what is it?"

"The guide is gone. He has taken the horses."

"What?"

"The half-breed has betrayed us," said Levison, between his teeth.

"Good heavens!"

Mr. Levison leaped up. The juniors were all awake now, and on their feet.

"He has deserted us! Has the arm of Dirk Power reached us, then, even here in the heart of the wilderness?" muttered Mr. Levison.

"Affah him!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"He cannot be far away," said Levison. "It is not ten minutes since I saw him."

Mr. Levison shook his head.

"In this blackness we cannot follow him into the forest. There is no trace to follow till dawn. By then he will be beyond pursuit—if he has not by then joined Dirk Power."

"You think that villain—" began Tom.

"I am sure of it."

Levison ground his teeth. His su-

pitions of the guide had come too late; or it was probable that Leronge had divined his suspicions, and acted at once. The guide was gone; the horses and mule were gone. The adventurers were abandoned, on foot, in the heart of the North-West wilderness.

Was the traitor in league with Dirk Power, or was it merely the booty that he sought? It was impossible to say with certainty; but the juniors felt the hovering presence of the madman from Alaska. Mr. Levison stamped out the embers of the camp-fire.

"What are we going to do, father?" whispered Frank.

Mr. Levison breathed heavily.

"We must wait till dawn. Then we must try to reach the hunter's camp on the Stickeen, where we are to get the sledges for the journey north. It means delay—more delay—on foot—" He broke off. "Sleep now, my boys. I will watch till morning."

But there was little more sleep for Tom Merry & Co. that night.

At the first gleam of dawn they were astir.

After a hurried breakfast they started, following the bank of the Stickeen as their only guide.

In the daylight doubtless the trail of the traitor could have been picked up in the forest; but it was useless to think of following it. Leronge was mounted, and he was far away by that time with the string of stolen horses.

Had he joined Dirk Power somewhere in the dim forest to the south? The possibility was enough to urge the fugitives to the greatest haste.

They shouldered their packs and started down the river.

The rugged, broken bank was difficult to follow, but it was their only guide to the hunter's camp, and they kept to it.

As the wintry sun rose higher over the forests they tramped on doggedly. It was not till noon that they stopped for a brief rest and a meal, washed down by water from the Stickeen.

Splash!

Tom Merry rose quickly from the half-frozen log upon which he was seated, and stared towards the glimmering river.

A canoe glided round a bend of the stream with the current.

Four men were in it, paddling.

For a moment Tom Merry supposed that it was an Indian canoe, rowed by Kootenays or Athabascas, and the thought was in his mind of getting help from the Indians. But the next moment he saw that the fur-clad figures in the canoe were white men.

One of them was the false guide, Gaston Leronge; one was the scarred Spaniard, another the Mexican, the associates of Dirk Power, and the fourth was—

Tom Merry knew that coppery face, those evil, burning eyes. It was Dirk Power!

"Cover!" he breathed.

"Bai Jove!"

"Dirk Power!" panted Mr. Levison.

"Cover!" hissed Tom Merry.

They threw themselves face down on the rocks of the river-bank. The first had screened them. They were not seen yet. Tom Merry raised his head a little to watch. The bank was high and rocky. The stream flowed ten or a dozen feet below. The canoe, as it came on, was hidden from sight by the high bank. But the paddling had ceased. There was no sound of a splash in the river.

"They've stopped!" whispered Levison.

Tom put his fingers to his lips. His grasp was on his rifle. If Dirk Power

had run them down he would not find easy victims. But Mr. Levison's hand was shaking on his gun; the sight of his deadly foe seemed to have deprived him of all his nerve. Ernest Levison's glance dwelt on his father with deep affection and compassion. It was the deadly pursuit, the ceaseless danger that dogged his steps that had unnerved the hunted man and robbed him of his resolution. Levison's teeth shut together hard. From the high, rocky bank came the murmur of voices.

"They will be following the river." It was the treacherous guide's voice, and he was speaking in English now. "It is their only way to the hunters' camp on the Stickeen."

"We have landed twice without finding a trail." It was Dirk Power's sibilant voice. "But they cannot be far away. Get ashore, Leronge—you have a good eye for a trail. If there is a trace of them on the bank—"

"I guess we have passed ahead of them; the canoe travels fast—"

"Get ashore!"

"Carambo! We are wasting time," said the Spaniard.

There was a curse from Dirk Power.

"Fool! If you had brought me word of them sooner—"

"I could not," muttered the half-breed sullenly. "I knew you were in pursuit, from their talk, but I knew not where to look for you. It was not till yesterday—when I saw you with my glass from the hill—and you were miles away on the river—"

A curse interrupted him. Every word came clearly to the juniors on the bank above.

"I could not leave them during the day. Already the boy suspected me; I saw it—"

"Cease your babble! Get ashore and look for a trail."

"Paddle in closer, then."

There was a sound of paddles, and the canoe jarred against the steep, rocky bank, then the sound of a man climbing the rugged rock from the water's edge.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

In a minute more the treacherous guide's head would rise into view over the bank amid the rocky boulders. Tom Merry's finger was on the trigger of his rifle.

There was a breathless hush. A stone fell under the climber's feet and splashed into the river. A curse from Dirk Power followed the sound.

The head of the half-breed came into sight. He was panting as he came struggling up the rugged bank; his dark bronze face was turned towards the juniors, within six feet of him. He saw them.

Crack!

Tom Merry's rifle spat fire, and with a cry the half-breed fell backwards.

The bullet had struck him in the shoulder, and he swept down helplessly as he lost his hold.

Crash!

A yell rang from the river.

Tom Merry ran forward to the edge of the rocks, his comrades at his heels. They were ready to fire on the canoe. But it was not needed.

The wounded half-breed had fallen fairly upon the canoe, and his weight had driven it bow under. In an instant the frail craft was swamped. The fierce current of the Stickeen tore at it as it went under, the paddles floating away amid the bubbles.

Deep under the rapid current the cap-sized canoe was swept away, leaving the four men struggling madly in the water. Tom Merry's rifle was not needed now.

"Good heavens!" panted Mr. Levison, as he gazed wildly at the scene.

The wounded half-breed, the Mexican, the Spaniard, were already sweeping helplessly down the river. Dirk Power made a fierce attempt to reach the bank; his hand grasped at the steep rocks, but there was little hold, and the current was tearing at him.

Tom Merry stared down at him, frozen with horror.

For a moment or two the coppery face of the madman was upturned to his gaze; and then the current tore him away. Struggling madly in the midst of the whirling waters, the man from Alaska was swept from his sight.

CHAPTER 6.

On the Yukon—Black News!

THE whips cracked merrily in the icy air.

On the frozen surface of the snowy plain the sledges glided lightly, leaving hardly a trace.

There were three sledges, each drawn by a team of dogs, and driven by a Yukon Indian.

Behind the adventurers lay the last outlying camp of the North-West; before them the frozen wastes of the Yukon.

Overhead the sky was like steel, with snow-clouds looming in the distance. Tom Merry & Co. were wrapped to their ears in thick furs, with fur caps pulled down over their ears and brows. It was the last stage of the perilous journey. They were almost on the borders of British territory now, and icy Alaska was in the misty distance ahead, where, save on the coast, hardly the foot of a white man trod.

Over the border was American territory, though many a long hundred miles from the United States, but an occasional fort or wireless station was all the traces the white man had left there. Farther, in the frozen North, was the icy Klondike River and the frozen town of Dawson, where the great gold-rush had been. But the destination of the Levisons was on the Alaska border.

The whips cracked; the rough-coated dogs scampered through the snow.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's cold!"

"Cold enough!" agreed Tom Merry, as the wind stung his face. "Look after your nose."

"What's the mattah with my nose, Tom Mewwy?"

"Nothing at present. But if you get it frost-bitten—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Think what you'll look like in the quad at St. Jim's without your noble nose!" said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, you know, it doesn't bear thinkin' of!" said Arthur Augustus, with a shiver.

The sledges slipped on swiftly.

So far as they could ascertain, the fugitives were no longer pursued. The preparations for the trip in the icy North had taken time; but nothing had been seen of Dirk Power or his associates.

Sometimes the juniors wondered whether they had perished in the swift waters of the Stickeen.

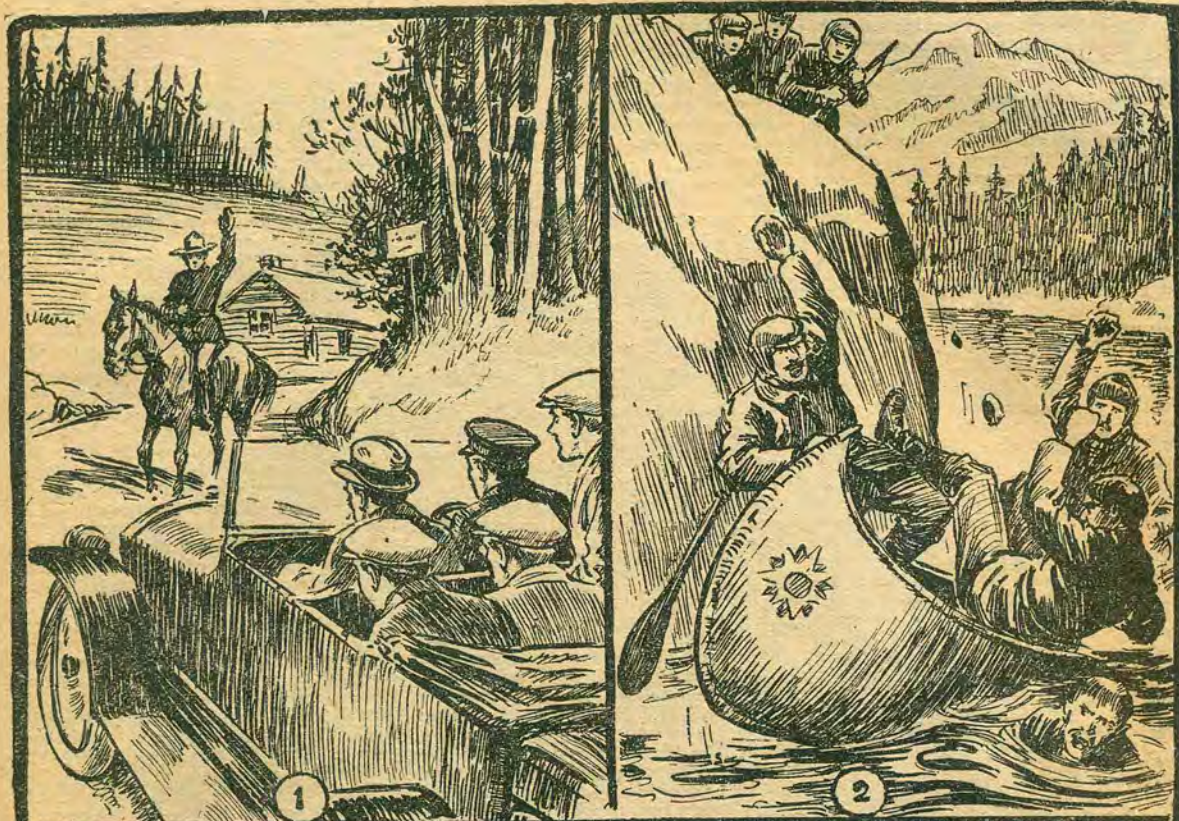
But they knew that Mr. Levison did not think so.

Dirk Power, at all events, had lost their track; that seemed certain. Day had followed day without a sign of him.

Day followed day in the snowy waste and still there was no sign of pursuit.

Mr. Levison was the guide of the party; this was old ground to him. He had been, long ago, in the gold-rush on

(Continued on page 12.)



(1.) A mounted man in uniform sat on his horse motionless in the centre of the road. "Halt!" he shouted. (See page 7.)

(2.) The wounded half-breed fell fairly upon the canoe, and in an instant the frail craft was swamped. (See page 10.)

(3.) Crack! Tom Merry pulled the trigger. The galloping horseman stopped suddenly; the horse reared back, and went rolling over. (See page 8.)

the Klondyke—In those dark old days when Dirk Power had been his partner, and they had discovered together the gold-mine that had made Mr. Levison rich.

They had followed Dirk Power's capture by the Yukon Redskins, and his long imprisonment in their lonely camp—long and bitter years, during which he had sworn vengeance again and again upon the partner whom he believed had betrayed him into the hands of Thunder Face, the Yukon chief.

Mr. Levison had told the juniors the whole bitter story, and they believed that he was innocent. But would Dirk Power believe it? What proofs would be convincing enough for that half-insane ruffian—insane with the thirst of vengeance?

But it was Mr. Levison's only hope. Thunder Face, the chief, could give him the proof. And the Yukon chief owed him a debt of gratitude; he had in those old days saved the Redskin from the claws of a grizzly bear. It was for that reason that he had been spared when Dirk Power had been made a prisoner.

On a clear, bitter morning, as the sledges glided over the snow, Mr. Levison raised his hand suddenly and pointed. Beyond a belt of scraggy pines that stood deep in snow ahead, a column of smoke could be seen rising against the steely sky.

"The Yukon village," he said.
"The village of Thunder Face?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes."
"And there—"
"There I shall find Thunder Face, the chief who held Dirk Power a prisoner for so long. He owes me his life—he will do anything to serve me. He spared me long ago for that reason, though he had sworn the death of all white men who came into his territory searching for gold. He can prove that I was innocent of all knowledge—"

"But will Dirk Power believe—"
"He will—he must!"

Tom Merry was silent.
The sledges glided on. With a loud barking of dogs, answered by the barking of innumerable curs from the Indian village, they swept through an opening in the pines, and the village lay before them. Round the lodges of the Redskins the snow lay white, trodden here and there into trails by the Indian hunters. A shout from the village announced that the sledges had been seen; and there was a glistening of spears as the Redskins poured out to meet the strangers. Tom Merry drew his rifle closer to him, but Mr. Levison touched him quickly on the shoulder.

"Do not touch a weapon—they are friendly. I am known here," he said. "Even after all these years there are many who will know me."

Mr. Levison's words were soon proved to be true. The Indians gathered round the sledges with curious and somewhat hostile looks till Mr. Levison called to them in their own language. The juniors listened to him in wonder. Not a glimpse of comprehension did they have of the strange, guttural sounds that were falling from his lips; but it was evident that the Indians understood.

They crowded round more closely, but their looks were friendly now; and a tall chief, wrapped from head to foot in skins and furs, stepped forward to speak in reply.

He answered in the same strange dialect, the juniors listening in silence.

Mr. Levison gave a sudden start.
His face became white as he listened to the guttural tones of the Indian, and

Levison gave him a quick glance of alarm. Frank caught his brother's arm.

"Something's wrong, Ernie!" he whispered.

Levison nodded without speaking; his eyes were fixed on his father's face.

Mr. Levison spoke again, in halting tones. He seemed to be questioning the Indian.

The chief replied gutturally; and a low groan left Mr. Levison's lips.

Levison sprang up.

"Father! What is it? What is it?" he cried.

Mr. Levison gave him a haggard look.

"We have made this journey in vain!" he said huskily. "All is lost! It is Fate!"

"But what—"

"What has happened?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in alarm.

Mr. Levison clenched his hands.

"We are too late—too late! Thunder Face, the chief, is dead!"

"Dead!" exclaimed Levison.

His father sank back in the sledge.

The sudden news, which dashed all his hopes to the ground, had overcome him like a blow.

"Dead!" he repeated. "We come too late! And with Thunder Face dies the last hope of proving my innocence!"

He groaned.

The Indian was speaking again, but Mr. Levison did not seem to hear. But he looked up at last, and nodded, and made a sign to the drivers to pass on into the village. He sat with a stunned look on his face as the sledges glided on among the lodges, surrounded by the Redskins. They stopped before a lodge, and the young chief spoke to Mr. Levison again, with a smile on his dusky face.

"They offer us the hospitality of the village," said Mr. Levison. "We must accept it—though there is little to remain here for. My only hope is gone. But the young chief, Running Elk, is friendly. Get down!"

They left the sledges.

Food was brought to them in the lodge, but Mr. Levison hardly touched it; he seemed plunged in despair. Tom Merry stepped to the opening of skins that served as a doorway and looked out. There was a buzzing of voices in the Indian village, and he wondered what it portended. Among the lodges the braves and squaws were crowded, and their eyes were fixed on the sky—on a strange thing that floated against the snowy clouds, like a bird on the wing—but like no bird that had ever been seen in the Yukon land before.

Tom Merry gazed at it in wonder.

As he gazed it grew larger and nearer, and a dull, distant droning came to his ears.

There were cries of wonder and terror from the Indians, and some of the squaws fled into the lodges. The hands of the braves trembled on their spears as they stared.

Levison's voice came from within the lodge.

"What is it, Tom?"

Tom Merry turned quietly, though his heart was beating.

"An aeroplane!" he said.

"What! An aeroplane—here!" exclaimed Frank.

Mr. Levison gave a startled cry.

"An aeroplane—here! Then it is Dirk Power—and we are lost!"

The Indians gazed upward, awestricken.

Running Elk, the young chief, caught Mr. Levison by the shoulder and pointed upward with his spear, that shook in his hand. He jabbered in the Indian dialect.

Mr. Levison answered in the same tongue dully. His eyes never left the flying plane.

"It's an aeroplane," said Manners, in a low voice. "But—but it may be an Army plane—from one of the American forts in Alaska—"

Tom Merry put up his glasses.

"It isn't that!" he said.

"But how do you know?"

"The pilot is Dirk Power."

"Oh!"

"He has come!" muttered Mr. Levison, with white lips. "That is why we have seen nothing of him for so long—he was gone—for that! Now he is come, and we are at his mercy!"

Tom Merry gripped his rifle.

"We are not at his mercy yet!" he said. "The Indians are friendly, sir, and we can fight! There cannot be more than two or three of them in the biplane!"

Mr. Levison did not reply. His eyes were fastened on the plane, which was now circling above the Indian village.

A grim silence fell.

The squaws peered out of the lodges with terrified eyes. The braves stood their ground, staring up; but it was evident that their nerves were badly shaken. Round and round over the village the plane circled—at a height of six hundred feet it "looped the loop," and the Indians gasped. Then it came down towards the village in a nose-dive.

Was it falling?

The engine was silent—the plane came fleeting down like an arrow, and it seemed inevitable that it must crash in the centre of the village.

But a hundred feet up it levelled out, and the engine picked up again with a roar.

It sped away from the village, and circled over the snowy plain outside the huddled group of lodges. It was so low now that the features of the men aboard could be seen—Dirk Power and the scarred Spaniard and the Mexican. A buzz of voices ran suddenly among the Indians—the juniors saw them pointing and gesticulating. They had recognised the copper-faced man—the man who had been a prisoner in their midst, and whom they had tortured. Terror was deeper in their dusky faces—they believed that their former victim had returned for vengeance, with this strange power from the sky. Some of the savages fell upon their knees, some on their faces. Mr. Levison looked at them with a bitter smile. He knew that the "stunts" the biplane was performing were intended to terrify the Indians, and impress them with the power of their enemy, and that in this the madman was succeeding perfectly. Dirk Power was master of the situation now.

"We can fight!" muttered Tom Merry.

Levison pointed.

"There's a machine-gun on the plane—they could blow us and all this village to splinters if they liked!"

"They're landing!"

The biplane was down at last, making a good landing on the plain two hundred yards from the lodges.

The Indians watched it, fascinated, as it hopped and ran towards the lodges, and stopped.

Dirk Power sprang to the earth.

The scarred Spaniard took his place in the pilot's seat. The biplane moved again, and ran, and rose. The Redskins stared dully. Overhead once more, flying low, the aeroplane circled. Dirk Power stood alone on the snowy plain, and with a commanding gesture he

CHAPTER 7.

For His Father's Sake!

THERE was a rush from the lodge. With startled faces Tom Merry & Co. gazed at the shape in the steely sky—now easily seen to be a biplane.

signed to the crowd of terrified Indians. They obeyed the silent command, crowding out of the village towards him, some of them on their hands and knees. Running Elk kept his head erect, but he was trembling as he approached the copper-faced Alaskan.

"We are lost!" muttered Mr. Levison. Standing among the lodges, the juniors waited and watched. Hundreds of Indians were crowding round Dirk Power now, and he was addressing them in their own tongue—in a long, loud harangue. His voice came faintly to the juniors from the distance.

Suddenly he waved his hand above—it was a signal to his comrades in the plane. The plane circled lower, and there was a grinding roar from the machine-gun. For a moment the juniors thought that it was a massacre of the Redskins that was intended. But the storm of bullets struck and tore upon a clump of pines at a distance from the crowd, tearing, rending, shivering. It was a display of force, and the Indians watched it, and understood. They knew that the fire could be turned upon them at any instant, and that their lives were not worth a minute's purchase—that every man, woman, and child in the settlement lived on only at the pleasure of the copper-faced man whom, years ago, they had tortured.

There was a howl of terror, and the savages fell on their faces. Dirk Power signalled again; the rattling roar of the machine-gun ceased; the plane rose higher.

Dirk Power's voice rang out again, in a renewed harangue, in the Indian dialect. His black eyes were blazing with triumph now.

There was a shout from the Indians, and the crowd turned and rushed back to the lodges.

Tom Merry set his teeth. "They are going to attack! That villain has induced them—"

"Do not fire!" panted Mr. Levison hurriedly. "Hold your hands! We are at their mercy!"

"But—"

"There are hundreds! Hold your hand!"

Tom Merry reluctantly lowered his rifle. It was true. Resistance was useless. The savages were swarming about them. They could have shot down a dozen—two or three dozen; but there were hundreds.

Mr. Levison's head rose erect. In that terrible moment his fear seemed to have left him; his courage returned to enable him to bear his fate.

His voice was calm as he spoke again. "Do not resist! They may spare your lives! My life is forfeit, but there is a hope that they may spare you—"

"Father!" groaned Levison. They were surrounded now. Mr. Levison called to Running Elk in his own tongue; the young chief looked away from him. Dusky hands were laid on Mr. Levison, rawhide thongs wound round his limbs and knotted. The juniors were hustled and disarmed, and driven back into the lodge. Levison struggled to reach his father's side, but a burly savage drove him fiercely into the lodge.

From the opening he saw his father led away—led away, as he knew, to Dirk Power—his arms bound down to his sides. He threw himself on the skins on the earth with a groan of despair.

"Ernie!" whispered Frank. The fog's face was like chalk. "Ernie, they are going—"

Levison groaned again. Tom Merry looked from the door.

The butt of a spear struck him on the chest and flung him back into the lodge.

The juniors were helpless prisoners; and Mr. Levison had passed now from their sight.

"Good heavens!" muttered D'Arcy. "Good heavens!"

"He is lost!" whispered Levison. "My father! He is lost!"

He crept to the opening again and looked out. Darkness was falling on the snowy plains of the Yukon—the lodges were dim in the twilight. From the plain outside the village came a dull shouting and yelling. Overhead, unseen now in the gloom, the aeroplane hummed.

A spear thrust at Levison, and he sprang back to escape the lunge. It was death to step forth from the lodge.

"Ernie!" moaned Frank. The darkness deepened. Where was Mr. Levison? What was happening?

Tom Merry bit his lip hard. They were helpless—helpless, and meanwhile, even their own lives might be lost at any moment now. A shadow darkened the opening of the lodge. Running Elk, the chief, stood there, his eyes gleaming into the dusky interior.

He spoke, but his words gave them no meaning. Not a word of the Indian dialect was known to them.

What was he saying? His looks were not hostile—indeed, the juniors could guess that it was against his will that he had turned on them; that it was the terror of Dirk Power that had made the change; that even if the chief had resisted his braves would not have helped him. What was he saying?

His words ceased—he made gestures. "We are to follow him," said Figgins, in a whisper.

No resistance was possible, and there was something in the Indian's manner that inspired hope.

The juniors followed him from the lodge, stared at on all sides by armed braves; but no hand was raised against them. Nothing could be seen of Mr. Levison.

They were led, in the thickening darkness, through the lodges, to where the sledges stood. The dogs were harnessed, the Yukon drivers were in their seats. Running Elk pointed to the sledges, and waved his hand to the shadowy south. His words were incomprehensible; but his gestures were not to be mistaken. To save his tribe and his village he had handed over Mr. Levison to his enemy; but he was willing to save the others—the way lay open to them to flee. And there was no time to lose; but it was certain that Dirk Power would not have spared them—would not, at least, have spared the sons of his foe.

"He's offering us escape." Tom Merry caught his breath. "But—but Mr. Levison—"

"We cannot save him!" breathed Lowther. "We cannot save ourselves! But—but to go without him—"

"Never!" Running Elk stared through the shadows, and his gestures became more animated. He lifted Frank Levison into a sledge.

"Not without my father!" panted Frank.

The Indian babbled words in his dialect. He was urging haste. Overhead hummed the unseen aeroplane.

Levison drew a hard, deep breath. "Go!" he said. "Go, you fellows! You may get help! There's a chance you may bring help to save my father! At least, save your own lives! Farther west—farther into Alaska—there is an American fort—the Yukon drivers know it. Fly while there is time—"

"But you—"

"Go!" said Levison hoarsely. "I stay with my father. But you go—there is a chance of getting help!"

Frank sprang from the sledge. "I stay with you, Ernie!"

"Father would send you away if he were here, Frank. Think of your mother! You must go! For Heaven's sake, you fellows, go while there is a chance. You may get help from the fort in time! It's the only chance for all of us! Go!"

Tom Merry realised that it was true. To throw their lives away would not help the madman's victim. There was a chance—a faint chance of getting help.

"You're right, Levison," said Tom huskily. "But you, too—"

"No! Quick, quick! There are Indians coming this way! Running Elk may not have the power to save you soon! Get in, Frank! Get in, I tell you!" Levison grasped his brother, and lifted him into the sledge again. "Go—go!"

The whips cracked. "Ernie!" shrieked Frank.

Tom Merry held him in the sledge. The whips cracked again! The sledges glided away on the snow into the darkness of the night. Levison stood beside the Yukon chief.

With a stony face he watched the sledges vanish into the shadows. Was there a chance of help—of rescue? It was faint. Running Elk stared at the junior, not understanding. He had remained to share his father's fate, whatever it was. It was death, and he knew it! But he did not falter. His father should not perish alone.

There was a pattering of moccasins on the snow. A dozen braves came speeding up. There was a babble of voices, and rough hands were laid on Levison. It was too late now, if he had faltered. But he did not falter. He was dragged away in the grasp of the Redskins, back to the lodges. In silence, in despair, he went, but his face was calm, his eyes clear. It was for his father's sake!

He was flung into the lodge. It was not empty. A bound man lay stretched on the skins. He cried out as Levison was hurled in.

"Ernest!"

"Father!"

"The others?" panted Mr. Levison.

"Escaped."

"But you—"

"I am with you to the end, father!" said Levison of the Fourth quietly.

From the dark sky came droningly the hum of the aeroplane dully through the yelling of the savages.

CHAPTER 8.

At the Torture-Stake!

A FLARE of dancing flame red-dened the darkness.

The bound man stirred among the skins that covered the earthen floor of the lodge.

Levison stood silent, leaning against the lodge-pole. His hands had been bound with a rawhide thong. His face was white, but it was still calm.

Through the wide opening of the lodge came the glare of the flames. At a distance logs and brushwood were blazing. The lodges loomed up shadowy in the flickering light. It played on dark, savage faces and gleaming spears.

A fur-clad figure darkened the opening of the lodge. The burning black eyes of Dirk Power glittered down upon his victim.

Mr. Levison met his gaze with the THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 659.

calmness of despair. Already he had met his enemy face to face, and learned what his doom was to be. The blaze of the great fire lighted by the Indians told him that the hour was at hand.

"At last!" said Dirk Power.

His voice was low, sibilant, like the hissing of a serpent. His gash of a mouth curved in a cruel grin.

"At last!"

"I am at your mercy!" said Mr. Levison faintly. "But even now, if you would listen—"

"You may speak!" said the Alaskan grimly. "Make the most of what time remains. It will be short."

"I am innocent—"

Dirk Power laughed.

"For ten years I was a prisoner in this little village," he said. "I worked for the Indians, driven by blows. I strove to escape, and they recaptured me and tortured me." His voice grew hoarse and broken with hatred and fury. "Ten long years! And meanwhile—meanwhile, you robbed me. The mine was yours—yours. You returned to England a rich man, leaving me— You know how you left me." He panted.

"I deemed you dead."

"Lies—lies!"

"I sought you far and wide after you were gone. I did not know you were a prisoner among the Indians."

"Yet they spared you!"

"It was because I saved the life of their chief, Thunder Face. Dirk Power, I came here for proofs of my innocence. I could have proved it even to you, but the chief is dead."

Dirk Power laughed again mockingly.

"Lies—lies!" he said. "You sold me into slavery among the Indians, and robbed me of the mine. Every day, through ten long years, I swore vengeance upon you, upon you and yours! When they tortured me, when in my anguish I felt madness creeping into my brain, then again I swore that I would live, that I would hunt you down, that the day of reckoning should come, that you should pay the price to the bitter end. I have kept my oath!"

The bound man lay silent.

He realised now that his hope had been vain, that even if he could have given proofs the madman would not have heeded. The man's blood-curdling laugh rang again eerily in the shadowy lodge.

"You and yours!" he repeated. "All of your blood! Your younger son has fled, to die of hunger in the wilderness. His bones will be picked by the wolves of the Yukon. But you—you—"

"I am at your mercy!" Mr. Levison's voice was steady. "But my boy here, he has not harmed you."

Dirk Power's eyes glittered.

"You and yours!" he said. He stretched his hand, to point to the gathering blaze without. "Look! You see the fire?"

"I see it!"

"They are planting two stakes there by my orders! I am master here." He showed his teeth in a savage grin. "Where I was slave, a tortured prisoner, I am now master. My word is law in this village. They fear me too much to disobey."

"I know it."

"When the stakes are prepared you will be led out, you and your son, to die—to die by the fire!"

"As you hope for mercy yourself, spare my boy!"

"Did you spare me?"

"I swear—"

"Enough! Lie there, like the dog you are, till the torture is ready. Think on your doom as you lie."

He turned, and strode from the lodge.

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The fur-clad figure vanished among the throng of Indians. Higher leaped the blaze of the fire.

Levison looked forth from the lodge opening. Close by the great bonfire, which now illuminated the whole village, two stakes were being planted in the ground by the savages. Round the stakes brushwood was being piled in readiness.

The junior shuddered.

The doom was at hand. Death in the flames. It was that he had faced, for his father's sake!

A groan came from the bound man on the skins.

"My boy, if only you had fled, if only you were safe, I could face death then!"

"Not alone, father!" said Levison. His voice did not falter. "I am with you to the end. Frank is safe. Frank will escape. Tom Merry will care for him and protect him. My place is with you."

Silence in the lodge.

In the firelight strange, wild figures were dancing, wild cries and yells stabbed the silence. The Indians were anticipating the scene of torture. Their savage instincts were roused at the thought of it. In those barbarous hearts there was no pity, no remorse. In the midst of dark, savage faces, of glaring, pitiless eyes the prisoners were to die by the torture. There was no hope.

Yet they still lay in the lodge; still the Redskins did not drag them forth. It was midnight. Hours dragged by. Why did not the savages come?

They knew only too well. The hours of bitter, racking suspense were part of the madman's revenge. They were to suffer ere they died. Death alone did not satiate his insane craving for vengeance. They were to lie, helpless, anticipating their doom, long ere they were dragged out to suffer at the stakes.

The night was growing old, the Redskins were impatient for the scene of torture. Dirk Power's voice was heard at last, calling in the Indian dialect.

There was a rush of feet towards the lodge.

Levison caught his breath.

The hour had come!

"My boy!" groaned his father.

The savages crowded into the lodge. Rough hands were laid on the prisoners, and they were hurried forth.

Loud yells, brandished spears, glittering, savage eyes, surrounded them as they were dragged to the stakes, full in the glare of the blazing fire. Round them crowded the Indians—braves and squaws and papooses—with cruel eyes.

"Your time has come!"

Dirk Power stood before them as they were bound upright to the stakes. His burning eyes gleamed at them.

"Why do you not beg for mercy?" He laughed mockingly. "Beg with your last breath!"

Mr. Levison was silent. Only his eyes turned with a glance of agony upon his son.

The rawhide thongs cut into the flesh as they were bound to the stakes. Round them the piles of brushwood were stacked closer.

Over the piled fuel only their heads were left visible, and their glances met. An Indian dragged a blazing brand from the fire to light the piles.

Dirk Power stood with folded arms looking on, his coppery face implacable, his eyes burning with the light of madness.

A cruel grin distorted his gash of a mouth. He showed his teeth like a wild animal.

The blazing brand approached in the hand of the Redskin.

"Father! Good-bye!"

"My boy—my boy!"

Dirk Power made a gesture, and the Redskin handed him the flaming brand. With his own hands he intended to set fire to the piles that were to burn his victims before his eyes.

"At last!" he said, between his teeth.

Levison closed his eyes.

The yelling of the Indians had died away in a hush. A sea of cruel eyes looked on, pitiless. In the silence the hum of the aeroplane came droningly from the blackness.

Crack, crack, crack!

CHAPTER 9.

Homeward Bound!

CRACK, crack-ack, crack!

A wild yell rang from the Redskins. Dirk Power started, and spun round, as the sudden blaze of rifle-fire stormed through the darkness. His coppery face was livid with rage. Whence came that sudden volleying, ringing from the night?

Crack, crack, crack!

Levison's eyes opened, to look upon a changed scene. The crowd of Indians was breaking up into a wild mob. Squaws and papooses were fleeing into the lodges; the braves yelled and brandished their spears. Some of them fled, some were reeling under the death-dealing volley. A yell of rage broke from Dirk Power.

Rescue was coming—rescue, how and why and whence he knew not—but the madman was not to be baffled of his prey. While the Redskins were breaking into wild panic and disorder, the madman rushed towards the stakes, the flaming brand aloft in his hand.

Crack-ack-ack-ack!

A bullet struck the brand as he was thrusting it towards the brushwood and spun it from his hand. It fell within a few feet of the pile, smoking and sputtering.

A bugle-call rang from the night; the volleying thickened. There was a heavy tramp of feet.

"You shall not escape me!"

Dim figures in uniform were seen now in the light of the fire. A voice shouted—the voice of Tom Merry of St. Jim's. Levison gazed like one in a dream. He could not stir a finger; he could only gaze—dazed, dizzy. Was it Tom Merry who was bounding towards him in the glare of the fire? Was that Frank? Was that Figgins? And those darting figures, with rifles in their hands—soldiers in United States uniform? Was it a dream—a feverish dream in the shadow of death?

"You shall not escape!"

The madman was leaping towards Mr. Levison, knife in hand. The bound man was helpless under his attack; but a rifle cracked, and Dirk Power staggered ere he could reach his victim. He fell heavily forward on the brushwood, his knife clattering from his hand.

"Tom Merry—"

"Saved!"

Dirk Power struggled to his feet. The bullet had gashed along his cheek, leaving a stream of red on the coppery skin. Tom Merry was springing towards him with clubbed rifle.

With a snarl, the madman turned and fled. Rifles cracked as he went—as he darted among the lodges in the darkness, and was lost to sight amid the mob of stampeding savages.

"Father!"

It was Frank Levison.

His knife was in his hand; he dragged away the brushwood, he slashed at his father's bonds. The rawhide parted under the knife.

Mr. Levison stood free. He staggered as he stood, almost overcome by the sudden turn of fortune. Frank ran to

his brother. In a minute more Levison of the Fourth stood free beside his father.

"But—but how—"

It was over!

Tom Merry & Co. had gathered in the lodge again; the soldiers were camped in the village by the still blazing fire. Out in the darkness Dirk Power was fleeing for his life; perhaps to rejoin his comrades in the aeroplane and escape, perhaps to perish in the Arctic wilderness. The juniors gave him little thought just then.

"But—" stammered Levison. Even yet he could scarcely realise it.

"It was good luck," said Tom Merry. "We were making for the American fort on the Alaska border—the drivers knew the way. But we could never have reached it in time to bring you help. But—"

"It was Providence," said Frank. "We came on the soldiers this side of the fort—"

"The aeroplane had been seen by the officer at the fort," explained Tom Merry. "A lieutenant and a party of men had been sent out to look for it. It was supposed to be some bold explorer in these icy deserts, perhaps in need of help, and it was the detachment looking for the aeroplane that we fell in with. They stopped us—"

"It was wathah a surprise for us," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Wathah a surprise for them, too. But what wippin' luck!"

"We told our story at once, and they pushed on with us to save you if there was yet time," said Tom Merry.

"And you arrived in time—barely in time!" said Levison. "Another few minutes—" He shuddered.

"Thank Heaven!" said Mr. Levison, in a low voice.

There was a short silence.

Mr. Levison broke it.

"Nothing remains for us to do here," he said. "We leave at dawn. If Dirk Power lives, he will follow." He shivered a little. "Let us not think of that now. Get what sleep you can. We start at dawn."

But there was little sleep for Tom Merry & Co. that night. And when dawn flushed up over the icy hills of Alaska they bade farewell to their rescuers, and the sledges started on the southern trail.

Day after day the sledges glided southward, and every day they scanned the misty wastes behind and the steely sky overhead. But Dirk Power had vanished.

Had the madman perished in the Arctic waste? Was his wild heart still at last under the carpet of snow? Had his bones been picked by the wolves that prowled in that starving desert? They could not tell. But no sign of him was seen; no sign of the aeroplane in the steely sky as the sledges fled ever southward.

And when at last there was green earth under their feet once more, a blue sky over their heads, they felt something like conviction that the madman's pursuit was ended—that the copper-faced man, seeking vengeance in the icy wastes, had found his death there.

But, deep down in his heart, Mr. Levison at least knew that it was not so—knew that he was not done with Dirk Power. And by day and night, from every shadow he seemed to see the burning eyes of the madman, watching—watching!

THE END.

(Another exciting story next week, entitled: "The Tables Turned!")

THE EDITOR'S CHAT.

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

Next Wednesday's Special Number.

Next week will appear the fourth of our Special Bumper Numbers of the GEM Library. With it will be given away the Fourth and Final Free Football Supplement, which will complete the Grand 32-page Free Football Annual. I venture to say that nothing like this superbly illustrated Annual has ever been given away before, and I have ample evidence that the Free Gift of this expensive production has met with the heartiest appreciation from my chums. Next Wednesday will see the volume completed, so no one can afford to miss our next issue. I have had many inquiries from readers asking if it is still possible to obtain the last two issues of the GEM, which contain Sections I. and II. of the Free Football Annual.

For the present it is still possible to obtain them. If you ask your newsagent he will get them for you at once.

The Football Annual makes a splendid present for a football enthusiast, and it is a good idea to order an extra copy of each of the four Bumper Numbers of the GEM in order to obtain a Free Annual to give to your chum. There is no doubt at all that he would appreciate it.

OUR NEXT SPECIAL COMPLETE STORY.

The next grand complete story of the Levisons and Tom Merry & Co., in their mad fight from the vengeance of the madman Dirk Power, is entitled:

"THE TABLES TURNED!"

By Martin Clifford.

This powerful story is thrilling to the last line, and no one can read it without being gripped by the intense interest of it. In this story Martin Clifford has a great chance, and makes the most of it.

Our two splendid new serials:

"RENTON OF THE ROVERS!"

By Paul Masters,

and

"SLAVE ISLAND!"

By Matthew Ironside,

are the best of their kind—fine football and adventure yarns respectively, full of original interest and excitement.

That popular feature:

MY READER'S OWN CORNER,

with its many half-crowns awarded to my chums each week, is retained, and a corner is found for my own little contribution, under the title of:

THE EDITOR'S CHAT.

THE EDITOR'S JOB.

This is the kind of thing that happens: Ting, ting, ting! goes the telephone-bell. "Is that the Editor of the Companion Papers?" asks somebody at the other end. It is. The answer is in the affirmative. "Can you tell me how to run an amateur magazine?" Just think of it! How can information like that be despatched over the wires? Then the office-boy comes in with a fresh batch of letters, all requiring immediate answering. The master printer is getting

urgent, the sub-editor wants to ask about the Christmas Number for the year after next, and—and all the loyal reader at the other ends wants is a tip about carrying on with his paper. The fact is, a query like that contains pretty well everything that matters—that is to say, you could start answering the interrogation, and keep on and on, and some more on, and yet not have finished. The editor of a magazine can do simple wonders with his work if he chooses. If he is a beginner, and has not much spare cash, he had better give up all thought of a printer. He can first astonish the world by exhibitions of his mighty brain-power, and he can egg on his friends to write something not hitherto

READ OF IN BOOKS, OR DREAMT OF IN DREAMS.

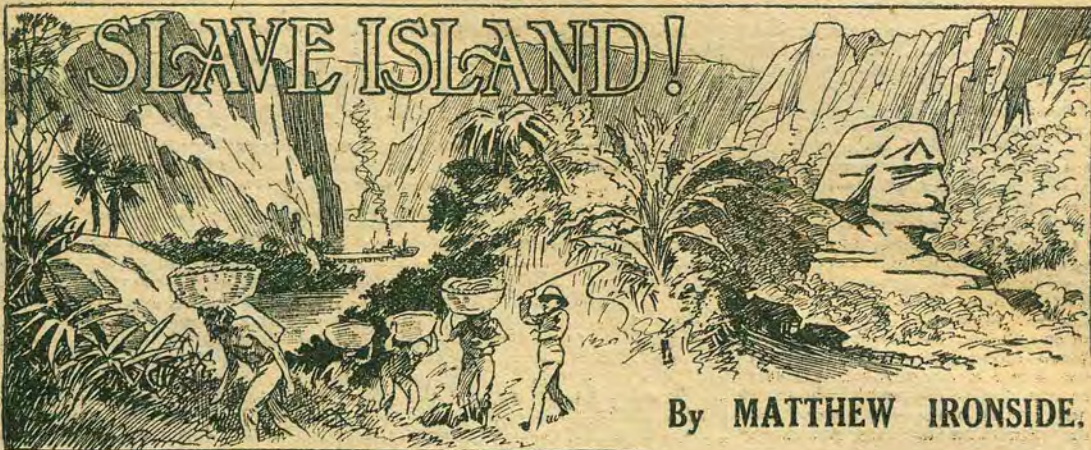
That is to say, it is not the form, style, method, etc., that matters. Get the best stuff, and you will win. Your relatives will be pleased. You will find members of the family "just wanting to have a look," so that they can laugh over the whimsical Limerick on the front page, and enjoy the character sketch in the middle of the paper. There will be chuckles over the parody of the typical love tale, and the comic account of the last sports day will be relished, even if there does happen to be some hard knocks. But it is no use expecting special information over the 'phone during a busy morning. Each amateur magazine has to be governed by its own special circumstances. It is far better to have a neatly-written, pass-round affair—twopence for three-day hire, say—than a smudgy, duplicated business, with the impress getting faint and far away towards the middle. Here, as in everything else, it is brain-power that counts. Some of the dullest, stupidest, most ditch-water stuff has been, and is, printed in perfect fashion, and on shiny paper of the best kind. Nobody admires the little, well-written magazine more than I do. I have known magazines of this sort which have been the work of folks who later on figured largely in the world of literature. For such periodicals are the outcome of trying, and it is the "trier," assisted by a dash of brilliancy, who gets there!

AN ALL-ROUND MAN.

I have heard from a supporter at New John Street, Hockley, who is one of the all-round men of the world. He served in the Guards during the war, and that wanted doing. He is a Birmingham man, and Birmingham generally wins. My correspondent has a chum with whom he cycled through Warwickshire in past summers. He is now intent on securing a post as steward on a liner, for he wants to see more of the world. My friend has a good talent for sketching, and he adorned his very interesting letter with some lightning portraits of the best.

Your Editor

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By **MATTHEW IRONSIDE.**

An Exciting Romance of Mystery, Intrigue, and Adventure.

Synopsis of First Chapters.

Jasper Standish leaves Bleakmore Prison after ten years' penal servitude. Years before he had taken on his shoulders a crime committed by Richard Harmer, on condition that Harmer looked after his wife and sent her abroad with her young son. Harmer went back on the bargain, and left the wife unprotected for, and after a few years she died. Standish vows revenge on all the family. When he leaves prison he makes a bargain with Hans Meppel, a Dutchman, who is the owner of Slave Island, to kidnap Dick Harmer and make him a slave on the Dutchman's secret plantations. Meppel agrees to do this. Dick Harmer is returning home from school when he is attacked by several Malays, and taken on board ship to Slave Island, accompanied by Hans Meppel and Standish. They reach the strange island, and Dick is passing through one of its many plantations when he sees the Dutchman belabouring a white girl slave, with a heavy whip. Mad with rage, he rushes up and dashes his clenched fists into Meppel's face.

(Now read on.)

Bastinadoed—The Wonders of Slave Island.

FOR a breathing space the Malays and the overseer were so amazed by Dick Harmer's daring that they stood gazing at him open-mouthed.

Then, as full realisation of what he had done came to them, a rush was made to seize him.

With his eyes blazing and his firm chin set hard, the British lad leaped back and swung up his fists. That he was in for trouble—bad trouble—he felt certain, and he saw no reason why he should not give a good account of himself before submitting to the inevitable punishment.

All his anger and indignation at his ruthless drugging and kidnapping was behind his blows as he struck out left and right at his foes. He sent two of the Malays sprawling with a straight left and a swinging right, tripped the third by thrusting a leg behind him and giving him a quick back-heel, and was just in time to spring clear to meet the rush of the powerful overseer.

The man swung his great body forward, and had his hands outstretched to clutch at him. There was a contemptuous smile on his thick lips when he made his dash; but it was not there for long.

Dick had carried all before him in boxing at his school, and there was little about the "noble art" that he did not

know. He side-stepped neatly, feinted with his right, then knocked the grin from the overseer's heavy countenance with a smashing blow from his left that landed full in the fellow's mouth.

He spat out a couple of teeth and a string of bad Dutch; but ere he could rush again Dick was spread-eagled upon the ground, flung there by one of the fallen Malays, who had clutched at his ankles and jerked his legs from under him.

By this time Hans Meppel had scrambled to his feet. He was far too heavily made to fall about with impunity, and was breathless and shaken. Also, he was well-nigh insane with rage, and would have raised his heavy boot and kicked savagely at the prostrate Dick's head but for Standish, who took a sharp stride forward and stopped him.

"Remember our compact! You would not kill him!" he rapped sternly.

Hans Meppel fell back, though his eyes were still murderous with rage.

"No! He shall live—and suffer!" he snarled, his hands clenching and the veins on his neck and forehead swelling like whipcord in his passion. "Bare his feet, men! You von of our punishments here shall see!" he said, addressing Standish.

The latter shrugged and looked on cynically as the Malays, who had picked themselves up, and the overseer fell upon Dick and held him down whilst his boots and socks were wrenched off.

A blow from the overseer's whip had sent the white girl back to her work, though, with her eyes distressed, she darted continuous glances over her shoulder towards her champion. The old negro, who seemed very ill, was taken no further notice of at present, and allowed to lie upon the ground.

Dick Harmer's hands were lashed behind his back, and a Malay, who had darted away to one of the shacks, returned with a long bamboo pole and two slender, pliable canes.

The lad's bare feet were forced together, and the pole, having been slipped under his legs just beneath the knees, they were bound to it.

A Malay seized one end, the overseer the other, and it was raised so that Dick lay on his back with his legs crooked above him; and now the two other Malays started to lash at the soles of his bare feet with the canes.

The brown men did not need to be told to exert themselves. They were only too ready to use all their strength to revenge themselves for the blows Dick had dealt them, and they struck mercilessly at the feet of their victim.

The agony soon became excruciating, and to the lad it felt as though his feet

had been plunged into a seething cauldron.

He clenched his teeth, determined not to cry out. Yet, plucky though he was, he found that to keep silent beneath the torture was almost impossible.

The pain grew fiendish. The thin canes bit deeply into the flesh of his soles, until the skin was broken and the blood began to flow. Then every blow felt like the cut of a razor.

Would the inhuman wretches never stop? he wondered. The torment was maddening—awful. His senses began to reel, and the agony sickened him. If only he had a chance against them—a chance to strike back! Well, perhaps one day he would get his opportunity! He gritted his teeth.

The canes continued to hiss through the air, and the lad's feet began to feel numbed and useless. Jasper Standish, who had paled a trifle, turned to the gloating Meppel.

"He looks like fainting," he said quietly. "He's had enough! Had your men better not stop?"

Hans Meppel laughed maliciously, let the boy's torture go on for several seconds longer, then waved his fat hand to the Malays to desist.

"Take him to the prison!" he ordered harshly. "He another doze shall haf, when his feet are healed in von or two days. By Himmel! But I will teach him what it means to go against me and strike me! For any other slave it would haf meant death, and he vill wish he had died before I vith him haf done!"

He glanced towards Standish.

"Come mit me, mein freundt," he said. "I beg dot you vill accept of the hospitality Slave Island has to offer. For one who iss nod a servitor, it iss nod a bad place."

He and Standish strolled off together, leaving Dick to the tender mercies of the Malays and the Dutch overseer whom he had struck in the mouth during the fight.

The latter kicked him savagely as soon as Meppel's back was turned, rousing the boy from a state of semi-coma.

The Malays cut the bonds that secured his legs to the pole, and, seizing him by the arms, dragged him to his feet. But they were so lacerated and numbed that he could not stand; and, as he collapsed in a heap, the overseer impatiently cried out for a horse to be fetched.

Meanwhile, accompanying Hans Meppel, Jasper Standish was viewing the wonders of the strange land, and receiving one surprise upon another.

They had left the vast banana plantation behind, and taken a path through a stretch of emerald green creeper and vine entangled land, lined

here and there by silver streams, which ended in a lovely, shimmering lake. Tall, rocky hills surrounded them, and ahead was a wide valley through which ran a well-made road.

Traversing this, to Standish's astonishment, they were confronted by a town of no mean dimensions.

It was too large to be taken in at a glance; but a birdseye view of it would have disclosed the fact that its area covered some two square miles, and that it possessed straight, well-shaded, plainly-marked-out streets.

Its buildings were white—replicas of the houses one finds in Morocco. The old Moorish style had been exclusively followed in their construction. Fat roofs, shaded with a profusion of tropical plants, wide inner and outer courtyards leading to terraced gardens, with long pergolas and pillared loggias and extensive gardens rioting with an orgy of colour met Standish's wondering eyes.

Against the blue of the sky beyond he could see the minarets of some building of worship, and away towards the centre of the settlement the dome of what appeared to be an edifice little short of a palace.

"Vell?" Meppel asked, chuckling, as they walked on and entered the first of the streets.

"I can hardly credit that I am not dreaming," Jasper Standish returned. "That such a place as this can exist on an island in the heart of the Pacific is almost past belief!"

Meppel shot him a glance from out of the corners of his eyes.

"Remember your oath of secrecy, mein friend!" he said, with a trace of menace in his guttural tones. "You will not go away and talk about it—eh?"

"Is that likely?" Standish asked. "Is it not my wish that the boy remains here for the rest of his life as a slave? I tell you, as I have told you before, that my revenge is everything to me."

"Jah!" The Dutchman nodded. "Ten bear in mind dot it would endanger the carrying out of your vengeance to talk in the outside world. True, you know neither the latitude nor longitude of t'is island, and it would be a million to von against anyone finding it. But—vell, a still tongue, mynheer, makes a wise head!"

Through street after street the two men went, until they arrived in a large square where the palace, which Standish had glimpsed from the distance, was built.

"My residence!" Meppel announced proudly. "On Thursday Island I shust a trader am. Here I am monarch of all I survey, ain't it?"

They crossed the magnificent courtyard that approached the huge, white edifice, and if Standish had been astonished before he was doubly so now.

Black, white, and half-caste slaves stood about, eagerly awaiting their master's commands. On the veranda that ran before the whole length of the building were more, who prostrated themselves before the piglike Dutchman and the Englishman as they approached.

A table, resplendent with silver and vessels and crockery of some translucent material like fine porcelain, stood in the centre of the veranda, laid in readiness for a meal.

Two beautiful young girls, who looked to Standish like Italians, began to wait upon the two men as they seated themselves. Standish partook of some delicate meat which he felt sure was that of some kind of young deer, and found its flavour exquisite. There were potatoes and artichokes, mushrooms, and a species of spinach; then some fish—fresh-water fish, from the lake, Meppel said—

was served, coming after the meat, contrary to the usual custom. But then, Slave Island had many customs peculiarly its own.

"Try t'ese cigars, mein friendt," Hans Meppel invited, after some luscious tropical fruit had been brought by the girls as dessert, and Standish had refused it. "T'ey are made from tobacco grown on the island, and very fine you vill find t'em. Coffee vill be here in von minute. Do you care for a liqueur?"

The Britisher shook his head.

"Tell me about this wonderful place you own," he requested, as he lit the cigar he had taken, and inhaled the smoke with keen appreciation. "The more I see the more bewildered and astounded I become."

"What iss t'ere to tell?" the Dutchman asked, spreading out his podgy hands, and shifting his cigar from one corner of his capacious mouth to the other with his tongue.

"For instance, how this colony of slaves originated—how so many different nationalities come to be represented among them—how your many overseers are content with what must be to them almost like captivity; unless, of course, they leave here for certain periods of change in the outer world."

Hans Meppel laughed.

"I do not know why I should your curiosity satisfy," he said. "But, if you really wish to learn t'ese t'ings, I see no harm in telling you. Let us take the overseers first. You ask how it iss they satisfied with their lot are?"

"Yes."

"Vell, t'ey haf got to be satisfied," the Dutchman answered, with a cynical smile. "T'ey from the island dare not go."

"But why?"

"Pecause every von of t'em iss a criminal—vanted by the police on some serious charge in some gountry or other."

Jasper Standish whistled softly.

"So that's the explanation—eh?" he said quickly.

"Jah! The gallows of England, the 'chair' of the States, the guillotine of France, avaits some, long terms of imprisonment others, if t'ey go to the gountry in which t'ey their crimes committed. I agents haf in most large gountries who keep on the look-out for criminals—preferably of Dutch nationality—who the police are seeking. If t'ey are found before the police get t'em, den that t'ey come here is suggested to t'em." He laughed. "Id offers a chance of safety nod to be lightly t'rown aside. Id iss nod many who refuse, and I ged as many overseers as I vant."

"And the commencement of the island and its system of slavery?"

"Ah, dot is easily eggspained, too, mynheer," Meppel answered. "Id vass started, roughly, fifty years ago by mein fader, Gustav Meppel, who vass first mate of a ship called the Seagull."

"She vass chartered by a sea-captain—whose name I forget, if I efer heard id—to come to t'is island on some secret mission. What dot mission vass, mein fader—nor, for dot matter, the skipper nor der crew—nefer found out, though dere must haf been some urgent object in id to bring the man who vent upon id so far."

"Mutiny broke oud on the ship—a mutiny, py the vay, dot mein fader led. He iss dead t'ese many years, and no harm can come of admitting the fact. The captain vass killed, also the man who had chartered the boat for the expedition. Soon afterwards the ship encountered a tropical storm. At the time id not far from here vass, and vass

broken to pieces on the submerged rocks dot abound round t'is coast.

"The island vass not always as id appears now—totally surrounded py rocks, ain't it? Where the great hinged rock hangs now vass the vaterway and an open space, and mein fader and a few of the crew managed to cling to pieces of wreckage and vere vashed ashore."

"And then?" Standish murmured, interested.

"Und t'en—vell, for upwards of six months they vere forced to remain on the island, no ship coming near to which they could signal. It vass during dot period of exile dot mein fader, finding the island vass capable of much money-making production, got into his prain the idea of running and yorking it with slave labour, and making huge profits for himself and the men who vere vith him."

"The wreckage of another ship, which must have gone down mit all hands, was flung up von day after a storm. On a lifebelt vass her name, the Mary Anne of Leith, and when, soon after, mein fader and his comrades sighted and signalled a schooner dot had been driven out of her course by the storm, to save any awkward inquiries as to what had happened on board the Seagull, they all declared t'emselfs to pe gommom sailors from the oder vessel—the Mary Anne of Leith."

"And, of course, they eventually returned to this island, and set up the slave colony?" Jasper Standish suggested; and Hans Meppel nodded his ponderous head.

"So!" he agreed. "In t'ose days the buying and selling of slaves still vent on, and it was nod difficult to run a cargo of niggers here from time to time."

"But the white people? In the plantation I heard French, German, and English spoken, and there vere also Chinese, Japs, and half-castes."

"Ah, mein fader was what you would call ruthless—a hot-headed fiend of a man when the mood took him," Meppel replied. "He black people disliked, and grew tired of seeing nodings save niggers about him. Just before he had the swinging rock erected, so dot the island should look from the sea shust a long range of barren rocks, a vessel was wrecked on the reefs, and amongst the few people who vere saved vass a young clergyman, who, though old and feeble now, iss still on the island, in charge of our church."

"The sight of him my fader an idea gave. He vass a widower. Why should he nod seek a bride, bring her back to the island, and marry her here? His overseers could haf vives, too, if t'ey would join him in his plan."

"It was—what?"

"Piracy," the Dutchman answered, flicking the ash from his cigar. "Shust dot, pure and simple. My fader and his men set out in t'air ship, which had lain in the vaterway, and attacked passenger ships which they came upon in t'air cruising."

"Men and vimmen passengers and the crews vere brought to the island, and forced to join the ranks of the slaves—all except the young girls, whom my fader and his overseers forced to stand mit t'em before the parson and become t'air vives."

"As the cultivation of the island vent on and on, more labour vass found to be vanted, and more piratical raids vere made, until men and vimmen of practically efray nation under the sun had been brought here. Dot, mein friendt, iss the whole story, which, I drust, has interested you."

"It has done more than that, Meppel," Jasper Standish answered. "It has gripped and fascinated me. The

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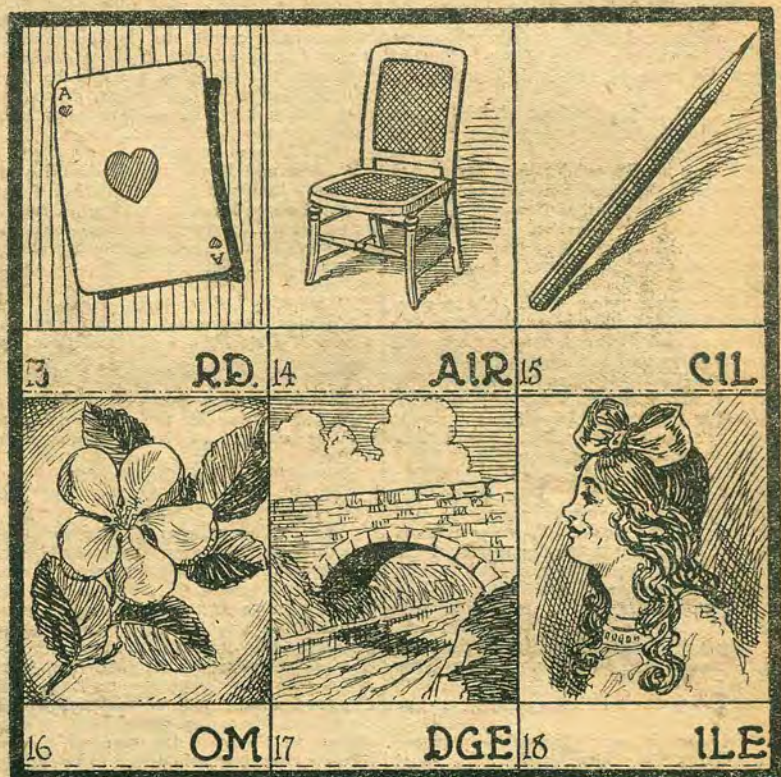
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most imaginative novelist could not devise in his fiction such a theme as this, which has happened in real life! It is marvellous—wonderful! Ah, see! They are bringing the boy this way!"

The Dutchman shaded his eyes and scowled towards the little party that was passing through the square on its way to the gaol, which lay in a street at the rear of the palace.

Dick Harmer, his hands still bound behind him, and his face pale, but set and defiant, was astride a horse, which the Dutch overseer whom he had struck was leading.

The three Malays walked beside the animal, one steadying the lad to prevent his being shaken from the saddle.

"The young tuffel to strike me!" Meppel muttered, tenderly feeling his damaged face. "Ach, Himmel! But THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 659.

what he had to-day is only a taste of what he shall have again and again! What did you think of the bastinado punishment?"

Standish shuddered; then his eyes smouldered with the hatred he bore his enemy's son.

"It was terrible, but, because he was the son of Richard Harmer, I enjoyed watching his torture!" he answered coldly. "Give him more; make his life a burden, my friend, and I shall not begrudge paying you!"

"As soon as his feet begin to heal they shall be laid open mit the canes again!" the Dutchman snarled, with a clenching of his great hands. "But, for the present, we will him forget, and seek enjoyment—unless you would like to see the quarries where all the stone for our building and street-paving comes?"

"No; let it be some pastime that will not necessitate our moving," Standish drawled, reaching for a fresh cigar. "These weeds are excellent, and I feel lazy."

Hans Meppel nodded, and clapped his hands.

Instantly the veranda seemed filled with slaves. Giant black men, graceful and beautiful girls, both dusky and white, slaves of both sexes, who held musical instruments, and who, at a wave of Meppel's podgy hand, began to play, streamed from the palace.

Then into the ring they had formed trooped eight lissom dancing-girls. In a flash they were in the midst of a bizarre yet superbly fascinating dance that thrilled even the world-hardened and cynical Standish.

They were followed by acrobats and jugglers, singers and jesters, and, as he

watched and smoked, the amazement of Standish grew ever more acute.

The whole experience took his mind back to the days of his childhood, when, as a happy boy, he had revelled in the pages of the "Arabian Nights." The thing seemed too incredible to be really true.

He might almost be living in the days of Old Rome, for, as Meppel had said, he was all-powerful here, monarch of all he surveyed—a modern Nero on a small scale!

A Welcome Visitor.

DICK HARMER paced the stone floor of his cell in Slave Island's gaol, thinking of the visit Hans Meppel had paid him early in the afternoon, and the malicious announcement the villainous Dutchman had made to him.

Four days had elapsed since his inhuman punishment at the hands of the Malays, and his feet were less tender and healing; but Meppel had informed him that on the morrow he was to be bastinadoed for the second time.

His hands were no longer tied. There was little need for them to be; for a cat could barely have squeezed through the bars of the window, and the massive, studded door was stoutly bolted on the

outer side, and also locked, so that escape was not to be thought of.

Escape unaided! Dick smiled mirthlessly and bitterly at the idea. No one was likely to come to his assistance, thought he; and he little dreamed that in this he was wrong, and that this evening someone was planning to help him break out of prison.

Dick sunk at last on to his bed, and sat there with his chin resting wearily between his cupped palms. The twilight deepened, and gave place to night, the darkness coming with eerie abruptness.

A noise at the door caused him to sit upright with a start. The overseer who acted as gaoler seldom visited his cell at this hour, and he wondered what it could mean as he heard the bolt drawn and the key grating in the lock.

The door was pushed noiselessly and slowly open. Then Dick leapt to his feet with a little gasp of amazement. The moon had risen, a shaft of its pale light illuminated the cell, and in it he had seen the figure of the girl he had championed in the banana plantation.

"You!" he breathed. "How—"

She came quickly forward, a finger to her lips, and even in the ghostly and uncertain light Dick Harmer saw that her deep brown eyes were full of fear.

"I heard you—you were to be

thrashed again by those brutes for—for protecting me!" she whispered, one of her small hands going impulsively to his sleeve. "I have to wait on the overseer here and his wife after my outdoor work is done, and—I knew where he hung his keys. Oh, be quick—escape before he discovers they are missing, and comes here!"

"Escape!" he said blankly. "But where?"

"Make through the interior, and try to reach the far side of the island," she went on, anxiously glancing towards the door. "None of us slaves are allowed to go in that direction; and there may not be rocks there that shut out the sea, and—possibly vessels you could signal. For pity's sake, hurry! If I am found here with you—if I am unable to replace the keys in time, I shall perhaps be beaten to death!"

"And you have taken this risk for me!" he said, in gratitude and admiration, clasping her hands. "I—"

She gave a frightened cry. Heavy, hurried footfalls had sounded in the corridor, and were coming towards the door of the cell.

"Too late!" she gasped, her face as white as death.

(Another instalment of this grand adventure serial next week.)



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