

SHARE THRILLS AND PERILS THIS WEEK WITH—

THE
GEM
2P

*The
St. Jim's
Explorers!*



I'LL BE HEARING FROM YOU, CHUMS—WHAT?



Blake Answers Back!

Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him c/o The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Be as candid as you like—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature a John Blunt himself! But keep your letter SHORT, and enclose if possible a photo of yourself for reproduction on this page. No photos can be returned.

An Aussie Reader, of Melbourne, Australia, writes:

Who are the junior captains of Claremont, St. Jude's, Bagshot, Redclyffe, and Abbotsford? When are we going to have a series of "Tom Merry's Weekly"? Is Vavasour still at St. Jim's? Who is Archie Howell? Could you suggest some school names?

ANSWER: *Teddy Baxter (Claremont), Lunn (St. Jude's), Cecil Pankley (Bagshot), Judd (Redclyffe), Fane (Abbotsford), "T. M. W." may re-appear when space permits. Vavasour has left St. Jim's. Howell is a member of the Greyfriars Remore. School names? What sort of names? I don't quite get you. Write more explicitly and I'll do my best to oblige, old chap! "Silly ass" and "hurling jabberwock" are "names" frequently in use at St. Jim's; but probably you want something quite different.*

Monty Powell, of Walmer, Kent, writes:

Let me get these off my chest:

1. Why does Gussy wear a "topper"?
2. Why is Lowther always smiling?
3. Why is everybody afraid of Herries' bulldog?
4. What will you do when you leave St. Jim's?
5. Have you a Cadet Corps at St. Jim's?

ANSWER: 1. *Mainly to keep his "roof" dry.*
 2. *He thinks it's a funny thing to be alive. Maybe he's right. Who knows?*
 3. *Are they? Towser will eat out of your hand—provided you are a pal of Herries', of course!*
 4. *Well, I'm wondering whether I'll become a Cabinet Minister or just muddle along as Viceroy of India, or something. Of course, I may have to take a subordinate position, to begin with. Lots of chaps do!*
 5. *St. Jim's O.T.C. (Officers' Training Corps) is being reformed, and plans plenty of activity!*



Monty Powell, of Walmer.

(Officers' Training Corps) is being reformed, and plans plenty of activity!

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Lionel Sudano, of Johannesburg, South Africa, writes:

Let me introduce myself. My name is Lionel Sudano. (Did I hear you say "How do you do?") If so, I do as I please. Joke! What part of South Africa does Clive come from? Give my regards to Lowther and D'Arcy. They are my favourites.

ANSWER: *As you've warned me, I won't extend the usual greeting, but I'll substitute—"How's tricks?" You don't know any? Well, here's one "Detective" Kerr told me. In a storm, a two-fingered signpost is blown down. It is an old-fashioned wooden one, and snaps off at the base. Along comes a motorist, and wonders which way the fingers originally pointed. How can he tell? S'easy! Look! If wood snaps off, it never snaps off evenly, and by replacing the post on its base so that it fitted, the motorist would be able to see how it had originally stood. All right, now you tell one! Clive comes from Cape Town.*



L. Sudano, of Johannesburg.

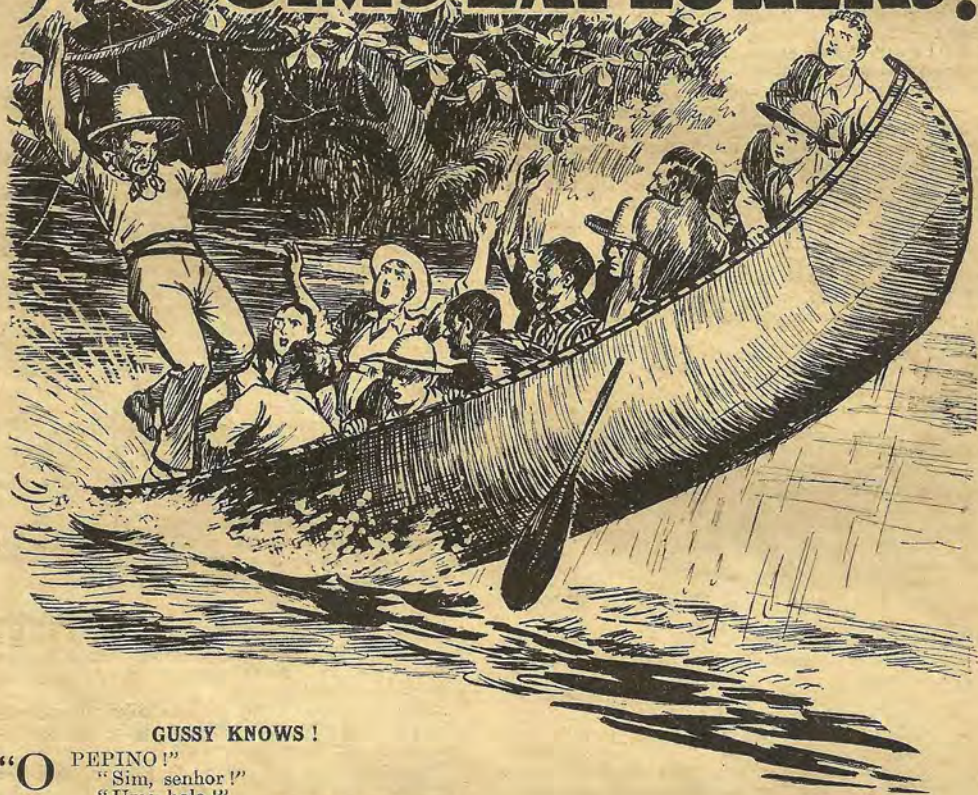
R. D., of Coates, writes:

I don't think Lowther is a bit funny. The only person who ever made me laugh is Gussy.

ANSWER: *Glad you like Gussy. He's a great pal and very amusing at times, with his little foibles. Lowther calling! Glad to hear you don't consider me funny. I'd be dashed annoyed if you did! If there's one thing I can't stand, it is to hear a fellow cackling away at my jokes. It only means he'll ask me for some more, and then some more, and thinking them up puts years on me. Thanks for giving me a start on the straight and serious road, pal! Maybe I'll end up as a reformer with a "pun," eh? Oo-er!*

A TRIP UP THE BLACK RIVER IN THE BACK-LANDS OF BRAZIL PROVES AN ALL-TOO-THRILLING AND PERILOUS ADVENTURE FOR—

The St. Jim's Explorers!



GUSSY KNOWS!

“O PEPINO!”
“Sim, senhor!”
“Uma bola!”

Tom Merry & Co. were quite able to understand those few words in Portuguese.

The St. Jim's party had been a few days at the Quinta da Silva, in the back-lands of Brazil, guests of Monsieur Moutarde, the French planter.

To the St. Jim's juniors Gaston Moutarde spoke in a mixture of English and French, but to everyone else at the quinta he talked in Portuguese, the language of the country. So the juniors were picking it up.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, indeed, had accumulated quite a stock of Portuguese words, though he did not always remember what they meant. As he sometimes used a noun in the place of a verb, and a verb in the place of an adjective, his meaning was not often clear to the natives.

It had been a hot day in Brazil. Now the heat of the tropical day was past, and Tom Merry & Co. were sitting in the shady

veranda in front of the white-walled quinta, looking over a garden that sloped gently down to the bank of the Rio Preto.

Gaston Moutarde was smoking a long brown “charuta,” which surrounded him with a haze of smoke and helped to keep off the mosquitoes. Arthur Augustus fanned himself with a palm-leaf.

Blake and Herries and Digby sat in a cheery row on the veranda rail. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther reclined luxuriously in canvas chairs. Every now and then they smacked at mosquitoes.

They were going to see a display of the “bola,” which on the South American pampas takes the place of the lasso of Northern America.

When the planter called “O Pepino,” a gigantic negro, clad lightly in a pair of red-striped calico shorts, appeared from somewhere and ducked a

**SUPER NEW SCHOOLBOY
ADVENTURE YARN**

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

woolly head and a grinning black face to his master.

From which the juniors guessed that Pepino was the name of the big black man. And when Gaston said "Uma bola," and the big black man departed, they guessed that he had gone to fetch a bola—with the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

"Pepino" was one of Gussy's stock of Portuguese words, and he knew that it meant "cucumber" in that language.

"Bai Jove! Do you grow them heah, Mr. Moutarde?" asked Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass inquiringly on the French planter.

"Grow them?" repeated Gaston Moutarde, blinking at him through the haze of the charuta. "Mais non! No! They are to make."
"You prize ass!" said Blake. "How could they grow them?"

"Weally, Blake, I don't see any othah way of gettin' them!" said Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "We grow them in England."

"We grow them in England?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! We have lots of them growin' undah fwames at Eastwood House in the kitchen gardens," answered Arthur Augustus. "Surely you have seen them gowin', Tom Mewwy?"

Six juniors blinked at Arthur Augustus in astonishment. They were aware that Gaston had sent the big black man for a bola. Arthur Augustus was under the impression that he had sent him for a pepino—a cucumber! So there was a slight misapprehension.

"Wandering in your mind, Gussy?" asked Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"I've never seen one in England at all," said Tom.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you must have gone about with your eyes shut! I have seen lots and lots of them."

"You've seen bolas in England?" exclaimed Herries.

"I have," said Monty Lowther—"lots!"

"Rot!" said Digby.

"My dear chap, they're quite a common sight," said Monty. "Bowlers are seen on almost every heah!"

"Bowlers!" repeated Jack Blake. "Is that one of your rotten puns?"

"No; one of my good ones," answered Lowther modestly.

"Oh, my hat! What are the bad ones like, then?" asked Blake.

"Fathead!"

"Weally, you fellows, I don't quite know what you are talkin' about!" said Arthur Augustus. "We are not speakin' of bolas, but cucumbahs, and—"

"Cucumbers!" ejaculated six juniors together.

"Yaas! Mr. Moutarde has just sent that black chap to fetch a cucumbah, hasn't he? I suppose they grow vewy big ones heah."

"You burbling ass! He has sent him to fetch a bola, to show us how it works!" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus smiled the smile of superior knowledge.

"My deah chap, pepino means cucumbah!" he answered. "I am gettin' to be wathah a dab at Portuguese. Pepino—cucumbah! See?"

"Pepino means that big nigger!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Wubbish, deah boy! They call a negwo a

negwo, same as we do! I distinctly heard Mr. Moutarde say 'O Pepino.' 'O' in Portuguese means 'the,' and pepino means cucumbah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys, there is nothin' whatevah to cackle at! I assuah you that I have got it wight," said Arthur Augustus. "That big black chap has gone to fetch a cucumbah. I suppose they grow them vewy big, and we are goin' to see a special specimen—see?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Well, here he comes," he said. "I don't see any cucumbers."

The big black man reappeared round the building. In one big black hand he carried a coiled rope, with an iron ball fastened at either end. There was certainly nothing of a vegetable nature about him, cucumber or anything else.

"Now you go to see," said Monsieur Moutarde. "O Pepino is verree clevair viz ze bola."

"See it now, Gussy?" grinned Blake. "That's a bola he's got in his paw—not a cucumber!"

"Yaas, wathah! I can see that that is a bola, Blake. But I certainly heard Mr. Moutarde tell him to bwing a cucumbah." Arthur Augustus turned to the planter. "Didn't you say 'o pepino' to that black chap, sir?"

"Mais oui!" assented Gaston Moutarde. "But yes."

"And isn't a pepino a cucumbah?"

Gaston looked puzzled for a moment. Then he burst into a laugh.

"Mais oui! Yes—oh, yes! Pepino he is cucumber! But also he is ze name of ze black man. Zat man he is name O Pepino."

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, it is vewy wemarkable for a man to be named Cucumbah," said Arthur Augustus. "He might as well be named Potato or Cauliflowah. A fellow couldn't weally be expected to guess that one."

"Not a fellow with a brain like yours, old chap!" said Blake. "Now let's see what Cucumber can do with the bola."

The planter called out to O Pepino, and the big black man ducked his woolly head. Then he proceeded to put up a performance with the bola which the juniors watched with great interest.

They were going to learn the use of the bola if they could while they were in South America, and they watched O Pepino to pick up tips in its use.

It seemed easy enough, the way O Pepino did it. With an easy swing of his big, bare black arm, he loosed the iron ball, which circled round a post at a distance. Then he caught the trunk of an orange-tree, and then a branch.

"Bai Jove! It seems pretty simple," remarked Arthur Augustus. "I have heard that it is wathah difficult to acquah skill in usin' the bolah, but it looks as easy as fallin' off a form."

"Not quite so easy as it looks," remarked Tom Merry.

"I wathah think I could handle it, deah boy. I fancy I will have a twy, anyhow. Keep your eyes on me, you fellows, and I think you will see that it is pretty easy to pick up."

"Go it!" grinned Blake. "Don't knock your own brains out with the ball!"

"Gussy will never do that!" said Monty Lowther, shaking his head.

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus confidently.

"Impossible!" said Monty. "No fellow could knock out what isn't there!"

"Wats!"
Arthur Augustus descended the steps of the veranda.

O Pepino, at a sign from the planter, handed the bola to the swell of St. Jim's, and stood back, grinning. Every face in the veranda was grinning, too.

Only Arthur Augustus fancied that it was easy to handle a bola first shot, and his audience watched him, wondering whether he would tap himself on the head with the iron ball or tie himself up in knots with the rope.

NOT AS PER PROGRAMME!

"GO it, Gussy!"

"Pile in, old bean!"

"We're watching!"

"Show us how it's done!"

Encouraging voices came from the veranda. But Arthur Augustus, now that he had got the bola into his noble hands, was a little slow in beginning. Already it did not seem so easy as it had looked.

However, he got going.

Swinging the ball, he let it fly, hoping, though perhaps doubting, that it would curl round the post, as it had done in the hands of O Pepino.

The next moment a wild yell awakened the echoes of the Rio Preto and the Brazilian forest beyond.

Bang!

"Yawoooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry & Co.

"Oh cwikey!"

Arthur Augustus was putting up an unexpected performance. Dropping the bola, he clasped his right knee with both hands and danced on his left leg.

"Oh cwumbs! I believe I have bwoken my knee! Oh cwikey!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"It banged on my knee—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh scissahs! I weally don't undahstand how it banged on my knee when I was aimin' at that post—but it did—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, old bean!" yelled Blake. "This is ripping!"

"Carry on!" chortled Herries.

"Wats!" Arthur Augustus rubbed his knee and lowered his leg tenderly to the ground. "One swallow does not make a summah, deah boys! There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at! It will be all wight next time. I did not give myself enough wope. I will let out more wope next time."

"Go it!"

Arthur Augustus went it. This time he was careful to let out plenty of rope. The iron ball circled in the air.

Then there was another frantic yell. It did not proceed from Arthur Augustus this time. It proceeded from O Pepino.

As the big black man was standing a dozen feet from Gussy, and almost directly behind him, he had probably considered himself safe from the bola. But that was a little mistake on the part of O Pepino. He wasn't!

The iron ball crashed on the side of a woolly head, and the black man clapped both hands to his head and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the veranda.

"Well hit!" yelled Blake.

"Man down!" chortled Dig.

"Oh cwikey! Where did that ball go?"

Arthur Augustus gazed around him with a bewildered look. "Did it hit anythin'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh cwikey! Did it hit you?" gasped

Arthur Augustus, gazing at the black man. "That is vewy wemarkable! I am feahfully sowwy! I assuah you that I did not intend it to hit you, Mistah Cucumbah."

"Mister Cucumber" gazed at him, rubbing his woolly head.

Black men's skulls are fairly solid, which was a fortunate circumstance for O Pepino. But he seemed to have had enough. The grin had vanished from his black face, and he glared at Arthur Augustus and spluttered indignant Portuguese.

"I am weally vewy sowwy!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "Weally, you should not have put your head in the way, but I am vewy sowwy I gave you such a cwack on it! I am afraid I don't know how to apologise in Portuguese, and you don't speak English, so—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't cackle, deah boys! Mistah Mustard—I mean Monsieur Moutarde—how do you say you are vewy sowwy in Portuguese?"

The planter chuckled.

"You give him some milreis, and it is all left!" he said—by which Monsieur Moutarde probably meant that it was all right.

"Bai Jove! If a tip will set it wight, wight—ho!" said Arthur Augustus, quite relieved that the matter could be settled so easily.

Looping the bola over his arm, he took out a wallet crammed with Brazilian paper money. He selected a note which was more or less the equivalent of a ten-shilling note.

O Pepino ceased to glare at once.

His eyes opened wide at the sight of that wallet. Probably the black man had never seen so much money at one time in his life before. His eyes rounded, and seemed almost to pop from his black face.

His black hand closed on the note extended to him, and he ducked his woolly head and grinned, with an extensive display of dazzling teeth. Then he retreated to a safe distance, as Gussy restored the wallet to his pocket and handled the bola again. O Pepino seemed to prefer to be farther off than the length of the cord when Gussy made his next essay with the bola.

"Carry on, Gussy!" came a chorus from the veranda.

"Yaas, wathah! I think it will be all wight this time," said Arthur Augustus.

He whirled the bola again. The iron ball spun round.

It whirled and whirled and whirled round Arthur Augustus, winding the rope round him, and, when all the rope was used up, cracked him on the chin!

"Oh cwikey!"

Arthur Augustus, in a state of great astonishment, stood wound up in the bola, rather like a mummy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a howl from his audience.

"Mon Dieu!" gasped Gaston Moutarde.

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"Zis is verree funny! Zis is vat you call in English one verree large joke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were standing up now to get a better view of the entertainment. Blake and Herries and Dig, in a row on the veranda rail, nearly fell off into the garden below as they rocked with merriment.

"Oh cwumbs! What has happened?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I seem to be all tied up—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give us some more!"

"Keep this up, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus proceeded to unwind himself. It was rather a long process, and he turned round and round and round as he unwound the bola, till he was quite giddy. Howls of laughter came from the juniors on the veranda, and from various points in the grounds of the Quinta da Silva, black and copper faces looked, with broad grins on them. Arthur Augustus was getting a larger and larger audience; his fame as an expert with the bola was spreading.

"I will twy once more!" gasped Arthur Augustus, when the bola was unwound at last.

"It is not so easy as it looks, you fellows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus was fearfully careful next time. He whirled the bola, giving it plenty of rope, and the ball circled at quite a distance from him. He was not going to get a tap this time!

The rope suddenly met with resistance. The iron ball had captured something.

Three fendish yells from the veranda announced what it had captured!

Blake and Herries and Dig had been sitting in a row. Now they were seen to be suddenly collected in a bundle.

The iron ball whirled round them, followed by the rope, and the three Fourth Formers of St. Jim's were suddenly collected in a bundle.

"Oh!" roared Blake.

"Ow!" yelled Dig.

"Oooogh!" spluttered Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Terrible Three. To Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther this seemed the cream of the joke—though not to Blake and Herries and Dig.

"Bai Jove! What—" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Yaroo!"

"Stoppit!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

Blake & Co., in a struggling bunch, rolled off the veranda rail. They landed in a heap in a flower-bed below, still circled and bunched together by the bola. The flowers in that bed suffered rather severely as they struggled and rolled and roared.

"Mon Dieu!" gasped Gaston Moutarde.

"Zis is to laff! Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Shell fellows.

They leaned over the veranda rail, gazing down at the three Fourth Formers below, weeping with merriment.

Blake and Herries and Dig were not laughing now. The funny side of Gussy's performance seemed to be quite lost on them. They roared and howled with fury.

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"Oh cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "What a vewy remarkable thing! I did not intend that at all, you fellows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I twust you fellows are not hurt! I wish you would not get in the way of the bolah when I'm pwactisin', but I hope you are not hurt."

"Wait till I get up!" roared Blake. "Somebody is going to be hurt!"

"Weally, Blake, you should not lose your tempah—"

"Let me get at him!" shrieked Dig.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Let me get loose, so that I can smash him into a million little bits!" roared Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Blake & Co. struggled up. They struggled to release themselves from the bola. The expressions on their faces indicated that something was coming to Arthur Augustus as soon as they were loose.

Their expressions were, indeed, so expressive that Arthur Augustus sagely decided not to wait till they were loose. Arthur Augustus decided to go for a stroll, and he went for one, and disappeared beyond the orange-trees, leaving Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther yelling with laughter in the veranda, and Blake and Herries and Digby yelling—not with laughter—below it.

GETTING AFTER GUSSY!

"GUSSY!"

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

Three voices were calling.

Arthur Augustus did not answer the call. He grinned. Like the ancient Gladiator, he heard but he heeded not.

Only a tree-trunk was between Arthur Augustus and his three chums, but it was some tree-trunk! It was more than ten feet in diameter, so it gave ample cover for the swell of St. Jim's.

Round that mighty trunk came the calling voices. If the callers followed the voices round, Gussy was going to circle that immense trunk, keeping out of their sight. He was anxious, at the moment, not to meet his friends.

"Gussy!" roared Blake.

"I know he came this way!" howled Dig.

"Where is he?"

"Blitherer, where are you?" roared Herries.

"We're going to rag you bald-headed, you mad ass!"

Arthur Augustus grinned, a silent grin.

"Look here, old beans, chuck it!" came Tom Merry's voice. "Gussy can't help being a blithering idiot—you know that."

"You've known him long enough to know that, old beans!" said Manners. "If Gussy showed a spot of sense you'd take him for a stranger."

"Stranger than anything I've ever heard, if he did!" said Monty Lowther.

Evidently the Shell fellows were there as well as Blake & Co., playing the part of peacemakers. But Blake & Co. had no use for peacemakers at the moment. They wanted Gussy, and they wanted him bad. How many bumps and bruises they had, after that crash down from the veranda rail, they had not counted, so they did not know; but they knew that the number was great. They could feel that! And their desire was strong to give Gussy some of the same.

"You Shellfish shut up!" hooted Blake. "Go and chop chips! I'm going to boot Gussy halfway back to Rio de Janeiro!"

"And I'm going to boot him half across South America!" said Herries.

"And I'm going to boot him to the Argentine and back!" said Digby.

"He's here somewhere!" snorted Blake. "Sticking behind this very tree, I shouldn't wonder."

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

"But," urged Tom Merry, "it was the funniest thing Gussy did when he roped in you three from the rail. Can't you see a joke?"

"Shut up," roared Blake, "or we'll boot you instead of Gussy! Come and look round this tree, you fellows."

That gigantic ceiba-tree stood on the bank of the Rio Preto—the Black River—at a little distance from the quinta. Farther on was the forest—the great primeval forest which approached within easy view of the windows of Monsieur Moutarde's residence.

The Quinta da Silva was the only white man's house for perhaps a hundred miles, and it was a farther distance than that from the nearest railway point. At Gaston's quinta, the St. Jim's fellows were in the very middle of the wilds of Brazil.

Gaston had cautioned the schoolboys against wandering into the forest—a caution they hardly needed, as they were aware that their enemy, Joao Rabeira, was lurking somewhere in the vicinity.

But that big ceiba-tree stood at some little distance from its brethren in the forest. There was a wide open space all round it, with only a few scattered orange-trees.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther stood in a group, watching Blake & Co. as the Fourth Formers circled round the big trunk.

Blake & Co. disappeared on one side of the trunk. Then, to the surprise of the Terrible Three, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy appeared in sight round the other side.

They stared at him.

Arthur Augustus, grinning, put a finger to his lips and stepped cautiously on, circling the immense trunk.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry.

Manners and Lowther gurgled.

But they uttered no word to give Gussy away. They watched him circle round on the left of the big ceiba, and watched Blake & Co. come circling round on the right.

"Here we go round the mulberry-bush!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake & Co. glared at them.

"What are you cackling at?" he hooted. "I've a jolly good mind to give you something to cackle for! Where can that ass Gussy be?"

"Oh where and oh where can he be?" sang Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's not here," said Herries. "We've been right round the tree."

"Where the dickens is he?" hooted Dig.

Both parties having circled the trunk, they were now in their original positions again, with the big ceiba between them. Arthur Augustus was out of sight—Blake & Co. in sight, and greatly exasperated.

"If that chucklehead has gone into the forest—" said Blake.

"I'm sure he hasn't!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Well, where is he, then?" howled Blake. "I'm sure he came this way. He's not hiding behind

this tree. We've been right round it to where we started from. Can he have cut down to the river?"

"Jolly swampy down by the water," said Dig. "Gussy's too particular about his clobber."

"I'll boot him all over Brazil!" howled Blake. "I'm covered with bumps and bruises, and I haven't given Gussy even one yet. I'm going to give him about ten thousand!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, behind the tree. But he did not murmur aloud. Arthur Augustus was understudying that artful animal, Brer Fox, who "lay low and said nuffin!"

"Look here, perhaps he dodged us round this tree," said Blake. "Let's go round again, and you stay here, Dig, in case he shows up."

"Oh owikey!" came a startled ejaculation from the other side of the big ceiba.

"That's Gussy!" roared Blake.

They rushed. Round the tree they went, and round it, from the other side, came Arthur Augustus, sprinting.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three. "Go it!"

D'Arcy disappeared round the trunk. Blake & Co., panting, came in sight round the other side. The Shell fellows watched them with great amusement. Blake & Co. tore round again, and Arthur Augustus reappeared, still going strong.

That game of "mulberry-bush" might have gone on quite a long time had not Jack Blake suddenly turned back.

Turning back, he met Arthur Augustus in full career, and they crashed.

"Oh owikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he spun from the shock. Blake sat down on a projecting root of the ceiba and yelled.

"Here he is! Grab him! Boot him! Lynch him! Serag him! Collar him!"

"Wescue, deah boys!" yelled Arthur Augustus, as Blake, Herries, and Dig all pounced on him together.

Tom Merry & Co. could not turn a deaf ear to that appeal. They rushed in and grabbed Blake, Herries, and Dig, one each.

"Hook it, Gussy!" gasped Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

And he hooked it promptly in the direction of the Rio Preto. Three Fourth Formers were left wrestling with three Shell fellows.

"Will you leggo, Tom Merry, you born idiot!" roared Blake.

"Not till you make it pax with Gussy!" chuckled Tom.

"I'll mop up South America with you!" gasped Blake.

Arthur Augustus vanished. Blake & Co. were kept busy till he had had plenty of time to vanish. And, having vanished, Gussy stayed vanished!

ROBBED!

"**B**AI Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He paused to listen.

There was a cheery grin on Arthur Augustus' face as he threaded his way through a thicket on the river-bank. But at a sound of rustling and crackling in the thicket behind him, he stopped and looked round.

Having left Blake & Co. under the big ceiba, about a quarter of a mile away, the swell of St. Jim's had no doubt that they were no longer on his track.

He was going to walk round the precincts of the Quinta da Silva till supper-time—thus giving his exasperated chums time to cool down—which they were likely to do as soon as the first effects of that collection of bumps and bruises had worn off.

But at that sound of crackling in the brake behind him, Arthur Augustus doubted whether he had, after all, thrown them off the track. Someone, his noble ears told him, was following him through the bushes by the river.

There were no big trees at hand for cover. Neither was there room for retreat—for on one side of that patch of thicket was the high bank of the river—on the other, the swamp by the water. So Arthur Augustus looked back rather anxiously.

"Oh! Only Cucumbah!" he ejaculated, as a big black face came into view.

It was O Pepino, the gigantic black man who had given the display with the bola. Arthur Augustus was relieved to see him. He did not want to meet Blake or Herries or Dig in their present exasperated state. But that big good-humoured, grinning black man did not matter.

But O Pepino was not grinning now. There was a set, rather grim expression on his big black face, and his jetty eyes had a gleam in them as they fell on Arthur Augustus.

"Pare!" he called out.

"I wondah what that means!" murmured Arthur Augustus, but as the black man gestured to him to stop, he remained where he was.

The black giant came tramping to the spot where he stood, and halted. Arthur Augustus backed away a little. He was rather startled by the expression on O Pepino's black face, and the glitter in his black eyes. As the man was one of the many negro servants employed at the quinta, he could not suppose that O Pepino meant any harm—but he certainly looked as if he did!

"Do you want anything, Mistah Cucumbah?" asked Arthur Augustus.

O Pepino stretched out an enormous black hand.

"Aonde e o dinheiro?" he grunted.

"What?"

"O dinheiro!" rapped O Pepino.

"Dinheiro!" repeated Arthur Augustus blankly. "The chap can't be askin' me for a dimmah! I wondah what the doce he means."

"De-me o dinheiro!" muttered the black man threateningly.

Then Arthur Augustus, with a jump, guessed it. "Dinheiro" was money. The black man was saying "Give me money!"

"Oh ewikey!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

He remembered that greedy flash in O Pepino's eyes when he had seen that well-filled wallet. He had paid it no attention at the time, and had not remembered it, but he recalled it now.

That wad of Brazilian bills in Gussy's wallet represented about twenty pounds in English money. Such a sum was a fortune to a black man in the back-lands of Brazil. Half as much would have made it worth O Pepino's while to throw up his job at the quinta, and decamp for parts unknown. Evidently that was what he was going to do.

He had watched Arthur Augustus, and taken the first opportunity of cornering him away from the house, and away from his friends. Arthur Augustus, by straying into that thicket, had played into his black hands.

"O dinheiro!" repeated O Pepino. "De pressa!"

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"You uttah wascal!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I will not give you anythin'! Take your black mug away, or I will punch it."

Arthur Augustus was not the fellow to hand over his cash on demand. He was prepared to resist to the utmost.

"Nao?" asked O Pepino.

"No! Certainly not! Oh ewikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as two enormous black hands grasped him.

He hit out with all his strength. His knuckles landed in the big black face with a punch that would have upended anyone near his own weight. O Pepino did not even blink. That punch, hefty as it was, did not seem to affect him more than the sting of a mosquito.

Arthur Augustus had no time for any more punches. He was swept off his feet, and dumped down on swampy earth, in the grasp of those mighty hands—either of which was twice or thrice too strong for Gussy to have dealt with it.

One huge hand pinned him down, pressing him to the earth with a weight that felt like a paving-stone.

The other grabbed in the pocket in which the black man had seen him place his wallet.

That well-filled wallet came out in the thievish fingers. Then O Pepino grinned, with a flash of white teeth, from ear to ear.

"Bom!" he ejaculated. "O dinheiro! Bom!"

"Oh ewikey!"

The pinning paw was withdrawn, and O Pepino, without giving the gasping swell of St. Jim's another look, tramped away towards the river, through the crackling, swaying brake.

Arthur Augustus sat up dizzily.

There was a swampy ooze round the roots in the thicket, and he was muddy and sticky. He staggered to his feet.

"Oh gwumbs!" he gasped. "That black bwute has wobbled me! Bai Jove!"

For a long minute, Arthur Augustus gasped for breath. Then, with teeth set and his eyes flashing, he started in pursuit of O Pepino. The crackling in the thickets was an easy guide.

What he was going to do if he overtook a gigantic negro who could have picked him up in one hand like a doll, Arthur Augustus did not pause to consider.

His noble blood was up, and he was going after O Pepino to get his wallet back if he could.

He tramped through the swampy thicket—the ground growing swampier and swampier as he approached the wide waters of the Rio Preto.

He emerged from the straggling, scrubby thickets at last on the open, evil-smelling mud-bank by the river.

On that mud-bank, O Pepino was tramping down to the water.

"Stop, you wascal!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

The black man heard the voice, and looked back over a brawny shoulder. He stared at Arthur Augustus, as if surprised to see him again. Then he grinned, with another flash of dazzling teeth.

Grinning, he tramped down to the water, the muddy ooze of the Preto rising over his brawny calves.

Arthur Augustus rushed after him. But his rush soon slackened as his feet sank in deep yellow ooze, which came up over his ankles, and then over his knees. He splashed on more slowly but determinedly on the track of the black man who had taken his wallet.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated suddenly.

O Pepino was wading out into shallow water. From a patch of scrub in the shallows, he drew a little dugout canoe. Evidently O Pepino had made preparations for immediate flight after robbing his master's guest.

He pushed the canoe out into deeper water, following it into the Preto up to his brawny chest; and then, with an activity surprising in so bulky a man, clambered into it, and picked up a paddle.

The paddle dipped into the water, and the canoe shot into the middle of the river.

Arthur Augustus, knee-deep in oozy mud on the bank, watched him in speechless wrath.

Even Gussy did not think of pursuing O Pepino by swimming. There were alligators in the Preto—five or six of them in sight from the spot where he stood.

"You wotten wascal!" roared Arthur Augustus, shaking his fist after the black man in the canoe. O Pepino gave him a mocking grin, and paddled up the river.

Down the river was the waterway by which goods came and went to and from the quinta, in canoes manned by Indians. Like most isolated places in the back-lands of Brazil, the Quinta da Silva depended on water transport. Gaston Moutarde was more a trader than a planter, and at intervals big and heavy "montarias" came up the Preto with cargoes of goods which he traded to the Indian tribes. O Pepino was not going down the river, where many eyes might have fallen on him, and he might have been tracked and taken when the hunt was up. He was fleeing up the river, into the unknown and untrodden region towards the mountains.

Arthur Augustus stood and watched him.

The canoe moved rapidly against the sluggish current of the Preto. In a few minutes, O Pepino and the canoe vanished into the red of the sunset, and Arthur Augustus was left alone.

KEEPING IT DARK!

"THAT image!" grunted Blake.

Six fellows were sitting in the shady, cool veranda in front of the quinta, watching the gorgeous sunset over the distant mountains to the west.

Gaston Moutarde had gone along to the Indian village a little distance down the Preto. Tom Merry & Co. were waiting for supper, and for Arthur Augustus to turn up. Gussy had not turned up yet.

"If that ass has gone wandering——" said Herries.

"It would be like him!" sighed Dig.

"He wouldn't be such a duffer!" said Tom Merry.

"Isn't he duffer enough for anything?" growled Blake.

"True, O King!" murmured Monty Lowther. "In that direction Gussy has no limit."

An hour ago Blake & Co. might have been supposed, from their looks and words, to be thirsting for Gussy's gore. But they had recovered a little since then, and they were getting anxious about Gussy.

Peril had haunted the St. Jim's party on the long journey up from Rio to the quinta on the Preto. And that peril still lurked in the forests and swamps surrounding the lonely house on the remote edge of civilisation. Only too well they knew that Joao Rabeira was watching for another chance. Why the Brazilian bandit was

their enemy they did not know, but there was no doubt about the fact.

"Here comes somebody!" said Manners, as there was a footstep in the garden below.

But it was not Gussy; it was Monsieur Moutarde returning from his visit to the Indian village.

He gave the schoolboys a nod and a smile as he came up the steps into the veranda.

"Any news, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

Gaston shook his head.

"Zere is yet no news of my friend Lord!" he answered. "But I zink zat perhaps in a few days zere may be news. Zere are many Indians zat I send up and down and round about, and perhaps soon zere is news."

And the trader passed into the house.

"What the dickens has become of Lord Conway?" said Tom Merry. "He started from here to go up the Preto, but he was due back weeks ago. I—I suppose that something must have happened to him!"

"Anything might happen there," said Manners, with a nod towards the distant mountains, from which the Rio Preto flowed. "According to what Mr. Mustard says, he's the last white man in this direction. It's all unexplored farther on. Only Indians, and a few bandits like Joao Rabeira."

"Yes, but Gussy got that letter from him at St. Jim's, just before we broke up for the holidays. He must have handed it to somebody to take to the post at Rio. He must have been all right then!"

"It's jolly queer!" said Monty Lowther. "If Gussy's brother could send a man with a letter why couldn't he get back himself?"

"Goodness knows!"

"It's pretty clear that Gaston thinks that something has happened to him up there in the unknown!" said Manners. "We've agreed to wait a week here to see if any news can be brought in by the Indians. Looks as if we're not likely to get any."

"And if we don't Gussy's made up his mind to go up the river and search for him," grunted Blake. "There'll be no stopping him."

"That villain Rabeira has got something to do with it!" said Tom. "We know that he thinks Gussy got some news of his brother in that letter, though we know, too, that there wasn't a word of news in it. But, for some reason or other, he doesn't want Lord Conway found."

"That makes one thing pretty clear," said Manners. "Gussy's brother is still alive. Otherwise, Rabeira wouldn't care a bean whether he was searched for or not."

"No, I suppose that's fairly certain!" agreed Tom. "But what the dickens can it matter to Rabeira, anyway?"

"I give that one up. It's jolly clear that it does, but goodness knows why!"

"And if that benighted ass has gone wandering, that bandit may have got him!" growled Blake. "I jolly well know he's on the watch. If that image doesn't turn up soon we'd better go and hunt for him."

"Hallo! Talk of angels!" said Monty Lowther.

He pointed to a figure that appeared from a path by the river. All eyes fixed in relief on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Then there was a general grin.

Arthur Augustus was far from presenting his

usual natty and spotless aspect. He was smothered with mud and slime from head to foot. "Where the dickens has he been?" grunted Blake. "Wallowing in a swamp, from the look of him."

"Been mud-collecting, Gussy?" called out Dig. Arthur Augustus came up the steps—with a wary eye on his comrades.

But Blake & Co. were not letting the sun go down on their wrath. They were no longer yearning to boot their noble chum all over South America. Moreover, it was clear from Gussy's looks that he had not been enjoying life.

"You look as if you want a wash, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I am in a feahfully mudday state, owin' to that beast!" answered Arthur Augustus. "I have had a vewy wotten expewience. It is all your fault, Blake, for playin' the goat in that widdleous way."

"What's happened?" asked Tom.

Arthur Augustus paused before replying.

"Has anything?" asked Manners.

"Yaas."

"Well, what?" demanded Blake. "Have you run into that villain Rabeira?"

"Not at all, deah boy! But——"

"But what?"

"Oh! Nothin'!" said Arthur Augustus.

Six fellows stared at him. It was perfectly plain that something had happened to Gussy. Indeed, he had said so. But he was not, it seemed, going to tell them what it was.

"You piefaced image!" said Blake. "What's the matter with you? Have you got your silly back up with your old pals because they didn't enjoy your potty tricks with a bola?"

"Wubbish, Blake! I am quite pwepared to ovahtook your thoughtless behaviour. You cannot help bein' wathah an ass, as I have told you before."

"Well, what's happened, image? Are you beginning to keep secrets from your keepers?" demanded Blake.

"Give it a name, Gussy!" urged Tom Merry.

"Make a clean breast of it, old tulip!" encouraged Manners.

"Come clean!" said Monty Lowther.

"The fact is, I think I had bettah not tell you fellows!" explained Arthur Augustus. "You see, it places me in a vewy awkward posish, as a guest in this house, enjoyin' the vewy genewous hospitality of Mistah Mustard. He would feel howwid if he knew that I had been wobbed by one of his servants."

"What?" gasped all the juniors together.

"Least said, soonest mended!" said Arthur Augustus sagely. "It was weally my own fault, in a way, for lettin' that black bwute see my wallet this aftahnoon."

"O Pepino!" exclaimed Tom.

"I would wathah not mention who it was, Tom Mewwy. You fellows are wathah thoughtless, and you might let somethin' out, you know, and that would make our kind fwiend Mistah Mustard feel wathah uncomfortable. The money does not weally mattah vewy much—it was only about twentay pounds, as neah as I wemembah——"

"A mere trifle!" said Blake sarcastically. "Hardly worth mentioning."

"Not exactly a twifle, Blake, but not worth makin' a feahful fuss about. I have to considah my host's feelin's first of all."

"But do you mean to say that that black man,

O Pepino, has robbed you, and bolted with the plunder?" exclaimed Tom.

"I do not mean to say anythin' about it, Tom Mewwy, for the weason I have given!" said Arthur Augustus. "If you fellows talked carelessly somethin' might get to Mistah Mustard's yabs and make him feel vewy uncomfortable! So I have decided to say absolutely nothin' on the subject, and I twust you will not ask me any questions, as I have wesolved to keep the whole mattah dark."

And with that Arthur Augustus walked into the house in search of a bath and a change, which he badly needed.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry blankly.

"Isn't it Gussy all over?" hissed Blake. "He brandishes a bagful of money under the nose of a nigger who probably has never seen five shillings in his life before and then goes and meets that nigger specially in a lonely spot! Isn't he the man to ask for it?"

"Isn't he just?" said Dig.

"But this won't do," said Tom. "If that black blighter, Pepino, has robbed Gussy, Mister Mustard ought to know at once, so that he can be run down and made to cough it up!"

"Gussy's keeping it dark!" chuckled Blake. "He's not going to tell Mister Mustard—and he's not going to tell us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I hope he will keep it just as dark from Monsieur Moutarde as he has kept it from us," said Tom Merry, laughing. "In that case, Mr. Mustard will know all about it at supper, and he can send somebody after that nigger."

Which probably would have been the case had not Monsieur Moutarde been called away that evening, so that the St. Jim's party had supper on their own. So, as it happened, Gussy's adventure was still being kept dark, so far as the planter was concerned, when the juniors went to bed that night.

THE TRIP UP THE RIVER.

"HAVE a good time!" said Monsieur Moutarde.

In the sunny morning the trader of the Quinta da Silva stood by his horse at the porch, and Tom Merry & Co. were seeing him off.

Since the St. Jim's juniors had been at the quinta, Mr. Mustard had made many excursions in many directions, seeking news among the natives of Lord Conway, his friend "Lord," as the French planter called him.

Gussy's elder brother had vanished from all knowledge up the dark and mysterious Rio Preto many long weeks ago. It was Gussy's fixed determination to explore that almost unknown river to its source in the western mountains to find his brother, if no news was received during the week.

Monsieur Moutarde smiled and shrugged his shoulders at that determination, knowing rather better than Gussy what lay ahead of an explorer in the untrodden country of the wild Caraya Indians.

But Gussy's pals, at all events, knew that there would be no stopping him—and they hoped fervently that Mister Mustard would be able to pick up news of the missing man among the Indian tribes.

"Have ze good time while zat I am to go for ze day!" said Monsieur Moutarde. "But go not into ze forest—zere is great danger in ze forest."

"Rely on us, sir!" answered Tom Merry.

EVERY WEDNESDAY

"Zat verree bad man Rabeira may be zere!" said Mister Mustard. "Here it is not like Rio de Janeiro—here, ze life is cheap! One zink nozzing of to take ze life like—pouf!—one mosquito! You go walk in ze forest, and zere is a knife, or zere is one rifle, and zen you do not walk out of a forest any more altogezzer!"

"We'll give the fowest a wide berth, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "But I suppose we may go on the wivah in a canoe."

"Mais si!" assented Monsieur Moutarde at ounce. "Zat is all left—or is it zat you say in English all right? Zat is all right! I give order to ze mordomo—ze steward—to make to do all zat you like. Au revoir, mes enfants!"

And the French trader mounted and rode away, and very soon disappeared by a forest path—the forest having no terrors for him, earnestly as he warned the schoolboys from wandering in its dark shades.

"Well, we're on our own to-day," said Blake. "Lots to do—even if we have to steer clear of the jolly old forest."

"Yaas, wathah! We are bound to wespect the wishes of Mistah Mustard," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Othahwise, I should wathah like to hunt for that wascal Wabeiwah in the fowest, and wun him down."

"Oh, my hat!" "I fancy you'd soon feel more run down than Rabeira!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"The fact is, you fellows, I think vevy likely Wabeiwah knows what has become of my bwothah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pwobably I could make him cough it up, if I got hold of him and gave him a feahful thwashin'."

"Probably!" grinned Tom Merry. "But we'll keep clear of the forest, all the same, as Mister Mustard makes a point of it."

"Would you fellows like a wun in a canoe?" asked Arthur Augustus. "If you don't like the ideah, I shall go alone—"

"I can see myself letting you go alone!" remarked Blake. "You start off anywhere alone, and you'll soon find my boot behind you."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Good idea to have a day out in a canoe," said Tom Merry. "Safe enough down the river—but we'll pack in a rifle in case of trouble. You never know your luck in these parts."

"All right, so long as Gussy doesn't get anywhere near the rifle!" remarked Monty Lowther.



The iron ball whirled round and round Arthur Augustus and finally cracked him on the chin.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We'll ask the mordomo to pack us a basket of grub, and make a day of it," said Blake. "You can take a rifle, Tom, as you're jolly handy with one. Gussy can take his face and his eyeglass—they will scare off the Carayas if we meet any—"

"You silly ass, Blake! I shall take a bola—"

"A what?" roared Blake.

"Pway do not woah at me, Blake! I shall take a bola—"

"You can take a bola, if you sit on it all the time!" said Blake. "But you start swinging a bola, old man, and we'll tie you hand and foot with the rope and gag you with the iron ball. That's a tip!"

"Wats!"

Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to make their preparations for that river trip in great spirits. Much as they liked Gaston Moutarde and his company, they quite liked the idea of looking after themselves for a day, and exploring the environs of the quinta on their own.

The black "mordomo," or steward, gave them every assistance. A canoe was selected, with six Indian paddlers; a large basket containing a large assortment of foods and drinks was carried down to it by one of the "mocos," and Tom Merry brought out one of Gaston's rifles and a supply of cartridges. Tom was a good shot, and quite ready to handle the rifle if needed—though the juniors did not expect that it would be needed.

Arthur Augustus took his bola—undeterred by Blake's dire threat of what was to happen to him if he attempted to handle the same.

When all was ready, the St. Jim's juniors went down to the landing-place, and embarked in the long canoe.

Early as it was, the sun was already hot—and it was going to be hotter. But, as Tom Merry remarked, they had not come to South America to be chilly—to which Monty Lowther added that if they wanted Chile they would have to sail round the Horn!

As the Indian paddlers spoke only their own tongue, and a few words of Portuguese, communication had to be chiefly by signs. Arthur Augustus pointed up the river, and the Indians paddled off at once in that direction.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Blake. "We're going down the river, Gussy!"

"Not at all, deah boy—we're goin' up the wivah!" said Arthur Augustus calmly.

"I think Mister Mustard would expect us to keep to the inhabited parts, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"That's all wight, deah boy! I asked him specially if we could go on the wivah in a canoe."

"Yes, but—"

"And that is what we are goin' to do—"

"But—"

"Pway do not keep on buttin' like a billy goat, deah boy! It will be vewy useful to us to explore the Pweto a little, as we shall have to go up the wivah to look for old Conway, if Mistah Mustard doesn't get news of him."

"But—"

"And I have anothah weason also," said Arthur Augustus. "I have decided to tell you what happened yesterday, as I wequiah your assistance in wunnin' down that black wascal!"

There was a chortle in the canoe.

"Oh, do tell us what happened yesterday!"

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said Blake sarcastically. "We haven't the faintest idea so far!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am just goin' to tell you, Blake, and I twust you will be vewy careful not to mention anythin' about it befoah Mistah Mustard. That black wascal O Pepino wobbed me yestahday, and cleahed off up the wivah in a canoe! I am goin' aftah him!"

The juniors stared at Arthur Augustus. They understood now why he had been so keen on a canoe trip on the river that morning. Gussy was going after the black man who had disappeared with his wallet.

"Oh, all right!" said Blake. "If there was the slightest chance of finding him, of course, we wouldn't let you go—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"As there isn't, you can carry on!"

"Wats!"

And the canoe, driven rapidly by six paddles, glided away up the mysterious waters of the Rio Preto.

THE MAN IN THE HAMMOCK I

TOM MERRY & Co. smiled.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked very thoughtful.

The current of the Rio Preto was sluggish, and the Indian paddlers drove the canoe against it with ease. Miles slid under the flashing paddles, and the Quinta da Silva was left far behind.

Here and there where the river narrowed, or where islands blocked its course, there were rapids, but generally, it was wide and slow. On either side, the primeval forest rose like a green wall.

It looked impenetrable; vast trunks, interspersed with smaller trunks, laced with immense masses of hanging lianas, growing down to the water's edge, and in some places in the water, where it shallowed under the banks.

Even the foot of an Indian hunter seldom trod in the dense forests that clothed both banks of the Preto.

And Arthur Augustus, as he watched the banks, seemed to begin to realise that he had set himself a task of some magnitude.

Wherefore did Gussy wrinkle his noble brows in thought, while his friends smiled.

Ten thousand fugitives could easily have found cover in those vast forests. It did not seem probable that a single fugitive would be rooted out.

The task was, in fact, wildly impossible, which the other fellows knew from the start, and which was now dawning on Gussy's noble brain.

Unless O Pepino hung about where he could be seen, he was not likely to be spotted. It was possible that, knowing pursuit to be impracticable, he might be careless. That was the only possibility.

At St. Jim's Tom Merry & Co. were good Scouts, and Gussy had had some vague idea of picking up the tracks of the big bare black feet.

Now, as he watched the forest-clad banks of the Preto, he abandoned that idea.

O Pepino had vanished up the river the day before. He might have landed anywhere and taken to the forest. He might have camped on one of the almost innumerable islands in the river. He might still be pushing on in his dugout, a day's journey ahead of the pursuers. Even Arthur Augustus was not thinking of pushing on

as far as the region inhabited by the wild tribes of Caraya Indians, many of them hostile to the whites. On the other hand, neither was it likely that O Pepino would venture among the Red tribes.

"Spotted him yet?" asked Jack Blake, when about five miles lay between the canoe and the quinta.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, look!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "There's a black face—looking at us from that tree!"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus grasped his bola, with which, apparently, he fancied that he was going to rope in O Pepino, if spotted. "Where, deah boy?"

Monty Lowther pointed.

Arthur Augustus gazed, and there was a ripple of laughter up and down the canoe.

A black face was looking out of a tree at the voyagers. But it was not the face of a black man; it was one of the myriads of black-faced monkeys that haunted the forest that was gazing at the canoe as it passed.

Arthur Augustus dropped the bola again.

"You uttah ass!" he snapped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus frowned as the canoe glided on.

"Are you going to cop him with that bola if you spot him, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, laughing.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let me catch you trying it on!" said Blake.

"You will certainly see me twyin' it on, Blake, if I spot the wascal! We cannot vewy well shoot him, so we must make him a pwisonah! And he is wathah too hefty to handle. It will be all wight if I get him with the bolah."

"Well, we're not likely to see much of him," said Manners. "He might be sitting behind any of those trees we've passed—and we've passed about a million so far."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

Arthur Augustus kept his eye and his eyeglass constantly on the alert. He was not going to admit, if he could help it, that he was leading his comrades on the wildest of wild-geese chases.

Not that the other fellows were taking the hunt seriously. They were out for a day on the river and a picnic at some agreeable spot; that was the programme so far as the rest were concerned. If Gussy chose to fancy that he was tracking down O Pepino, nobody minded.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus suddenly. He half-rose in his seat, his eyeglass fixed on a muddy, swampy tributary of the Preto that trickled into the river from under vast branches.

"Bai Jove, that's a canoe!"

The juniors looked round.

"A canoe, and no mistake!" said Tom Merry.

"Some Indian—"

"Pewwaps it is O Pepino's canoe, Tom Mewwy."

"Perhaps!" grinned Tom.

Arthur Augustus signed to the paddlers to slow down. The canoe lost way, and rocked on the current opposite the point where the little stream trickled out in a mass of swampy slime thick with mosquitoes.

A small dugout canoe was visible there. It was tied on to a low branch, and rocked on the shallow water. It was untenanted; its owner was evidently on the shore, screened from sight by the forest.

That little dugout certainly looked like the one

in which D'Arcy had seen O Pepino fleeing the previous day. But there were a good many hundreds of them on the Preto.

It was quite possible that it belonged to some Indian, for the juniors were now in the "sertao"—the wilderness—and some wild Indian hunter might have strayed down the river as far as this. Arthur Augustus, however, was not thinking of straying Indians; he was thinking of the black man who had pinched his wallet.

"We had bettah look into this, I think," he remarked.

"Go it!" said Tom. "If there's a wild Indian about, I dare say he will let us know by whizzing an arrow."

"Look out!" said Monty Lowther. "When an Indian whizzes an arrow, the whizzibility is good!"

"Pway don't make wotten puns now, Lowthah! This is a serious mattah!"

"Is it?" asked Monty, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gestured to the paddlers. They pushed the canoe closer to the spot where the little dugout rocked on the shallow stream.

Closer to the spot, the juniors saw something that they had not noticed before. Under a branch close to the canoe a hammock was slung, and it was evidently occupied.

It was now drawing towards noon; and at noontide in Brazil all living things take a rest in the fierce heat of the tropical day. Obviously the owner of the dugout had tied up and taken to his hammock, for the usual siesta. Slings a hammock to a branch was the usual way of camping in the Brazilian sertao.

It was possible, no doubt, that the man in the hammock was the fugitive negro. The juniors were now many long miles from the quinta, and O Pepino might have considered himself far enough away for safety.

But that seemed rather too much luck to be probable. It was very much more likely that the man was some Indian or half-breed wanderer of the forest.

But Arthur Augustus' noble eye gleamed behind his eyeglass. He was hopeful, at least, that he had got his man! Gussy was very keen to show the rest of the party that this was not a wild-geese chase.

He grasped his bola again.

"Hallo, he's waking up!" murmured Blake.

Tom Merry grasped his rifle. It was necessary to be on guard in encountering any denizen of the wild forest. Nobody but Gussy supposed that the bola would do him any harm.

The sound of the paddling had evidently awakened the sleeper in the hammock. The hammock stirred as he sat up in it. A big grass hat bobbed into view, and from under it a dark, fierce face looked out on the river.

There was a gasp from the St. Jim's crew.

It was not the big black face of O Pepino that they saw. It was not an Indian's face. It was the fierce, evil face of their old enemy, Joao Rabeira, that glared down at them from the hammock.

A BRUSH WITH THE BANDIT!

"RABEIRA!" stammered Tom Merry.

"Oh crumbs!"

"That wascal!"

"Joao Rabeira!"

The juniors stared blankly at the fierce face staring down from the hammock. Joao stared at

them with equal surprise. It was quite an unexpected encounter on both sides.

"Corpe de Deoa os rapazes!" buttered the bandit. "The boys! Os rapazes!"

For a long astonished moment they stared at one another. Then Tom Merry lifted the rifle and clamped it to his shoulder, his eyes gleaming over it.

"We've got that rascal now!" he exclaimed. "Push closer and collar him! If you touch a weapon, Joao Rabeira, I shall pull the trigger."

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. The bandit, sitting up in the hammock, was groping at his belt.

But the rifle, levelled at a distance of hardly more than ten feet, daunted him. Tom Merry held it as firm as a rock, his finger on the trigger. He was ready to fire, and determined to fire, if it was needed. On the steamer out to Rio, and since landing in South America, Arthur Augustus had again and again narrowly escaped death at the hands of the outcast of the sertao, and Tom had no idea of standing on ceremony with the desperado.

The canoe was in shallow water, and Blake seized a pole and punted it under the tree. Joao Rabeira, from his looks, was more than half-inclined to leap down into the canoe, knife in hand, cutting and slashing right and left. But a bullet would have crashed through his body as he leaped, and he knew it.

Instead of leaping down to the canoe, the bandit suddenly flung himself from the hammock into the branches of the tree.

"Stop!" shouted Tom.

And he fired.

The bullet tore through thick foliage. A yell answered—but it was a yell of mocking defiance—Rabeira was not hit. The vast wall of foliage swallowed him up in a moment.

Whiz!

"Yawoooh!"

Arthur Augustus had hurled the iron ball of the bola. Why it swung back and banged on his chest, Arthur Augustus did not know.

But it did—and Arthur Augustus went over, extended at full length among the bare brown legs of the Indian paddlers.

"Oh cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Crack!

Tom Merry fired again into the masses of foliage into which the bandit had disappeared.

But Rabeira was deep in cover; the bullet tore away leaves and twigs, whistling harmlessly through the trees.

"He's gone!" said Herries.

"Oh cwikey!" came a wail from Arthur Augustus. He sat up dizzily. "Did one of you silly duffahs push me? I fell ovah—"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Fancy running into that black-faced blighter!" said Manners. "Not much chance of bagging him. But we'll bag his canoe; we don't want him following us on the river."

He dragged the dugout loose.

Crack!

A report came from the wall of greenery. Rabeira had a firearm at hand, evidently, and he was now using it from his cover. A bullet whistled over the canoe.

"Beter push off!" exclaimed Blake. "I don't want to stop the next one."

The Indian paddlers did not need telling. At the crack of the rifle from the forest every paddle

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dashed into the Preto, and the canoe shot away from the bank. Manners had hold of the dugout, and it was towed away.

Crack! came again from the foliage.

The bullet struck the canoe and glanced off into the river. Tom Merry fired back, but the shot went at random. The paddles flashed and dipped, and the canoe shot away like an arrow. All the advantage was on the side of the bandit, firing from cover, and only the swift retreat of the canoe saved the St. Jim's juniors from being picked off one after another. From the wall of green forest came crack after crack as the bandit emptied his magazine; but one of the many islands of the Preto quickly interposed as the canoe flew away, and the juniors were safe from the fire.

"Better not stop to talk to him next time, Tommy," remarked Monty Lowther. "You have to shoot first in this country."

"Um!" said Tom.

"It is vewy odd that I did not get him with the bola!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally thought I had him! Somethin' hit me on the chest—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at! Tom Mewvy could not vewy well shoot the bwute without givin' him a chance, but if I had got him with the bolah it would have been all wight."

"Lucky you only banged yourself with it!" said Blake darkly. "If you'd banged me I'd jolly well dip your head into the river!"

"Wats!"

"Hold on to this dugout while I get an axe!" said Manners; and Tom Merry held the bandit's craft while Manners knocked a hole in the bottom, and it sank under the waters of the Preto.

It was rather fortunate for the juniors that they had captured the dugout; for, otherwise, it was very probable that the bandit would have followed them up the Preto, looking for a chance for a long-distance shot. Rabeira was left on shore now, and in the thick and tangled forest he had no chance of keeping pace with the canoe if he thought of following it.

The paddlers kept up the same swift speed until a mile lay between the canoe and the spot where Rabeira had been encountered.

Then, feeling safe from the bandit, they slowed down and dark eyes turned inquiringly on the juniors. It was time for the midday rest, and the Indians were ready to sleep in the shade as soon as the word was given.

"Better look for a camp and lunch," said Blake. "Anybody feeling warm?"

He wiped away a stream of perspiration.

"Yaas, wathah! But we don't want to waste time, deah boys, if we are goin' to get on the twack of that wascal O Pepino."

"That's all right—we're not!"

"Weally, Blake, you ass—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"The crew will go on strike if we don't let them have their siesta," he said. "Everybody shuts down here in the middle of the day, Gussy. Look for a spot where we can camp—if there's a spot on the river where there are no alligators or snakes or jaguars."

"I'd rather find a spot where there are no mosquitoes!" sighed Monty Lowther. "But that's asking too much in Brazil."

The canoe paddled on more slowly, the St. Jim's juniors watching for a favourable spot

for a camp. Having promised Monsieur Moutarde not to enter the forest, they did not want to land on the bank, so they watched the islands as they passed them, strung out one after another.

Most of them were thickly wooded down to the water's edge and circled by smelly swamp. Squawking parrots in infinite numbers tenanted the branches.

"This looks better than the rest!" said Tom at last, as the canoe glided by a little island less thickly wooded, and with open spaces among the trees and thickets.

And the canoe pushed in through swampy mud and roots, and the St. Jim's adventurers landed.

THE TRACK IN THE SWAMP!

"HOT!" murmured Blake.

"Tepid!" agreed Monty Lowther.

"Fairly warm!" grinned Tom Merry.

A haze of heat hung over the Rio Preto. Even Arthur Augustus, keen as he was to get on the track of O Pepino, did not feel disposed to move after lunch.

The canoe lay aground on the swampy margin of the river-island. The Indian crew, having eaten a meal of mandioca bread and "carne seca"—a tough, dried meat that defied the teeth of the St. Jim's fellows—had slung hammocks under shady branches and gone to sleep.

Tom Merry & Co. had unpacked a big basket, eaten their lunch, washed it down with cold coffee, and now they rested in the shade.

There was nothing for it in Brazil but to wait till the fiercest heat of the day had passed before getting into motion again.

That island on the Preto was rather like an oven. Innumerable parrots blinked at the juniors from the trees, and still more innumerable mosquitoes hummed and buzzed round them. The masses of foliage above shut off the direct rays of the burning sun, but did not shut off the heat.

Big alligators lay like logs in the swampy mud, or floated lazily on the surface of the Preto. Butterflies a foot in span sailed in the hot air, brilliant with colour. Spiders with immense legs crawled on the tree-trunks. Solitary as the place was, so far as human beings were concerned, it was thickly populated with other creatures, teeming with life.

"Old Conway may have landed on this wivah when he came up the wivah!" remarked Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "The old chap must be still on this wivah somehow—p'obably not more than a hundred miles farthah up. Bai Jove! He will be surprised when we wun into him next week."

"Let's hope we shall!" murmured Tom Merry.

"It looks as if Mistah Mustard isn't goin' to get any news of him, deah boy, and that means that we shall have to go and look for him! I shall certainly not return to St. Jim's till I have found him."

"Um!" said Tom dubiously.

"Somethin' must be p'ventin' him f'rom comin' back, of course," said Arthur Augustus, "and it is p'wetty cleah that that wascal Wabeiwah is mixed up in it, though goodness knows how. Pewwaps he is pwisonah some-whah—though if he is, I weally don't see how

he got that lettah off to Wio that weached me at St. Jim's. It is weally vevy puzzlin'!"

And Arthur Augustus shook his head. The mystery of Lord Conway's fate was a hopeless problem.

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet.

"You fellows thinkin' of movin' on?" he asked.

"Not yet," yawned Blake, "and if we were the Indians aren't. They expect to have their midday snooze out!"

"I think I will have a look wound," said Arthur Augustus. "That wascal O Pepino is as likely to have stopped heah as anywhah else."

There was a sleepy chuckle from six juniors. Arthur Augustus' statement was correct; that spot, about fifteen miles from the quinta, and deep in the heart of the wilderness, was as likely as any other. But it was no more likely than any other, so far as the juniors could see.

"Go it!" yawned Blake. "Don't walk down an alligator's neck, or crack your own hut with that bola."

"Wats!"

Taking his bola coiled over his arm, Arthur Augustus strayed inland on the little island. In a few minutes the tropical vegetation hid the camp by the canoe from sight, if he had looked round.

He picked his way by the openings among the trees, every now and then pushing aside masses of heavy, juicy lianas.

In about a quarter of an hour he had crossed the island and was looking at the river on the other side.

He stopped under vast branches that stretched over fetid swamp, looking about him.

Suddenly he gave a start.

Almost at his feet, in the slimy earth, was a deeply marked track. It was the track of a large naked foot.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

His eyes gleamed.

There was no mistake about the footprint. Someone was on that side of the island, unknown to the St. Jim's party camping on the shore.

It was the print of a naked foot, and none of the Indian paddlers had crossed the island. Someone obviously had been there when the voyagers landed.

Now that he noticed it, the swell of St. Jim's noticed other prints. They led down from the shore to the water.

In the shallow water lay masses of driftwood, left there by the current. Following the trail with his eye, Arthur Augustus discerned another object lying among the logs and branches in the mud—a small dugout canoe, pulled up out of the water.

"Bai Jove!" repeated the swell of St. Jim's.

He bent and scanned the tracks. They led up from the dugout to the shore where he stood. There were no back tracks to the dugout. It was not a white man's track; the naked foot was clearly imprinted in the mud. It might have been an Indian's, but the enormous size of the track reminded him of the gigantic stature of O Pepino. It was a very big man, or, at all events, a man with very big feet, who had landed there.

Arthur Augustus' face was excited now.

It was quite likely that that island in the river, a good fifteen miles from the quinta, might have

been selected by the black fugitive as a hide-out. Most likely O Pepino expected to be hunted. He could not have guessed that Arthur Augustus, from a motive of delicacy, had refrained from letting Monsieur Moutarde know that he had been robbed by one of the servants of the quinta.

Likely enough he would seek some hidden spot to lie low for a few days and nights, to make his escape later when the hunt had died down.

Those footprints in the mud looked like it.

Arthur Augustus turned his head and scanned the thick trees that grew close down to the swampy shore.

There was no sign of a living being there; but that someone was there, the dugout, half-hidden among the driftwood, and the track leading from it, proved.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

What were all those doubting Thomases going to say to this? The man was there—at least, somebody was there, and the chances were that it was O Pepino. All that was necessary was to hunt him out.

Arthur Augustus made a step to return to the camp across the island, but he stopped.

He could see nothing of the negro; but the negro, if he were there, might be watching him. In which case he was fairly certain to cut back to his dugout and flee while Gussy was gone to call his friends.

Arthur Augustus turned again and stepped out towards the canoe. It was distinctly disagreeable to step into the soft, slimy, squelching mud, stirring up evil scents at every step; but he was not going to leave the present possessor of his wallet a way of escape.

The filthy mud oozed round him, and he left tracks from his mosquito-boots deeper than those of the bare feet as he went. But he tramped on determinedly till he reached the dugout.

His first idea was to drag it to the water and set it adrift. But there were two good reasons against that course. It was a long and hard task to drag the dugout through the mud to the water in the blazing heat, and there was the possibility that it did not, after all, belong to the fugitive from the Quinta da Silva.

Leaving it where it lay, therefore, Arthur Augustus contented himself with piling driftwood into it. He found that task sufficiently hefty in the heat of a tropical day. But he laboured resolutely, stacking log after log into the dugout till it was filled, the weight sinking it deep into the mud.

Nobody, it was certain, would be able to get that dugout in motion again in a hurry. Even when the logs were dragged out the dugout needed extracting from the mud into which it was deeply sunk.

Satisfied that the fugitive's retreat was cut off, Arthur Augustus tramped back to dry land. His eyes were warily open, but he saw no sign of the black man, and heard nothing but the chatter of the parrots.

Hot as it was, the swell of St. Jim's recrossed the little island almost at a run. He arrived at the St. Jim's camp perspiring and panting.

"Here he comes!" yawned Monty Lowther. "Caught him, Gussy?"

"Got him in your pocket?" asked Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus smiled serenely.

He had a surprise up his sleeve for those fellows who fancied that he could not track down

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a fugitive black man in the wilds of the Rio Preto.

"You fellows feel wested now?" he asked.

Tom Merry sat up.

"Well, we might get a move on now, if you're in a fearful hurry," he said.

"Pway don't bweak your neck about it!" said Arthur Augustus, with gentle sarcasm. "But if you feel up to a twot, I should like you to come across the island with me and bag that niggah."

"Eh?"

"What?"

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"I have twacked him down," he said negligently. "I think I told you fellows that I came up the wivah to twack him down."

"You howlin' ass!" roared Blake. "What have you tracked down now—another bandit like Rabeira, or an Indian fisherman?"

"I have twacked down that niggah," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I am goin' to collah him now and make him return his plundah. Are you fellows goin' to back me up?"

Tom Merry & Co. got on their feet, blinking at Arthur Augustus.

"I have nobbled his dugout so that he cannot get away," added Arthur Augustus. "Still, the soonah we collah him the bettah! You fellows comin'?"

"Is that ass trying to pull our leg?" asked Digby.

"Weally, Dig——"

"Dreaming, old chap?" inquired Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Oh, let's go and see!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "If Gussy has damaged a dugout belonging to some fisherman we shall have to pay for the damage."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on," said Blake. "I'll eat all the niggers we find on this island."

"Follow on, deah boys!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

And he led the way, and the juniors followed him across the island, only Arthur Augustus expecting that the trail would lead them to O Pepino and the pilfered wallet.

THE HUT ON THE ISLAND!

"OH!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Oh!" repeated Blake.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

The juniors had pushed through the trees and thickets of the interior of the island. They had reached the spot where Arthur Augustus had stood when he had spotted the footprint in the swamp.

And now they all spotted it. It was plain enough to be seen, and they looked at it, and looked at one another.

At a distance lay the dugout that Gussy had piled full of lumber. It lay as he had left it, barely visible in the mud that oozed round it. Gussy's tracks beside those of the big, bare feet stood out plain to the view. The juniors scanned the barefoot track. Blake whistled.

"Somebody's been here!" he said.

"Somebody's here now, I fancy!" said Tom.

"Some Indian," said Herries.

"Or a nigger fisherman," said Lowther.

"Or," said Tom Merry, laughing, "that black man who ran away from the quinta yesterday with Gussy's wallet. It's jolly possible."

"Well, let's see," said Blake.

Scoutcraft learned at St. Jim's came in useful

now. From the track in the mud the juniors picked up further traces that led into the thick trees at a little distance.

"Keep that popgun ready, Tom!" said Manners. "We don't know what sort of a passenger we're going to wake up."

"It's all wight, Mannahs; I've got the bola weady," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly.

"If you start any monkey-tricks with that bola you know what to expect!" hissed Blake.

"Wats!"

Two of the juniors carried axes brought from the canoe. Tom Merry had the rifle ready. It was quite possible that a jaguar or a puma might lurk in the thickets, or that the man from the dugout might turn out to be some desperado like Rabeira. Someone, it was certain now, was there, and the juniors were all on their guard.

Here and there they picked up traces again—broken branches and twigs, lianas cut away, hanging, moss-torn, aside. But the distance they had to cover was short.

"Look!" breathed Tom Merry suddenly.

"A hut!" muttered Blake. "We've run him down—whoever he is."

Standing under the wide spreading branches of a big ceiba-tree was a little "choupana." It was built of poles cut in the thickets and trimmed by the axe, with a slanting roof of the same material.

The front was completely open. Many huts the juniors had seen on the banks of the Preto consisted of nothing but a roof on four poles. But this choupana was a more solid construction, with three walls, fairly strongly built. Obviously it was not a new building—it was overgrown with creepers, and in places the woodwork had rotted away from the damp of the river. Probably it had been standing for many years, hidden in solitude, never visited unless by some chance fisherman, or Indian hunter, or perhaps by some fugitive seeking safety in the wilds. The earthen floor was thickly covered by dead leaves.

It was unoccupied now, as the juniors saw at a second glance. But it had recently been occupied, for there was a hammock slung across the interior, and an axe stood against the wall—clean and bright, which would have rusted had it been there any considerable time.

Having ascertained that the hut was empty, the juniors pushed on and entered it.

"This is his quartahs, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "Don't make a wow—he may come back any minute, and he jolly well won't if he heahs us heah."

"But who's been here?" asked Herries.

"O Pepino, deah boy."

"Um! Perhaps!"

"I don't think there is vewy much doubt about it. Howevah, we are goin' to make suah," said Arthur Augustus. "If we had dwooped in a little earliah, I expect we should have found him snoozin' in that hammock. But he can't be vewy fah away!"

The juniors looked curiously round the hut.

It was clear that the choupana had stood there a long time; and they wondered who could have built it in that unpeopled solitude. It was a rather more elaborate construction than an Indian hunter would have taken the trouble to erect, but it was difficult to fancy a white man building himself a dwelling in such a place—unless, indeed, he were some desperate outcast who had fled to the forests and the swamps.

"Hallo, what's this?" exclaimed Manners. He kicked out an object that lay half-buried under dead leaves in a corner of the choupana.

It was a tin box, once japanned black, now thick with rust. The juniors looked at it curiously.

It was evidence that at some time or other a white man had been there—probably a good time ago, from the state of the despatch-box.

"Anything in it?" asked Blake.

The lid was closed, but the lock was broken. Probably they were not the first finders, and the first finder had broken it open to see whether it contained anything.

Manners jerked the rusty, creaking lid open.

Once, no doubt, the box had contained papers, carried by some traveller in the wilds. Now it contained nothing but an old newspaper cutting. The box had preserved it, but it was yellow and crinkled.

The cutting was a printed photograph of a man in military uniform, and under it were the words in Portuguese:

"O GENERAL POTOMAYO."

"General Potomayo!" said Tom. "Anybody ever heard of him?"

Nobody had.

"Before our time, I expect," said Blake. "That's jolly old. Can't have been General Potomayo who put up this hut, I suppose."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not likely! Somebody lived here once and left this old box behind when he went, and left that cutting in it. May have been here for donkeys' years."

The juniors looked round the hut again, curious to find any more traces of a former occupant. Blake kicked a hard object out of the carpet of dead leaves.

It was an old rusted sword-hilt, with part of the broken blade still attached, red with rust.

"By gum!" said Blake. "That looks as if a soldier has been here—might have been the jolly old general, after all. Generals in Brazil have to bunk sometimes—they have a revolution every other week."

"It's possible!" assented Tom.

Arthur Augustus held up his hand.

"Quiet, deah boys—"

"What—"

"Somebody's comin'!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

There was a sound of rustling from the thick brake round the choupana. Someone was approaching the hut.

The juniors moved to the back wall of the hut, so that the newcomer, whoever he was, should not see them till he entered. They stood silent, watching and waiting.

The brushing and rustling came closer. Obviously, the newcomer did not know that anyone was there, for he came without any attempt to disguise his approach, pushing noisily through the branches and creepers.

A gigantic figure emerged suddenly from the brake, and stood in the open front of the choupana. It was a big negro, clad only in red-striped calico shorts and an immense hat. He had a string of fish in one hand, which showed how he had been occupied during his absence from the hut.

"O Pepino!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

The juniors all knew him at once. Arthur Augustus—marvellous to relate—had been right, all along the line! Standing hardly ten feet from

them, his big black eyes almost popping from his black face with astonishment as he stared at them, was the fugitive from the Quinta da Silva.

CAUGHT IN THE SWAMP!

O PEPINO stood as if thunderstruck. The string of fish dropped from his hand. Spellbound with amazement at the sight of the schoolboys, he stared with popping eyes, and his glance fixed on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Um Ôho!" he ejaculated.

"Collar him!" shouted Blake.

But O Pepino did not wait to be collared. For one moment he stood as if spellbound, the next he was leaping away.

"After him!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Stand cleah while I get him with the bola!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

Unheeding, the juniors rushed after O Pepino.

Arthur Augustus, with really a touching faith in his skill with the bola, was making a cast. Certainly an expert with a bola could have roped in O Pepino, swiftly as he darted away. But Arthur Augustus was far from an expert. The iron ball banged on the hammock in the hut, and curled round it. Arthur Augustus had made a catch—but not the one he wanted.

Breathing hard, the swell of St. Jim's stopped to disentangle the bola before he rushed after his comrades.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. were speeding on the track of O Pepino.

Big and heavy as he was, the black man covered the ground almost with the fleetness of a deer, dashing away branches, flinging aside masses of lianas, never pausing for a second.

But fast as he went, the juniors were fast on his track. He was heading directly for the spot where the footprints lay in the mud—evidently to flee in his dugout. But Arthur Augustus had put paid to that in advance—he was not likely to get away in his canoe. The juniors were almost at his heels as he broke out of the wood on the island shore.

"We've got him!" panted Tom.

"You bet!" said Blake. "He can't get off the island! We've got him all right; there's enough of us to handle him, big as he is."

O Pepino's bare feet were splashing through the mud as he raced for his dugout. He reached it as the juniors came rushing out of the trees behind him.

They heard a roar of rage from the big negro. He reached his canoe before he saw what had happened to it. He bent and dragged at it for a moment, but huge and strong as he was, he could not move it. He stood upright again, glaring back at the crowd of schoolboys, already coming across the mud towards him.

His thoughts could be read in his face, in the glare of his fierce rolling eyes. He was thinking of charging straight at them, trusting to his huge strength to deal with them. He was certainly a match for at least three or four of them, possibly for them all, and such a struggle would have been a terrible one for the schoolboys.

Tom Merry's face set hard, and he lifted his rifle, aiming low. If the black giant rushed, he was going to stop him with a bullet in the leg.

O Pepino understood; that was plain enough and he stood where he was, glaring. Tom Merry called to him.

The black man did not understand English, and Tom knew only a few words of Portuguese. But

he could make his meaning clear enough to the man who had D'Arcy's wallet in the pocket of his calico trousers.

"O dinheiro!" called out Tom Merry.

The juniors were quite ready to let the black man run, if he handed over the plunder he had taken from Arthur Augustus.

But now that they had, contrary to all expectation, run him down, they were not going to let him escape with his plunder.



The bandit suddenly leaped from the hammock into the branches of the tree. "Stop!" shouted Tom, levelling his rifle.

O Pepino understood; that was plain enough from his look. His black hand went for a moment to the pocket of his calico shorts. Perhaps he thought, for a moment, of handing over the stolen wallet as the price of freedom. If so, he abandoned that idea. Turning, he ran on towards the river, splashing through the thick, oozy swamp, deeper and softer farther from the shore.

Tom Merry lowered the rifle.

"After him!" he exclaimed.

And the juniors rushed down the shore. Evidently, O Pepino intended to escape by swimming the Preto. It would have been easy to knock him over with a bullet as he ran, but Tom did not think for a moment of doing so. The money was not worth the wretched man's life, or inflicting serious injury. Only in defence would he have pulled the trigger.

But it was quickly clear that, if a shot was not fired, O Pepino would not be caught.

When the juniors had passed the dugout, they sank to their knees in swamp. Manners gave a sudden cry, and disappeared to the shoulders.

His comrades halted at once, and gathered round him. Even before they could grasp him,



he was in to the neck. Abandoning the pursuit of O Pepino, they grasped Manners, and dragged him up.

"Got back!" gasped Tom.

"Yes, rather!" panted Blake. "We may go in over our heads in this putrid muck, any minute."

The juniors picked their way back much more carefully than they had advanced. What had happened to Manners showed that there were

patches in the swamp as soft as quicksands, and the danger-spots were hidden from sight. At every step in the yielding, treacherous ooze, they dreaded to be engulfed.

Breathless, panting, thick with slime, they reached the firm shore at last, gathering under a gigantic ceiba-tree that grew partly in the swamp.

Then they looked at O Pepino, expecting to see him swimming, far beyond their reach. But the black man was not swimming.

"Oh!" gasped Blake. "Look!"

A big grass hat showed over the swamp—bare, glistening black shoulders under it. O Pepino was in up to the armpits.

Evidently, in his haste, he had struck one of the treacherous patches and sunk in. He was making frantic efforts to extricate himself, but in vain; every effort drove him deeper into the slime.

"By gum! He's caught!" exclaimed Lowther.

The juniors stood watching the struggles of the negro with startled faces. They hoped, and expected to see him drag himself out to firmer soil. But it was soon clear that that was beyond his powers. His arms thrashed wildly, his elbows sinking in the sucking mud.

"Got him, deah boys?" exclaimed a breathless voice. Arthur Augustus emerged from the trees, his bola over his arm.

"Look!" answered Tom in a low voice.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stared at the negro, his face paling. He raised his hand and pointed.

"Look!" he breathed. "Oh, look!"

From the shallow water, at a little distance from the helpless negro, a hideous snout rose. The scaly back of an alligator glimmered in the sunshine.

The juniors gazed in horror.

They could not help the negro; they could not approach him without sharing his fate. He could not escape—he was pinned by the choking mud. The alligator, emerging from the shallow water, was creeping towards him, the huge body leaving a deep trough in the mud as it crawled.

"Shoot!" muttered Blake hoarsely. "Fire at the alligator!"

Tom Merry clapped the rifle to his shoulder and fired. The bullet struck the great cayman, glancing off like hail from glass. He pulled the trigger again and again, till he had emptied his rifle. Every bullet struck the alligator, but they seemed to have no more effect on it than peas from a pea-shooter.

With a white face, Tom lowered the rifle.

It was useless; there was no help for the doomed man. Pinned in the swamp, he struggled wildly, while the alligator crept closer and closer.

A loud yell came from the negro, his eyes turning on the group of schoolboys on the shore. It was a yell of appeal, but they could not help him. They could only watch, their faces like chalk.

"Gussy!" shouted Blake suddenly.

Tom Merry looked round.

"Where's Gussy?" he exclaimed. The swell of St. Jim's was no longer standing with his comrades.

Unnoticed, while Tom Merry was still pumping bullets at the alligator, Arthur Augustus had left his comrades. Now their eyes turned on him—clambering along an immense branch of the ceiba-tree that extended over the spot where the negro was pinned in the swamp.

"Gussy!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Oh, if he falls—" breathed Blake. "Gussy, come back, come back!"
Arthur Augustus did not heed.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH!

"Gussy!"
"Come back, you madman!"
"Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus did not seem to hear. He knew what he was going to do—if he could! And the fact that he was taking his life in his hands and facing the most terrible of deaths, did not make the swell of St. Jim's hesitate for a moment.

Where that great branch left the parent trunk, it was a yard in thickness. But farther towards the extremity, it thinned and thinned. The end of it was high over the head of the hapless negro.

Close to the trunk it would have supported the weight of the whole Fourth Form at St. Jim's. But thirty feet from the parent trunk, it was a different matter.

There it sagged and swayed under the weight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry & Co. watched him. Every moment they dreaded to see the long branch snap, and precipitate him into the fetid swamp below. The farther he crawled, the greater became the danger of a snap, and they heard the creaking of the sun-dried wood as Gussy reached a distance of forty feet from the trunk.

Arthur Augustus heard it too, but he did not heed it. His face was set and calm, but tense. His eyeglass was jammed tightly into his eye. He crawled steadily along the creaking, swaying branch that dipped, and dipped, and creaked, and swayed the farther he went. At that distance, it was hardly ten inches thick, and every moment the swell of St. Jim's was in danger of rolling from one side or the other.

"Gussy!" groaned Blake. The sweat was pouring down his face.

He made a step towards the tree. But he stopped again. To go after D'Arcy was worse than useless; the branch where he had now reached was a doubtful support for one—and it would infallibly have cracked under the weight of two.

The negro had seen the junior in the ceiba now. His starting eyes were turned up to Arthur Augustus as the junior crawled.

"Um Olho—Um Olho!" panted O Pepino.

At any other time the juniors might have smiled at the name by which he called Arthur Augustus—"One-Eye," evidently an allusion to Gussy's eyeglass.

The negro's arms were still above the swamp. He extended them in beseeching gestures towards the junior above.

Tom Merry wiped his forehead. Hot and blazing as the tropic day was, he was feeling cold. It was only a matter of minutes—but every minute seemed a century long to the horror-stricken schoolboys.

Every moment they dreaded to see Arthur Augustus pitch off his precarious perch, or to hear the crack of the branch as it snapped.

Below him was the ooze which had engulfed O Pepino, and if he fell into it, nothing could save him. And the alligator was crawling nearer—ploughing through the mud, the hideous snout now not a dozen feet from the negro. And, as if the news had spread among the horrible inhabitants of the Rio Preto, another and another

alligator began to crawl through the shallows, heading for the same spot. To fall from the branch was certain death—choking death in the suffocating slime, or still more terrible death in the shearing jaws of the caymans.

"Oh!" breathed Blake, as the swell of St. Jim's, after what seemed an endless time of horror, stopped almost at the extremity of the swaying branch!

Now he was almost directly above the negro. O Pepino was silent now, but his starting eyes were fixed on the swell of St. Jim's.

The watching juniors felt their hearts beat to suffocation as Arthur Augustus drew himself up astride of the branch. It swayed and dipped, and it seemed almost impossible that he would not roll off and shoot down.

But the swell of St. Jim's sat tight, locking his legs below the branch. If it broke under his weight and let him down, he could not help it, but he was not going to fall.

Now Arthur Augustus uncoiled the bola, which he had looped over his shoulder.

He passed one end, with its iron ball, round the branch, and knotted it there. The other iron ball he lowered to the negro.

O Pepino's big black hands were ready to receive it. As the ball came within his reach he grasped it. It sank beside him in the swamp and the taut cord was in his hands.

As he dragged on it, striving to pull himself up, the branch dipped, with a loud, long creak.

For the moment it seemed to Tom Merry & Co. that the negro, in his haste to escape, was going to cut off his own chance, and doom Arthur Augustus to death at the same time.

His haste was easy to understand—for a greedy, nosing snout was now within six feet of him. But it was fatal to both unless he waited. And the black man understood and slacked on the rope. He released one hand and waved it towards the tree.

"Da pressa, da pressa!" he called hoarsely. "Senhor Um Olho, da pressa!"

"Wight-ho!" called back Arthur Augustus. He knew what "da pressa" meant—"Quick!" But he did not need telling to be quick! He had to take his weight off the branch before the negro could pull himself up on the rope, or it was death to both.

Swiftly he twisted round and started crawling back to the trunk. The swiftness with which he moved made Tom Merry & Co.'s hearts leap into their mouths. He had to take risks—if all he had done was not to be in vain—for it was a matter of moments now before the jaws of the cayman reached their victim.

Once, twice, he almost slipped, but he clambered on. And now the negro was dragging on the rope of the bola again, exerting all his great strength to drag himself from the grip of the slime that sucked him back as he struggled to free himself.

Hand over hand, climbing with desperate strength, dragging his legs from the ooze, O Pepino climbed and swung clear of the swamp. By the time he was clear Arthur Augustus had reached the trunk and clambered down to the earth, breathing in great gasps.

Blake caught him by the arm.

"Gussy!" he breathed.

Arthur Augustus did not heed; his eyes and his eyeglass were fixed on the negro.

O Pepino swung over the snapping jaws of the alligator. The huge brute, wallowing and floundering in slime, snapped his great jaws, and

for a sickening second the juniors dreaded to see the terrible rows of teeth rend flesh and bone. But the muscular black legs swung up, with almost a monkey's activity, out of reach.

A few moments more and O Pepino had swarmed up the rope to the branch and caught the branch in his strong hands.

Under his weight, more than twice that of Arthur Augustus, the branch dipped and dipped, till the negro's feet almost touched the scaly back of the alligator. If it snapped now—

But it did not snap! And another moment was enough for O Pepino. He swung along, hand after hand, below the branch, holding to it, and not till he reached a point where it was thick and strong did he clamber up on it.

Then he crawled along the branch to the trunk. Below, in the swamp, three or four alligators were floundering and splashing, sending up sprays of foul ooze. But O Pepino was safe from their jaws now.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "Do you know, deah boys, that was wathah touch and go! I have wuined my clobbah on that twee—but I do not wegwet it!"

"Oh, Gussy, you old ass!" murmured Blake. "I'd jolly well have kicked you if you'd dropped down on that alligator!"

"Weally, Blake—"
O Pepino dropped from the ceiba-tree and stood, a mass of clinging slime from head to foot, looking at the juniors. They did not approach him. After what the hapless man had been through no one was disposed to lay a hand on him. Arthur Augustus gazed at him thoughtfully through his eyeglass.

"I twacked that man down to get my wallet back," he remarked, "but let him wip! Unless he returns it of his own accord I am not goin' to wowwy the poor bwute aftah all that!"

"I can see him doing it," murmured Monty Lowther. "Oh, my hat!" he ejaculated the next moment.

O Pepino groped in a muddy pocket with a muddy hand and drew out the stolen wallet. He came towards the staring juniors, fell on his muddy knees in front of Arthur Augustus, and held out the wallet.

"Desculpe-me, senhor Um Olho!" he said in a husky, gasping voice. "O dinheiro do senhor!"

IN THE BANDIT'S GRASP!

THE paddles dashed in the yellow waters of the Rio Preto.

Tom Merry & Co. sat about the canoe, gliding down the river back to the distant quinta. Arthur Augustus smiled—the smile of superior wisdom.

The island of the hut was left far behind. Tom Merry sat with the rifle across his knees, his eyes warily on the wooded banks; and other eyes in the canoe were watchful. The St. Jip's fellows were on the look out for Joao Rabeira, in case the bandit might be watching for them on their way home.

Gussy could not help smiling. He was not the fellow to rub it in. Still, there it was. He had set out that day to track down O Pepino. He had tracked him down. He had set out to recover that lost wallet. He had recovered it.

There had been, perhaps, a chance in a thousand. But, as it happened, that thousandth chance had materialised! So Gussy smiled.

"What are you grinning at, image?" inquired Blake.

"I was not awah that I was gwinnin', Blake," answered Arthur Augustus mildly. "And I am not goin' to wub it in. So I will not ask you who was wight aftah all! Still, who was?"

And Arthur Augustus chuckled. "There's a canoe behind us," said Manners, who had been glancing back several times. "We're being followed, you fellows."

"That rascal Rabeira," said Tom. "We sank his canoe," said Lowther. "But he may have picked up another—he wouldn't be particular how he got hold of one."

The juniors looked back as the Indian crew paddled on with the current. They were passing a string of small swampy islands. A dugout glanced into view and disappeared again behind an island.

They glimpsed a big grass hat in it. It had only one occupant, and he was seen only for a moment.

Tom Merry's face set grimly. "Rabeira, I suppose," he said. "Well, we're ready for him!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps you had bettah hand me the wife, Tom Mewwy!" suggested Arthur Augustus. "I have lost my bola now, you know."

"Fathead!" said Tom politely. "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"There it is again!" said Manners, as the gliding dugout astern shot into view again.

Tom Merry half raised the rifle. If it were the bandit in pursuit, the juniors did not need telling his intentions, and Tom was prepared to greet him with a stream of bullets.

But now that they could see the figure in the dugout, in the blaze of the sunset, they discerned



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that it was not Joao Rabeira. It was a man almost twice the size of the bandit, burly as Joao was, and the sun glistened on a shining black skin.

"A nigger!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove! It's Cucumbah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

The man astern raised his head to stare, and they saw his face—the broad black face of O Pepino.

The big black man was following them down the river. He had been left behind on the island, and no doubt had spent a good deal of time in sorting out the dugout; but he paddled fast, and now he had almost overtaken the juniors' craft.

They watched him in surprise.

Nobody in the party had expected to see O Pepino again. As he could not know that his theft had not been reported to Monsieur Moutarde the juniors supposed that he would keep clear of the quinta. It seemed, however, that he was following them home.

He did not draw nearer. Now that he was in easy sight of the canoe he seemed content to keep it in sight.

"Bai Jove! I wondah what he is aftah us for?" said Arthur Augustus.

"Changed his mind again about that wallet, perhaps," suggested Herries, with a grin. "Blessed if I expected him to hand it over as he did."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

The dugout remained at the same distance, and the juniors ceased to watch it after a time. But they watched the thickly wooded banks of the Preto very warily, prepared for a sudden shot from cover.

The quinta was still several miles away. The canoe was now at a point where the river narrowed between an island and the shore. At that point great branches of ceiba-trees arched over the water from side to side in a vast roof of foliage.

Tom Merry glanced up at that leafy roof over the river. It was exactly the spot that the cunning bandit might have chosen for an ambush.

Even as he looked up a figure came shooting down suddenly from a branch, landing with a heavy crash on the bow of the canoe.

"Look out!" yelled Blake.

But it was too late.

That heavy weight suddenly crashing down on the bows, drove the head of the canoe under water, and in a second or less the Preto was rushing into the canoe, flooding it fore and aft.

Before the juniors knew what was happening, their craft was under the surface and they were struggling in the water.

The Indians, who could swim like fishes, struck out for the bank at once. The juniors struggled in the surging current over the sunken canoe. The rifle slipped from Tom Merry's hands and went to the bottom of the Preto—not that it would have been of any use in the water.

So swiftly had the man in the tree shot down that they had hardly seen him, but they knew that it must be the bandit. But they were swimming for their lives now—in the narrows, the water was deep and swift. The swimmers went whirling on in the current; and on Arthur Augustus, as he swam, a sudden grasp was laid.

The swell of St. Jim's gave a startled gasp.

Close by him a dark, evil face rose and black

eyes glittered into his. He was in the grasp of the bandit.

"Afinal!" hissed Joao Rabeira. "At last!"

The next moment Arthur Augustus was dragged under the surface.

He struggled madly.

In the deep twilight that reigned under the over-arching branches it was probable that his comrades did not even see the bandit—and all of them were struggling in the current. There was no hand to help the swell of St. Jim's—and in the iron grip of the bandit he was little more than an infant.

Blinded by the water, choking and suffocating, Arthur Augustus fought desperately for his life.

Once his head came up and he gulped in one breath, but it was driven under again. Both the sinewy hands of the bandit were gripping him, and in that grip he was powerless.

His senses were swimming; and in that terrible moment the swell of St. Jim's gave himself up for lost. The ruthless outcast of the sertao was drowning him like a rat.

He struggled and fought and kicked in vain. With his lungs bursting for air, his senses spinning, he was lost—but, even as it seemed that death was grasping at him, the hold on him suddenly relaxed, and he shot up to the surface again.

His face came into the air, he gulped in breath, panting, gasping, dizzy, swimming only by instinct.

"Gussy!" It was Tom Merry's voice, but it was calling from a distance.

Why had the bandit let him go? One of his comrades must have come to his aid. Then Gussy's dizzy eyes made out a small canoe—and a brawny black arm over the gunwale beating at a head in the water with a paddle.

He heard a gasping and gurgling sound—it came from the bandit.

Dizzily, like a fellow in a dream, Arthur Augustus saw O Pepino in the dugout, lashing out with his paddle—he saw the evil, enraged face of Rabeira, with blood running down it—then that desperate face ducked under and disappeared.

Arthur Augustus gave a faint cry. But even as he was sinking, a black hand grasped him and he was dragged out of the water.

O PEPINO'S LORD AND MASTER!

"OH cwikey!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyes opened and he blinked dizzily round him.

He was lying in the dugout. Six fellows were holding on round the little craft; there was no space for them on board. O Pepino paddled to the shore, where the Indians had already landed.

The swell of St. Jim's sat up.

"Oh cwikey!" he repeated. He had lost consciousness for several minutes and he was still dizzy. "Bai Jove! You fellows all wight?"

"Right as rain!"

"Where's Wabeiwah?"

"Gone!" answered Tom Merry. His voice was quivering. "I saw you, Gussy—but I could not reach you in time—but the brute's gone under—drowned, very likely. But if O Pepino hadn't followed us—" Tom's voice broke.

Nothing was to be seen of the bandit. Possibly he had gone under the waters of the Rio Preto; but it was more likely that he had scrambled

(Continued on page 36.)

STOLEN GOLD!

By Martin Clifford.

TWO IN TROUBLE!

"I GUESS those galoots have found trouble!" Bob Lawless shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked away across the wide expanse of the prairie, dotted with clumps of timber, as he spoke.

Frank Richards & Co. were on the homeward trail after their holiday in the North-West. Far behind them now rose the pine-clad slopes and the rocky summits of the Cascade Mountains. They were heading southward for the Fraser River, with some more days of travel before them ere they reached their homes in the Thompson Valley.

Frank Richards, Bob Lawless, and Vere Beauclerc were riding a little ahead, followed by Chunky Todgers and Yen Chin and the pack mule. Away ahead of the schoolboy party two diminutive figures had come into view on the plain, Bob's keen eyes being the first to sight them.

The two strangers were a good distance ahead on the same scarcely marked trail, and, being on foot, they were half-hidden by the high grass. They were tramping on slowly, their heads bent, and their looks indicative of heavy fatigue.

"I guess there's been trouble," Bob Lawless went on. "Those galoots never started on this

prairie on foot, I reckon. They've lost their horses, and they've had to tramp it."

"Poor beggars!" said Frank.

"There's twenty miles ahead of them to the nearest settlement, I calculate," said Bob. "They've got a hard row to hoe."

"We shall be camping soon," said Frank. "Let's put on speed and overtake them, Bob, and see if we can help."

Bob Lawless nodded.

"I was just thinking of that," he replied.

"Good idea!" agreed Beauclerc. "Put it on!"

"Hustle, there!" Bob called back to Chunky Todgers and Yen Chin. And the chums of Cedar Creek urged on their horses.

They had been proceeding at a leisurely pace when they sighted the two forlorn wanderers ahead; but now they were galloping they soon overhauled them. Bob's expression changed as they came nearer and nearer to the pair.

"I guess I've seen those galoots before," he said suddenly.

"Can't see their faces," remarked Frank. "There seems something familiar about them, though."

"Guten and Keller," said Vere Beauclerc quietly.



Like a snake in the grass, Kern Guten crawled away from the camp.

"My hat!"

Instinctively the chums of Cedar Creek slackened down a little. They were not anxious to fall in with Gunten and Keller, their old enemies of Cedar Creek School. The two Swiss schoolboys had spent the school holiday in the North-West, and more than once had fallen in with Frank Richards & Co., and there had been trouble.

Bob frowned grimly.

"Better keep clear of them," he said. "We've had trouble enough with them."

"But—" began Frank.

"They're bad eggs, Franky."

"I know; but they've had hard luck, by their looks," said Frank. "They've lost their horses, and they're stranded. After all, they belong to our school, rotters as they are."

Bob Lawless made a grimace.

"You mean you want to lend 'em a hand," he grunted. "They're the kind of rotters to bite the hand that helps them. Still, I don't mind."

"They've seen us," said Chunky Todgers.

Gunten and Keller had heard the hoof-beats behind, and looked round. They stared in surprise at the sight of Frank Richards & Co., and stood motionless, evidently waiting for the party to come up. The looks of the two Swiss showed that they were very much down on their luck. It was clear that they had been in the wars.

"Hallo, you galoots!" exclaimed Bob Lawless as he drew rein. "I never expected to see you again before we got back to school."

"Where are your horses?" asked Frank.

Gunten gritted his teeth.

"Stolen!" he answered. "We fell in with a gang of rustlers this morning. They took our hosses, and cleared us out of our money, and everything else they took a fancy to."

"And left us to hoof it," said Keller, with a quaver in his voice. "We're tired out, and jolly near famished."

"Hard luck!" said Beauclerc.

"Yes; very amusing to you. I dare say," said Gunten, between his teeth. "You can cackle."

"But we're not cackling, Gunten," said Frank Richards mildly.

"The yellow heathen is, at any rate."

Yen Chin, as a matter of fact, was grinning all over his face. The little Chinese did not seem to be troubled with much compassion for the two Swiss in their misfortune.

"Shut up, Yen Chin!" growled Bob.

Bob did not like Gunten and Keller by any means, but he could feel for them in their distress.

"Velly funnee!" said Yen Chin coolly. "Guntee velly bad egg! Kellee velly bad egg! Servee light! Oh, yes!"

"Well, it does serve them right," remarked Chunky Todgers. "All the same, it's up to us to lend them a hand."

"I'm not asking for your help!" growled Gunten.

"Servee light. Goey choppee chips!"

"You heathen rotter!"

"Not so much chin-wag, Gunten," grunted Keller. "We're in a bad box. Look here, you chaps, we'll be glad of some help. We've eaten next to nothing to-day."

"You're welcome to camp with us and share round," said Bob Lawless at once. "But none of your tricks. We did as much for you before, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,643.

when you landed yourselves in a scrape, and you played a dirty trick on us. None of that, or I tell you there'll be trouble!"

"That was only a—a joke."

"We don't like jokes of that kind. Look here, we're camping at the next timber," said Bob. "Hoof it along with us as far as that."

"I'm dog tired," mumbled Keller.

Frank Richards jumped from his pony.

"Get into the saddle," he said. "I'll walk."

"I—I say, that's jolly good of you, Richards!" mumbled Keller. And he gladly climbed on the back of the pony.

"You can have my gee, Gunten, for a bit," said Bob. And he dismounted.

Gunten promptly mounted Bob's pony. Vere Beauclerc dismounted, and walked with his chums, leading his horse.

A mile on a clump of timber rose from the plain, a spring sparkling in the sunset among the trees. There the Cedar Creek party halted to camp for the night. The horses and the mule were staked out, and the latter unloaded.

Bob Lawless was about to begin gathering brushwood for a camp-fire, when he paused.

"Hold on!" he said. "How far back did you meet those rustlers, Gunten?"

"A good many miles," answered the Swiss.

"We've been tramping ever since."

"We don't want them to call on us, if they're within sight of smoke," Bob explained to his chums. "Of course, they wouldn't handle us as they seem to have done with these chaps; but we don't want any shooting, if we can help it. I reckon we'll do without a fire. It's not cold since we left the hills."

"Good idea!" agreed Frank Richards. "We've got plenty of cold meat, and we don't need to cook."

"I say, I was going to make a jolly good supper," said Chunky Todgers. "There's game in this timber—"

"Bother your supper, Chunky! Leave it till to-morrow, and you can feed till you burst your crop!"

"Look here, Bob—"

"Br-r-r-r!" was Bob's answer.

And Chunky Todgers was to relinquish the vision of a glorious supper, which he had been looking forward to all day, and the party sat down to cold meat and corn-cakes, which, however, they ate with good appetites.

GOOD SAMARITANS!

BOB LAWLESS had taken a large buckskin bag from his saddle at the halt and fastened it to his belt when the schoolboys camped. It was a heavy bag, and both Gunten and Keller looked at it very curiously, probably guessing what it contained.

"How did you get on with that strike you made up in the hills?" asked Gunten suddenly. "You were working a placer—"

"First chop!" answered Bob cheerily. "We put in a week's hard work and cleared out the placer."

"You found dust?"

"I guess so—in fact, you know we did!" said Bob, looking at him. "You saw Yen Chin with some of our dust, I guess."

"And you've got it there?" asked Gunten.

"A thousand dollars worth!" answered Bob. "That was clear after we'd spent money on tools and things in the camp at Tucker's Bar. Not so bad a bag on a holiday, I reckon."

Gunten compressed his lips. There was bitter envy and malice in his eyes.

"You fellows have all the luck," he said sullenly. "We've had the worst."

"I dare say we each got what we deserved," said Bob dryly.

"We've had rotten luck all along," said Keller. "We lost our canoe and outfit on the rapids and had to spend money on horses. Now we've lost them."

Bob Lawless looked very thoughtful. In the buckskin bag there was gold-dust to the value of a thousand dollars, which was to be divided into two hundred dollars each for the five members of the party.

Frank Richards smiled as he read the expression in his Canadian cousin's face, and Vere Beauclerc smiled and nodded. They could guess Bob's thoughts.

"I suppose you galoots are cleared right out?" said Bob, after a short silence.

"Down to bedrock!" grunted Gunten. And Keller nodded dolorously.

Bob glanced at his comrades.

"What do you fellows say?" he asked. "We're going to divvy up the dust when we get home. What about letting these two galoots stand in to see them through?"

Chunky Todgers' eyes opened wide. Yen Chin shook his head emphatically. But there was assent from both Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc.

"You don't mean that?" asked Gunten.

"I do mean it," said Bob quietly. "Yen Chin and Chunky don't agree, I see that, but we three do, and you two fellows shall stand in equal with us three in six hundred dollars, if you like."

"And welcome!" said Frank Richards.

Beauclerc nodded.

"I guess we close on that," said Keller, with a grin. "I don't know what you're doing it for, but I agree. I owe money for my outfit at Thompson, and it will see me through."

Kern Gunten did not speak. There was a strange expression on his heavy face.

"Well, what do you say, Gunten?" asked Bob genially. "It was a windfall for us. We never expected to bag anything of the kind, of course. You've had hard luck and it will help you through."

Gunten shook his head.

"I don't want to touch your dust," he said deliberately. "Keller can do as he likes, but I shan't touch it."

Bob shrugged his shoulders.

"Suit yourself," he answered.

"Well, I guess you're a jay, Gunten!" exclaimed Keller. "I think it's jolly decent of these chaps, and I accept—with thanks, too. Don't be a silly ass! Your popper will make a row when you crawl in and tell him you're cleaned out, I know that. Take your chance while you can!"

"I guess I know my own business best," said Gunten.

And with that the subject dropped.

Gunten sat silent for some time with his eyes on the dark trees round the camp as he finished his supper. Suddenly he gave a start and jumped to his feet. He pointed excitedly to the shadowy wood.

"Look out!" he exclaimed.

Bob Lawless grasped his rifle at once, remembering the rustlers.

"What is it?" he asked.

"One of that gang that robbed us this morn-

ing!" said Gunten. "He was staring out from the thicket. He's gone!"

The schoolboys were all on their feet now, rifle in hand. But there came no sound from the timber, not even the rustling of a twig. The sun was gone now, and the dim twilight of the stars reigned on the prairie. In the timber all was darkness.

"By gum!" muttered Bob Lawless. "We shall have to keep our eyes peeled to-night. You sure you weren't mistaken, Gunten?"

"Quite sure!"

"I heard nothing," said Bob. "I reckon I'll take a look round before I turn in. You fellows keep a watch out."

Bob went into the timber, his eyes well about him and his rifle ready.

Gunten rose to his feet.

"I reckon I'll look round, too," he said.

"Better keep here," said Frank. "You're not armed."

"Lend me a gun."

"No lendee gun!" came at once from Yen Chin. "Guntee shootee old Bob velly likely."

"You heathen rascal!" roared Gunten.

"Me knowee Guntee. Velly bad egg. Oh, yes!"

Frank Richards smiled a little. He did not distrust Gunten to that extent, but, at the same time, he was not disposed to hand over his own weapon to the Swiss. He was not called upon to answer, however, for Gunten did not repeat his request, probably knowing that it would be refused.

"Come on, Keller," he said. "Let's have a look round."

"I'd rather stay here."

"Oh, don't be a fool! Come with me!"

Keller unwillingly rose and followed his comrade. They disappeared into the shadows of the timber. Yen Chin rose to his feet.

"Me lookee lound, too," he said.

"Sit down," answered Frank. "You'll lose yourself, kid! Stay where you are."

"Me wantee lookee lound!" persisted the little Chinese.

Yen Chin glided away into the timber, unheeding.

Frank Richards, Beauclerc, and Chunky Todgers remained in charge of the camp and the horses, waiting rather uneasily for the others to return. Bob Lawless came back before long.

"All serene!" he said. "I can't find any trace of anybody in the timber. I guess Gunten was mistaken. Where are they?"

"Gone to look, too," answered Frank.

"Silly duffers!" commented Bob. "We'd better stay up till they come in."

And Bob sat down on a log, his rifle on his knees and his eyes very sharply on the shadowy timber.

A PRECIOUS PAIR!

"WHAT'S the game, Gunten?" Keller asked the question sullenly when the two Swiss were a dozen yards from the camp.

"I'm not going into the wood in the dark. That rustler—"

Gunten broke in impatiently.

"Don't be a fool! There was no rustler."

"But—but you said—"

"I was fooling them, of course," muttered Gunten. "Those rustlers are thirty miles away."

I guess. They were going west when they left us."

Keller stared at his comrade in utter bewilderment.

"What did you want to give a false alarm for?"

"Oh, you're a jay!" said Gunten impatiently. "Look here, Keller, we both owe money for our outfit in Thompson, and we're cleaned out. We spent every cent on our new outfit after we lost the canoe, and now we've been robbed of the whole caboodle."

"I know that. But a whack in the gold-dust will help us out, and they've offered—"

"Hang them and their offers! I don't want shares in their dust! I want the lot!"

"What?"

"There's a thousand dollars in that bag," said Gunten, sinking his voice. "Think of that! It would see us through and give us plenty over."

"You fool!" muttered his companion. "They'd give us the trail-ropes again, as they did before, if we tried anything of the sort. There's five of them, armed, against us two."

Gunten smiled sourly.

"I'm not thinking of tackling them," he said. "That wouldn't do, anyway. We can't knock them on the head, and nothing short of that would be safe. But there's no reason why we shouldn't bag the dust. Bob Lawless keeps the bag tied to his belt. When he's asleep—"

"Well?"

"One cut of a knife would get the bag loose, without waking him, and then—"

"Oh, you're mad!" muttered Keller. "I dare say you could do that much. But how could you get away with it? They'll be watching the horses. They haven't forgotten the trick we served them before."

"I know that."

"Well, are you thinking of starting out on foot?" sneered Keller. "Suppose they didn't miss the bag till morning? Then they'd simply run us down."

"That's no good, of course. We've got to stick them for a supply of food before we leave them. We can't take that without being seen, and we can't take the horses. We're not going to light out with the dust."

Keller looked bewildered.

"Not light out! Then as soon as Bob Lawless misses the dust, do you think he won't know who's taken it?"

"Yes. He'll think of the rustler he thinks I saw in the thicket," said Gunten coolly.

"Oh!"

"That's why I pretended to see the man there. Now do you savvy?"

Keller shook his head.

"They may think of the rustler, but they're jolly certain to think of us, too. They'll search us to the skin."

"Of course they will. I've considered that. But we shan't have the dust about us. As soon as I get my hands on the bag I shall hide it. Easy enough to do that."

"Oh!" said Keller again.

"They can search us if they like; they'll find nothing. They'll have to take the trail tomorrow without the bag of dust. We shall go with them."

"And then—"

"After we've parted with them—we can work up a quarrel—we get back here and lift the dust," said Gunten coolly. "We can buy horses

at a settlement, and ride home with money in our pockets."

"By gum, it's a cinch—if you can get hold of the dust!" said Keller.

"I can do that. I guess I know how to work the rifle," said Gunten.

"Where will you hide the dust?" muttered Keller.

"I'm going to find a hollow tree before we get back to camp."

"Good!"

Keller's objections were overcome now. In the darkness under the timber the two young rascals proceeded to search for a hiding-place for the bag of gold-dust, and in a few minutes they found a hollow tree. Gunten thrust his arm into the hollow and felt around it.

"I guess this will do," he said. "We can stuff some brushwood in after the bag, and they'll never find it, even if they think of looking."

"Don't forget the tree."

"I guess I'll remember it," said Gunten. "Look at it—two forked branches covered with creepers. I shan't forget that. Let's get back."

The two Swiss returned to the camp on the edge of the timber.

"Oh, here they are!" said Bob Lawless, as Gunten and Keller came out into the starlight. "Seen anything?"

"I heard something," said Gunten calmly. "I'm pretty certain that there's somebody lurking in the wood."

"I heard a footstep," said Keller, backing up his companion's story.

"Mine perhaps," said Bob, laughing. "I reckon you were mistaken, Gunten."

"Better keep a watch to-night, all the same," said Gunten anxiously.

"You bet!" answered Bob. "Might lose our hosses if we don't."

Gunten affected not to see that allusion to the trick the two Swiss had played on a previous occasion.

"Time to turn in," he said, with a yawn. "I'm tired out. I reckon I shall sleep like a top to-night."

"Whack out the blankets, Franky," said Bob. "Lucky we've got a few spares. Where has that blessed heathen got to, I wonder?"

Gunten looked round quickly. He had not noticed the absence of Yen Chin.

"Has the heathen gone out?" he asked.

"The young ass went to look for your blessed rustler," said Frank Richards. "I'm afraid he'll get lost."

"If he does he can camp out in the timber till morning," said Bob. "No finding him in the dark. He shouldn't have gone."

Gunten's eyes glimmered. Yen Chin was the only member of the party of whose keenness he was in fear, and nothing would have suited his plans better than for the little Chinese to remain out of camp for the night. He made no remark, however.

The campers waited up some time for Yen Chin, but the Chinese did not appear.

"The young ass!" said Frank at last. "He would go. After all, it won't hurt him to sleep in the bush. It's not cold. Just as good as being here, except that he won't have his blanket."

"Blow him!" said Bob. "You fellows turn in; my first watch."

Chunky Todgers was already fast asleep and snoring. Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc

rolled themselves in their blankets to sleep, and the two Swiss followed their example.

Bob Lawless remained near the staked-out horses, on the watch.

At midnight he called Vere Beauclerc, who rose to take his turn of duty.

"Yen Chin come in?" asked Beauclerc.

"No."

"The young ass!" Beauclerc took his rifle, and paced to and fro in the darkness while he kept watch. Bob Lawless was very quickly in the land of dreams.

Darkness and silence reigned. In the darkness Beauclerc was unconscious of the fact that Gunten was moving silently, cautiously. He did not know that the Swiss, like a snake in the grass in nature as well as action, was crawling away into the timber. Black shadows hid the cunning Swiss as he moved, and when he crawled back some time later, Beauclerc was still unaware that Gunten had been out of camp.

MISSING!

MORNING dawned on the prairie. It was Frank who was keeping the last watch, and he called to his comrades as the sunlight strengthened on the plain, turning it into a sea of green and gold.

Bob Lawless sat up, yawned, and kicked Chunky Todgers in the ribs, and Chunky jumped up with a yell.

"That blessed Chinee come back?" asked Bob, looking round.

"No," answered Frank.

"Bother him! That means that we shall have to hunt for him before we take the trail!" growled Bob. "Here, wake up, Gunten! Wake up, Keller!"

The two Swiss sat up and rubbed their eyes. Bob cast an impatient look towards the timber. He had intended to take the trail early after a hasty cold breakfast. But Yen Chin could not be left behind.

"He's bound to find his way back now it's daylight," said Beauclerc.

"Unless something's happened to him," said Frank uneasily.

"He had his gun with him. He would have used it if he was in danger, and we should have heard it."

"Yes, that's so."

The party sat down to a cold breakfast, and they were just beginning when Bob Lawless suddenly started to his feet, with a loud and excited exclamation.

"Great gophers! The bag!"

"The bag!" repeated Frank.

Bob's hand was at his belt. The place was empty where he had slung the buckskin bag the previous night.

"It's gone!" he shouted.

"Gone!" yelled Chunky Todgers. "The gold-dust?"

"Yes."

"Oh, gum! But it can't be gone!"

"Must have come unfastened," said Beauclerc.

"How could it be gone, Bob? You'll find it in the grass."

Bob Lawless' eyes gleamed.

"It hasn't come unfastened," he said. "Look here! The strap's been cut clean through with a knife!"

"Great Scott!"

Gunten and Keller went on with their break-

fast, apparently unconscious of the looks the chums cast upon them.

"Gunten," said Bob, very quietly.

The Swiss looked up.

"Do you know anything about this?"

"What should I know?" said Gunten, with a sneer. "Do you think I've taken your bag of gold-dust?"

"Yes, to be candid, I do," answered Bob.

"It's been cut loose from my belt while I was asleep, and somebody's taken it."

Gunten shrugged his shoulders.

"You should have kept better watch," he said.

"That rustler has bagged it."

Bob fixed his eyes on Gunten.

"It's possible that there was a rustler in the timber last night," he said slowly. "Only you saw him, though. It's possible that he may have sneaked in through the grass and corralled my bag. But it's jolly unlikely. I may as well speak out plain, Gunten. I think you've got it, and I'm going to see."

"You can do as you like, of course," said Gunten slowly. "You're armed, and I'm not, so you can insult me as much as you choose, I suppose."

"If I'm doing you a wrong, I'm sorry. But I'm going to see whether you've got my dust, and that's flat—you and Keller!"

"You're welcome!"

Gunten and Keller held up their hands submissively, while Bob Lawless made a thorough search of them. The buckskin bag did not come to light, however. It certainly was not concealed about either of the two Swiss.

"Well?" said Gunten sneeringly, when Bob had finished.

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"You've not got it about you," said Bob. "If you took it, you've hidden it somewhere. Easy enough to crawl out of camp in the dark and hide it, I guess."

"If it was easy enough for me to crawl out unseen, it was easy for anyone to crawl in unseen," said Gunten. "I don't know anything about it. It looks to me as if that rustler I saw last night crept in and robbed you."

Bob wrinkled his brows. There was certainly reason in what the Swiss said.

"Better search," said Frank Richards abruptly.

Bob Lawless nodded, and the chums of Cedar Creek began a search for the missing buckskin bag. They extended the search to a good distance round the camp, among the trees and tangled thickets. But if the bag was hidden there, it was too well hidden for them to find it.

They returned to the camp at last, tired and angry. The two Swiss were still there, and they found Yen Chin sitting on a log, eating his breakfast.

"Oh, you've come back, then!" growled Bob Lawless.

"Turnee up like bad penny," said Yen Chin, grinning. "Old Bob in bad tempee this morning."

"The dust's been stolen."

"Velly bad," said Yen Chin. "P'l'aps Guntee stealee."

"Blest if I know!"

"Where have you been all night, Yen Chin?" asked Frank Richards.

"Walkee 'bout, and sleepee undel tlee," said the Chinese. "Allee light. Solly makee Flanky anxious. Oh, yes!"

"You didn't see anything of a rustler in the wood?"

"No see."

The chums ate their belated breakfast in glum spirits. The gold-dust had vanished, and there seemed no prospect of finding it. But naturally their suspicions lingered upon the Swiss.

"We'll stick here for the morning and hunt for it, anyway," said Bob. "If a rustler's bagged it and vamoosed, we shall never see it again, of course, but—" He paused.

"But if it's hidden in the timber, to be taken after we've gone, that's different," said Beauclerc.

"It won't be," said Bob grimly. "Gunten and Keller are going to keep in our company till we get back to Thompson Valley. They're not going to have any chance of coming back and taking it."

Keller started, but Gunten burst into a laugh.

"We'll be glad to travel with you," he said.

"You'll stay in camp for the present," said Bob. "Yen Chin, stay with them and see that they don't light out. If they try to vamoose, give them a charge from the shotgun in their legs."

"What you tinkee?" grinned the Chinese, and his look showed that he would not fail to carry out Bob's instructions.

"We'll help you hunt for the thing, if you like," said Keller.

Bob's answer was curt.

"I guess I don't trust you. Stay here."

And, leaving the two Swiss in charge of the Chinese, with the loaded shotgun on his knees, Frank Richards & Co. resumed their search for the missing dust. It was a discouraging search, for they knew all the time that the stolen bag

might be twenty miles away, if some unknown thief had taken it. The search was only founded upon their distrust of the Swiss.

Gunten and Keller were not without uneasiness as they waited in the camp. Well as the stolen buckskin bag had been hidden, it was barely possible that it might be found.

But when the sun was at the meridian, and the chums returned wearily to camp, their looks showed that they had been unsuccessful.

"Any luck?" asked Gunten, smiling.

"No!" snapped Bob.

They ate their midday meal almost in silence, Chunky Todgers giving a deep groan every now and then.

After the meal there was a consultation.

"We can't do any good by hanging it out here," said Bob glumly. "It's a case of easy come easy go. The dashed stuff's gone, and we may as well make up our minds to it. It's rotten, but it can't be helped."

Chunky groaned.

"We've only allowed ourselves time to get home before school begins, too," said Bob. "We can't afford to lose another day. What do you fellows say?"

"Better get on the trail," said Frank.

"And keep Gunten and Keller with us," added Beauclerc quietly.

"You bet!"

Upon that point the chums were determined, though their suspicion was less keen now. If the Swiss had taken the gold, they were not to be allowed a chance of returning to the timber and taking it from its hiding-place.

The horses were saddled, and the mule's pack being distributed among the other animals, Gunten and Keller rode double upon the animal. There were glum faces in the party as they set out on the trail.

THE PLOTTERS' PUNISHMENT!

FRANK RICHARDS & CO. took little heed of the two Swiss as they travelled on that day. Gunten and Keller looked gloomy as the afternoon waned into evening. They were looking for a chance to get away, but it had not come. They were, in fact, more or less prisoners, and they realised it.

Gunten had tried the resource of a quarrel, but that had failed him. The chums of Cedar Creek, half-suspecting his motive, refused to answer him. And when he became insulting a "lick" from Bob's trail-rope gave him a hint to be silent, and he was silent.

But the Swiss was growing desperate as mile after mile intervened between him and the timber left far behind. To recover the buckskin bag hidden in the tree he had to retrace the journey on foot, and that was no easy task. Indeed, after another day's journey, he was not sure that he would be able to find the timber-clump again in the wide prairie.

That night, at the latest, he had to escape. Then, with the gold-dust in his possession, he would be able to reach the settlements and pay his way home.

At sundown the party halted by a stream that murmured through low bushes and long grass.

The two Swiss sat sulkily on a knoll, while the chums camped and built a fire, and Bob and Frank and Beauclerc went to look for game. Chunky Todgers gathered brushwood for the fire, and Yen Chin was set to watch the two Swiss, with the shotgun ready.

Gunten and Keller gave him savage looks. To their amazement, after his comrades were out of sight, Yen Chin rose from the ground and walked away towards the stream. Gunten and Keller exchanged a rapid glance.

"The fool's forgotten us!" muttered Keller. "More likely fed-up with the job of watching us," grinned Gunten. "Now's our chance!"

Yen Chin was standing by the stream, twenty yards distant, looking with apparent interest into the glistening waters as they rippled by. He had his back to the two Swiss, who rose with great caution and tiptoed away in the opposite direction.

The Chinese did not turn his head.

Gladly enough would the Swiss have stolen a horse apiece, but Yen Chin was standing close by the animals, and so that was impossible without risking the shotgun. They were only too glad of the chance of escaping at all, and their hearts were beating fast as they stole away.

There was a yell from Chunky Todgers as he came back with his plump arms full of brushwood.

"Yen Chin, you silly heathen, you've let them go!"

Yen Chin looked round. Gunten and Keller had taken to their heels now, and were running hard, and he caught a last glimpse of them vanishing among the tall grass of the prairie.

"Gonee!" said Yen Chin calmly.

"You jay!" roared Chunky. "They've gone back for the dust. I'll bet you they have!"

"No findee, me tinkee!"

Chunky Todgers threw down the brushwood and stood for ten minutes telling Yen Chin what he thought of him. The little Chinese listened with a sleepy grin.

Chunky's tirade was still going strong when Frank Richards and his chums returned to the camp, well supplied with game for supper.

"Hallo! What's the row?" exclaimed Bob. "Where are the Swiss?"

"Gone!" howled Chunky. "The heathen let them loose!"

"Yen Chin, you born idiot—"

"No mattee," said Yen Chin. "Allee light!"

"We can run them down on horseback," said Frank Richards.

"In the dark?" grunted Bob.

"We know where they are heading for."

"What's the good? They won't go straight back there. They'll keep close till they know we're off the scene," said Bob. "Oh, that idiotic heathen! We oughtn't to have trusted him."

"Velly good to tusteee Chinese," said Yen Chin. "Me tellee you allee light. You losee gold-dust— you velly silly. Me findee."

"What!" yelled the whole party.

Yen Chin grinned and fumbled among his garments, and to the amazement of his comrades, produced the buckskin bag. Bob, almost gasping, pounced upon it and opened it. The gold-dust was there!

"Great gophers!" gasped Bob dazedly. "Here's the dust right enough! Was it you who lifted it, you monkey? Is this another of your heathen tricks? By gum, I've a jolly good mind to—"

"No playee tlick," said Yen Chin indignantly. "Me velly good boy."

"How did you get the dust, then?" asked Chunky Todgers, feasting his eyes upon it.

Yen Chin chuckled.

"Chinese velly clevee boy," he said. "Velly deep ole lascal, you bet! Oh, yes! Last night Gunttee and Kellee goey out. Pletend lookee for

bad man in timbel. Oh, yes! Me tinkee keepee eye on ole lascals. Oh, yes! Me goey, too!"

"You were watching them!" exclaimed Beandlere.

Yen Chin nodded, evidently in great enjoyment.

"Me watee. Keepee velly close, and watee and listen. Oh, yes! Heal Gunttee talkee to Kellee. Sayee steal gold-dust ffrom silly ole Bob, and hideoe in hollow tlee. Me stickee in wood, watee and watee."

"So that's why you didn't come back to camp?" said Frank in wonder.

"Allee light. Me watee and watee!" grinned the Chinese. "Latel on Gunttee stealee bag. Comee cleepce into wood, and hideoe in hollow tlee. Me say nuffin; no lettee Gunttee see. Oh, yes! Gunttee hideoe bag and goey back, cleepce likee snake. Me smiley. Goey to hollow tlee, takee out bag, and puttee back blushwood in hollow."

"My only hat!" murmured Frank.

"Lettee Gunttee tinkee bag hideoe allee light. What you tinkee? Me comee backee in morning, bag safee under jackee. What you tinkee? Me laugh velly muchee when pool ole Bob searchee for bag."

And Yen Chin roared. Frank Richards & Co. gave the Chinese very peculiar looks.

"You young rascal!" roared Bob, in measured tones. "You let me hunt all the morning for the bag. Why didn't you tell us?"

"Spoilee jokee on Gunttee," explained Yen Chin. "You savvy? Gunttee goey twenty milee back to take bag ffrom hollow tlee. No findee. Ha, ha!"

And he roared again.

The chums of Cedar Creek stared at one another, and then burst into a roar. They understood now. Yen Chin had allowed the two Swiss to escape on purpose, and they had twenty miles to tramp back on the rough prairie to find the gold-dust hidden in the hollow tree. When they arrived and found it was not there, their feelings could be better imagined than described.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Yen Chin joined in the roar of laughter.

"Good jokee on Gunttee. What you tinkee?" he grinned. "Goey tlam, tlam, tlam twenty milee, and lookee in hollow tlee and findee nothing! Me tinkee Gunttee and Kellee solly stealee. Oh, yes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of Cedar Creek camped in great spirits, and they burst into renewed laughter whenever they thought of the two rascals tramping mile after mile over the dark plains to find plunder that was not there.

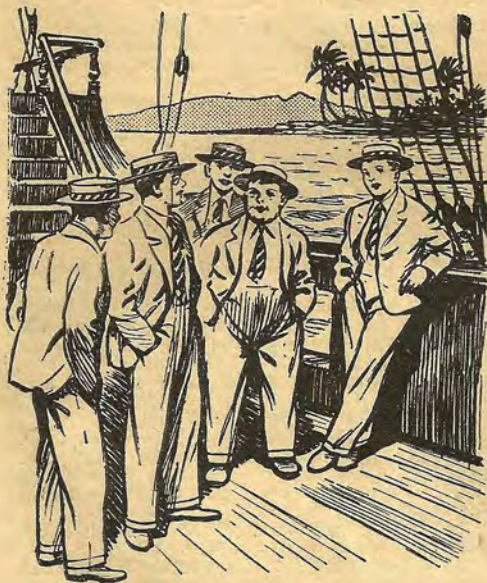
They felt that they could quite forgive Yen Chin for the trouble they had gone through in view of the peculiar punishment of Gunten and Keller.

The next day two disappointed and furious young rascals were tramping wearily on the prairie. Gunten and Keller were getting their punishment.

Frank Richards & Co., at the same time, were riding cheerily homeward, to arrive in great spirits, with a thousand dollars worth of gold-dust to show for their excursion into the wild North-West. But long after the chums of Cedar Creek had arrived at the Lawless Ranch, Gunten and Keller were still on the tramp, homeward bound.

Next Week: "GUNTEN GETS THE BOOT!"

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UP THE ORINOCO !

"THE Orinoco at last!" said Jack Drake. Trinidad had been left behind—the waters of the Gulf of Paria no longer washed round the timbers of the old Benbow.

Threading her way through the many islands of the Orinoco delta, the school ship plunged her prow in the yellow waters of the great river of Venezuela.

"So that's the Orinoco!" said Tuckey Toodles. "That's it."

Tuckey Toodles blinked at the great river, and the Guiana sierras in the distance, shimmering in the sun-blaze. The Benbow juniors were crowding the deck, looking about them with eager eyes.

"I can tell you fellows all about this," said Tuckey Toodles. "This is the place where Sir Thingummy What's-his-name—"

"Who?" asked Dick Rodney.

"Sir What's-his-name Thingummy—I forget the name exactly—"

"Sir Walter Raleigh, perhaps?" suggested Rodney, laughing.

"Yes, very likely—I'm not great on names. Well, he came here, you know, in the reign of Queen—Queen—"

"Victoria?" suggested Sawyer major.

"No, it wasn't Victoria," said Tuckey, wrinkling his fat brows in thought. "Couldn't have been Victoria. Queen Something—"

"Make it Elizabeth!" said Rodney.

"Yes, very likely. He came in search of El—El—El—something or other—"

"El Dorado?"

"Just so," pursued Toodles. "He never found it, and King James cut his head off. He never smiled again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You needn't cackle, you fellows," said Tuckey Toodles. "I'm telling you all this so that you'll know something about the place. I'm pretty

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THE TREASURE CLUE!

By Owen Conquest.

good at history. I don't mind telling you fellows. El Dorado means something in Spanish—"

"Not really?" asked Jack Drake, with deep sarcasm.

"Yes, really," answered Toodles, quite blind to the sarcasm. "It means something, you know, or something or other—"

"The Golden City, ass!"

"Exactly."

"We don't need Mr. Packe to take us in the history class," remarked Dick Rodney. "A talk with Toodles is ever so much better. We learn such a lot of new things."

"Well, I know about these things, you know," said Toodles modestly. "I don't brag of it—I just happen to be well up in history, that's all. I've been thinking, you chaps—"

"Gammon!"

"I have, really. I don't see why we shouldn't find a gold-mine on the Orinoco," said Toodles. "It would be no end of fun to go back to St. Winifred's with our pockets crammed with gold from the Spanish Main, wouldn't it? When we go ashore I'm jolly well going to have a look! I've asked Peg Slaney to show me that document of his—when he's had his grog. I've heard him bragging in the fo'c'sle about knowing where to find a treasure—but he only swore at me. He's an awful beast, you know. Wouldn't it be ripping to get on the track of El Dorado, like Sir Thingummy What-d'you-call-um?"

"Topping!" said Jack Drake, laughing. "Slaney isn't likely to show you his document, though—and probably there's nothing in it, if he did."

"Egan thinks there's a lot in it," remarked Daubeny of the Shell.

"Hallo, there the fellow is!" murmured Toodles.

The one-eyed seaman came along the deck and stopped near the group of juniors. He did not look at them. His single eye was turned upon the distant forest watchfully, as if seeking some familiar landmark.

The juniors glanced at him curiously.

When he had had his allowance of grog Peg Slaney was accustomed to talk freely of the mysterious document in his possession, which was supposed to contain the secret of a hidden treasure, and to brag of the wealth which was one day to be his.

Certainly, if there was anything in it, he would have done more wisely to keep his secret; the Spanish document had been heard of by everyone on board the Benbow, from the fo'c'sle to the captain's cabin.

But in his most reckless moments Slaney had

never offered to show the mysterious document—though, as it was written in Spanish, it would have been a mystery to most of the schoolboys.

Sawyer major gave the one-eyed seaman a gentle poke in the ribs, and Slaney turned quickly towards him, with a start.

"Thinking of your giddy buried treasure, old top?" asked Sawyer major affably.

Slaney squinted at him sullenly without answering.

"Of course, we're going to share it round when you find it," continued Sawyer. "We'll help you bring it on board when that time comes. I dare say the captain will lend us the long-boat. I suppose the quarter-boat wouldn't carry all the stuff, would it?"

Slaney scowled and lurched away without a word, and the humorist of the Fourth chuckled.

"The dear man looks like a budding millionaire, doesn't he?" he remarked. "I don't think I'd give him more than fourpence for his buried treasure. Hallo, there's the bell for dinner!"

And the juniors crowded into the dining-room, while the school ship surged on her way up the Orinoco.

DRAKE DECLINES!

DAUBENY of the Shell joined Jack Drake when lessons were over that day on the Benbow.

Daub had an unusually thoughtful expression on his face.

"I want you to come along to my cabin for a jaw, Drake," he said, rather abruptly.

"Right-ho!"

"We can have a talk over tea, you know. I—I suppose you'll want to bring Rodney?"

"Do you mind?"

"N-no; you'll tell him all about it anyhow, I suppose."

"About what?" asked Drake.

"What we're goin' to discuss."

"Oh, we're going to discuss something, are we?" asked Drake, looking curiously at the dandy of the Shell.

"Yes. It's really Egan's idea—"

Drake frowned.

He did not "pull" with the black sheep of the Shell.

"I don't think much of Egan or his ideas," he said bluntly. "If it's only that—"

"Well, give him a hearing, anyhow."

"Oh, all right!"

Daubeny walked away, and Drake joined his chum, Dick Rodney, under the awnings. They chatted and watched the distant sierras, as the Benbow surged on up the great river, till it was time to repair to Daub's study. Then they made their way to the Shell quarters.

They found Daubeny and Egan and Torrence in the study, and the Shell fellows greeted the Fourth Formers very civilly. Egan of the Shell evidently had his best manners on. He had never liked Daub's reconciliation with Jack Drake, and had done his best—or his worst—to prevent it; but just at present he seemed to desire to keep the peace all round.

Drake, who carried easy-going good nature rather to excess, was quite willing to accept the olive branch, and it was a cheery and good-tempered party that sat down to tea.

"The Benbow is going up as far as Tortola, I think," Egan remarked, after a time.

"Can she go as far?" asked Drake.

"I believe so. There'll be a trip on in a river steamer to Ciudad Bolivar later," said Egan.

"Never mind that now. We're getting near to the region where Sir Walter Raleigh fancied he was going to find the city of gold. There's been plenty of gold found in that region since his time."

"Lots."

"Are you thinking of looking for a gold-mine, like Tuckey Toodles?" asked Rodney, smiling.

"Not a mine," said Egan; "but I believe there's a treasure to be found, and I think we're the chaps to find it, if we stand together."

"That's the idea," said Daubeny, with a rather anxious look at Jack Drake. "If we all go into it together—"

"You're thinking of Peg Slaney's Spanish paper?"

"Yes."

"That's his, not ours," said Drake curtly.

"The question is, is it his?" said Egan. "We know what the nigger Tin Tacks has told us. He was servant to Daub's father when Sir George Daubeny was on the Orinoco, and he says that Peg Slaney robbed his master of a valuable Spanish document. Does that speak for itself? The document he brags about belonged to Daub's father."

Drake nodded.

"It's quite possible," he said.

"Well, then, as it was stolen from Daub's father, it's justifiable to get it off that rascal."

"So that's the idea?"

"Yes."

"Don't you agree, Drake?" asked Daubeny.

"No. There's no proof that Slaney's paper is the one that belonged to your father. It's likely enough, but you can't take the man's property without any proof."

Egan gritted his teeth.

"The proof's clear enough," he said. "Tin Tacks says—"

"Tin Tacks may be mistaken. And it's years since Sir George Daubeny was in this country. Suppose the document isn't the same—it would be robbery to take it off Slaney."

"I agree with that," said Dick Rodney quietly. "You want jolly clear proof before you rob a man, I should say."

Egan sneered.

"That means that you fellows won't come into the game?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"Keep out of it, then!" exclaimed Egan savagely. "My belief is that that paper belongs to Daub by rights, and Daub's a fool if he doesn't get hold of it. There's a treasure going for the fellow who's got the sense to bag it—and why should it be left to that drunken, squinting rascal Slaney?"

"If it's his—"

"The treasure can't be his, anyhow."

"Goodness knows to whom the treasure belongs, if it exists," said Drake. "We've no proof that it exists yet. But it doesn't belong to us any more than to Slaney."

"Every man for himself in a country like Venezuela," said Egan sourly. "Do you think there's a man in the country who wouldn't get his paws on it if he could—whether it belongs to him or not?"

"Very likely. There's a limit to that," answered Drake, rising from the table. "If that's the idea, I'm down on it. Prove that Slaney's paper was stolen from Daub's father, and I'm your man fast enough. Until then I'm leaving it alone. Come on, Rodney."

The two Fourth Formers quitted the cabin.

Egan cast a dark look after them. "I knew how it would be," he sneered. "I told you Drake wouldn't touch it, Daub—especially with that goody-goody cad Rodney with him. You were an ass to want him to hear a word about it."

Daubeny shifted uneasily. "He's right, you know," he muttered. "What rot! I tell you it's every man for himself in a half-civilised country like this. Your father made his pile here. How do you know how he made it?"

Daubeny flushed angrily. "Look here, Egan—" "Never mind Daub's father," broke in Torrence pacifically. "The question is, are we going in for the stunt without Drake?" "Yes, we are!" snapped Egan. "I am, at any rate—and if you fellows don't join in the risk you won't join in the loot, and that's flat!"

"I'm with you." "What about you, Daub?" Vernon Daubeny hesitated.

"You dropped all your cash on the races in Port of Spain," said Egan. "You owe money right and left on the ship, and you're hard up. And you turn up your nose at handling what's really your own."

"I'm with you," said Daubeny at last. "It's clear enough for me, and I'm with you, Egan."

"Good!" For a long time the three Shell fellows sat in the cabin in a haze of cigarette-smoke, with the door locked, discussing the plan of campaign. Right or wrong, Daubeny & Co. intended to gain possession of Peg Slaney's mysterious document—and now the only question that remained to be settled was how it was to be done. And that was the question that the three Shell fellows discussed long and earnestly—with the aid of innumerable cigarettes.

ROBBED!

"YOU want to see me, Mass' Daubeny?" Tin Tacks, the Barbadian coloured gentleman, looked into the cabin with his usual expansive grin on his black face. Tin Tacks' grin displayed a dazzling set of white teeth, which contrasted queerly with his ebony complexion.

"Yes; come in, quick!" muttered Daub. Daub was alone in his cabin. It was a couple of days since the meeting there, when Egan's "idea" had been expounded, and had been turned down by Drake and Rodney.

Since that time nothing had been said on the subject to the Fourth Formers. Jack Drake hoped that Daubeny had dropped the idea, but he did not know, for Vernon Daubeny had taken to avoiding him a good deal. During the stay at Trinidad the former rivals of the Benbow had become very good friends; but now Daub seemed quite under the influence of his old associates again.

It was the lure of gold that drew him on. Egan firmly believed in the reality of Peg Slaney's treasure, and Daub was hand-in-glove with the black sheep at last.

In those circumstances, he felt that the less he saw of Drake and Rodney the better.

He signed to Tin Tacks to come into the cabin, and closed the door hastily when the Barbadian was within. The sun was setting on the sierras of Venezuela. The Benbow was gliding up the wide Orinoco, under the guidance of a half-breed pilot.

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Tin Tacks looked rather oddly at his old master's son. There was a hurried mysteriousness in Daub's manner which surprised the negro and made him a little uneasy.

"You want 'peak to old Tin Tacks?" he asked. "Yes, yes. You used to serve my father when he was on the Orinoco, in the old days," said Daub.

"Yes. Him berry grand gentleman," said Tin Tacks.

"He was a good master to you?"

"Berry good." "You'd like to do me a service, for his sake?" "Me serve Mass' Jack," said Tin Tacks. "Me Mass' Jack's man. Any'ing else I do for you, Mass' Daub."

"Good. You remember that Slaney stole a paper from my father?" Tin Tacks' eyes gleamed.

"Me 'member." "He's got that paper still," said Daubeny.

"How Mass' Daub know?" "He's got a paper about a treasure, and it must be the same. I want you to help me get it from him."

Tin Tacks paused. "Me ask Mass' Jack," he said.

"Never mind Drake now!" exclaimed Daubeny irritably. "He's not in this. You're a strong fellow, and you can handle Slaney easily. If you could get him tippy you could get the paper off him without his even knowing it. Will you do it, Tin Tacks?"

Another long pause. Then the black Barbadian shook his head slowly.

"If Mass' Jack say so," he said at last. "Oh rot! He won't say so."

"Then Tin Tacks no do it. Mass' Jack know best."

Daubeny set his teeth. "Hang you! Get out of my cabin, then!" Tin Tacks quitted the cabin without another word, with a cloud on his black face.

A minute later, Egan of the Shell entered. There was an eager expression on his face.

"Well?" he asked quickly. "N.g.!" growled Daubeny. "The dashed nigger is too beastly particular. He won't take a hand unless Drake approves."

"Confound him!" "Well, what's to be done, then?" grunted Daubeny discontentedly. "I don't see how we're to handle Slaney. We don't want a row on the ship, and to be hauled up before Mr. Vavasour or Captain Topcastle. They'd make us give Slaney back his paper fast enough."

"I wouldn't care if I'd got a copy of it," said Egan.

"You couldn't read it."

"Fathead! I could copy it out, and get it translated afterwards. We only want to get a sight of it."

"Well, how?" "That dashed nigger could have done it for us easily enough—he's as strong as a horse," snarled Egan. "But we've got to manage it ourselves. The thing's got to be done—" Egan broke off suddenly. "Who the thunder's that?"

It was Torrence of the Shell who entered the cabin. He was grinning.

"Hallo! Whispering together like a pair of dashed conspirators in a play!" he said, laughing. "What's the stunt now?"

"We were talking about Slaney."

"You can see him, if you like," grinned

Torrence. "He's been at the rum again, and the boatswain has been sousing him with buckets of water."

"My hat! Where is he, then?"
 "They left him on deck—drunk as a lord!" grinned Torrence. "He will be up before the captain in the morning. If you'd like to see him he's there—abaft the foremast, snoring like a pig. Sawyer major had an idea of tarring his face, but old Piper cleared the fellows off."

Egan's eyes glittered.
 "Wait here!" he said.
 "But what—"

Egan left the cabin quickly. Torrence looked inquiringly at Vernon Daubeny.

"What—?" he began.
 "Quiet!" said Daub. "Just wait! Leave it to Egan. If he chooses to take the risk, more power to his elbow!"

Egan of the Shell stole softly on deck. A mist was rising from the Orinoco, obscuring the light of the stars that were coming out in the sky overhead. The sun was quite gone now. Forward there was a murmur of voices, and dimly aft he could make out some moving figures. But the Benbow juniors were all below.

Abaft the foremast, Peg Slaney lay extended on the deck.

The wretched man was quite unconscious. His besetting vice had found him again. More than once severe punishment had fallen upon him for it, but he could not resist the rum when he had a chance at it. He lay with his head resting on a canvas sack, sleeping in the warm, tropical night—the deck round him wet from the "sousing" the irate boatswain had given him in the vain attempt to bring him round.

Egan glanced round him with a white, guilty face. He was not observed. The mist was his friend.

He stepped softly to the side of the wretched seaman and stooped over him.

With fingers as nimble as those of a pick-pocket, he searched the insensible man.

In less than a minute his touch was upon a small leather pouch, secured to a lanyard round the one-eyed seaman's neck.

He whipped out his knife and cut the lanyard. The next moment the pouch was in his pocket, and he was scudding away.

More than once he had seen the squinting seaman take the precious document from the greasy pouch and pore over it. He knew that he had gained the prize.

With a white face, breathless but triumphant, Egan of the Shell darted into Daubeny's cabin. He closed the door hurriedly and locked it.

"Got it?"
 Daubeny panted out the words breathlessly.

"Yes!"
 "Oh gad!"

Egan opened the pouch. There was a breathless ejaculation from all three as the Spanish paper fell out on the table.

The trio pounced upon it together. Eagerly they looked at it in the light of the swinging lamp.

"The right paper this time!" said Egan huskily. "Look, there's the word 'oro.' That means gold. Now for it!"

"We can't read it."
 "Shut up a minute!"

Egan opened a fountain-pen and a pocket-book. With feverish haste he began copying out the Spanish of the mysterious document word for word, though of the words he understood hardly

more than one or two. His comrades watched him in breathless silence.

In a few minutes it was done. Egan put the copy into the pocket-book and placed the latter carefully in an inner pocket.

"What are you goin' to do with this now?" asked Daubeny, touching the one-eyed seaman's paper.

"Chuck it through the porthole!" suggested Torrence.

Egan shook his head.
 "Slaney can have that back," he said. "Better for him not to know that we have seen it. He won't be on his guard against us then. Once we get ashore he would be as likely as not to stick a knife into us if he knew we were after the treasure."

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Torrence.
 "Let him go on believing that he's got the secret all to himself," said Egan, with a sour grin.

He left the cabin. In a few minutes he returned—without the pouch.

"What have you done?" asked Daubeny.
 "It's in his pocket now," grinned Egan. "He's still as senseless as a log. He will find the lanyard cut, but most likely he'll think he did that while he was squiffy. Anyhow, he can't know anybody has seen his precious document. Now we've got to set to work on this."

And until bed-time that night the three Shell fellows, regardless of prep, were hard at work on the Spanish document, poring over Egan's copy with untiring attention, but getting very little nearer the hidden meaning of it.

THE CLUE!

DAUBENY & CO. had never been famous as "swots," but during the next couple of days they worked hard at Dr. Pankey's Spanish class.

Dr. Pankey was a good-natured gentleman, quite keen to impart his knowledge of that musical language to the Benbow juniors, and some of the fellows were keen on it, Spanish being the language of the country they were visiting in the school ship. Drake and Rodney and Esteourt and Troope were careful pupils, but they were outdone now by Daubeny & Co. The three slackers of the Shell seemed to have bucked up wonderfully.

They wanted to know exactly enough Spanish to translate the copy of Peg Slaney's document—no more.

As for Peg Slaney, he seemed to have no suspicion.

He had been put in irons for drunkenness by Captain Topcastle, and threatened with instant dismissal from the ship if such an outbreak

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occurred again. He went about the Benbow more sullenly than ever now, squinting more sourly at the juniors and the crew with his single eye.

But he did not give any more attention than usual to Daubeny & Co., and it was clear that he did not suspect them of possessing a copy of his treasured document. Certainly he must have found that the lanyard to the pouch had been cut through, but Slaney never knew quite what he did when the rum mastered him; certainly he did not guess what had actually happened.

Daub & Co. almost dismissed Slaney from their minds. They felt sure of getting ahead of him now. All their spare time was devoted to Spanish, with an eye to the mysterious document.

Dr. Pankey was always ready to help his pupils, and when one or another of the three brought him a word or a phrase to translate, he did so cheerfully and at once. By that means nearly all the document was translated piecemeal, and Daub & Co.'s smattering of Spanish enabled them to do the rest. The good doctor certainly had no suspicion that his kind instructions were helping the three young rascals in what amounted to a theft.

Whether the document had originally belonged to Daub's father was a question they could not answer with certainty. It was more than probable, and at that they had to leave it. Under Egan's lead neither Daub nor Torrence was inclined to be over-scrupulous.

Daub & Co. gave little heed to the magnificent scenery through which the Benbow was gliding as it progressed up the mighty river. They were thinking only of the prize that had at last fallen into their greedy hands. It was a happy hour for them when at last the Spanish paper lay before them, translated into English to the last word.

They read it again and again, with breathless eagerness, again and again comparing it with the Spanish original, to make sure that every word was correctly rendered. In English it ran:

"From Las Tablas three days in canoe on the Rio Catalina. Land at the stone bluffs, and follow the Indian path by the arrow-wood graves. The gold is buried under the great ceiba on the mesa."

Daubeny & Co. pored and pondered over that strange direction, discussing it eagerly.

"Even in English it's a bit of a twister," said Torrence. "Where is Las Tablas? Is it a town?"

"Yes, up the Orinoco, past Barrancas," said Egan. "I don't think the Rio Catalina is marked on the map. Lots of the tributaries of the Orinoco are not marked."

"Three days in a canoe," said Daubeny. "How the thump are we to get away from the Benbow for three days?"

"We've got to."

"We shall find the stone bluffs all right, I suppose," said Torrence, "and the Indian path. But what the thump is a tree grave? Sure that's right?"

"Quite right. We shall find all that out."

"And what's a mesa?"

"Sort of table-rock. I dare say it's a plain landmark in that region."

"But I say, it's a wild region on that bank of the Orinoco!" said Torrence. "Hardly a settlement anywhere. Indians and jaguars and smugglers—what they call contrabandistas—and

runaway revolutionists. I say, it doesn't sound much of a catch!"

Egan shrugged his shoulders.

"If you funk it you can stay on the Benbow," he said.

"I'm goin'!" said Daubeny determinedly. "We'll all go. We shall land at Las Tablas, anyhow, and we can dodge off an' hire a canoe and get away. We can risk a floggin' for this."

"Yes, rather!"

"The Redskins here have poisoned arrows," observed Torrence.

"Bother the Redskins and their poisoned arrows! We're goin' after the treasure."

Upon that point Egan and Daubeny had made up their minds, and Torrence made up his mind, too. All three of them had complete faith in the strange document. It seemed to them that they were almost touching the store of hidden gold with their fingers. How it had been placed there, how long it had lain buried under the ceiba-tree, they did not know—could not guess. But it was there. Doubtless it was a treasure buried during one of the Venezuelan revolutions, possibly accumulated by some president to take in his flight when a new claimant of power drove him out.

Eagerly now the bucks of the Shell watched the progress of the Benbow up the great South American river, following the same track as Sir Walter Raleigh in his quest of treasure in the far-off days of Queen Bess. They were glad when the school ship arrived at Barrancas, where the Rio Macareo joins the Orinoco, opposite the great island of Tortoia. There they sighted the river steamer that comes from Trinidad by way of Macareo, on its way to Bolivar, the capital. At Barrancas the Benbow cast her anchor.

The same night Tin Tacks looked into Cabin No. 8 in the Fourth.

"Dat squinting white trash gone, Mass' Jack!" he said.

Drake looked up.

"Slaney?" he asked.

"Yes, Mass' Jack. Him desert—go off in Indian canoe," said the black Barbadian. "Good riddance to bad rubbish, Mass' Jack, I tink."

"What's that?" It was Daubeny's voice in the passage. "Did you say that Slaney's gone, Tin Tacks?"

The black man glanced round.

"Yes, Mass' Daub. Cap'n Topcastle say him no come back—gib him cat-o-nine-tails if him show up on Benbow again."

"The villain! He's gone—after the treasure—" Daubeny checked himself as the juniors in Cabin No. 8 stared at him, and hurried away in search of Egan and Torrence to impart the news.

Rodney grinned.

"Slaney's bolting seems to have upset Daub," he remarked. "I suppose he's after the treasure—if there is a treasure. I don't see it matters."

Jack Drake did not reply, but his brow was very thoughtful. He remembered the talk in Daubeny's cabin, and he wondered whether the chums of the Shell had succeeded, after all, in getting knowledge of the treasure clue. If so, it seemed likely to serve them little, with the squinting seaman first in the field. That was precisely the subject of a wildly excited discussion that was now going on in Vernon Daubeny's cabin.



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THE ST. JIM'S EXPLORERS!

(Continued from page 22.)

ashore on the island. Anyhow, he was not to be seen.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "Ho vevy neably had me this time! Oh cwombs!"

He shivered. He had passed through the very valley of the shadow of death, and it seemed to him that he could still feel the savage grasp of the bandit dragging him down.

The dugout bumped on the swampy shore. Tom Merry & Co. scrambled out of the water, drenched and dripping. Arthur Augustus rose dizzily to his feet.

O Pepino looked at him, a grin on his black face. He spoke in Portuguese, incomprehensible to Arthur Augustus.

"Sowwy I can't understand you, Cucumbah," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head, "and still sowwyah that you can't understand me, as I should like to express my gwatitude for what you have done. How do you say you are feahfully gwateful in Portuguese, Tom Mewwy?"

"Blessed if I know," answered Tom. "But muito obrigado means much obliged."

"That's all wight! Muito obrigado, Mistah Cucumbah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Nada! Nada!" said O Pepino.

"Anybody know what he means by nada, deah boys?"

"It means nothing," said Tom. "Pepino's saying that what he has done is nothing."

"Oh, I see! Bai Jove, it may be nothin' to him, but it was somethin' to me!" said Arthur Augustus. "He has saved me f'rom bein' drownded like a wat in a twap! Bai Jove! What does he want now?"

Arthur Augustus was about to step ashore. But a big black hand touched his arm, restraining him.

"Meu senhor!" said O Pepino. "Meu patroa!"

"Guess that one, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"He's calling you his lord and master!" he answered.

"Bai Jove!"

The big black hand pressed on Gussy's shoulder and he sat down again. He blinked at O Pepino.

"It's all right, Gussy!" said Tom, laughing.

"It's because you got him away from the alligator. That's why he was following us home. He's attached himself to you instead of your wallet—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"O senhor Um Olho meu senhor, meu patroa!" said O Pepino.

"Mister One-Eye, my lord, my master!" translated Tom.

"Oh cwikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's going to take you home in the dugout, Gussy!" grinned Blake. "We common persons, who are not lords and masters, have got to hoof it to the quinta. Ta-ta!"

"Bai Jove!"

O Pepino pushed off and paddled down the Preto. Tom Merry & Co. had to tramp down the bank to reach the quinta, their canoe being at the bottom of the river. It was a tired party that arrived, at last, at the Quinta da Silva.

"No news of old Conway," said Arthur Augustus the next day to his friends, "and that means that I am goin' to look for him up the Pweto! But—"

Arthur Augustus paused thoughtfully. "It will be feahfully wisky, and I am not suah that I ought to take you fellows."

To which six voices replied in unison:

"Fathead!"

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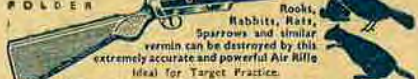
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