

THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S IN A THRILLING ADVENTURE!

THE
GEM
2^d

*Gussy's
Wild
Man!*





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.

"Regular Reader," of Cheshire, writes:

At last! The chance I've been waiting for! The unbelievable has happened; you've actually been proven wrong. But you'd better be a man and own up to it instead of stalling—see? You've said Tom Merry is the handsomest boy in the Shell, also the best cricketer, whereas if you had read the first Talbot series closely you would have seen it stated explicitly that Talbot is the handsomest fellow and as good as Tom Merry with the bat or Fatty Wynn with the ball. If you don't print this you're a funk! YAH!

ANSWER: Form varies; looks are a matter of opinion. I think Tom Merry is the handsomest fellow in the Junior School, but some might plump for Talbot—with strong support from readers like yourself! I agree Talbot is as good as Merry with the bat; but Fatty Wynn can beat all-comers with the ball. You thought you had me "middle stump," didn't you?

Betty Field, of Ludlow, writes:

Why can't we have the early adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. back in the GEM?

Is St. Jim's a real school? What is the average height of a Fourth Former?

How can you "Answer Back" in London when you are abroad?

ANSWER: The Editor tells me that Greyfriars stories may soon be appearing in the GEM again.

Well, this is a real answer; I mean to say, I must be somebody, mustn't I? But then I might be Peter Pan, mightn't I? The average height of the Fourth Formers is 5 ft. 3 in.

I took a huge batch of letters abroad with me. Readers whose answers have been delayed, please accept my humblest apologies, but I'm going over their questions with the utmost care every spare minute I get.

Moore Kitchener, of Wyhen, Coventry, writes:

I have made a new type of lighter-than-air machine. It's really a marvellous invention, but will require financial support. What would you do? Where does Skimpole live? I jolly well think he is the brainiest chap in the school!

ANSWER: This is rather a "heavy" problem, not to be dismissed as though it were "light as air." "Raising the wind" sufficiently for your purpose may raise a "storm" of protest among your pals—if they are called upon to contribute! How big is your "screw"—I mean, your salary? If you are still at school you may have to wait till you can finance your invention yourself before

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you can "spread your wings." Skimpole wrote a 10,000-word letter of thanks, but when he began to read it I took refuge in "flight"!

Miss G. M. C., of Holt Wood, Oxshott, writes:

Are you allowed pets at St. Jim's? If so, what is yours?

Is St. Jim's named after anybody?

Is a reader allowed to write more than once?

ANSWER: We keep what pets we please, provided permission as to suitability is obtained first from the headmaster. I haven't one at present. "Pets" like Grundy or Trimble, of course, are in a class by themselves, and don't have to be taken out with a collar on! Saint James gave St. Jim's its patronymic. Write as often as you like.

Miss B. L. P., of Belfast, Ireland, writes:

Why does Gussy speak the way he does? Why doesn't Martin Clifford write about some of Gussy's love affairs? Have Kildare, Levison, Cardew, D'Arcy, Merry, Lowther, Manners, and you any sisters? Is St. Jim's near Cliff House? Do you like girls?

ANSWER: As I have explained before, Gussy has an impediment in his speech. Martin Clifford has already written about several of Gussy's love affairs. That's not to say he "loves" to write about nothing else! Only Levison of your list boasts a "sis." She goes to Cliff House, which is not near St. Jim's. Yes, I like girls—though I guess I'm no "lady-killer"!

"Donald," of Exeter, Devon, writes:

Now, "Johnny Knowall," answer these, if you can!

(1) What are the words of the music played as a signature tune to Music Hall on the radio, namely "The Spice of Life"?

(2) What make of film does Manners use in his camera?

(3) Who presses D'Arcy's trousers for him?

ANSWER:

(1) I'm not allowed to print the words of songs, the copyright of which belongs to the publishers.

(2) I'm not allowed to advertise particular makes of film—though Manners, being patriotic, says that for snapshots British films will help you to "click"!

(3) Mr. Wigge, of Rylcombe, presses and does minor repairs to Gussy's "clobber."



TOM MERRY PULLS TRIGGER!

TOM MERRY awoke.

Something had brushed by him as he slept and, light as the touch was, it had been sufficient to awaken him. Camping in the forest, in the wilds of Brazil, he slept more lightly than in the old dormitory at St. Jim's.

He lifted his head from the bundle of leaves that formed his pillow and peered round him in the darkness.

There was no sound in the camp of the St. Jim's juniors, under the vast forest branches on the bank of the Rio Preto—the Black River of Brazil.

Dimly Tom could make out the forms of his comrades, wrapped in slumber. Manners and Lowther lay near him. A little farther, on the other side, was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Then came Blake, and Herries, and Digby.

Near at hand, fast asleep, his head resting on his arm, was Gaston Moutarde, the French trader, his rifle by his side.

Of the other member of the party—O Pepino, the black man—Tom could see nothing. O Pepino was on the watch, somewhere near the dark trees.

At a little distance, the waters of the Rio Preto flowed, glimmering in the bright stars of South America. Far out on the river was a black mass—the Ilha dos Macacos, or Island of Monkeys, to which the St. Jim's fellows were to cross at dawn. But it was far from dawn yet.

Tom Merry rose on one

elbow, his other hand going to his rifle. What had awakened him he did not know, but he was sure that something had brushed by him.

Danger lurked in every shadow in that remote recess of the wilderness of the back country of Brazil. Jaguars and pumas and coiling anacondas were in the forest, and possibly wandering Caraya Indians, or some of the "banda" of Joao Rabeira, the Brazilian bandit. Tom did not mean to close his eyes again till he was sure; yet he could see and hear nothing to alarm him.

There was no camp-fire in the St. Jim's camp. Cold as the night was, after a day of blazing heat, Gaston had not ventured to light a fire, to betray the camp to hostile, watchful eyes. Only a glimmer of the starlight on the river penetrated under the heavy branches.

But Tom gave a sudden start, and the blood thrilled to his heart. He caught a greenish glimmer of light within six or seven feet of him. Two gleaming eyes scintillated in the gloom.

Of the creature to whom they belonged he could see nothing. But those two eyes, like balls of fire, gleamed in the dusk over Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he lay in slumber.

Tom Merry's heart beat for a few moments almost to suffocation. But he kept his head. His grasp closed hard on his rifle.

Now he realised why he had not seen the animal that was crouching close by the swell of

St. Jim's. It was a black puma, invisible in the darkness. Even now he knew that it was there he could hardly make out the outlines of the sinuous form of the great cat of the forest.

The puma's head was raised—looking at him!

It was the puma, creep-

**Full-of-Thrills Story of the
Latest Adventures of Tom
Merry & Co. in Brazil by
MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

ing from the forest so stealthily that even O Pepino on the watch had seen and heard nothing, that had brushed by him lightly in passing. Death had passed him in that moment unknown. And he knew, with a shudder, that it was his own movement that had startled the puma and caused it to raise its head from its destined victim, and that otherwise the jaws would already have fastened on D'Arcy as he slept! The black, cat-like head, with its burning eyes, was over the still form of the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus could not have stirred without touching it.

For a long moment Tom was motionless, the cold sweat on his face. There was a movement in the sinuous black body. Whether the puma was about to seize the sleeper under its jaws or to spring, Tom did not know. But as it quivered into motion he whipped up his rifle and thrust it forward.

The muzzle almost touched the puma's head as he pulled the trigger.

Bang!

The rifle-shot rang like thunder in the silence of the forest.

A fearful scream rang with the shot.

One of the glimmering greenish eyes was blotted out, like a candle suddenly extinguished.

Only that one screaming yell came from the puma. Then it thudded down—dead!

The shot could hardly have missed at such a range, and Tom Merry's hand had been steady, his head cool, in spite of his fast-beating heart. The bullet had crashed fairly into the puma's brain, killing it instantly.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy woke as a heavy weight fell across him. "What the dooce are you up to, you fellows?"

Every fellow had awakened at the roar of the rifle. Manners and Lowther, Blake and Herries and Digby were on their feet, grasping their machetes. Quicker still was Gaston Moutarde, rifle in hand. From the blackness under the trees O Pepino came running.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Gaston. "Vat—"

"What the thump—" exclaimed Blake.

"Bai Jove! Gewwoff!" hooted Arthur Augustus. "Has somebody fallen ovah me, or what? If you are larkin', Lowthah, you ass, I—"

Tom Merry had jumped towards the swell of St. Jim's, his rifle clubbed. Arthur Augustus was in reach of the terrible monster's claws, and had the puma only been wounded, his peril would have been terrible. But the black body that lay across him was still!

"Oh!" panted Tom.

"What—" shouted Manners.

"Will you gewwoff!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "What the dooce do you mean by pinnin' me down like this? Look heah—"

Arthur Augustus was trying to struggle up. Then, as he suddenly saw what it was that lay across him, he gave a wild yell.

"Oh cwikey!"

"All serene, Gussy!" panted Tom. "All right, old man—"

O Pepino came racing up.

"Men patrao!" he panted. "Senhor Um Olho!"

O Pepino dragged the puma off the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh cwikey!" repeated Arthur Augustus faintly.

Blake and Herries gave him a hand up. The swell of St. Jim's staggered to his feet, staring at the dead puma.

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"Bai Jove!" he stuttered. "I thought it was one of you fellows larking. Oh cwumps! Is that a jaguah?"

"A puma, I think," said Tom.

"Mon Dieu!" said Gaston Moutarde. "Some-run has had ze escape verree narrow! Zat is one close shave! Zat puma he come for his suppair, isn't it. And you shoot him altogether dead, mon cher."

"Thank goodness I woke up!" said Tom, with a shudder.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, shivering. "Bai Jove! I wathah expected it to be excitin' in the fowest, you fellows, but this is weally a little too much of a good thing! I shall be vewy glad when we have found old Conway and got out of this. I am vewy much obliged to you, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

Gaston Moutarde made a gesture to the black man and O Pepino dragged away the body of the puma and tipped it into the Rio Preto.

A minute later the hardy French trader was asleep again. But it was not so easy for Tom Merry & Co. to sleep. There were wakeful eyes in the St. Jim's camp when the light of dawn came glimmering through the forest branches.

THE ENEMY ON THE ISLAND!

"OH!" gasped Jack Blake, as the hat spun on his head.

From the island in the river rolled the report of a rifle.

It was a bright morning on the Rio Preto.

Tom Merry & Co. had turned out at dawn and eaten their breakfast of dried meat, washed down by water. The St. Jim's adventurers were on hard tack. Since Joao Rabeira had sent their canoe to destruction in the Black River, with most of their outfit, they had been on foot, with little more than they stood up in, but as determined as ever to push on in search of Gussy's brother, lost in the Brazilian wilds.

Now they were standing on the river bank, looking across at the thickly-wooded island far out in the river.

Somewhere on the Ilha dos Macacos was buried the treasure of Potomayo, the revolutionary general who had fled to the wilds, only to meet his fate at the hands of the savage Indians of the desert.

It was exciting enough to the schoolboys to think of the buried treasure on the island in the Rio Preto. But they were thinking chiefly of Lord Conway, who had found the hiding-place of Potomayo's treasure, and had since been hunted for his life by Joao Rabeira and his gang of bandits. They hoped, they believed, that Gussy's brother was still living, lost in the Brazilian wilds; and somehow, they hoped, at least, they were going to find him and rescue him.

Looking towards the wooded island, across the arm of the Preto, they were wondering whether any of Joao's outcast gang were there now.

Joao Rabeira had been wounded, and seven of his outcast banda wiped out in the ambush in the swamp into which Gaston had led them. But it was likely that there were others on the island; for the bandits knew as much of the treasure of Potomayo as Tom Merry & Co. knew, and it was probable that the river-island was their headquarters while they searched for it.

It was for that reason that Gaston had burned no camp-fire in the night. If there were enemies on the island he did not wish to warn them. But the shot that had killed the puma must have

rung and echoed far across the river and reached the ears of any who were on the island.

That the island, silent and desolate as it looked, was tenanted was suddenly made clear by the ring of a rifle shot and the bullet that whizzed by Blake's head as he stood on the bank.

There were men on the island, and that shot in the night had put them on their guard. No doubt they had been watching the bank from the island since the first gleam of dawn, and now they had spotted the St. Jim's party.

"Zat you take cover!" shouted Gaston.

But the juniors did not need telling that.

They were down on their faces in a moment, in cover of the bushes and trailing roots on the river bank.

"O inimigo!" said O Pepino. "Os inimigos!"

"What does that mean, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I nevah can wemembah that wotten Portuguese somehow! And whenever I wemembah, it doesn't seem to mean what it ought to mean."

"The enemy," said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah, I wemembah now! Amigo is a twiend—inimigo is an enemy. But what does he mean by O and os?"

"Fathead! O is 'the,' singular; os is 'the,' plural. That's the umpteenth-hundred-and-umpteenth time I've told you, ass!"

"All these beastly singulahs and pluwal's are a wowwy!" said Arthur Augustus. "But, of course, I can recollect them all wight, except when I happen to forget them, you know! I should get on pwetty well with Portuguese if only the words did not slip my memowry."

Crack! came from the island again. The juniors were in good cover, but the bullet went close; it crashed on the trunk of a big ceiba-tree behind them. Then came two reports almost blended into one, and the bullet whizzed over them as they lay.

"Dois!" said O Pepino.

"What does Cucumbah mean by doysh, Tom Mewwy?"

"Two!" answered Tom.

"Zere are two on ze island, I zink!" said Gaston Moutarde. "Zey know zat ve are here! Quand meme, I zink perhaps I take zem by ze surprise."

"We're goin' to the island, Mistah Mustard?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Mais oui! Yes, mon petit!" answered the French trader.

"But Lord Conway cannot be on the island, as the bandits are there," said Monty Lowther. "We know that he must have been there once, as he located the loot of that jolly old revolutionist, Potomayo. Gussy had that in the letter he got at St. Jim's. But that was a good many weeks ago, sir."

Gaston nodded.

"Vrai!" he answered. "Zat is true! I do not zink zat my friend Lord he is on ze island; if he was zere, his life is not worth zat of a mosquito. Somewhere in ze wilderness my friend Lord he is lost. North, south, east, west—who shall say? We make ze headquarter on ze island while zat we search for my friend Lord."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "It will be a stwong posish if we have any more twouble with the Indians. And we can see that those wascals do not get hold of the treasure if we are on the spot. They haven't found it yet, but there's no doubt that they've been combin' the island for it evah since they found out that old Conway had discovahed it."

"C'est ca!" said Gaston. "Also, ve go to finish viz ze bandits! Zen it will be all left!"

"All wight!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Crack, crack! rang again from the island. Again two rifles were heard. The juniors had no doubt that only two of the gang had been left on the Ilha dos Macacos when Joao had gathered his savage crew to attack the St. Jim's party down the Preto.

"But how—" asked Tom.

The arm of the Preto that separated the Island of Monkeys from the southern bank, where the St. Jim's fellows lay, was at least sixty yards across. How they were to reach the island without a craft of any kind was rather a mystery to the juniors. Certainly they could all swim, but the boldest swimmer might have hesitated to plunge into a river infested by alligators.

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"Yaas, how are we goin' to get acwoss, Mistah Mustard?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Gaston smiled.

"Zat is all left!" he said. "You leave zat to me—Gaston Moutarde. Now, you stay here while zat I leave you, and you stir not one step, as you say in your language. Viz ze rifles you keep up a fire on ze island—you pop off ze shot every now and zen to keep zose rascals occupy! Comprennez?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Leaving the juniors in cover on the bank, Gaston disappeared into the shady forest.

What his intention was Tom Merry & Co. did not know. But Gaston was in command, and they carried out his instructions. There were two rifles in the party, carried by Tom Merry and George Herries, who were the best shots among the juniors. They opened fire on the island as soon as Gaston was gone.

As the sun rose higher in the sky shots rang from both sides of the water, spattering in leaves and branches on the island and on the bank.

The shooting was random enough, for not so much as a finger was to be seen on either side, and both parties were careful to keep in cover. But the juniors understood that they were to keep the attention of the bandits fixed upon that spot while the French trader was engaged elsewhere.

It was half an hour later that they suddenly sighted Gaston Moutarde again.

"Bai Jove! Look!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

He pointed up the river.

At a distance up the Rio Preto, coming down with the current, was a large log—one of the many masses of driftwood that floated on the river. On that log Gaston Moutarde sat astride, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,646.

his rifle under his arm, steering the log with a branch held in the other hand.

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom. "That's the game!"

"Bom!" murmured O Pepino, grinning.

"Keep going with that rifle, Tom!" said Manners. "If those rotters spot Mr. Mustard on that log they'll get him."

Tom Merry and Herries fired bullets into the jungly wood on the island. From the island the fire was returned. So long as the two bandits remained in their present position, facing the southern bank, they could not deal with the French trader on the log floating down from the west, and it was evident that they had not seen him so far and did not suspect his stratagem. In keen anxiety to keep their attention occupied, the juniors fired fast. And Monty Lowther put his hat on the end of a long stick and lifted it in the bushes.

Crack-ack! Two shots from the island sounded like one, and two bullets tore through the hat.

It dropped from the stick with two holes through it, and Lowther chuckled.

"Lucky my head wasn't in it—what?" he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Those blightahs think they have got one of us!"

"There goes Gaston," murmured Blake.

The French trader on the floating log disappeared into the thickets that grew out into the water on the western end of the Ilha dos Macacos. Gaston had reached the island in the Preto.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS!

TOM MERRY & CO. watched anxiously through the bushes on the bank.

Gaston was on the island unknown to the two members of Joao Rabeira's banda who were there, still loosing off bullets at the bank where the juniors lay in cover.

He had made his landing unseen by them, but now that he was getting to close quarters it was one man against two.

Tom Merry and Herries still kept up their fire, but they were careful to pitch their bullets low, into the island bank. Random shots whizzing over the island might have meant danger to Gaston now that he was ashore. The Ilha dos Macacos was thick with wood and jungle, and they could see nothing but the wall of tropical greenery facing the water. But from the wall of greenery still came the cracking of the bandits' rifles. Evidently they did not suspect, so far, that an enemy had landed and was behind them on the island.

The long minutes as they passed were packed with tense anxiety for the St. Jim's juniors.

They could picture the French trader threading his way stealthily through the trees and thickets on the island, to take the bandits in the rear. But they could see nothing of him, and had they not glimpsed him as he floated down on the log, would never have dreamed that he was on the island at all.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "I wondah—"

Crack, crack! came from the wall of green on the Ilha dos Macacos. Then crack! came another shot from another rifle.

"Gaston!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Hark!" gasped Dig.

From the island came a loud, fearful cry. It was the cry of a man struck by a bullet.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,646.

"Oh, look!" gasped Herries.

The wall of green on the island parted as a stumbling figure fell from its cover. A wild-looking, black-bearded bravo stumbled down and fell headlong into the river.

The juniors saw him struggling feebly as he was washed down by the current. He disappeared from their sight amid the cluttered driftwood on the rolling waters of the Preto. They were glad to see no more of him; only too well they knew that the alligators were watchful for their prey!

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He wiped a spot of perspiration from his forehead.

"Bom!" grinned O Pepino.

The merciless warfare of the sertao had no horrors for O Pepino. He grinned from ear to ear, showing all his dazzling white teeth as the wretched bandit went to his death.

"Listen!" muttered Dig.

From the island came no more firing. There was a crashing and rustling in the thickets, and the juniors knew the meaning of it. Gaston had reached the enemy from behind and shot down one of them; now he was engaged in a struggle with the other, hand to hand.

Tom Merry dropped his rifle-butt. Careless of cover now, the St. Jim's juniors stared across at the island. The French trader, at grips with the bandit, was fighting for life or death, and they could not help him—they could not reach him—they could only wait in the deadliest anxiety. The river rolled between, and the jaws of the alligators were ready for a swimmer.

It was but the space of a minute—but never had a minute seemed so age-long to the juniors. Behind that screen of tropical growths on the island two men were locked in a death-grapple—only one could survive. Was it to be Gaston or the desperate and ferocious outcast of the desert with whom he was grappling?

Suddenly there was a crash in the bush on the island shore. A body came crashing through to splash in the river.

The juniors glimpsed it as it splashed into the Preto—and it was not Gaston!

"Thank goodness Mistah Mustard's all wight!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"O inimigo-morto!" grinned O Pepino.

Again the bush on the island parted, and a hand was waved. The smiling face of Monsieur Montarde looked across at the juniors. He waved to them and they waved back.

Faintly, from the distance, his voice called across the stretch of water:

"Allons! Zat is all left! Now you come to ze island, mes enfants! Je vous dis, it is all left!"

Then he shouted in Portuguese. O Pepino waved a big black hand and shouted back:

"Sim, senhor!"

Gaston disappeared. He was in possession of the Ilha dos Macacos now, and it only remained for the juniors to join him there. How they were going to join him they did not yet know.

"Venha, meu patroa!" said O Pepino to Arthur Augustus, and the swell of St. Jim's followed him, the other fellows following on.

O Pepino led them through the forest up the bank of the Preto. At a distance above the island he stopped on the bank and spoke to the juniors in Portuguese, of which they understood little. But they understood his actions.

The black man began to gather logs that

floated by the bank, cutting long, ropy lianas with his machete to bind them together.

"Oh!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "A waft!"

"A raft!" said Tom. "That's the idea! Go it!"

And the juniors lent O Pepino their assistance. Five or six floating tree-trunks were gathered in, and the lianas bound them together as securely as hempen rope.

In an hour the raft was completed. Tom Merry & Co. embarked upon it with their packs, and O Pepino, with a long branch stripped of twigs and leaves, which he used as a punt-pole, pushed off from the shore.

"This is all wight!" remarked Arthur Augustus, as he sat down on the raft. "Wight as wain! Bai Jove, you know, we could build a waft to twavel down the wivah back to the quinta, when we have found old Conway. Evah so much easiah than foot-sloggin' through these beastly fowstah and swamps."

"We haven't found old Conway yet," murmured Blake.

"We're goin' to, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "We're goin' to find old Conway and go back to Wio with our pockets stuffed with Potomayo's tuesday! And I can tell you fellows that I shall not be sowwy to see St. Jim's again aftah this expewience in the wilds of Bwazil!"

O Pepino punted the raft out into the middle of the Preto. Then the current carried it down to the island. The middle of the river was too deep for punting, but every now and then the black man shoved at some mass of driftwood to keep the raft on its course. Slowly but surely it approached the western end of the river-island, and there the juniors saw Gaston again, waiting for them to land.

The raft bumped into swampy thickets, and the St. Jim's juniors scrambled ashore. They landed at last on the island where Lord Conway, months ago, had located the treasure of Potomayo.

THE CANOE ON THE PRETO!

"O INIMIGO!" came the voice of O Pepino. It was late in the afternoon.

The black man was perched on a branch high up a big ceiba-tree that grew in the centre of the Ilha dos Macacos.

From that perch Cucumber was keeping watch in all directions.

Under the vast branches of the ceiba was a roughly built choupana, or hut, which had evidently been the dwelling of Joao Rabeira's gang while they had been on the island; perhaps of Gussy's brother, Lord Conway, before them.

It was built of poles cut from the forest, and consisted merely of four corner-posts, with a wide, slanting roof, like many of the huts that the juniors had seen in the back-country of Brazil.

It was a shelter from sun and rain, and that was all. Such as it was, the St. Jim's party had taken possession of it.

In the hut they had found supplies of food and ammunition, and other things that came in useful—especially blankets. Their own blankets had gone down with their canoe, since when they had felt the cold keenly enough at night.

Everything in the choupana was in an indescribably dirty state—the bandits had not been cleanly in their habits. Tom Merry & Co. had spent most of the day, so far, cleaning out their new quarters and washing the blankets in the river. Bedding was now sprawling over the bushes to dry in the hot sun.

But they had found time to explore the island to some extent. All over the Ilha dos Macacos they found traces of its former occupants—paths cut through the thickets by machetes, and here and there an excavation in the swampy soil. It was plain that Joao Rabeira's gang had combed the island pretty thoroughly for the hidden treasure of O General Potomayo. But it was a large island and covered with tropical growths as with a thick carpet, and such a search was an almost endless task.

The juniors thought it probable that Lord Conway, when he had camped on the island, had made the discovery by some happy chance. Certainly, there seemed to be no clue to the hiding-place, and it was certain that the bandits had searched and searched for long weeks without success. In his letter to Gussy, Lord Conway had said only that the treasure was buried on the Ilha dos Macacos; but where it was buried was a secret known only to the man who was lost in the trackless wilderness.

The call of O Pepino from the high branch of the ceiba put the St. Jim's juniors on the alert at once. Rifles were grasped, and all eyes turned up towards the black man on watch in the high tree-top.

"O inimigo" meant "The enemy"—but whether it was some band of wandering Caraya Indians, or some remnant of the bandit gang, the juniors did not know. Gaston shouted up in Portuguese, and Cucumber replied in the same tongue.

The juniors caught the words "Joao Rabeira" and "canoa."

"By gum! That villain again—in a canoe!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove! I wathah thought we were done with that wottah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Gaston knocked him ovah with a bullet in the swamp, and there was only one othah man left of his gang—"

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom.

Gaston Moutarde, rifle in hand, was already threading his way through the thickets towards the eastern end of the island—the end that faced down the river. The juniors had not understood all that O Pepino called from the tree, but Gaston's action apprised them that Joao Rabeira was coming up the river in a canoe.

No doubt he was returning to his headquarters on the island, unaware that it was now in the hands of his enemies. The bandit had evidently survived the wound he had received in the fight in the swamp; but it was likely that it had delayed him. Anyhow, the St. Jim's party were first in the field, and the Ilha dos Macacos was in their possession now.

They hurried after Gaston, and reached the edge of the island facing down the river. There was a stretch of swamp, thick with mosquito haunted bush, between them and the water. Looking across it, they saw the canoe—a small dugout—coming up slowly against the sluggish current.

A swarthy half-breed was paddling it, standing to the paddle. Another man lay in the canoe, only partly seen; but the juniors had a glimpse

of an evil face, with a knife-cut on the dark cheek—and they knew Joao Rabeira.

That swarthy, savage face was unusually pale, and the glinting black eyes were hollow. Joao had been hit hard, though he had survived the French trader's bullet. The canoa was still at a distance, when the juniors saw the wounded bandit raise his head, and stare hard towards the island, and speak to the man with the paddle, though he was too distant for them to hear the sound of his voice.

The half-breed ceased to paddle, only keeping the head of the dugout to the current, while he also stared hard and suspiciously towards the island.

"Bai Jove! Looks as if they think we are heah!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"The brute's as suspicious as a jaguar," said Tom. "If they come on, we can get hold of that scoundrel and keep him safe."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The canoe remained motionless on the sluggish current, both the bandits staring suspiciously at the Ilha dos Macacos. It was clear that something had alarmed them.

"Think they know that we're here, Mister Mustard?" asked Blake.

Gaston smiled.

"Pour cela, non!" he answered. "But I zink zat Joao expect his men to be on ze watch, and to make some signal zat it is all left."

"Oh! Of course!" exclaimed Tom. "If the men he left here were here still, they would be on the look-out for him."

"C'est ca!" assented the French trader.

"They're not coming on," said Manners. "They guess that there's something wrong—look!"

Joao's head sank out of sight below the gunwale of the dugout. The half-breed flashed his paddle, and the canoe whirled round for retreat down the river.

Evidently, from the absence of some expected signal from his associates on the island, Joao had taken the alarm. The juniors had hoped that the rascal would walk into the trap, to be kept a prisoner while they pursued their search for Lord Conway. But it was clear that the bandit, wary as a jaguar of the forest, was too alert for that.

"They're going!" said Blake. "Oh!" he added in a startled ejaculation, as Gaston's rifle rang beside him.

Crack!

The juniors caught their breath as the half-breed in the dugout pitched over, dropping his paddle, and splashed into the Preto.

Crack, crack, crack!

Gaston was firing fast, aiming the bullets into the dugout. His face was set and grim.

The juniors watched in silence. Every bullet struck the canoe, drifting slowly down the current of the Preto. But Joao, only too well aware now that enemies were on the island, kept well down in cover, and the drifting of the canoe carried him farther and farther from the trader's rifle. Bullet after bullet crashed on the dugout.

The juniors, watching it breathlessly as it drifted unguided, saw it eddy to the bank, and bump into swampy shallows. For a moment it seemed about to capsize.

But a dusky hand was seen, grasping the paddle that the half-breed had dropped. Only a hand and an arm could be seen as Joao steered the dugout off the bank. Twice the French trader fired at that arm, but the range was too long for

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,646.

so small an object, though both bullets went close. The canoe eddied out again into the main stream of the Preto. It grew smaller in the distance as it drifted on, till a winding turn in the river hid it from sight.

Gaston shrugged his shoulders.

"Allons! Zat rascal he have as many lives as ze cat!" he said. "But I zink perhaps zat ve are zrough viz Joao Rabeira."

Tom Merry & Co. had little doubt of it. The last of Joao's desperate gang had fallen, and Joao himself was sorely wounded, and it seemed to them that they were done with their savage enemy at last.

DANGER!

TOM MERRY & CO. were hard at work during the days that followed.

After the long and weary journey, which had ended at last at the Ilha dos Macacos, they had a day's rest—which was mostly, however, spent in making their quarters more habitable.

But the following day the search for Gussy's missing brother commenced in earnest.

Communication with the banks of the Preto was easy, for in a creek near the choupana they had found a canoe that had been used by the bandits.

But now that they faced the task which had brought them into the very heart of the wilds of unexplored Brazil, the juniors realised only too clearly the extent of it, and the almost hopeless outlook.

All they knew of the movements of Lord Conway, since he had disappeared into the wilderness, was that he had visited the Ilha dos Macacos, where he had located the buried loot of the revolutionary general, Potomayo.

Since then he had been hunted by Joao Rabeira and his bandits—and it seemed unlikely that with the bandits on the island he would have remained in its proximity.

Most probable, it seemed that he would have made an attempt to strike down the river, and get back to civilisation. But if he had made that attempt, he had failed, or he would have arrived at the Quinta da Silva long before the juniors started up the Black River in search of him.

Whether some bullet from the bandits' rifles had laid him low—whether he had fallen into the hands of the wild Carayas—whether he had sunk down from hunger and exhaustion—alone in the wilds, after the last of his party had left him, they could not guess. They hoped and believed that he was still living; but if he still lived, it was clear that he was unable, for reasons unknown to them, to follow the guidance of the river back to Gaston's quinta.

But wherever he was, and whatever his fate, the search for him in the boundless, trackless wilds seemed hopeless—except that the juniors were determined not to give up hope.

With the Ilha dos Macacos as centre and camp, Gaston planned expeditions in various directions, day after day.

There were no Indian settlements near the spot, but many were to be found within a day's march, and some of the natives were friendly, and known to the Frenchman, who had traded with them.

From these, Gaston was in hope of picking up news.

Apart from that, there seemed little hope, unless chance befriended the searchers. Near the Ilha, they could not hope to see anything of the man they sought, for Lord Conway would have

avoided the headquarters of the bandits. But it was a good centre for making expeditions, as they could not tell in what direction he had gone after leaving the island—north or south, east or west.

For day after day the quest continued, Gaston always leading the way, and generally taking three or four of the juniors with him, leaving the others in garrison on the island with O Pepino.

Strong and sturdy as they were, the schoolboys were not equal to the constant fatigue, which seemed to make no impression on the hardy trader.

Generally the searchers returned to camp at nightfall, but twice the expeditions lasted over two or three days, going far afield.

But the result was always the same.

From friendly Indians, when he encountered them, Gaston was able to get no news of a wandering white man, and in the forests and the swamps there was no sign.

"Like hunting for a needle in a jolly old haystack, Gussy!" said Blake one morning, when the canoe pushed off with Gaston for a new trip.

In the canoe with the French trader were Tom Merry, Mariners and Lowther, who were to accompany him on the trail, and O Pepino, who was to bring the canoe back to the island after landing them.

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "But we're goin' to find old Conway somehow."

To which Blake, Herries and Dig made no reply. There was little hope of success in the quest, and they knew it.

The previous day, the four Fourth Formers had been on the trail with Gaston, and now it was their turn to remain in garrison on the river island.

"It's wathah wotten, stickin' heah doin' nothin', you fellows!" said Arthur Augustus, with a sigh.

"We can't keep it up every day, as Mister Mustard does," said Blake. "And we've got to guard the camp."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas," he agreed. "But it's wotten, all the same. I would wathah be huntin' for old Conway."

They watched the party land on the northern bank, and disappear into the forest. Then the black man paddled the canoe back to the island, and slid it into the creek near the choupana.

The four juniors went to rest in their hammocks. O Pepino kept watch and ward. There was always danger of a visit from wandering Carayas; and though nothing had been seen of Joao Rabeira since the day he had drifted down the Preto in the dugout, they had not forgotten him.

It was a couple of hours later that O Pepino looked into the choupana, under the slanting roof of which the hammocks were slung, and held up a big black hand in sign of caution.

The juniors slid from the hammocks at once, and Herries grasped his rifle, the other three catching up their machetes.

"Nao! Nao!" whispered O Pepino, pointing to the rifle. "Nunca!"

"That means you're not to shoot, Hewwies, old chap!" said Arthur Augustus. "Mistah Mustard warned us not to fish if it could be helped. There may be Indians in the fowest, and they would heah."

"But what—" asked Dig.

"O canoa!" breathed O Pepino.

"That means a canoe!"

O Pepino pointed up the river. The juniors understood that a canoe was coming down the Rio Preto.

"That wottah Wabeiwah again!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Rabeira?" asked Blake.

O Pepino shook his woolly head.

"O Caraya!" he answered.

"Indians!" breathed Blake.

The juniors followed O Pepino from the hut.

They were careful to keep in cover of the trees that screened them from the river. Watching from cover, they saw a dugout canoe coming down the stream, paddled by a single Indian. On his bronze face were cut circles that looked strangely like eyes at a distance.

The canoe was still distant, coming downstream. Whether the savage was heading for the island, or intending to pass it, they could not tell.

"All wight if he passes us!" whispered Arthur Augustus. "But—if he lands on the island—"

He did not finish the sentence. All the juniors knew what would be the result if the savage landed on the island and discovered them there.

Once already, in their perilous journey up the Rio Preto, they had fallen in with a band of savage Carayas, and narrowly escaped with their lives. If the savage carried the news of their presence to his tribe, it meant an attack by the wild Carayas.

Their hearts beat painfully as they watched the Indian in the canoe.

It came on slowly with the sluggish current, assisted by a few strokes of the paddle. O Pepino cast one anxious glance round him to make sure that the juniors were well hidden in cover. If the Indian intended to pass the island, and if he saw nothing to excite his suspicions, all was well. Otherwise—the black hand of O Pepino gripped the handle of his sharp machete.

Nearer and nearer came the canoe. Then with a stroke of the paddle, the Indian turned it in towards the island.

Blake caught his breath.

"He's going to land!" he muttered.

The juniors watched in silence. O Pepino's eyes were glittering from his black face.

The canoe slid among the thickets growing half in the water.

The Caraya stepped on the swampy shore. The juniors, hardly breathing in their cover, watched him.

They saw him suddenly start and bend his head, staring at the earth, and knew that his keen eyes had picked up a footprint in the soft soil. Up to that moment his manner had been careless, but in an instant he was on the alert like a wild animal. His black eyes shot a suspicious stare towards the trees that hid the juniors, and he snatched bow and arrow from the canoe. In a second he had fitted arrow to bow, and the string was drawn to his bronze ear.

Herries pushed the rifle forward. O Pepino grasped his arm.

"Nao!" he breathed. "Nao!"

Evidently the black man feared that other Indians might be within hearing of a shot. His movement, slight as it was, made a faint rustle in the thicket, that reached the keen ears of the savage standing by the canoe.

Instantly the bow twanged, and the arrow whizzed into the thicket that hid the St. Jim's juniors.

There was a gasp from Blake. The savage could not see them; but that faint rustle had guided him, and the arrow passed within an

inch of Jack Blake's head, piercing the crown of his hat, and knocking it backwards off his head.

"Oh!" gasped Blake.

O Pepino's black arm swept through the air. There was a sudden flash in the sunlight as the machete flew from his hand. With amazing swiftness, the savage was fitting another arrow to his bow; but before the arrow could fly, the whizzing machete reached him.

The juniors saw it crash on the bronze chest, and the Caraya toppled back with a shriek and fell beside his canoe.

"Oh cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

As swift as the Caraya's arrow, O Pepino leaped from cover.

The Indian was struggling up, his dark face ablaze with ferocity, when the negro reached him, and they grappled on the water's edge. For a long minute the juniors, as if spellbound, watched a wild, desperate struggle; but the strength of the black man was twice that of the Redman, and suddenly the combatants parted, the Caraya crashing headlong into the water.

The juniors ran forward. The savage had splashed in and sunk under the surface; he came up three or four yards from the shore of the island.

But it was only for a moment that the wild, fierce face was seen above the surface of the Black River. A yell was choked by bubbling water as the Indian disappeared—dragged down by the jaws of an alligator.

O Pepino picked up his machete. He watched the widening circles on the river where the savage had disappeared; and then turned to the juniors with a grin that showed every gleaming tooth in his head.

"Bom!" he said.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus faintly.

It was the warfare of the sertao, grim and merciless. O Pepino wiped his machete and pulled the Indian's dugout up the shore, to conceal it in the creek. The juniors watched him in silence. Then he resumed his watch, while the schoolboys, still in silence, returned to their hammocks in the choupana.

THE FOOTPRINT IN THE FOREST!

"OH!" exclaimed Tom Merry. He scrambled up.

Manners and Lowther looked round.

"What—" they exclaimed together.

"Look!" said Tom breathlessly.

Gaston Moutarde, who was leading the way through the forest, machete in hand, stopped and looked back.

"Vat is zat?" he called. "Vhy do you stop?"

"It's a footprint!" called back Tom.

"Mon Dieu!"

With a bound the French trader came back to where the juniors stood.

It was late in the hot tropical day. By winding ways in the forest, they had covered more than ten miles from the Rio Preto. Tom Merry, catching his foot in a trailing liana, stumbled and fell, and his hands, as he threw them out to save himself, sank into a mass of rotten vegetation, stirring up evil smells. It was then that he saw the footprint, clearly marked in the soft, rotting mass, only a foot from him.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Gaston as he bent and stared at it. "Zat is ze foot of a white man!"

The Shell fellows did not need telling that. It was the track of a booted foot that had sunk into the soft mass. It was no Indian of the

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,646.

forest; it was a white man who had trodden there.

Tom Merry, grasping his rifle, cast quick glances round into the shadowy, encircling forest.

"Rabeira!" he exclaimed.

That was the first thought in the minds of the three juniors. But Gaston shook his head.

"Non!" he answered.

"One of his gang?" asked Manners.

Again the French trader shook his head.

"I zink zat ze banda zey are finish," he said. "Of zat banda of seclerats, zere is only Rabeira zat remain—and zis footstep, he is not Rabeira's! Pour cela, non!"

"But what other white man—" began Lowther.

He broke off suddenly. It was for a white man that they were searching, with little hope, in the wilderness!

"Oh!" exclaimed Manners. "If it's possible—"

Gaston's eyes were gleaming as he examined the footprint. The juniors could see that he was excited. They watched him measure the print with his hand, and he muttered to himself excitedly in French.

"Pas possible! Pas possible!" he repeated. "Mais, mon Dieu!" He looked up at the eager faces of the juniors. "Voyez!" he said. "Look! So far as we know, zere is no white man but Rabeira and ourselves in zis wilderness, and one ozzet, perhaps. It is not ze foot of Rabeira zat make zis sign; ze foot of zat bandit is twice so large, n'est-ce-pas?"

"That's true," said Tom.

His heart beat quickly. It was a man's footprint, but it was nothing like the size of the bandit's foot. It was the track of a smaller man, or a man with a smaller foot, that was clear.

"I zink," went on Gaston softly, "zat zat footprint is ze same size as ze footprint of my friend Lord. Many times have I seen him when Lord stay viz me, chez moi, at ze quinta. Ze man zat pass by zis way, he have ze foot ze same size as Lord."

"Oh gun!" murmured Monty Lowther.

The juniors looked at one another.

It seemed too good to be true—too much good fortune to be hoped for. And yet it was what they had hoped for—what they had almost expected. If Lord Conway was still living, as they were determined to believe, he was somewhere in the vast forests that lay about the upper waters of the Rio Preto; and what was more likely than that his tracks had been left in many places? Startling as it was, it was not, after all, so surprising that they should have stumbled on the track of a man who for long weeks and months had been wandering in the forests.

"Oh, if only it was Lord Conway!" said Tom, with a deep breath. "What ripping luck!"

Gaston smiled.

"Zat would be tip of a top!" he agreed. "Perhaps oui, perhaps non! Nous verrons; we shall see! But it is verree strange, isn't it?"

"How do you mean?" asked Tom. He could see that something had struck the French trader which had escaped his own attention.

"Zat is ze track of ze right foot," said Gaston.

"But where is ze track of ze left?"

"Oh!" said Tom.

The juniors bent and scanned the ground. Deep and clear, the print of the right boot was to be seen. But there was no trace of the left,



Tom Merry's heart beat almost to suffocation as he saw the black puma, its eyes gleaming in the dark, crouching close by Arthur Augustus.

They stared blankly. It looked for the moment as if a one-legged man had trodden there.

"Voilà!" exclaimed Gaston suddenly.

With his hand he traced a faint indentation where the track of the left foot should have been, judging by the position of the right.

It was the sign of the left foot, but so faint that it required a careful scrutiny to detect it.

"Je comprends," said the French trader. "I understand. Vous voyez—you see zat ze right foot he is deeply mark. Zat man zrow ze weight on ze right leg. On ze left he zrow no weight. Ze left leg he is damage."

"Oh, that's it!" exclaimed Tom. "A lame man."

"C'est ca! Zat man he have ze left leg damage," said Gaston. "Perhaps he have one wound in zat leg. Et voyez—look again." He pointed to a deep, round hole in the soft soil close by the faint imprint of the left foot. "You see—un baton!"

"He walked with a stick?" said Tom.

"Zat is so!"

"By gum!" said Manners, with a deep breath. "Are we on the track at last, you fellows? If old Conway was injured—with a gammy leg, walking with a stick—that may be why he never tried his luck at getting back down the river."

"It looks jolly like it," said Lowther.

"Poor old Conway—dot-and-carry-one in these awful forests!" said Tom. "But if only we're on the track at last!"

"How old is that footprint, Mr. Mustard?" asked Manners. "I suppose you can judge, more or less?"

Monsieur Moutarde nodded.

"It is not so verree old," he said. "I zink it is hier—yesterday—zat ze man pass zis vay; perhaps zis morning."

"And if we can follow up the track," exclaimed Tom—"if we can pick up sign and follow him, we—"

"C'est ca!" said Gaston. "Zat is vat we s'all try to do, mon petit. All ozzer zings have ze go-by, as you say in your language, while zat we try to follow us zis track!"

To the juniors there was no further sign to be seen.

They were Scouts at St. Jim's, and good Scouts, but this was beyond them. But Gaston Moutarde, who had hunted with the Indians in the Brazilian forests, was as keen and wary as the keenest Caraya in picking up sign. If there was sign to be found, Tom Merry & Co. did not doubt that the keen-eyed French trader would find it.

But it was not easy.

That stretch of rotting vegetation had taken and retained the footprint of the man who had trodden there. But round it was hard ground, retaining little or nothing in the way of sign.

But if there were no footprints there was other sign to be found—a broken branch, a cut mass of lianas—and slowly but surely Gaston tracked the way the lame man had limped through the forest.

But it was slow work, and the sun was sinking deeper in the west, dark shadows stealing over the forest, deeper and darker.

It had been arranged with the garrison of the

Ilha dos Macacos that the party would return at sunset. But now, as the sun sank over the distant mountains, they were still more than ten miles from the banks of the Rio Preto, and it was impossible to think of returning and abandoning the trail they had so fortunately discovered.

The dark was coming, when it would be impracticable to follow it farther; but in the morning, with the light of day, there was hope of tracking the trail to its end.

In the falling dusk they came on a soft and swampy patch where the lame man had trodden, and once more they saw his trail clearly—the deeply imprinted right foot, the lightly falling left, and the hole pierced in the earth by the end of the stick on which he had leaned.

Gaston stood looking down at the sign in the gathering shadows, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther waited for him to speak.

"We're not going back?" asked Tom at last, as the French trader stood silent and thoughtful. Gaston shook his head.

"Pas possible," he answered slowly. "If zis is, as I hope, ze track of my friend Lord, we shall follow it to a finish, when zat ze morning comes vunce again. We cannot return to ze island till we know, and on ze Ilha dos Macacos zey must wait."

"One of us—" said Tom. He was thinking of the anxiety of the garrison on the island if the party did not return at the time appointed.

Gaston smiled, and shook his head again.

"You would lose ze way in ze forest, mon garcon," he answered. "Zat is not possible."

Tom was silent. He knew that Monsieur Montarde was right.

"Zey may be anxious on ze island," said Gaston. "But, after all, it is only to wait, and when zat we return we may have ze good news for zem. Zey have ze order not to leave ze island—zat is all left. Zey must wait."

"We camp here, then?" asked Monty Lowther. Gaston nodded.

"Mais oui—but yes!" he answered.

It was evidently the only thing to be done. To abandon the trail when there was still a chance of finding the lost man in the wilderness was not to be thought of. And, as the brief tropical twilight deepened to darkness, the party camped for the night, with the hope that, when daylight came again, they would follow up the trail and find in some nook of the wilderness the man they had come so far to seek.

THE WATCHERS OF THE ISLAND!

"O SENHOR e tarde!" said Cucumber.

"What does that mean, Blake, deah boy?"

"Cucumber means that the boss is late, fat-head!"

"If that is all it is all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "But—"

Sunset was fading out on the Rio Preto. The four juniors on the island were watching the river-bank anxiously at the spot where Gaston's party had landed that morning, and where they were expected to reappear at sunset. But there was no sign of the party returning.

All had been quiet on the Ilha dos Macacos since the visit of the wandering Caraya. No other Indians had been seen; there had been no alarm. Now the long hot day was ending, and every minute the juniors expected to hear from the bank the signal of Gaston's whistle for the

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,646.

canoe to be sent across. But as the sunset faded into dark there came no signal.

Blake and his comrades could not help feeling anxious.

There might be a dozen causes for delay—some slight accident in the forest, or a need for making a wide detour to avoid an enemy, or even the possibility that the searchers had found some sign of the man they were seeking. But there were a thousand perils in the wilderness, and any one of them might have materialised. Four faces were clouded on the Island of Monkeys when night set in and there was no sign of their friends.

O Pepino, with a cheery black face, set about broiling fish caught in the river for supper. So long as "Mr. One-Eye," as he called Arthur Augustus, was safe O Pepino was satisfied. Moreover, he knew better even than the juniors did the innumerable delays that might have occurred to a party traversing the primeval forest.

"If they're only late—" said Herries, breaking a long silence as the juniors ate their supper, seated on logs in front of the choupana.

"No good thinking of anything else," said Blake uneasily.

"Indians!" muttered Dig. "We've seen nothing of them since that man in the dugout this morning—but—"

"We should have heard firing."

"Not if they're too far off."

"A hundred things may have happened to keep them late," said Arthur Augustus slowly. "But—"

"I dare say we shall hear Gaston's whistle any minute," said Blake. "It's no good fancying things until we know."

"Wathah not! But—" Arthur Augustus broke off, with a worried brow.

Supper was finished, but there was no signal whistle from the dark bank of the Preto.

Under the shining stars the juniors stood watching the bank for a long time as the night grew older. But at midnight there was still no signal, and they went at last to their hammocks in the choupana.

O Pepino kept watch and ward, sitting before the open front of the hut, leaning against one of the corner-posts.

But there was little sleep for Blake & Co. that night. Eyes closed, only to open again.

During the night, which seemed endlessly long to the garrison of the Ilha dos Macacos, there was no signal from the bank, no sound of the whistle to call the canoe across.

With the first glimmer of dawn the juniors turned out. In the rising sunlight they scanned the dark wooded bank of the Preto. That dark, grim forest had swallowed their friends from sight twenty-four hours ago, and it hid their fate.

Where were Gaston Montarde, Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther? Perhaps even then tramping back through the forest—perhaps only a hundred yards away, to appear any moment—perhaps long miles distant and encompassed by some deadly peril; it was impossible to say.

Cucumber cooked the breakfast. His cheerful black face showed no sign of uneasiness. O Pepino was not given to thinking much, or to worrying at all. Arthur Augustus spoke to him at last.

"What do you think has happened to Monsieur Montarde, Cucumbah?"

Of that question O Pepino understood only the name of the French trader, and the translation

of his own, by which Gussy called him. But he could guess its purport.

"O senhor e tarde!" he answered as before.

"Nao inimigo?" asked Arthur Augustus, putting it in Portuguese, meaning "Not an enemy?"

Cucumber shrugged brawny black shoulders.

"Talvez!" he said.

"Bothah! What does that mean, Blake?"

"It means perhaps!" grunted Blake.

"Oh cwumbs!"

After breakfast the juniors watched the bank again. But there was no sign of their friends, and they knew now that something must have caused a very long and unforeseen delay, or else disaster had occurred. It was impossible to tell which, and they could only hope for the best.

"This won't do, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus at last. "If they don't turn up this mornin' some of us will have to go to look for them."

Blake shook his head.

"Orders not to leave the island," he answered.

"We're bound to play up, Gussy. Mr. Mustard's in command and he's given his orders."

"Yaas; but—"

"Suppose they came back and found us gone?" said Herries. "We've got to play up, Gussy."

"Of course, we could not all go," agreed Arthur Augustus. "You fellows can stay on the island while I go—"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Chump!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"How many yards would you cover before you lost yourself?" demanded Blake. "We've come out here to find old Conway—not to go hunting for a silly ass who's lost himself for nothing."

"Wats! Probably I could pick up their twail; I am a pretty good scout."

"Idiot!" said the three juniors together.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"We might send Cucumber," said Blake.

"But Gaston's ordered him not to leave the island, and we can't go against that. He will do anything you tell him, Gussy, but you can't tell him to disregard his master's orders."

"Certainly not," said Arthur Augustus. "But for that I should take him with me."

"You're not going, ass!"

"You'd only lose yourself, fathead!"

"Chuck it, dunderhead!"

"If they do not return by noon I shall go and look for them," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"You had better hand me the wife, Hewwies."

"I'll watch it!" said George Herries.

"Now, look here, Gussy," said Jack Blake impressively, "we've got orders to wait here, and we're going to wait—see? If they don't come back in three or four days that will alter the case, and we shall have to consider what to do. At present we're going to toe the line. And if I see you trying to get off this island I shall yank you back by your silly ears!"

"I should uttably wefuse to be yanked back by my silly yahs—I mean, by my yahs, Blake! I considah—"

"Fathead!"

"I wepeat—"

"Chuck it!"

Arthur Augustus chuckled it. But his noble mind was made up. If Gaston and his party did not return by noon he was going in search of

them, leaving the other fellows with Cucumber to garrison the island. On that point Arthur Augustus was determined, and there was no room for argument.

The morning passed slowly on the island in the Rio Preto. And when the blazing sun of noon was burning down on the Brazilian forests there was still no sign of the party returning. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a wary eye, and a wary eyeglass, on his comrades, quietly prepared for action.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS KNOWS BEST!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY sat under a shady tree, fanning his heated face with a palm-leaf. In the burning heat of the tropical noon there was nothing for it but to sit in the shade and rest.

Blake, Herries, and Digby had gone to the hammocks under the shade of the slanting roof of the choupana. O Pepino lay in the shade; but if he slept, it was with one eye open. Cucumber had his full share of South American laziness, but in watching over the safety of Senhor Um Olho, or Mr. One-Eye, he forgot that he was lazy.

"Gussy!" called out Blake from his hammock.

"Yaas, deah boy?"

"It's cooler in here. Get into your hammock."

"It is not vewy cool anywhah, Blake. It's all wight."

Arthur Augustus did not stir.

The three juniors in the hammocks went to sleep. They had lost a good deal of sleep in the anxious night, and in the drowsy heat of noon they nodded off, one after another.

But Arthur Augustus was not thinking of sleep.

He was only waiting for his opportunity to get away without intervention from his comrades. Presently he rose from his seat under the tree. Three fellows were fast asleep, and Cucumber, whether asleep or not, did not heed the movements of Senhor Um Olho.

Quietly Arthur Augustus slipped a bag over his shoulder, packed with dried meat and mandioca bread, and fastened his water-bottle to his belt. To his belt also he hooked a machete.

The missing party had not returned. Arthur Augustus was going to look for them. But it was necessary to be cautious, for his comrades certainly would not have allowed him to leave the island had they observed him. They had no faith in Gussy's powers to track a missing party through the trackless Brazilian forests. Arthur Augustus had to get away quietly if he was to get away at all.

Having made his preparations for the expedition, the swell of St. Jim's strolled into the thickets in a casual sort of way.

Cucumber certainly would not have ventured to stop him if he had observed him and guessed his intentions. But he might have awakened the others.

The little creek in which the canoes were hidden was not far from the choupana under the big ceiba-tree. Had there been only one canoe, Arthur Augustus would have hesitated. He could hardly have taken the only canoe and left his comrades stranded on the island. But the dugout taken from the Caraya was there. That solved the difficulty.

The dugout was tied up to a projecting root, the paddles lying in it. It was a craft of the rudest construction, made by hollowing out the

interior of a tree-trunk and shaping it with a machete. But Arthur Augustus had no doubt that he could manage it.

All he needed to do was to push out and float down the current. It was easy to steer for the bank with a paddle.

He cast the dugout loose and stepped into it. Cautiously he pushed with a paddle, and it floated on the shallow, swampy creek into the river.

Sitting in the dugout, Arthur Augustus glanced round. The three juniors in the choupana, he knew, were asleep, and he could see nothing of O Pepino; the thickets on the island shore hid him from the negro.

The dugout drifted down the current.

All he had to do was to slant across the arm of the Preto that divided the island from the northern bank. With a stroke or two of the paddle Arthur Augustus directed his craft towards the bank.

In a few minutes he was bumping into swampy thickets ashore, landing some distance lower down than the spot where Gaston and his party had landed the previous day. But once ashore, it was easy to tramp back to that spot—at least, Arthur Augustus had no doubt that it was.

He tied the canoe to a trailing root in the river, so that it would catch an eye from the island when it was looked for. As soon as the juniors saw it they would know where he was gone—too late to think of stopping him, which was all that mattered.

Leaving the canoe bobbing on the current, the swell of St. Jim's plunged into the forest.

Having gone up the bank to the spot, as near as he could locate it, where the party had landed the morning before, he proceeded to look for sign. Sign was not easy to find; but he knew that Gaston had intended to strike directly away from the river, so all that he had to do was to turn his back on the Rio Preto and march.

And he started; and about ten minutes later he came upon a spot where a machete had cut through clinging lianas, and knew that, so far, he was following the track of the party. Quite bucked by his success so far, Arthur Augustus swung on, looking for more sign.

Meanwhile, nobody had missed him on the island. So long as the drowsy heat of the tropical midday lasted, the three juniors in the choupana slept. Arthur Augustus had been gone considerably more than an hour when Jack Blake awakened and turned out of his hammock.

Digby and Herries were still asleep. Blake left the choupana and went to the water's edge to look across at the bank. O Pepino, lying in the shade, had his eyes shut, but they opened as Blake passed.

Blake watched the bank for a few minutes, and then, as he turned back, he noticed that Arthur Augustus was no longer sitting under the tree where he had left him. Blake was far from guessing what had happened, but he called to O Pepino.

"Where's D'Arcy?"

"Nao entendo!" said Cucumber, blinking.

"I mean Senhor Um Olho!"

O Pepino rose to his feet at once and looked round. He shook his woolly head. Nothing was to be seen of Mister One-Eye.

Blake had no doubt that Arthur Augustus had simply shifted his position to seek a cooler or more shady spot. But he called:

"Gussy!"

There was no answer to his call.

"Gussy!" roared Blake.

But only the echo answered.

Then, for the first time, a doubt crossed Blake's mind. He remembered Arthur Augustus' words that morning.

"Gussy!" he bawled. "You silly ass! You blithering fathead! Gussy, you dummy! Gussy, you goat! Gussy!"

From the choupana came two calling voices. Herries and Dig had been awakened by the shouts.

"What's up?"

"What's the row?"

"That idiot Gussy!" shouted Blake in consternation. "I believe he's got off the island. You know the silly rot he was talking this morning—"

"Oh, my hat!"

Herries and Dig came running out of the choupana. Blake hurried through the thickets to the little creek. He gave a roar as he arrived there.

"The dugout's gone—the Indian dugout!"

"Oh, the fathead!" gasped Herries. "Then—he's gone!"

"Oh, the ass!" howled Digby.

"Que ha?" exclaimed O Pepino. "Senhores, que ha?" Cucumber was taking the alarm now. He realised that the juniors were anxious about "Senhor Um Olho."

"D'Arcy—he's gone!" exclaimed Blake. "He's taken the dugout and gone! If we're too late to stop him—"

O Pepino understood. He plunged knee-deep into the shallows and stared up and down the river. The dugout, across the water at the northern bank, caught his eye at once, and he shouted and pointed.

Then he ran for the canoe in the island creek.

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake. "There's a chance of stopping him—if only we're in time to collar him."

The three juniors jumped into the canoe, and O Pepino scrambled in and seized the paddle. The canoe shot across to the spot where the dugout was tied up. They scrambled ashore.

"Meu patrao!" muttered O Pepino, scanning the bank with anxious eyes.

He pointed to muddy tracks leading away into the forest, left by Arthur Augustus' boots, thick with the wet slime of the river.

"Meu patrao!" he repeated. He stood and stared into the shadowy depths of the forest, his black brow deeply puckered with anxiety.

His anxiety now was as keen as that of the juniors. For a long minute he stood staring into the forest; then he turned to the schoolboys babbling rapid Portuguese and pointing back to the island.

Then, without waiting for an answer, O Pepino tramped away into the forest, leaving the dismayed juniors on the bank. Evidently he had started at once in search of Senhor Um Olho—regardless of his master's orders to remain on the island.

"Oh, that ass!" breathed Blake. "Cucumber will find him if he can be found; we can't do anything! Oh, the fathead!"

Slowly the three juniors returned to the canoe and paddled back to the Ilha dos Macacos.

Arthur Augustus was gone—vanished into the forest, where his friends had no more chance of finding him than he had of finding Gaston.

But they had faith in O Pepino; the faithful Cucumber would find him if he was to be found.

If only he was not hopelessly lost before the black man started after him—that was all they could hope for now as they waited with anxious hearts on the Ilha dos Macacos.

A MEETING IN THE FOREST !

"**B**AI Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He came to a halt, staring round him into dense undergrowths.

Where he was he had not the faintest idea.

For three long hours he had kept on, hoping that he was on the track of Gaston's party, but doubting more and more.

Aware that the French trader had struck northward, away from the river, Arthur Augustus had planned to strike in that direction also, hoping to pick up sign by the way.

But after a little distance he had made the discovery that he could not possibly distinguish north from south, and east from west.

As the sun was well past the zenith, he had rather banked on getting his bearings from the sun sinking westward. But, though he could feel the heat of the sun only too palpably, he could not spot the faintest sign of that luminary in the sky. The roof of tangled foliage over the forest shut off the sky, save for a filtering glint of sunshine here and there.

Sign of Gaston's party failed, and Arthur Augustus hunted for it in vain. When it dawned upon him that he had lost himself he still had a hope of following his own trail back to the river and starting again with better luck.

His own back-trail proved as difficult to pick up as Gaston's. For some little distance he had left smears of the wet slime from the river, but that had not lasted long. That now was miles behind him. And at length Arthur Augustus realised that he was hopelessly lost in the forest, and had not the faintest chance of finding his way out of it.

The steamy heat was stifling. He was tired to the bone with continual tramping, clambering over logs and fallen branches, and hacking at clinging creepers. And he came to a halt at last, wondering dismally what his next step was going to be.

Whether he had wandered back towards the river, whether he had wandered on away from it, he had to own up that he did not know. All he knew for certain was that he was on the northern bank of the Rio Preto—apart from that, he might have been anywhere in Brazil.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, apparently addressing a black-faced monkey that peered at him from a tree. "This is wotten!"

He sat down on a fallen tree-trunk to rest his weary limbs.

He had started with high hopes of trailing down Gaston's party, of coming up with them somewhere, sooner or later, and, if they were in peril, of rendering aid. He was not thinking of that now. It had dawned on Gussy's noble mind that only the wildest chance could bring him in contact with Gaston's party—not the sort of chance that a fellow could bank on.

Sitting on the log, he took off his hat—the big, shady, grass hat that O Pepino had plaited for him after his own was lost in the river—and wiped the thick perspiration from his brow.

He fanned his blazing face with a leaf, and tried to think it out.

He had to have a rest. He refreshed himself with a sip or two from his water-bottle. But thirsty as he was, he drank sparingly. Now that

he realised his situation, he knew that it might be long before he found water again, and that he might perish of thirst in the forest.

But after a rest he rose to his feet, to push on again.

Whether or not he could find a way through the forest by pushing on, it was certain that he could not find one by sitting still. And although he could not see the sunset, he knew that the sun must by this time be getting low in the west. The thought of nightfall in the forest was not pleasant.

Suddenly his eye gleamed behind his eyeglass. "Oh, bai Jove!" he ejaculated. "What jollay luck!"

A great mass of creepers hung between trees in his way, and he was about to push them aside when he perceived that a quantity had been cut down with the clean sharp stroke of a machete.

It was sign so plain that a blind man could almost have spotted it. Someone had passed that way before him, hacking at the tangled lianas as he went.

Whether the sign was new or old, D'Arcy could not tell. He hoped that it was sign of Gaston's party. It was possible, however, that it had been left by some wandering Indian, and he was very cautious as he pushed on.

He trod carefully, his eyes well about him, his machete in his hand—the machete was his only weapon, excepting the knife at his belt. Again and again he found a trace of a former passage in the thick forest; and he pressed on, though the forest was now darkening as the sun sank lower, and it was growing too dim to pick up even the faintest sign easily. But the hope that he was on the track of Gaston's party spurred him on.

Suddenly, as he passed under the black shadow of a ceiba-tree, his head bumped on something that stirred.

For a second he fancied that it was some unusually heavy mass of vegetation. The next second a harsh, startled voice broke on his ears.

"Corpo de Deos!"

Arthur Augustus bounded almost clear of Brazil!

It was the voice of Joao Rabeira that he heard; it was a hammock he had bumped into, in which the bandit had bedded down for the night!

"Oh cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Crack!

He leapt back as the shot rang. In the dark shadows a dark, evil face looked over the edge of the hammock, and Joao's voice was heard as he fired.

"O rapaz! O irmaozinho!" Evidently, dark as it was under the tree, the bandit's keen eyes had seen Arthur Augustus and recognised him. "O irmaozinho" was a term D'Arcy had heard him use before—the "little brother," meaning the younger brother of Lord Conway.

The bullet grazed D'Arcy's shoulder as he bounded back.

There was a rustling as the bandit rolled from his hammock. The meeting in the depths of the forest was as startling to Joao Rabeira as to Arthur Augustus; but the ferocious bravo was swift to take advantage of it. And the activity with which he scrambled from his hammock, showed that he had recovered to a great extent from his wound.

Arthur Augustus scrambled away into the forest.

He had found a trail and followed it—and it had led him to Joao Rabeira. He darted into the jungly undergrowths as fast as his legs could carry him. Again a shot rang out, but it was almost at random in the tangle of jungle and the falling darkness.

Arthur Augustus plunged on desperately. His machete was not much use against a firearm, and he knew that it was death that was at his heels.

Only the fact that Joao was still to some extent handicapped by his wound, and that the darkness was thickening like a black cloak on the forest, saved Arthur Augustus. He stopped, panting for breath, in the midst of a hanging mass of lianas and listened—and heard a distant rustling as the bandit sought him in the forest. But the darkness was growing black and impenetrable, and the rustling at last died away in silence.

Not till there had long been silence, however, did Arthur Augustus venture to stir. Then softly, as silently as he could, he stepped away, and pushed on—and did not halt till he began to doubt whether he might not be moving in a circle, and returning towards the bandit's camp!

That misgiving brought him to a halt. His weary legs were bending under him; fatigue hung on him like a heavy weight. He threw himself down at last, and, too exhausted even to think of lurking jaguars and pumas, fell into a deep sleep.

MISSING !

"RIEN!" said Gaston Moutarde moodily.

"Nothing?" said Tom.

"Nozing!"

Many a long mile from the spot where Arthur Augustus had encountered the bandit, four weary trackers had come to a halt.

For a whole day, from early morning till the sun went down, Gaston Moutarde had hunted for sign of the lame man with the stick, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had hunted with him.

Twice they had found sign. That was in the morning. But the rest of the day passed in hopeless questing; and at length even Gaston had to confess himself beaten.

It was a bitter blow. More and more the conviction had forced itself into their minds that it was Lord Conway, the lost man of the wilderness, on whose track they had chanced. But the sign had failed; and, indeed, it was fairly certain that if the lame man was Conway, he would have left as little sign as he could when he moved in the forest, with the bandits hunting him for his life. He could know nothing of the change that had taken place at the Ilha dos Macacos.

The juniors could picture him—if indeed the lame man was Conway—camped in some remote, hidden recess, creeping out cautiously for food, dragging his injured leg with the aid of a stick. If only they could have tracked him to his camp—yet they knew that if more sign had been there to pick up, it might have been the bandits who would have tracked him.

"But," said Gaston slowly, "zere is hope, mes enfants! I zink zat cet homme he is my friend Lord—he live, and we will find him! Mais oui! But now it is necessary to be of return to ze Ilha dos Macacos—our friends zere will be of the most anxious. Anozzer day, and zere is more search—search till we find! Yes! Now it needs to be of return!"

Reluctant as they were to admit failure, the

juniors had to agree. They were weary to the bone, and there were many long miles to be traversed back to the island in the Preto. They had, at least, discovered something—and they knew the quarter in which to renew the search. That was a consolation for failure as they turned their footsteps homeward.

Sunset deepened into dark, and they were still tramping wearily through the endless forest. Gaston threaded his way without a pause; and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther tramped and stumbled after him. It had been dark for two or three hours when at last their ears were gladdened by the sound of the waters of the Preto.

They came out on the bank at last in the glimmer of the stars.

Gaston blew the signal on his whistle.

Looking across in the bright starlight that streamed down on the river, Tom Merry could make out three figures on the island shore. A light flashed for a moment in answer to the whistle.

"All right on the island, at any rate!" said Manners.

"Thank goodness for that!" said Tom. "We've been away two whole days instead of one—they must have been anxious—"

"Here comes the canoe!" said Lowther.

From the island shore, the canoe pushed out. Gaston uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Mon Dieu! Vat zen!"

There were three figures in the canoe. In the starlight, Blake, Herries, and Digby could be recognised. It was O Pepino who should have ferried the canoe across, at the signal whistle.

Tom Merry caught his breath.

"Has something happened to Cucumber?" he breathed.

They waited anxiously for the canoe to reach the bank. Blake, Herries, and Digby paddled it across, and it bumped into the swampy shore. Gaston caught at prow and held on.

"Vat is it zat happen here?" he exclaimed anxiously. "Is it zat zen Carayas have been to come?"

"There was an Indian in a dugout yesterday," answered Blake. "Cucumber put paid to him—it was all right."

"But ze black man, O Pepino—why do he not bring ze canoe, zen?" exclaimed Gaston.

"It's rotten," said Blake. "Cucumber's gone after Gussy."

"After Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"The silly ass went off early this afternoon—he was anxious about you, and fancied he might be able to find you!" groaned Blake. "If we'd seen him we'd have stopped him fast enough—"

"When we found he'd gone, Cucumber went after him," said Digby. "We've seen nothing of either of them since."

"Thank goodness you fellows have got back all right, anyhow!" said Herries. "I—I hope old Cucumber will be able to find Gussy—"

Monsieur Moutarde compressed his lips hard.

"Allons!" he said. "Zat is news of ze verree bad. Ce petit fou—" He checked himself. "But if it is to find, ze black man will find—zat is somezing. Zat you get in ze canoe, mes garçons."

The juniors embarked, and the canoe paddled back to the island. The news that Arthur Augustus was missing was a heavy blow to the returning party. That he was hopelessly lost, almost as soon as he had started, they had not the slightest doubt, and the only comfort was that

O Pepino had followed him as soon as he was missed.

"But what kept you fellows?" asked Blake.
"We began to fancy all sorts of things!"

"We found sign, and we believe it was sign of Lord Conway," answered Tom. "That's the news we had for Gussy—if he had been here!"

"Oh, the ass!" muttered Blake.

The juniors landed on the island, and Gaston drew the canoe up into the creek. It was a troubled party that went to the hammocks in the choupana that night. There was good news for Gussy, if he had been there to hear it—but Arthur Augustus unfortunately was far away; where, his friends could not even surmise, except that they knew that he must be lost in the boundless forest.

Their only hope was that O Pepino would find him, and they hoped that when dawn came, they would hear a call from the bank. But dawn came, and the sun climbed high into the cloudless blue heavens, and there was no sign of Arthur Augustus—no sign of the black man who had gone in search of him.

THE HUT IN THE FOREST !

"O H, cwikey!" murmured Arthur Augustus.
He stood very still.

It was a burning morning in the forest. For hours, since he had risen and breakfasted on a mouthful of dried meat and a few sips of water from his bottle, Arthur Augustus had been wandering. He had to find his way out of the forest if he could—he had long ago abandoned the hope of ever finding Gaston and his party. But his hope of getting out of the scrape in which he had landed himself was growing fainter and fainter.

He had covered many, many miles, he knew that. He longed for a glimpse of the river which would have been a guide. But only the bewildering trees, endless and innumerable, met his gaze in all directions.

It was a rustling sound in the thickets that caused him to stop and listen with beating heart. Whether it was made by a jaguar or a coiling anaconda, by a wandering peccary or by the bandit hunting for him, or some straying Caraya Indian, he could not tell; but he stood still, suppressing his breathing and listening.

Suddenly, through an interstice of the heavy creepers that hung about him, he caught sight of a hat—a big grass-hat, and he knew that it was Joao Rabeira. He did not doubt that the bandit, who knew now that he was alone in the forest, was hunting him; and he had come very close.

Arthur Augustus stood still, his lips set, his hand on his machete.

Had the bandit parted that screen of lianas he must have seen him. But the big grass-hat bobbed out of sight again as suddenly as it had appeared.

The rustling made by the Brazilian bandit in his movements passed on. He had not seen the schoolboy—he had not heard him.

The sound of the bandit died away in the forest. Arthur Augustus resumed his way, his back to the direction taken by Joao Rabeira. That caused him to change his former direction—but it mattered little, for all directions were much the same to him; he was only keeping on in the faint hope of emerging somewhere, and one way was as good as another to a fellow who was utterly and hopelessly lost.

Hours passed, and he heard nothing more of the bandit. The heat grew more and more intense as the sun climbed to the zenith.

The hapless junior began to look at last for a shady spot, to rest during the fierce heat of the tropical midday.

It was then that a faint sound, as of the trickle of water, came to his ears.

Tired as he was, spent, and almost in despair, it was a hopeful sound to him. The water in his bottle was almost gone, and his lips were dry with thirst. Water was a godsend, if he could find it; and there was a hope, too, that a trickling stream might be some tributary of the Rio Preto, and might guide him back to the river.

He listened intently, trying to follow the sound. Again and again he lost it, and found it again, and then, at length, it was plain and unmistakable, the trickle of water flowing among leaves and roots in the dense forest. And a glimmer caught his eyes at last—the glimmer of water.

It was the tiniest of streams, hardly a foot wide and shallow—here and there dammed by some huge root and changing its course to flow round the obstruction. Arthur Augustus turned in the direction in which it flowed, hoping to find some spot where it was deep enough to fill his bottle, hoping, too, that however far away the river might be, that tiny forest stream would flow into it at last.

"Oh!" he ejaculated suddenly.

He had followed the stream, pushing through tangled thickets and creepers, for about a quarter of a mile. Then he stopped in a little clear space of ground, from which the wild bush receded. There in a deeper hollow the tiny stream had gathered into a pool.

But even as he stooped to the pool, his eyes fell upon something that startled him. Within a few yards of the pool, and built against the trunk of a massive ceiba, stood a hut.

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Arthur Augustus stared at it blankly. For a second he wondered whether it might be the dwelling of some Indian hunter. But it was not the usual choupana with merely a slanting roof on four corner-posts. It was small, as if designed only for a single occupant, but it was walled round, and there was a door in front, on hinges of twisted fibre. The door was shut, and he wondered whether the hut had an occupant.

The thought of Joao Rabeira came into his mind. If this was some shelter the bandit had built for himself, in the remote depths of the forest— But he remembered that he had come upon the bandit camping in a hammock slung to a tree, which surely he was not likely to do if he had a hut in the forest.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

If that hut was the shelter of an enemy, he was in deadly danger. But if by chance it sheltered some hunter, or even some not hostile Indian, the discovery was a windfall to him. He had only the faintest hope of ever dragging his weary limbs from the tangled depths of that deadly forest, and it was worth taking some risk when his case was already hopeless.

He stood looking at the hut for some minutes, and, at last, approached the door.

All was silent within, and he could guess that the hut was untenanted. He would have heard some sound of breathing even if an occupant had been sleeping within.

He removed at last the wooden pin with which the door was fastened, and opened it and peered inside.

It was dim and shadowy. He made out a hammock, slung across, almost filling the room. Several gourds and two or three cooking utensils lay about the earthen floor. In a basket of plaited osiers was a stack of fruits, and in another a large store of Brazil nuts. The fruit was fresh, and had plainly been gathered that day, and so the hut had very recently been occupied.

Arthur Augustus turned again and looked round him. Whoever occupied that hut in the depths of the forest was absent, but might return at any time. Indeed, as the heat of the day was now coming on, it was likely that he would return soon.

Arthur Augustus stooped to fill his bottle at the pool. It was then that he noticed tracks in the soft earth by the water—evidently those of the man who lived in the solitary hut.

They were the tracks of bare feet—not large, but larger than his own. But what struck Arthur Augustus most was the deep imprint of the right foot and the faint trace imprinted by the left. It puzzled him for a few minutes, and then he guessed the obvious explanation: the man was lame.

A white man—lame of one leg. It was certainly not Joao Rabeira; he was not lame, as D'Arcy knew only too well from the activity of his pursuit. It was scarcely likely to be some surviving member of the banda, especially as the hut was clean and tidy and evidently well kept; and D'Arcy remembered the foul and dirty state in which the choupana on the Ilha dos Macacos had been found after the bandits had camped there. That the unknown occupant of the solitary hut might be an enemy was possible enough; but it was more than worth the risk of taking the chance, and Arthur Augustus very soon made up his mind.

Having filled his bottle, he entered the hut and



"Corpo de Deos!" came a harsh voice. Arthur Rabeira

drew a bench, which he found within, to the doorway. He sat there, eating his lunch of carne seca, washed down by clear fresh water from the stream, and waited. And it was in little more than half an hour that a rustle in the surrounding trees told him that the mysterious dweller in the wilderness was returning.

THE WILD MAN OF THE WOODS!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS watched, almost breathlessly.

He had drawn the door of the hut close before he sat down inside, to screen him from view. It was only prudent to see before he was seen. But the door of plaited osiers and palm-leaves had many interstices through which he was easily able to watch.

From the thick circle of trees round the little pool a figure emerged—so wild-looking a figure that it made D'Arcy start as his eyes fixed on it.

The face, if it were a white man's face, was so darkly bronzed by the sun that it looked almost as dark as an Indian's—what could be seen of it. But it was more than half hidden by a wild and shaggy beard that had clearly never known scissors or razor for a very long time. Shaggy hair was also seen under the edges of the grass-hat on the head.

The man came with a limping step into the



Augustus bounded almost clear of Brazil. It was Joao bandit!

open, assisting himself with a long thick stick in his left hand. The right leg stepped actively; the left trailed like an injured limb. The man's clothing was as wild as his shaggy face. His feet were bare and his garb was little more than a kind of tunic made of the skin of some animal, fastened by a belt of serpent-skin, in which gleamed a knife and a machete.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, as he watched him. The man was a white man, he was sure of that, but he looked as wild and untamed as the savage wilderness round about him.

Arthur Augustus tried to think of the spot of Portuguese that he knew. He supposed that the wild-looking denizen of the forest must be some native hunter, Brazilian or half-breed, and it was not much use thinking of addressing him in English.

"Bons dias!" he murmured to himself, all ready to say "Good-day!" to the stranger when he reached the hut.

The man who had emerged from the forest was as much on the alert as any wild animal that dwelt in the sertao. Although there could be no doubt that he was the dweller in the lonely hut, he approached it with the utmost caution, as if fearing that an enemy might have appeared there during his absence. He stood in the open for a long minute, glancing swiftly round the little

clearing, and then his hand went to the machete in his belt as he stepped towards the hut.

He stopped again suddenly, and Arthur Augustus saw the bearded lips move as he gave a startled gasp.

He bent, scanning the earth by the little pool. Arthur Augustus wondered why for a moment; then he realised that he must have left tracks in the soft soil, and that they had caught the eyes of the wild man of the forest.

One swift glance, and then the man was upright again, leaning his left hand on the stick, clutching the machete in his right. His eyes fixed on the door of the hut; he knew that someone was there.

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet and pushed the door open. He waved a hand in sign of friendship, hoping that the stranger would understand, and called out quickly:

"Amigo! Bons dias, senhor!"

Instantly the lame man bounded back, and in spite of his dragging leg it was so swift a bound that he almost reached the forest again with that single backward leap.

"Amigo!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Nao inimigo! Amigo!"

He stepped out of the hut into the sunlight that came into the little clearing from above.

The wild-looking man stopped dead.

At the first glance in the doorway he had seen nothing of Arthur Augustus but the big grass-hat that O Pepino had plaited for the swell of St. Jim's. Now, however, he could see his face.

He stood transfixed, staring at that face. The machete dropped from his hand, thudding to the ground. On the shaggy-bearded face was an expression of utter amazement and bewilderment.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Thank goodness he's dwopped that beastly choppah, anyhow! I twust that he will not cut off befoah I have had a chance of speakin' to him!"

Leaving his own weapons in his belt, Arthur Augustus held up both hands, empty, as he stepped towards the wild man of the Brazilian forest. Even a savage must have understood that as a sign of amity.

"It's all wight!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, forgetting his Portuguese. "Pway don't be alarmed, my deah fellow. I am a stwangah heah, lost in the fowest, and if you could guide me back to the Wio Pweto I should be evah so much obliged. Oh cwikey! Of course, you don't undahstand all that! I mean— Oh bothah! I wish Tom Mewwy was heah to tell me some Portuguese."

The man stood stock-still, with a stunned amazement in his face, like a man who could not believe his eyes or his ears. D'Arcy saw his lips move, and caught a mutter of words, to his astonishment, in English.

"Impossible! My senses have left me and I am dreaming!"

Arthur Augustus fairly grinned with glee. The wild man of the woods understood English; that was certain, as he spoke it!

"I say, this is wippin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I am feahfully glad that you undahstand English, deah boy, because my Portuguese is vewy wotten! Pway don't be alarmed! I am a fwiend, you know! It is all wight—wight as wain! I came on your hut quite by chance, wandewin' in the fowest, and have been waitin' for you to turn up—see?"

"Good heavens!" came a husky voice from the

thick, shaggy beard. "I am not dreaming, but how is this possible?"

The wild man of the forest came towards the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus gave him an encouraging grin.

There was no hostility in the man's look. There was only an overwhelming amazement. It might have been supposed that he knew Arthur Augustus and was amazed to find him there in the Brazilian wilderness.

"All wight, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am sowwy to see that you have a game leg. Pewwaps we can do somethin' for it when we get to our camp, if you can show me the way to the Island of Monkeys——"

"What?"

"The Ilha dos Macacos," said Arthur Augustus. "That is where we are campin' while we are huntin' for my bwothah, who has been lost in these feahful fowestss——"

"Your brother?"

"Yaas! Bai Jove, you may know somethin' about him, as you live in this place!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus eagerly. "He is Lord Conway. Oh ewike! I wondah what the fellows would say if I got back with news of old Conway! Have you evah heard of Lord Conway? Bai Jove! What are you gwinnin' at?" added Arthur Augustus, puzzled, as the wild man of the forest suddenly grinned and then burst into a laugh.

"You young ass!" said the wild man.

"Eh?" Arthur Augustus jumped as he heard that.

"You don't know me?"

"I have nevah had the pleasuah of seein' you befoah, that I know of," answered the perplexed swell of St. Jim's.

"Luckily you have not changed as I have changed," said the wild man of Brazil. "I knew you at once, though I could not believe my eyesight when I saw you. Months in this savage forest have made a difference—no wonder you do not know me! But, in the name of wonder, Arthur——"

"Bai Jove! How do you know my name?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, bewildered.

"In the name of wonder, Arthur, how did you get here? I had almost given up hope of seeing a white man's face again, least of all my brother's!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy almost fell down!

GUSSY FINDS HIS BROTHER!

"KICK-Kick-Kick-Conway!" stuttered Arthur Augustus.

The wild man of the woods grinned.

"And you never guessed?" he exclaimed.

"Bai Jove! Old Conway!" said Arthur Augustus dizzily. "I know your voice now, old chap, but it's changed wathah—though not so much as your looks. What the dooce have you gwown into a beavah for, Conway?"

Lord Conway chuckled.

"There are no barbers' shops in this part of Brazil, Arthur. And when I was dodging Joao Rabeira for my life, I did not stay to unpack a razor to take with me."

"Bai Jove! I suppose not," assented Arthur Augustus. "You look a feahfully wagged wobin, old chap; but, bai Jove, how feahfully glad I am to see you!"

Lord Conway wrung his hand. Wild as he looked, with his long hair and shaggy beard and

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dress of wild animals' skins, it was not surprising that Arthur Augustus had never dreamed of recognising in him the handsome, well-dressed, clean-shaven young man he knew and remembered. But now that he did know him, Arthur Augustus could pick out familiar features through that shaggy screen. The swell of St. Jim's fairly bubbled with glee.

"Bai Jove! What will Tom Mewwy say? What will Blake say? Won't they just jump! What will Mistah Mustard say? Fancy me findin' you all on my own, Conway, old chap!"

"Is it possible that your schoolboy friends are in this deadly wilderness with you, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah! You see, aftah gettin' that extwaordinary lettah from you at St. Jim's, I wesolved to come out to Bwazil in the hols and find you," explained Arthur Augustus. "We met Monsieur Moutarde on the steamah comin' out, and found out that he was a fiend of yours, and we've been stayin' at his quinta till we came up the Wio Pweto to hunt for you."

"Gaston is with you?"

"Yaas, wathah! Could you guide me back to the Ilha dos Macacos, old chap? It is quite poss that Mistah Mustard has got back by this time."

"The bandits——"

"There is only one left of that gang of sweeps, old chap—Joao Wabewah," said Arthur Augustus. "We're camped on their island."

"By gad!" said Lord Conway. "Come into the hut, Arthur, and tell me all about it! This wants some gettin' used to."

They sat down in the hut, neither of them thinking of the siesta that was due in the heat of midday. Arthur Augustus had a great deal to tell his brother, so long lost and so strangely found. And when Arthur Augustus had told all, he was eager to hear.

"I got away from them," said Lord Conway.

"But"—he pointed to his leg—"one bullet went too close. Luckily, it passed clean through the limb, and I was able to bandage the wound. But it left me lame, as you see. It has been mending slowly; it will be well in the course of time, with care and attention. But though I had the luck to escape the bandits, I could make no attempt to escape from this wilderness. I could only hide in nooks and crannies of the forest while they hunted me——"

"Thank goodness you kept cleah, old chap!" said Arthur Augustus, with a deep breath.

"After a time the hunt slackened," went on Lord Conway. "For weeks I was in daily danger of my life, but then they seemed to give up the hunt——"

"Huntin' for the tweasure on the island instead," said Arthur Augustus; "and that wottah Wabewah had othah fish to fwy."

"Then I built this hut where I could get water," said his brother. "With the help of a stick I was able to get about and hunt for food. I hoped that the time might come when the limb would be well enough for me to make an attempt to get away down the river. But——"

"All wight now," said Arthur Augustus. "Once we get back to the island—— You see, we have the canoe we got frowm the bandits, and we shall take you down the wivah, old chap. If only Mistah Mustard and Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah come back safe——"

He broke off as Lord Conway suddenly started to his feet.

A sound from the forest had reached the ears of the man who had so long led a hunted life

that every sense was on the alert like a jaguar's.

He grasped his machete.

"Did you hear?" he breathed.

"Nothin', deah boy."

"Perhaps only some animal of the forest," muttered Lord Conway. "But you told me that you came on Joao Rabeira—that he was hunting you. If he has picked up your trail it may have led him—"

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

In the excitement and the happy satisfaction of having found his lost brother, Gussy had completely forgotten Joao Rabeira. But he realised that it was not likely that the bandit had forgotten him.

Within the hut the brothers listened intently. And Lord Conway gritted his teeth under his wild beard as, looking from the doorway, he saw a big grass-hat emerge from the surrounding jungle, and under it a dark and evil face that he knew only too well.

"Rabeira!" he breathed.

"That wottah!"

The bandit came to a halt, his rifle thrust forward, ready to fire. He stared at the hut, evidently surprised to see it there.

The trail of Arthur Augustus had led him unexpectedly to the hiding-place of the man he had so long hunted in vain. Looking from the shadowy interior of the hut, the brothers saw the grin of savage triumph that overspread the dark face. Lord Conway's eyes glittered, and he gripped the handle of his machete almost convulsively. He stepped swiftly into the doorway, and his arm swung, the gleaming machete whizzing direct at the evil face of the bandit.

But Joao was on his guard.

He caught the gleam of the whizzing axe and leaped aside. It crashed to the ground, missing him by a yard. The next moment he had leaped back into the cover of a tree.

"Corpo de Deos!" His mocking voice came ringing across the clearing. "Senhor Lordship, I have found you at last! Afinal! Afinal! Corpo de Deos! You shall tell me with your last breath where the treasure of Potomayo is buried on the Ilha dos Macacos! Sim, sim, senhor! O irmaozinho—he die—but you, Senhor Lordship, you shall live long enough to tell your secret under torture to Joao Rabeira!"

And the ring of the rifle followed the words, the bullet crashing through the flimsy walls of the hut.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH!

LORD CONWAY grasped Arthur Augustus by the shoulder and dragged him down to the earthen floor.

"Keep low!" he breathed.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Crack, crack! came from the bandit's rifle. The bullets tore through the hut, crashing into the trunk of the ceiba-tree against which it was built. Joao Rabeira was keeping in cover on the edge of the little clearing, but he was hardly ten yards distant.

Lord Conway overturned the bench on which Arthur Augustus had sat and placed it in front of his brother. Then he drew in front of himself a log that had served as a table. Lying behind them, they were protected, and they soon needed that protection. Joao could guess that they were lying down to dodge his fire, and he aimed low as he fired again. A bullet knocked up dust from

the floor; another crashed into the log; another into the bench.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "If a fellow could only get at the waseal!"

"I hope that he may try to get at us!" muttered Lord Conway. He reached over and took Arthur Augustus' machete. "If the scoundrel would try to get to close quarters—"

But there was little hope of that. So long as he kept his distance Joao was master of the situation. They could not emerge from the hut into the open without being immediately shot down, and sooner or later the searching bullets would find them out. Joao was not likely to venture within reach of a whizzing machete by coming out of his cover.

Crack, crack!

A bullet, passing through the bench, dropped, spent, within an inch of Arthur Augustus' head.

"Bai Jove!" was all he said.

The fire ceased for a time. They could guess that the bandit was changing his position to fire from another angle.

At the back the massive trunk of the ceiba formed the wall of the hut. There was no danger from that direction. But on either side, as in front, only the flimsy walls of poles and leaves interposed between them and the bandit. By circling round the clearing, still in cover, Joao was able to fire from either side instead of from the front as at first.

Lord Conway gritted his teeth with helpless rage. If only the bandit would have attempted a rush! But he knew that there was no chance of that.

Crack! came again after a long interval. The bullet came crashing through the right-hand wall. It kicked up the earth a foot from Lord Conway. Another shot barely missed him, and, passing him, grazed Arthur Augustus' shoulder.

"This is gettin' wathah warm!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "What frightful luck that I should have led that blightah heah, old chap! He would nevah have dropped on you but for me!"

"While there's life there's hope!" muttered his brother. "Keep close!"

"Do you know how fah we are from the wivah?" asked Arthur Augustus. "If they heard the fiwin' on the island—"

"This place is over twelve miles from the Rio Preto."

"Oh cwums!"

"There is no chance of that!" muttered Lord Conway. "But you told me that Gaston Moutarde was in the forest—if he has not yet returned to the island, he may hear—there is a chance—"

Crack, crack, crack!

Arthur Augustus gave a little jump.

"Arthur, you're hit—" panted Lord Conway.

"Only a sewatch!" said Arthur Augustus composedly. He wrapped his handkerchief round his wrist, where a grazing bullet had scratched the skin. "All wight, old chap!"

There was another cessation of the fire. It lasted while the bandit circled round the clearing again to take up a position on the left. But the fire restarted suddenly, rapidly, a stream of bullets tearing through the hut, till the bandit had emptied his magazine. It seemed only by a miracle that the two escaped the whizzing stream of lead.

Crack, crack, crack! came again when Joao had reloaded.

Then, of a sudden, the firing ceased, and a loud, startled, furious yell reached the ears of Arthur Augustus and his brother.

It was followed by wild scuffling and struggling.

Lord Conway started to his feet.

"Arthur! Do you hear that? Can it be help—our friends—"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus leaped up.

They listened with thumping hearts. There was no more shooting—but they could hear the wild scuffling and panting of fierce breath! Clearly, the bandit, as he kept up his fusillade

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on the hut, had been attacked by some enemy—he was fighting now, hand-to-hand.

Lord Conway, machete in hand, rushed from the hut, with Arthur Augustus at his heels. Whatever it was that was happening, it gave them a chance of getting to close quarters with the bandit, without falling under his fire.

On the edge of the clearing, two figures were locked in a desperate struggle. The bandit's rifle lay on the earth where it had been struck from his hand. He was struggling desperately in the powerful grasp of a herculean black man.

"Cucumbah!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"O Pepino!" exclaimed Lord Conway. He had known the black man at Gaston's quinta long months ago.

"Good old Cucumbah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, he must have come atah me—"

"And the villain's firing guided him here!" said Lord Conway grimly. He ran towards the struggling combatants.

But the combat ceased suddenly before he reached them. There was a sudden flash of a knife in the negro's sinewy hand. One terrible cry came from Joao Rabeira—and his struggling ceased. O Pepino leaped to his feet, panting for breath, leaving the knife buried to the very hilt.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Meu patrao!" O Pepino grinned, and ducked his woolly head to Arthur Augustus. "Meu patrao, Senhor Um Olho!" He pointed to the form that lay still under the ceiba. "Morto! Bom!"

Lord Conway looked down at Joao Rabeira. The bandit's hunting of his enemy and of the treasure of Potomayo had ended—with his life! O Pepino, hunting for Arthur Augustus in the forest, had heard the far-echoing reports of the incessant firing. It was the bandit's own ruthless ferocity that had brought his fate upon him.

"Bom!" grinned O Pepino.

HOMEWARD BOUND!

TOM MERRY, in the glowing sunset, stood on the shore of the Ilha dos Macacos, and looked at the river bank.

It had been a weary day to the St. Jim's juniors on the island. Arthur Augustus was still missing, and the only hope of his friends lay in the fact that O Pepino was still missing also. The faithful negro was searching for him in the forest, and all that his friends could do was to wait and hope. Gaston had left the island during the day, but he had returned alone—he had discovered nothing. Now the sun was setting again—and Tom Merry & Co. watched the river bank—with little hope.

"That ass!" muttered Blake. But he checked himself. His heart was heavy with dread of what might have happened to Arthur Augustus since he had left the island and plunged into the trackless depths of the forest.

"Cucumber will find him!" said Tom hopefully. "Gaston thinks there's a good chance—"
"Mais oui!" said Monsieur Moutarde. "Zere is one good chance, I zink. But we must wait! And when ze petit is of return, zen we follow up ze footprint in ze forest, and perhaps we find my friend Lord!"

But the French trader spoke more hopefully than he felt.

"Something's stirring on the bank!" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly. There was a movement in the thick wall of green on the bank of the Rio Preto.

Gaston grasped his rifle. A thick mass of lianas on the bank was pushed aside, and a figure appeared from the forest. But it was not, as the watchers from the island fully expected, the figure of a wild Caraya. It was the weary, tattered, but well-known figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—his eyeglass gleaming in the glow of the sunset.

"Gussy!" yelled Blake.

"Gussy!" roared Tom.

"C'est le petit!" exclaimed Gaston. "He is of return! Ah ca! Zis is vat you call tip of a top!"

"Look!" yelled Manners.

Following Arthur Augustus from the forest came the gigantic figure of O Pepino, with a burden on his back. He set it down on the shore of the Preto—and the juniors gazed in amazement at a wild-looking figure dressed in animals' skins, with a tousled shaggy beard.

"Who—" gasped Tom.

"Who the thump—" exclaimed Lowther.

Arthur Augustus was waving his hand from the bank. Gaston rushed for the canoe. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther jumped into it with him. Blake, Herries, and Dig followed in the Indian dugout. They paddled swiftly across to the bank.

"Buck up, you fellows!" called out Arthur Augustus, grinning with glee. "It's all right! I've found him!"

The canoes bumped on the bank; the St. Jim's fellows scrambled ashore. Gaston Moutarde made a rush for the wild-looking figure that stood beside the negro, leaning on a stick. He guessed before the juniors did. It was a lame man that Cucumber had carried on his back, through endless miles of tangled forest—and Gaston guessed!

"Allons! Mon ami!" exclaimed Gaston. "I embrace my friend Lord!"

"Lord—" gasped Tom Merry.

"Lord Conway!" yelled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Oh crumbs!"

"You—you—you found him!" stuttered Blake.

"Oh crikey!"

"Mon ami! Zis is my friend Lord!" squeaked Gaston. He embraced the wild man of the woods, kissing him on both cheeks, and then kissing him on both cheeks again. Then he released him, and danced round him, gesticulating with both hands, and almost with his legs, in his exuberant delight. "Voila, my friend Lord zat is lost, and he now find! Allons! Is not zis tip of a top!"

Lord Conway grinned through his shaggy beard.

"Glad to see you, Gaston, old man," he said.

"I hope you will be able to lend me a razor!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"You are no end of a beavah, Conway, old boy!"

"Well," said Jack Blake, "this takes the cake! I was going to boot you all over Brazil for clearing off like that, Gussy—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"So was I!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"And I!" said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Zis is tip of a top!" trilled Gaston. "Zis is vat you call, in English, one piece of all left—or is it zat you say all right?"

And a happy party packed into the canoes to paddle back to the Ilha dos Macacos.

"And the jolly old treasure?" said Arthur Augustus, the following morning, when the party turned out to make their preparations for the return journey down the Rio Preto to Gaston's quinta.

Lord Conway smiled.

Scissors and razor had done their work, and the wild man of the woods had disappeared, his place taken by a handsome young man whom all the juniors knew. Every face was bright on the Ilha dos Macacos that morning. Everyone was looking forward to getting back to the quinta, and out of the savage wilds.

"Yes, where's the jolly old treasure?" asked Tom Merry. "Joao's gang seem to have searched the island pretty thoroughly—and we've looked round a bit ourselves—but—"

"But it was not likely to be found," said Lord Conway. "I found it entirely by chance, and left it where I found it."

"But how—" asked Arthur Augustus.

Lord Conway pointed to the choupana.

"My Indian crew built that for me when I camped on the island, six months ago," he answered. "Four holes had to be dug for the four corner-posts. One of them was on the spot where old General Potomayo buried his loot twenty years ago! I left it there, and planted the corner-post over it—"

"Oh, bah Jove!"

"Great pip!" gasped Tom. "Then when Joao Rabeira and his gang were here, living in that hut, they were walking over it every day—and never guessed!"

"Any more than we did!" grinned Blake.

"Who'd have thought it, you fellows?" said Arthur Augustus. "Cucumbah—get a what-do-you-call-it in Portuguese—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Conway spoke to O Pepino in Portuguese. The black man fetched a spade from the choupana, and began to dig under one of the corner-posts, pointed out by Lord Conway. The juniors gathered round eagerly to watch. In a few minutes the post was dragged out; and then, after a few more spadefuls of earth had been tossed out, a rusty iron despatch-box was revealed. O Pepino, staring, lifted it out, and handed it to Lord Conway.

He opened the lid.

The treasure of Potomayo was revealed at last. There was a wad of American notes, another of English banknotes, another of Brazilian notes, as well as a stack of silver dollars. General Potomayo, when he fled to the wilds after his unsuccessful revolution, seemed to have "done" himself fairly well!

"And what is it worth, Conway, old chap?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"About seven thousand pounds!" answered his brother. "But as it belongs to the Brazilian Government by rights, there will only be a percentage for the finder—"

"Oh, cwums! I nevah thought of that!"

Lord Conway laughed.

"There will be something left over after it is handed in at Rio, which will be equally whacked out in this party," he said. He closed the despatch-box, and tossed it into the canoe. "And now—aboard!"

The canoe and the dugout, both packed,
(Continued on page 36.)

FACED WITH A FIGHT AGAINST THE SHERIFF AND HIS POSSE, THE CEDAR CREEK REBELS ARE RESOLVED THAT THERE SHALL BE—

NO SURRENDER!

By
Martin Clifford

THE ENEMY AT THE GATE!

"HERE they come!"

Frank Richards was standing on a pine bench inside the barred gate of Cedar Creek School. His head rose above the level of the gate, and he was keeping watch on the trail that ran to the school from the direction of Thompson Town.

Behind him in the playground a score of Cedar Creek fellows were engaged in excited discussion. From the doorway of the lumber schoolhouse Black Sally, the cook, looked out with an almost comic expression of amazement on her ebony face. The happenings at Cedar Creek since the headmistress, Miss Meadows, had been dismissed quite dazed old Sally.

The school was in revolt, an unheard-of thing in the history of Cedar Creek. Under Miss Meadows' rule the school had gone on the even tenor of its way with cheerful contentment. But there was a change now, with a vengeance. Cedar Creek was on the warpath!

As Frank Richards called out the alarm there was a rush of fellows to join him at the gate. Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc jumped up on the pine bench beside him and looked over the gate into the trail.

On the trail there was a clatter of horses' hoofs. Big and bronzed, with a grim brow under his stetson hat, mounted upon a large-boned horse, came Sheriff Henderson, of Thompson. With him rode Mr. Gunten, the fat storekeeper, and Ephraim Peckover, the new headmaster of Cedar Creek, the gentleman whom his new pupils refused to admit to the school. Behind them trotted big Dave Duckers, the sheriff's man.

There was a buzz from the schoolboys at the sight of the grim, bronzed face of the sheriff. Mr. Henderson represented law and order in the Thompson Valley, and he was not a man to be trifled with. Frank Richards & Co., determined as they were, knew very well that it would not be so easy to deal with Sheriff Henderson as with Mr. Gunten or Mr. Peckover.

"I say, now the circus is going to begin!" murmured Chunky Todgers, with some signs of uneasiness in his fat face.

"I guess it is," said Bob Lawless. He swept off his hat in salute to the sheriff as the latter drew rein outside the gates. "Good-morning, Mr. Henderson!"

"Morning!" said the sheriff gruffly.

"Nice morning, sheriff!" said Frank Richards, smiling cheerily over the gate.

"So glad to see you this morning, sheriff!" said Vere Beauclerc, with great politeness. "Sorry we can't ask you in."

Sheriff Henderson rode closer to the gate and fixed his grim gaze on the cheery, youthful faces

on a level with his own as he sat his big horse.

"Now, what's all this?" he growled.

"All what, old scout?" asked Bob Lawless.

"I don't want any chinwag, Lawless! What game are you playing here?"

"It isn't a game, I guess. We mean business!"

"Open that gate at once!"

"Can't be did!"

"Now, look here, youngsters," said Mr. Henderson patiently, "this gentleman hyer—Mr. Peckover—has been appointed headmaster in place of Miss Meadows by the board of trustees. You are under his authority. He must be admitted to the school at once and his orders obeyed."

"We don't recognise him as our headmaster," said Frank Richards calmly. "Miss Meadows is headmistress of this school."

"Hear, hear!"

"But Miss Meadows has been dismissed by the board," said the sheriff.

Frank's eyes flashed.

"And why has she been dismissed?" he exclaimed. "Because she turned Kern Gunten out of the school for being a blackguard and a rascal, and his father, old man Gunten there, worked it to get her dismissed by the board so that his precious son could come back!"

"You insolent young rascal!" roared Mr. Gunten.

"Oh, you dry up!" said Frank Richards unceremoniously. "What is the board, after all—you and old Grimm, and my uncle—Mr. Lawless. Mr. Lawless stood up for Miss Meadows, and you know it. You and old Grimm had your way, because you're hand-in-glove with one another!"

"That's straight talk!" grinned Bob Lawless.

Old man Gunten had turned purple, and he seemed to have some difficulty in breathing. Probably the wealthy storekeeper of Thompson had never listened to such direct remarks before. But Frank Richards & Co. had no politeness to waste on him.

"We're standing up for Miss Meadows!" continued Frank. "Miss Meadows is still Head of Cedar Creek School, so far as we're concerned. She's appealed against the decision of the board, as we happen to know, and she may be reinstated by the authorities. Whether or not, we refuse to admit any other Head to the school!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted Tom Lawrence. "So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Gunten!"

The sheriff had listened quietly. As a matter of fact, he sympathised a good deal with the schoolboy strikers, as he knew Miss Meadows well, and respected that lady highly, and did not respect Mr. Gunten at all.

But the law was the law, and the sheriff had his duty to do. As so often happens in human disputes, it was not a case of right against wrong, but of one right in conflict with another.

"You understand now, Mr. Henderson?" asked Beaucherc.

"I understand," said the sheriff, with a nod. "That's all beside the question. I'm here to uphold the law. The board has power to dismiss a schoolmistress, and has done it. It has power to appoint a new schoolmaster, and has done it. I'm as sorry as you boys are that Miss Meadows has gone. But, as a matter of fact, Mr. Peckover is master of Cedar Creek, and you must obey him."

"We won't," said Frank, "and that's an end of it!"

"Now let in Mr. Peckover at once and submit to proper authority," said the sheriff, "and I have no doubt that Mr. Peckover will pass over what has happened, and pardon you all if you return to your duty at once."

And the sheriff glanced inquiringly at Mr. Peckover for that gentleman to confirm his statement. Mr. Peckover's reply came acidly from his thin lips.

"Nothing of the kind," he said coldly. "Every boy who has taken part in the rebellion will be severely punished."

The sheriff made an impatient gesture. By a promise of a pardon the matter might have been ended there and then—at least, the sheriff thought so. But it was evident that nothing was farther from the thoughts of Mr. Peckover than a pardon for the rebels.

"Well," said the sheriff, "with that I have nothing to do. Mr. Peckover is your schoolmaster, my boys, and my business is to see him admitted here and placed in authority. Will you open the gate?"

"Sorry, sheriff. No!"

"We don't want trouble with you, Mr.

Henderson, or with Dave there," said Dick Dawson; "but we're holding the fort till Miss Meadows comes back."

"Holdee outee, you bet!" chimed in Yen Chin, the Chinese. "Punchee nose if tly to come in, sheliff. Oh, yes!"

"Will you open the gate?" roared the sheriff, his anger rising at this defiance of his authority.

"No," said Frank Richards, "we won't open the gate, sheriff!"

"Force will be used!"

"Same on this side!"

"And I'll lay my trail-rope about you, too!" roared the sheriff.

"Go ahead, then!"

The sheriff signed to his man to approach.

"Get in and open the gate, Dave!" he said.

"I'm your man, sheriff!" said Big Dave cheerily.

And he rode his horse close to the gate and grasped the top to climb over.

NO ADMITTANCE!

DAVE DUCKERS was a big and powerful man, and certainly equal to any four of the Cedar Creek fellows in a fight. He had not the remotest idea that the boys would venture to dispute his entrance. But he was speedily undeceived.

As he grasped the top of the gate with his sinewy hands, Frank Richards and Bob Lawless produced their riding-whips and rapped on his knuckles hard. Big Dave gave a yell.

"You young hounds! Let up!"

Rap, rap, rap!

The schoolboy strikers evidently meant busi-



Clods of earth and chunks of wood rained down from the rebels on to the enemy.

ness. But so did Dave Duckers, and, in spite of the rapping on his knuckles, he threw a brawny leg over the gate.

"Will you get back?" shouted Bob Lawless.

"I guess not!" panted the sheriff's man.

"Then here goes! Look out for your cabeza!" Crash!

The stock of the riding-whip came down on Dave's stetson hat, smashing it flat on his head, and considerably hurting his head.

"That's a hint!" said Bob. "Get back, or you'll get some more, and worse!"

"Let that man alone!" shouted the sheriff, while old man Gunten and Mr. Peckover looked on speechlessly.

"Call him off, then!" said Frank Richards.

"Get on with it, Dave!" rapped the sheriff.

With really heroic fortitude, Dave Duckers essayed to clamber on. He released one hand from the gate to punch furiously at the school-boys within. But his arms were grasped by several pairs of hands and held, and he was helpless.

At the same time Bob Lawless leaned over and gave the horse below a flick of his whip. Big Dave's horse started and reared, and another flick sent him jumping away. Ducker's legs were dragged from the saddle, and he bumped against the gate, holding on to the top with one hand.

His fingers, seized from within, were forced open, and he lost his hold, and dropped with a heavy bump to the ground. There he sat and roared.

"Yah! Oh! Oh, Jerusalem crickets!"

A yell of laughter from above answered him. Big Dave Duckers crawled away from the gate.

Mr. Henderson's face was dark with anger. The rough handling of his man showed him that he had taken on a bigger order than he had supposed, but he did not even think of retreat.

"Come and have some yourself, sheriff!" yelled Chunky Todgers, much encouraged by the successful defence.

"Shut up, Chunky!" said Frank. "Don't cheek Mr. Henderson. I hope you'll go back to Thompson now, sheriff. Nothing doing here!"

Mr. Henderson squared his jaw.

"Will you open that gate?"

"No fear!"

"Come on, Dave!" said the sheriff. "Back me up!"

"I'm with you, sheriff," said Duckers, rather dismally.

Mr. Henderson rode up to the gate, and Dave Duckers climbed on his horse and followed him. A line of determined faces met them.

"You'll get hurt, sheriff!" said Frank Richards, setting his teeth. "We don't want to touch you, but you're not coming in here."

The sheriff did not heed. He grasped the top of the gate and essayed to pull himself over, Dave Duckers following his example.

"Go for them!" said Bob Lawless.

Lash, lash, lash!

Two pairs of hands on the gate were mercilessly lashed, but, in spite of the lashing, the sheriff and his man came on grimly. They got their chests on the gate-top, and each got a leg over. The matter was critical then, for in a few more moments the two brawny men would have rolled over and dropped into the school enclosure. But Frank Richards & Co. were ready.

The two legs, as they came over the gate, were grasped by many hands and shoved back. Dave

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Duckers overbalanced, his hands losing their hold, and he hung head downwards, only held by the grasp of three or four fellows on his leg.

The sheriff clung on desperately, but he, too, was pushed over, still clinging. A fierce rapping on the fingers unloosened his grip at last, and he let go, and as soon as his hold was lost, he fell back in a heap on his horse, and slid from the horse's back to the ground with a bump.

Dave Duckers, held by his leg, was howling with wrath and apprehension as he anticipated every moment a fall on his head.

"Let up!" he yelled. "I mean, hold on! Don't let me drop on my cabeza, you young hounds! Oh, gum!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep him there for a bit," gasped Bob Lawless. "It will cool him down."

"How do you like it, Dave?" chuckled Chunky Todgers.

"Oh, holy Moses!" howled Dave. "Sheriff, lend a hand! I guess I shall crack my cabeza if I drop! Oh, Jerusalem!"

Sheriff Henderson staggered to his feet and grasped his unfortunate follower. Then Frank Richards & Co. kindly let go the captured leg, and Dave Duckers was helped to the ground.

"Oh, holy smoke!" he mumbled. "Sheriff, I guess I've had enough of this."

Sheriff Henderson did not reply. He glared speechlessly at the grinning faces over the gate.

"You young scallawags!" he gasped at last.

"We warned you, sheriff!" answered Frank Richards.

"I guess you'll suffer for this!" roared the sheriff.

"We're chancing that."

"Are you going to get that gate open, Mr. Henderson?" spluttered old man Gunten furiously.

"Can you tell me how to get it open?" hooted the sheriff.

"That's your business!"

"Then leave it to me, and hold your tongue!"

And with that reply the sheriff turned his back on the stuttering storekeeper.

AN ATTACK IN FORCE!

FRANK RICHARDS & CO. looked watchfully over the gate and waited. So far they had been successful, and they were much encouraged thereby.

Sheriff Henderson seemed at a loss. As for old man Gunten and Mr. Peckover, they waited for the sheriff to make some move, leaving him to solve the difficulty.

After a time the sheriff spoke to his follower in a low voice, and Dave Duckers rode round the fence of the school enclosure, evidently looking for some other mode of entrance. But he found the other gate fastened, and whenever he looked over the wall, he found that he was watched for. He gave it up, and trotted round to join the sheriff at the gate again.

"I guess it's no go, sheriff," he said. "I reckon that we've got to let up."

Sheriff Henderson looked again at the grinning faces over the gate.

"This is a serious thing you're doing, young fellows!" he said.

"I guess so," assented Bob Lawless. "Quite serious, sheriff. We mean business!"

The sheriff turned to Mr. Gunten.

"I guess I can do nothing more at present," he said. "You've got the school into a state of

riot among you, and there's no getting in now. I shall have to get more force!"

"Get it, and don't lose time!" snapped Mr. Gunten.

Mr. Henderson signed to his man, and they rode away at a gallop up the trail to Thompson. A loud cheer from the Cedar Creek fellows followed them. The retreat of the sheriff and his man was an acknowledgment of defeat.

Old man Gunten shook a fat fist at the schoolboy strikers. He was bitterly disappointed by the result of the sheriff's visit. Not for a moment had he imagined that Cedar Creek would venture to resist the representative of law and order.

He had begun to realise that he had stirred up a wasps' nest, so to speak, at Cedar Creek School, and he began to have doubts as to how the matter would end. But he was none the less determined to have his way.

As he shook a podgy fist at the rebels, a clod of earth from Eben Hacke caught him under his fat chin, and he nearly fell from his horse.

Mr. Peckover hastily rode back out of range, and the fat storekeeper followed him, spluttering. They trotted away at last up the trail in the direction taken by the sheriff and his man.

"Looks like a victory for us, you chaps!" grinned Chunky Todgers.

"Hurrah!"

"So far," said Frank Richards soberly. "But you heard what the sheriff said. He's gone for more men."

"Let 'em come!" said Bob Lawless. "They'll find us ready for them! If they get in over the fence there'll still be the schoolhouse, and we can hold that against all Thompson Valley!"

Frank Richards laughed.

"I don't know about that," he said. "But we can hold it against the sheriff and his men. We'd better get ready for a tussle."

Matters were growing serious for the schoolboy strikers, but there was no thought of surrender, only of preparation for the struggle to come. It was probable enough that the enemy would effect an entrance at some point in the school enclosure if they came in force, but the schoolhouse itself was a stronghold that was not likely to be taken easily.

In the interval before the sheriff could return Frank Richards & Co. improved the shining hour, as it were, by making the schoolhouse ready for defence if the emergency arose.

Black Sally was politely but firmly requested to vacate her quarters, which she did; and the Chinese servant was also given notice to quit, and the schoolboys had the house to themselves.

Lumber was carried into the house by many busy hands, and boards nailed across windows inside, and logs piled against doors. In the course of an hour the schoolhouse was turned into a veritable fortress, and only the main door was left open on the porch, all ready to be closed and barred if the rebels had to retreat into the house.

Every fellow obtained a stick, a whip, or a pole to defend the walls as soon as the attack came, and Bob Lawless appointed the defenders to their places.

Meanwhile, Yen Chin was left to keep watch at the gate, with his eyes on the trail. All preparations were completed by the time the Chinese gave the alarm. He was heard yelling at last:

"Sheriff come! Gettee move on!"

There was a rush to the gate. Frank Richards jumped on the bench within and looked over. A bunch of horsemen came in sight, galloping towards the school. He recognised them as men

belonging to the town of Thompson, and observed that most of them were grinning.

They were the sheriff's posse, citizens of Thompson who were called on when necessary to maintain law and order. From their looks, it was evident that they regarded it as a joke, their being called up to quell a schoolboy rebellion at the section school.

There were ten men in all in the party, and it was evidently a force that the schoolboys could not deal with if they once got to close quarters. Behind the party rode Mr. Peckover and old man Gunten. They were looking much more satisfied now, in the confident anticipation of putting down the revolt at Cedar Creek.

With a clatter of hoofs the horsemen stopped outside the gate.

"Hallo, sheriff!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "Back again?"

"Open that gate!" rapped Mr. Henderson.

"Can't be done!"

The sheriff raised his hand and pointed to the gate.

"Get over the gate, men, and lay your ropes round those pesky young rascals!"

"You bet, sheriff!"

There was a clattering and crashing as the horsemen rode close to the gate to clamber over. But the task was not so easy as they supposed. The defenders were in deadly earnest, and their weapons came into play without mercy, and there were loud yells among the sheriff's posse.

"Sock in to them!" shouted Frank Richards.

"Give 'em beans!" roared Bob Lawless.

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"You young rascals! Yaroooh!"

The reception was a little too hot, and the horsemen backed away from the gate, with a wild clatter of hoofs and jingling of bridles.

"Go on! Go on!" yelled old man Gunten furiously. "What are you backing out for? Get on with it!"

"Get on with it yourself, you fat coyote!" roared Dave Duckers. "Go and get your own silly cabeza cracked, if you like!"

"Yes; come on, old man Gunten!" shouted Bob, flourishing his stick. "Come on, old sport!"

Old man Gunten did not come on, but he addressed the sheriff's men in language that was more plain than polite till Mr. Henderson gruffly told him to "Shut his chin!"

Then the sheriff rapped out an order to his men, who were not grinning now by any means. Their first brush with the schoolboy strikers had convinced them that the matter was serious.

"Cut down the gate!" rapped Mr. Henderson.

Dave Duckers and another man unslung woodman's axes from their saddles; they had evidently come prepared for that last resource. They advanced to the gate and started on it with the axes. The gate was thick and strong, but splinters flew fast under the hefty blows that rained down.

"By gum!" said Chunky Todgers, in dismay. "This lets us out, you chaps!"

Crash, crash, crash!

But the rebels were quick to reply. From within, clods of earth and chunks of wood rained down on Duckers and his companion so hotly that they retreated at last.

"Better keep your distance!" called out Bob Lawless. "This isn't a game, and any galoot who comes within range will get hurt!"

"Cut down that gate!" roared Mr. Henderson.

He seized one of the axes and rushed at the

gate, and another man followed. The crashing blows resounded again, and the gate creaked and rocked under the assault.

From above came a shower of missiles, and the sheriff's companion retreated, yelling. But Mr. Henderson stuck to it, crashing blows on the yielding gate, while clods of earth struck him like snowballs from above.

"Get my trail-ropes, Franky!" whispered Bob, as he sent clod after clod down on the angry, perspiring sheriff.

Frank Richards ran for the rope, and he was back in less than a minute. Bob noosed the end, and looked over at the sheriff, labouring below with undiminished vigour.

"Look out, sheriff!" shouted Dave Duckers, as he saw the lasso whirl in Bob's skilled hand.

The sheriff did not heed.

Crash, crash, crash!

The last blow sent the quivering axe-head fairly through the gate, and it stuck in the hard wood. As the sheriff dragged it fiercely to release it, the noose of the lasso dropped over his shoulders. He released the axe then and jumped back, but it was too late.

Half a dozen hands dragged on the rope within, and, as the noose slipped lower down round the sheriff, it tightened, and his arms were pinned to his sides.

"Pull!" yelled Bob.

Three or four fellows threw their weight on the rope inside the gate. The result was that the sheriff was dragged off his feet and bumped on the gate, suspended on the end of the lasso. He was dragged half-way to the top of the gate, and hung there, gasping.

Bob Lawless took a turn of the rope round a post inside and knotted it.

"You can let go now!" he gasped.

The schoolboys lined the gate again. Below them the sheriff was hanging in the lasso, which was taut round his arms and body, quite unable to release himself.

"I guess that puts the stopper on you, sheriff!" said Bob Lawless.

"Oh! Ah! Ow!" gasped the sheriff. "Let up! I'll skin you for this! Come and get me loose, you fools!"

His big boots beat a furious tattoo on the gate as he swung. There was a rush of his men to help him, but it was met by a regular fusillade from within, and the assailants fell back again.

NO SURRENDER!

BOB LAWLESS leaned over the gate and tapped the raving sheriff gently on the shoulder. Mr. Henderson glared up at him. The grip of the rope round his arms and body, with all his weight thrown on it, was hurting him.

"You young villain!" he gasped. "Let me loose!"

"Soon as you like, sheriff, if you'll give your word to light out for Thompson and let us alone," said Bob.

"I'll skin you!" raved the sheriff.

"I guess I'm not looking for a chance of being skinned, sheriff!" chuckled Bob. "Will you let up and light out if we cast you loose?"

"No!" roared the sheriff.

"Then I guess you can swing there till you get tired!"

The sheriff was tired already, to judge by his wild wriggings and his flow of language.

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"Why not surround the place and get in where you can?" snapped old man Gunten.

The suggestion was a good one, and the sheriff shouted to his posse to do so, and the horsemen rode round the school fence in a wide circle.

"This is where we beat a retreat, I think," remarked Frank Richards. "We can't keep them out in a dozen places at once."

Bob Lawless nodded.

Over the high fence the heads of the riders could be seen, surrounding the school enclosure, and the defenders were not numerous enough to man the whole extent of the spacious fence. On all sides hands were laid on the wall, and grim faces looked over.

Bob Lawless marshalled his men, and there was an orderly retreat from the gate, but missiles flew thickly at the assailants, and more than one of them dropped to the ground outside, yelling.

But one man dropped inside at last, then another and another. They came on with trail-ropes coiled in their hands, with the very evident intention of administering terrific thrashings to the schoolboy strikers as soon as they were within reach.

But by that time Frank Richards & Co. had retreated to the porch of the schoolhouse, and were ready to disappear from sight. Bob Lawless saw all the others inside, and was the last to follow.

Big Dave was within a dozen feet of him, rope in hand, when Bob stepped inside the house and the big door was slammed. A bar rattled into place, securing it.

"Not this time, I guess!" called out Bob Lawless from within.

"You pesky young coyote!" yelled Big Dave. "Open that door at once! You hear me?"

"Go and chop chips!"

Big Dave bestowed a tremendous kick on the door, which made it shake, but did no damage except to the paint.

By this time the sheriff had been released, and he strode towards the schoolhouse in a towering rage. He struck with his clenched fist on the big pine door.

"Let me in at once!" he shouted.

"Not to-day, sheriff!" answered Frank Richards.

"The door will be broken in!"

"Go ahead!"

"Get the axes!" exclaimed Mr. Henderson.

"You're doing a lot of damage to the school, sheriff!" chuckled Bob Lawless. "Mind the trustees don't bring an action for damages against you."

"Buck up with those forms!" shouted Frank.

The garrison were dragging the forms and desks out of the big school-room to pile against the door. Outside, the axes were already sounding. But inside a solid array of heavy desks and forms was piled up, and behind that another and another, till the hall was one huge barricade.

A gleam of daylight came through the door as the blows were plied without and the stout wood was split. As a panel burst open, the assailants ceased to smite and the sheriff applied his eyes to the opening.

"You can see it's no good now!" he exclaimed. "Now, open the door before any further damage is done!"

Then the sheriff gasped. Instead of a crowd of schoolboys within, what he saw was a mass of desks and forms of heavy pine with iron legs, extending back to the depth of a dozen feet or so. It was evidently impossible for his men to hew a

way through such a terrific barricade as that, to say nothing of the damage to school property that would have been entailed.

"By gum!" gasped the sheriff, quite taken aback.

"Aire we going on, boss?" inquired Dave Duckers.

Mr. Henderson shook his head.

"No good breaking in the door, we could never get through that," he said. "Look at it."

Big Dave looked through the split in the door and ejaculated.

"Oh, Jerusalem!"

It was plain that the task was hopeless.

Old man Gunten arrived on the scene now with Mr. Peckover, both of them apparently under the impression that the trouble was over. Mr. Peckover was rubbing his thin hands, with a cruel gleam in his eyes, in anticipation of the punishment he was about to inflict.

"Why is not the door open?" asked Mr. Gunten.

"What does this nonsense mean?"

The sheriff snorted.

"Use your eyes!" he growled.

Old man Gunten applied his eyes to the orifice, and snorted with wrath.

"The young scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "You should not have given them time to build up that barricade, sheriff!"

"How could I help it?" roared the sheriff. "Wasn't I roped at the gate?"

"You shouldn't have been. Do you call yourself a sheriff, and allow yourself to be beaten by a parcel of schoolboys?" raved the storekeeper, who was too enraged to care what he said. "What use are you, I'd like to know?"

"Calm yourselves!" urged Mr. Peckover. "The immediate business is to effect an entrance and bring those young scoundrels to order."

"It's got to be done!" snorted Mr. Gunten.

"I suppose you are responsible for the damage done, Mr. Gunten?" snapped the sheriff.

"Hang the damage! Get ahead with your work!"

The sheriff opened his lips for an angry reply, but he closed them again and strode away from the porch.

"Break in a window!" he rapped out.

Dave Duckers took his axe and advanced to the window of the school-room nearest the porch. The wooden shutters within were closed, but they were soon shattered by the powerful blows of an axe. But as they splintered it was seen that thick planks were nailed across inside.

"Oh, by gum!" gasped Duckers.

"Get on!" snapped the sheriff.

Crash, crash!

The axe smashed through one of the planks, leaving a wide gap. But the defenders were ready inside. Through a gap a long pole was suddenly shoved, and the end of it caught Big Dave under the chin. With a wild howl, Dave Duckers dropped the axe and staggered back.

The pole was instantly withdrawn, and there was a loud chortle within.

"Come on again!" called Frank Richards.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" howled Dave Duckers, clapping his chin with both hands. "Yow-ow! Sheriff, I guess I'm no hog, and I know when I've had enough. Yow-ow!"

"Get on!" yelled old man Gunten, almost dancing with rage. "You fool! Get on, I tell you!"

Big Dave made no reply, but he strode at old

(Continued on page 36.)



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UNDER FIRE!

"YOW-OW!"

"Dry up, Toodles!"

"Wow!"

"What's the matter, you fat porker?" groaned Tuckey Toodles. "I'm bitten all over! I'm covered with fearful wounds. Ow! Ow! I wish I hadn't come!"

"Hear, hear!" said Dick Rodney heartily. "I wish you hadn't, old chap."

"It's your fault," said Tuckey Toodles, dabbing with a fat paw at another mosquito which had taken a fancy to his fat little nose. "You ought to have brought mosquito nets, Drake."

"Fathead!" said Drake laconically.

"You can't travel in South America without mosquito nets!" howled Tuckey Toodles. "The beastly Orinoco is nearly all mosquitoes and alligators and jaguars, and other beastly things. It's a beastly country, and a beastly river, and you fellows are beasts, too!"

And with that sweeping indictment of his surroundings and his comrades, Rupert de Vere Toodles sank back in the canoe and fanned himself with a big palm leaf.

There were grounds for Tuckey's complaints; certainly the mosquitoes were very numerous, and very hungry. And they had a special liking for the fat Fourth Former.

But the other fellows suffered, too. Only Tin Tacks, the black gentleman of Barbados, seemed indifferent to the nips of mosquitoes. Tin Tacks paddled on industriously, regardless of such trifles. He seemed indifferent to the heat as well; and the heat was overpowering to the others.

It was not only hot but steaming, and there were weird smells on the Rio Catalina, one of the thousand little tributaries of the mighty Orinoco. Rotting vegetation lay in heaps along the stream, under a burning sun.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,646.

RIVAL TREASURE-SEEKERS!

By Owen Conquest.

It was fortunate for the voyagers that the stream was narrow, and in most places the branches of the great trees on either bank met over the water, and gave a welcome shade.

Jack Drake and Dick Rodney bore their hardships philosophically, and Daubeny stood them pretty well. Egan and Torrence grumbled incessantly, though in that line Tuckey Toodles beat them easily.

The Benbow juniors were beginning to think that they would have earned the treasure of the Orinoco—if ever they found it.

It was being borne in upon Daubeny's mind that he had done a reckless thing in leaving the safe shelter of the school ship to undertake this expedition into the heart of the wilds.

But it was too late to turn back now—and not even Tuckey Toodles wanted to turn back.

For three days they had paddled up the little stream. By deep primeval forest, by swamp and lagoon, they had pushed on; and three days in the wilds had made a great difference to the juniors. Mr. Packe would hardly have known them if he could have seen them now.

Their clothes were tattered and torn, their skins burnt brown and scratched by thorns; and they were almost tattooed by mosquito bites. Their small supply of provisions had run out; but there was ample game and fruit along the banks, so they had at least food in plenty.

Once, from a dense patch of chaparral on the bank, a rifle-shot had whizzed over the canoe, warning them that Peg Slaney, their rival in the quest, was still keeping pace with them.

But for three days they had not seen the one-eyed seaman who held the same clue to the buried gold of the Orinoco.

It was the fourth morning now—a hot, steaming morning, with a burning sun blazing down through the foliage that linked overhead.

Daubeny of the Shell sat in the canoe, conning over the copy of the treasure clue.

He glanced up impatiently at the thick forest that covered the river bank on both sides.

"Confound it!" said Daubeny at last. "Where are the stone bluffs mentioned in this dashed paper?"

Drake glanced at the paper, and read it through once more.

"From Las Tablas three days in canoe on the Rio Catalina. Land at the stone bluffs, and follow the Indian path by the Arrowac tree-graves. The gold is buried under the great ceiba on the mesa."

Vernon Daubeny gave a grunt.

"We've followed the Rio Catalina for three

days," he said; "but we haven't sighted the stone bluffs yet."

"No sign of them so far," said Drake, glancing along the wall of tropical vegetation on the bank. Daubeney gnawed his lip.

"You're sure the copy's right?" asked Rodney.

"It was copied from Slaney's paper, which he stole from my father years ago. We translated it all right."

Tin Tacks glanced round.

"All right, Mass' Daub," he said, "me know."

"How do you know, Tin Tacks?"

Tin Tacks grinned his expansive grin.

"P'raps dat paper mean three day in canoe with Indian paddlers," he explained. "Go faster dan canoe with only one black gentleman at de paddle."

Drake laughed.

"Of course," he said, "that's the explanation. We've got only one paddler, and a heavy load for him to get along. We shall come to the stone bluffs later, Daub."

"Good!" said Daubeney, much relieved. "I hadn't thought of that. Good for you, old snow-ball."

"Yow-ow-ow!" came from Tuckey Toodles.

"Shut up, Toodles!" roared Drake.

"I'm bitten!"

"You'll be kicked as well if you don't make less row."

"Yow-ow! Why didn't you bring a mosquito net, you ass?" groaned Tuckey. "You might have brought one, at least, for me."

"You ass, how could we have dodged away under Mr. Packe's eyes if we stopped for all the things we wanted?" growled Drake.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"I warned you you wouldn't like the trip, when you barged in," said Drake. "Now you're landed in it, dry up, for goodness' sake, and give us a rest."

"Yah!" was Tuckey's reply.

The canoe glided on, as the sun rose higher and hotter. Perspiration streamed down every face. There was an incessant stream of gasps and groans from Toodles, by way of accompaniment to the splash-splash of the paddle.

Egan of the Shell started up suddenly with an exclamation, and pointed.

"Look!"

"The stone bluffs!" exclaimed Torrence.

"Good!"

Ahead of the canoe the forest fell away on one side of the stream, and the bank rose from the water in high precipitous bluffs of grey stone. Daubeney's eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

"Right, after all!" he exclaimed. "Go it, Tin Tacks!"

"Me go it, Mass' Daub, debblish quick," answered the Barbadian black gentleman cheerfully.

The canoe shot onward against the sluggish current, and the stone bluffs loomed nearer. Out of the shade of the trees, the sun beat down mercilessly upon the treasure-seekers.

Tin Tacks paddled along the bluffs, looking for a landing-place.

From the top of the bluffs, fifty feet above the stream, came a sudden puff of smoke and a flash. Crack!

A bullet missed the black man by a foot, and plunged into the water beside the canoe.

DOWN AND OUT!

"PEG SLANEY!" shouted Drake.

From the top of the bluffs a savage, sun-scorched face, with a single squinting eye, glared down.

It was the one-eyed seaman of the Benbow, with a smoking rifle in his hand.

Tin Tacks turned the canoe directly towards the bank.

Another bullet from above splashed into the water behind the canoe.

Tuckey Toodles gave a loud howl as a splash of water caught him.

Tin Tacks' object was soon apparent. Close up under the precipitous rocks it was impossible for the man on top of the bluffs to take aim downward at the canoe. The bulges of the rock sheltered the canoe from his fire.

The canoe floated in safety close by the bluffs.

There was tense excitement among the treasure-seekers now. Vernon Daubeney had his revolver in his hand. Excepting for Tin Tacks' rifle, it was the only effective weapon in the party.

"The rotter's ahead of us," said Egan, between his teeth. "He's stopped at the bluffs to wait for us to come up. He reckoned he would pick us off in the canoe."

"He can't touch us now," said Drake, "and when we get ashore we'll deal with him fast enough."

Tin Tacks moved the canoe slowly along the bluffs till he came to a narrow opening in the cliffs. He tooled the canoe into the little cove.

"We land here, Mass' Jack."

"Right-ho, Tin Tacks!"

There was a strip of sand by the cove at the foot of the cliff, and the juniors scrambled ashore.

"We hab to leave de canoe here, Mass' Jack."

Tin Tacks pulled the light craft out of the water.

"Dere not much for us to carry."

Drake laughed rather ruefully.

"Not so much as we should like," he said. "We shall travel light, anyhow."

"I say, Drake—"

"Well, fathead?"

"We can't climb those cliffs."

"We've got to, Tuckey!"

"Well, I can't!"

"Then you'll have to stay behind, old bean," said Drake. "Nothing else to be done that I can see."

"Can't you carry me up among you, somehow?"

"Bow-wow! Lead on, Tin Tacks, old top!"

"Dis way, Mass' Jack."

The treasure-seekers had landed a quarter of a mile from the spot where Slaney had fired on them. But they kept well on their guard as they essayed to climb the steep bluffs.

From the cove, a steep and rugged path was practicable up the height, and Tin Tacks led the way with the activity of a mountain goat, his rifle slung across his broad shoulders.

The juniors followed in single file.

Tuckey Toodles, with a deep groan, followed after his comrades.

"You've been this way before, Tin Tacks?" asked Drake, as they paused to rest on a ledge of mossy rock.

"Ves, Mass' Jack, long ago. Tin Tacks nebber forget. Tin Tacks debblish clobber ole feller."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Rodney.

They climbed on.

From rugged rock to rugged rock, Tin Tacks

led the way, with a lithe activity amazing in a black gentleman of his size.

He stopped when his head was nearly on a level with the flat top of the bluff.

"What now?" asked Daubeny.

Tin Tacks grinned.

"Dat fellow Paquito—ole Slaney—debblish cute," he said. "He know dis path—he know we come up. Him come dis way to watch for us. P'r'aps him waiting on top, ready to shoot soon as we put up head to be shot at. What you tink?"

"Very likely," said Drake.

"What the thump are we going to do, then?" muttered Torrence. "We're goin' to be picked off like dashed partridges as soon as we show ourselves, at any rate."

"You wait a bit," said Tin Tacks. "Me know. Ole Tin Tacks jolly clebber ole goat. You see."

The black Barbadian removed his hat, and placed it on the muzzle of his rifle.

Jack Drake & Co. watched him in silence.

The path ended in an abrupt edge of rock, over which the juniors would have to scramble, and to do so with a watchful rifleman waiting above was to ask for death.

Tin Tacks raised his rifle, with the hat on it, slowly, so that the top of the hat showed above the sharp edge of rock. From the top of the bluff it looked exactly like the head of a climber rising into view.

Crack!

A shot rang out, and the bullet cut through the hat, and, had there been a head inside, the climber would have fallen with the bullet in his brain.

As it was, two holes were bored in the sides of the hat, and the bullet went whizzing away in the tropical sunlight.

Before the report had died away, Tin Tacks, with a scrambling leap, was on top of the bluff.

Peg Slaney, six or seven feet away, was lying on the rock, his rifle covering the outlet of the steep path. He was reloading rapidly, but he had no time to ram in the cartridge before Tin Tacks was upon him. Slaney, with a roar of rage, grappled with him, and they rolled over on the cliff together.

"Come on!" yelled Drake.

He bounded up, his comrades at his heels.

Tin Tacks and Slaney were struggling furiously, but the one-eyed ruffian had little chance against the powerful negro. He was down on his back, with a brawny black knee on his chest, when Drake reached the spot, and the negro's knife flashed in the sun-blaze as he threw up his hand to strike.

A second more, and the one-eyed seaman would have lain a dead man on the bluff.

Jack Drake caught the sinewy arm as it was descending.

"Stop!" he shouted.

The knife barely missed Slaney as Drake dragged the negro's arm aside.

"You can't kill him, Tin Tacks!" panted Jack.

"Me kill him stone dead, Mass' Jack! Him no good to live! Him bad man, and try to shoot us!"

"He may be a murderous brute, but we're not," said Drake. "Tin Tacks, put back your knife, old man."

"But, Mass' Jack—"

Tin Tacks was keenly disappointed. It was only his deep respect for Mass' Jack that kept

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the knife from Slaney's breast. With a single jerk of his powerful arm he could have thrown the junior off.

He sheathed his knife, however.

"You be sorry for dis some day, Mass' Jack," he said.

"I—I say, Drake—" muttered Daub hesitatingly.

"Well, Daub?"

"It's madness to let him live, and try again to—"

Drake's eyes flashed.

"We're not assassins," he said. "We haven't adopted the manners and customs of this beautiful country to that extent, I hope."

"But what are we going to do with the man?" demanded Daubeny. "We can't take a prisoner along on a journey like ours."

"No fear!" said Torrence.

Egan burst into a bitter, mocking laugh.

"We shall all lose our necks, owing to Drake's foolery!" he exclaimed. "If that man lives he will follow us and kill us if he can!"

"We'll see that he doesn't," said Drake.

"Fool!" hissed Egan.

"That's enough! If you want to be knocked down on your back, Egan, you've only got to keep on in that strain!"

Egan choked back his rage with an effort.

Tin Tacks turned a deeply distressed face upon his young master.

"What we do with dis swab, Mass' Jack, if no kill him?" he asked.

"Fasten the brute's hands for the present," said Drake.

"Berry well; you gib orders here, Mass' Jack."

And when the black Barbadian had finished securing Peg Slaney, there was no doubt that the one-eyed seaman was safe enough.

DRAKE SPEAKS HIS MIND!

THE treasure-seekers camped on the bluffs under a group of cabbage palms at some distance back from the river, where the ground was fertile and the forest recommenced. They rested in the shade, and ate their frugal meal, of which Slaney was offered a share. The one-eyed ruffian accepted it willingly enough, and ate with a good appetite, his hands being loosened sufficiently for the purpose.

Slaney was evidently in a state of great astonishment. He would have shot down his rivals in the gold quest without scruple, and he had fully expected the same fate if fortune turned against him—as it had turned. Why Jack Drake had made the negro spare his life was a puzzle to the ruffian; but it is possible that he was touched with gratitude in his own hard, rough way.

Dick Rodney was fully in support of Drake in the matter; but Daubeny & Co. were very dubious, excepting Egan, who was savagely angry at Drake's ill-timed squeamishness, as he considered it. As for Tuckey Toodles, he did not give the matter a thought. He was concentrating his attention on the eatables.

"We've got to follow an Indian path here," said Daubeny, as he finished his lunch with a mango. "We ought to find that easily enough; but what are we going to do with that ruffian, Drake?"

"Let him loose, to pot us from behind a ceiba!" sneered Egan.

"We've got his rifle," said Rodney.

"Very likely he knows the Arrowac Indians in this part, and can set them on us!" snapped Egan.

Drake wrinkled his brows in thought.

To kill the one-eyed ruffian was unthinkable; but to set him free was to add immeasurably to the dangers of the trip, already bristling with perils.

The mention of the "Arrowac tree-graves" in the document showed that they were now in the country of wild Indians, and it was only too probable that Slaney had acquaintances among them from his old life on the Orinoco.

"We can't let him go," said Drake. "Luck's been our way, and we've nobbled the villain. We shall have to take him along with us, a prisoner."

"Hard enough without that!" growled Egan.

"Well, we didn't come out here on a picnic, I suppose," retorted Drake.

"It's rot! The man's an attempted murderer!"

"Very likely a murderer half a dozen times over," said Torrence.

"We're going to keep clear of bloodshed if we can," said Drake quietly. "If we have to fight for our lives, that's another matter. Slaney can come with us, loose enough for marching, but with his hands tied. He can't do any harm then."

"I call it silly rot!"

"You can call it what you like, Egan, but that's the programme."

Egan's eyes glittered.

"Are you master here?" he demanded. "It seems to me that this is our expedition, and Daub's let you into it."

"Where would you be if we hadn't come along?" asked Tuckey Toodles. "We saved your lives."

"You didn't, you fat frog!"

"Look here, Egan, you cheeky rotter—"

"Mass' Jack massa here!" interposed Tin Tacks. "Me 'bey orders of Mass' Jack, and nobody else!"

"That settles it!" said Drake, laughing. "Tin Tacks is the whole of the armed force, and the armed force says it is going to obey my orders. So I am military dictator, you see, Egan. But, all the same, we're quite ready to step out and go back to the Benbow, and leave you fellows on your own, just as we found you if you like."

"Of course, we don't want anything of the kind," said Egan, dismayed at the bare thought of being abandoned in the forest.

"Of course we don't!" growled Daubeny. "Doring off, Egan! I agree with Drake; and, anyhow, he's boss of the show if he chooses. We can yank that scowling brute along with us somehow."

"I guess if you'll let me put in a word, sir—"

said Peg Slaney, speaking for the first time.

"Go it!" said Drake.

"You've got me down," said the one-eyed seaman. "I own up to that. Here, I'm on my beam-ends on a lee-shore, and there's no getting out of it. I guess I'm ready to join your party, if you say the word, on fair shares all round. There's enough for all buried under the ceiba on the mesa. After all, it's my clue you've got to the treasure."

"Where did you get it?" snapped Egan.

"I guess that's neither here nor there," said Slaney. "I've as much right to it as you young gents here, anyhow!"

"You stole it from my father!" said Daubeny.

Peg Slaney sneered.

"Suppose I did take it from Sir George Daubeny?" he said. "Where did Sir George get it? Ponce Garcia gave it to him when the game was up! Well, where did Ponce Garcia get it? He left a long knife between the shoulders of the man that had it before him."

The juniors shuddered.

Slaney spoke with a savage, sneering earnestness, and there was little doubt that he was stating the facts.

"And where did the gold come from in the first place, Slaney?" asked Jack Drake, after a pause.

"I guess it was got together during the revolution years ago, and it was going to be used to pay troops agin the Government; but the revolution petered out, and most of the leaders were shot, with their backs up agin walls," said Slaney. "Ponce Garcia was shot, too."

"I suppose the Government would have a claim to it," said Rodney.

Slaney laughed jeeringly.

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"There's been two or three different Governments since then," he answered. "Ponce Garcia's revolution was one out of a dozen."

"What a jolly country!" said Rodney. "I think I shan't be sorry when we say good-bye to Venezuela."

"I shall be glad to see some good grub on the Benbow again!" said Tuckey Toodles, with a deep sigh.

"Well, what do you say, Master Drake?" asked Slaney. "You saved my life, and I guess it's only you keeping the knife from my heart at this blessed minute. Let me join your gang, and I'll play the game square. You'll find me useful. I know the country, and I tell you—"

Drake shook his head.

"You're not to be trusted," he said. "If you could be relied on I'd agree, but you couldn't. You'll have to come along a prisoner."

"I should jolly well think so!" snapped Egan. Slaney shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I guess you're right not to trust a sea-lawyer like me," he said, without any show of resentment. "But I mean it, fair and square. But if I'm not with you, I'm agin you, and I ain't goin' to be robbed of the treasure without a tussle for it!"

Drake hesitated.

"I'm willing enough for you to share in the treasure if we find it," he said. "You've as much right as we have. What do you say, Daub?"

"No!" yelled Egan.

"Dash it all, Drake!" muttered Daubeny.

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"The fellow tried to kill us!" muttered Torrence.

"Well, you got his treasure clue off him by a trick!" retorted Drake. "You couldn't expect him to take it smiling, I suppose. Nobody's a right to the treasure, if it comes to that—only the finder. We agreed to join in on condition the ownership of the treasure was settled fairly and squarely, if found. Slaney is a ruffianly brute, but he had the clue. I think it would be fair to let him take his whack."

"Same here!" said Rodney, after a pause.

"I've agreed for you to be leader, Drake," said Daubeny. "Let it be as you say. There's enough for all, anyhow."

"Rot!" said Tuckey Toodles.

"You shut up, Toodles!"

"I'm not going to! I—"

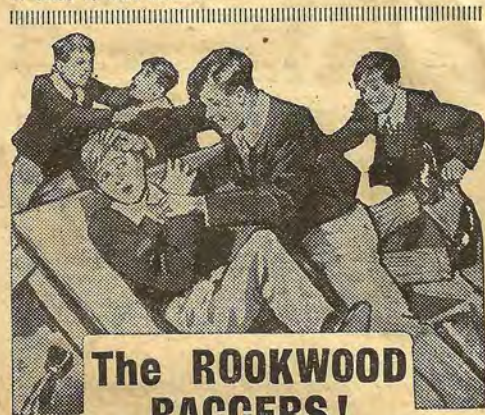
"I don't agree!" said Egan and Torrence together.

"You don't count!" retorted Drake coolly. "Slaney comes in for his whack, if there's anything to be whacked out. He's going to be one of the finders, though, with his hands tied. And now we'd better be moving."

He rose from the log he was seated on, and the discussion ceased. Tin Tacks was already seeking for the Indian path.

THE UPPER HAND!

THE sun was low in the west when the adventurers resumed their journey, Tin Tacks having discovered the Indian path—a beaten track that led from the bluffs through the heart of the forest. The track, trodden by the feet of generations of Indians, was plainly enough marked, and there was no doubt about it once it was found.



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It was with wary eyes that the adventurers followed it under the big ceiba-trees, amid pendant masses of lianas and Spaniards-beard. There were no fresh tracks to be discerned on the path, but its existence showed that the wild Arrows were somewhere in the locality.

Whether the Indians would attack them the juniors did not know; but it was extremely likely that the savages, if met with, would prove hostile. They had no cause to love the white man. The Venezuelan Government is not exactly a fatherly Government to its savage subjects of the forest and the llano.

They were a good many miles from the Rio Catalina when they camped for the night in the heart of the forest.

Peg Slaney had marched in silence with the party, his hands and ankles loosely shackled, to allow him freedom in walking, but no freedom for escape. When they camped, the one-eyed seaman threw himself down in the herbage to rest.

A fire was not lighted; the night was warm, and it was probable that a light would attract undesirable visitors.

Tin Tacks took a careful look at Slaney's bonds when the juniors turned in. The one eye of the prisoner glinted at him savagely. Leaving the ruffian in his bed of grass, the black Barbadian took his rifle under his arm, to keep watch and ward.

The juniors were soon fast asleep; the fatigue of the day soon made them slumber, in spite of discomforts.

Blackness surrounded them in the deep forest, broken only by the glitter of occasional fire-flies darting among the trees. Sometimes from the distance came the howl of some wild animal, prowling in the woods for prey.

The camp was some little distance off the Indian path, and it was towards the path that Tin Tacks' watchfulness was chiefly directed.

Once in the night a dim figure passed along the path from the river, and Tin Tacks' wary eyes watched him from the shadow. It was the figure of an Indian, with a grass-plaited game-bag slung on his shoulders. The black man made no sound, and the copperskin passed on without dreaming of the camp close at hand.

Jack Drake, sleeping soundly in his leafy bed, was dreaming of home and England—of the old playing fields at St. Winifred's.

He awakened suddenly.

As he came out of the slumber with a start, he felt the pressure of a hand over his mouth.

"Silence!"

It was a fierce whisper in his ear. The blood thrilled through his heart as he recognised the voice of Peg Slaney.

It was the one-eyed ruffian, whom he had seen lying bound hand and foot. Peg Slaney was free, and Drake shuddered as he felt the point of a knife pressed to his chest.

"Not a sound! Not a movement!" came the fierce whisper.

Drake lay still.

The point of the knife was over his heart; it needed only a movement of the ruffian's arm to drive it home and still its throbbing for ever.

He gazed upward silently.

Over him was a dark shadow, under the dark shadows of the trees, and from the shadow scintillated a single eye. Silent, with throbbing heart, he lay—at the mercy of the ruffian whose life he had spared!

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The President of the Exchange Pen Pals Club, 34, Gladstone Road, Chippenham, Wilts, wishes to thank all those members and non-members abroad who sent him telegrams on May 1st. Any boy scout who collects county badges and would like to start a section for this in the above club is invited to write to-day, enclosing stamped, addressed envelope for reply.

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GUSSY'S WILD MAN!

(Continued from page 23.)

floated away down the Rio Preto. The island dropped astern, and disappeared from sight. The Ilha dos Macacos was left once more to the monkeys!

"Bwazil was all wight in a way, you fellows," remarked Arthur Augustus a few weeks later, as the boat train from Tilbury drew in at the

NO SURRENDER!

(Continued from page 29.)

man Gunten, took him by the collar, and shook him like a rat.

"Help!" spluttered the fat storekeeper. "Ruffian! Mr. Henderson, help! Yaroooh! Oh! Ah! Grrrr!"

Shake, shake, shake!

"Help!" shrieked Mr. Gunten.

Big Dave shook him once more, and then pitched him away, and Mr. Gunten rolled on the ground. Then Big Dave strode away towards the gates to his horse. He had had enough of the schoolboy strikers and of old man Gunten.

The storekeeper got up breathlessly, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels. "Sheriff!" he spluttered. "Arrest that man! Place him in custody! Do you hear?"

"Oh, don't be a jay!" was the sheriff's reply. "What—what?"

"Stow your chinwag!" exclaimed the sheriff. "If you talk to a galoot like that you must expect to be handled. Dry up!"

Old man Gunten almost choked.

Mr. Peckover gave him a hand and assisted him to his feet. The storekeeper brushed him aside by way of thanks. Tempers were failing on all sides among the attacking party.

Mr. Gunten strode towards the sheriff and shook a fist under his nose.

"You insolent rascal!" he raved.

"What?" spluttered the sheriff.

The fat storekeeper was trembling with rage.

"What do you call yourself?" he hooted. "Sheriff of Thompson! And you're beaten by a gang of boys! By gosh, I'll have you sacked if you don't put that man in the calaboose at once, and if you don't bring those boys to order! You hear me?"

London terminus. "We had wathah a wippin' time there, takin' one thing with anothah; and I was sowwy to part with old Cucumbah. But it's wippin' to be back in England. And affah sewappin' with jaguahs, and Indians, and bandits, and things, it will be easy as fallin' off a form to give Piggins & Co. of the New House the kybosh next term! What?"

And Tom Merry & Co. agreed, without a dissentient voice, that it would!

Next Wednesday:

"BAGGY TRIMBLE'S BOOBY-TRAP!"

"By hokey!" said the sheriff. "You'll have me sacked, will you? I'll give you some plain talk, Mr. Gunten. It's your own fault that this trouble has happened. It was a dirty trick to discharge Miss Meadows for no fault of hers, and I guess you did it because she turned your blackguard of a son out of the school, as he deserved. And now, Mr. Gunten, as you think I'm no use, I'll vamoose the ranch, and you can handle the affair on your lonesome, and just as you like."

And with that the sheriff called to his men and strode away to the gate.

Old man Gunten stood breathless with rage for some moments; then he shrieked after the sheriff.

"Come back! Do you hear me? Come back! I order you!"

Sheriff Henderson did not heed. He strode to his horse and mounted, and his men followed his example. Probably Mr. Henderson was glad enough, in any case, to be relieved of the difficult task he had undertaken, but to have the insolence of the storekeeper added to the difficulty of the task was the last straw.

The sheriff had washed his hands of the business, leaving old man Gunten and the new schoolmaster to deal with it as they thought fit. There was a clatter of hoofs on the trail as the sheriff and his posse rode off to Thompson, unheeding the frantic commands of old man Gunten.

From within the barricaded schoolhouse came a derisive yell:

"Come on, Mr. Gunten!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Old man Gunten did not reply. He seemed to be on the verge of an attack of apoplexy. The first round of the contest was over, and Frank Richards & Co were the winners.

Next Week: "HOLDING THE FORT!"

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