THE BIG NATIONAL FICTION MAGAZINE
TWICE-A-MONTH
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

The Popular Magazine

OCT. 7
1925

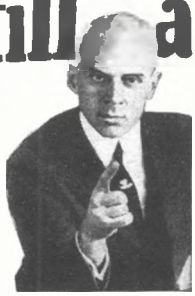
25
cts.

BY
SAPPER
COMPLETE IN
THIS ISSUE

A
BULL-DOG
DRUMMOND
NOVEL

Electrical Experts are in Big Demand!
—L. L. Cooke

I Will Train You at Home to fill a Big-Pay Job!



L. L. COOKE
Chief Engineer

It's a shame for you to earn $15 or $20 or $30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert you could make $70 to $200—and do it easier—not work half so hard. Why then remain in the small-pay game, in a line of work that offers no chance, no big promotion, no big income? Fit yourself for a real job in the great electrical industry. I'll show you how.

Look What These Cooke Trained Men are Earning

Makes $700 in 24 Days in Radio

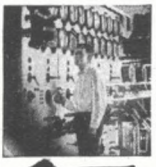
"Thanks to your interesting Course I made over $700 in 24 days in Radio. Of course, this is a little above the average but I run from $10 to $40 clear profit every day; you can see what your training has done for me."
FRED G. McNABB,
848 Spring St., Atlanta, Ga.

$70 to $80 a Week for Jacquot

"Now I am specializing in auto electricity and battery work and make from $70 to $80 a week and am just getting started. I don't believe there is another school in the world like yours. Your lessons are a real joy to study."
ROBERT JACQUOT,
2005 W. Colorado Ave.,
Colorado Springs, Colo.

$20 a Day for Schreck

"Use my name as a reference and depend on me as a booster. The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging better than $500 a month from my own business now. I used to make $18 a week."
A. SCHRECK,
Phoenix, Ariz.



Plant Engineer—Pay Raised 150%

"I was a dumbbell in electricity until I got in touch with you Mr. Cooke, but now I have charge of a big plant including 600 motors and direct a force of 34 men—electricians, helpers, etc. My salary has gone up more than 150%."
GEORGE ILLINGWORTH,
63 Calumet Road,
Holyoke, Mass.

Be an Electrical Expert
Earn $3,500 to $10,000 a Year

Today even the ordinary Electric an—the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the Electrical Expert—who is picked out to "boss" the ordinary Electricians—to boss the Big Jobs—the jobs that pay $3,500 to $10,000 a Year. Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs." Start by enrolling now for my easily learned, quickly grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home-Study Course in Practical Electricity.

Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School Graduate. As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training you need and I will give you that training. My Course in Electricity is simple, thorough and complete and offers every man, regardless of age, education or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from $70 to $200 a week.

No Extra Charge for Electrical Working Outfit

With me, you do practical work—at home. You start right in after your first few lessons to work at your profession in the regular way and make extra money in your spare time. For this you need tools, and I give them to you—5 big complete working outfits, with tools, measuring instruments and a real electric motor.

Your Satisfaction Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you, too, can get into the "big money" class in Electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition, if, when you have finished my Course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made. And back of me in my guarantee, stands the Chicago Engineering Works, Inc., a two million dollar institution, thus assuring to every student enrolled, not only a wonderful training in Electricity, but an unsurpassed Student Service as well.

Get Started Now — Mail Coupon

I want to send you my Electrical Book and Proof Lessons, both Free. These cost you nothing and you'll enjoy them. Make the start today for a bright future in Electricity. Send in Coupon—NOW.

L. L. Cooke, Chief Engineer
Chicago Engineering Works
Dept. 77, 2150 Lawrence Av. Chicago

L. L. COOKE, Dept. 77, 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago — The Man Who Makes "Big-Pay" Men

Send me at once without obligation your big illustrated book and complete details of your Home Study Course in Electricity, including your outfit and employment service offers.

Name .....

Address .....

Occupation .....

MAIL COUPON FOR MY FREE BOOK

5 big outfits given to you — no extra charge

The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

J. E. GREENSLADE

JACK WARD
Chicago

"I didn't want to work for small pay. Easily proved Mr. Greenslade was right—over $1,000 every month last year."

WARREN HARTLE
Chicago

"After 10 years in the railway mail service I decided to make a change. Earned more than $1,000 the first 30 days."

F. WYNN
Portland

"Last week my earnings amounted to $554.37; this week will go over $400. Thanks to the N. S. T. A.

CHARLES V. CHAMPION,
Illinois

"I'm now President, and my earnings for 1925 will easily exceed the five figure mark, thanks to your training."

You're Fooling Yourself

-if You Think These Big Pay Records Are Due to LUCK!

But don't take my word for it! When I tell you that you can quickly increase your earning power; I'LL PROVE IT! FREE! I'll show you hundreds of men like yourself who have done it. And I'll show you how you can do it, too.

I'LL come directly to the point. First you'll say, "I could never do it: These men were lucky." But remember the men whose pictures are shown above are only four out of thousands and if you think it's luck that has suddenly raised thousands of men into the big pay class you're fooling yourself!

Easy to Increase Pay

But let's get down to your own case. You want more money. You want the good things in life, a comfortable home of your own where you can entertain, a snappy car, membership in a good club, good clothes, advantages for your loved ones, travel and a place of importance in your community. All this can be yours. And I'll prove it to you, Free.

First of all get this one thing right; such achievement is not luck—it's KNOWING HOW! And KNOWING HOW in a field in which your opportunities and rewards are ten times greater than in other work. In short, I'll prove that I can make you a Master Salesman—and you know the incomes good salesmen make.

Every one of the four men shown above was sure that he could never SELL! They thought Salesmen were "born" and not "made"!

When I said, "Enter the Selling Field where chances in your favor are ten to one," they said it couldn't be done. But I proved to them that this Association could take any man of average intelligence, regardless of his lack of selling experience—and in a short time make a MASTER SALESMAN of him—make him capable of earning anywhere from $5,000 to $10,000 a year. And, that's what I'm willing to prove to you, FREE.

Simple as A. B. C.

You may think my promise remarkable. Yet there is nothing remarkable about it. Salesmanship is governed by rules and laws. There are certain ways of saying and doing things, certain ways of approaching a prospect to get his undivided attention, certain ways to overcome objections, batter down prejudice and outwit competition.

Just as you learned the alphabet, so you can learn salesmanship. And through the NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION METHOD—an exclusive feature of the N. S. T. A. System of Salesmanship Training—you gain the equivalent of actual experience while studying.

The N. S. T. A. System of Salesmanship Training and Employment Service will enable you to quickly step into the ranks of successful salesmen—will give you a big advantage over those who lack this training. It will enable you to jump from small pay to a real man's income.

Remarkable Book, "Modern Salesmanship" Sent Free

With my compliments I want to send you a most remarkable book, "Modern Salesmanship."

It will show you how you can easily become a Master Salesman—a big money-maker—how the N. S. T. A. System of Salesmanship Training will give you years of selling experience in a few weeks; how our FREE Employment Service will help select and secure a good selling position when you are qualified and ready. And it will give you success stories of former routine workers who are now earning amazing salaries as salesmen. Mail the attached coupon at once and you will have made the first long stride toward success.

National Salesmen's Training Ass'n

Dept. R-4

N. S. T. A. Buildings, 1139 N. Dearborn, Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Association, N. S. T. A. Buildings, Dept. R-4 1139 N. Dearborn, Chicago, Ill.

Send me free your book, "Modern Salesmanship," and Proof that I can become a MASTER SALESMAN.

Name .....

Address .....

City .....State .....

Age .....Occupation .....

"THE TOWN IN THE SEA" is the title of the complete and unabridged two-dollar book in the next issue of POPULAR. It is by that writer of fascinating stories, H. de Vere Stacpoole, and concerns the efforts of a party of adventurers to secure the treasure of an underwater city in the Mediterranean. Have your news dealer reserve a copy of POPULAR for you. On the news stands October 20th.

Vol. LXXVII OCTOBER 7, 1925 No. 6

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary.

Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1909, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $1.72. Foreign, $5.44.

Address all communications to the Street & Smith Corporation

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION $4.00 **SINGLE COPIES 25 CENTS**

Those who stopped outside to listen did not know he was playing her accompaniment *without touching the keys!*

It happened at the Drake Hotel, Chicago, during the National Music Convention in June

And now anyone—without previous training—can play roll music with the same control of Keys—the same Personal Touch that a pianist has in playing by hand

THAT morning one of the visitors at the Music Trades Convention was playing roll music on the Gulbransen Registering Piano with all the expression of a brilliant pianist—yet this man could not tell one note from another on a piece of sheet music!

His audience sat and listened in amazement—among them composers, musicians and dealers in musical instruments.

It was a thrilling revelation—this instrument on which can be played roll music with all the Self-Expression—the Personal Touch—the variety of Tone Volume—that hand-playing has.

Yet there are actually thousands of people—people unable to read sheet music—who play the Gulbransen easily and inspiringly. And you can do the same at home.

Your Undiscovered Talent

You can play the introduction to a ballad or an operatic aria as a musician would play it—lively at first, then slowly as you near the words, then pausing for the singer, then subduing the melody to a whisper.

The vocalist carries the air. The piano plays only the accompaniment, regardless of the melody notes that are cut in the roll.

You can play a piano solo correctly, accenting the melody or the chords. You can play dance music in perfect time and rhythm.

Personal Touch — selective touch — self-expression —as in playing by hand—that is the missing art that A. G. Gulbransen contributed to roll-playing.

Hand-playing had it. Player pianos did not. So untrained persons could not play as musicians do.

Mr. Gulbransen had spent a life-time in making fine musical instruments and believed there must be a way. At last he discovered it, and gave it to the world in this creation—the Gulbransen Registering Piano.

Anyone can play it—you, or the unexpected guests who drop in of an evening.

FREE—*Color-Book de Luxe, "Your Unsuspected Talent—Its Discovery and Enjoyment"*

Your home will be known for its entertainment and charm if you own a Gulbransen—Grand or Upright.

Only mail us the coupon and we'll send free our de luxe color-book—"Your Unsuspected Talent—Its Discovery and Enjoyment"—and the address of a nearby Gulbransen show room where you can see and try all Gulbransen models.

GULBRANSEN
The *Registering* Piano

National Prices—Easy Terms

Gulbransen pianos are sold at the same cash price, freight prepaid, throughout the U. S. You can see this price stamped on the back. Gulbransen dealers are prepared to deliver any model, for a small cash payment—balance to suit the purchaser. A reasonable allowance for your present piano.

Four Upright Models—Community, $450, Suburban, $530, Country Seat, $615, White House, $700; Straight Grand, $785; Registering Grand, $1275.

SEND THIS COUPON

to Gulbransen Company, 3204 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago
for Color-Illustrated Book De Luxe
"Your Unsuspected Talent—Its Discovery and Enjoyment"

☐ Check here if you own a piano and we will send you form enabling us to estimate value.

*Name*_____

*Address*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____

The Nat'l Ass'n of Piano Tuners recommends that all pianos be tuned twice a year. Your Gulbransen deserves this care

GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

In all the little towns of French Morocco, that war-torn country where Riffian tribesmen are making so valiant a battle against the power of the French, it is the custom of the natives to come together in great numbers and listen to professional story-tellers.

Before crowds of appreciative natives, the story-tellers weave their yarns of love, romance, and adventure and are well paid for their efforts. These story-tellers have a profound influence upon the communities and help mold public opinion.

In America the development of large-circulation fiction magazines has long made it possible for dwellers even in the most remote hamlets to satisfy the universal love for fiction that girdles the world. Everywhere men and women find escape from the harassments and worries of life by listening at the feet of story-tellers.

And now a great American publishing concern has taken another forward step in the providing of good fiction. Chelsea House at Seventh Avenue and Fifteenth Street, New York City, the "Story-teller's Headquarters," is providing for a constantly growing and ever-appreciative audience the best of modern fiction in attractively printed and bound books at a cost that fits every pocket.

These seventy-five-cent popular copyrights that bear the "CH" brand on their jackets make it possible for every one to get together a library of good books that will bear the test of time and bring joy into many a life.

Here are thumb-nail reviews of some of the latest "CH" offerings, but get the complete list for yourself to learn what a treasure-trove is at your command.

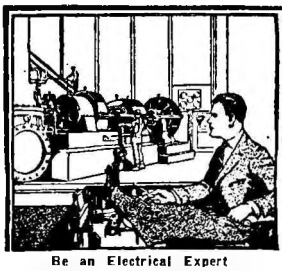
THE GOLDEN BOWL, by Harrison Conrard, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Into a land where mountain ranges flatten out into hummocks on the tawny sands, the great desert country of the West, go two men in search of the treasure of the Golden Bowl. Adventures await them on every hand. There is a fight ahead for the treasure, a beautiful girl, and for honor as well. Mr. Conrard makes you feel the terrible sufferings of the men as they stagger along in search of the Bowl, makes you share with them their disappointments and final triumphs. No lover of real Western stories can afford not to have this book in his library.

THE SPIDER'S DEN, by Johnston McCulley, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

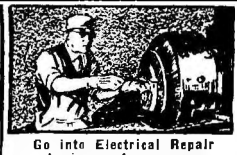
When good-looking John Warwick, popular young society man and athlete, saw the girl drop her gold mesh bag and beckon him to follow her, he hesitated to fall for so obvious a ruse. But something compelled him to accept that challenge, and soon he was in the midst of the most thrilling adventures of all his colorful career. How he got into

(Continued on 2nd page following.)

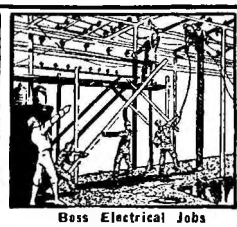


Be an Electrical Expert
EARN WHILE LEARNING

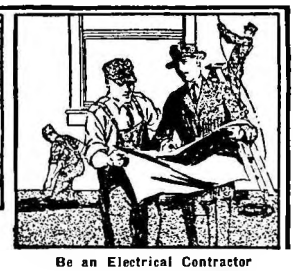
Early in your training I give you special instruction in house-wiring, Radio, and other practical work. I show you how to get spare-time work, and valuable experience. Many students make my training pay for itself in this way.



Go into Electrical Repair business of your own
Profits $5,000 to $15,000 a year

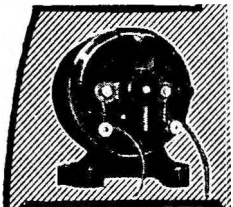


Boss Electrical Jobs



Be an Electrical Contractor

Train at Home for a fine Electrical JOB and a big RAISE in Pay!



$10 Motor-4 Big Outfits Given to every Student
Not a Penny Extra Cost

4 BIG Electrical Outfits Given

to you without one penny of extra charge. Not a "premium"—not something "FREE" to induce you to enroll. But costly, standard, full-size tools, materials, and equipment. The man-size motor of the same type as the big-fellows in a power plant. Not a toy, but a regular power-motor. Runs on Alternating or Direct Current, or 32-volt farm electric system. Comes to you knock-down. It's part of your job to wind the armature and assemble it. That's the way you learn Electricity by the Dunlap Job-Method.

GO INTO ELECTRICITY!

—the business of a million opportunities. Be an Electrical Expert. Go into the one great Industry where it's easy to get to the top, to make money, to make a real success. You don't need money in the bank or "pull" to get ahead in Electricity—all you need is Training, honest, complete training, such as I guarantee you.

If you are now earning less than $40 per week

if you want to be an ELECTRICAL EXPERT—if you want to step quickly into the class of men earning from $60 to $250 a week—*write me at once!* This million-dollar school offers ambitious fellows their big opportunity to learn every branch of Electricity at home in spare time by a wonderful, new, practical JOB-METHOD.

Learn Electricity Quick by My "JOB-METHOD"

My training is so simple a school-boy can grasp it instantly. Common Schooling all you need. No previous experience required. But my students make rapid progress because I train them on actual Electrical jobs, with standard-size tools and materials which I supply without extra cost. The first half of my training is APPLIED ELECTRICITY—a complete course in itself. In the second half I give you Electrical Engineering subjects. I give you Electrical Drafting, Radio, Automotive Electricity, and many other valuable subjects, all for one small price, *and on easy terms.*

WRITE ME TODAY!

Yes, I can help you make a success in the great electrical business. Right now I am making an amazing offer. Don't enroll for any course until you get it. Coupon brings complete information. Mail it to me, personally, *today!*

Chief Engineer DUNLAP
Electrical Division
AMERICAN SCHOOL
Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Dept. E7192
CHICAGO

FREE JOB SERVICE
for Students and Graduates

We have supplied thousands of jobs FREE, not only to graduates, but to STUDENTS also. This JOB-SERVICE keeps in touch with great Electrical employers all over America. The day you enroll, this Job-Service Department registers you, finds out what kind of job you want, and where you want to work, etc.

REPORT PAY INCREASES OF 50% TO 500%

I have hundreds of letters which prove my training has doubled and trebled the pay of my students and graduates. My training includes Radio, Auto Electricity, Electrical Drafting, Business Training, and Electrical Engineering subjects, all for one small price and on terms within reach of all.

CHIEF ENGINEER
DUNLAP
and 22 Noted Engineers

This is no one-man, one-idea school. 22 noted engineers, educators, and executives of the following great corporations and universities have helped Chief Engineer Dunlap make this training complete and up-to-the-minute.

1. General Electric Co.
2. Commonwealth Edison Co.
3. Crocker-Wheeler Co.
4. Cutler-Hammer Mfg. Co.
5. American Telephone & Telegraph Co.
6. Westinghouse Electric & Mfg. Co.
7. Western Electric Co.
8. Underwriters Laboratories, Inc.
9. Columbia University
10. Dartmouth College
11. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
12. Lehigh University
13. University of Vermont
14. Armour Inst. of Technology
15. University of Kansas

AND MANY OTHERS

THE AMERICAN SCHOOL

is chartered by the State of Massachusetts since 1897 as an educational institution, not for profit. Over 200 educators, executives, and engineers have prepared the wonderful home-study courses we offer. You will be astonished at the many ways we help our students and graduates progress to success.

MAIL COUPON TO-DAY

Chief Engineer Dunlap
AMERICAN SCHOOL, Dept. E7192,
Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago

I want to be an Electrical Expert. Please rush guarantee, job-service facts, complete information, money-saving offers.

Name .....

St. No. .....

City ..... State .....

the Spider's Den—and out—what befell him there, makes as baffling a detective story as we have read this year. See if you do not agree with us when you are more than a quarter way through the book.

HER DESERT LOVER, by Louisa Carter Lee, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75c.

She came stumbling through the storm into that quiet home of refinement. She could not gasp out her name. She was unknown, a woman of mystery. And what her coming did to change the life of that home! The fast-moving adventures that ensued are put down in wonderfully compelling style by the talented author of this love story. There's a glamour and romance about the book that hold your interest to the very end.

WHOSE MILLIONS? by Joseph Montague, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75c.

Millions gone begging! No heir to the Heathcote fortune of $20,000,000! With such an unusual situation, Mr. Montague opens his book with a rush and go that carries the reader on through the search for the missing heir, the struggle with a daring band of thieves, the final victory. You'll not forget this book in a hurry. It is an outstanding example of the story-teller's art.

OBJECT: ADVENTURE, by Ray Courtney, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75c.

Kent McGregor was frankly out for the thrills of Western life and his advertisement was headed with the title of this book. We are here to say that Kent's craving was more than satisfied and that he had adventures galore. He found that the O. B. Davis, his new employer on whose ranch he was to work, was a very good-looking young woman, and he found a number of other things in and about that ranch not quite so attractive, but all giving him his fill of adventure.

WHILE the books reviewed above are all popular, 75-cent copyright novels bearing the famous "CH" brand on their jackets, the lover of fiction must not forget that Chelsea House publishes attractive two-dollar books as well. For example—

FRONTIER OF THE DEEP, by Will Beale, published by Chelsea House, Price $2.

A veteran editor, who has the best of modern fiction at his competent finger tips told me that he had rarely read so fine a book as this, and his enthusiasm had genuine warmth in it. I understand, now that I have read the book, why he praised it so highly.

Mr. Beale has taken a land of epic grandeur for his background, the Great Canadian Northeast, and with the sound of surf thundering all through his pages he has painted an unforgetable picture of the lives of the simple fisher folk. These fine French-Canadians come alive in this book. We read with sympathy and understanding about their adventures and romances and wild loves. Mr. Beale has done a masterpiece, a book that is bound to live.

Classified Advertising

Agents and Help Wanted

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., Dept. 225, St. Louis, Mo.

LIGHTNING STRANGE BATTERY Compound. Charges discharged batteries instantly. Eliminates old method entirely. Gallon free to agents. Lightning Co., St Paul, Minn.

$60-$200 A WEEK. Genuine Gold Letters for store windows. Easily applied. Free Samples. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 428 B North Clark, Chicago.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. Every owner buys gold initials for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 179, East Orange, N. J.

EARN $10 DAILY silvering mirrors, plating, refinishing metalware, headlights, chandeliers, bedsteads. Outfits furnished. Decie Laboratories, 1135 Broadway, New York.

AGENTS, our new Household Cleaning Device washes and dries windows, sweeps, cleans walls, scrubs, mops. Costs less than brooms. Over half profit. Write Harper Brush Works, 201 3rd Street, Fairfield, Iowa.

AGENTS 90c. an hour to advertise and distribute samples to consumer. Write quick for territory and particulars. American Products Co., 1015 Acquilla Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

$50.00 SUITS FOR ONLY $23.50! Make big money taking orders from friends and neighbors. $3.00 to $5.00 an hour in spare time. $75.00 to $125.00 a week for full time. We supply handsome Swatch Outfit, large size samples and all latest styles in elegant leather case. Positively finest outfit ever furnished salesmen. Write for yours at once and get started making the big money right away. Address Dept. 178, James Oliver, Inc., 848 West Adams Street, Chicago.

MEN AND WOMEN wanted as exclusive representatives, all localities, taking orders for beautiful low-priced house, porch, and street dresses. I deliver, collect, and pay you every Saturday. Carol Lee, 1082 Gateway Station, Kansas City, Mo.

AGENTS—WRITE FOR FREE Samples. Sell Madison "Better-Made" Shirts for large Manufacturer direct to wearer. No capital or experience required. Many earn $100 weekly and bonus. Madison Mfgrs., 503 Broadway, New York.

Agents and Help Wanted—*Continued*

NEW WONDERFUL SELLER. Cost 10c, profit $1.40, monogramming autos. Experience unnecessary. Free samples. Worcester Monograms, B 149, Worcester, Mass.

BIG MONEY—fast sales; every one buys gold initials for their auto; sell $1.50, profit $1.44. Ten orders daily easy. Samples, information free. World Monogram, Dept. 12, Newark, N. J.

$15 DAILY (Sworn Proof) Introducing New Guaranteed Hosiery. Must wear or replaced free. No capital or experience required. You simply write orders. We deliver and collect. Your Pay Daily. Spare time satisfactory. Macochee Textile Company, Station 45010, Cincinnati, Ohio

MEN, 18 UP. Be Railway Mail Clerks, $1,900 year. Particulars free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. H2, Rochester, N. Y.

IF I SEND YOU A SUIT made in the latest style from the finest goods, will you keep it, wear it, and show it to your friends as a sample of my sensational $25.00 suits guaranteed regular $50.00 values? Could you use $3.00 an hour for a little spare time? If so, write me at once for my wonderful new proposition. Just write your name and address on a card and mail to Dept. 900, Knickerbocker Tailoring Co., 133 So. Peoria St., Chicago.

Help Wanted—Female

$6-$18 A DOZEN decorating pillow tops at home, experience unnecessary; particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 110 LaGrange, Ind.

Help Wanted—Male

ALL Men, Women, Boys, Girls, 17 to 65 willing to accept Government Positions $117-$250, traveling or stationary, write Mr. Ozment, 308, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

EARN $110 to $250 monthly, expenses paid as Railway Traffic Inspector. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. Excellent opportunities. Write for Free Booklet. CM-28 Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

SILVERING MIRRORS. French plate. Easily learned; immense profits. Plans free. Wear Mirror Works, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

ESTABLISH YOURSELF—AT HOME—As a Photographic Expert. Make $75 a week while learning. Write at once for Temporary Offer. International Studios, Dept. 140 C, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

$115-$400 MONTHLY paid—Ry. Station—Office positions. Free passes. Experience unnecessary. Write Baker, Supt., 49, St. Louis, Mo.

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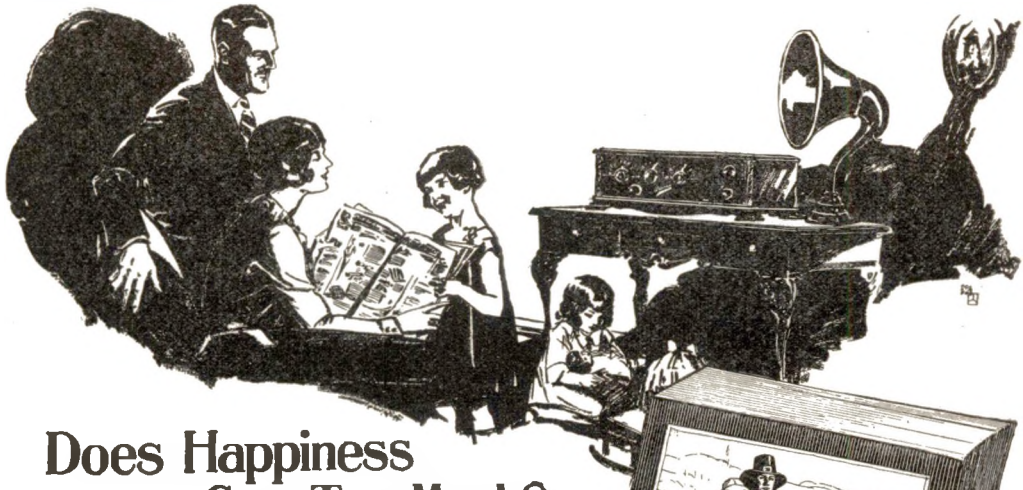

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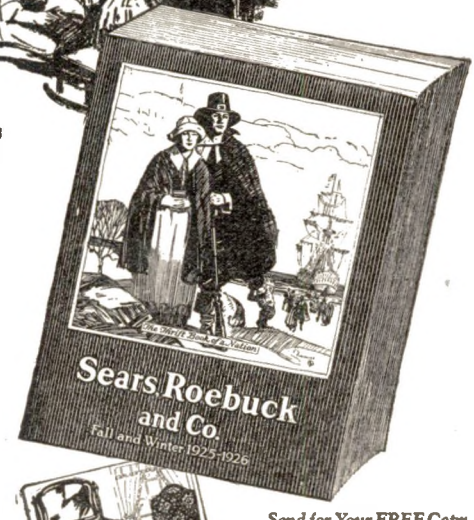

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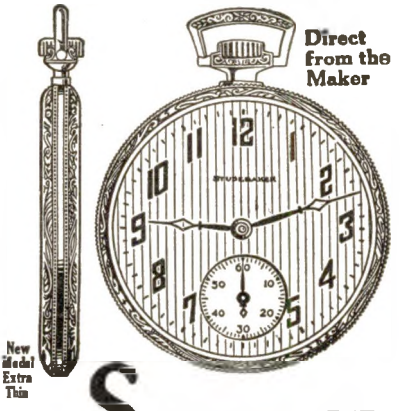

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXVII OCTOBER 7, 1925 No. 6

The Nameless Terror

By "Sapper"

Author of "Bulldog Drummond."

In the matter of uncovering subtle mysteries, Bulldog Drummond is inferior to none, not even the justly famous Sherlock Holmes. And as the details of horror slowly unfold in our story, showing the rotten core beneath the fruit of adventure, we are impressed, nay, astounded, at the genius, the cool command over men and their activities, which repose in the person of this remarkable man hunter.

CHAPTER I.

A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

IT was on a warm evening toward the end of April that the first act of this strange drama took place. I was dining at Prince's with Robin Gaunt, a young and extremely brilliant scientist and a very dear friend of mine.

We had been at school together and at Cambridge; and though we had lost sight of each other during the war, the threads of friendship had been picked up again quite easily at the conclusion of that performance. I had joined the Gunners, while he, somewhat naturally, had gravitated toward the Royal Engineers.

For a year or two, the powers that be, ordained that he should make roads, a form of entertainment of which he knew less than nothing. And Robin smiled thoughtfully and made roads. At least he did so officially: in reality he did other things, while a sergeant

with a penchant for rum superintended the steam roller.

Then one day came a peremptory order from G. H. Q. that Lieutenant Robin Gaunt, R. E., should cease making roads and should report himself at the seats of the mighty at once. Robin, still smiling thoughtfully, reported himself. He had been doing other things during that eighteen months and the fruits of his labors, sent direct and not through the usual official channels, lay on the table in front of the man to whom he reported.

From then on Robin became a mysterious and shadowy figure. I met him once on the leave boat going home, but he was singularly uncommunicative. He was always a silent sort of fellow, though on the rare occasions when he chose to talk he could be brilliant. But during that crossing he was positively taciturn.

He looked ill and I told him so.

"Eighteen hours a day, old John, for eleven months on end. That's what I've been doing and I'm tired."

"Can you take it easy now?" I asked him.

"If you mean by that have I finished, then I can—more or less. But if you mean can I take it easy from a mental point of view, God knows! I'll not have to work eighteen hours a day any more, but there are worse things than physical exhaustion."

Suddenly he laid his hand on my arm.

"I know what they are," he said tensely. "I know it's just one's bounden duty to use every gift one has been given to beat 'em. But damn it, John—they're men too! They go back to their womenkind, just as all these fellows on this boat are going back to theirs."

HE paused, and I thought he was going to say something more. He didn't.

That was in July '18, and I didn't see him again till after the armistice. We met in London, and at lunch I started pulling his leg over his eighteen hours' work a day. He listened with a faint smile and for a long while refused to be drawn. It was only when the waiter went off to get change for the bill that he made a remark which for many months stuck firmly in my mind.

"There are a few things in my life that I'm thankful for, John," he said quietly. "And the one that I'm most thankful for is that the boches broke when they did. For if they hadn't——"

"Well—if they hadn't?"

"There wouldn't have been any boches left to break."

"And a good thing too!" I exclaimed.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"They're men too, as I said before. However, in parliamentary parlance the situation does not arise."

With that, the conversation closed. Periodically during the next few months that remark of his came back to my mind.

"There wouldn't have been any boches left to break."

An exaggeration, of course, a figure of speech, and yet Robin Gaunt was not given to the use of vain phrases. Years of scientific training had made him meticulously accurate in his use of words; and certainly if one tenth of the wild rumors that circulated round the military Hush-Hush Department were true, there might be some justification for his remark. But after a time I forgot all about it, and when Robin alluded to the matter at dinner on that evening in April I had to rack my brains to remember what he was talking about.

I'd suggested a play, but he had shaken his head.

"I've an appointment to-night, old man, which I can't break. Remember my eighteen hours' work a day that you were so rude about?"

It took me a second or two to get the allusion.

"Great Scott!" I laughed. "That was the war to end war, my boy. You don't mean to say that you are still dabbling in horrors?"

"Not exactly, John," he said gravely. "When the war was over I put the whole of that part of my life behind me. I hoped, as most of us did, that a new era had dawned; now I realize, as all of us realize, that we've merely gone back a few centuries. It is merely a question of time before the hatred of Germany for France boils up and cannot be restrained. Any thinking German will tell you so. Don't let's worry about whose fault it is; we're concerned more with effects than causes.

"But when it does happen," he went on, "there will be a war which for unparalleled ferocity has never before been thought of. Don't let's worry as to whether we go in, or on whose side we go in; those are problems that don't concern us. Let us merely realize that primitive passions are boiling and seething in Europe, backed by inventions which are the last word in science. Force is the sole arbiter to-day; force and blazing hate, covered for diplomacy's sake with a pitifully thin veneer of honeyed phrases. I tell you, John, I've just come back from Germany and I was staggered, simply staggered. The French desire for revanche in 1870, compared to German feeling to-day, is as a tallow dip to the light of the sun.

"However, all that is neither here nor there. Concentrate on the one idea that force is the only thing that counts to-day; concentrate also on the idea that frightfulness in war is inevitable. I've come round to that way of thinking. The more the thing drags on, the more suffering and sorrow to the larger number. Pursuing the argument to a logical conclusion, it seems to me that it might be possible to arm a nation with a weapon so frightful that by its very frightfulness war would be impossible, because no other country would dare to fight."

"Frightfulness only breeds frightfulness," I remarked. "You'll always get countermeasures."

"Not always," he said slowly. "Not always."

"But what's your idea, Robin? What nation would you put in possession of such a weapon—granting for the moment that the weapon is there?"

He looked at me surprised. It was a silly remark, but I was thinking of France and Germany.

"My dear old man—our own, of course. Who else? The policeman of the world! Perhaps America too—the English-speaking peoples. Put them in such a position, John, that they can say, should the necessity arise: 'You shall not fight. You shall not again blacken the world with the hideous suffering of 1914. And since we can't prevent you fighting by words, we'll do it by force.'"

"You can't demonstrate the frightfulness of any weapon, my dear fellow," I objected, "unless you go to war yourself. So what is the good of it, anyway?"

"Then, if necessary, go to war. Go to war for one day—against both of them. And at the end of that day say to them: 'Now will you stop? If you don't the same thing will happen to you to-morrow and the next day and the next until you do!'"

"But what will happen to them?" I cried.

"Universal, instantaneous death over as large or as small an area as is desired."

I THINK it was at that moment that I began to entertain doubts as to Robin's sanity. Not that people dining near would have noticed anything amiss with him; his voice was low-pitched and quiet. But the whole idea

was so utterly far-fetched and fantastic that I couldn't help wondering if his brilliant brain hadn't crossed that tiny bridge which separates genius from insanity.

"It was ready at armistice time," he continued, "but not in its present form. To-day it is perfected."

"But, Robin," I said a little irritably, "what is this *it?*"

He smiled and shook his head.

"Not even to you, old man, will I tell that. If I could, I would keep it entirely to myself, but I realize that is impossible. At the moment there is only one other being in this world who knows my secret—the great-hearted pacifist who has financed me. He is an Australian who lost both his sons in Gallipoli and for the last two years he has given me ceaseless encouragement. To-night I am meeting him again—I haven't seen him for three months—to tell him that I've succeeded. And to-morrow I've arranged to give a secret demonstration before the army council."

He glanced at his watch, and stood up.

"I must be off, John. Coming my way?"

Not wanting to go back so early, I declined and I watched his tall spare figure threading its way between the tables.

"Universal, instantaneous death!"

Rot and rubbish—it was like the wild figment of a sensational novelist's brain. And yet—I wasn't satisfied.

"Hullo, Stockton! How goes it? Has she left you all alone?"

I glanced up to see Toby Sinclair grinning at me from the other side of the table.

"Sit down and have a spot, old man," I said. "And it wasn't a she, but a he."

For a while we sat on talking and it was only when the early-supper people began to arrive that we left. We both had rooms in Clarges Street, and for some reason or other—I forget why—Sinclair came into mine for a few minutes before going on to his own. On that simple little point there hung tremendous issues.

He came in and he helped himself to a whisky and soda and sat down to drink it. It was just as I was following his example that the telephone rang. I remember wondering as I took up the receiver who could be ringing me up at that hour, and then came the sudden paralyzing shock.

"John! John! Help! My rooms! Oh-h-h!"

So much I heard and then silence. Only a stifled scream, and a strange choking noise came over the wire, but no further words.

The voice had been the voice of Robin Gaunt.

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE THEIR EYES.

I SHOUTED down the mouthpiece of the telephone and Sinclair stared at me in amazement. I feverishly called the exchange, only to be told that the connection was broken and that they could get no reply.

"What the devil is it, man!" cried Sinclair, getting a grip on my arm. "You'll wake the whole house in a moment."

A little incoherently I told him what I'd heard, and in an instant the whole look of his face changed.

"You know his house?" said Sinclair.

"Down in Kensington," I answered.

"Got a weapon of any sort?"

I rummaged in my desk and produced a revolver—a relic of my army days.

"Good!" he cried. "Stuff some ammunition in your pocket and we'll get a move on."

"But there's no necessity for you to come!" I expostulated.

"Go to hell!" he remarked tersely. "This is the sort of thing I love. Old Hugh will turn pea green with jealousy to-morrow when he hears."

We were hurtling west in a taxi, and my thoughts were too occupied with what we were going to find at the other end to inquire who old Hugh might be. There was but little traffic—the after-supper congestion had not begun—and in less than ten minutes we pulled up outside Robin's house.

"Wait here," said Toby to the taxi driver. "And if you hear or see nothing of us within five minutes drive like blazes and get a policeman."

"Want any help now, sir?" asked the driver excitedly.

"Good lad!" cried Sinclair. "But I think not. Safer to have some one outside. We'll shout if we do."

The house was in complete darkness, as were those on each side. The latter fact was not surprising as a "To Be Sold" notice appeared in front of each of them.

"You know his rooms, don't you?" said Sinclair. "Right! Then what I propose is this. We'll walk straight in as if we're coming to look him up. No good hesitating. And don't use that gun unless it's necessary."

The front door was not bolted and for a moment or two we stood listening in the tiny hall. The silence was absolute and a light from a lamp outside, shining through a window, showed us the stairs.

"His rooms are on the first floor," I whispered.

"Then let's go and have a look at 'em," returned Toby.

With the revolver in my hand I led the way. One or two stairs creaked loudly and I heard Sinclair cursing under his breath at the noise. But no one appeared and, as we stood outside the door of Robin's sitting room and laboratory combined, the only sound was our own breathing.

"Come on, old man," said Toby. "The longer we leave it, the less we'll like it. I'll open the door, and you cover any one inside with your gun."

With a quick jerk he flung the door wide open and we both stood there peering into the room. Darkness again and silence, just like the rest of the house. But there was one thing different: a faint, rather bitter, smell hung about in the air.

I groped for the switch and found it and we stood blinking in the sudden light. Then we moved cautiously forward.

IN the center of the room stood the desk, littered, as usual, with untidy array of books and papers. The telephone stood on one corner of it, and I couldn't help thinking of that sudden anguished cry for help that had been shouted down it, less than a quarter of an hour before. If only it could speak and tell us what had happened.

"Good Lord! Look at that!" muttered Toby.

I looked. There were crimson stains upon the floor, the desk, a chair. Papers were splashed with it and a little trickle oozed sluggishly off the desk on to the carpet.

The curtains were drawn and suddenly Toby picked up a book and hurled it at them.

"One of Drummond's little tricks," he remarked. "If there's any one behind, you can spot it at once and with luck you may hit him in the pit of the stomach."

But there was no one there; there was no one in the room at all.

"Where's that door lead to?" he asked.

"Gaunt's bedroom," I answered, and we repeated the performance.

We looked under the bed and in the cupboard—not a sign of anybody. The bed was turned down ready for the night, with his pajamas laid in readi-

ness, and in the basin stood a can of hot water covered with a towel. But of Robin or any one else there was no trace.

"Damn funny!" said Toby, as we went back into the sitting room.

"What's that scratching noise?"

It came from behind the desk, and suddenly a little short-tailed, tawny-colored animal appeared.

"Holy smoke!" cried Toby. "It's a guinea pig. And there's another of 'em, Stockton, dead."

Sure enough a little black one was lying rigid and stretched out close to the desk.

"Better not touch it," I said warningly. "Leave everything as it is."

Then a thought struck Toby.

"Look here, Stockton, he can't have been whispering down the phone! Isn't there any one else in the house who would have heard him?"

"There is no other lodger," I replied. "His landlady is probably down below in the basement, but she's stone deaf. She's so deaf that Gaunt used to write things down for her in preference to talking."

"I think we ought to see the old trout, don't you?" he said, and I went over and rang the bell.

"She may or may not hear it," I remarked, as we waited. "Incidentally, what on earth is this strange smell?"

Sinclair shook his head.

"Search me. Though from the look of those bottles and test tubes and things I assume your pal was a chemist."

A creaking on the stairs, accompanied by the sounds of heavy breathing, announced that the bell had been heard and a moment later the landlady appeared. She stared at us suspiciously until she recognized me, which seemed to reassure her somewhat.

"Good evening!" I roared. "Have you seen Mr. Gaunt to-night?"

"I ain't seen him since yesterday morning," she announced. "But that ain't nothing peculiar. Sometimes I don't see 'im for a week at a time."

"Has he been in the house here since dinner?" I went on.

"I dunno, sir," she answered. "He comes and he goes, does Mr. Gaunt, with 'is own key. And since 'e pays regular, I puts up with 'im in spite of all those 'orrors and chemicals and things. I even puts up with 'is dog, though it does go and cover all the chairs with white 'airs."

"Dog," said Toby thoughtfully. "He'd a dog, had he?"

"A wire-haired terrier called Joe," I said. "Good little beast."

"Then I wonder where the dickens it is?" he remarked. "Good Lord! What's all that?"

From the hall below came the sound of many footsteps and the voice of our taxi driver.

"This will give the old dame a fit," said Toby with a grin. "I'd forgotten all about our instructions to that stout-hearted Jehu."

There were two policemen and the driver who came crowding into the room amid the scandalized protests of the landlady.

"Five minutes was up, sir, so I did as you told me," said the driver.

"Splendid fellow!" cried Toby. "It's all right, constable; that revolver belongs to my friend."

The policeman who had picked it up suspiciously from the desk transferred his attention to me.

"What's all the trouble, sir?" he asked. "Don't be alarmed, mother, no one's going to hurt you."

"She's deaf," I told him, and he bellowed in her ear to reassure her.

Then briefly I told the two constables exactly what had happened. I told them what I knew of Gaunt's intentions after he had left me, of the cry for help over the telephone and of our subsequent movements. The only thing I did

not feel it incumbent on me to mention was the object of his meeting with the Australian. I felt that their stolid brains would hardly appreciate the matter, so I left it at business.

"Quarter of an hour you say, sir, before you got here? You're sure it was your friend's voice you heard."

"Positive," I answered. "Absolutely positive. He had an unmistakable voice and I knew him very well."

AT that moment from the window there came an exclamation. The second constable had pulled the curtains and he was standing there staring at the floor.

"Gaw lumme!" he remarked. "Look at that."

We looked. Lying on the floor, stone dead and twisted into a terrible attitude, was Robin's terrier. We crowded round, staring at the poor little chap, and it seemed to me that the strange smell had become much stronger.

Suddenly there came a yell of pain and one of the policemen, who had bent forward to touch the dog, started swearing vigorously and rubbing his fingers.

"The little beggar is burning hot!" he cried. "Like touching a red-hot coal."

He looked at his finger and then there occurred one of the most terrible things I have ever seen. Literally before our eyes the fingers with which he had touched the dog twisted themselves into knots—then the hand—then the arm. A moment later he crashed to the ground as if he'd been poleaxed and lay still.

I don't know if my face was like the others, but they were all as white as a sheet. It was so utterly unexpected, so stunningly sudden. At one moment he had been standing there before us, a great big jovial red-faced man; the next he was lying on the carpet, staring at the ceiling with eyes that would never see again.

"Don't touch him!" said a hoarse voice which I dimly recognized as my own. "Don't touch him. The poor devil is dead anyway."

THE other policeman, who had gone down on his knees beside the body, looked up stupidly. Ordinary accidents, even straightforward murder, would not have shaken him, but this was something outside his ken.

"I don't understand, sir," he muttered. "What killed him?"

"He was killed because he touched that dead dog," said Sinclair gravely. "We can none of us tell any more than that, officer. And this gentleman is afraid that if you touch him the same thing may happen to you."

"But it's devil's work!" cried the constable, getting dazedly to his feet. "It ain't human."

For a while we stood there staring at the dead man, while the landlady rocked hysterically in a chair with her apron over her head. Of the four of us, only I had the remotest idea as to what must have happenel; to the others it must have seemed not human, as the policeman had said. Even to me with my additional knowledge the thing was almost beyond comprehension.

"It looks, as you say, constable, like devil's work," I said at length. "I think the best thing to do is to ring up Scotland Yard and get some one in authority here at once. This has become a little above our form."

"I agree," said Sinclair soberly. "Distinctly above our form."

The constable went to the telephone and the taxi driver stepped forward.

"If it's all the same to you, gents," he said, "I think I'll wait in the cab outside. I kind of feel safer in the fresh air."

"All right, driver," returned Sinclair. "But don't go away. They'll probably want your evidence as well as ours."

"Inspector MacIver—coming at once, sir," said the constable, replacing the receiver with a sigh of relief. "And until he comes I think we might as well wait downstairs. Come along, mother; there ain't no good your carrying on like that."

He supported the old landlady from the room and when we had joined him in the passage, he shut and locked the door and slipped the key in his pocket. Then, having sent her down to her basement, we three sat down to wait for the inspector.

"Cigarette, bobby?" asked Sinclair, holding out his case. "Helps the nerves."

"Thank you, sir, I don't mind if I do. It's fair shook me, that has. I've seen men killed most ways in my time—burned, drowned, hung—not to say nothing of three years in the war; but I've never seen the like of that before. For 'im just to go and touch that there dead dog and be dead 'imself." He looked at us diffidently. "Have you got any idea, gentlemen, as to what it is that's done it?"

"It's some ghastly form of poison, constable," I said. "Of that I'm pretty certain. But what it is, I know no more than you. Mr. Gaunt was a marvelous chemist."

"A damn sight too marvelous!" said the policeman savagely. "If it's 'im what's done it, I'm thinking he'll find himself in queer street when he comes back."

"I think it's *if* he comes back," I said. "There's been foul play here—not only with regard to that dog, but also with regard to Mr. Gaunt. He idolized that terrier; nothing will induce me to believe that it was he who killed Joe. Don't forget that cry for help over the telephone. And the condition of the room. It's my firm belief that the clew to the whole mystery lies in the Australian gentleman whom he was going to meet to-night. He left me at Prince's to do so. Find that man and you'll find the solution."

"Have you any idea what he looks like?" asked Toby.

"That's the devil of it!" I answered. "I haven't the slightest. All I can tell you is that he must be a fairly wealthy man who had two sons killed in Gallipoli."

The policeman nodded his head portentously.

"The Yard has found men with less to go on than that, sir," he remarked. "Very likely he'll be putting up at one of the swell hotels."

"And very likely he won't," put in Toby. "If what Mr. Stockton thinks is right, and this unknown Australian is at the bottom of it all, stopping at one of the big hotels is just what he wouldn't do. However, there's a taxi, so presumably it's the inspector."

The constable hurriedly went to the front door to meet MacIver. He was a short, thickset, powerful man with a pair of shrewd penetrating eyes. He gave a curt nod to each of us and listened in silence while I again repeated my story. This time I told it a little more fully, emphasizing the fact that Robin Gaunt was under the impression that he had made a far-reaching discovery which would revolutionize warfare.

"What sort of a discovery?" interrupted MacIver.

"I can't tell you, inspector," I said, "for I don't know. He was employed during the war as a gas expert, and when the armistice came he had, I believe, invented a particularly deadly form of gas which, of course, was never used. And from what he told me at dinner to-night, this invention was now perfected. He described it to me as causing universal instantaneous death!"

The inspector fidgeted impatiently. Imagination was not his strong point and I admit it sounded a bit fanciful.

"He left me to go and interview

an Australian who has helped him financially," I went on. "His idea was that the appalling power of this discovery of his could be used to prevent warfare in future, if it was in the sole hands of one nation. He thought that no other nation would then dare to go to war. And his intention was to demonstrate before the army council to-morrow, with the idea that England might be that one nation. That is what he told me this evening. How far his claims were justified, I don't know. What his discovery was, I don't know. But two things I do know: First, that Robin Gaunt is a genius and, second, that his claim can be no more fantastic than what we all of us saw take place before our very eyes half an hour ago."

MACIVER grunted and rose from his chair.

"Let's go and have a look."

The constable led the way and once again we entered the room upstairs. Everything was just as we had left it; the dead man still stared horribly at the ceiling; the terrier still lay a little twisted heap in the window; the crimson stain still dripped sluggishly off the desk. But the strange smell we had noticed was considerably less powerful, though the inspector remarked upon it at once and sniffed.

Then, he commenced his examination of the room. It was an education in itself to see him work. He never spoke, and at the end of ten minutes not a corner had been overlooked. Every drawer had been opened; every paper examined and discarded; and the net result was—nothing.

"A very extraordinary affair," he said quietly. "I take it you knew Mr. Gaunt fairly intimately?"

He looked at me and I nodded.

"Very intimately," I answered. "We were at school together and at college and I've frequently seen him since."

"And you have no idea beyond what you have already told me, as to what this discovery of his was?"

"None. But I should imagine, inspector, in view of his appointment with the army council to-morrow, that some one at the war office may be able to tell you something."

"It is, of course, possible that he will keep that appointment," said MacIver. "Though I admit I'm not hopeful."

His eyes were fixed on the dead dog.

"That's what beats me particularly," he remarked. "Why kill the terrier? A possible hypothesis is that he didn't; that the dog was killed accidentally. Let us, for instance, imagine for a moment that your friend was experimenting with this device of his. The dead guinea pig bears that out. Then some accident occurred. I make no attempt to say what accident, because we have no idea as to the nature of the device. He lost his head, snatched up the telephone, got through to you—and then realizing the urgent danger rushed from the room, forgetting all about the dog. And the dog was killed."

"But surely," I objected, "in those circumstances we should find some trace of apparatus. And there's nothing."

"He might have snatched it up when he left and thrown it away somewhere."

"He might," I agreed. "But I can't help thinking, inspector, that it is more sinister than that. If I may say so, I believe that what happened is this. The Australian whom he was going to meet was not an Australian at all. He was possibly some foreigner, who was deeply interested in this device and who had deceived Gaunt completely. He came here to-night and overpowered Gaunt; then he carried out a test on the dog and found that it acted. After that he, probably with the help of accomplices, removed Gaunt, either with the intention of murdering him at leisure or of keeping him a prisoner."

"Another hypothesis," agreed the inspector, "but it presents one very big difficulty, Mr. Stockton. Your friend must have suspected foul play when he rang you up on the telephone. Now you're on a different exchange and it must have taken, on a conservative estimate, a quarter of a minute to get through. Are we to assume that during those fifteen seconds this Australian, or whatever he is, and his accomplices stood around and looked at Mr. Gaunt doing the one thing they didn't want him to do—getting in touch with the outside world?"

It was perfectly true and I admit the point had not struck me. Yet in the bottom of my mind I still felt convinced that in the Australian lay the clew to everything and I said as much.

"Find that man, inspector," I repeated, "and you've solved it. There are difficulties, I know, of which not the least is the telephone. Another is the fact that Gaunt is a powerful man; he'd have struggled like a tiger."

"They may have tidied up after," put in Toby. "Hullo! What's the matter?"

The policeman, who, unnoticed by us, had left the room, was standing in the door, obviously much shaken.

"This affair gets worse and worse, sir," he said to MacIver. "Will you just step over the passage here and have a look in this room?"

WE crowded after him into the room opposite—which belonged to the corresponding suite to Robin's. Instantly the same faint smell became noticeable, but it was not that which riveted our attention. Lying on the floor was a man and we could see at a glance that he was dead. He was a great big fellow and his clothes bore witness to a most desperate struggle. His coat was torn, his waistcoat ripped open, and there was a dark-purple bruise on his forehead. But in the strange rigidity of his limbs, and in the fixed staring eyes, he resembled exactly the unfortunate constable in the room opposite.

A foot or so away from his head was a broad-brimmed hat and MacIver turned it over with his foot. Then he bent down to examine it.

"I'm thinking, Mr. Stockton," he remarked grimly, "that we've done what you wanted to do. We've found the Australian. That hat was made in Sydney." He whistled softly under his breath. "And that effectively knocks both our hypotheses out of court." He made a sudden dart into the corner. "Constable, give me those tongs. I guess I'm not touching anything I can avoid in this house to-night."

He took the tongs and lifted up what appeared to be an India-rubber glove. It was a sort of glazed white in color and was obviously new, since the elastic band which fitted round the wrist was quite clean and there was no sign of scratches or dirt anywhere.

"Put this on the desk in the other room," said MacIver to the policeman. "And now we'll go over every single room in this house."

WE did; we explored the attic and the basement—the sitting rooms, the scullery. It was nearly three o'clock before we had finished. But not another thing did we discover; quite obviously everything that had happened had occurred in those two rooms. MacIver grew more and more morose and uncommunicative and it was obvious that he was baffled.

Even when Toby Sinclair put forward what seemed on the face of it to be a fairly plausible explanation, MacIver merely grunted and expressed no opinion.

"I'll bet you that that's what happened," Toby said, as, the search concluded, we stood once again in Robin's room. "The two of them were in here—Gaunt and the Australian, when they

were surprised by some one. The Australian, whom we've suspected unjustly, fought like a tiger and gained just sufficient time for Gaunt to get through on the telephone. Then they killed the Australian and got at Gaunt. Don't ask me to explain the dog, for I can't."

It seemed plausible and during the drive home behind our patiently waiting taxi driver I could think of nothing better. We'd both been warned that our evidence would be required the following day. The constable, reënforced by another, had been left in possession of the house.

"I believe you've hit it, Sinclair," I said, as the car turned into Clarges Street. "But what's worrying me is what has happened to that poor devil, Gaunt."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"If I am right, Stockton," he answered gravely, "I'm thinking I wouldn't issue a policy on his life, if I were in the insurance business. In fact, what I don't understand is why they didn't kill him then and there."

The car pulled up at the door of my rooms and I gave the driver a fiver.

"You've been splendid," I said.

"Don't mention it, sir," he answered. "But I guess there's one thing you might like to know."

He pointed to a taxi, which had just driven slowly past and was now turning into Curzon Street.

"It's empty; but that there car was down in Kensington all to-night, just about a 'undred yards along the road. You two gents have been followed." He handed me a slip of paper. "And that's the number of the car."

CHAPTER III.

FOR A TREMENDOUS STAKE.

I HAVE purposely alluded at some length to that last conversation between Robin Gaunt and myself at Prince's. Apart altogether from the fact that he was my friend, it is only fair that his true character should be known. At the time, it may be remembered there were all sorts of wild and malicious rumors going round about him. From being an absolutely unknown man as far as the general public was concerned, he attained the notoriety of a popular film star.

It was inevitable, of course; the whole affair was so bizarre and extraordinary that it captivated the popular fancy. The most favorite explanation was the most unjust of all to Robin. It was that he was a cold-blooded scientist who had been experimenting on his own dog. A sort of supervivisectionist, a monster without a heart, who had been interrupted in the middle of his abominable work by the Australian whom he had murdered in a fit of rage. Then, a little alarmed at having killed a man as well as a dog and a guinea pig, he had rung me up on the telephone as a blind and fled.

This theory was ridiculous to any one who knew him, but there is no doubt that, as an explanation of what had occurred, it was the one that had most adherents. Certainly the possibility of Robin having killed the Australian—it transpired that he was one David Ganton, a wealthy man, who had been staying at the Ritz—was entertained for a considerable time.

At the inquest, I made no mention of the conversation I have recorded. My lips were sealed by the interview which occurred the following morning. I was rung up on the telephone at eleven o'clock and an unknown voice spoke from the other end.

"Is that Mr. Stockton? It is Major Jackson speaking. I hope it won't be inconvenient for you to come round at once to the war office in connection with the affair last night. Ask for G branch, room 38. Instructions will be sent down, so you will have no delay at the door."

To room 38, G branch, I accordingly went, there to find four people already assembled. Seated at a desk was a tanned, keen-faced man who had soldier written all over him. Standing against the mantelpiece and smoking a cigarette was a younger man, whom I recognized, as soon as he spoke, as the man who had rung me up. The other two consisted of Inspector MacIver and a thin-lipped man wearing pince-nez, whose face seemed vaguely familiar.

"Mr. Stockton?" Major Jackson stepped forward and shook hands. "This is General Darton." He indicated the man at the desk. "And this is Sir John Dallas. Inspector MacIver, I think you know."

That was why Sir John's face had seemed familiar. As soon as I heard the name I remembered having seen his photograph in a recent copy of the *Sphere,* as the author of an exhaustive book on toxicology.

"Sit down, Mr. Stockton," said the general, "and please smoke if you want to. You can guess, of course, the reason we have asked you to come round."

"I told him, sir," put in Major Jackson.

"Good! Though I expect it was unnecessary. Now, Mr. Stockton, we have heard from Inspector MacIver, an account of last night and what you told him. But we think it would be more satisfactory if we could hear it from you firsthand."

SO once again I told them everything. I recalled, as far as possible, word for word my conversation with Robin at dinner and I noticed that the two officers glanced at one another significantly more than once. But they listened in silence, save for one interruption when I mentioned his notion of fighting indiscriminately against both sides, regardless of country, but in the cause of humanity.

It was the general who smiled at that and remarked that as an idea it had at any rate the merit of novelty.

Then I went on and outlined what had happened up till the arrival of the inspector, paying, naturally, particular attention to the death of the constable. It was at that point that Sir John spoke for the first time.

"Did you happen to see what part of the dog the constable touched?" he asked.

"Roughly, I did, Sir John. He laid his hand on the dog's ribs, just above the left shoulder."

He nodded as if satisfied.

"I thought as much. Now another thing. You saw this man die in front of your eyes. Did the manner of his death create any particular impression on your brain apart from its amazing suddenness?"

"It produced the impression that he had acute pain spreading from his fingers up his arm. The whole arm seemed to twist and writhe and then he was dead."

Once again Sir John nodded as if satisfied.

"There is only one other point which I might mention," I concluded. "The inspector can tell you everything that happened while he was there. As we got out of our taxi in Clarges Street, another car drove slowly by. And our driver told us that it was the same car that had been standing for hours about a hundred yards farther down the road. It was empty and this is the number." I handed the slip of paper to MacIver, who glanced at it and gave a short laugh. "It struck us both that we might have been followed."

"This car was found deserted in South Audley Street this morning," MacIver said. "Its rightful owner was arrested for being hopelessly drunk in Peckham last night at about half past nine. And he swears by all his gods that the only drink he'd had was one

whisky and soda with a man who was a stranger to him. His car was standing in front of the pub at the time and he remembers nothing more till he woke up in his cell with his boots off."

"That would seem to prove outside influence at work, inspector," said the general.

"Maybe, sir," said MacIver cautiously. "Maybe not. Though it does point that way."

"But, good heavens, general!" I cried. "Surely there can be no doubt about that. What other possible solution can there be?"

FOR a moment or two he drummed with his fingers on the desk.

"That brings us, Mr. Stockton," he said gravely, "to the main reason which made us ask you to come round here this morning. We have decided to take you into our confidence and rely upon your absolute discretion. I feel sure we can do that."

"Certainly, sir," I said.

"In the first place, then, you must know that the army council regards this as a most serious matter. There is no doubt whatever that Gaunt was a most brilliant man; his work during the war proved that. But as you know yourself the armistice prevented any practical test. There is a vast difference between theory and practice. However, with a man like that, one is prepared to take a good deal on trust and when he asked to be allowed to give us a demonstration to-day, we granted his request at once.

"I may say that at the time of the armistice there were still two points where Gaunt's discovery failed," he went on. "The first and lesser of the two lay in the stuff itself; the second and greater lay in the method of distributing it. In applying to us for his demonstration, he claimed to have overcome both these hitherto insurmountable difficulties."

"At the time when the war ended it was, as you can guess, a very closely guarded secret," the general continued. "Not more than four men knew anything about it. And then, the war over, and the necessity for its use no longer existing, the whole thing was rather pigeonholed. In fact it was only the day before yesterday, on the receipt of Gaunt's request, that the matter was unearthed again. Naturally we imagined that it was still just as close a secret as ever.

"The events of last night prove that it cannot have been, unless my alternative theory should prove to be correct. And if that is so, Stockton, we are confronted with the unpleasant fact that some one is in possession of this very dangerous secret. Even in its armistice stage the matter would be serious enough; but if Gaunt's claims are correct, words are inadequate to express the dangers of the situation which will arise.

"Any one who is in the slightest degree in touch with the European pulse to-day knows we are living on the edge of a volcano. Nothing must be done to start an eruption. Nothing, you understand! That brings me to my point. When you give your evidence at the inquest, Stockton, I want you to obliterate from your mind the conversation you had with Gaunt last night. The whole force of Scotland Yard is being employed to try and clear this thing up and secrecy is essential. And we therefore rely entirely on your discretion and that of your friend, Mr. Sinclair."

"You can certainly rely on him, sir," I said. "But what am I to say, then? I must give some explanation."

"Precisely," he agreed. "But before I suggest to you what that explanation might be, I will ask Sir John to run over once more the conclusions he has arrived at."

"They are quite obvious," said the

celebrated toxicologist. "As you may be aware the vast majority of poisons must either be swallowed or injected to prove fatal. With the first class, we are not concerned, but only with the second. In this second class the primary necessity is the introduction of the poison into a vein. You may have the bite of a snake, the use of a hypodermic syringe, or the prick of a poisoned dart—each of which causes a definite puncture in the skin through which the poison passes into a vein. In each of those cases the puncture is caused mechanically—by the snake's fang, or the dart, as the case may be.

"Now there is another tiny class of poisons—it is really a subdivision of the second class—of which, frankly, we know very little. Some expert toxicologists are even inclined to dismiss them as legendary. I'm not sure that I myself didn't belong to their number until this morning. Evidence is in existence—but it is not reliable—of the use of these poisons by the Borgias and by the Aztecs of Mexico. They were reputed to kill by mere external application, without the necessity of a puncture in the skin. They were supposed to generate some strange shattering force, which killed the victim by shock. Now that is absurd; no poison can kill unless it reacts point-blank on the heart. In other words a puncture is necessary and this class supplies its own punctures by some peculiar chemical action.

"You remember the policeman's last words: 'The dog is burning hot.' What he felt was a mass of small open blisters breaking out on his hand, through which the poison passed into his veins and up his arm to his heart. Had he touched the dog anywhere else, nothing would have happened; as bad luck would have it he put his hand on the very spot where the poison had been applied to the dog.

SO much is clear. In all three cases that eruption of blisters is there; in the dog above its shoulder, in the policeman on his hand, and in the case of the Australian on his right temple. Excepting in those places, it is perfectly safe to touch the bodies.

"Now I was in that house at four o'clock this morning; the inspector, very rightly, judged that time was an important factor and called me up. I took down with me a number of guinea pigs and I carried out a series of tests. I held a guinea pig against the danger spot in each body and the three guinea pigs all died. I did the same an hour later. The one I put against the dog died; the one I put against the policeman's hand died, but the one I put on the Australian's forehead did not. It is possible that that means that the Australian was killed some time before the dog; on the other hand, it may merely prove that the dog's long coat retained the poison more effectively. Finally I used three more guinea pigs at six o'clock and nothing happened to any of them.

"My conclusions, therefore, are as follows: Mr. Gaunt has discovered a poison, which judging from the few tests I have carried out already is unknown to science. It kills almost instantaneously when applied externally to the bare skin. Its effect lingers for some time, but only on the actual place on the body where it was applied. After a lapse of seven or eight hours no further trace of it remains, even there.

"As to the method of application," he went on, "I can give no positive opinion. One thing, however, is clear; the person using it would have to exercise the utmost caution. If it is fatal to his victim, it is equally fatal to the operator should it touch him. It is therefore probable that the glove found on the floor was worn by the man using the stuff. And I put forward as a pos-

sible opinion the idea of something in the nature of a garden syringe which could be used to throw a jet in any required direction."

He paused and glanced at the general.

"That is all I've got to say, except that I propose to carry on with further experiments to see if I can isolate this poison. But I confess that I'm not hopeful. If I were able to obtain some of the liquid I should be more confident, but I can only try my best thus handicapped."

"Thank you very much, Sir John," said the soldier. "Now, Stockton, you see the position. It seems pretty clear that Gaunt has solved one difficulty, by perfecting the stuff. Has he solved the other as to the means of distribution? A syringe such as Sir John suggests may be deadly against an individual in a room; used by an army in the field anything of that sort would be useless; just as, after the first surprise in the war, flammenwerfer were useless.

"Until we know that second point, therefore, the less said about this matter, the better. And so we come to what you are going to say. It will be distasteful to you, for Gaunt was your friend, but it is your plain and obvious duty. We are faced with the necessity of inventing a plausible explanation, and the inspector has suggested the following as filling the bill."

THEN he put forward the theory to which I have alluded. He admitted that he didn't believe in it himself; he went so far as to say that he wished to Heaven he could.

"It will of course be unnecessary and undesirable for you to advance this theory yourself," he concluded. "All that is required of you is that you should keep your mouth shut when it is advanced. Because the devil of it is, Stockton, that the signs of struggle on the Australian preclude any idea of accident and subsequent loss of head on the part of Gaunt."

For a time I sat in silence while they all stared at me. To deliberately allow one's pal to be branded as a murderer is not pleasant. But it was clear that there were bigger issues at stake than that.

"I quite understand, sir," I said. "And I will get in touch with Sinclair at once and see that he says nothing."

"Good!" said the general, holding out his hand. "I knew I could rely on you."

"Inquest to-morrow," put in MacIver. "I'll notify you as to time and place."

With that I left and went in search of Toby Sinclair.

CHAPTER IV.

BULLDOG ON THE JOB.

I FOUND Sinclair in his rooms consuming breakfast, while, seated in an easy-chair with his feet on the mantelpiece, was a vast man I had never seen before. It was my first meeting with Drummond.

"Hullo, old man! Take a pew!" cried Toby, waving half an impaled sausage at a chair. "That little fellow sitting opposite you is Drummond. I think I mentioned him to you last night."

"Morning," said Drummond, uncoiling himself and standing up. We shook hands and I wished we hadn't. "Hear you had some fun and games last night."

"I've been telling him, Stockton, about our little effort," said Sinclair, lighting a cigarette.

"Well, don't tell any one else," I remarked. "I've just come from the war office and they're somewhat on the buzz. It's bound to come out, of course, that a new and deadly form of poison was in action last night, but it's got to rest at that."

I ran briefly over what General Darton and Sir John had said and they both listened without interruption.

"What do you think of it, Hugh?" asked Sinclair, after I'd finished.

"This beer ain't fit to drink, Toby. That's what I think." He rose and strolled over to the window. "Absolutely not fit to drink."

"Very interesting," I remarked sarcastically. "The point is doubtless of paramount importance, but may I ask you to be good enough to promise me that what you've heard goes no farther? The matter is somewhat serious."

"The matter of this foul ale is a deuced sight more serious," Drummond answered genially. "Toby, old lad, something will have to be done about it. In fact, something is going to be done about it now."

He strolled out of the room and I looked at Sinclair in blank amazement.

"What on earth is the man up to?" I asked angrily. "Does he think this thing is a jest?"

TOBY SINCLAIR was looking a bit surprised himself.

"You can never tell what old Hugh thinks," he began apologetically, only to break off as a loud squealing noise was heard on the stairs. The next moment Drummond entered, holding a small and very frightened man by the ear.

"Foul beer, Toby," he remarked. "Almost foul enough for this little lump of intelligence to be made to drink as a punishment. Now, rat face, what excuse have you got to offer for living?"

"You let me go," whined his prisoner, "or I'll 'ave the perlice on yer."

"I think not, little man," said Drummond quietly. "Anyway I'll chance it. Now who told you to watch this house?"

"I ain't watching it, governor! Strite I ain't."

His shifty eyes were darting this way and that, looking for a way of escape.

"I'm an honest man, I am, and—oh! guv'nor, lemme go! You're breaking my arm."

"I asked you a question, you little swine," said Drummond. "And if you don't answer it, I will break your arm. And that thing you call a face as well. Now, who told you to watch this house?"

"A bloke wot I don't know," answered the man sullenly. "'E promised me 'arf a quid if I did wot 'e told me."

"And what did he tell you to do?"

"Foller that there gent if he went out." He pointed at Sinclair with a grimy finger. "Foller 'im and mark down where 'e went to."

"And how were you to recognize me?" asked Toby.

"'E showed me a photer, 'e did. A swell photer."

For a moment or two Sinclair stared at the man in amazement; then he crossed over to a writing table in the corner.

"Well I'm damned!" he muttered, as he opened a big cardboard cover with a photographer's name printed on it. "I'll swear there were six here yesterday and there are only five now. Was that like the photograph he showed you?"

He held one up in front of the man.

"That's it, governor; that's the very one."

"There is a certain atmosphere of rapidity about this," murmured Drummond, "that appeals to me."

He thoughtfully contemplated his captive.

"Where were you to report the result of what you found out?" he went on. "Where were you going to meet him, to get your half quid?"

"Down at the Three Cows in Peckham, guv'nor. To-night at nine."

I gave a little exclamation and Drummond glanced at me inquiringly.

"Not now," I said. "Afterward."

He nodded.

"Listen here, little man," he remarked quietly. "Do you want to earn a fiver?"

"You bet yer life I do, sir," answered the other earnestly.

"Well, if you do exactly what I tell you to do, you shall. This gentleman whose photo you have seen is shortly going out. He is going to lunch at Hatchett's in Piccadilly. After lunch he will take a little walk in the park and after that he will return here to his lodgings.

"He will probably dine at the Berkeley. At nine o'clock to-night you will be in the Three Cows at Peckham and you will report this gentleman's movements to the man who promised you half a quid. If you do that—exactly as I have told you—you can come back here to-morrow morning about this time and you'll get a fiver."

"You swear there ain't no catch, guv'nor?" asked the other.

"I swear there's no catch," replied Drummond quietly.

"Right, sir, I'll do it." He touched a finger to his forehead and dodged out of the room.

"A distinct air of rapidity," repeated Drummond thoughtfully. "I wonder if he'll do it."

"How did you know he was watching the house?" I asked curiously.

"It stuck out a yard," he answered. "He was on the pavement when I came here an hour ago and he's not a Clarges Street type. What was it hit your fancy over the Three Cows?"

"The real driver of the taxi that followed us last night was drugged in a Peckham pub by a man he didn't know. Presumably it was the Three Cows."

"Then possibly we shall meet the man who followed you last night at nine o'clock this evening. Which will be one step up the ladder at any rate."

He picked up his hat and lighted a cigarette.

"By the way, what's the number of your house?"

"3 B. It's about ten doors down toward Piccadilly."

Suddenly he gave a grin of pure joy.

"Is it possible, my jovial bucks," he cried, "that once again we are on the warpath? That through the unpleasant object who has lately honored us with his presence we shall be led to higher and worthier game? Anyway, we can but baptize such a wonderful thought in a Martini or even two."

WE followed him down the stairs and Toby smiled as he saw the look on my face.

"It's all right, old man," he remarked. "He's always like this."

"And why not, forsooth!" boomed Drummond, waving his stick joyfully in the air. "Eat, drink and be merry. Don't you agree with me, sir?"

He stopped suddenly in front of a complete stranger, who stared at him in blank amazement.

"Who the—the devil are you, sir?" the stranger spluttered. "And what do you mean by speaking to me?"

"I liked your face," answered Drummond calmly. "It's the sort of face that inspires confidence in canaries and white mice. Good morning! Sorry I can't ask you to lunch."

"But the man is mad!" I murmured helplessly to Toby, as we turned into Piccadilly.

"There is generally method therein," he answered.

Drummond smiled.

"He knows not our ways, Toby," he remarked. "But judging by appearances you're evidently the important one, Stockton. That one only stuck out a foot."

"Do you mean to say that that man

you spoke to was on the lookout for me?" I inquired, astonished.

"What the dickens did you think he was doing? Growing water cress on the pavement?" He dismissed the matter with a wave of his hand. "Yes, Toby," he went on, "I have distinct hopes. Matters seem to me to be marching well. And if we adopt reasonable precautions this afternoon, it seems to me that they may march even better this evening under the hospitable roof of the Three Cows."

He turned in to Hatchett's. "We may as well conform to the first part of the program at any rate. And over some oysters we'll discuss the first move."

"Which is?" I asked.

"How to get you two fellows to my house without your being followed. Because I feel that for any hope of success in the salubrious suburb of Peckham, we must effect one or two changes in our personal appearance and I have all the necessary wherewithal in Brook Street. Toby's little pal I think we can neglect; it's that other bloke who is after you that will want watching."

He gave a short laugh and then continued:

"Talk of the devil; here he is—don't look round either of you, but he's taken a table near the door. Well, well! Now the fun begins. He is ordering the *plat du jour* and a whisky and soda; moreover, he is adopting the somewhat unusual custom of paying in advance. Most thoughtful of him. It goes to my heart to think that his money will be wasted."

He signaled to the head waiter, who came at once.

"Add this little lot to my account," said Drummond. "We've suddenly remembered we're supposed to be lunching in Hampstead. Now, you two—up the stairs, through Burlington Arcade, into a taxi and straight to Brook Street. I'll deal with this bloke."

ONE of the strangest things to me is the unquestioning obedience to Drummond into which I dropped at once. That first day I met him I did what he said with the same readiness as I did in days to come, after I had grown to know him better.

I stopped at the top of the stairs for a moment or two to see the fun. Drummond was halfway up when he dropped his stick. In stooping to pick it up, he completely blocked the gangway. Behind him, dancing furiously from side to side in his endeavors to pass, was the other man.

"Why, it's the man with the charming face!" cried Drummond genially. "But I wish you wouldn't hop, laddie. It's so damned bad for the tum-tum."

I heard no more. Toby Sinclair, swearing vigorously under his breath, dragged me into Piccadilly.

"Confound you, Stockton, why don't you do what you're told? I was halfway along Burlington Arcade before I realized you weren't there. You'd better take it here and now that if Hugh tells you to do a thing he means it to be done exactly as he said. And he said nothing about standing and watching him."

"Damn Drummond and everything connected with him!" I cried irritably. "Who is he anyway to give me orders?"

He laughed quietly, as we got into the taxi.

"I'm sorry, old man," he said. "I was forgetting for the moment that you only met him for the first time to-day. You'll laugh yourself in a few days when you recall that remark of yours.

"If there's a man living in England to-day," he went on, "who is more capable than Hugh of finding out what happened last night, I'd like to meet him."

I smiled my incredulity. The things that had happened since my return from the war office had rather driven that

interview from my mind. But now I had leisure to recall it and the more I thought of it, the less I liked it. It is all very well in theory to say that there are occasions when an individual must suffer for the good of the state, but in practice it is most unpleasant when that individual is your own particular friend. Mercifully Robin had neither kith nor kin, which eased my mind a certain amount; by allowing this false impression to be given at the inquest I was harming no one, except Robin himself.

If he was dead, sooner or later his body would be found, which would prove beyond a doubt that he was not the original culprit; whereas if he was alive, the time would come when I should be able to explain. For all that, nothing could alter the fact that I disliked my rôle.

I said as much that afternoon as we sat in Drummond's study. He had come in about two hours after us and he seemed a bit silent and thoughtful.

"You can't help it, Stockton," he said. "And probably Gaunt if he knew would be the first man to realize the necessity. It's not that that's worrying me." He rose and went to the window. "I'm thinking I've made a fool of myself. I don't see a sign of any one—I haven't for the last hour—and I took Ted's car out of St. James Square and have been all round London in it; but I'm afraid I've transferred attention to myself. There was just a second or two on the stairs at Hatchett's when our little lad of the genial face looked at me with the utmost suspicion."

He resumed his chair and stretched out his legs.

"However, we can but chance it. It may lead to something."

"It's very good of you," I said, a little doubtfully. "But I really don't know if—I mean, the police and all that, don't you know."

HE gazed at me in genuine amazement.

"My dear man!" he remarked. "If you want to leave the thing to old MacIver and company, say the word. I mean it's your palaver and I wouldn't butt in for the world. Or if you want to handle the thing yourself, I'm away out from this moment. You can have the free run of my various wardrobes if you want to go to Peckham to-night."

I couldn't help it; I burst out laughing.

"Frankly, it would never have dawned on me to go to Peckham to-night," I said. "Incidentally if it hadn't been for you I shouldn't have known anything about Peckham, for I should never have had the nerve to pull that little blighter into Toby's rooms even if I'd realized he was watching the house—which I shouldn't have. What I meant was that it seemed very good of you to worry over a thing like this—seeing that you don't even know Gaunt."

An expression of profound relief had replaced the amazement.

"By Jove, old man!" he remarked. "You gave me a nasty fright then. What on earth does it matter if I know Gaunt or not? Opportunities of this sort are far too rare to stand on ceremoney. What I was afraid of was that you might want to keep it all for yourself. And I can assure you that lots of amusing little shows I've had in the past have started much less promisingly than this. You get Toby to tell you about 'em while I go and rout out some togs for to-night."

"What an amazing bloke he is!" I said, as the door closed behind him.

Toby Sinclair smiled thoughtfully.

"In the words of the American philosopher, you have delivered yourself of a perfectly true mouthful. And now if you take my advice you'll get some sleep. For with Hugh on the

warpath, and if we have any luck, you won't get much to-night."

He curled himself up in a chair and in a few minutes he was fast asleep. But try as I would, I could not follow his example. There was a sense of unreality about the whole thing; events seemed to be moving with that queer jumbled incoherence that belongs to a dream. Robin's despairing cry; the policeman crashing to the floor like a bullock in a slaughterhouse; the dead Australian who had fought so fiercely. And against whom? Who was it who had come into that room the night before? What was happening there even as Robin got through to me on the phone?

Suddenly I seemed to see it all. The door was opening slowly and Robin was staring at it. For a moment or two we watched it and then I could bear the suspense no longer. I hurled myself forward, to find myself in the grip of a huge black-bearded man with a yellow handkerchief knotted round his throat.

"You swine!" I shouted, and then I looked round stupidly.

For the room had changed and the noise of a passing taxi came from Brook Street.

"Three hours of the best," said the big man genially, and a nasty-looking little fellow behind him laughed. "It's half past seven and time you altered your appearance."

"Good Lord!" I muttered with an attempt at a grin. "I'm awfully sorry; I must have been dreaming."

"It was a deuced agile dream," answered Drummond. "My right sock suspender is embedded about half an inch in my legs. Toby saw you coming and dodged."

He turned to the little fellow who was lighting a cigarette.

"Make some cocktails, old man, while I rig up Stockton so even his mother won't know him."

"Great Scott!" I said. "I'd never have known either of you."

"You won't know yourself in twenty minutes," returned Drummond. "You're going to be a mechanic with communistic tendencies and my third revolver."

CHAPTER V.

IN DISGUISE.

THE Three Cows at Peckham proved to be an unprepossessing spot. It was a quarter to nine when we entered the public bar and the place was crowded. The atmosphere reeked of tobacco smoke and humanity and in one corner stood one of those diabolical machines in which, for the price of one penny, a large metal disk rotates and delivers itself of an appalling noise.

Involuntarily I hesitated for a moment; then, seeing that Drummond had elbowed his way to the bar and that Toby was standing behind him, I reluctantly followed. What on earth was the use of this amateur dressing-up business?

"Three of four-'alf, please, miss," said Drummond, planking down a shilling on the counter. "Blest if you ain't got much thinner since I was last 'ere."

"Come off it," returned the very fat maiden tersely. "You ain't a blinking telegraph pole yourself. Three whiskies and splash and a Guinness. All right! All right! I've only got two hands, ain't I?"

She turned away and I stared round the place with an increasing feeling of disgust. Racing touts, loafers, riffraff of all descriptions filled the room and the hoarse hum of conversation, punctuated by the ceaseless popping of corks for the drinkers of Bass, half deafened one. But of either of our friends of the morning there was no sign.

I took a sip out of the glass in front of me. Drummond was engaged with a horsy-looking gentleman spotting winners for next day; on my other

side, Toby Sinclair, in the intervals of dispassionately picking his teeth, was chaffing the fat barmaid's elderly companion. I wondered if I appeared as completely at ease in my surroundings and as little noticeable as they did. A cigarette might help, I reflected, and I lighted one. A moment or two later Drummond turned round.

" 'Ear that?" he remarked in a confidential whisper. "Strite from the stables. Why the devil don't you smoke a Corona Corona, you fool! Put out that Turk. And try and look a bit less like a countryman seeing London for the first time. Absolutely strite from the stables. Stargazer—for the two thirty. 'E can't lose."

IT was that moment that I saw them enter—the man who had been in Hatchett's and another one. Of the squealing little specimen who had been dragged into Toby's room I saw no sign, but doubtless he would come later. However, the great point was that the others had arrived and I glanced at Drummond to make sure he had noticed the fact.

To my amazement he was leaning over the bar calling for "Mother" to replenish his glass and that of his new friend, the horsy-looking man. So I dug him in the ribs covertly, at the same time keeping a careful eye on the two newcomers. It was easy to watch them unperceived, as they were talking most earnestly together. By the most extraordinary piece of good fortune they found a vacant place at the bar, just beside the horsy man.

I dug Drummond in the ribs and whispered in his ear: "Do you see who has just come in? Standing next to this awful stiff?"

He nodded portentously. Excuse me one moment, Mr. Bloggs."

He turned to me and his expression never varied an iota.

"Laddie," he murmured wearily, "I saw them ten minutes ago. I felt London shake when you gave your little start of surprise on seeing them yourself. With pain and gloom I have watched you regarding them as a lion regards the keeper at feeding time at the zoo. All that remains is for you to go up to them and let them know who you are. Then we'll all sing 'Auld Lang Syne' and go home. Well, then that's agreed. Come in 'ere between us, Mr. Bloggs," said Drummond confidentially. "Talk to me and my pal for a bit."

For a moment or two I listened to their talk and then something drew my attention to a man seated by himself in a corner. He had a tankard of beer at his side and his appearance was quite inconspicuous. He was a thickset burly man, who might have been an engine driver off duty or something of that sort.

Yet he seemed to me to be studying the occupants of the bar in a curiously intent manner. After a while I began to watch him covertly, until I grew convinced that my suspicions were correct.

He was watching us. Once or twice I caught his eye fixed on me with an expression which left no doubt whatever in my mind that his presence there was not accidental. Though I immediately looked away, lest he should think I had noticed anything, I began to feel certain that he was another of the gang—possibly the very one we had come to find. Moreover, my certainty was increased by the fact that never once, as far as I could see, did the two men standing next to Drummond glance in his direction.

"Well, I'm off." It was Toby speaking, and with a nod that included all of us he slouched out of the bar, to be followed shortly afterward by Mr. Bloggs.

"One of the lads," remarked Drummond, as the swing doors closed behind Mr. Bloggs. "Another of the

same, Mother, and a drop of port for yourself."

"Closing time!" bellowed a raucous voice, and a general move toward the door took place.

The two men next to Drummond finished their drinks, and then, still engrossed in conversation, went out into the street along with the rest. He made no movement to follow them, which rather surprised me.

Since my principal interest lay in the thickset, burly man, who was one of the last to leave, it suited me very well. In him, I felt convinced, lay the first clew to what we wanted. When I saw a second man, whom I had not previously noticed and who had been sitting in another corner of the bar, whisper something in his ear as he went out, it seemed proof positive. However, true to my decision, I said nothing about what I had discovered, and, smiling inwardly, I waited to hear what Drummond proposed to do.

"Not bad," he remarked in his normal voice, as we strolled toward the nearest tube station. "Almost too good. In fact—I wonder. It was a bit too blatant, Stockton. That's the trouble."

"I don't understand."

"Ten Ashworth Gardens," he answered.

"What on earth do you mean?" I remarked, staring at him blankly.

"Ten Ashworth Gardens," he repeated, "wherever that may be. Shortly we will get into a taxi and follow Toby there."

"I say, do you mind explaining?" I demanded.

He laughed again and hailed a passing taxi.

"Victoria Station, mate, Brighton line. And 'op it. Now," he continued, as the man turned his car, "I will endeavor to elucidate. While talking to Mr. Joe Bloggs our two friends on my right mentioned that address. They mentioned it again when I changed my position and stood next to them. Now, my experience is that people don't shout important addresses at one another in public—at least, not people of that type. That's why I said that it struck me as being a little too blatant. However, it may have been that they thought they were perfectly safe, so that it's worth trying."

He put his head through the window. "I've changed my mind, mate. I want to go to Hashworth Gardens. Know 'em?"

"Know my face," answered the other. "Of course I do. Up Euston way."

"Well, stop afore you get there, and me and my pal will walk."

FOR a while I hesitated as to whether I should tell him my suspicions, but I still felt a bit riled at what I regarded as his offhand manner. So I didn't, and we sat in silence till Piccadilly Circus and Shaftesbury Avenue were left behind us.

"Look here, Stockton," said Drummond suddenly, "this is your palaver principally, so you'd better decide. We're being followed."

He pointed at the little mirror in front of the driver.

"I rather expected we might be and now I'm sure. So what do you propose to do? It's only fair to warn you that we may be putting our noses into a deliberate and carefully prepared trap."

"What would you do yourself if I wasn't here?" I asked.

"Put my nose there, of course," he answered.

"Then mine goes, too," I said.

"Good man!" he cried. "You'll be one of the firm in no time."

The car pulled up and the driver stuck his head round the door.

"Second on the left up that road," he said, and we watched his red tail

lamp disappearing down the almost deserted street.

At the far end, just before a turn, stood another stationary car, and Drummond gave a sudden little chuckle.

"Our followers, unless I'm much mistaken. Let's get a move on, Stockton, and see what there is to be seen before they arrive."

He swung off down the turning, and at the corner of Ashworth Gardens a figure detached itself from the shadows. It was Toby Sinclair.

"Fourth house down on the left, Hugh," he said. "And there's something funny going on there. I haven't seen the sign of a soul, but there's the most extraordinary sort of sound coming from a room on the first floor. Just as if a sack was swinging slowly against the blind."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MOVING MENACE.

IT was an eerie sort of noise, such as you may hear sometimes in old houses in the country when the wind is blowing. Creak, shuffle, thud—creak, shuffle, thud, and every now and then a sort of drumming noise such as a man's heels might make against woodwork. For a while we stood listening, and once it seemed to me that the blind bulged outward with the pressure of something behind it.

"That's no sack," said Drummond quietly. "I'm going in, trap or no trap; there's foul play inside that room."

Without a second's hesitation he walked up the steps and tried the front door. It was open, and Sinclair whistled under his breath.

"It is a trap, Hugh!" he whispered.

"Stop here, both of you," he answered. "I'm going to see."

We stood there waiting in the hall, and I have no hesitation in confessing that the back of my scalp was beginning to prick uncomfortably. The silence was absolute; the noise had entirely ceased. Just once a stair creaked above us, and then very faintly we heard the sound of a door opening. Simultaneously the noise began again—thud, shuffle, creak—thud, shuffle, creak—and the next moment we heard Drummond's voice.

"Come up—both of you!"

We dashed up the stairs and into the room with the open door. At first I could hardly see in the faint light from a street lamp outside, and then things became clearer. I made out Drummond, holding something in his arms by the window, and then Toby flashed on his torch.

"Cut the rope," said Drummond curtly. "I've freed him from the strain."

It was Toby who cut it; I just stood there feeling dazed and sick. For the sack was no sack, but our rat-faced man of the morning. He was hanging from a hook in the ceiling, and his face was glazed and purple while his eyes stared horribly. His hands were lashed behind his back and a handkerchief had been thrust tightly into his mouth.

"Lock the door," ordered Drummond, as he laid the poor fellow down on the floor. "He's not quite dead, and I'm going to bring him round if every crook in London is in the house. Keep your guns handy and your ears skinned."

He unknotted the rope and pulled out the gag, and after ten minutes or so the breathing grew less stertorous and the face more normal in color.

"Take a turn, Stockton," said Drummond at length. "Just ordinary artificial respiration. I want to explore a bit."

I knelt down beside the man on the floor and continued the necessary motions mechanically. It was obvious now that he was going to pull round, and if anything was going to be dis-

covered I wanted to be in the fun. Sinclair had lighted a cracked incandescent light which hung from the middle of the ceiling, and by its light it was possible to examine the room.

There was very little furniture: a drunken-looking horsehair sofa, two or three chairs, and a rickety table comprised the lot. But on one wall, not far from where I knelt, there was hanging a somewhat incongruous piece of stuff, like a disk.

MY artificial respiration ceased and my mouth grew dry. For the stuff was moving; it was being pushed aside and something was appearing round the edge. Something that looked like a small-caliber revolver, and it was pointed straight at me. No, it was not a revolver; it was a small squirt or syringe, and behind it was a big white disk. Into my mind there flashed the words of Sir John Dallas only that morning—"Something in the nature of a garden syringe"—and with a great effort I forced myself to act.

I rolled over toward the window, and what happened then is still more or less a blur in my mind. A thin jet of liquid shot through the air and hit the carpet just behind where I'd been kneeling. At the same moment there came the crack of a revolver, followed by a scream and a heavy fall. I looked up to see Drummond ejecting a spent cartridge, and then I scrambled to my feet.

"What the devil!" I muttered stupidly.

"Follow it up," snapped Drummond, "and shoot on sight."

He was out in the passage like a flash, with Toby and I at his heels. The door of the next room was locked, but it lasted only one charge of Drummond's. Then for a moment or two we stood peering into the darkness—at least, I did. The others did not, which is how one lives and learns. I never heard them; I never even realized they had left me. When two torches were flashed on me from the other side of the room, I shrank back into the narrow passage.

"Come in, man, come in," muttered Drummond. "Never stand in a doorway like that. Ah!"

He drew in his breath sharply as the beam of his torch picked up the thing on the floor. It was the man who had been in Hatchett's that morning, the man who had stood behind him at the Three Cows—and he was dead. The same terrible distortion was visible; the cause of death was obvious.

"Don't touch him, for Heaven's sake!" I cried, as Drummond bent forward. "It's the same death as we saw last night!"

"And you were darned nearly the victim, old man," said Drummond grimly.

"By Jove, Hugh, it was a good shot!" said Toby. "You hit the syringe itself and the stuff splashed on his face. You can see the mark!"

It was true; in the middle of his right cheek was an angry red circle, in which it was possible to see an eruption of tiny blisters. And the same strange, sweet smell hung heavily about the air.

"So things begin to move," said Drummond quietly. "The whole thing was a trap, as I thought. They evidently seem to want you pretty badly, Stockton."

"But why?" I asked angrily. "What the devil have I got to do with it?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"They may think you know too much; that Gaunt told you things."

"But why hang that poor little chap in the next room?" asked Toby.

"Ask me another," answered Drummond. "Possibly they found out we'd got at him, and they hanged him as a punishment for treachery; possibly to insure our remaining here some time to bring him round. And, incidentally—who hanged him? The occupants of the car that followed us couldn't have

got to this house before we did, and he was triced up before Toby arrived here. That means there were people here before, and the occupants of that car have yet to arrive."

Suddenly his torch went out and I felt his hand on my arm warningly.

"And unless I mistake," he whispered, "they've just come. Stick by me, Stockton; you're new to this game. Get to the window, Toby, and keep against the wall."

What had caused his sudden action? I hadn't heard a sound, and at that time I had yet to find out his almost uncanny gift of hearing. To me the house was in absolute silence; the only sound was the heavy pounding of my own heart. Then a stair creaked as it had creaked when Drummond left us in the hall.

I glanced at Drummond; his hand was feeling for the window catch. With a little click it went back, and once more he crouched, motionless. Again the stair creaked and yet again, and I thought I heard men whispering outside the door. Suddenly, with a crash that almost startled me out of my senses, Drummond flung up the sash, and the whispering ceased; all was silent.

"Stand by to jump when I give the word," muttered Drummond, "and then run like hell. There's about a dozen of 'em."

He was crouching below the level of the window sill; dimly on his other side I could see Toby Sinclair. Then the whispering started again; men were coming into the room. There was a stifled curse as some one stumbled against a chair, and at that moment Drummond shouted, "Jump!"

Just for a second I almost obeyed him, for my leg was over the sill. Then I heard him fighting desperately in the room behind. He was covering our retreat, a thing which no man could allow.

CHAPTER VII.

EYES OF DEATH.

THERE may have been a dozen men in the room in all; I know there were three of them on me. Chairs went over as we fought on in the dark, and all the time I was thinking of the liquid on the floor and the dead man's face and what would happen if we touched it. As if in answer to my thoughts, there came Drummond's voice.

"I have one of you here powerless," he said. "In this room is a dead man who died—you know how. Unless my two friends are allowed to go at once, I will put this man's hand against the dead man's cheek. And that means death."

"Who is that speaking?" came another voice out of the darkness.

"Great Scott!" Drummond's gasp of surprise was obvious. "Is that you, MacIver?"

"Switch on the lights," returned the other voice angrily.

There stood my burly, thickset man of the Three Cows.

"What is the meaning of this foolishness?" he snarled. He glared furiously at Drummond and then at me. "Why are you masquerading in that rig, Mr. Stockton?" he went on suspiciously. Then his eyes fell on the dead man. "How did this happen?"

Drummond, sprawling in a chair, was laughing helplessly.

"I didn't recognize you at the Three Cows, Captain Drummond," said MacIver ominously.

"But I think it's only right to warn you that you're mixing yourself up in a very serious matter. Into Mr. Stockton's conduct I propose to inquire later." Once again he looked at me suspiciously. "Just at the moment, however, I should like to know how this man died."

Drummond nodded and grew serious.

"Quite right, MacIver. We were in the next room—all three of us. Good Lord! I wonder what's happened to rat face. You see, an unfortunate little bloke had been hanged in the next room——"

"What?" shouted MacIver, darting out into the passage.

We followed, crowding after him, only to stand in amazement at the door. The light was still burning, the rope still lay on the carpet, but of the man we had cut down from the ceiling there was no sign. He had absolutely disappeared.

"Well!" muttered Drummond. "This beats cockfighting. Wouldn't have missed it for a thousand. Look out! Don't go near that pool on the floor. That's some of the juice."

He stared round the room and then lighted a cigarette.

"There's no good you looking at me like that, MacIver," he went on quietly. "There's the hook, my dear fellow; there's the rope. I'm not lying. We cut him down and we laid him on the floor just there. He was nearly dead, but not quite. For ten minutes or so I put him through artificial respiration —then Mr. Stockton took it on. And it was while he was doing it—kneeling down beside him—that this bit of curtain stuff moved. I'd be careful how you touch it; there may be a bit of that liquid on it."

HE drew it back, covering his hand with the tablecloth.

"You see, there's a hole in the wall communicating with the next room. Through that hole the man who is now lying dead next door let drive with his diabolical liquid at Mr. Stockton. By the mercy of Allah, Stockton rolled over in time and the stuff hit the carpet—you can see it there, that dark stain. So then it was my turn, and I let drive with my revolver."

"We heard a shot," said MacIver.

"That's his syringe, or whatever you like to call the implement," continued Drummond. "And it obviously wasn't empty, for some of the contents splashed back in his face. The result you see in the next room, and I can't say I regret it."

"But this man you say was hanging? What on earth has become of him?"

"Search me," said Drummond. "The only conclusion I can come to is that he recovered, after we had left the room, and decided to clear out."

"Go and search the house," MacIver snapped. "Every room. And if you find anything suspicious, don't touch it, but call me."

He waited till they had all left the room; then he turned to Drummond.

"Now, sir," he said, "I want to get to the bottom of this. In the first place, what brought you to this house?"

"The bird in the next room shouted the address in my ear," returned Drummond, "that time we were having one at the Three Cows."

"Damn it!" exploded MacIver. "What took you to the Three Cows? In disguise, too!"

"Just vulgar curiosity, Mac," replied Drummond airily. "And we felt that our presence in evening clothes might excite rude comment.

"The fact of the matter, MacIver, is that we're up against some pretty unscrupulous swine. Their object to-night was to kill Mr. Stockton, and they very nearly succeeded. Why they should view him with dislike is beyond me, but the fact remains that they do. They set a deliberate trap for us and we walked into it with our eyes open. You followed on, and in the darkness everybody mistook everybody else."

The detective transferred his gaze to Toby Sinclair.

"You're Mr. Sinclair, ain't you?"

"I am," returned Toby affably.

"I thought you were both of you told not to pass this matter on. How is it

that Captain Drummond comes to know of it?"

"My fault entirely, inspector," said Toby. "I'd already told him before Mr. Stockton returned from the war office this morning."

"So I thought I'd help you unofficially," murmured Drummond, "the same as I did at the time of the Black Gang."

MacIver's scowl grew positively ferocious.

"I don't want your help," he snarled.

He swung round as some of his men came into the room. "Well?"

"Nothing, sir. The house is empty."

"Then, since the hour is late, I think we'll leave you," remarked Drummond. "You know where to find me, Mac; and you'd better let me know what I'm to say about that bloke's death. From now on, I may say, we shall drop this and concentrate exclusively on the breeding of white mice."

For a moment I thought MacIver was going to stop us; then, apparently, he thought better of it. He favored us with a parting scowl and, with that, we left him. By luck we found a taxi, and Drummond gave his own address.

"There are one or two things we might discuss," he said quietly, as we got into the car. "MacIver's arrival is an undoubted complication. I wonder how the devil he spotted you, Stockton."

"That's what beats me," I remarked. "I spotted him—not as MacIver, of course—down at the Three Cows. He struck me as a suspicious character, so I kept my eye on him casually while you were talking to that racing tout."

"Oh, Lord!" Drummond began to laugh. "Then that accounts for it. The effect of your casual eye would make an archbishop feel he'd committed bigamy. It has a sledge-hammer action about it, old man."

"Joking apart, Hugh, what's the next move?" interposed Sinclair.

"It rests on a slender hope, old boy," said Drummond. "It rests on the reappearance of little rat face. Of course, he may be able to tell us nothing; on the other hand, there must have been some reason for tricing him up. And that reason may throw some light on the situation."

The car pulled up in front of his house and we got out.

"Come in and change," he went on, "and we'll have a nightcap."

I lighted a cigarette. As I did so I saw that Drummond was staring with curious intentness at a letter and a parcel that lay on the hall table. The parcel was about the size of a cigar box, and the label outside proclaimed that it came from Asprey's.

He led the way upstairs, carrying them both with him. Then, having drawn himself some beer and waved his hand at the cask in the corner for us to help ourselves, he slit the envelope open with a paper knife.

"I thought as much," he said, after he had read the contents. "But how very crude! And how very untruthful! Though it shows they possess a confidence in their ability which is not so far justified by results."

WE looked over his shoulder at the typewritten slip he held in his hand. It ran as follows:

Mr. Stockton is dead because he knew too much; a traitor is dead because he was a traitor. Unless you stop at once, a fool will die because he was a fool.

"How crude!" he repeated. "How very crude! I'm afraid our opponents are not very clever. They must have been going to the movies or something. It is rare to find three lies in such a short space. Toby, bring me a basin chock-full of water, will you? There's one in the bathroom."

His eyes were fixed on the parcel and he was smiling grimly.

"To be certain of success is an admirable trait, Stockton," he murmured, "if you succeed. If, on the contrary, you fail, it is ill advised to put your convictions on paper. Almost as ill-advised, in fact, as to send live stock disguised as a cigarette case."

"What on earth do you mean?" I asked.

"Put your ear against that parcel and listen," he answered shortly.

Suddenly I heard it—a faint rustling and then a gentle scraping noise.

"You're having an excellent introduction to this sort of game," he laughed. "In fact, I've rarely known events come crowding so thick and fast. But crude, oh, so crude!"

"Here you are, old man. Is there enough water?"

Toby had reëntered the room with the basin.

"Ample," answered Drummond, picking up the parcel and holding it under the surface. "Give me that paper weight, Stockton, and then we can resume our beer."

Fascinated, I watched the bubbles rise to the surface. At first they came slowly, then as the water permeated the wrappings they rose in a steady stream. Then, clear and distinct, there came a dreadful hissing noise and the surface of the water became blurred with a faint tremor as if the box itself was shaking.

"A pleasant little pet," murmured Drummond, watching the basin with interest. "There's no doubt about it, you fellows, that the air of rapidity grows more and more marked."

At last the bubbles ceased; the whole parcel was water-logged.

"We'll give it five minutes," said Drummond.

WE waited, I, at any rate, with ill-concealed impatience, till time was up and Drummond took the parcel out of the water. He cut the string and removed the paper. Inside was a wooden box with holes drilled in it, and the water was draining out of it, and there within was a horrible sight.

It was a spider of sorts, but such a spider as I have never dreamed of in my wildest nightmares. Its body was the size of a hen's egg; its six legs the size of a crab's. And it was covered with coarse black hair. Even in death it looked the manifestation of all evil, with its great, protruding eyes and short, sharp jaws, and with a shudder I turned away.

Drummond was staring at the box, and there, sure enough, was an envelope. It was sodden with water, but the letter inside was legible. For a while we stared at it uncomprehendingly.

This is to introduce William, If you decide to keep him, his favorite diet is one of small birds and mice. He is a married man and, since I hated to part him from his wife, I have sent her along, too. She is addressed to the most suitable person in the house to receive a lady.

For a moment or two we stared at the note uncomprehendingly, and then Drummond gave a sudden, strangled grunt in his throat and dashed from the room.

"Phyllis!" he flung at us hoarsely.

"Good Lord! His wife!" cried Toby, and with sick fear in our hearts we followed him.

"It's all right, darling," came his voice from above us, but there was no answer.

When we got to the open door and looked into the room, the silence was not surprising.

Cowering in a corner, her eyes dilated with horror, there stood a girl. She was staring at something on the carpet—something that was hidden from us by the bed. Her lips were moving, but no sound came from them and she never even lifted her eyes to look at her husband.

I don't wonder. My skin still creeps

as I recall that moment. If the dead thing below had been horrible, what words can I use for the living? As with many spiders, the female was larger than the male, and the thing which stood on its six great legs about a yard from the girl's feet looked the size of a puppy. It was squat and utterly loathsome, and, as Drummond with the poker in his hand dashed toward it, it scruttled under the bed, hissing loudly.

It was I who caught Mrs. Drummond as she pitched forward in a dead faint, and I held her while her husband went berserk. It was my first acquaintance with his amazing strength. He hurled heavy pieces of furniture about as if they were out of a doll's house. The two beds flew apart with a crash, and the foul brute he was after sidled under a wardrobe. Then the wardrobe moved like Kipling's piano, save that there was only one man behind and not several.

But at last he had it, and with a grunt of rage he hit it with the poker between the beady, staring eyes. He hit it again and again and then he turned round and stared at us.

"If ever I lay hands on the man who sent these brutes," he said quietly, "I will do the same to him."

He took his wife from me and picked her up in his arms.

"Let's go out of here before she comes to," he went on. "Poor kid, poor little kid!"

He carried her downstairs and a few minutes later she opened her eyes. Stark horror still shone in them, and for a while she sobbed hysterically. But at length she grew calmer, and disjointedly, with many pauses, she told us what had happened.

SHE'D come in from a dance and seen the boxes lying on the hall table. She'd taken hers upstairs, thinking it was a present from her husband. She'd opened it at her dressing table. Then she'd seen this awful monster staring at her. Her maid had gone to bed, and suddenly it had scrambled out of the box and flopped off the table onto the floor at her feet.

She began to shudder uncontrollably; then she pulled herself together again.

"It just squatted there on the floor, and its eyes seemed to grow bigger and bigger. Once I found myself bending right forward toward it, as if I was forced against my will. I think if it had touched me I should have gone mad. Who sent it, Hugh? Who was the brute who sent it?"

"If ever I find that out," said Drummond grimly, "he will curse the day that he was born. But just now, darling, I want you to take some sleep dope and go to bed."

"I couldn't!" she cried. "I couldn't sleep with a double dose."

"Right-ho!" he answered. "Then stop down here and talk to us. By the way, you don't know Mr. Stockton, do you? He's really quite good looking when you see his real face."

"Look here, Hugh," cried his wife, "I know you're on the warpath again! Well, I tell you straight I can stand most things—you've already given me three goes of Peterson—but I can't stand spiders. If I get any more of them, I shall sue for divorce."

"Life is real and life is earnest," chanted her husband. "And Stockton's becoming one of the boys, my pet. We've had a really first-class show tonight. What's that you're grasping in your hand, Toby?"

"Another note, old boy. He's a literary gent, is our spider friend."

"Where did you find it?"

"In the box on Phyllis' dressing table. And I don't think it will amuse you."

It did not.

A little nervy? Lost your temper? Well, well! They were quite harmless, both of

them, though I admit Mary's claim to beauty must not be judged by ordinary standards. But let that be enough. I don't want meddlers. Next time I shall remove you without mercy, so cease being stupid.

"An amazingly poor judge of human nature," said Drummond softly. "Quite amazingly so."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

WE were confronted, on the morning after our visit to the Three Cows, with the following position of affairs: The secret of a singularly deadly poison had been stolen, and in the process of the theft the inventor of the poison had disappeared, his dog had been killed, and the man who had not only been his friend, but had also been financing his experiments, had been murdered. The death of the constable was an extraneous matter, and therefore did not affect the position, save that it afforded proof of the deadliness of the poison.

Sinclair and I, owing to the fact that we had come to Gaunt's rooms, had been followed; and, of the two of us, I was regarded as the more dangerous. My death had been deliberately decided on, in fact, under circumstances which our enemies imagined did not admit of failure.

They had clearly added Drummond to the list, probably, as he surmised, owing to the incident at Hatchett's. The fact that the head waiter knew him rendered useless his efforts to throw them off his track. We were undoubtedly followed to the Three Cows, with the idea of inveigling us to Ashworth Gardens. MacIver was there simply and solely because he knew it was the pub in which the taxi driver had been drugged the night before and the detective hoped to pick up a thread to follow.

We held a council of war, at which I met Peter Darrell and Algy Longworth—two of Drummond's friends—for the first time, and we discussed the affair from every angle.

"No help from the spider affair," said Toby. "But why hang rat face? That's what beats me."

Drummond lighted a cigarette before replying.

"There's a far more interesting point than that," he remarked, "and I mentioned it last night. Who hanged him? There were people in that house before we got there; men don't hang themselves as a general rule. Those people left that house before we arrived there, just as the man who tried to murder Stockton got there after we arrived.

"And on one thing I'll stake my hat," he went on. "The man did not come up the stairs, or I'd have heard him. If he didn't come up the stairs, he entered by some unusual method, presumably the same as that by which the others left, or else Toby would have seen them. And houses with unusual entrances always interest me."

"There's generally a back door," said Algy Longworth.

"But only one staircase, laddie," returned Drummond. "And the man I killed did not come up that staircase. No, the old brain has seethed, and I'm open to a small bet that what they intended to do is clear. They meant to kill Stockton and then they assumed that Toby and I would dash into the next room to catch the fellow who did it. Owing to the door being locked, he would have time to get away. Then probably we should go for the police. And when we got back, I'm wondering if we would have found either body there.

"On the other hand," he went on, "we should have had to admit that we were masquerading in disguise, and doubts as to our sanity, if nothing worse, would be entertained. That, coupled with the spiders, they thought,

would put me off. Instead of that, however, he didn't kill Stockton, and got killed himself. Moreover, the police came without our asking and found a dead body."

"But look here, Hugh," interrupted Peter Darrell, "you said he'd have time to get away. How? The door is off, and if he'd jumped out of the window you could have followed him."

Drummond grinned placidly.

"The window was shut and bolted, Peter. That's why I think I shall return to Ashworth Gardens in the very near future."

"You mean to go back to the house?" I cried.

"No—not to number ten," he answered. "I'm going to number twelve—next door. And there's very little time to be lost."

HE stood up and his eyes were glistening with anticipation.

"It's clear, boys, it must be. Either I'm a fool, or those blokes belong to the genus. If only old MacIver hadn't arrived last night, we could have followed it through then. There must be a means of communication between the two houses, and in number twelve we may find some amusement. Anyway, it's worth trying. But as I say there's no time to be lost. They've brought the police down on themselves in a way that shows no traces of insanity on our part, and they'll change their quarters. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if they've done so already."

"Aren't you coming to the inquest?" asked Toby.

Drummond shook his head.

"I haven't been asked to attend. And when it comes to the turn of our friend last night, doubtless MacIver will tell me what to say."

The door opened and the butler entered.

"Inspector MacIver would like to see you, sir."

"Show him up. Dash it all—that's a nuisance! It means more delay." However, his smile was geniality itself as the detective entered. "Good morning, inspector! Just in time for an ale."

But our visitor was evidently in no mood for spots of ale.

"Look here, Captain Drummond," he said curtly, "have you been up to your fool tricks again?"

"Good Lord! What's happened now?" said Drummond, staring at him in surprise.

"The body of the man you killed last night has completely disappeared," answered MacIver, and Drummond whistled softly.

"The devil it has!" he muttered. Then he began to laugh. "You don't imagine, do you, my dear fellow, that I've got it lying about in the bathroom here? But how did it happen?"

"If I knew that, I wouldn't be here," snapped the inspector, and then, with the spot of ale literally forced on him, he proceeded to tell all that he did know.

Three of his men had been left in the house, and, owing to the smell from the poison, they had none of them been in the room with the dead man. Also, the window had been left open and the door locked. MacIver had left to ring up Sir John Dallas, but he was out of London. When the inspector finally got through to the house of a well-known scientist in Hampshire, where Sir John was staying for the night, in order to discuss the very matter of this poison, it was nearly five o'clock in the morning.

Sir John had decided that so much time had already elapsed that the chances of his being able to discover anything new were remote. So he had adhered to his original plan and come up by an early train, which the inspector met at Waterloo. Together they went to ten Ashworth Gardens, and MacIver unlocked the door. And the room was empty; the body had disappeared.

The three men who had been left behind all swore that they hadn't heard a sound. The front door had been locked all night, and the men had patrolled the house at intervals.

I GLANCED at Drummond and I thought I detected a suppressed excitement in his manner. But there was no trace of it in his voice.

"It is possible, of course," he remarked, "that the man wasn't dead. He came to, found the door locked, and escaped through the window."

MacIver nodded his head portentously.

"That point of view naturally suggests itself. And, taking everything into account, I am inclined to think that it must be the solution."

"You didn't think of finding out if the blokes next door heard anything?" asked Drummond casually.

"My dear Captain Drummond!" MacIver smiled tolerantly. "Of course I made inquiries about the occupants of neighboring houses."

"You did, did you?" said Drummond softly.

"On one side is a clerk in Lloyds with his wife and two children; on the other is an elderly maiden lady. She is an invalid and, at the moment, has a doctor actually in the house."

"Which is in number twelve?" asked Drummond.

"She is. Her name is Miss Simpson. However, the point is this, Captain Drummond: there will now, of course, be no inquest as far as the affair of last night is concerned."

"Precisely," murmured Drummond. "That is the point, as you say."

"So there will be no necessity——"

"For us to concoct the same lie," said Drummond, smiling. "Just as well, old policeman, don't you think? It's really saved every one a lot of bother."

MacIver frowned and finished his beer.

"At the same time, you must clearly understand that Scotland Yard will not tolerate any further activities on your part."

"From now on I collect butterflies," returned Drummond gravely. "Have some more beer?"

"I thank you—no," said MacIver stiffly, and with a curt nod to us all he left the room.

"A rum development, that, Hugh," said Sinclair.

"Think so, old man? I don't know. Once you've granted what I maintain—namely, that there's some means of communication between the two houses—I don't think it's at all rum. Just as MacIver said—the point is that there will be no inquest. Inquests mean notoriety—newspaper reporters, crowds of people standing outside the house staring at it. If I'm right, that's the one thing that the occupants of number twelve want to avoid."

"But, dash it all, Hugh!" cried Darrell. "You don't suggest that the invalid Miss Simpson——"

"To blazes with the invalid," said Drummond. "How do we know it's an invalid? They may have killed the old dear, for all we know, and buried her under the cucumber frame. Of course that man was dead; I've never seen a deader. Well, dead bodies don't walk. Either he went out through the window or he went into number twelve. The first would be an appalling risk, seeing it was broad daylight; in fact, without making the devil of a shindy it would be an impossibility. So that's where I get the bulge on MacIver. I can go into number twelve and he can't, without a warrant. That's so, isn't it, lawyer man?"

"He certainly can't enter the house without a warrant," I agreed. "But I don't see that you can go at all."

"My dear old lad," he answered, "I am Miss Simpson's long-lost nephew from Australia. If she is all that she

pretends to be, I shall buy her some muscatel grapes, kiss her heartily on each cheek, and fade gracefully away. But if she isn't——"

"Well?" I said curiously. "If she isn't?"

"Then there will be two liars in the house, and that's always a sound strategical position if you're the lesser of them. So long, boys. Tell me all about the inquest and stand by for a show to-night."

CHAPTER IX.

THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY.

THE inquest was an affair of surpassing dullness, chiefly remarkable for the complete suppression of almost all the facts that mattered. I realized, of course, that it was part of the prearranged plan, though even I was surprised at the result when compared to the facts.

I told of the cry over the telephone; in short, I told, with the omissions I have mentioned, the story I have already put down in these pages up to the moment when Inspector MacIver arrived. Toby Sinclair confirmed my yarn.

Then Sir John Dallas gave his evidence, which consisted of a series of statements of fact. The deaths had been due to an unknown poison administered externally; he was unable to say how it had been applied. He could give no opinion as to the nature of the poison, beyond saying that it punctured the skin and passed up an artery to the heart. He was continuing his experiments in the hopes of isolating the fateful toxins.

Then MacIver was called. I admired the almost diabolical cunning with which he slurred over the truth and advanced the theory that had been decided upon. He didn't say much, but the reporters seized it with avidity and turned it from a weakly infant into a lusty child.

"No trace has been discovered of Mr. Gaunt?" asked the coroner.

"None," admitted MacIver. "Naturally, a full description has been circulated all over the country."

The verdict was "Willful murder by some person or persons unknown" in the case of the Australian and "Death by misadventure" in the case of the constable. In the latter case expressions of sympathy were tendered to his widow.

"Well done, Stockton," said Major Jackson as we went out of the court together.

"I suppose you know they had a shot at me last night," I said.

"The devil they did!" he remarked, looking thoughtful. "Where?"

"It's too long a story to tell," I answered. "Have you heard anything about the selling of the secret abroad?"

"Couldn't have yet," he replied. "Of course, strictly between ourselves, we're onto it in every country that counts. But the trouble is that unless old Dallas can isolate this poison, the mere fact of finding out that some other power has got the secret isn't going to help, because we can't make it ourselves. We've given him all the data we possess at the war house, but he says it isn't enough. He maintains, in fact, that if that formula represents the whole of Gaunt's discovery at the time of the armistice, then it would have been a failure."

"Gaunt said he'd perfected it," I remarked.

"Quite," answered Jackson. "But, according to Dallas, it isn't merely a process of growth along existing lines, but the introduction of something completely new. I'm no chemist, so I can't say if the old boy is talking out of the back of his neck or not."

He hailed a passing taxi.

"It's serious, Stockton, deuced serious. Our only hope lies, as the general said yesterday, in the fact that the dis-

tribution question may defeat them. Because we've gone through every single available paper of Gaunt's, and that point doesn't appear anywhere. You see"—his voice dropped to a whisper—"airplanes are impracticable—they travel too fast and they couldn't take up sufficient bulk. And a dirigible—well, you remember sausage balloons, don't you, falling in flames like manna from the heavens in France? One incendiary bullet—and finish. That's the point, but don't pass it on. Has he solved that? If so——"

"Universal, instantaneous death."

ROBIN'S words came back to me, and they continued to come back all through the day, when, for very shame's sake, I was making a pretense of work. They danced between my eyes and the brief in front of me, till in despair I gave up trying to concentrate on it.

At that stage of my deliberations I heard a loud and well-known voice in the office outside.

"Is Mr. Stockton in? I can't help it if he is busy. I've just killed my grandmother and I want his advice."

I went to the door and opened it. Drummond stood there beaming cheerfully at my outraged clerk, and as soon as he saw me he waved his hand.

"Bolted the badger!" he cried. "My boy, I must have words with you. Yonder stout-hearted lad says you're busy."

"A brief," I said a little doubtfully, "which I ought to get on with. However, come in."

"Blow your old brief," he answered. "Give the poor girl custody of the children and be done with it."

He sat down and put his legs on the desk, while I, with a glance at my clerk's face of scandalized horror, hurriedly shut the door.

"Look here, Stockton!" said Drummond, lowering his voice. "I thought I'd rout you out here, because it was a bit too long to say over the telephone. And since you're really the principal in this affair you ought to know at once. To start at the end of the matter, I haven't the faintest doubt in my own mind now that my suspicions about number twelve are correct.

AS you know," he continued, "I went up to see my long-lost aunt—Miss Simpson. I put on a slouch hat and made one or two slight alterations in my appearance. The first thing I did was to call at one or two of the local food shops. At the greengrocer's who supplied the house I discovered her name was Amelia. Apparently she sometimes paid by check—in fact, they'd had one from her only last week.

"Well, that was a bit of a jolt to start off with. However, I thought I'd have a shot at it since I'd got so far. So off I strolled to number twelve. Two of the most obvious policemen I've ever seen in my life are watching number ten, but they paid no attention to me as I went past.

"I rang the bell, and for some time nothing happened. And then a curtain in the room next the front door moved slightly. I was being inspected, so I couldn't back out. Therefore I rang again to show there was no ill feeling. An unpleasant-looking female opened the door about four inches and regarded me balefully.

" 'Good morning,' I remarked, getting my foot wedged in that four inches. 'I've come to see Aunt Amelia.'

" 'Who are you?' she asked suspiciously.

" 'Aunt Amelia's nephew,' I answered. 'It's ten years now since my father—that's her Brother Harold—died, and his last words to me were: "Wallie, my boy, if ever you go back to England, you look up Sister Amelia." '

"You see, Stockton," he went on, "I'd already decided that if it was a genuine

snow I'd get out of it by pretending that it must be another Miss Simpson."

"'Miss Amelia's ill,' said the woman angrily.

"'Too bad,' I said. 'I reckon that seeing me will be just the thing to cheer her up.'

"'She's not seeing any one, I tell you!' she declared.

"'She'll see little Wallie,' I said. 'Why, according to my father, she was clean gone on me when I was a child. Used to give me my bath and doses of dill water. Fair potty about me was Aunt Amelia. Besides, I've got a little memento for her that my father gave me to hand over to her.'

"As a matter of fact I'd bought a small pearl necklace on the way up.

"'I tell you she can't see you!' snapped the woman. 'She's ill. You come back next week and she may be better.'

"Well, there was nothing for it," Drummond continued. "I leaned against the door and the door opened. And I tell you, Stockton, I got the shock of my life. Standing at the foot of the stairs was a man with the most staggering face I've ever thought of. Tufts of hair sprouted from it like whin bushes on a seaside links; he was the King Emperor of Beavers. But it wasn't that which stopped me in my tracks, it was the look of diabolical fury in his eyes. He came toward me —and he was a heavyweight, all right —a pair of great, black, hairy fists clenched at his sides. And what he resembled most was a dressed-up gorilla.

"'What the devil do you want?' he snarled at me from the range of about a foot.

"'Aunt Amelia,' I replied, staring him in the eyes. 'And I reckon you're not the lady in question.'

"I saw the veins beginning to swell in his neck, and the part of his face not covered with vegetation turned a rich magenta.

"'You infernal puppy!' he shouted. 'Didn't you hear that Miss Simpson was ill?'

"'The fact is hardly to be wondered at with you about the house,' I retorted, getting ready, I don't mind telling you, Stockton, for the father and mother of scraps.

"But he didn't hit me; he made a desperate effort and controlled himself.

"'I am Miss Simpson's doctor,' he said, 'and I will tell her of your visit. If you leave your address, I will see that you are communicated with as soon as she is fit to receive visitors.'

"Now that told one beyond dispute," Drummond went on, "that there was something wrong. If he really had been the old lady's doctor, if she really was ill upstairs, my intentionally insulting remark could only have been received as vulgar and gratuitous impertinence. So I thought I'd try another.

"'If this is a sample of your bedside manner,' I said, 'she won't be fit to receive visitors for several years.'

"And once again I thought he was going to hit me, but he didn't.

"'If you come back to-morrow morning at this hour,' he remarked, 'I think your aunt may be fit to receive you. At the moment I fear I must forbid it.'

"Well, I did some pretty rapid thinking. In the first place, I knew the man was lying; he probably wasn't a doctor at all. No man with a face like that could be a doctor; all his patients would have died of shock. In the second place, I'd had a fleeting glimpse out of the corner of my eye of a couple of men upstairs who were examining me through a mirror hanging on the wall —a mirror obviously placed for that very purpose with regard to visitors.

"And another thing stuck out a yard. Throughout the whole of our conversation he had kept between me and the stairs. Of course, it might have been accidental; on the other hand, it might not. The way it struck me, however,

was that he was afraid, seeing that I was obviously a breezy customer, that I might make a dash for it. And I nearly did, Stockton, nearly did.

HOWEVER—not quite. I'd seen two men upstairs; there might be more; moreover, the bird I was talking to—if he was as strong as he looked—would have been an ugly customer by himself. And even if I'd got to the top and been able to explore the room, it wouldn't have done much good. I couldn't have tackled the show single-handed.

"So I pulled myself together and did my best to appear convinced.

" 'Well, I'm real sorry Aunt Amelia's so sick,' I said. 'And I'll come round to-morrow, as you say, doctor. Just give her my love, will you, and on my way back I'll call in and tell 'em to send along some grapes.'

" 'That is very good of you,' he answered. 'I feel sure Miss Simpson will appreciate your kind attention.'

"And with that I hopped it, sent up some grapes, and that's that."

"But didn't you tell the police?" I cried excitedly.

"Tell 'em what?" he returned.

"Why, that there's foul play going on there," I almost shouted.

"Steady, old man," he said quietly. "Your lad outside will die of a rush of red corpuscles to the head if he hears you."

"No, but look here, Drummond," I said, lowering my voice, "you may have hit on the key of the whole affair."

"I think it's more than probable that I have," he answered calmly. "But that seems to me to be quite an unnecessary reason to go trotting off to the police."

"But I say, old man," I began feebly, mindful of my previous resolutions. Then the darned fellow grinned at me in that lazy way of his and I laughed.

"What do you propose to do?" I said at length.

"Anticipate the visit to Aunt Amelia by some nine or ten hours and go there to-night. Are you on?"

"Confound you," I said, "of course I am!"

"Good fellow!" he cried. "I knew you'd do it."

He took his feet off the desk and leaned toward me.

"Stockton," he said quietly, "we're hot on the track. Be round in Brook Street at eight o'clock to-night."

CHAPTER X.

INTO A TRAP.

I WAS at Drummond's house to the minute that night. For a while after Drummond had left my office, I told myself that I would have nothing more to do with the business, but it was a feeble struggle. The excitement of the thing had got hold of me.

"Splendid!" said Drummond as I walked in. "That completes us. Stockton, this is Ted Jerningham, a lad who is distinctly quick on the uptake. You know the rest of the crowd."

Counting myself, there were six in the room.

"We will now run over the plan of operations," he went on, when I had removed two dogs from a chair and sat down. "I've told these four birds what I told you this afternoon, Stockton, so it only remains to discuss to-night. In the first place, we've had a stroke of luck, which is a good omen. The street running parallel to Ashworth Gardens is called Jersey Street. And the back of number thirteen Jersey Street looks onto the back of twelve Ashworth Gardens. Moreover, the female who owns number thirteen Jersey Street lets rooms, and I have taken those rooms for a week—rent paid in advance—for a party of divinity students.

"Separating the backs of the houses are two brown patches of mud with a

low wall in the middle which a child of four could climb with ease," he continued. "And since there is no moon to-night there oughtn't to be much difficulty in getting over that wall unseen—should the necessity arise.

"And since the spectacle of four of you dashing down the stairs and out of the old girl's back door might rouse unworthy suspicions, I have stipulated that we must have the use of a ground-floor sitting room at the back of the house. She doesn't usually let it, but I assured her that the wild distractions of Jersey Street would seriously interfere with our meditations."

"Four?" interrupted Jerningham. "Why four?"

"I'm coming to that," said Drummond. "I want some one with me in number twelve. And since the sport will probably be there I think it's only fair to let Stockton have it, as this is really his show."

He picked up from his desk a cowl-shaped black mask and regarded it reminiscently.

"Lucky I kept a few of these. Do you remember 'em, you fellows? Stockton wouldn't, of course."

He turned to me.

"Years ago we had an amusing little show rounding up communists and other unwashed people of that type. We called ourselves the Black Gang, and it was a great sport while it lasted."

"Good heavens!" I said, staring at him. "I dimly remember reading something about it in the papers. I thought the whole thing was a hoax."

They all laughed.

"That's when we chloroformed your pal MacIver and left him to cool on his own doorstep. Happy days, laddie, happy days! However, taking everything into account, the going at the moment might be worse. And it struck me that these things might come in handy to-night. If we wear our old black gauntlets, and these masks well tucked in round the collar, it will afford us some protection if they start any monkey tricks with that poison juice of theirs. At any rate, there is no harm in having them with us in case of accidents; they don't take up much room and we can easily slip them into our pockets.

"So it all boils down to this," he went on. "Stockton and I will deposit you four in Jersey Street, where you will take up a firm position in the back sitting room. Bearing in mind that you are destined for the church, and the penchant of landladies for keyholes, you will refrain from your usual conversation.

"That being quite clear," pursued Drummond, "we will pass on. Should you hear shouts as of men in pain from the house opposite, or should you, on glancing through the crack of the blind, see me signaling, you will abandon your attitude of devotion and leg it like hell over the wall. Because we may want you quick! Wear your masks; Ted to be in charge, and I leave it to you as to what to do once you arrive in number twelve."

"And if we neither hear nor see anything?" asked Jerningham. "How long are we to give you?"

"I think, old boy," said Drummond, "that half an hour should be long enough. In fact," he added, rubbing his hands together in anticipation, "I'm not at all certain it won't be twenty-nine minutes too long. Let's get on with it."

We pocketed our masks and gauntlets and went downstairs. There was no turning back for me now; I was definitely committed to go through with it. Our taxi drive seemed to me the shortest on record. We had two cars, and Drummond stopped them several hundred yards short of our objective. Then, leading the way with me, we walked in pairs to Jersey Street.

Number thirteen was typical of all

the houses in the neighborhood—an ordinary, drab London lodging house of the cheaper type. The landlady, when she finally emerged, was affability itself. The strong odor of gin that emerged with her showed that the rent had not been wasted and led us to hope that sleep would shortly overcome her.

"Lower the light, some one, and then come and reconnoiter. There's the house facing you; there's the wall. No lights. I wonder if the birds have flown. No, by Jove! I saw a gleam then from that upstairs window. There it is again!" Drummond whispered.

SURE enough, a light was showing in one of the rooms, and I thought a shadow moved across the blind. Downstairs all was dark, and after a short inspection Drummond stepped back into the room.

"Come on, Stockton," he said. "We'll go round by the front door. Don't forget I'm an Australian and you're a pal of mine whom I met unexpectedly in London to-day. And if I pretend to be a little blotto—pugnaciously so—back me up. Ted—half an hour, but keep your eye glued on the house in case we want you sooner."

"Right, old man! Good luck!"

We walked through the hall cautiously, but the door leading to our landlady's quarters was shut. In three minutes we were striding down Ashworth Gardens. A figure detached itself from the shadows outside the scene of last night's adventure and glanced at us suspiciously. But Drummond was talking loudly, as we passed the man, of his voyage home, and the fellow made no effort to detain us.

"One of MacIver's men," he muttered to me as he turned into number twelve. "Now, old man, we're for it. If I can, I'm going to walk straight in."

The front door was bolted, however, and we had to ring. Once more he started talking in the aggressive way of a man who has had something to drink, and I noticed that the detective was listening.

The door suddenly opened, and a man stood there looking at us angrily.

"What do you want?" he snapped. "Are you aware, sir, that there is an invalid in this house?"

"I'm perfectly well aware of it," returned Drummond loudly. "But what I'm not aware of—and what I'm going to be aware of—is how that invalid, who is my aunt, is being treated. I'm not satisfied with the attention she is receiving"—out of the corner of my eyes I saw the detective drawing closer—"not at all satisfied. And I and my friend here are not going to leave this house until Aunt Amelia tells me that she's being well looked after. There's such a thing as the police, sir, I tell you——"

"What on earth are you talking about?" said the man savagely, and I noticed he was looking over our shoulders at the detective, who was now listening openly. "However, you'd better come inside and I'll consult the doctor in charge."

He closed the door behind us, and Drummond gave me an imperceptible wink. Then he went on again aggressively:

"How many doctors are there in this house? I saw a man this afternoon with a face like a hearthrug—is he here? And do you all live here? I tell you I'm not satisfied! And until I see my Aunt Amelia——"

A door opened, and the man whom Drummond had described to me in my office came out into the hall.

"How dare you return here, sir?" he shouted. "You're the insolent, interfering young swine who was here this afternoon, and if you aren't out of this house in two seconds I'll throw you out!"

"You'd better not!" answered Drummond calmly. "And why don't you let

your face out as a grouse moor? I'm your patient's nephew, and I want to know what all you ugly-looking swabs are doing in this house!"

With a quick movement he stepped past the man into the room beyond, and I followed him. Three more men were there, sitting round a table, and they rose as we entered. Two packed suit cases lay on the floor, waiting to be strapped up, and on the table were five glasses and a half-empty bottle of whisky.

"Five of you," continued Drummond. "I suppose you'll be telling me next that my aunt runs a boys' school. Now then, face fungus, what the hell does it mean?"

THE men were glancing at one another uneasily. Suddenly the whole beauty of the situation flashed on me. They knew as well as we did that there was a Scotland Yard man outside the house and the fact was completely tying their hands. Whatever they may have suspected concerning Drummond's alleged relationship, we were, as he had himself remarked, in the sound strategical position of being the lesser liars of the two.

In my own mind I was firmly convinced by this time that there was no Miss Simpson and that even if there were, she was no sickly invalid, ailing in bed. Yet at that moment there came a weak querulous woman's voice from the landing upstairs.

"Doctor Helias! Doctor Helias, I've been waked up again just as I was going off to sleep. Who is it making that terrible noise downstairs?"

The black-haired man swung round on Drummond.

"Now are you satisfied?" he asked savagely.

He strode to the door and we heard him speaking from the foot of the stairs.

"It's the nephew I told you about, Miss Simpson, who called to see you this afternoon. He seems to be afraid you aren't being properly looked after. Now I must insist on your going back to bed at once."

He went up the stairs and I glanced at Drummond. His eyes were narrowed as if he, too, was puzzled and it was likely that a woman's voice was the last thing he expected to hear. But his voice was perfectly casual as he addressed the room at large.

"Dangerous place London must be. Do you—er—doctors always carry revolvers with you?"

"What are you talking about?" snapped the man who had let us in.

Without a word Drummond pointed to one of the suit cases where the butt of an automatic was plainly visible.

"I suppose when your surgical skill fails, you merely shoot your patients," went on Drummond affably. "Very kind and merciful of you, I call it."

"Look here," said the other grimly, "we've had about enough of you, young man. You've forced your way into this house; you've insulted us repeatedly; and I'm thinking it's about time you went."

"Are you?" returned Drummond. "Then you'd better think again."

"Do you mean to say that now you've heard what your aunt has said to Doctor Helias, you still are not satisfied?"

"Never been less so in my life," he replied genially. "This house reeks of crooks like a seaside boarding house of cabbage at lunch time. And since we've wakened poor auntie up between us, I'm going to see her before I go."

Doctor Helias stood aside and I followed Drummond into the passage.

"The first door on the left," murmured the doctor. "You will find your aunt in bed."

"Keep your eyes skinned, Stockton," whispered Drummond, as we went up the stairs. "There is some trap here, or I'll eat my hat."

CHAPTER XI.

WRITTEN IN RED.

THERE was no sign of anything out of the ordinary as we entered the room. A shaded lamp was beside the bed and the invalid was in shadow. But even in the dim light one could see that she was a frail old lady, with the ravages of pain and disease on her face.

"My nephew!" she said in a gentle voice. "My Brother Harry's boy! Well—well—how time does pass. Come here, nephew, and let me see what you've grown into."

With an emaciated hand she held up the electric lamp so that its rays fell on Drummond. The next instant the lamp had crashed to the floor. I bent quickly and picked it up and as I did so the light for a moment shone on her face. And I could have sworn that the look in her eyes during that brief instant was one of sheer, stark terror.

So vivid was the impression that I stared at her in amazement. True, the look was gone at once, but I knew I had not been mistaken. The sight of Drummond's face had terrified the woman in the bed. Why? Crooked or not crooked, it seemed unaccountable.

"I'm so weak," she said apologetically. "Thank you, sir—thank you——" She was speaking to me, as if she realized that I was staring at her curiously. "It was quite a shock to me to see my nephew grown into such a big man. I should never have known him, but that's only natural. You must come again when I'm better, nephew, and tell me all about your poor dear father."

"I certainly will, Aunt Amelia," said Drummond thoughtfully.

"Harry was always a little wild, but such a dear lovable boy," went on the old lady. "You're not very like him, nephew."

"So I've been told," murmured Drummond, and I saw his mouth beginning to twitch. "I'm much more like my mother. She'd just about have been the same age as you, auntie, if she'd been alive. You remember her, don't you—Jenny Douglas that was, from Cirencester?"

"It's a long time ago, nephew."

"But my father always said that you two were such friends!"

For a moment the woman hesitated and from downstairs came the sound of an electric bell rung twice.

"Why, of course," she said. "I remember her well."

"Then you must have a darned good memory, auntie," said Drummond grimly. "It was conceivable that you might have had a brother called Harry who went to Australia, though I did happen to invent him. But by no possible stretch of imagination could you have had a sister-in-law called Jenny Douglas from Cirencester, for I've just invented her, too!"

"Look out, Drummond!" I shouted, and he swung round.

Stealing across the floor toward us was the black-haired Doctor Helias with a piece of gas pipe in his hand and behind him were three of the others.

Then like a flash it happened. It was the men we were watching; we'd forgotten the invalid in bed. I had a momentary glimpse of bedclothes being hurled off and a woman fully dressed springing at Drummond from behind. In her hand was something that gleamed and suddenly the overpowering smell of ammonia filled the room. But it was Drummond who got it straight in the face. In an instant he was helpless from the fumes, lurching and staggering about blindly, and even as I sprang forward to help him I heard the woman's voice.

"Put him out, you fool!"

The black-haired man put him out easily and scientifically.

"My God!" I muttered. "You've killed him."

That was my last remark for some hours. The three men who applied themselves to me were also experts in their line and I estimated it at half a minute before I was gagged and trussed up and thrown into a corner. But I was still able to hear and see.

"You fool!" said the woman to the man called Doctor Helias. "Why didn't you tell me it was him?"

"What do you mean?" he answered. "I don't know who he is any more than you do. Isn't he the nephew?"

She gave a short laugh.

"No more than I am. And you can take it from me I know him only too well. He suspected, of course; that's why I rang.

"Put 'em both below, and for Heaven's sake get a move on. Is he dead?" Once again she pointed at Drummond and the big man shook his head. "If I'd known he was coming, I'd have been out of this house four hours ago. Mon Dieu! Helias—you have bungled this show."

"But I—I don't understand," stammered the other.

"Throw 'em below!" she stormed at him. "With your brain you wouldn't understand anything."

"Take 'em downstairs," snarled Helias to the others. He was glaring sullenly at the woman, but he was evidently too afraid of her to resent her insults. "Hurry, curse you!"

At that moment the fifth man dashed into the room.

"Men coming across the wall at the back," he said breathlessly. "Listen! They're getting in now."

FROM below came the sound of a window opening and muttered voices.

"Police?" whispered the woman tensely.

"Don't know; couldn't see."

"How many?"

"Three or four."

"Out with the light. Whoever they are—do 'em down one by one as they come into the room. But no noise!"

Then ensued the most agonizing minute I have ever spent in my life. Helpless, unable to do anything to warn them, I lay in the corner. It was Ted Jerningham, of course, and the others—I knew that and they were walking straight into a trap. The room was dark; the door was open; and outlined against the light from the passage I could see the huge form of Doctor Helias crouching in readiness. Dimly I saw the others waiting behind him and then the woman moved forward and joined them. But before she did so, I had seen her stand on a chair and remove the bulb from the central electric light.

The steps on the stairs came nearer and now the shadow of the two leaders fell on the wall. There was a click as the switch was turned on—and then, when nothing happened, they both sprang into the room. For a moment they were clearly visible against the light and even I gave a momentary start at their appearance.

IN the excitement of the past few minutes I had forgotten about the black masks and they looked like two monstrous specters from another world. The woman gave a little scream and then the other two came through the door.

Thud! Thud! Swiftly Helias' arm rose and fell with that deadly piece of pipe in his hand and the two last arrivals pitched forward on the floor without a sound.

But it was hopeless from the start. Two to five—the odds were impossible, especially when one of the five was a man with the strength of three. It may have been half a minute, but it certainly wasn't more before the bunch

of struggling men straightened up and two more unconscious and black-cowled figures lay motionless.

With a feeling of sick despair I watched the woman put back the bulb and flood the room with light. What an ignominious conclusion to the night's work! And what was going to happen now? We were utterly powerless and our captors were not overburdened with scruples.

Already Helias had taken off the masks and was staring at the unconscious men on the floor with a savage scowl.

Then something made me look at the woman. She was leaning against the table and in her eyes was something of that same look of terror that I had seen before.

"Kill them! Kill them all! Now—at once."

Her voice was harsh and metallic and the others stared at her in amazement.

"Impossible, madame," said Helias sharply. "It would be an act of inconceivable folly."

She turned on him furiously.

"It would be an act of inconceivable folly not to! I tell you they are more dangerous far—these men, than all the police of England.

"I tell you I know these men!" she stormed. "And that one"—she pointed to Drummond—"is the devil himself."

"I can't help it, madame," returned the doctor firmly. "I have no scruples, as you know, but I am not a fool. And to kill these men or any of them would be the act of a fool. We have to get away at once; there is no possible method of disposing of the bodies."

"Perhaps you're right," she remarked reluctantly. "But, I would sooner have seen all Scotland Yard here than that man."

"Who is he?" asked Helias curiously.

"His name is Drummond," answered the woman. "Get on with it and put them below."

From the darkness of the cellar where they pitched us, I listened to the sounds of their departure. How long it was before the last footstep ceased above I don't know, but at length the house was silent and after a while I fell into an uneasy dose.

I woke with a start. Outside a wagon was rumbling past, but it was not that which had disturbed me; it was something nearer at hand.

"Peter! Algy!"

It was Ted Jerningham's voice and I gave two strangled grunts by way of reply.

"Who's there?"

Once more I grunted, and after a pause I heard him say:

"I'm going to strike a match."

The feeble light flickered up and he gave a gasp of astonishment. Sprawling over the floor just where they had been thrown lay the others and as the match spluttered and went out Algy Longworth groaned and turned over.

It was Drummond himself who had taken it worst. The cowls had broken the force of the blows in the case of the others, while I had come off almost scot-free. But Drummond, poor devil, was in a really bad way. His face was burned and scalded by the ammonia and the slightest movement of his head hurt him intolerably. In fact it was a distinctly pessimistic party that assembled upstairs at half past six in the morning. We none of us asked anything better than to go home to bed—none of us, that is, save the most damaged one. Drummond wouldn't hear of it.

"We're here now," he said doggedly, "and even if my neck is broken, which is more than likely by the feel of it, we're going to see if we can find any clew to put us on the track of that bunch. For if it takes me five years, I'll get even with that gorse bush."

"I think the lady disliked us more than he did," I remarked. "Especially

you. She went so far as to suggest killing the lot of us."

"The devil she did!" grunted Drummond.

"She knew you. She knew your name. I think she knew all of you fellows by sight, but she certainly knew Drummond."

"The devil she did!" he grunted again, and stared at me thoughtfully out of the one eye that still functioned. "You're certain of that?"

"Absolutely. You remember she dropped the lamp in her agitation when she first saw your face? I saw the look in her eyes as I picked it up—it was terror."

Now they were all staring at me.

"Why," I went on, "she alluded to you as the devil himself!"

"Good Lord!" said Drummond softly, "it can't be—— Surely, it can't be——"

"There's no reason why it shouldn't," said Jerningham. "It's big enough for them to handle."

"We're talking of things unknown to you, Stockton," explained Drummond. "But in view of what you saw and heard, it may be that a very extraordinary thing has taken place. Confound my neck!"

HE rubbed it gently and then went on again.

"As far as I know, there is only one woman in the world who is likely to regard me as the devil himself and be kind enough to suggest killing me. And if it is she—— Great Scott, boys! What stupendous luck!

"If it's she—then Helias—— Oh, my sainted aunt! Don't tell me that old gorse bush was Carl Peterson."

"I don't know anything about Carl Peterson," I said. "But it was old gorse bush, as you call him, who flatly refused to kill you and us as well. Moreover, he didn't know you."

"Then gorse bush wasn't Carl. But the woman—— Ye gods! I wonder! Just think of the humor of it, if it really was Irma. Not knowing it was me, she thought I possibly was the genuine article—the real Australian nephew. She made herself up into a passable imitation of Aunt Amelia, kept the light away from her face and trusted to luck. Then she recognized me and saw at once that I was as big a fraud as she was and that the game was up."

"Damnation!" roared a furious voice from the door. "What are you doing here again?"

"MacIver, little twitter," said Drummond. "I would know that fairy voice anywhere."

He rose cautiously and turned round.

"What on earth has happened to your face?" demanded the detective.

"Aunt Amelia sprayed it with ammonia from point-blank range," said Drummond. "A darned unfriendly act, I think you'll agree. And then a nasty man covered with black hair took advantage of my helpless condition to sandbag me. Mac, my lad, in the course of a long and blameless career I've never been so badly stung as I was last night."

"What do you mean by Aunt Amelia?" growled the other.

"The official occupant of this house, Mac."

"Miss Simpson. Where is she?"

"I know not. But somehow I feel that the sweet woman I interviewed in bed last night was not Miss Amelia." Then with a sudden change of tone, he went on: "Have you found the communication between the two houses?"

"How do you know there is one?"

"Because I'm not an utter fool," said Drummond. "It was principally to find it that I came here.

"Lord, man, it's obvious! That fellow the other night was dead, so how did the body disappear? It couldn't have gone out by the window in broad

daylight and unless your men were liars or asleep it couldn't have gone out by the door. So there must have been some way of communication."

"I found it by accident a few minutes ago from the next house," remarked MacIver. "It opens into the bedroom above."

"I thought it must," said Drummond. "And I wouldn't be surprised if dear Aunt Amelia's bed was up against the opening."

"There was a woman here, was there?"

"There was." For a moment or two Drummond hesitated. "Look here, MacIver," he said slowly, "we've had one or two amusing little episodes together in the past and I'm going to tell you something. After they knocked me out last night, Mr. Stockton, who was only bound and gagged, heard one or two very strange things.

"This woman who was here masquerading as Miss Simpson evidently knew me. She further evinced a strong wish to have me killed then and there. Now who can she have been? MacIver, I believe—and mark you, there is nothing inherently improbable in it—I believe that once more we are up against Peterson. He wasn't here; but the girl—his sweetheart—was. I may be wrong, but here and now I'd take an even pony on it."

"Perhaps you're right," acknowledged the other. "We've heard nothing of the gentleman for two or three years."

"And if we are, MacIver," continued Drummond gravely, "this whole show—serious as it is at the moment—becomes ten times more so."

"If only I could begin to understand it," said the detective angrily. "The whole thing seems so utterly disconnected and pointless."

"And it will probably remain so until we reach the end, if we ever do reach the end," said Drummond. "One thing is pretty clear—this house was evidently the headquarters of that part of the gang which lived in London."

"I'm getting into touch with Miss Simpson at once," said MacIver.

Drummond nodded.

"She may or may not be perfectly innocent."

"And two of my fellows are searching this house now," went on the detective. "But, Captain Drummond, I'm defeated—absolutely defeated! If whoever is running this show wanted to get away with Gaunt's secret—why all this? Why didn't they go at once? Why waste time?"

MACIVER swung round as one of his men entered the room. The man was carrying in his arms a metal tank of about four gallons' capacity, which was evidently intended to be strapped to a man's back. To the bottom was attached a length of rubber tubing, at the end of which was fixed a long brass nozzle with a little tap attached. On one side of the tank a small pump was placed and we crowded round to examine it as he laid it carefully on the table.

"Two or three more of them in the cellar below, sir," said the man.

"Pretty clear what they are intended for," said Drummond gravely. "It's nothing more nor less than a glorified fruit sprayer. And with that liquid of theirs inside——"

"There is this, too, that I found," went on the man. "I'd like you to come yourself, sir, and see. There was blood on the walls and on the floor—and this——"

From his pocket he took a handkerchief and it was stained with blood. It was quite dry and MacIver opened it out and laid it beside the tank.

"Hullo!" he muttered. "What's this mean?"

Scrawled over part of the material were some red letters. The ink used

had been blood; the pen might have been the writer's finger.

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A smear completed it; evidently he'd collapsed or been interrupted.

"I found it in a crack in the wall, sir," said the man. "It had been pushed in hard."

MacIver's eyes had narrowed and without a word he pointed to the corner of the handkerchief. Clearly visible through the stain were two small black letters. The letters were R. G., Robin Gaunt's initials.

CHAPTER XII.

LOCKED IN.

IT was Robin Gaunt's red-stained handkerchief that lay in front of us. He, too, had been thrown into the same cellar where we had spent the night. And where was he now?

"Show me exactly where you found the handkerchief," MacIver said to his subordinate.

We all trooped after him and by the light of an electric torch we explored the cellar. The officer pointed to the crack in the wall where he had found the handkerchief and to the dark stains just below and on the floor.

"I'm thinking," said Drummond gravely, "that the poor fellow was in a pretty bad way."

Torch in hand MacIver began to carry out his examination systematically. An opening in one wall led to a smaller cellar and it was there that three other spraying cisterns, similar to the one upstairs, were standing. They differed in small details, but their method of action was the same. In each design there was a pump for producing the necessary pressure and a small stopcock at the end of the spraying pipe which allowed the jet of liquid to be turned on or off at will.

"Take these upstairs," said MacIver to the officer, "and put them alongside the other one."

Once more he resumed his examination, only to stop abruptly at the startled exclamation that came from his man. He was standing at the top of the cellar steps, tugging at the door.

"It's locked, sir!" he cried. "I can't make it budge."

"Locked!" shouted MacIver. "Who locked it?"

"It's been locked from the other side and the key is not in the keyhole."

MacIver darted up the steps and switched his torch on to the door.

"Who came in last?" he demanded.

"I did," said Toby Sinclair. "And I left the door wide open. I can swear to it."

In a frenzy of rage the inspector hurled himself against it, but the result was nil.

"Not in a hundred years, Mac," said Drummond quietly. "No man can open a door as stout as that at the top of a flight of stairs. You can't get any weight behind your shoulder."

"But, man," cried the other, "we haven't been down here ten minutes! Whoever locked it must be in the house now."

"Bexton is there too, sir," said the officer. "He was exploring upstairs."

"Bexton!" bellowed the inspector through the keyhole. "Bexton! Lord! Is the man deaf? Bexton, you fool, come here!"

There was no answer.

"Steady, MacIver," said Drummond. "He's possibly up at the top of the house and we'll get him as soon as he comes down. No good getting needlessly excited."

"But who has locked this door?" demanded the detective. "That's what I want to know."

"Precisely, old lad," agreed Drummond soothingly. "That's what we all want to know. But before we have any chance of knowing, we've got to

get to the other side. And since we can't blow the blamed thing down, there's no good going on shouting. Let's have a look at it; I'm a bit of an authority on doors."

He went up the stairs and after a brief examination he gave a short laugh.

"My dear Mac, short of a crowbar and a pickax we're stung. And since we've none of us got either in our waistcoat pockets, there's no good worrying. The bolt goes actually into the brickwork; you can see it there. And the lock on the door has been put on from the other side, so a screw driver is no good."

He came down again, laughing and after lighting a cigarette deposited himself on the floor with his back against the wall.

"Mac, if that's our only means of illumination, you'd better switch it off. We may want it later—you never know."

"Bexton must be down in a moment or two," said the inspector angrily.

"True," agreed Drummond. "Unless he's down already."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there are some people knocking about in this district who are no slouches in the sandbag game. And I should think it was quite on the cards that the worthy Bexton has already discovered the fact."

"If that's the case, we're here for hours."

"Just so," agreed Drummond.

"Supposing we all shouted together?" I suggested, after we had sat in silence for several minutes. "Somebody must hear surely."

We let out a series of deafening bellows and at length our efforts were rewarded. A heavy blow was struck on the other side of the door and an infuriated voice shouted through the keyhole.

"Stop that row! You'll have plenty of time to sing glees when you're breaking stones on Dartmoor. If you do it any more now, I'll turn a hose on you."

We heard the sound of retreating footsteps and MacIver gave a gasp of amazement.

"Am I mad?" he spluttered. "Am I completely insane? That was Fosdick's voice—the man on duty next door."

Then every semblance of self-control left him and he raved like a lunatic.

"I'll sack the fellow! I'll have him out of the force in disgrace. He's been drinking; the fool's drunk! Fosdick—come here, Fosdick!"

HE went on shouting and beating on the door with the tin reservoir, till once again came a blow from the other side, followed by Fosdick's voice.

"Look 'ere, you bally twitterer; I'm getting fair fed up with you. There's a crowd outside the door now asking when the performing hyenas are going to be let out. Now listen to me. Every time I 'ears a sound from any of you, you stops down there another 'alf hour without your breakfasts. The van when she comes can easily wait and I ain't in no hurry."

"Listen, you fool!" roared MacIver. "You're drunk; you've gone mad. I order you to open the door. It's me—Inspector MacIver."

"Inspector my aunt," came the impassive reply. "Now don't you forget what I said. The van oughtn't to be long now."

"The van," said MacIver weakly, as the footsteps outside departed. "What van? In the name of Heaven—what is the man talking about?"

"Oh, Mac," cried Drummond helplessly, "don't make me laugh any more! As it is I've got the most infernal stitch."

"The whole thing is entirely owing to your unwarrantable interference!" snapped the detective.

"My dear Mac," said Drummond, "if as you think your bloke Fosdick has gone off the deep end, you really can't blame me. Personally I don't think he has."

"Then perhaps you'd be good enough to explain what he's doing this for," returned MacIver sarcastically. "A little game, I suppose?"

"Nothing of the sort," answered Drummond. "My dear man, cease going off like a steam engine and think for a moment. The whole thing is perfectly obvious. The van is to take us to prison."

"W-what on earth——" stuttered MacIver.

"No more and no less," went on Drummond calmly. "Yonder stout-hearted warrior is under the firm impression that he has a band of dangerous criminals safe under lock and key. He sees promotion in store for him, dazzling heights——"

"Inspector MacIver! Inspector MacIver! Are you there?"

IT was Fosdick's agitated voice from the other side of the door.

"I should rather think I am," said MacIver grimly. "Open this door, you perishing fool!"

"I will, sir, at once. It's all a mistake."

"Open the door!"

"But I haven't got the key. Wait a bit, sir, I'll get a screw driver.

"Hurry!" roared MacIver. "May Heaven help that man when I get at him."

It was a quarter of an hour before the door was opened and we trooped upstairs, followed by the trembling Fosdick.

"Now, you fool," said MacIver, "will you kindly explain this little jest of yours?"

"Well, sir," answered the man, "I'm very sorry, I'm sure—but I acted for the best.

"I was on duty outside number ten, when I saw you come out of this house."

"You saw me come out of this house? Why, you blithering idiot, I've been locked up in the cellar all the morning."

"I know that now, sir, but at the time I thought it was you. You passed me, sir—at least the man did—and you said to me: 'We've got the whole bunch.' It was your voice, sir, your voice exactly. 'They're in the cellar in number twelve—locked in, and I've got the key. I'm going round to the Yard now and I'll send a van up for 'em. They can't get out, but they may make a row.'

"And then you went on—or rather the other man did: 'By Jove, this is a big thing! I've got one of 'em in there that the police of Europe and America are looking for. I had him once before—and do you know how he got away? Why, by imitating my voice over the telephone so well that my man thought it was me!' And then you see, sir, when I heard your voice in that there cellar I thought it was this other bloke imitating you and so, thought to let him be.

"Well, sir, I waited and waited and the van never came—and then I went upstairs. They've knocked out Bexton, sir; I found him unconscious on the floor in the room above. So then I rang up the Yard; nothing had been heard of you. And then I knew I'd been hoaxed."

"He certainly put it across you, all right," said MacIver grimly. "I'd give quite a lot to meet the gentleman."

"I wonder what the inducement was?" remarked Drummond. "No man was going to run such an infernal risk for fun."

"By Jove!" cried MacIver. "That cistern is gone. It's lucky I had the handkerchief in my pocket."

"He was carrying a tin with straps

on it when he spoke to me," said Fosdick, and MacIver groaned.

"Literally through our fingers," he said. "However, we've got the three other cisterns. Though I'd much sooner have had the man."

"Anyway, that's a point cleared up," remarked Drummond cheerfully. "We know why he came here——"

"We don't!" snapped MacIver.

"True, my dear old policeman," said Drummond. "But it is, as they say, a possible hypothesis. In the hurry of their departure last night, they forgot these little fellows down in the cellar, so some one came back to get them. He found one nicely put out for him on the table and a personally conducted Cook's party in the cellar inspecting the others. So, in addition to taking his property, he locked the cellar door. Easy, laddie, easy."

"What is your reconstruction?" asked McIver quietly, and I noticed his look of keen attention.

"Well, this is how I see it," said Drummond. "Their first jolt was the fact that Gaunt managed to get through on the telephone to Stockton. Had that not happened, they'd have been in clover. It might have been a couple of days before the Australian was found dead in that house. The old woman is deaf and probably the first thing she'd have known about it was when she showed a prospective lodger a dead man in her best bedroom and a dead dog across the passage.

"But Gaunt getting through on the phone started it all and everything that has happened since is due, I'm certain, to their endeavor to fit in their previous arrangements with this unexpected development. They brought Gaunt here; that's obvious. Why did they bring Gaunt here particularly? Well—why not? They had to take him somewhere.

"They brought him here," he went on, "and then for reasons best known to themselves, they decided to murder Stockton. Well, we all know what happened then and it was another unexpected development for them. The last thing they wanted was your arrival on the scene. And you wouldn't have arrived, Mac—unless you'd followed Stockton. That's what huffed 'em—old Stockton giving his celebrated rendering of a mechanic at the Three Cows. Naturally you suspected him at once; it was without exception the most appalling exhibition of futility I've ever seen."

"Thanks so much," I murmured.

"That's all right, old bean," he said affably. "I expect you're a marvelous lawyer. However, to continue. You arrived, Mac, with most of the police force of London next door—and you can bet your life the people in here began to sweat some.

"Why didn't they go at once? I don't know their reason, but it must have been a pretty strong one. Anyway, they chanced it—and, by Jove, they've pulled it off! That's why I take off my hat to 'em. They were ready to go last night and they went last night and the last twenty-four hours they spent in this house must have been pretty nerve wracking."

CHAPTER XIII.

A MATTER OF INCHES.

"MAY I ask what you are doing in my house?" came in an infuriated female voice from the door. "The idea!"

A tall, thin, acidulated woman was standing at the door regarding us balefully and MacIver swung round.

"May I ask your name, madam?"

"Simpson is my name, sir. And who may you be?"

"I'm Inspector MacIver from Scotland Yard and I must ask you to answer a few questions."

"Scotland Yard!" cried Miss Simp-

son shrilly. "Then you're the very man I want to see. I have been the victim of a monstrous outrage."

"Indeed," remarked MacIver. "I'm sorry about that. What has happened?"

"Three weeks ago a female person called to see me in this house. She wished to know if I would let it furnished for a month. I refused and told her that I considered her request very surprising as I had not told any house agent that I wanted to let. I further asked her why she had picked on my house particularly. She told me that she had just returned from Australia and was spending a month in London.

"She further said that before going to Australia she had lived with her father in this house and that since he was now dead she wished to spend the month under the old roof for remembrance sake. However, I told her it was impossible and she went away. Two days afterward occurred the outrage. Outrage, sir—abominable outrage, and if there is any justice in England the miscreants should be brought to justice! I was kidnaped, sir, abducted by a man."

"Is that so?" said MacIver gravely. "How did it happen, if you please, Miss Simpson?"

"I was returning from the tube station late in the evening—I had been to a theater—and as I reached the end of the road a taxi drew up beside me. At the time the road was deserted; as usual, no adequate protection by the police was available against gangs of footpads and robbers. From the taxi stepped a man and before I had time to scream, or even guess their full intention, I was bundled inside by him and the driver—a handkerchief was bound round my mouth and another round my eyes and we were off."

"You have no idea of course who the men were," said MacIver.

"Absolutely none!" she remarked indignantly. "Do you imagine, sir, that I should number among my acquaintances men capable of such a dastardly act?"

"What about the servants?" asked Drummond. "Didn't they start running round in circles when you failed to roll up?"

"That is one of the very points I wish to clear up," she replied. "Jane—I kept only one maid—and received a telegram only that morning stating that her mother in Devonshire was ill. So she had gone off and there was therefore no one in the house. But that was three weeks ago. Surely she must have returned in that time and, if so, when she failed to find me here why did she say absolutely nothing to the police?"

"Where did they take you?" demanded MacIver eagerly.

"I don't know; I can't tell you. It was a house in the country; that's all I can say. It stood by itself among some trees—but I was blindfolded the whole way there. And when they brought me back this morning, I was again blindfolded. They brought me as far as the Euston Road, whipped off the handkerchief from my eyes, pushed me out on the pavement and then drove off at a furious rate. Now, sir, what is the meaning of this treatment?"

"If you'll come upstairs, Miss Simpson, you'll understand," answered MacIver. "The meaning of the whole thing is that you happened to be living in this house. And it wasn't you they wanted; it was the house. Had you agreed to let it to that woman who called to see you, none of this would have happened."

"But why did they want the house?"

"That's why!"

MACIVER stepped into the room where Drummond and I had interviewed the bogus invalid and pointed to an opening in the wall.

"You knew nothing of that, of course?"

"Good heavens, no!" She was staring at it in amazement. "What's through on the other side?"

"The next house—number ten."

"And that's been there all these years. Why, I might have been murdered in my bed."

"It's a carefully done job, MacIver," said Drummond, and the detective nodded.

The wall of each room consisted of imitation-oak boarding and the opening was made by means of two sliding panels. The brickwork between them had been removed to form the passage and the opening thus made crowned with a small iron girder. The two panels moved in grooves which had been recently oiled and, when closed, it was impossible to notice anything unusual.

"Do you mean to say that a gang of criminals have been living in my house?" the lady gasped.

"That is just what I do mean," replied MacIver. "But I don't think they are likely to return. If they intended to do so, they wouldn't have let you go. They lived here and they used the empty house next door. The thing I'm going to find out now is the name of your predecessor. Can you tell me the agent through whom you got this house?"

"Paul & Paul, in the Euston Road."

"Good! That saves time."

"And now I shall be glad, sir, if you would go," the lady said. I presume I may expect to hear in time that the police have a clew to account for my treatment. It would be too much to expect any more. But at the moment my house resembles a bear garden and I would like to start putting it into some semblance of order——"

Then occurred a most embarrassing incident. Drummond became lightheaded. We heard a dreadful noise from an adjoining room; he had burst into song. The next moment—to our horror—he came dancing through the door, and made a bee line for Miss Simpson.

"My Tootles!" he cried jovially. "My little flower of the East!"

Miss Simpson screamed; Ted Jerningham gave an uncontrollable guffaw.

"Dance with me, my poppet!" chanted Drummond, seizing her firmly round the waist.

Protesting shrilly, the unfortunate woman was dragged round the room until between us we managed to get hold of Drummond. The poor chap was completely delirious, but fortunately for all concerned not violent. We explained to the almost hysterical woman that he'd had a very bad blow on the head the preceding night, from one of the same gang of scoundrels who had abducted her—and that, of course, he was suffering from concussion.

THEN we got him downstairs and into a taxi. He was still humming gently to himself and playing with a piece of string, but he offered no resistance.

"Extraordinary thing, his going like that so suddenly," I said to Peter Darrell, who was sitting opposite.

"Frightfully so," agreed Drummond. "Just hold that end of the string."

"G-good Lord!" I stammered. "Do you mean to say——"

"Hold the end," he said tersely. "I want to see something.

"I thought as much," he said quietly. "Tell the taxi to stop at the first small hotel we come to. You go back, Peter, and bring MacIver along there at once. Tell him it's urgent, but don't let that woman hear you."

"Who—Miss Simpson?"

"She's no more Miss Simpson than I am."

The car pulled up and we all got out.

"Go back in it, Peter, make any old excuse. Say I left my hat—but get MacIver quickly. Now, Stockton, let's have a drink and think things over."

"I say, Drummond," I said weakly, "do you mind explaining?"

"All in good time, old man, all in good time. I refuse to utter until I've got outside a pint."

"What on earth is the meaning of this?" said MacIver a few minutes later, as he came into the room where we were sitting.

"Only that you apologized for my attack of insanity so convincingly that I think the lady believed it. I sincerely hope so, at any rate. While you were holding forth, Mac, about the secret opening I went on a little voyage of exploration. And I found a cupboard full of female clothes. They were all marked 'A. Simpson' and right in front three or four skirts were hanging. I don't know why exactly, but it suddenly occurred to me that the skirts seemed singularly short for the lady. So I took one down and measured it round the waistband with this string.

"Allowing the span of my hand to be about ten inches, I found that Miss Simpson's waist was approximately forty inches. Now that woman is thinner than my wife—but I thought I'd make sure. I took her measurement with this bit of string when I was dancing with her and if that is Amelia Simpson she's shrunk thirteen inches round the tum-tum."

MACIVER rose and walked toward the door.

"What are you going to do?" asked Drummond.

"Have that woman identified by somebody," answered the detective. "Ask her some more questions and if the answers aren't satisfactory, clap her under lock and key at once."

"Far be it from me to call you an ass, dear boy, but that doesn't alter the fact that you are one. At least you will be, if you arrest that woman.

"And if you give her sufficient rope, we may get a lot more. Think, man, just think! What did that fellow who impersonated you run his head into a noose for this morning? Not for the pleasure of locking us into a cellar. What has that woman turned up for so quickly, pretending she is the rightful owner? If those garments belong to Miss Simpson—as they surely must do—the two women must be utterly unlike. True, they would assume—and rightly so as it happened—that none of us had ever seen Miss Simpson. All the same if they hadn't been in a tearing hurry they would surely have sent some one a little less dissimilar than she.

"They are in a tearing hurry," he went on, "but what for? There's something in that house that they want and want quickly; something they forgot last night when they all flitted. And when that woman finds it—or if she finds it—she'll go with it—to them. And we shall follow her. Do you get me, Steve? We can watch the house in front from number ten. We can watch it from behind from number thirteen Jersey Street, in which six respectable divinity students have taken rooms for the week. Let's get rid of the young army that we've had tracking around up to date and be nice and matey.

"We insist, Mac, on seeing the fun. Out of the kindness of my heart I've put you wise as to what I discovered and you've got to play the game. You and I and Stockton will go to number ten; Ted, Peter and Algy to Jersey Street. Toby, you trot back and tell Phyllis what is happening—and tell her to put up some sandwiches and half a dozen Mumm'll. Then come back to Jersey Street and tell the old geezer there that it's a new form of spring

water. And send all the rest of your birds home to bed, Mac."

"It's strictly irregular," the detective said, grinning, "but, dash it all, Captain Drummond, I'll do it."

"Good fellow!" cried Drummond. "Let's get on with it."

"I'll keep a couple of my men below in number ten to follow her if she goes out," went on MacIver.

"Excellent," said Drummond. "And Toby can tell my chauffeur to bring the Hispano up to Jersey Street. I'll guarantee to keep in sight of anything in England in that machine!"

So once more we returned to number ten. No one had entered the house next door during our absence—and no one had come out, at any rate at the front. Of that Fosdick, who was still on duty, was sure. Then there commenced a weary vigil. We were in the room which communicated with number twelve, but though we pulled back the panel on our side no sound came from the next house. If she was carrying out her intention of restoring some semblance of order, she was being very quiet about it.

I think MacIver was nodding a bit, when there suddenly came the sound that banished all sleep. It was a scream—a woman's scream—curiously muffled and it come from number twelve. It was not repeated and as we dashed open the other panel the house was as silent as before. We rushed through into the passage and thence into the bedrooms—everywhere the same scene of disorder. Clothes thrown here and there; bedclothes ripped off and scattered on the floor; disorder everywhere.

"She's restored a semblance of order all right," said MacIver grimly, as we went downstairs.

Then he paused; a light was filtering out from the half open cellar door.

"The end of the search, Mac," said Drummond. "Go easy."

CHAPTER XIV.

PUT TO THE TEST.

AT first, as we stood on the top of the stairs, we could see nothing. A solitary candle guttered on the floor, throwing monstrous shadows in all directions; and then we smelled it once again—that strange bittersweet smell—the smell of death.

She lay there—the woman who had taken Miss Simpson's place—and the scream we had heard had been with her last breath. The same dreadful distortion, the same staring look of horror in the eyes—everything was just the same as in the other cases. But somehow with a woman it seemed more horrible.

"It's diabolical stuff!" cried MacIver fiercely, as he bent over the woman. "How did it happen, I wonder?"

"It's on her hand," said Drummond. "She's cut it on something. Look, man—there's a bit of a broken bottle beside her with liquid in it. For Heaven's sake be careful! The whole place is saturated with the stuff."

"We'll leave the body exactly as it is," said the inspector, "until Sir John Dallas comes. I'll go and telephone him now. Captain Drummond, will you and Mr. Stockton mount guard until I return?"

"Certainly," answered Drummond, and we followed the inspector up the stairs.

"So that's what they came to look for," I remarked as the front door closed behind MacIver.

"Seems like it," agreed Drummond, lighting a cigarette thoughtfully. "And yet it's all a little difficult. A fellow may quite easily forget his handkerchief when he goes out, but he ain't likely to forget his trousers. What I mean, Stockton, is this: The whole thing has been done from the very beginning with the sole idea of getting the

secret of that poison. Are we really to believe that after committing half a dozen murders and a few trifles of that description they went off and left it behind? Is that the only sample in existence? And if it isn't, what is the good of worrying about it? Why send back for it at all? It looked as if it was quite a small bottle.

"There's another point," he went on after a moment. "Where was that bottle this morning? I'll stake my dying oath that it wasn't lying about in the cellar. It was either hidden there somewhere or that woman took it down there with her. Great Scott, but it's a baffling show!"

We sat on in silence, each busy with his own thoughts.

"If Gaunt is dead, Drummond," I said after a while, "it may account for a lot. It's not likely that he had very large supplies of the stuff in his rooms. And we know, anyway, that a lot of it was wasted when you shot our friend the night before last. So it seems to me to be perfectly feasible that that bottle down below contained the only existing sample—which in the event of Gaunt's death would become invaluable to them. They may not know his secret, in which case their only hope would be to get a sample."

"But why leave it behind?" he objected. "Why go to the worry and trouble of hiding it in the cellar? For I think it must have been hidden there. The idea that the unfortunate woman should have carried it down there seems pointless. It's just my trouser example, Stockton."

"Each one may have thought the other had it," I said, but he shook his head.

"You may be right," he remarked, "but I don't believe it was that she was looking for. And my opinion is that the clew to the whole thing is contained in that bloodstained handkerchief, if only one could interpret it. 3 P 7 AN T. It's directions for something; it can't be meaningless."

Once again we relapsed into silence, until the sound of a taxi outside announced the arrival of some one. It was MacIver, and with him was Sir John, carrying some guinea pigs in cases.

"Sorry to have been so long," said the inspector, "but I couldn't get Sir John on the telephone, so I had to go and find him. Has anything happened here?"

"Not a thing," said Drummond.

MacIver had brought another torch and several candles, and by their light Sir John proceeded to make his examination. He had donned a pair of stout India-rubber gloves, but even with their protection he handled things very gingerly.

First, he poured what was left of the poison into another bottle and corked it with a rubber cork. Then he took a sample of the dead woman's blood, which he placed in a test tube and carefully stoppered. Finally, after a minute examination of the cut in her hand and the terrible staring eyes, he rose to his feet.

"We can now carry her upstairs," he remarked. "There is nothing more to be seen here. But on your life don't touch her hand."

WE lifted her up, and MacIver gave a sudden exclamation. Underneath where the body had been lying, and so unseen by us until then, was a hole in the floor. It had been made by removing a brick, and the brick itself, which had been concealed by the body, lay beside the hole. At the bottom of the hole were some broken glass and the neck of the bottle from the base of which Sir John had removed the poison. So it was obviously the place where the poison had been hidden. But who had hidden it—and why?

"Obviously not a member of the

gang," said MacIver, "or she would have known where it was and not wasted time ransacking the house."

"Therefore, obviously, Gaunt himself," said Drummond. "Great Scott, man!" he added. "It's the third brick from the wall. Give me your stick, Sir John. The handkerchief, MacIver—three and seven."

He tapped on the seventh brick and, sure enough, it sounded hollow. With growing excitement we crowded round as he endeavored to pry it up.

"Careful—careful!" cried Sir John anxiously. "If there's another bottle we don't want any risk of another casualty. Let me—I've got gloves on."

Sure enough, when the seventh brick was removed, a similar hole was disclosed, at the bottom of which lay a small cardboard pill box. With the utmost care he lifted it out and removed the lid. It was filled with a white paste, which looked somewhat like boracic ointment.

"Hullo!" he said after he'd sniffed it. "What fresh development have we here?"

Suddenly Drummond gave a shout of comprehension.

"I've got it! It's the message on the handkerchief. Three P—the third brick, poison. Seven AN T—the seventh brick, antidote. That's the antidote, Sir John, you've got in your hand, and that's what they've been after. That woman came down to look for it—and she only found the poison. Gaunt must have hidden them both while he was a prisoner down there, and then left that last despairing message of his!"

"We'll try at once," said Sir John quietly.

He handed me the pill box and kept the poison himself.

"Take a little of the ointment on the end of a match," he said, "and I'll take a little of the poison. You hold one of the guinea pigs, MacIver. Now, the instant I have applied the poison you follow it up with your stuff in the same place, Stockton."

BUT the experiment was valueless. With a convulsive shudder the little animal died, and when we tried with another the result was the same.

"Not a very effective antidote," said Sir John sarcastically.

"Nevertheless," insisted Drummond doggedly, "I'll bet you it is the antidote. Couldn't you analyze it, Sir John?"

"Of course I can analyze it!" snapped the other. "And I shall analyze it."

He slipped the box into his bag, followed by the bottle of poison.

"I wonder if I might make a suggestion," said Drummond. "I don't want to seem unduly an alarmist, but I think we've seen enough to realize that we are up against a pretty tough proposition. Now, do you think it's wise to have all one's eggs in one basket, or rather all that stuff in one box? It might get lost; it might be stolen. Wouldn't it be safer, Sir John, to give, say, half of it to MacIver—until, at any rate, your analysis is concluded. I see you have a spare box in that bag of yours."

"A most sensible suggestion," remarked Sir John, "with which I fully agree."

"Then come in here, Sir John," said Drummond.

He led the way into one of the downstairs rooms and shut the door. It seemed to me that he was looking unduly grave. He watched the transfer of half the paste to another box, and he waited till MacIver had it in his pocket.

"Please send for Fosdick, MacIver," said Drummond.

A little surprised, the inspector stepped to the window and beckoned to the man outside.

"Any one been in this house, Fos-

dick, during the last half hour?" asked Drummond.

"Only Sir John's assistant, sir."

"I haven't got an assistant!" snapped Sir John.

"My sainted aunt, Mac!" said Drummond grimly. "We're up against the real thing this time. He's gone?"

"Yes, sir," replied Fosdick. "About ten minutes ago."

"Then I tell you, Sir John, your life is not safe. It's the stuff in the pill box that they are after. Perhaps we've put it on wrong; perhaps you've got to eat it. Anyway, that man who posed as your assistant knows you've got it. I beg of you to put yourself under police protection day and night. If possible, until you have analyzed the stuff, don't go near your house. Remain inside Scotland Yard itself."

What Sir John lacked in inches he made up for in pugnacity.

"If you imagine, sir," he snapped, "that I am going to be kept out of my own laboratory by a gang of poisoners, you're wrong. If the inspector here, considers it necessary, he can send one of his men to stand outside the house. But not one jot will I deviate from my ordinary method of life for twenty would-be murderers. Incidentally," he added curiously, "how did you know a man had been here?"

"The position of the cellar door," answered Drummond. "It's a heavy door and I know how I left it when we went in. It was a foot farther open when we came out—and there is no draft."

Sir John nodded approvingly.

"Quick—I like quickness. What in the name of fortune have you done to your face?"

"Don't you worry about my face, Sir John," said Drummond quietly; "you concentrate on your own life."

"And you mind your own business, young man!" snapped the other angrily. "My life is my own affair."

"It isn't," answered Drummond. "It's the nation's—until you've analyzed that stuff. After that, I agree with you, no one is likely to care two hoots."

Sir John turned purple.

"You in-insolent young puppy!" he stuttered.

"Cut it out, you silly little man," said Drummond wearily.

"Sorry I lost my temper with the little bloke," he said to me as he spun the Hispano into the Euston Road. "But really, old man, this stunt of yours is enough to try anybody's nerves."

When home, I didn't get as far as bed. I just fell asleep in an easy-chair in my room, until I woke with a start to find the lights on and some one shaking me by the shoulder.

It was Drummond, and the look on his face made me sit up quickly.

"They've got him," he said, "as I knew they would. Sir John was stabbed through the heart in his laboratory an hour ago."

"How do you know?" I cried.

"MacIver has just rung up. Stockton, as I've said before, we're up against the real thing this time."

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER A CLEW.

I THINK it was the method of the murder of Sir John that brought home to me most forcibly the nerve of the gang that confronted us. I will set forth what happened as detailed in the papers of the following day. The cutting is before me as I write.

"Another astounding and cold-blooded murder occurred between the hours of nine and ten last night. Sir John Dallas, the well-known scientist and authority on toxicology, was stabbed through the heart in his own laboratory.

"The following are the facts of the case: Sir John gave evidence as recently as the day before yesterday in

the sensational Robin Gaunt affair. He also stated that he was endeavoring to analyze the drug, and there can be little doubt that he was engaged on that very work when he met his end.

"Yesterday afternoon a further and at present a secret development occurred which caused Sir John to feel hopeful of success. He returned to his house in Eaton Square in time for dinner, which he had served in his study—the usual course of procedure when he was busy. At eight thirty he rang the bell, and Elizabeth Perkins, the parlor maid, came and removed the tray. He was apparently completely absorbed in his research at that time. On the desk in front of him was a bottle containing a colorless liquid which looked like water and a small cardboard box.

"At between nine o'clock and a quarter past the front doorbell rang, and it was answered by Miss Perkins. There was a man outside who stated that he had come to see Sir John on a very important matter. She told him that Sir John was busy, but when he told her that it was in connection with Sir John's work that he was there, she showed him along the passage to the laboratory. And then she heard the stranger say distinctly, 'I've come from Scotland Yard, Sir John.'

"There can be but little doubt that this man was the murderer himself, since no one from Scotland Yard visited Sir John at that hour.

"Miss Perkins, having shown this man into the laboratory, returned to the servants' hall, where she remained till ten o'clock. At ten o'clock she had a standing order to take Sir John a glass of warm milk, if he had not rung for it sooner. She got the milk and took it to the laboratory. She knocked and, receiving no answer, she entered the room. At first she thought he must have gone out, as the laboratory appeared to be empty, and then she saw a leg sticking out from behind the desk. She went quickly to the place to find, to her horror, that Sir John was lying on the floor with a dagger driven up to the hilt in his heart.

SHE saw at a glance that he was dead, and, rushing out of the house, called in a policeman who at once rang up Scotland Yard. Inspector MacIver, who is in charge of the Robin Gaunt mystery, at once hurried to the scene. It was he who elucidated the fact that the bottle containing the colorless liquid and the little cardboard box had completely disappeared. It seems that one motive for the murder of this distinguished savant was the theft of these two things with their unknown contents. Since we know that Sir John was experimenting with this mysterious new poison, the connection between this dastardly crime and the Gaunt affair seems conclusive.

"The matter is in the capable hands of Inspector MacIver, and it is to be hoped that before long the criminals concerned will be brought to justice."

But day after day went past and nothing happened. Scotland Yard began to get it hot and strong from the press.

The only ray of comfort during the weeks that followed lay in Drummond's happy idea of dividing the antidote—if it was an antidote—into two portions. MacIver's specimen had been analyzed and its exact composition was known. The trouble lay in the fact that it was impossible to carry out further experiments, since we possessed none of the poison.

For an antidote to be efficacious it is advisable to know how to use it. Since the most obvious was not the correct one, we were not much further advanced. Still, the general opinion was that Drummond's theory was correct, and all the necessary steps were taken to allow of its immediate manufacture on a large scale, should occasion arise.

Gradually public interest died down. Nothing further happened, and it seemed to all of us that the events of those few days were destined to have no sequel. Only Drummond continued to do anything; the rest of us slipped back into the normal tenor of our ways. He still periodically disappeared for hours at a time—generally in a disguise of some sort.

The case of the man called Doctor Helias held out a little more prospect of success. Drummond and I separately described that human monstrosity to MacIver, and within two days a description of him was circulated all over the world. But it wasn't likely to prove of much use. If the secret of the poison had been handed over to a foreign power, it was clear that Doctor Helias was an agent of that power. If so, they wouldn't give him away.

MacIver also turned his attention to the genuine owner of number twelve. First he tracked the maid, and we found out that part, at any rate, of the story told us by the woman who had died was true. Some one had come round and asked Miss Simpson to let the house; she had talked it over later with the maid. On a certain morning a wire had come stating that her mother was ill and summoning the maid to her home in Devonshire. To her surprise she found her mother perfectly fit. The wire had been sent from the village by a woman; that was all they could tell her at the post office.

Next morning, when she was still puzzling over the affair, a letter had come in Miss Simpson's handwriting. It was brief and to the point, stating that she had decided, after all, to let her house and was proposing to travel. It inclosed a month's wages in lieu of notice. The maid had felt hurt at such a brusque dismissal and was shortly going to another place.

"That's really all I got out of her," said MacIver, "except for a description of Miss Simpson. She is short and fat, as Captain Drummond surmised. Also, according to the maid she has no near relatives and very few friends. She hardly went out at all and no one ever came to the house. Moreover, the description the maid gave me of the woman who came to ask to rent the house would fit the woman who impersonated Miss Simpson and was killed."

Inquiries as to Miss Simpson's predecessors helped as little. Messrs. Paul & Paul were the agents right enough, but all they could say, having consulted their books, was that the house had belonged to a Mr. Startin, who, they believed, had gone abroad. They knew absolutely nothing about him.

Then on the twentieth of June occurred the next link in the chain. It was an isolated one. The few people who may have read the paragraph in the papers probably never connected it with the other issues.

A fisherman named Daniel Coblen made a gruesome discovery late yesterday afternoon. He was walking over the rocks near the Goodrington Sands at Paignton when he saw something floating in the sea. It proved to be the body of a woman in an advanced stage of decomposition. He at once informed the police. From marks on the unfortunate lady's garments it appears that her name was A. Simpson. Doctor Epping, who made an examination, stated that she must have been dead for considerably over a month.

Few people who may have read the paragraph would have traced a connection between it and Sir John Dallas' being stabbed to death, but MacIver went down posthaste to Paignton. It transpired at the inquest that death was due to drowning; no marks of violence could be found on the body. How had she been drowned? No local boatmen knew anything about it; no ship had reported that any passenger of that name was missing. How, then, had Miss Simpson been drowned?

It was well-nigh inconceivable that they would have taken the trouble to put her on board a boat merely to take her out to sea and drown her, when their record in London showed that they had no hesitation in using far more direct methods. It seemed to add but one more baffling feature to a case that contained no lack of them already.

ITS sole result was that Drummond's interest, which seemed to be waning, revived once more. Day after day he disappeared by himself, until his wife grew quite annoyed about it. I, too, thought he was wasting his time. What he was doing, or where he went, he would never say. He just departed in the morning or after lunch and often did not return till two or three in the morning. Since there seemed to be nothing particular to look for, and no particular place to look for it in, the whole thing struck me as somewhat pointless.

It was about that time that I began to see a good deal of Major Jackson. His club had been closed down for structural repairs and the members had come to mine. So I saw Jackson two or three times a week at lunch. General Darton, too, was frequently there, and sometimes we shared the same table. On the whole I thought they were fairly optimistic; nothing had as yet been heard from any of our agents abroad which led them to suspect any particular power of having acquired the secret.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PUZZLE TO THE PRESS.

IT was in July that the Wilmot rigid-airship publicity stunt was first started. Up to that date airships were regarded as essentially connected with the fighting services. It was then that the big endeavor was made to popularize them commercially.

The first difficulty which the promoters of the scheme had to overcome was a distinct feeling of nervousness on the part of the public. Airplanes they were accustomed to; the magnificent Croydon-to-Paris service was by this time regarded as being as safe as the boat train. But rigid airships were a different matter. Airships caught fire and burned; airships broke their backs and crashed; airships had all sorts of horrible accidents.

The second difficulty was financial nervousness in the city, doubtless induced largely by the physical nervousness of the public. Would a fleet of rigid airships—six was the number suggested—pay? They were costly things to construct; a mooring mast worked out at about one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, a shed at more than five hundred thousand dollars. Would it prove a commercial success?

Then came the celebrated trip on July twenty-fifth, when representatives from every important London paper were taken for a trial voyage and entertained to a luncheon during the journey which the Ritz itself could not have beaten.

I have before me a copy of the *Morning Herald* of the twenty-sixth, in which an account of the trip is given. Having described the journey and paid a glowing tribute to the beauty and the comfort of the airship, the writer proceeded as follows:

Then came the culminating moment of this wonderful experience. Lunch was over, a meal which no restaurant de luxe could have bettered. The drone of the engines ceased and the whole gorgeous panorama of English woodland scenery unfolded itself before our eyes. It was the psychological moment of the day: it was the fitting moment for Mr. Wilmot to say a few words. Tall, thickset, and with graying hair, and eyes gleaming with enthusiasm he stood at the end of the table.

"I am not going to say much," he remarked, in his deep, steady voice—a voice which holds the faintest suspicion of American accent, "but I feel that this occasion may

mark the beginning of a new epoch in British aviation. To-day you have seen for yourselves something of the possibilities of the airship as opposed to the airplane; I want the public to see those possibilities, too. The lunch which you have eaten has been prepared entirely on board. I mention that to show that the domestic arrangements are passably efficient. But that, after all, is a detail. Think of the other possibilities. A range of three thousand miles, carrying fifty passengers in the essence of comfort! Australia in a fortnight; America in three days. And it is safe, gentlemen—safe. That is the message I want you to give the British public."

I can imagine that the reader is now reading in blank amazement. What, he will say, is the fellow talking about? What on earth has the Wilmot dirigible got to do with the matter? Any hope of success for the scheme was killed when the airship crashed in flames. Anyway, what has it got to do with Gaunt and his poison?

HERE is another matter that seems irrelevant. On July thirty-first, the celebrated American multimillionaire, Cosmo A. Miller, steamed into Southampton Water in his equally celebrated yacht, the *Hermione*. He had with him on board the type of party that a multimillionaire might have been expected to entertain. There was his wife, for whom he had recently bought the notorious Shan diamonds. "The Diamonds of Death," they had been christened. Then there was Angela Greymount, a well-known film star; Mrs. Percy Franklin, a New York society woman and immensely wealthy; and, finally, Mrs. James Delmer, the wife of a Chicago millionaire. The feminine side of the party was to be completed by the Duchess of Sussex—also an American—and Lady Agatha Dawkins, an extremely amusing woman whom I knew slightly.

The men consisted of the owner, three American business friends, the Duke of Sussex, and Tony Beddington, who was, incidentally, a pal of Drummond's. He and the duke also joined the yacht in England.

The yacht itself was a miniature floating palace. It had a swimming pool and a gymnasium; it had listening-in sets, and an electric piano incrusted in precious stones—or almost. There was gold plate for use at dinner, and the plebeian silver for lunch. In fact, it was the supreme essence of blatant vulgarity.

When the *Hermione* steamed slowly down Southampton Water there were in all forty souls on board. The sea was like a mill pond; the date was August second. On August fourth a Marconigram was received in London by the firm of Bremmer & Bremmer. It was from Mr. Miller and was the last recorded message received from the *Hermione*. From that moment she completely disappeared with every soul on board.

Nothing was ever discovered; no trace was found of the yacht.

There is a connection between these events, between the disappearance of the *Hermione* and Robin Gaunt's cry over the telephone. Also, the Wilmot rigid airship plays its part in the story. You will see as you read on.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERY OF BLACK MINE.

ON September fifth Drummond rang me up at my office, asking me to go round to his house at once. The events I have just recorded were as irrelevant to us as they appear to be on these pages. In fact, the last thing known to us which was connected in any way with Robin Gaunt in our minds was the discovery of Miss Simpson's body at Paignton.

It was with a considerable feeling of surprise that I listened to what Drummond had to say over the telephone.

"Found out something that may be

of value. Can you come round at once?"

I went, to find to my amazement a man with him whom I had never expected to see again. It was the little, rat-faced man who had been put to watch Toby Sinclair, and whom we had saved from hanging in number ten. He was sitting on the edge of his chair, plucking nervously at a greasy hat in the intervals of getting outside a quart of Drummond's beer.

"You remember Mr. Perton, don't you, old boy?" asked Drummond, winking at me. "I happened to meet him this morning and reminded him that there was a little matter of a fiver due to him."

"Well, gentlemen," said Mr. Perton nervously, "I don't know as 'ow I can call it due, for I didn't do wot you told me to. But I couldn't, sir! I 'ad a dreadful time. You won't believe wot them devils did to me. They 'ung me."

"Did they, indeed?" said Drummond quietly. "They don't seem to have done it very well."

"Gawd knows 'ow I escaped, guv'nor. They 'ung me, the swine, and left me swinging. I lost consciousness, I did—and then when I come to again I was lying on the floor in the room alone. You bet yer life I didn't 'alf do a bolt."

"A very sound move, Mr. Perton. Have some more beer? Do you know why they hanged you?"

"Strite I don't, guv'nor. They said to me, they said, 'You're bait, my man, just bait.' They'd got me gagged, the swine, and they was a-peering out of the window. 'Here they come,' says one of 'em. 'Trice 'im up!' So they triced me up, and then they give me a push to start me swinging. Then they does a bunk into the next 'ouse."

"How do you know they bunked into the next house?" inquired Drummond.

"Well, guv'nor, there was a secret door, there was—and they'd brought me from the next house."

He looked at us nervously, as if afraid of the reception of his story.

"How long had you been in the next house, Mr. Perton," asked Drummond reassuringly, "before they brought you through the secret door to hang you?"

"Three or four hours, sir, bound and gagged. Thrown in the corner like a ruddy sack of pertaters. Just as I told you, sir."

"I know, Mr. Perton, but I want my friend to hear what you have to say, also. During those three or four hours, while you were thrown in the corner, you heard them talking, I guess, didn't you?"

"Well, I didn't pay much attention, sir," said Mr. Perton apologetically. "I was a-wondering wot was going to 'appen to me too 'ard. But there was a great, black-bearded swine who was swearing something awful. And two others wot was sitting at a table drinking whisky. They seemed to be fair wild about something. Then the other bloke come in—the bloke wot had been in Clarges Street that morning, and the one wot had brought me from the Three Cows to the 'ouse. They shut up swearing, though you could see they was still wild.

" 'You know wot to do,' says the new man, 'with regard to that thing.' He points to me and I listened 'ard.

" 'We knows wot to do,' says the black-bearded swab, 'but it's tomfoolery.'

" 'That's for me to decide,' snaps the new bloke. 'I'll get the others next door and I'll do the necessary once they're there.' They didn't say nothing then abaht making me swing, you see, so——"

"True, Mr. Perton," interrupted Drummond. "But they did say something else, didn't they?"

"Wot, that there bit about Land's Hend? Wot was it 'e said, now—old black beard? Yus—I know. 'We'll all be in 'ell's hend,' he said, 'not Land's

Hend, if we goes on like this.' Then some one cursed 'im for a ruddy fool."

"You're sure of that, Mr. Perton, aren't you?" I could hear the excitement in Drummond's voice. "I mean the bit about Land's End."

"Sure as I'm sitting 'ere, sir."

HE took a large gulp of beer, and Drummond rose to his feet.

"Well, I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Perton. I have your address in case I want it, and since you had such a thin time, I must make that fiver a tenner." He thrust two notes into the little man's hand, rushed him through the door, and bawled for Denny to let him out. Then he came back, and his face was triumphant.

"Worth it, Stockton! Worth day after day, night after night, searching London for that man! Heavens, the amount of liquor I've consumed in the Three Cows!"

"Great Scott!" I cried. "Is that what you've been doing?"

"That—and nothing else. And then I ran into him this morning by accident, outside your rooms in Clarges Street. Still, it's been worth it; we've got a clew at last."

"You mean——" I said, bewildered.

"Land's End, man—Land's End!" he cried. "I nearly kicked the desk over when he said it first. Then I sent for you; I wanted him to repeat his story for confirmation. He did—word for word. The fog is lifting a little, old boy; one loose end is accounted for, at any rate. I always thought they hanged the poor little chap in order to get a sitting shot at us. As they told him—bait. But, anyway, that is all past and a trifle. We can let him pass out of the picture. We, on the contrary, I hope and trust, are just going to pass into it again."

"You really think," I said doubtfully, "that we're likely to find out anything at Land's End?"

"I'm going to have a good try, Stockton," he replied quietly. "On his own showing the little man was listening with all his ears at that time, and it seems incredible to me that he would invent a thing like that. We know that the rest of his story was true—the part that he would think us least likely to believe.

"Very well, then. Assuming that black beard did make that remark, it must have had some meaning. And what meaning can it have had except the obvious one—namely, that the gang was going to Land's End? Why they went to Land's End, Heaven alone knows. But what this child knows is that we're going there, too. I've warned the boys—Toby, Peter, and Ted are coming with us. Algy is stopping behind here to guard the fort."

"What about MacIver?" I asked.

Drummond grinned.

"Mac hates leaving London," he remarked. "And if by any chance we do run into gorse bush, I feel MacIver would rather cramp my style. When can you start?"

"Well——" I said doubtfully.

"After lunch?"

"I've got a rather important brief."

"Damn your brief!"

I did, and after lunch we started. We went in the Hispano and spent the night in Exeter.

"Tourists, old lads," remarked Drummond. "That's what we are. Visiting Penzance. Let's make that our headquarters."

So at four o'clock on the sixth of September five tourists arrived at Penzance and took rooms at a hotel. No record of our names will be found on the hotel register, however. And the hotel proprietor at Exeter would have been hard put to it to recognize the five men who got out of the Hispano in Penzance. We were thoroughly disguised. There was no point in handicapping ourselves necessarily, and

Drummond and I, at any rate, would be certainly recognized by the gang, even if the others weren't.

The next day we split up. The plan of action we had decided on was to search the whole of the ground west of a line drawn from St. Ives to Mount Bay. We split it into five approximately equal parts with the help of a large-scale ordnance map, and each part worked out at about ten square miles.

"To do it properly should take three or, perhaps, four days," said Drummond. "It's hilly going and the north coast is full of caves. If anybody discovers anything, report to the hotel at once. In order to be on the safe side we'd better all return here every night."

We drew lots for our beats, and I got the center strip, terminating to the north in the stretch of coast on each side of Gurnard's Head. Having a very mild sketching ability, I decided that I would pose as an artist. So I purchased the necessary gear, slung a pair of field glasses over my shoulder, and started off.

THE weather was glorious and I foresaw a pleasant holiday in store. I admit frankly that I did not share the optimism of the others. It struck me that, considering over four months had elapsed, we were building altogether too much on a chance remark.

I stopped for a few moments to light my pipe, and a passing shepherd touched his cap.

"Going sketching, sir?" he said in his delightful West-country bur. "There certainly do be some fine views round these parts."

I walked with him for a while, listening absent-mindedly to his views on men and matters. In common with a large number of people in many walks of life, he was of the opinion that things were not what they were. The good old days! Those were the times.

"I remember, sir, when each one of them was a working concern." He paused and pointed to a derelict mine below us. "That was Damar Mine—that was, and two hundred men used to work there."

"Bad luck on them," I said, "but I think as far as the scenery is concerned it's better as it is. Didn't pay, I suppose."

"That's it, sir, didn't pay. Though they do say as how the men that are working Black Mine are going to make it pay. A rare lot of money they're putting into it, so Peter Tregerthen told me. He be one of the foremen."

"Where is Black Mine?" I asked perfunctorily.

"Just over this hill, sir, and you'll see it. Only started in May, they did. Queer people, too."

I stared at him.

"How do you mean—queer people?" I asked.

"Peter Tregerthen, he tells me as how they've got queer ideas," he answered. "Scientific mining they're a-going for, carrying out lots of experiments secretly—things which the boss says will revolutionize the industry. But so far nothing seems to have come of them; they just goes on mining in the old way. There it is, sir, that's Black Mine."

"How many men are employed there?" I asked my companion.

"Not many, sir, yet," he answered. "It's up in that wooden building yonder on the edge of the cliffs that they be experimenting, as I told you. No one aren't allowed near at all. In fact, Peter Tregerthen, he did tell me that one day he went up and there was a terrible scene. He wanted for to ask the boss something or tother, and the boss very nigh sacked him. Well, sir, I reckons I must be a-going on. Be you waiting here?"

"Yes," I said. "I think I'll stop here a bit. Good morning to you."

I watched him go down the hill and strike the road. Then, moved by a

sudden impulse, I retraced my steps to the reverse slope of the tor and, lying down behind a dock, I focused my field glasses on the wooden building which was so very private in its owners' estimation. It seemed a perfectly ordinary building. I could see now that it stretched back some distance from the edge of the cliff, though, being foreshortened, it was hard to guess any dimensions.

I was coming to the conclusion that I was wasting time, when a man came out of the building and walked toward the mine. I saw, on consulting the ordnance map, that the mine itself was just over half a mile from where I lay, and the cliff's edge was distant a farther half mile.

It was just about ten minutes before the man reappeared on my side of the mine buildings. I watched him idly; he was still too far off for me to be able to distinguish his features. After a while he struck the road, but instead of turning along it one way or the other he came straight on and commenced to climb the hill.

"Good morning!"

THE man who had come from the mine breasted the rise in front and I glanced up. He was a complete stranger, with a dark, rather swarthy face, and I returned the compliment politely, seemingly very busy.

"Sketching, I see," he remarked affably.

"Just beginning," I answered. Then I took the bull by the horns. "I've been admiring the country through my glasses most of the morning."

"So I perceived," said another voice behind my shoulder. It was a second man, whom also I failed to recognize. "You seemed to decide to start work very suddenly."

"I presume," I remarked coldly, "that I can decide to start work when I like, where I like, and how I like. The matter is my business and my business only."

A quick look passed between the two men and then the first arrival spoke.

"But, of course," he remarked, still more affably, "the fact of the matter is this: By way of experiment a small syndicate of us have taken over Black Mine. We believe, I trust rightly, that we have stumbled on a method which will enable us to make a large fortune out of tin mining. The information has leaked out and we have had several people attempting to spy on us. Please wait!" He held up his hand as I began an indignant protest. "Now that I have seen you, I am perfectly sure that you are not one of them. But you will understand that we must take precautions."

"I would be obliged," I remarked sarcastically, "if you would tell me how you think I can discover your secret—even granted I knew anything about tin mining, which I don't—from the range of a mile."

"A very natural remark," he replied. "But to adopt military terms for a moment, there is such a thing as reconnoitering a position, I believe, before attempting to assault it."

"Which, it seems to me, sir, you have been doing pretty thoroughly this morning," put in the other.

I rose to my feet angrily.

"Look here!" I said. "I've had about enough of this. I'm an Englishman and this is England."

Once again I saw a quick glance pass between them.

"There is no good losing your temper, sir," said the first man. "We are speaking in the most friendly way. And since you have no connection with the tin-mining industry, there is no need for us to say any more."

"I certainly have no connection with the tin-mining industry," I agreed. "But for the sake of argument supposing I had! Is that a crime?"

"In this locality, and from our point of view," he smiled, "it is. In fact it is worse than a crime; it is a folly. Several people have proved that to their cost. Good morning."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SIGNALS FROM THE SEA.

I WATCHED the two men go and my first thought was to pack up and walk straight back to the hotel. And then saner counsels prevailed. That second man—where had he come from? I felt certain now that I had been under his observation. He must have been lying up in that high ground behind me on the right. Glancing round, I could see hundreds of places where men could lie hidden and watch my every movement.

Was it genuine? That was the whole point. Was all this talk about revolutionizing tin mining the truth, or merely an elaborate bluff?

Was it genuine? The question went on reiterating itself in my mind. It was still unanswered when I returned to the hotel about tea time.

We weighed up the points for and against the second alternative over a round of short ones before dinner.

"In fact," remarked Drummond, "the matter can only be solved in one way. We will consume one more round of this rather peculiar tipple which that sweet girl fondly imagines is a Martini; we will then have dinner; and after that we will go and see for ourselves."

"Supposing it is genuine," I said doubtfully.

"Then, as in the case of Aunt Amelia, we will apologize and withdraw. And if they refuse to accept our apologies and show signs of wishing to rough-house, Heaven forbid that we should disappoint them."

We started at nine in the car. There was no moon and we decided to approach from the west, that is the Land's End direction.

"We'll leave the car a mile or so away—hide it if possible," said Drummond. "And then, Stockton, call up your war lore, for we're going to have a peerless night creep."

"Do we scatter, Hugh, or go in a bunch?" asked Jerningham.

"Ordinary patrol, Ted. I'll lead; you fellows follow in pairs. Carry a revolver, but don't use it except as a last resort."

Such were Drummond's orders, followed by a reminder of the stringent necessity for silence.

"On their part as well as our own," he said quietly. "If you stumble on any one, don't let him give the alarm."

In our pockets we each of us had a gag, a large handkerchief, a length of fine rope and a villainous-looking weapon which Drummond alluded to as "Mary." It was a short, heavily loaded stick and, as he calmly produced these nefarious objects from his suit case, followed by five decent-sized bottles of chloroform, I couldn't help roaring with laughter.

It was ten o'clock when we reached a spot at which Drummond considered it sound to park the car. For the last two miles we had been traveling without lights and with the aid of a torch we confirmed our position on the map.

"I make out that there is another ridge beyond the one in front of us before we get to Black Mine," said Drummond. "If that's so and they've got the place picketed, the sentry will be on the farther one. Manhandle her in, boys; she'll make a noise on reverse."

WE backed the car off the road into a deserted quarry and then with a final inspection to see that all our kit was complete we started off. Toby and I came five yards behind Drummond, with the other two behind us.

I soon began to realize that the yarns I had heard from time to time—told casually by his pals about our leader—were not exaggerated. I have mentioned his marvelous gift of silent movement in the dark. I had myself seen an exhibition of it in the house in Ashworth Gardens. But that was indoors; this night I was to see it in the open. You could hear nothing; you could see nothing, until suddenly he would loom up under your nose with whispered instructions.

"Steady, old man," he whispered from somewhere behind me. We're just short of the top of the first ridge; spread out sideways until we're over. Then same formation. Pass it back."

We waited till the other two bumped into us. As we were passing the orders, there came a faint snarling noise away to our left. We stared in the direction it came from, but it was not repeated. All was silent save for the lazy beat of the breakers far below.

"By gad, you fellows, we've bumped the first sentry!" Drummond materialized out of the night. "Fell right on top of him. Had to dot him one. What's that?"

A stone moved a few yards away from us, and a low voice called out:

"Martin! Martin, are you there? What was that noise? This gives me the jumps. Martin—where are you? Ah!"

The beginnings of a scream were stifled in the speaker's throat and we moved cautiously forward to find Drummond holding some one by the throat.

"Put him to sleep, Ted," he whispered, and the sickly smell of chloroform tainted the air.

"Lash him up and gag him," said Drummond, and then with infinite precaution he switched his torch for a second on the man's face. He was one of the two who had spoken to me that morning.

"Good," said Drummond cheerfully. "We won't bother about the other; he will sleep for several hours. And now, having mopped up the first ridge, let us proceed to do even likewise with the second. Hullo! What is that light doing? Out at sea there."

THREE flashes and a long pause—then two flashes. That was all; though we waited several minutes, we saw nothing more.

"Obviously a signal of some sort," remarked Drummond. "And presumably it is to our friends in front. By Jove! you fellows, is it possible that we've run into a bunch of present-day smugglers? What a perfectly gorgeous thought! Let's get on with it. There's not likely to be any one in the hollow in front, but go canny in case of accidents. Same formation as before and spread out when we come to the next ridge."

Once more we started off. Periodically I glanced out to sea, but there was no repetition of the signal. Whatever boat had made it was lying off there now without lights—waiting. And for what? Smugglers? Possible of course. But what a coast to choose! And yet was it a bad one? Well out of the beaten track, full of caves, sparsely populated.

"Hit him, Stockton!"

Toby Sinclair's urgent voice startled me out of my theorizing just in time. I had literally walked on a man and it was a question of the fraction of a second as to whether he got away and gave the alarm.

"Good biff," came Drummond's whisper, as the man crashed. "I've got the other beauty. We're through the last line."

The other two had joined us and for a while we stood there listening.

"So our friends are not in bed," said Drummond softly. "There is activity in the home circle. Let's go and join

the party. We'll make for the edge of the cliff a bit this side of the house."

It was farther than it looked, but we met no more sentries. No further trace of life showed in the wooden house as we worked our way cautiously forward.

"Careful!" Drummond's whisper came from just in front of us. "We're close to the edge." He was peering in front and suddenly he turned round and gripped my arm. "Look up there toward the house! See anything? Underneath a little—just below the top of the cliff."

I stared at the place he indicated and sure enough there was a patch which seemed less dark than its surroundings.

"There's a heavily screened light inside there," he muttered. "It's an opening in the cliff."

Then, quite clearly audible over the lazy beat of the sea below, we heard the sound of rowlocks.

"This is where we go closer," said Drummond. "It strikes me things are going to happen."

We crept toward the house and I know that I was quivering with excitement. I could just see Drummond in front well enough to conform to his every movement.

AT last he stopped for good and I saw him beckoning us to come and join him. He was actually on the edge of the cliff and, when I reached his side and passed over, I very nearly gave the show away in my surprise. Not twenty feet below us a man's head was sticking out of the face of the cliff. We could see it outlined against a dim light that came from inside and he was paying out something hand over hand. At first I couldn't see what it was. It looked like a rope and yet it seemed singularly stiff and inflexible.

"Form a circle," breathed Drummond to the three others. "Not too near. For Heaven's sake don't let us be surprised from behind."

"What on earth is that he's paying out?" I whispered in his ear, as he once more lay down beside me.

"Tubing, of sorts," he answered. "Don't talk—watch."

From below came a whistle and the man immediately stopped. Then a few seconds later came another whistle and the man disappeared. Something must have swung into position behind him, for the light no longer shone out; only a faint lessening of the darkness marked the spot where he had been. Then, though it may have been my imagination, I thought I heard a slight gurgling noise such as a garden hose makes when you first turn the water on.

Coil by coil he pulled the tubing up until it was all in; then again he disappeared and the screen swung down, shutting out the light.

"Stockton," whispered Drummond, "we've found 'em."

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"Explore," he replied quietly. "If we'd got through without bumping their sentries, I'd have given it a chance till daylight to-morrow. As it is, it's now or never."

"Then I'm coming with you," I remarked.

"All right," he whispered. "But I'm going down to reconnoiter first.

"As soon as I signal all right, the next man comes down. And if they find the rope and cut it, we'll fight our way out through the back door. One other thing—instructions re revolvers canceled. It's shoot quick and shoot often. Great heavens! what's that, Stockton?"

From somewhere near by there came a dreadful chattering laugh followed by a babble of words which died away as abruptly as it had started. To the others it was merely a sudden noise,

staggering because of the unexpectedness of it, but to me it was a paralyzing shock which for the moment completely unnerved me. For the voice which had babbled at us out of the night was the voice of Robin Gaunt.

CHAPTER XIX.

A WAVE OF DEATH.

"YOU'RE certain of that?" muttered Drummond tensely, for even his iron nerves had been shaken for the moment.

"Absolutely," I answered. "That cry came from Robin Gaunt."

"Then that finally proves that we're on to 'em. Let's get busy; there's no time to lose."

We made fast the rope and then lay peering over the edge of the cliff as he went down hand over hand. For a moment the light gleamed out as he drew aside the screen and then we heard his whispered "Come on."

One after another we followed him till all five of us were standing in the cave. Behind us a curtain of stout sacking, completely covering the entrance, was all that separated us from a hundred-foot fall into the Atlantic; in front—what lay in front? What lay round the corner ten yards away? Even now I can still feel the pricking at the back of my scalp during the few seconds we stood there waiting.

I straightened up to see that Drummond had reached the corner and was peering cautiously round it. He was flattened against the rough wall and his revolver was in his hand. Inch by inch he moved forward with Jerningham just behind him and the rest of us following in single file.

Suddenly Drummond became motionless; just ahead of us a man had laughed.

"I can't see what there is to laugh at," snarled a harsh voice. "I'm sick to death of this performance."

"You won't be when you get your share of the stuff," came the answer.

"It's an infernal risk, Dubosc."

"You don't handle an amount like that without running risks," answered the other. "What's come over you tonight? We've been here four months and now, when we're clearing out, you're as jumpy as a cat with kittens."

"It's this damn place, I suppose. No report in from the sentries? No one about?"

"Of course there's no one about. Who would be about in this God-forsaken stretch of country if he hadn't got to be?"

"There was that sketching fellow this morning. And Vernier swears that he was lying there on the hill examining the place for an hour through glasses."

"What if he was? He couldn't see anything."

"I know that. But it means he suspected something."

"It's about time you took a tonic," sneered the other. "We've gone through four months in this place without being discovered. Now, when we've got about four more hours to go at the most, you lose your nerve because some stray artist looks at the place through field glasses. You make me tired. Devil take it, man, it's a tin mine, with several perfectly genuine miners tinning in it!"

He laughed once again and we heard the tinkle of a glass.

"What are we going to do with that madman Gaunt when we go?"

"Kill him," said the other callously. "If he hadn't gone mad and suffered from his present delusion, he'd have been killed weeks ago. Hullo, here he is! Why ain't you tucked up in the sheets, loony?"

Then I heard old Robin's voice. "Surely it's over by now, isn't it?"

"Surely what's over? Oh, the war! No; that's not over. The Welsh have gained a great victory over the English

and driven 'em off the top of Snowdon. Your juice doesn't seem to be functioning quite as well as it ought to."

"It must succeed in time," said Robin, and his voice was the vacant voice of madness. "How many have been killed by it?"

"A few hundred thousand," answered the other. "But they're devilish pugnacious fighters, these Englishmen. And the general won't give up until he's got that leg of Welsh mutton for his dinner. By the way, loony, you'll be getting slogged in the neck and hurt if I hear you making that infernal noise again. Your face is bad enough without adding that shindy to it."

"Get out, you fool!" snarled Helias, who had entered.

"Let him be, Helias," said one of the others. "He's been useful."

"His period of utility is now over," returned Helias. "I'm sick of the sight of him."

"But there isn't enough!" wailed Gaunt. "Too much has gone into the sea and it is the air that counts."

"It's all right, loony, there's plenty for to-night. Go and put your pretty suit on so as to be ready when *he* comes."

A DOOR closed and for a time there was silence. Then Helias spoke.

"You've neither of you left anything about, have you?"

"No. All cleared up."

"We leave the instant the job is finished. Dubosc, you're detailed to fill the tank with water as soon as it's empty. I'll deal with the madman."

"Throw him over the cliff, I suppose?"

"Yes, it's easiest. You might search his room, Gratton; I want no traces left. Look at the fool there, peering at his guage to see if there's enough to stop the war."

"By Jove, this is going to be a big job, Helias!"

"A big job with a big result. The chief is absolutely confident. Lester and Degrange are in charge of the group on board the *Megalithic* and Lester can be trusted not to bungle."

Then a quivering voice shouted:

"Boss! Boss! Vernier is lying bound and gagged on the hill outside there."

"What's that?" We heard a chair fall over as Helias got up. "Vernier gagged! Where are the others?"

"Don't know, boss. Couldn't see them. But I was going out to relieve Vernier and I stumbled right on him. He's unconscious. So I rushed back to give the warning."

"Rouse every one," said Helias curtly. "Post the danger signal in the roof. And if you see any stranger, get him dead or alive."

Drummond stepped forward into the room and the rest of us ranged up alongside him.

"Well, gorse bush, we meet again. I see you've removed your face fungus —very wise. The police were so anxious to find you."

"It's the Australian!" muttered Helias. He was standing by the table in the center of the room and his eyes were fixed on Drummond.

"Have it that way if you like," returned Drummond. "The point is immaterial. What my friends and I are principally interested in is you, Doctor Helias. And when we're all quite comfortable, we propose to ask you a few questions. First of all, you three go and stand against that wall, keeping your hands above your heads."

Drummond pulled up a chair and sat down facing Helias.

"Now then—to begin at the end. Saves time, doesn't it? What exactly is the game? What are you doing here?"

"I refuse to say."

"Look here," said Drummond quietly, "let us be perfectly clear on one point,

Doctor Helias. I know you, if not for a cold-blooded murderer yourself, at any rate for a man who is closely connected with several of the worst. I've got you and you're going to the police. What chance you will have then, you know best. But if you get my goat, you may never get as far as the police. For only a keen sense of public duty restrains me from plugging you where you sit, you ineffable swine.

"Who was the woman who impersonated the wretched Miss Simpson, the first time?" Drummond queried.

"I refuse to say."

"She knew me, didn't she? I see you start. You forget that Stockton was not unconscious like the rest of us. Helias—do you know a man called Carl Peterson?"

He fired the question out suddenly and this time there was no mistaking the other's agitation.

"So," said Drummond quietly, "you do. Where is he, Helias? Is he at the bottom of all this? Though it's hardly necessary to ask that. Where is he?"

"You seem to know a lot," said Helias slowly.

"I want to know just that one thing more," returned Drummond. "Everything else can wait. Where is Carl Peterson?"

"Supposing I told you, would you let me go free?"

Drummond stared at him.

"If I had proof positive—and I would not accept your word only—as to where Peterson is, I might consider the matter."

"I will give you proof positive. To do so, however, I must go to that cupboard."

"You may go," said Drummond. "But I shall keep you covered and shoot without warning on the slightest suspicion of trickery."

"I am not a fool," returned the other curtly. "I know when I'm cornered."

He rose and walked to the cupboard and I noticed he was wearing a pair of high, white-rubber boots.

"Been paddling in your poison, I suppose," said Drummond. "You deserve to be properly drowned in a bath of it."

The other took no notice. He was sorting out some papers, apparently oblivious of Drummond's revolver, which was pointing unwaveringly at the base of his skull.

"Strange how one never can find a thing when one wants to," he remarked conversationally. "Ah! I think this is it."

HE came back to the table with two or three documents in his hand.

"I have your word," he said, "that if I give you proof positive you will let me go."

"You have my word that I will at any rate think about it," answered Drummond. "Much depends on the nature of the proof."

Helias had reseated himself at the table opposite Drummond, who was looking at the papers that had been handed to him.

"But this has got nothing to do with it!" cried Drummond, after a while. "Are you trying some fool trick, Helias?"

"Is it likely," said the other. "Read on."

"Keep him covered, Ted."

Then suddenly Drummond sniffed the air.

"There's a strong smell of that poison of yours, Helias."

I caught one glimpse of Helias's face of unholy triumph and the next moment I saw it.

"Lift your legs, Drummond!" I yelled. "Lift them off the floor."

The advancing wave had actually reached his chair; another second would have been too late. The passage sloped down abruptly from the opening in the

cliff to the room and pouring down it was a stream of the liquid. It came surging over the smooth floor and in an instant there ensued a scene of wild confusion. Drummond had got on the table; Toby Sinclair and I scrambled on to chairs; and Jerningham and Darrell just managed to reach a wooden bench.

"You devil!" shouted the man Dubosc. "Turn off the stopcock. We're cut off."

Helias laughed gratingly from the passage into which he had escaped in the general scramble. Then for the first time we noticed the three other members of the gang. They were standing against the wall—completely cut off, as they said. Owing to some irregularity in the floor, they were surrounded by the liquid, which still came surging into the room.

SUDDENLY the first of them went. He slipped and fell into the stuff and as he fell he died. Without heeding him, the other two fought on. What good they could do by fighting was beside the point; the frenzied instinct of self-preservation killed all reason. Forgetful of our own danger, we watched them fascinated.

It was over; and we stared at the three motionless bodies in stupefied silence.

"I don't like people who interfere with my plans," came the voice of Helias from the passage. "Unfortunately I shan't have the pleasure of seeing you die, because the thought of your revolver impels me to keep out of sight. But I will just explain the situation. In the cupboard is a stopcock. In the building beyond you is a very large tank, containing some tons of this poison.

"We use the stopcock to allow the liquid to pass through the pipe down to the sea—on occasions," he went on. "Now, however, the end of the pipe is in the passage, which as you doubtless observed slopes downward into the room where you are. So the liquid is running back into the room and will continue to do so until the stopcock is turned off or the tank is empty. It ought to rise several feet, I should think. I trust I make myself clear."

"There's only one thing for it," said Drummond at length. His voice was quite steady and he was tucking his trousers into his socks as he spoke.

"You're not going to do it, Hugh!" shouted Jerningham. "We'll toss."

"No, we won't, old lad. I'm nearest."

He stood up and measured the distance to the cupboard with his eye.

"Cheerio, old lads—and all that sort of rot!" he remarked. "Usual messages, don't you know. It's my blithering fault for having brought you here."

"Don't!" we shouted. "For God's sake, man—there's another way. There must be!"

Our shout was drowned by the crack of a revolver. It was Drummond who had fired and the shot was followed by the sound of a fall.

"I thought he might get curious," he said grimly. "He did. Poked his face round the corner."

"Is he dead?" cried Ted.

"Very," answered Drummond. "I plugged him through the brain."

"Good Lord, old man!" said Peter shakily. "I thought you meant that other stuff."

"Dear old Peter," Drummond smiled, "I did. And I do. But I'm glad to have paid the debt first. You might —er—just tell—er—you know, Phyllis—and all that."

For a moment his voice faltered; then with that wonderful cheery grin of his he turned to face certain death. And it wasn't only Peter who was sobbing under his breath.

His knees were bent; he was actually

crouching for the jump when the apparition appeared in the door.

"Hugh!" shouted Ted. "Wait!"

It was the figure of a man clothed from head to foot in a rubber garment. His legs were incased in what looked like high fishing waders; his body and hands were completely covered with the same material. But it was his head that added the finishing touch. He wore a thing that resembled a diver's helmet save that it was much less heavy and clumsy. Two pieces of glass were fitted for his eyes and just underneath there was a device to allow him to breathe.

He stood there for a moment with the liquid swirling round his legs and then he gave a shout of rage.

"The traitor! The traitor! There will not be enough for the air."

It was Robin Gaunt and with sudden wild hope we watched him stride to the cupboard. Of us he took no notice; he did not even pause when one of the bodies bumped against him. He just turned off the stopcock and then stood there muttering angrily while we wiped the sweat from our foreheads and breathed again. For the moment, we were reprieved.

"The traitor! But I'll do him yet. I'll cheat him."

He burst into a shout of mad laughter.

"I'll do him! There shall be enough."

Still taking no notice of us, he waded back to the door and disappeared up the passage. What wild delusion was in the poor chap's brain we knew not; it was sufficient for us at the moment that the liquid had ceased to rise.

"He is coming! He is coming! And there will be enough."

WE pulled ourselves together; hope sprang up in our minds, though Heaven knows what we hoped for. Whoever this mysterious "he" proved to be, it was hardly likely that he would provide us with planks or ladders by which we could walk over the liquid.

"What's that noise?" cried Toby.

It sounded like a motor cycle being ridden over undulating ground or a distant airplane on a gusty day. It was the drone of an engine—now loud, now almost dying away, but all the time increasing in volume. Shout after shout of mad laughter came from Gaunt and once he rushed dancing into the room with arms outstretched above his head.

"He comes!" he cried. "And the war will cease."

Suddenly Gaunt reappeared again, staggering and lurching with something in his arms. It was a pipe similar to the one which had so nearly caused our death and he dropped the nozzle in the liquid.

"I'll cheat him!" chuckled Gaunt. "The traitor."

It was Drummond who noticed it first and his voice almost broke in his excitement.

"It's sinking, you fellows! It's sinking."

It was true; the level of the liquid was sinking fast. Hardly daring to believe our eyes, we watched it disappearing, saw first one and then another of the dead men come to rest on the floor and lie there sodden and dripping. And all the time Robin Gaunt stood there chuckling and muttering.

"Go on, pump, go on. I will give you the last drop."

"But where's it being pumped to?" asked Jerningham dazedly. "I suppose we aren't mad, are we? This is really happening. Great Scott, look at him now!"

Holding the pipe in his hands, Gaunt went to pool after pool of the poison as they lay scattered on the uneven floor. His one obsession was to get enough, but at last he seemed satisfied.

"You shall have more!" he cried. "The tank is still half full."

He lurched up the passage with the piping and a few seconds later we heard a splash.

"Go on!" came his shout. "Pump on; there is more."

"Devil take it!" cried Drummond. "What is happening? I wonder if it's safe to cross this floor.

"Be careful, old man," said Jerningham. "Hadn't we better let it dry out a bit more? Everything is still wringing wet."

"I know that. But what's happening? We're missing it all. Who has pumped up this stuff?"

He gave a sudden exclamation.

"I've got it. Chuck me a handkerchief, some one. These two books will do."

He sat down on the table and tied a book to the sole of each of his shoes. Then he cautiously lowered himself to the ground.

"On my back—each of you in turn!" he cried.

Thus did we escape from that ghastly room, to be met with a sight that drove every other thought out of our mind. Floating above the wooden hut, so low down that it shut out the whole sky, was a huge black shape. It was Wilmot's dirigible.

Standing by the tank of which Helias had spoken was Robin Gaunt and the piping which had drained the liquid from the room was now emptying the main reservoir.

"Enough; there will be enough!" he kept on saying. "And this time he will succeed. The war will stop. Instantaneous, universal death. And I shall have done it."

WE could see the details of the airship, pick out the two central gondolas and the keel which formed the main corridor of the vessel. Once I thought I saw a man peering down at us—a man covered with just such a garment as Robin was wearing.

"Pumping it into a ballast task," said Toby, going to the door. "You see that? They're letting water out as this stuff goes in."

He pointed to the stern of the vessel and in the dim light it was just possible to see a stream of liquid coming out of the airship.

Suddenly the noise of the engine increased and the airship began to move. I glanced at Robin and he was nodding his head triumphantly.

"I knew there would be enough," he cried. "Go—go and stop the senseless slaughter."

"Well, I'm damned!" said Jerningham, sitting down on the grass and scratching his head.

"You're certain it was Wilmot's?" asked Drummond.

"Absolutely," replied Toby. "There's no mistaking her."

"Can't we get any sense out of Gaunt?" inquired Jerningham.

"Where is he, anyway?"

Just then Gaunt appeared. He had taken off his suit of India-rubber and I gave an exclamation of horror as I saw his face. From chin to forehead ran a huge red scar; the blow that caused it must have well-nigh split his head open. He came toward us as we sat on the ground and stopped a few yards away, peering at us curiously.

He stared out over the sea and Drummond shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"Or better still, as I have told them all," said Robin dreamily, "is a big city. The rain of death. Think of it! Think of it in London!"

With a sudden gasp Drummond got to his feet. "What are you saying, man? What do you mean?"

"The rain of death coming down from the sky. That would stop the war."

"But there isn't a war!" shouted Drummond, and Robin cringed back in terror.

"Steady, Drummond," I said. "Don't frighten him. What do you mean, Robin? Is that airship going to spray your poison on London?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Perhaps if the war doesn't stop he will do it. I have asked him to."

He wandered away a few paces and Jerningham shook his head.

"Part of the delusion," he said. "Why, Wilmot is trying to float a company."

"I know that," returned Drummond. "But why has he got that poison on board?"

"It's possible," I remarked, "that he is taking the stuff over to some foreign power to sell it."

"Then why not make it over there and save bother?"

To which there was no answer.

"Anyway," said Drummond, "there is obviously only one thing to do. Get out of this place and notify the police. I should think they would like a little chat with Mr. Wilmot." Then suddenly he stared at us thoughtfully. "Wilmot! Can it be possible that Wilmot himself is Peterson?"

He shook both his fists in the air suddenly.

Jerningham was coming toward us, waving some papers in his hand.

"Just been into another room," he cried, "and found these. Haven't examined them yet, but they might help."

With a scream of rage, Robin, who had been standing vacantly beside us, sprang at Jerningham and tried to snatch the papers away.

"They're mine!" he shouted. "Give them to me."

"Steady, old man," said Drummond, though it taxed all his strength to hold the poor chap in his mad frenzy. "No one is going to hurt them."

"It's gibberish," I said, peering over Jerningham's shoulder.

"Just gibberish," I repeated. "What else can one expect?"

I turned away and as I did so Jerningham gave a cry of triumph.

"Is it?" he said. "That's where you're wrong. It may not help us much, but this isn't gibberish."

In his hand he held a number of sheets of paper covered with Robin's fine handwriting. He glanced rapidly over one or two and gave an excited exclamation.

"Written before he lost his reason!" he cried. "It's sense, you fellows—sense."

And the man who had written sense before he lost his reason was crying weak tears of rage as he still struggled impotently in Drummond's grip.

CHAPTER XX.

THE NARRATIVE OF ROBIN GAUNT.

MANY times since then have I read that strange document, the original of which now lies in Scotland Yard. And whenever I do my mind goes back to that September morning when, sitting in a circle on the short clipped turf, two hundred feet above the Atlantic, we first learned the truth. After a while Robin grew quiet.

Before me as I write is an exact copy. Not a line will be altered, not a comma. But I would ask those who read to visualize the circumstances under which we first read that poor madman's closely guarded secret, with the writer himself beside us and the gulls screaming discordantly over our heads.

It started without preamble:

I AM going mad. I, Robin Caxton Gaunt, believe that I shall shortly lose my reason. The wound inflicted on me in my rooms in London, the daily torture I am subjected to, and above all the final unbelievable atrocity which I saw committed with my own eyes, and for which I feel a terrible personal responsibility, are undermin-

ing my brain. I have some rudimentary medical knowledge; I know how tiny is the dividing line between sanity and madness. And I have been seeing things lately that are not there and hearing things that do not exist.

It was in the summer that the idea first came to me of inventing a weapon so frightful that its mere existence would stop war. At first it seemed a wildly fanciful notion, but the more I thought of it, the more the idea gripped me. Quite by chance, in July, when I was stopping in Scotland playing golf, I met a man called David Ganton—an Australian—whose two sons had been killed in Gallipoli.

He was immensely wealthy—a multimillionaire—and rather to my surprise, when I mentioned my idea to him casually one evening, he waxed enthusiastic over it. To him, war was as abhorrent as it was to me; and he, like I, was doubtful as to the efficacy of the League of Nations. He immediately placed at my disposal a large sum of money for research work and told me that I could call on him for any further amount I required.

At last I solved the problem. I had in my laboratory a liquid so perfectly blended that two or three drops touching the skin meant instantaneous death.

Then came the second great difficulty—distribution. The tank scheme, however effective it might have been when a war was actually raging, was clearly an impossibility in such circumstances as I contemplated. Something far more sudden, far more mobile was essential.

Airplanes had great disadvantages. Their lifting power was limited; they were unable to hover; they were noisy.

Then there came to my mind the so-called silent raid on London during the war, when a fleet of Zeppelins drifted downwind over the capital with their engines shut off. Was that the solution?

THERE were disadvantages there too: First and foremost—vulnerability. Silent raids by night were not my idea of the function of a world policeman. But by day an airship is a comparatively easy thing to hit; and once hit she comes down in flames.

The solution to that was obvious—helium. Instead of with hydrogen, she would be filled with the noninflammable gas, helium.

Which brought me to the second difficulty—expense. Hydrogen can be produced by a comparatively cheap process—the electrolysis of water; helium is rare and costly.

I met Ganton in London and told him my ideas. His enthusiasm was unbounded; the question of expense he waved aside as a trifle.

"That's my side of the business, Gaunt, leave that to me. You've done your part; I'll do the rest."

Then as if it was the most normal thing in the world he calmly announced his intention of having a rigid dirigible constructed of the Zeppelin type. He got one, then made the acquaintance of a man called Wilmot, who deceived Ganton completely.

On the night of April twenty-seventh, a ghastly tragedy occurred in my rooms in Kensington—a tragedy for which I have been universally blamed.

I will put down the truth of what happened in my rooms that night. I had never seen Wilmot, but I know that he was coming round with Ganton to see the demonstration. Ganton had written me to that effect and so I was expecting them both. Wilmot proved to be a big, thickset man, clean shaven, and with hair graying a little over the temples. His eyes were steady and compelling; the instant you looked at him you realized that his was a dominating personality.

I let them both in myself—Mrs. Rogers, my landlady, being stone deaf—and took them at once up to my

room. I was the only lodger in the house at the time.

Wilmot professed to be keenly interested and stated that he regarded it as an honor to be allowed to be present at such an epoch-making event. Then briefly I told them how matters stood. Since I had perfected the poison, I had spent my time in searching for an antidote; a month previously I had discovered one. It was not an antidote in the accepted sense of the word, in that it was of no use if applied *after* the poison.

It consisted of an ointment containing a drug which neutralized not the poison, but the blister. So that if it was rubbed into the skin *before* the application of the poison, the blister failed to act, and the poison—not being applied subcutaneously—was harmless. I pointed out that it was for additional security, though the special India-rubber gloves and overalls I had were ample protection.

Wilmot was interested in the matter of the antidote.

Then I showed them the special syringes and cisterns I had designed, more out of curiosity than anything else, for our plan did not include any close range work.

He was interested—very interested in those—was that devil Wilmot.

Then I experimented on two guinea pigs. The first I killed with the poison; the second I saved with the precious antidote.

"Most interesting," remarked Wilmot. He went to the window and threw it up. "The smell is rather powerful," he continued, leaning out for a moment. Then he closed the window again and came back; he had signaled to his brother devils outside before our very eyes and we didn't guess it. Why should we have? We had no suspicions of him.

"And to-morrow you demonstrate to the war office?" he asked.

"I have an appointment at ten thirty," I told him.

"And no one save us three at present knows anything about it?"

"No one," I said. "And even you two don't know the composition of the poison or of the antidote."

"But, presumably, given samples it would be easy to analyze them both."

"The antidote, yes—the poison, no," I remarked. "The poison is a secret known only to me, though, of course, I propose to tell you. I take it that there will be no secrets between us three."

"None, I hope," he answered. "We are all engaged on the same great work."

JUST then a stair creaked outside. As Mrs. Rogers slept downstairs she rarely if ever came up at that hour. So almost unconsciously, certainly suspecting nothing, I went to the door and opened it. What happened then is still a somewhat confused blur in my mind.

Standing just outside the door were two men. One was the man whom I afterwards got to know as Doctor Helias; the other I never saw again till he was carried in dead to the cellar where they confined me.

I heard a sudden cry behind me and there was Ganton struggling desperately with Wilmot. In Wilmot's hand was a syringe filled with the poison and he was snarling like a brute beast. For a second I stood there stupefied; then it seemed to me we all sprang forward together—I to Ganton's assistance, the two others to Wilmot's. And after that I'm not clear. I know that I found myself fighting desperately with the second man, while out of the corner of my eye I saw Wilmot, Helias and Ganton go crashing through the open door.

"Telephone Stockton!"

It was Ganton's voice and I fought my way to the instrument. I was

stronger than my opponent and I hurled him to the floor, half stunning him. It was Stockton's number that came first to my head and I just got through to him. I found out from the papers that he heard me, for he came down at once, but as for me I know no more.

I can still see Helias springing at me from the door with something in his hand that gleamed in the light; then I received a fearful blow in the face. And after that all is blank. It wasn't till later that I found out that little Joe —my terrier—had sprung barking at Wilmot as he came back into the room and had been killed with what was left of the poison, after Ganton had been murdered in the next room.

How long afterward it was before I recovered consciousness I cannot say. I found myself in a dimly lighted stone-floored room which I took to be a cellar. Where it was, I know not to this day. At first I could not remember anything. My head was splitting and I barely had the strength to lift a hand. The cause of my weakness was the wound inflicted on me by Helias; at the time I could only lie in a kind of stupor in which hours were as minutes and minutes as days.

Then out of confusion came an idea —vague at first, but growing in clearness as time went on. I was still in evening clothes, and in the pockets of my dinner jacket I had placed the two samples—the bottle containing the poison and the box full of the antidote. Were they still there? I felt, and they were.

Would it be possible to hide them somewhere in the hope of them being found by the police? If they were found, then my own country would be in the possession of the secret, too.

But where to hide them? I was too weak to stand, much less walk, so the hiding place would have to be one which I could reach from where I sat. Just then I noticed, because my hand was resting on the ground, that some of the bricks in the floor were loose.

I know now that the hiding place was discovered by the authorities. Was it my handkerchief, I wonder, on which I scrawled the clew with my finger? But why did they lose the antidote? Why didn't they guard John Dallas? He was murdered by Wilmot. He was murdered by that devil—that devil—— I must be calm. But the noises are roaring in my head; they always do when I think that it was all in vain.

I buried the two things under two bricks and I pushed the handkerchief into a crack in the wall behind me. Then I think I must have slept—for the next thing I remember was the door of the cellar opening and men coming in, carrying another in their arms. They pitched him down in a corner, and I saw he was dead. Then I looked closer, and I saw it was the man I had fought with at the telephone.

But how had he died? Why did his eyes stare so horribly? Why was he so rigid?

It was Helias who told me—he had followed the two others in.

"Well, Mr. Pacifist," he remarked, "do you like the effects of your poison? That man died of it."

Until my reason snaps, which can't be long now, I shall never forget the horror of that moment. It was the first time I had seen the result of my handiwork on a human being. Since then I have seen it often—but that first time, in the dim light of the cellar, is the one that haunts me.

For a while I could think of nothing else; those eyes seemed to curse me. I think I screamed at them to turn his head away. I know that Helias came over and kicked me in the ribs.

"Shut that noise!" he snarled. "We've got quite enough to worry us as it is, without your help. I'll gag you if you make another sound."

Then he turned to the two others.

"That fool has brought the police into the next house," he raved, and wild hope sprang up in my mind. "That means we must get these two out of it to-night. Get his clothes."

One of the men went out, to come back almost at once with some raiment of mine.

I THINK I must have become unconscious again; I have no coherent recollection of anything for the next few hours. Dimly I remember being put into a big motor car, seeing fields and houses flash past. I was taken somewhere in the country, and there were big trees around the house. Otherwise, I can give no description of the house in which I was kept a prisoner for the next few weeks.

One night, when I was feeling desperate, I determined to chance things. I flashed my electric light on and off, hoping possibly to attract the attention of some passer-by. Two minutes later Helias came into the room. I had not seen him since the night in the cellar, and at first I did not recognize him, for he had shaved his face clean.

"You would, would you?" he said softly. "Signaling! How foolish! No one can see. But you obviously need a lesson."

He called to another man and between them they slung me up to a hook in the wall by my feet, so that I hung head downward. After a while the pressure on the partially healed wound on my face became so terrible that I thought my head would burst.

"Don't be so stupid another time," he remarked, as they cut me down. "If you do, I'll have your window boarded up."

They left me, and in my weakness I sobbed like a child. Had I had any, I would have killed myself then and there with my own poison. But I hadn't, and they took care to see that I had no weapon which could take its place. I wasn't allowed to shave; I wasn't even allowed a steel knife with my meals.

The days dragged on into weeks, and weeks into months, and still nothing happened. Then one day—I'd almost lost count of time, but it was in June—the door of my room opened and Helias came in, followed by Wilmot.

"You certainly hit him pretty hard, doctor," said Wilmot, after he'd looked at me for some time. "Well, Mr. Gaunt—been happy and comfortable?"

"You devil!" I burst out, and then, maddened by his mocking smile, I cursed and raved at him till I was out of breath.

"Quite finished?" he asked, when I stopped. "I'm in no particular hurry, and, as I can easily understand a slight feeling of annoyance on your part, please don't mind me. Say it all over again if it comforts you in any way."

"What do you want?" I said, almost choking with sullen rage.

"Ah, that's better! Will you have a cigar? No. Then you won't mind if I do. The time has come, Mr. Gaunt," he went on, "when you must make a little return for the kindness we have shown you in keeping you alive. For a while I was undecided as to whether I would dispose of you like your lamented confrère, Mr. Ganton, but finally I determined to keep you with us."

"So Ganton is dead," I said. "You murdered him that night."

"Yes," he agreed. "As you say, I killed him that night. As I wanted the airship and not Mr. Ganton, the inference is obvious. You've no idea, Mr. Gaunt, how enormously it simplifies matters when you can get other people to pay for what you want yourself.

"In addition to that," Wilmot went on quietly, "the late Mr. Ganton presented me with an idea. And ideas are my stock in trade. For twenty years now I have lived by turning ideas into deeds, and though I have accumulated

a modest pittance I have not yet got enough to retire on. I trust that with the help of Mr. Ganton's idea—elaborated somewhat by me—I shall be able to spend my declining years in the comfort to which I consider myself entitled."

"I don't understand what you're talking about," I muttered stupidly. "What is it you want me to do?"

"First, you will move from here to other quarters which have been got ready for you. Not quite so comfortable, perhaps, but I trust they will do. Then you will take in hand the manufacture of your poison on a large scale, a task for which you are peculiarly fitted. A plant has been installed which may perhaps need a little alteration under your expert eye; anything of that sort will be attended to at once. You have only to ask."

"But what do you want the poison for?" I inquired.

HE smiled. "It is for me, Mr. Gaunt, and I am cosmopolitan. But you need have no fears on that score! I am aware of the charming ideal that actuated you and Mr. Ganton, but, believe me, my dear young friend, there's no money in it."

"It was never a question of money!" I cried.

"I know." His voice was almost pained. "That is what struck me as being so incredible about it all. And that is where my elaboration comes in. Now, there is money in it; very big money if things work out, as I have every reason to hope they will."

"And what if I refuse?" I said.

He studied the ash on the end of his cigar.

"In the course of the twenty years I have already mentioned, Mr. Gaunt," he returned, "I wouldn't like to say how many people have made that remark to me. And the answer has become monotonous with repetition. Latterly one of your celebrated politicians has given me an alternative reply, which I will now give to you. Wait and see. We've been very kind to you, Gaunt, up to date. You gave me a lot of trouble over that box of antidote which you hid in the cellar, though I realized that it was partially my fault in not remembering sooner that you had it in your pocket. In fact, I had to dispose of an eminent savant, Sir John Dallas, in order to get hold of it."

"Then the authorities got it!" I almost shouted.

"Only to lose it again, I regret to say. By the way"—he leaned forward suddenly in his chair—"do you know a man called Drummond—Captain Hugh Drummond?"

[From beside me as I read, Drummond heaved a deep sigh of joy.

"It is Peterson," he said. "That proves it, Go on, Stockton."]

"Hugh Drummond! No, I've never heard of the man. But do you mean to say you murdered Sir John?"

"Dear me! That word again! Yes, Sir John failed to see reason—so it was necessary to dispose of him. Your omission of the formula for the antidote on the paper containing that of the poison has deprived the world, I regret to state, of an eminent scientist. However, during the sea voyage which you are shortly going to take I will see that you have an opportunity of perusing the daily papers of that date. They should interest you, because really, you know, your discovery of this poison has had the most far-reaching results. Still, if you will give me these ideas——"

He rose, shrugging his shoulders.

"Am I to be taken abroad?" I cried.

"You are not," he answered curtly. "You will remain in England. And if I may give you one word of warning, Mr. Gaunt, it is this: I require your services on one or two matters and I intend to have your services. And my earnest advice to you is that you should

give that service willingly. It will save me trouble, and you—discomfort."

With that they left me, if possible more completely bewildered than before.

It was two days later that Helias entered the room and told me to get ready.

"You are going in a car," he said, "and I am going with you. If you make the slightest endeavor to communicate or signal to any one, I shall gag you and truss you up on the floor."

And that brings me to the point—eyes, those ghastly staring eyes! And the woman screaming! My head——

AT this point the narrative as a narrative breaks off. It is continued in the form of a diary. But it has given rise to much conjecture. Personally I think the matter is clear. I believe that "head" was the last coherent word written by Robin Gaunt. The rest of the sheet is covered with meaningless scrawls and blots. I think that at that point the poor chap's reason gave. How comes it then that the diary records events which occurred after he had been taken away in the motor car? To me the solution is clear. The diary, though its chronological position comes after the narrative given above, was actually written first.

CHAPTER XXI.

FURTIVE NOTES.

THE diary of Robin Gaunt was evidently written quickly, furtively. It follows:

I am on board a ship. She is filling with oil now from a tanker alongside. No lights. No idea where we are. Thought the country we motored through resembled Devonshire.

They're Russians—the crew—unless I'm much mistaken. The most frightful gang of murderous-looking cutthroats I've ever seen. Two of them fighting now; officers seem to have no control. Difficult to tell which are the officers. Believe my worst fears confirmed: the bolsheviks have my secret.

The murderers! The foul murderers! There was a wretched woman on board and these devils have killed her. They pushed her in suddenly to the cabin where I was sitting. She was terrified with fear, poor soul. The most harmelss little, short, fat woman. English. They hustled her through—three of them—and she screamed to me to help her. But what could I do? Two more of the crew appeared and one of them clapped his hand over her mouth. They took her on deck—and with my own eyes I saw them throw her overboard. It was dark, and she disappeared at once. She just gave one pitiful cry—then silence. Are they going to do the same to me?

It is incomprehensible. There must be at least fifty rubber suits on board, with cisterns and everything complete for short-range work with my poison. An officer took me to see them and one of the men put one on.

"Good?" asked the officer, looking at me.

I wouldn't answer, and a man behind me stuck a bayonet into my back.

"Good now?" snarled the officer.

I nodded. Oh, for a chance to be on equal terms!

Thank Heaven, I am on shore again! They dragged me up on deck and I thought it was the end. A boat was alongside, and they put me in it. Then some sailors rowed me away. It was dark, and the boom of breakers on rocks grew louder and louder. At last we reached a little cove, and high above me I could see the cliffs. The boat was heaving, and then the man in charge switched on an electric torch. It flashed on the end of a rope ladder dangling in front of us and swaying perilously as the swell lapped it and then receded.

He signed to me to climb up it, and when I hesitated for a moment he struck me in the face with his boat hook. So I jumped and caught the ladder, and immediately the boat was rowed away, leaving me hanging precariously. Then a wave dashed me against the cliff, half stunning me, and I started to climb. An ordeal even for a fit man. Exhausted when I reached the top. I found myself in a cave hewn out of granite. And Helias was waiting for me.

"Your quarters," he said. "And no monkey tricks."

They are ready to manufacture my poison, but I won't help!

Dear God! I didn't know such things were known to man! Four days—four centuries. Don't judge me—I tried, but the entrance was guarded.

[In the original this fragment was almost illegible. Poor devil—who would judge him? Certainly not I, John Stockton. Who can even dimly guess the refinements of exquisite torture they brought to bear on him in that lonely Cornish cave? I like to think that behind that last sentence lies his final desperate attempt to outwit them by hurling himself onto the rocks below. "But the entrance was guarded."]

IT is made. And now that it is made, what are they going to do with it? They've let me alone since I yielded, but my conscience never leaves me alone. Night and day, night and day, it calls me "coward." I am a coward.

Should I have ended it all? It would have been so easy. It would be so easy now. One touch, one finger in the tank, and everything finished. But surely, sooner or later, this place must be discovered. I lie and look out over the gray sea, and sometimes on the far horizon there comes the smoke of a passing vessel.

Things are going to happen. There's a light at sea—signaling. Is it the ship, I wonder? They're letting down the pipe from the cave above me. It's flat calm; there is hardly a murmur from the sea below.

Six thousand feet below me gleams the Atlantic; I am on board the dirigible that Wilmot murdered Ganton to obtain. I have locked my cabin door; I hope for a few hours to be undisturbed. And so, while the unbelievable thing that has happened is fresh in my mind, I will put it down on paper.

[This final portion of Robin Gaunt's diary was written in pencil in much the same ordered and connected way as the first part of his narrative. It shows no trace of undue excitement in the handwriting, nor does it show any mental aberration as far as the phraseology is concerned.]

I will start from the moment when I saw the signal from the sea. The pipe was hanging down the cliff, and after a while there came a whistle from below. Almost at once I heard the gurgle of liquid in the pipe; evidently poison from the tank was being lowered to some one below. Another whistle and the gurgling ceased. Then came the noise of oars; the pipe was drawn up and for some time nothing more happened.

It was about half an hour later that Helias appeared and told me to come with him. I went to the main living room, where I found Wilmot and a man whom I recognized as having seen on board. They were talking earnestly together and poring over a chart that lay between them on the table.

"The first port of call is the Azores," I heard Wilmot say.

The other man nodded and pricked a point on the chart.

"That's the spot," he said. "A bit west of the Union Castle route."

Just then I became aware of the faint drone of an engine. It sounded like an airplane, and Wilmot rose.

"Then that settles everything. Now I want to see how this part works."

He glanced at me as I stood there listening to the noise, which by this time seemed almost overhead. "One frequently has little hitches the first time one does a thing, Mr. Gaunt. You will doubtless be able to benefit from any that may occur when you proceed yourself to stop the next war."

They all laughed and I made no answer.

"Let's go and watch," said Wilmot, glancing at his watch. "I'll just time it, I think."

We approached the tank, and then to my amazement I saw that there was a large open space in the roof through which I could see the stars. Even as I stared upward they were blotted out by a huge shape that drifted slowly across the opening, so low down that it seemed on top of us.

"The dirigible that Mr. Ganton so kindly bought for me," said Wilmot genially. "As I say, it is the first time we have done this, and I feel a little pardonable excitement."

NOW the huge vessel above us was stationary, her engines going just sufficiently to keep her motionless in the light sea breeze. As I stared at her, fascinated, something hit the side of the wooden house with a thud. A man clad in one of the rubber suits who was standing on the roof slipped forward and caught the end of a pipe similar to the one in the cave. This he dropped carefully into the tank.

"Ingenious, don't you think, Mr. Gaunt?" said Wilmot. "We now pump up your liquid into the ballast tanks, at the same time discharging water to compensate for weight. You will see that by keeping one tank permanently empty there is always room for your poison to be taken on board. When the first empty tank is filled, another has been emptied of water and is ready."

I hardly listened to him; I was too occupied in watching the level of the liquid fall in the gauge of the tank, too occupied in wondering what was the object of it all.

"Twelve minutes," he remarked as the pump above began to suck air in the tank. "Not so bad. We will now go on board."

Swinging above us was a thing that looked like a cage, which had evidently been let down from the airship. In a moment or two it came to rest on the roof and Wilmot beckoned to me to go up the steps.

"Room for us both," he said.

He took me into the dining cabin, and a woman was there. She was smoking a cigarette and I saw she was very beautiful. She stared at me with a sort of languid interest; then she made some remark to Wilmot at which he laughed.

"Our friend Helias has a strong right arm," he remarked. "Well, Gaunt—very soon now your curiosity is going to be satisfied. Have you ever heard of Mr. Cosmo Miller?"

"I have not," I replied.

"He is an American multimillionaire and at the moment he is some forty miles ahead of us in his yacht. If you look through that telescope, you will be able to see her.

"A charming boat—the *Hermione*," he went on "It goes against the grain to sink her."

"To do what?" I gasped.

"Sink her, my dear Gaunt. She is, one might say, your war. She is also the trial run to give us practice for other and bigger game."

I stared at him speechlessly; surely he must be jesting.

"But, good God!" I burst out. "You can't mean it. What is going to happen to the people on board?"

"They are going to sink with her," he replied, getting up and looking through the telescope.

A man came into the cabin, and Wilmot swung round.

"No message been sent yet, chief."

Wilmot nodded and dismissed him.

Half a mile ahead of us lay the yacht, steaming slowly ahead. The passengers were lining the rail, staring up at us, and in a few seconds we had come so close that I could see the flutter of their pocket handkerchiefs.

"Come with me, Gaunt!" snapped Wilmot. "Now comes the business. My dear, you stay here."

He rushed me along the main corridor till we came to one of the central ballast tanks. The engines were hardly running, and I realized that we must be directly over the yacht and just keeping pace with her. Two men clad in rubber suits stood by the tank; two others were by the corresponding tank on the opposite side of the gangway.

Wilmot himself was peering into an instrument set close by the first tank, and I saw a duplicate by the second. I went to it and found it was an arrangement of mirrors based on the periscope idea; by looking into it I saw directly below the airship.

Of the next ten minutes how can I tell? Straight underneath us—not a hundred feet below—lay the yacht. Every one—guests, crew, servants—were peering up at the great airship, which must have seemed to fill the entire sky. Then Wilmot gave an order. Two levers were pulled back, and the rain of death began to fall. The rain that I had invented!

I SAW a woman who had been waving at us fall backward on the deck and lie there rigid, her face turned up toward us. A man rushed forward to her help; he never reached her. The poison got him first. All over the deck it was the same. Men and women ran screaming to and fro, only to crash forward suddenly and lie still as the death rain went on falling. I saw three colored men, their black faces incongruous against their white ducks. They had rushed out at the sound of the pandemonium on deck, and with one accord, as if they had been poleaxed simultaneously, they died. I saw a man in uniform shaking his fist at us. He only shook it once, poor devil.

Then as if from a great distance I heard Wilmot's voice: "Enough."

Stumbling blindly, I went back to the central cabin. The girl was still there, staring out of the window, and I think I screamed foolish curses at her. She took no notice; she was watching something through a pair of glasses.

"Quite well timed," she remarked, as Wilmot entered "She's only about a mile off."

I looked and saw a vessel tearing through the water toward us, coming to the rendezvous of death.

"I would never have believed," said Wilmot, "that with her lines she would be capable of such speed."

Then he turned to me.

"Put on that suit," he ordered curtly. "We're going down on deck."

The deck was wringing wet; the smell of the poison lay heavy in the air. Again and again I asked myself what was the meaning of this senseless outrage? I didn't know then of the incredible wealth of the wretched people who had been killed, of the marvelous jewels that were on board.

The other vessel lay alongside; a dozen of the crew, clothed in rubber suits, had come on board the yacht. It was the ruthless efficiency of it all that staggered me; they worked like drilled soldiers. One by one they carried the bodies below and piled them into cabins. When a cabin was full, they shut the door. They damped down the stoke-room fires; they blew off what head of steam remained. They stove in the four ship's boats and sunk them; they moved every single thing that would float and put it below in such a place that when the ship sank everything would go down with her. All the while the dirigible circled overhead.

AT last Wilmot appeared again. He was carrying a bag, and I saw him signal to the airship. She maneuvered back into position and the cage was lowered onto the deck of the yacht. A minute later we were in the dirigible once more.

"A most satisfactory little experiment," said Wilmot. "We will now examine the spoils more closely."

Sick with the horror of it all, I stood at the cabin window while he and the woman went over the jewels on the table behind me. We had circled a little away from the yacht, and the other vessel no longer lay alongside but a hundred yards or so away. Suddenly there came a dull boom and the yacht rocked a little on the calm sea.

"A sight, my dear, which I don't think you've ever seen," said Wilmot, and he and the woman came to the window. "A ship sinking."

Slowly the yacht settled down in the water; they had blown a great hole in her bottom. Then at last, with a sluggish lurch, her bows went under and she turned over and sank. For a time the water swirled angrily to mark her grave; then everything grew quiet. No trace remained of their devilish handiwork; the sea had swallowed it up.

"Most satisfactory," repeated Wilmot. "Don't you agree, Gaunt?"

"And you have committed that atrocious crime for those!" I said, pointing at the jewels.

"Not altogether," he answered. "As I told you before, this is merely in the nature of a trial trip. Of course, it's pleasant to have one's expenses paid, but the principal value of this has been practice for bigger game. That is what we are out for, my dear Gaunt—bigger game."

I watched him with a sort of dazed fascination as he lighted a cigar. Then he began to examine through a lens the great heap of precious stones in front of him. After a while the thought began to obsess me that he was not human. His complete air of detachment, his amused comments when he discovered that a beautiful tiara was only paste, above all the languorous indifference of the girl who, only an hour before, had witnessed an act of wholesale murder, made my head spin.

They are devils—both of them—devils in human form and I told them so.

"There now," he said genially, "I am always forgetting that your knowledge of past events is limited. An amusing little story, Gaunt, and one which flatters your powers as a chemist. My men, as you may know, are largely Russians of the lower classes. Docile, good fellows as a general rule, with a strong streak of blind superstition in them.

"I admit that it was with some trepidation—pardonable, I think you will allow—that I put the matter to the test. Of the efficacy of your poison I had no doubt, but with regard to the antidote I had only seen it in action once and then on a guinea pig.

"But the episode in question will, I am sure, interest you. As I had foreseen, some stupid men began to question my authority. It came to my ears that there was a conspiracy to take my life. It is true I had had a man flogged to death, but what is a Russian peasant more or less? Apparently this particular fellow sang folk songs well, or tortured some dreadful musical instrument better than his friends. At any rate, he was popular and his death was a source of annoyance to the others. So, of course, it became necessary to take the matter in hand at once in a way which should restore discipline, and at the same time prevent a recurrence in the future.

"I bethought me of your antidote. 'Here,' said I to myself, 'is an opportunity to test that dear chap Gaunt's excellent ointment in a manner both useful and spectacular.' So I rubbed it well

into my face and hands—even into my hair, Gaunt—and strode like a hero of old into the midst of the malcontents. You perceive the beauty of the idea?

"For a moment they stared at me dumfounded—my sudden appearance had cowed them. And then one of them pulled himself together and discharged a syringe full of the liquid at me. It hit me in the cheek—a most nervous moment, I assure you. I apologize deeply to you now for my qualms; I should have trusted your proven skill better.

"Nothing happened and the men cowered back. I said no word, but step by step I advanced on the miscreant who had dared to try and rob the world of one of its chief adornments. Step by step he retreated till he could retreat no farther. Then I took his hand and laid it on my cheek. And that evening we tied him in a weighted sack and buried him at sea and——"

[At this point Gaunt's narrative breaks off abruptly. Evidently he was interrupted and crammed the papers hurriedly into his pocket. The only other document—the most vital of all—was scrawled almost illegibly on a torn scrap of paper.]

I heard them to-day. They didn't know I was listening. The *Megalithic* with thirty of the gang on board. Attack by night. The bigger game. He will succeed, he is not human. Hydrogen, not helium. Not changed. Sacrifice ship. Fire——

That is all. Those are the papers that we of Drummond's party read sitting on the edge of the cliff with the writer beside us, staring with vacant eyes over the gray sea below. Those were the papers, stumbled on by the merest accident, on which we had to base our plans. Was it true or were we the victims of some gigantic delusion on the part of Gaunt? That was the problem that faced us as the first rays of the early sun lit up Black Mine on the morning of September eighth.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FINAL COUNT.

HOW much of Gaunt's information was true? We had confirmation of much of it with our own eyes. We had seen the pipe lowered over the cliff; we had seen the mysterious signal from the sea. Above all we had seen Wilmot's dirigible actually filling up with the poison. So much, therefore, we knew. But what of the rest?

What of the astounding story of the *Hermione?* Had we discovered the solution of the yacht's disappearance, or had we been wasting our time reading the hallucination of a madman's brain? Had Gaunt—having read in the papers of the loss of the *Hermione*—imagined the scene he had described?

So we reasoned and still could come to no conclusion. It seemed so wildly fantastic, so well-nigh incredible. If those epithets could be used in connection with the *Hermione*, what was to be said concerning the amazing fragment about the *Megalithic?* Even granted for the moment that the description of the loss of the *Hermione* was correct, were we seriously to imagine that the same thing could be done to a great Atlantic liner?

From the very first moment Drummond made up his mind and never changed it.

"It's the truth," he said quietly. "I am convinced of it. The mystery of the *Hermione* is solved. And with regard to the *Megalithic*, it is the truth also."

I suppose he saw my look of incredulity, for he then addressed himself exclusively to me.

"Stockton, ever since the time in Ashworth Gardens, when that woman recognized me, I've known that we were up against Peterson. I've felt it in

every fiber of my being. Now it's proved beyond a shadow of doubt. Whatever may or may not be true in that diary of Gaunt's, that fact is obvious. Wilmot is Peterson; nothing else could account for his asking Gaunt if he knew me."

I was surprised by the gravity of his tones.

"You've asked once or twice about Peterson," he went on, after a while. "But though we've told you a certain amount, to you he is merely a name. To us, and to me particularly, he's rather more than that. That is why I am certain in my own mind that the scrawled message about the *Megalithic* is true. The principal reason for making me think it is true lies in the last few words. That is Peterson all over."

I glanced at the scrap of paper.

"'Hydrogen, not helium,'" I read aloud. "'Not changed. Sacrifice ship. Fire——'"

"You fellows!" Drummond was almost shouting in his excitement. "It's stupendous. Don't you see the tear in the paper there between 'sacrifice' and 'ship?' 'Ship' doesn't refer to the *Megalithic;* the word 'air' has been torn out. It's the airship he is going to sacrifice. It is still full of hydrogen; Peterson wasn't going to the expense of refilling with helium."

He was pacing up and down, his hands in his pockets.

"That's it; I'll swear that's it! It's the Peterson creed. It's the loophole of escape that he always leaves himself. He has decided to attack the *Megalithic*—why, we don't know. Possibly a boatload of American multimillionaires on board. He's got thirty of his own men in the ship and that strange craft of his alongside. Let's suppose the attack is successful.

"The liner disappears, sinks with all hands. Right—there's nothing further to worry about. But supposing it isn't successful! With the best of luck and arrangement it's a pretty big job to tackle—even for Peterson. What's going to happen then?

"In a few seconds the astounding news will be wirelessed all over the world that Wilmot's dirigible is carrying out an act of piracy on the high seas of such unbelievable deviltry that it would make our old pal Captain Hook rotate in his coffin if he heard of it.

"Suppose another thing, too. Suppose it is successful, but that the wireless people in the *Megalithic* manage to get a message through before their gear is put out of action. Peterson gets that message on his own installation. What's he going to do? He may be an institution all right at the moment, but he won't have the mayor and a brass band out to welcome him on his return, once the truth is known.

SO he descends from his airship either into his mysterious vessel, or else onto dry land. We know he can do that. What he does with the crew is immaterial. Probably leaves them with a few ripe and fruity instructions and a bomb timed to explode a little later. So Wilmot's dirigible pays the just retribution for an astounding and diabolical crime, while Wilmot himself retires to Monte Carlo on the proceeds thereof.

"It's what he has always said; there's nothing like dying to put people off the scent. No police in the world are going to bother to look for the blighter if they think he is a perfectly good corpse in his own burned-out airship. It's a pity in a way," he concluded regretfully, "a great pity; I should have liked to deal with him personally."

"Well, why not?" asked Jerningham.

"It's too big altogether, Ted," answered Drummond. "I never mind chancing a certain amount without MacIver, but I don't think we'd be justified this time. The consequences of failure would be too appalling. Let's

dump the sentries inside the hut and then push off and have some breakfast. After that, we'll make for London and MacIver. Whatever is believed or is not believed, there's one thing that Peterson is going to find it hard to explain. Why are his ballast tanks full of Gaunt's poison?"

So we carried the men who still lay bound and gagged into the wooden hut.

"What on earth are we going to do with Gaunt?" I asked.

"Well, since the poor bloke is bug house, I suppose we'll have to stuff him in a home or something. Anyway, that comes later; the first thing is to lead him to an egg or possibly a kipper. We can pretend he's eccentric, if the staff becomes alarmed when they see him."

So we returned to the hotel, which I certainly had never expected to see again.

Sleep! I wanted it almost more than food; sleep and something to get rid of the racking headache which the fumes of that foul liquid had produced.

"Good Lord!" Drummond's startled exclamation roused us all. He was staring at a newspaper.

"What's the day of the week?"

"Thursday," answered some one sleepily.

"Look here, you fellows," he said gravely, "pull yourselves together and wake up. The *Megalithic* sails to-day from Liverpool for New York."

We woke up all right at that, and his next remark completed the arousing process.

"To-day, mark you—carrying thirty million in bullion on board."

"Instantaneous, universal death!" babbled Gaunt, but we paid no attention.

We just sat there—all ideas of sleep banished—staring at Drummond.

"They must be warned," he said decisively. "Even at the risk of making ourselves look complete and utter fools. The *Megalithic* must be wirelessed."

He put his hand into his pocket and pulled out some letters.

"Give me a pencil; I'll scribble down a message."

Suddenly he broke off and sat looking blankly at something he held.

"Well I'm damned!" he muttered. "I'd forgotten all about that. To-night is the night of Wilmot's Celebrated Farewell Gala Night Trip. Somebody sent me two complimentary tickets for it. Couldn't think who'd done it or why. Phyllis was keen on going."

ONCE more he fell silently as he stared at the two tickets.

"I've got it now," he said at length, and his voice was ominously quiet. "Yes—I've got it all now. Peterson sent me those two tickets and there's no need to ask why."

He turned to the girl who was putting the breakfast on the table.

"How long will it take to get through to London on the telephone? Anyway, I must do it. Get me Mayfair 3XI. Now then, you fellows—food. And after that we'll drive to London as even the old Hispano has never moved before."

"What are you ringing up Algy for?" asked Darrell.

"I want four more tickets for to-night's trip. And above all I want some of that antidote. Peterson is not the only man who can play that particular game."

"What about wirelessing the *Megalithic?*" I asked.

He looked at me with a queer smile.

"No necessity now, Stockton. If there is one thing in this world that is certain beyond all others, it is that Wilmot's dirigible will be at the aërodrome when we get back to London. For I venture to think—without undue conceit—that there is one desire in Mr. Wilmot's heart that runs even the possession of thirty million fairly close. And that desire is my death."

I stared at him incredulously, but he was perfectly serious.

"Had I not known that he was going to be there," Drummond went on, "it would have been imperative to warn the *Megalithic*. Now, the situation is different. If we wireless, don't forget that he will get the message. We warn him equally with the ship."

"Yes, but even so," I objected, "dare we run the risk?"

"There is no risk," replied Drummond calmly. "Now that I know who Wilmot is—there is no risk. And tonight I'm going to have my final settlement with the gentleman."

He would say no more; all the way back to London when he drove like a man possessed with ten devils he hardly opened his lips. Sitting beside him, busy with my own thoughts, the spell of his extraordinary personality began to obsess me Never had he seemed so completely sure of himself—so absolutely confident.

THE thing that baffled me was why Wilmot should waste time. Granted that Drummond's theory was correct and that after having attacked the *Megalithic* the airship was to come down in flames, why fool around with a two or three-hour sky cruise beforehand?

Drummond smiled at my remarks.

"Why of necessity should you assume that it's going to be three hours wasted? You don't imagine that a man like Peterson would consider it necessary to return to the aërodrome and deposit his passengers?"

"But, great Scott, man!" I exploded. "He can't carry out an attack on the *Megalithic* with fifty complete strangers on board his airship."

"Can't he? Why not? Once granted that he's going to carry out the attack at all, I don't see that fifty or a hundred and fifty strangers would matter. You seem to forget that an integral part of his plan is that none of them should return alive to tell the tale."

"It's inconceivable that such a man can exist," I said.

"He's mother's bright boy all right, is Carl Peterson," agreed Drummond. "I confess that I'm distinctly curious to see what is going to happen tonight."

"But surely, Drummond," I said, "we're not justified in going through with this. An inspection of his ballast tanks will prove the presence of the poison. Then the matter passes into the hands of Scotland Yard."

"I'm perfectly aware that that is what we ought to do," he returned gravely. "Moreover, it is what we would do if it were possible."

"But why isn't it possible?" I cried.

"Think, man," he answered. "At a liberal estimate we shall have an hour in which to change and get to the aërodrome. If we puncture a tire, we shan't have as much. Let us suppose that during that hour we can persuade MacIver and Co. that we are not mad. What is going to happen then? MacIver appears at the aërodrome with a bunch of his pals and attempts to board the airship. Peterson, who can spot MacIver a mile off, either sheers off at once in his dirigible, leaving MacIver dancing a hornpipe on the ground, or what is just as likely, lets him come on board and then murders him.

"Don't you see, Stockton, the one fundamental factor of the whole thing is that that airship is never going to return? I've thought it over and I'm convinced that our best chance is to let his plans go on as he has arranged them. It won't seem strange to him that I turn up; he'll merely assume that I've utilized the ticket he sent me in utter ignorance of who he is. And then——"

"Yes," I said curiously, as he paused. "And then—what?"

"Why, just one thing. The one vital

thing, Stockton, which knocks the bottom out of his entire scheme. If we're right, and I know we're right, his whole plan depends on his ability to leave the airship. And he's not going to leave the airship."

"For all that," I argued, "he may cause the most ghastly damage to the *Megalithic*."

"I think not," said Drummond quietly. "I've made out a rough time-table and this is how I see it. He plans to attack her somewhere off the south coast of Ireland, probably in the early hours of to-morrow morning. Long before that the guests will have realized that something is wrong. The instant that occurs, he will show his hand and matters will come to a head. One way or another it will be all over by eleven o'clock."

"It's an awful risk we're running!" I muttered.

"And an unavoidable one," he returned. "There's not a human being in England who would not believe us to be absolutely crazy if we told them what we know. So that any possibility of preventing people going on board that airship to-night may be ruled out of court at once."

IT was half past five when we arrived and we found Algy Longworth waiting for us at Drummond's house.

"Done everything you told me, old lad," he cried cheerfully. "They thought I was mad at the war house. Great Scott!" he broke off suddenly as he saw Gaunt. "Who's your new pal?"

"Doesn't matter about him, Algy. You've got the antidote?"

"A bucket of it, old boy."

"And you've got four tickets for Wilmot's dirigible this evening?"

"Got 'em at Keith and Prowse. What is the fun and laughter?"

"Peterson, Algy. Our one and only Carl! He's Wilmot."

Algy Longworth stared at him incredulously.

"My dear old bird," he said at length, "you're pulling my leg."

"Wilmot is Carl Peterson, Algy. Of that there is no shadow of doubt. And that's why you've got four tickets. We renew our acquaintance to-night."

"Good Lord! Well, the tickets are a tenner each, including dinner, and I got the last. So we must get our money's worth."

"You'll get that all right," said Drummond grimly. "Have you brought everybody's clothes round? Good. Get changed, you fellows, we start at six."

We started at six, leaving Denny in charge of Robin. Each of us had in his pocket a pot of the antidote and a revolver and no one talked very much. Drummond, his face set like granite, stared at the road in front of him. Algy Longworth polished and repolished his eyeglass ceaselessly.

The evening was calm and still as we motored into the aërodrome. Great flaring arc lights lit up everything with the brightness of day, while above our heads attached to the mooring mast floated the graceful vessel, no longer dark and sinister as we had seen her the night before, but a blaze of light from bow to stern.

She was due to start at seven o'clock and at ten minutes to the hour we stepped out of the lift at the top of the mast into the main corridor of the dirigible. Everywhere the vessel was gayly decorated with festoons of brightly colored paper and fairy lights. In the first of the big cabins ahead we caught a glimpse of a crowd of fashionably dressed women gathered round a thickset, good-looking man in evening clothes. Mr. Wilmot was welcoming his guests.

"Is that Peterson?" I whispered to Drummond.

He laughed shortly.

"Do you mean—do I recognize him? No, I don't. I never have yet, by looking at his face. But it's Peterson all right."

He was handing his coat and hat to a diminutive black boy in a bright-red uniform and I glanced at his face. A faint smile was hovering round his lips, but his eyes were expressionless. Even the smile vanished as he strolled toward the group in the anteroom; he was just the ordinary society man attending some function.

Drummond now had turned away and was chatting with some one he knew, but I noticed that he continually edged nearer and nearer to the place where Wilmot was standing a little apart from the others. At last he stopped in front of them and gracefully bowed.

"Good evening, duchess," Drummond remarked. "Why aren't you slaughtering birds up north?"

"How are you, Hugh? Same thing applied to you By the way—do you know Mr. Wilmot—Captain Drummond?"

The two men bowed and Jerningham and I drew closer I know my hands were clammy with excitement and I don't think the others were in much better condition.

"Your last trip, Mr. Wilmot, I believe," said Drummond.

"That is so," answered the other "In England, I regret to say, the weather is so treacherous that after the early part of September flying ceases to be a pleasure."

"He has got some wonderful surprise for us, Hugh," said the duchess.

"Merely a trifling souvenir, my dear duchess," remarked Wilmot suavely.

"Of what has become quite an institution, Mr. Wilmot," put in Drummond.

Wilmot bowed.

"I had hoped perhaps to have made it even more of an institution," he returned. "But the public takes to new things slowly. Ah, we're off!"

"And what," asked Drummond, "is our course to-night?"

"I thought we would do the Thames Valley. Duchess—a cocktail?"

A waiter with a row of exquisite glasses containing an amber liquid was handing her a tray.

"Captain Drummond? You, I'm sure, will have one."

"Why certainly, Mr. Wilmot. I feel confident that what the duchess drinks is safe for me."

Once again the eyes of the two men met.

DELIBERATELY Drummond introduced the Robin Gaunt mystery and of the fate of the *Hermione*. Just as deliberately Wilmot discussed them both. But all the time he knew and we knew that things were moving inexorably toward their appointed end. And what was that end going to be?

At last dinner was over and a sudden silence fell as Wilmot rose to his feet. A burst of applause greeted him and he bowed with a faint smile.

"Your grace." he began, "ladies and gentlemen. It is, believe me, not only a pleasure but an honor to have had such a distinguished company to-night to celebrate this last trip in my airship. I am no believer in long speeches, certainly not on occasions of this sort. But, before distributing the small souvenirs which I have obtained as a memento of this—I trust I may say—pleasant evening, there is one thing which as loyal subjects of our gracious sovereign it is our duty to perform. Before requesting the distinguished officer on my right"—he bowed to Drummond, and suddenly with a queer thrill I noticed that Drummond's face was shining like an actor's with grease paint—"to propose his majesty's health, I would like to mention one fact.

"The liqueur in which I would ask

you to drink the king," he went on, "is one unknown in this country. It is an old Chinese wine, the secret of which is known only to a certain sect of monks. Its taste is not unpleasant, but its novelty will lie in the fact that you are drinking what only two Europeans have ever drunk before. One of those is dead—not I hasten to assure you as a result of drinking it—the other myself. I will now ask Captain Drummond to propose the king."

In front of each of us had been placed a tiny glass containing a few drops of the liqueur and Drummond rose to his feet, as did all of us.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said mechanically, and I could tell he was puzzled, "the king!"

The band struck up the national anthem and we stood there waiting for the end. Suddenly on Drummond's face there flashed a look of horror and he swung round, staring at Wilmot. Then came his mighty shout, drowning the band with its savage intensity.

"Don't drink! For God's sake—don't drink! It's death!"

UNCONSCIOUSLY I sniffed the contents of my glass, smelled that strange sickly scent, realized that the liquid was Gaunt's poison.

The band stopped abruptly and a woman started to laugh hysterically. Still Drummond and Wilmot stared at one another in silence while the great vessel drove on throbbing through the night.

"What's all this damned foolery?" came in angry tones from a red-faced man halfway down the table. "You're frightening the women, sir. What do you mean—death?"

He raised the glass to his lips and before any of us could stop him he drained it. Drinking it, he crashed forward across the table—dead.

Still Drummond and Wilmot stared at one another in silence.

"The doors, you fellows," Drummond's voice reached us above the din. "And line up the servants and keep them covered."

With a snarl that was scarcely human, Wilmot sprang forward. He snatched up the duchess' liqueur glass and flung the contents in Drummond's face. And Drummond laughed.

"Your mistake, Peterson," he said. "You only got half the antidote when you murdered Sir John Dallas. Ah—no—your hands above your head!"

The barrel of his revolver gleamed in the light and once again silence fell as, fascinated, we watched the pair of them. They stood alone at the head of the table and Drummond's eyes were hard and merciless, while Peterson plucked at his collar with hands that shook.

"Where are we driving to at this rate, Carl Peterson?" asked Drummond.

"There's some mistake," muttered the other.

"No, Peterson, there is no mistake. To-night you were going to do to the *Megalithic* what you did to the *Hermione*—sink her with every soul on board. There's no good denying it; I spent last night in Black Mine."

The other started uncontrollably, and the blazing hatred in his eyes grew more maniacal.

"What are you going to do, Drummond?" he snarled.

"A thing that has been long overdue, Peterson," answered Drummond quietly. "You unspeakable devil, you wholesale murderer!"

He slipped the revolver back in his pocket and picked up his own liqueur glass.

"The good host drinks first, Peterson." His great hand shot out and clutched the other's throat. "Drink, you brute, drink!"

Never to my dying day shall I forget the hoarse yell of terror that Peter-

ion uttered as he struggled in that iron grip. His eyes stared fearfully at the glass and with a sudden stupendous effort he knocked it out of Drummond's hand.

Once again Drummond laughed; the contents had spilled on the other's wrist.

"If you won't drink—have it the other way, Carl Peterson. But the score is paid."

His grip relaxed on Peterson's throat; he stood back, arms folded, watching the criminal. Whether it was the justice of fate, or whether it was that previous applications of the antidote had given Peterson a certain measure of immunity, I know not. But for full five seconds did he stand there before the end came. In that five seconds the mask slipped from his face and he stood revealed for what he was. And of that revelation no man can write.

Thus did Carl Peterson die on the eve of his biggest coup. As he had killed, so was he killed, while all unconscious of what had happened, the navigator still drove the airship full speed toward the west.

BUT little remains to be told. It was Drummond who walked along the corridor and found the control cabin. It was Drummond who put a revolver in the navigator's neck and forced him to swing the airship round and head back to London. It was Drummond who commanded the dirigible till finally we tied up once more to the mooring mast.

Then it was Drummond, who, revolver in hand to stop any rush of the crew, superintended the disembarkation of the guests. Lift load after lift load of white-faced women and men went down to the ground till only we six remained. One final look did we take at the staring glassy eyes of the man who sprawled across the chair in which he had sat to entertain royalty and then we too dropped swiftly downward.

News had already passed round the aërodrome and excited officials thronged round us as we stepped out of the lift. But Drummond would say nothing.

"Ring up Inspector MacIver at Scotland Yard," he remarked curtly. "Leave all the rest of them on board till he comes. I will stop here."

Barely had we sat down in one of the waiting rooms, when an agitated man rushed in.

"She's off!" he cried. "Wilmot's dirigible is under way!"

We darted outside to see the great airship slowly circling round. She still blazed with light and from the windows leaned men, waving their arms mockingly. Then she headed northeast. She was barely clear of the aërodrome when it happened. What looked to me like a yellow flash came from amidships, followed by a terrible rending noise. Before our eyes the dirigible became a roaring furnace of flame. Then, splitting in two, she dropped like a stone.

What caused the accident no one will ever know. Personally I am inclined to agree with Drummond that one of the crew, realizing that Wilmot was dead, decided to ransack his cabin to see what he could steal. In the cabin he probably found some infernal device for causing fire, which, in his unskillful hands, exploded suddenly. It is a possible solution; that is all I can say for it.

For twelve hours no man could approach the wreckage so intense was the heat. When at length it was possible, the bodies were so terribly burned as to be unrecognizable. Two only could be traced—the two in evening clothes. Though which was the red-faced man who had drunk and which was Wilmot, no one could say. The point is immaterial and there's not much use in worrying further. What did matter was

that one of those two charred corpses was all that remained of the super-criminal known to the world as Wilmot—and known to Drummond as Carl Peterson.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FROM AN UNKNOWN.

TO the best of my ability I have set down the events of that summer. There will be many even now who will in all probability shrug their shoulders incredulously. Well, I cannot make any man believe me. If people choose to think that Gaunt's description of the sinking of the *Hermione* is a madman's delusion based on what he had read in the papers, they are welcome to their opinion. But the *Hermione* has never been heard of again and it is now more than a year since she sailed from Southampton.

What is of far more interest to me is what would have happened had the attack been carried out on the *Megalithic*. What would have happened if Drummond had not chanced to pick out the scent of death in his glass, from the heavy languorous smell of the hothouse flowers that filled the cabin in which we dined? Can't you picture that one terrible moment, as with one accord every man and woman round that table pitched forward dead, under the mocking cynical eyes of Wilmot, and the great airship with its ghastly load tore on through the night?

Then—what would have happened? Would the attack have been successful? I know not, but sometimes I try and visualize the scene. The dirigible—no longer blazing with light—but dark and ghostly, keeping pace with the liner low down. Those thirty desperate men, the shattered wireless, and over everything the rain of death. Then the strange craft capable of such speed in spite of her lines. Everywhere panic-stricken women and men dashing to and fro and finding no escape. Perhaps the siren blaring madly into the night, until that too ceased because no man was left to sound it.

Then in the gray dawn the transfer of the bullion to the other vessel, the descent of Wilmot from the airship, perhaps a torpedo. A torpedo was all that was necessary for the fated *Lusitania*.

Then last of all I can see Wilmot—his hands in his pockets, a cigar drawing evenly between his lips—standing on the bridge of his ship. The swirling water has calmed down; only some floating wreckage marks the grave of the *Megalithic*. Suddenly from overhead there comes a blinding sheet of flame and the doomed airship falls blazing into the sea.

Guesswork, I admit—but that is what I believe would have happened. But it didn't, and so guesswork it must remain to the end. There are other things too we shall never know. What happened to the vessel with the strange lines? There is no one known to us who can describe her save Robin Gaunt and he is incurably insane. Where is she? What is she doing now? Is she some harmless ocean-going tramp, or is she rotting in some distant deserted harbor?

What happened to the men we had left bound in Black Mine? For when the police got there next day, there was no sign of them. How did they get away? Where are they now? Pawns, I admit, but they might have told us something.

Finally, the thing that interests Drummond most. How much did Peterson think we knew?

Personally I do not think that Peterson believed we knew anything at all until the end. Obviously he had no idea that we had been to Black Mine the night before, until Drummond told him so. Obviously he believed himself perfectly safe and but for the discovery of Gaunt's diary he would have been.

Should we, or rather Drummond, ever have suspected that liqueur except for the knowledge we had? I doubt it, and so does Drummond. Even though we knew that smell so well—the smell of death—I doubt if we should have picked it out from the heavy exotic scent of the flowers.

They are questions which forever will remain unanswered. As I write these words Drummond and his wife are in Deauville and so I must rely on my memory for something which, at the time, did not strike me as very important.

It was four days after the airship had crashed in flames. The scent of the poison no longer hung about the wreckage; the charred bodies had all been recovered. As he stood looking at the débris, a woman in deep black approached him.

"You have killed the man I loved, Hugh Drummond," she said. "But do not think it is the end."

He took off his hat.

"It would be idle to pretend, mademoiselle," he said, "that I do not know you. But may I ask why you state that I killed Carl Peterson? Is not that how he died?"

With his hand he indicated the wreckage.

She shook her head.

"The airship came down in flames at half past one," she said. "It was at ten o'clock that Carl died."

"That is so," he said gravely, "I said the other to spare your feelings. You have seen, I presume, some one who was on board?"

"I have seen no one," she answered.

"But those details have been kept out of the papers!" he exclaimed.

"I have read no paper," she replied.

"Then how did you know?"

"He spoke to me as he died," she said quietly. "And as I said before, it is not the end."

Without another word she left him Was she speaking the truth, or was there indeed some strange rapport between her and Peterson? Did the personality of that archcriminal project itself through space to the woman he had loved for so many years? And if so, what terrible message of hatred against Drummond did it give to her?

He has not seen her since; the memory of that brief interview is getting a little blurred. Perhaps she too has forgotten—perhaps not. Who knows?

A complete two-dollar book, "The Town in the Sea," by H. de Vere Stacpoole, will appear in the next issue of POPULAR.

INDISPUTABLE PROOF

COLONEL FRANKLIN PIERCE MORGAN, who began writing about politics and politicians shortly after his namesake was President of the United States, was reading his morning paper in the National Press Club in Washington.

"I see here," he remarked, "Conan Doyle's thinking of coming over with another lecture proving that the dead can come back. A superfluous undertaking. Anybody can go up to the capitol and see a dozen old congressmen who are final proof that the dead keep on coming back."

When the Sea Gives Up its Dead

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "Two Men and the Dog," "Tim of Bush Valley," Etc.

Mr. Tink wanders in out of eternity, to discover that, perhaps after all, there are worse things than being dead.

MR. SAMUEL TINK stood on the top of the hill below which lay the little coast town of Honey Harbor, and surveyed his birthplace without sentiment, although many years had passed since he had last beheld it.

Silver and cut glass, the sea lay beneath a burning July sun, the rays reflecting from its gentle ripples as from millions of facets; lazily a small schooner drifted in, her weatherworn topsails scarce filled with the faint draft of air that failed to stir the surface of the water. Closer lay the village—neat white cottages, half hidden by clambering vines, the church, the store, the post office, the schoolhouse—just as the returning wanderer remembered it a dozen years before. An artist might seek far for a choicer bit of village scenery.

But Mr. Tink, weary from a long walk on a dusty road and being further burdened with a bundle slung across a stick, which though light represented his entire worldly possessions, was not artistically inclined. He was hot and thirsty. On his right was the village graveyard, and he remembered a well just within the gate. He entered and with much creaking of the rusty well sweep, drew a bucket of cool water with which he reluctantly and partially satisfied a thirst wont to be quenched by other liquid. This done, led by curiosity, he walked between the graves, reading the inscriptions, some of them weather-stained and familiar, others new and strange.

Choosing the shade of a great elm he sat down and filled a pipe meditatively, resting his back against the reverse of a headstone. The grave it

marked was ill kept and overgrown by weeds. Mr. Tink finished his pipe and tapped it out on the stone.

"I wonder," he soliloquized, "who's planted here? His folks have let the weeds grow shameful. He'd ought to haunt them, he had."

He rose, and stepping to the front read the inscription on the stone:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
SAMUEL TINK.
WE HOPE TO MEET HIM
WHEN
THE SEA GIVES UP ITS DEAD.

"Blow me!" ejaculated Mr. Tink, "it's me!" He read the words again and pinched himself.

"I *am* alive all right," he said. "The idea of putting up a stone to me before my time! It gives me the shivers, it does. And my grave that growed up with weeds it might belong to a Dutchman! Somebody ought to be ashamed of theirselves!"

As Mr. Tink's surviving relatives, so far as he was aware, were restricted to a sister and an aunt, both living in Honey Harbor, there could be little doubt as to the responsibility. He viewed his putative resting place with strong disfavor, and picking up his bundle with a sigh, resumed his way. As he descended the hill leading to the village his imagination was active.

It was not thus, poor and afoot, that he had pictured his return to his native place. He had hoped to come back in style, either as mate of a vessel standing aft roaring orders at the hands, or if by land, in a carriage, resplendent in new clothes and with money in his pockets. But Fate had proved unkind, and had granted him only the means of locomotion possessed by Adam and about the same amount of money, though slightly more liberal in the matter of raiment. Yet, though fortune had not smiled upon his efforts or the lack of them, his return would not be uneventful.

A man whom everybody thought lost at sea and had mourned as dead could not reappear in the flesh without creating a stir, even in sleepy Honey Harbor. In fancy he saw himself the center of a wondering throng listening breathlessly to the narrative of his adventures and pressing liquid refreshments upon him at frequent intervals. His step lightened, he swung the bundle jauntily and entered the village with a glow in his heart.

STRAIGHT as the homing bird Mr. Tink made his way down the street to the little hotel with the sign of the Silver Scales, and entering, slouched up to the bar. Behind it, in shirt-sleeved comfort, stood the proprietor, Mr Joseph Judd, slightly fatter, slightly balder, but on the whole very little changed by the years. At a table sat three men playing cards. Mr. Tink knew them all. He pulled his hat down over his eyes against the moment when his identity should be dramatically revealed.

Mr. Judd nodded to the stranger and asked what he would have. Mr. Tink named his beverage, and as Mr. Judd appeared to be waiting for something, reluctantly threw a small coin on the bar.

"Nice little place you have here," he said patronizingly.

Mr. Judd nodded and looked at Mr. Tink more closely.

"Seems to me I've seen you before, somewhere," he said.

"Think so?" responded Mr. Tink, dropping his head so that his face was further shadowed by his hat brim.

"I meet a lot of queer customers," said Mr. Judd.

He seemed disinclined to pursue the subject further and began to polish glass. Mr. Tink, after several tentative remarks, which failed to arouse

Mr. Judd's interest in his identity or elicit a response, took off his hat.

"Look at me!" he exclaimed dramatically.

Mr. Judd obeyed with some apprehension.

"You ain't got smallpox, have you?" he asked. "I think I see a kind of a rash. If you was to wash your face you——"

"You don't know me," interrupted the returned wanderer. "I'm Sam Tink!" He paused to watch the effect of the startling announcement.

Mr. Judd's face expressed no emotion.

"So you are," he said. "I know you now." After a moment's thought he produced the coin just received from Mr. Tink and rang it suspiciously on the bar. Satisfied, he returned it to the till. "You've come back," he said in statement of the obvious.

"You thought I was dead!" said Mr. Tink.

"I did," admitted Mr. Judd. "I remember what made me take notice of it. There was a bill you owed me and it ain't settled yet. Would you like to square it now?"

"All in good time," said Mr. Tink loftily. He walked over to the three card players. "Hello, boys!" he said.

"Why," said one, "if it ain't Sam Tink! I thought you was down with Davy Jones. Sit in, Sam, and take a hand."

Mr. Tink, however, refused in disgust. He was not going to throw away the dramatic possibilities of a return from the dead on a hand of cards. "It's good to get back after all I've been through," he said. "To see you boys sitting here, same as ever, rests me. So different from the adventures I've had."

"I s'pose you have had adventures," said one tactfully. "At least you look as if you had. There's a sort of a reckless air about you, Sam, that shows me you've seen a deal of the world since you left. You look like a man that could tell a lot if you wanted to."

The highly gratified Mr. Tink, after paying a tribute to the speaker's powers of keen observation, suggested the advisability of refreshment and, nobody else offering to defray its cost, and Mr. Judd emphatically refusing to allow it to go upon the old bill, paid for it with considerable reluctance. He entertained the company with an account of marvelous and highly improbable adventures and when symptoms of weariness on the part of his audience became too patent to be overlooked, inquired for the news of the town in his long absence.

"I almost forgot," he said, after various inquiries. "How's my old Aunt Jane and my sister?"

"Your aunt is dead and your sister is married to Bill Worts," said Mr. Judd.

"She is?" said Mr. Tink in surprise, referring to his sister. He reflected a moment. "I guess I better go and see her. Where does she live?"

HE received minute instructions and set out for his sister's abode. Arrived at the gate, he viewed with approval a cozy brick cottage, tidy lawn bordered with flower beds and neatly kept walks.

"Nice place they have," soliloquized the wanderer. "I'll just hang up my hat here for a while. I hope the shock of seeing me won't be too much for her."

He passed up the walk and rang the bell, sniffing the air which contained evidence of the preparation of supper.

A black-eyed, determined-looking woman, some five years his junior, opened the door and immediately shut it to a crack and put her foot against it.

"Be off!" she said. "I've nothing for you."

"Yes, you have," said her unrecog-

nized brother, with jocularity. "Give me a kiss, my dear!"

For answer the door was jerked violently open and he received a resounding slap that brought the tears to his eyes.

"You'd assault a helpless woman, you wretch!" cried Mrs. Worts. Then her femininity asserted itself. "Bill!" she called shrilly. "Help, Bill!"

A heavy footfall echoed through the house and Mr. Worts appeared. He bore a towel and had evidently been disturbed at his ablutions.

"He tried to kiss me!" cried Mrs. Worts, pointing to the bewildered Mr. Tink.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Worts, with unflattering incredulity; but nevertheless he turned to the intruder. "Wot d'ye mean by it?" he demanded threateningly.

"Kill him!" cried the outraged Mrs. Worts.

"This here is a nice home-coming!" said Mr. Tink, retreating as Mr. Worts, urged on by his wife, advanced reluctantly. "To think that my own sister shouldn't know me!"

"Lord!" said Mr. Worts, stopping short in relief. "Why, it's your dead brother Sam, Nellie!"

MRS. WORTS, checking herself in a demand for the life of Mr. Tink, scrutinized his features closely and assumed a less hostile attitude, though one lacking much of sisterly warmth.

"Why couldn't he say so, then, instead of frightening a poor woman to death?" she said grudgingly. "It's just like you, Sam, to do such a trick, with every one hoping you'd rest quiet in your grave somewheres till the Last Day. Selfish and thoughtless you always was! And me that nervous I'm hardly able to stand at times."

"Nervous!" said Mr. Tink, rubbing his cheek tenderly. "For a nervous woman you hit remarkable hard."

"She's all nerves," said Mr. Worts, eying his better half respectfully. "She acts on impulse. Only this morning she heaved the——" He broke off in a cough as he caught his wife's eye.

"Well, let's go inside," said Mr. Tink. "No use standing out here all night. I could eat a bite of suppor, if I was asked."

He led the way and, guided by excellent olfactory organs, penetrated to the kitchen, which was apparently in charge of a little girl with a very spiky pigtail adorned by a huge bow.

"Claribel," said Mrs. Worts, "this is your Uncle Sammy we counted dead."

"Come and kiss me, my dear," said Mr. Tink with an attempt at affection.

"Shan't!" said Miss Worts with brief decision. She favored her uncle with a dispassionate stare. "I like your grave," she said. "I go there on holidays."

"Do you?" said Mr. Tink, restraining an instinctive shiver. "I'm glad to see there's some one cares for me."

"I play hide and seek and leapfrog on it," said his niece, "me and the other girls. I like it 'cause nobody minds if we play there. Have you been in heaven? Ma said she hoped so, but she wasn't sure."

"Oh, she wasn't, wasn't she?" said Mr. Tink eying his somewhat embarrassed relative coldly, but for reasons connected with his finances restraining an impulse to put his reflections into words. With some sarcasm he stated his opinion that Miss Worts resembled her mother. He added that she might grow out of it.

"Robert, our next, takes after me," said Mr. Worts, accepting the change of topic with relief. "Here he is now."

Master Worts, an urchin of some eight summers, to all appearance spent in close contact with the earth, entered the room and was presented to his uncle.

"A fine boy," said Mr. Tink diplo-

matically. "What would you like to be when you grow up, my lad? A sailor, like me?"

"No," said Master Worts in a tone of conviction, after a careful inspection of his new relative.

"You'd sail all over the blue, sunny seas," said his uncle persuasively, with a strong effort of imagination, "and see lions and elephants and sharks and flying fish and whales!"

The delights of the life maritime failed to impress Master Worts.

"Aw, g'wan!" he said, and, admonished by his mother, proceeded to remove the outer surface of soil which adorned his features.

"He's going to be a minister," said Mrs. Worts with maternal pride. "He knows the Golden Rule already, and part of a song about the prodigal son. He shall sing it for you later. It will be appropriate—you having come back."

"They say the good die young" said Mr. Tink, eying his nephew, "but if he lives to grow up you make him a missionary. I know a tribe that would like to have him." He gloated for a moment over the cannibalistic propensities of the tribe in question. "He'd feel quite at home with them, too," he added.

THE readiness of supper interrupted further speculation as to the future of Master Worts and when the meal was over, Mrs. Worts demanded of her brother an explanation of his long absence and silence.

"The last we heard of you," she said, "you were aboard the *Reindeer,* and she was never heard of after she left port."

"The *Reindeer,*" said Mr. Tink, "was lost in the north Atlantic with all hands but me. She was rammed amidships one dark night by a lumberin', stinkin' farm wagon of a Dutch cattle ship showin' no lights; she was hove down and rode over and sunk while you'd count twenty. Only that Providence took care of me I'd have been drowned with the rest."

"No one understands the ways of Providence," said his sister musingly. "I always said you weren't drowned; there's a proverb against it."

"I was throwed into the sea by the shock," said Mr. Tink, neglecting, to his sister's obvious disappointment, to ask for a quotation of the proverb referred to, "and, coming to the surface, I happened to grab the bight of a davit-fall dangling from the Dutchman's port side. Sloppy with their gear is Dutchmen! I swarmed up it to her deck. She stood by for maybe ten minutes and burned a flare while they looked for damage below the water line. Not finding any, she hooted her siren a couple of times and went ahead, not caring enough about how many she had drowned to lower a boat. Instead of treating me as a distressed seaman the way they should, they shoved me down into the stokehold and made me work my passage to Hamburg. There I was shanghaied aboard a freighter for the west African coast. I took fever and was put ashore to die. When I got better I started for home."

"You've been a long time on the road," said his sister with sarcasm.

"I was wrecked on the way on a uncharted island in the South Seas," said the wanderer. "I was the only man who got ashore. The natives took me for a god."

"I've heard say they worship most anything in those parts," said his sister acidly.

"It wasn't an easy job," continued the wanderer. "Too much is expected of a god. I resigned in favor of a nickel alarm clock that was washed ashore in a sea chest, and I became a king, which let me do as I pleased."

"A king!" said Mr. Worts, impressed.

"Nice king!" said Mrs. Worts with a

sniff. "And I s'pose you had a queen," she added with open incredulity.

"Thirty-four of 'em," said Mr. Tink stoutly. "All young and lovely."

"Claribel and Robert, go to bed!" said Mrs. Worts. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she continued to her brother.

"Why should I?" said the ex-ruler defensively. "Solomon had——"

"Compare yourself to Solomon!" interrupted his sister indignantly.

"Where did you say this island was?" asked Mr. Worts with keen interest.

"In the South Seas," replied Mr. Tink vaguely.

"It'd be hard to find, I expect," said Mr. Worts, in a tone of disappointment.

"Not charted," said Mr. Tink. "It's a lovely place; birds and fruit and flowers—and hard work unknown"

"Ah!" said the enraptured Mr. Worts longingly.

"It would just suit both of you," remarked Mrs. Worts. "It's a wonder to me you ever left there," she added to her brother.

The latter shook his head. "I felt the call of my native land," he said, "and I couldn't stay away. I wanted to see you again. But that's enough of me. When did Aunt Jane die?"

"Three years ago," said Mrs. Worts.

"She had some property," said Mr. Tink. "Did she remember me at all?"

"She put up a monument to you in the graveyard," replied Mrs. Worts.

"In her will, I mean," said Mr. Tink.

"No," said his sister. "She thought you were dead. What would be the use? She spoke of meeting you in heaven. I think her mind wandered at the last."

"Who got her property?" demanded Mr. Tink, refusing to be drawn into a discussion of his deceased relative's sanity.

"I did," replied Mrs. Worts.

THE eyes of brother and sister met and held each other for a moment; there was a decided lack of affection in the glance.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Mr. Tink. "You'll do what's right with it, of course?"

"It won't be spent foolishly, if that's what you mean," returned his sister.

"I'll speak frankly," said Mr. Tink. "I've come home without much money—stony broke, in fact. Aunt Jane always intended me to have a share of her property and I'd have had it if she'd known I was alive. Naturally you'll give me half of it, anyway."

"Naturally I won't!" said Mrs. Worts coldly. "What do you take me for?"

"Aunt Jane would wish you to," returned Mr. Tink solemnly, "and the wishes of the dead had ought to be considered by the living. I can fancy I see her looking down at you now, never thinking but what you'll give me a share."

"I can't!" snorted his sister.

"If you don't she won't rest quiet in her grave," pursued Mr. Tink.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said his sister. "She said she did more than her duty by you when she put up a stone. She's resting quiet enough, poor soul."

"Do you disregard the wishes of the departed dead?" asked Mr. Tink, in a tone of solemn menace.

"Let the dead tell me their wishes if they have any," said Mrs. Worts. "You've been away for years, spending all your money on yourself, and I might have starved to death, for all you cared. Now you come back broke after being a god and a king—or so you say, for I don't believe a word of it—and living sinful with savages, and want my money. You don't get a dollar of it. You're welcome to three meals a day for a week or two, or until you can get a job, but that's all. I won't rob my innocent angels of children for you.

And if you don't like it, you can do the other thing."

"A nice sister you are——" began Mr. Tink wrathfully; but at that moment sounds from above indicated the opening of active hostilities between the angels just referred to and Mrs. Worts left the room hurriedly. Further sounds indicated the intervention of a larger power. But Mrs. Worts, dispensing with the formality of bidding her brother good night, remained upstairs.

Mr. Tink, left alone with his brother-in-law, entertained him with some reminiscences of the youth of Mrs. Worts indicating a lack of the most ordinary human attributes on the part of that lady and with great fervor expressed his gratitude to a Providence which had seen fit to restrict his sisters to one.

Mr. Worts, however, maintained a discreet and experienced silence, glancing from time to time apprehensively toward the door, and Mr. Tink, from want of encouragement or lack of opposition, presently came to the end of his brotherly remarks.

It was then that Mr. Worts, for whom the topic appeared to possess a strong attraction, requested further information as to Mr. Tink's thirty-four queens, and the latter's memory or inventive genius proving equal to a personal description of each, the two gentlemen passed a pleasant evening in the discussion of domestic problems and the difficulties attending the lot of a king and a god as compared with those besetting the ordinary citizen—comparison going to show that even divinity and royalty are not exempt from trials arising from the uncertainty of feminine temper.

It was a matter of mutual agreement, however, that certain recognized means of enforcing a husband's authority in vogue in the South Seas might be introduced elsewhere with advantage. At this point an insistent demand from Mrs. Worts that her lord obtain his accustomed rest, instead of sitting up listening to the vain tales of one noted for disregard of the truth, put an end to the conversation for the night.

IN the morning, after breakfast, Mr. Worts having departed to his toil, Mr. Tink smoked a pipe in the garden and considered the situation. He was very nearly dead broke—down, in fact, to his last ten dollars—and the thought of work was extremely distasteful. Prudently determined to husband his resources, he made an attempt when his pipe was finished to secure a small loan from his sister, even promising usurious interest for the temporary accommodation, but met with a flat and sustained refusal. And when, in his natural disappointment, he gave vent to a frank and brotherly opinion of such meanness, he received in return a vivid word picture of himself which was startling in its extreme candor.

Under the circumstances a dignified retreat seemed advisable and he executed a strategic change of base, coming to rest in the peaceful seclusion of the Silver Scales. Mr. Judd, however, hinted several times at the desirability of a settlement of the old account, and one or two early callers venturing sarcastic comment on the proverbial lack of moss on a rolling stone, and, moreover, neglecting to include him in invitations to drink, Mr. Tink left that haven in disgust and wandered away from the village.

Mechanically he plodded back over the road of the day before and cursed the reputed joy of a home-coming for a delusion and a sham; mechanically, too, he entered the graveyard and established himself before his own monument.

"I'd have the best of it if I was lyin' there," he soliloquized bitterly. "No more hazin' by blasted greasers; no more goin' aloft at night in the pitch

dark when it's that cruel cold your fingers freeze to the ratlines and the reefing-gear cuts across your cheeks like whips; no more havin' your drink hocused by a crimp an' wakin' up to find yourself with a head like a sore tooth an' six months of hell on a Cape Horner to look for'ard to! Blow me, but I've a notion to make that there stone earn its money."

He pondered, but doubts of the wisdom of an exchange of worlds came to his aid.

"It would be a satisfaction to them if I made away with myself, and so I won't," he continued inwardly. "That's how much they think of me—lettin' all manner of weeds grow and playin' leapfrog above my breast an' for all they knew or care I might be in heaven lookin' down at 'em. I'll tell 'em what I think of it. And I'll pull up them weeds now—there ain't many a man gets a chance to weed his own grave!"

He moved over to the stone and stooped above the overgrown ground. As he did so he saw in the center of the rank vegetation a space a couple of feet square where fresh soil appeared. Apparently the weeds had been removed there and transplanted back again. The soil had not been disturbed the day before; of that he was quite sure. Curiosity leading him to suspend weeding operations, he dug into the fresh patch with hands hardened to the texture of shovels by long years of pull-hauling on stiffened rigging.

His burrowing fingers encountered something solid; he dug eagerly and presently hoisted out a bulky package wrapped in oiled silk and securely tied. He cut the string with his knife and opened the bundle.

"Holy mackerel!" gasped Mr. Tink.

For there before him in the naked daylight, staring at him plainly, waiting to be picked up, were bills—money, greenbacks—bunches of them—sheafs of them—wads of them—sufficient in quantity to pay for the most glorious series of busts in the world and the price of a life berth in a sailors' home left over.

Mr. Tink sat down on the ground and stuck his legs straight out in front of him; he plunged his hands deep in his pockets and blinked furiously.

"I'm dreaming, that's what I am!" he ejaculated. "Or dead. Say, I believe I'm in heaven!"

He glanced around for further evidence of an arrival in realms of bliss, but only earthly surroundings met his eyes. Down the long, grave-bordered path showed the gates and beyond them passed slowly the well-known figure of Mr. Judd of the Silver Scales.

"It can't be heaven," said Mr. Tink with conviction, eying Mr. Judd's retreating figure, but it may be the other place. Did I suicide, after all?"

Certain tests assured him that the flame of life still burned brightly in his breast and he began to count his treasure. There were big bills and little bills, all fresh and new, and the total ran into the thousands. The money counted, Mr. Tink, after a period of ecstatic admiration, wrapped it in its covering, adding a newspaper for further concealment, and stood erect.

"I don't know whose it was, nor I don't care," he said. "I know whose it is now. Whoever had it can't need it worse than I do. He deserves to lose it—disturbing the dead to hide it. And if I had been dead and planted there," continued Mr. Tink thoughtfully, "I'd have come to life with all that money so close to me. I'd feel it in my bones."

HE tucked the bundle under his arm and, looking up and down the road cautiously to assure himself that the coast was clear, set out for the village at a brisk walk. The road was dusty and the sun was hot, but he whistled

cheerily as he went. He even welcomed a feeling of dryness in his throat, which at any other time he would have regarded as an affliction.

"Get good and dry while you have the chance," said Mr. Tink, confidentially addressing that portion of his anatomy. "Talk of a time! I'll have a time like a admiral's dream. It's a pity this town is so small."

He opened the door of his sister's house and went in whistling, much to the indignation of that lady, whose temper was ruffled by household cares.

"What have you got there?" she asked, eying the package.

"Shirts," replied Mr. Tink prudently.

"And about time," said Mrs. Worts, glancing with meaning at the garment worn by Mr. Tink.

The latter, however, did not heed. He shut the door of his room and, after gloating over his find for some moments, filled his pockets with bills; he then raised a loose board in the floor and carefully cached the remainder. This done, he made his way down stairs, three steps at a time, singing lustily as he went. He astounded his sister by catching her about the waist and imprinting an affectionate though hurried kiss upon her ear, which she had instinctively turned toward him.

"You're drunk!" she said, indignantly extricating herself from her brother's arms.

"Not yet," said Mr. Tink with the happy optimism of anticipation. "I won't be back till supper, and maybe not then," he added, as he left the house.

When that evening, Mr. Worts, who had torn himself from the delights of home by alleging anxiety for his brother-in-law, entered the Silver Scales, he found that gentleman the center of an admiring audience. He had concluded the history of his adventures and was setting forth his intentions for the future. As he bought refreshments for all hands at very frequent intervals his remarks were listened to in rapt attention.

"An' so I come here in no kind of style at all, just to see who my friends was," he said. "Some give me the cold shoulder and some didn't. Most did, including of some I see now filling theirselves at my expense. But let that go; I bear no ill feeling, for they're beneath it. I might have come back in a private yacht with a black boy to open the bottles, but I come afoot, over the road; and as for the bottles, Joe Judd is as good as a black boy, which he resembles in some ways, as long as he remembers his place." He eyed the reddening features of Mr. Judd with calm superiority.

"Havin' been first a god an' then a king, like I just told you, I'm used to bein' waited on proper," he continued. "I'm used to bein' worshiped and kotowed to an' havin' food an' drink served to me at all hours by high priests and beautiful young women on their bended knees. If they was to see me sitting drinking intimate with such a looking crew as you are, they wouldn't believe their eyes. They'd be shocked and I wouldn't blame 'em."

"Far as looks go," remarked an indignant auditor, "the less you say about 'em the better. Just take a squint in the glass—that's all!" He breathed hard and glanced around for approval.

Mr. Tink did not heed.

"Bein' in America, although a king, I bow to a democratic sentiment which is maybe all right in its place," he said. "I throw on no dog here. Later, when I go to Washington to see a brother ruler, you bet I do it in style. You'll read about it in the papers—or get some one to read it for you. I need a private sec'tary an' I'd offer one of you the job, but you haven't got the eddication." He shook his head sorrowfully.

"This town lacks eddication. I've

read of towns getting gifts of libraries, but what good would that be to you? I'd give you one if you could use it. Nothin' small about me! If a Highland Scotchman from Pennsylvania can pry himself loose from the price of a library, I can do better. I've thought it over and I'll present you with a orphan asylum—you agreeing solemn, s'elp you, to furnish the orphans. All your orphans will be welcome; they'll be brought up as Christians, which they wouldn't be at home. An' the sooner I see all them orphans, the better I'll be pleased."

HE beamed benevolently on the company, but the condition of the munificent gift prevented applause. Instead, there was a low growl. For the first time he caught sight of Mr. Worts.

"Give him a drink!" he shouted. "Billy Worts is a white man and one of nature's noblemen. I appoint him my ambassador to my royal brother, George, king o' the bloomin' English! Gents, here's to my royal brother!"

He drained a glass and demanded its replenishment.

"Us kings has our troubles," he proceeded. "Don't you think it's all plain sailing, partic'larly for such of us as has to rule over blacks. 'In time of peace prepared for war,' as Solomon said. And Solomon had all sorts of foreigners and knew what he was talking about. For an early king he was a good one. Not but what foreigners and such has their good points, and, as subjects, is superior to scum like you. To talk high government matters to you is like castin' pearls before swine."

"Come home," said Mr. Worts, interpreting a threatening murmur from the insulted audience to be fraught with danger to the visiting statesman.

"Come where?" returned Mr. Tink. "You're a ambassador; you're going to Lunnon, blow me! Dear hold Lunnon! Say, ' 'ome,' Billy, when you mention that there sacred word, else you won't never be pop'lar there. 'Ave another glawss, hold chap!"

"You've had too many," said Mr. Worts, seizing his arm. "Come on, now!"

"I've mistook your calling," said Mr. Tink. "You do say them words so natural. I recall you as a ambassador and appoint you a p'leeceman. All right, off'cer, I'll go quiet. This is what comes of keeping vile companions, like I've always been warned against."

He shook his head sorrowfully at the indignant company and allowed himself to be led away. In the time required to traverse two blocks, which was somewhat longer than might have been expected, owing to difficulties of locomotion, he offered Mr. Worts successively several offices of both honor and emolument in his kingdom and appeared deeply pained by the latter's indifference to them. Finally, in an outburst of generosity, he presented him with half his queens. Unfortunately this gift was made in the hearing of Mrs. Worts and Mr. Worts' refusal was considered by Mr. Tink in the light of diplomacy merely.

"I understan'," he said, in a tone intended to be inaudible, but which was quite clear. "Don' mention it to Nellie, eh? All righ', ol' boy. Fine woman, but bad tempered. Don't take after me. I sympathize with you, Bill!" Remarks which caused Mr. Worts a very bad half hour subsequently.

In the morning Mr. Tink made an excellent breakfast, observed in admiring wonder by his brother-in-law and in grim disapproval by his sister. Unabashed by her caustic comments on his lapse of the night before, Mr. Tink went to his room and returned bearing a package which he opened, displaying to the amazed eyes of his relatives more money than they had ever seen in their lives before.

"I didn't come home empty handed," he said. "I wanted to see how I'd be treated and I found out. You thought I wanted Aunt Jane's money, Nellie! Keep it and I'll keep mine. There's lots more where it comes from. My secretary of the treasury sends it to me. But I'll pay my board while I'm here."

He drew a bill of small denomination from the bundle and handed it to her. After a moment's hesitation he handed her another of smaller denomination, explaining that it was for the children.

"You shouldn't keep all that money in the house," said Mr. Worts. "It might be stolen and I don't want it around. If I was you, I'd bank it."

"Good idea," said Mr. Tink, "I will."

WHEN the only bank in Honey Harbor opened for business, Mr. Tink presented himself at the wicket and expressed his desire to open an account.

"Open it in the name of Samuel Tink, Esquire, Gentleman," he said. "And write it down plain that when a check signed by Samuel Tink, Esquire, comes in it's to be paid on the nail and no questions asked. Here's the money. Count it for yourself."

He handed in the parcel and the cashier, after a look of amazement at Mr. Tink's outer man, ran a trained thumb and finger over the bills. He then scrutinized Mr. Tink closely.

"Where did you get this?" he asked.

"I made it," said Mr. Tink flippantly.

"I wouldn't advise you to say that," said the cashier.

He picked up a stamp, struck a bill, and handed it through the wicket to Mr. Tink. Across its face appeared the awful word, *"Counterfeit!"*

A chill rain was falling and a dense fog bank rolled in on Honey Harbor. On the hill above the town stood Mr. Samuel Tink. He had just come from the graveyard and the inscription on his monument was fresh in his mind. Bitterly he quoted it.

"'We hope to meet him when the sea gives up its dead,'" he muttered. "Well, they won't do it before and if I have any say in it, I'll be the last man up." And Mr. Tink turned his back forever on his birthplace and plodded eastward through the gentle rain.

Another humorous story by A. M. Chisholm will appear in the next number of POPULAR.

A "SAVE A DOG" LEAGUE

DOG owners all over the country are worried about the prevalence of distemper, the most deadly disease of the canine world and the one least understood by the veterinarians. The death rate among victims of this mysterious malady is exceedingly high and the methods of treatment have advanced little in the last twenty years.

For the purpose of encouraging study of this disease and of finding new and better methods of treatment, whether they come from members of the medical profession or from laymen, the Canine Protective League has been organized. This new organization wants the moral support of dog lovers everywhere and invites any one interested to join. There are no dues or membership fees. Miss Gilda Gray, the dancer, is one of the prime movers in this organization, and will enroll all who are interested. Her address is Rockville Centre, Long Island, New York. If you are a dog lover write to her and get behind the League in its work of saving dogs.

The Judgment Trail

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "The Sungazers," "Temescal," Etc.

Bill Morningstar resorts to the primitive justice of the desert, which is very often more reliable than man-made law, to prove his claim to innocence.

CHAPTER I.

GOLD DUST.

AND then he commanded the sun 'to stand still,'" said Bill Morningstar, "which kind of makes me think he was onto the eclipse and that goes to show you can't know too much about things, only you want to be kind of careful to know how much you know and how much you don't."

Having delivered himself of this cross section of a rough-and-ready philosophy, Bill Morningstar attacked the breakfast which he had allowed me to prepare for him, but only after an understanding that the breakfast should be eaten out under the pepper tree in the back yard.

Bill always claimed that half of his appetite departed with the appearance of table linen and cut glass. So the pancakes, coffee, bacon and eggs, and toast, with ripe figs and cream, were served on the plain, weather-gray pine table, after Bill had been supplied with the weapons essential to a vigorous battle with the variegated array before him. He annihilated the stack of pancakes in one attack, and having laid the foundation for further maneuvers, charged at the bacon and eggs with an obvious preference for the sword rather than the spear. The figs and cream vanished in the general rout.

Bill gave no quarter and asked none. He scorned cream in his coffee; he liked it hot; and, seemingly quite oblivious to the adage that "coffee should be seen and not heard," made away with three generous cups of it and

then shook the pot to see if it were empty.

Some folk eat and converse at the same time. But not Bill. Words could never have made headway against the current of his operations. So possessing myself in patience, I smoked my pipe and watched the morning sunlight filter through the pepper-tree branches and surround Bill with a sort of golden penumbra until he looked like some prehistoric deity throned at a feast in a green cavern swimming with golden-green light.

BILL shoved his empty cup from him, leaned back in his chair and began filling his pipe. His heavy black eyebrows drew together as he puffed at a pipe which obviously needed reboring. The dappled sunlight fell upon his broad heavy shoulders, his stiff black hair, his huge hands folded affectionately across his stomach as though he cherished that which had so recently gone to establish a firmer waistline. His strong, ruddy face was in shadow. He looked exceedingly comfortable, almost beneficent.

"Five times—this trip," he said. Bill meant merely around the world.

"When are you going to quit and settle down?" I asked.

"That's what I was thinkin', just a minute ago," said Bill. "Thinks I: 'If I was eddicated and had enough money to live on and had some line what would keep me busy enough to forget that this here game of living is a kind of dog-eat-dog proposition at the best, I might build me a shack in the hills, like this, only smaller, and get me a good dog and some chickens and one of them encyclopedias and kiss me hand to the world and wanderin' and call it a day.'

"But, honest, mate, I'm too healthy for that kind of a life. Had a bet with a guy down on North Main Street the other day, one of them physical-clutcher guys what was showin' off his chest. He got to talkin' about measurements and how you could buy his patent pulley machine and get stronger than a wampus cat.

"He said for any gent in the crowd to step up and he would illustrate by measurements. Most of the crowd was kind of lean Mexicans and a few Americans what looked hungry. So I steps up and takes off me coat. He started in to measure me and talk; and he whispers to me to tell 'em I been usin' one of his machines and to come around after the lecture and he would hire me. I seen he was tryin' to dodge the bet of five dollars that nobody in the crowd could match him in development, so I didn't say nothin' but just let him go on measurin'.

"Seventeen inches for me neck, forty-two for me chest and seventeen inches and a half for the calf of me leg. And no fat on me anywhere! And he handed over the five, but I didn't come back to work for him. Not me! I'm too healthy to set down and think. I got to keep moving along."

"There's some good land open to entry, back here in the hills," I said. "A man could homestead and prove up on a tidy place. And by the time he had secured a title, the land would be worth enough to make the venture a paying proposition. Acreage is getting scarce, even up here."

"You mean a homestead what some fella give up, because he couldn't make a go of it?" queried Bill.

"Yes. And that has been overlooked," I told him.

"Well, I'd rather tackle desert minin', than homesteadin'," declared Bill. "Homesteadin' is the biggest gamble what is."

Bill Morningstar touched the blanket roll at his feet.

"I got part of a desert mine right here," he said. "Kind of a sample, anyhow. Like to see it?"

I nodded. Bill unlashed his roll and dug up a tin can that had once contained tomatoes. He pulled a wad of newspaper from the can and carefully poured into a saucer a trickle of coarse gold and among it a few tiny nuggets.

"How's that?" he said, grinning.

"Been prospecting?" I asked.

Bill shook his head.

"Remember reading about a guy that was found dead over near Daggett, at them springs north of town? It was a couple of weeks ago."

I RECALLED the newspaper article which I imagined was founded on fact but as usual had been converted into another desert mystery by some enterprising reporter. The article had hinted at foul play, as the dead prospector, when found, had a jagged wound in his head.

"What's the connection?" I asked.

"This was his stuff," declared Bill Morningstar. "I found him."

"What were you doing that far from the railroad?" I asked.

"Campin' at the springs. A guy give me a lift in his car. He was drivin' through to Daggett. I guess mebby he was nervous. Anyhow, he pulled up at the water-hole sign and says for me to skip over and fill the canteen as the water in the radiator was getting low. I hopped out and the son of a gun just lit out and left me. The spring being about a hundred yards off the road, he waits till I get to the sink and then I hears the machine buzz.

"Thinks I: 'It ain't so far to Daggett and here's a fair good camp and seeing as how he chucked me bed roll out of the car, here I stay.'

"Anyhow, I was poking around looking for a spot to spread me tarp, when I tumbled onto the dead prospector. He was layin' on his face. A old canteen was near him. It was empty."

Bill pointed toward the gold in the saucer.

"He had this stuff on him and a old nickel-plated watch, a jackknife and some cigarette papers and tobacco. I got to lookin' around and pretty soon I spied the tracks of a burro and tracks what I seen had been the dead man's —and some other tracks that he didn't make. Them tracks was made by another man and they come from the road and went back to it again and disappeared."

"Automobile?" I suggested.

Bill nodded indifferently.

"Somebody fixed him. But they didn't take the stuff on him, or, anyhow, this much of it. Now what would you 'a' done, if you had been me?"

"Report to the authorities, I suppose," I said.

"Well, I did, but I done it by leavin' my report on a piece of paper, instead of personal. Next mornin' I hopped a freight at Daggett and dropped off at San Berdoo, where I wrote a letter to the sheriff. Then I come on through to Los Angeles."

"I remember reading about the anonymous letter," I told Bill. "I suppose you didn't want to get mixed up in the affair."

"Not me!" declared Bill vehemently. "And say, mate, do you know, I'm thinking the guy that dumped me off there at the water hole knowed somethin' about the deal. If he give me a ride that far, what did he shake me for when we was so clost to Daggett?"

"It does look rather strange," I agreed.

"Yes. And it feels worse than that!" said Bill. "Now, I seen plenty of stiffs, all over the country. And I been mixed up in some lively scraps, but they was always folks around what could see what was goin' on. But finding that dead man out there, along toward evening, and considerin' the way I'd been dumped down and left and everythin', why I got leery of the whole business.

"I figure it this way: nobody has said a word to me and I been moochin' around town for eight or ten days. But if a cop was to trail me, or pull me in, I'd figure right away that the guy in the machine put 'em up to it —*after* the news got around that they was a dead man over by them springs. I figure the guy in the machine didn't want to give out that kind of information himself."

"It may be," I said. "But you shouldn't worry. Bob, Mr. Brandstatter, Manning and I know that you're square."

"And sixty or eighty million folks in this country that don't," said Bill. "I ain't takin' no extra chances. So I figure I'll leave this stuff with you"—Bill gestured toward the saucer of gold dust and nuggets—"and mooch along up to Soledad Cañon and say hello to Bob and his wife. Bob would be kind of interested."

"I'm interested myself," I told him. "You always manage to fetch along something exciting when you appear."

"If a fella keeps ramblin' around he can't help but get mixed up in things," stated Bill.

And then, much to my amazement, he reached over and poured the gold dust into the cream pitcher and wiped the saucer clean with the napkin that he had not used. I was about to remark upon this peculiar proceeding—I had been watching Bill's hands, not his face—when I glanced up. Bill was looking sideways toward the stables at the rear of the yard.

"Give me your pencil," he whispered.

I handed him my pencil and he wrote a number on the table top, then handed the pencil back to me.

A MAN stepped from the corner of the corral and came toward us. Simultaneously, a machine buzzed up the driveway and stopped within a few yards of the pepper tree. Three men got out of the car and strolled our way. I recognized one of them as the chief deputy sheriff. He nodded pleasantly, we shook hands and I introduced Bill Morningstar.

Bill didn't shake hands. He busied himself cleaning and refilling his pipe. I asked the men to sit down—four of them—for the chap who had approached from the stables was now among us.

"Got any more sheriffs left in the office?" asked Bill with a sarcastic grin.

"A couple," said the chief deputy. "You're Bill Morningstar, all right! We want you to come along down to the office and have a talk with the big chief."

"All right!" said Bill promptly.

I was surprised at his ready acquiescence and I anticipated the immediate development of a scheme to outwit the deputies. Yet Bill seemed serene. Once I caught his glance directed toward the cream pitcher. The chief deputy apologized for interrupting our visit and laughing good-naturedly said he thought he would go over my guest before they took him down to the office.

Bill frowned, stood up and the four deputies searched him rapidly, the chief commenting on Bill's size and general make-up. But when it came to handcuffing Bill, I entered a demurrer.

"If he gives you his word he'll go without a fuss, he'll keep it," I told the chief.

"Only," said Bill, sitting down again and folding his huge arms, "I want to know what you're takin' me for. It ain't law to grab a man like this and not tell him why he is wanted."

"We want to ask you some questions about that guy you found over by Red Rock Springs," said the chief.

"That I found? Where did you get that idea, anyhow?" asked Bill.

"You were seen in Daggett, three days before he was found by the San

Berdoo boys," replied the chief deputy. "You came in on foot, from the direction of Red Rock Springs."

"All right!" said Bill. "I'll go along with you and you got my word for it that I won't take any of you guys apart."

And Bill bade me farewell and asked me to lend him my lead pencil.

"I'm goin' to do some writin' while I'm visiting with these guys," he said.

The deputies laughed, escorted Bill to the machine and drove away. I picked up a few of the dishes and carried them to the kitchen. Returning, I gathered up some more of the dishes, among them the cream pitcher which I set aside for future inspection.

As I brushed the crumbs from the table top I noticed the figures Bill had scribbled on the table and wondered if they might be interpreted as having to do with the recent murder. I puzzled over the numbers, six of them, wondered if they might not be telephone numbers and finally decided to copy them in my notebook.

That afternoon, Robert Andover, Bill Morningstar's erstwhile companion of the trails, called me up on long distance and asked me if by any chance I knew where Bill was. He said that Bill had written to him stating that he was on his way to the Soledad. Bob had not seen Bill Morningstar for two years and Bill's advent was always an occasion.

"I think Bill is in jail," I told Bob over the telephone.

"Hell, no!" came Bob's voice. "I'll drive right down."

CHAPTER II.

THE LAW ON OUR SIDE.

STILL puzzling about Bill Morningstar's indifference to arrest—and if ever there was a man who hated restraint it was Bill—I washed the few dishes, put the house in order and presently found myself overhauling my camp outfit, without having the least idea why I was doing so. I had no intention of going anywhere, in fact there was work to do at home; moreover, Bob Andover had telephoned that he would drive down from the Soledad and he always stopped with me when visiting Los Angeles.

While pawing over my outfit I came upon a topographical map of San Bernardino County, or rather, several sections of it, and recalling Bill's mention of Red Rock Springs, I studied that section, visualizing the country as I remembered it.

Bill had been picked up by the man in the car at Crucero Junction, on the Tonopah and Goldfield Railroad. North lay the Panamint hills, Ballarat, Randsburg and a dozen old mining towns. The section had been rich in mineral and, according to many an ancient prospector who still prowled about that desert region, yet concealed vast fortunes in gold, lost mines of fabulous output and tidy placer prospects that had been overlooked by the earlier mining men.

I replaced the maps, tucked my outfit away and, to satisfy my sudden interest in the far outlands, picked up my cap and climbed to the crest of the hills back of the house. I prowled through the brush until late afternoon, then descended to the house, arriving a few minutes before Bob Andover drove up in his big, dusty roadster, parked the car in the driveway and strolled in with a nonchalance which masked his curiosity as to Bill Morningstar's actual whereabouts and present state of health.

"Well?" said Bob, after we had shaken hands.

"Bill is in the cooler," I said. "Wait till I stir up some chow and I'll elaborate."

"Which cooler?" asked Bob.

"County!"

Bob stepped over to the telephone. I heard him talking to the chief deputy while I was preparing our bachelor supper. Two hours later, Bob and I were on our way to town and presently we managed to see Bill Morningstar. Bill and Bob did most of the talking. Later, in the sheriff's office, and still later at the sheriff's home, Bob took the lead in matters conversational with the result that before midnight we were sworn in as special deputies and Bill Morningstar was released from jail and turned over to us as our prisoner.

Shortly after midnight the three of us forgathered at my bungalow in the hills and perfected a plan which was to lead to the discovery of the murderer of the prospector and incidentally exonerate Bill—this latter circumstance apparently of minor interest to Bill himself, who seemed interested only in the fact that an adventure was in prospect and that his old friend and companion of the trails was not only willing, but anxious to head the expedition and see it through.

At three that morning we rolled out of the driveway and onto the hill road. In an hour we were slipping swiftly along the Foothill Boulevard toward San Bernardino. Somewhere between Upland and San Bernardino we heard the distant popping of a motor cycle. Bob, who had been doing a comfortable fifty on all the straightaway stretches, stepped the big roadster up to sixty and turned off the headlights, as dawn made the highway visible—a dark-gray streak that swam steadily past us without a jog or curve.

The motor cycle gained on us, however. Bob settled himself and teased the car up to sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five—and then I asked him if he had forgotten that he had a wife and family, even if Bill Morningstar and I were bachelors. Bob shook his head. The needle of the speedometer crept round to eighty. It seemed that we were gaining on the motor cycle, when directly ahead loomed the bulk of a truck and a trailer which swayed from side to side, actually covering more right of way than it was entitled to.

Bob honked for a chance to pass, but the truck kept the middle of the road. We slowed down to twenty-five, directly behind the truck. The motor cycle whizzed past, slowed up and presently signaled us to stop, just after we had crept round the truck and had exchanged felicitations with its driver.

"What's the big idea?" asked the motor-cycle officer, drawing off his gloves, with that old, familiar manner.

"Late for breakfast," answered Bob. "Why don't you pinch that truck driver?"

"That'll be about all from you!" said the officer, as he pulled out that same, old, familiar notebook.

"Then we'll just jog along," declared Bob. "Here are our credentials. Sorry to have spoiled your fun!"

"That's all right, Mr. Armstrong," said the officer, immediately changing tone and returning the slip of paper Bob had handed to him. "You got a fast bus."

"Oh, she'll do," said Bob. "So long! We're holding up the truck and that's just too bad."

"I'll tell him where to head in," said the officer.

AND then we were again on our way, doing a smart fifty, with Bill Morningstar snoozing beside me and Bob tooling the car along with a nonchalance which masked his alertness. As he said later, he could have made it round the truck, if he had cared to risk it, but the officer might not have seen the truck in time and at the clip he was traveling—— But we didn't elaborate the possible details of that contingency.

We had breakfast in San Bernardino, visited the sheriff's office and found out who owned the car from which Bill had been so unceremoniously dumped at Red Rock Springs. The car had originally belonged to a man named Johnson who operated a small garage in San Bernardino. Upon inquiry, we discovered that he had sold it to a desert prospector named Simmons, yet there seemed to be no official record of the transfer.

So we started for Victorville with such information as we had been able to obtain and from thence we posed as mining men, our light camp outfit and the clothes we wore substantiating our attitude.

Shortly after passing Barstow, I fell asleep in spite of the roughness of the desert road. As I slept I dreamed that I was driving my own car down a mountain grade—that the brakes would not hold, that the gears were stripped, and that the steering wheel had no effect whatever upon the direction of the plunging car. I tried to jump out but was powerless to do so. Then as a bridgeless cañon loomed at the bottom of the grade, the car stopped gently. I awoke, gasping, to find that Bob had pulled up where the Red Rock Spring Road forks from the main highway, a few miles west of Daggett.

"The house is in session," declared Bob, climbing down and walking round the car.

"Aren't we going on into Daggett?" I asked.

"I was, but Bill vetoed the suggestion," replied Bob.

"For why?" said Bill, stretching and yawning. "'Cause, then this here Simmons, what tried to wish that there dead prospector onto me, gets wise and lays low till we beat it back to Los Angeles. Nope! I'm for headin' out to the springs and catchin' that there burro."

"Burro?" exclaimed Bob.

"Sure! A gray-and-white burro was prowlin' around the springs when I camped there that night. Seemed like he was scared to come in. I got a hunch that that burro belonged to the prospector what I found."

"But what has that to do with——" I began, but Bill waved an authoritative paw.

"You're asleep, yet! Where's that canteen? I got to soak up some of me ideas."

Bill located the canteen and drank generously.

"It's like this!" he declared. "That prospector was camped at Red Rock Springs when somebody jumped him. I seen signs that he had camped there, includin' that burro what came nosin' around at night but was scared to come in and drink. Now I ask you—where is that prospector's pack and packsaddle and tarp, and such?

"And what was in them packs? And who took 'em? They weren't at the spring when I camped there that night. And if he was packin' the kind of stuff I found in that little can, in his pocket, where did he get it? The papers says that old man had been comin' into Daggett for years and goin' out again, regular, and nobody knowed where he went. Now, I figure that where he went is where you'll find the other guy —that there Simmons what dumped me at the springs and beat it.

"Simmons thinks he's hung that killin' onto me and he don't know the cops turned me loose again. So he tackles the job of findin' the dead prospector's mine, but if he is wise, he catches that burro first. For why? 'Cause that there gray-and-white burro, with a pack on him, and headed northeast, will naturally hit back for the mine and all Simmons would have to do would be punch him along and follow. What I want to know is, did this here Simmons catch the burro, or did he try to trail the prospector by back

trackin'? Can we find out any of that in Daggett? I guess not!

"So I say our game is to head for the springs and make camp. Things comes to them what waits, as Bob says, only you want to keep your eyes rollin' while you're waitin'. All in favor say 'Aye,' and them that ain't can say their prayers. I'm goin' to Red Rock!"

"All right!" said Bob briskly. "Take one of the canteens. I'm going on to Daggett and look around a bit. I'll come out to the spring this evening. I'll fetch what provisions we'll need. Coming along, Walter?"

I TOLD Bob I thought I'd hike with Bill, as it was but a mile to the spring—that I was stiff from sitting in the machine and moreover I needed exercise.

"Renegade!" laughed Bob as he hopped into the car. "Feel the old desert calling you, eh?"

"Fetch along plenty o' tobacco," said Bill as Bob swung the car round.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROSPECTOR'S TRAIL.

BILL MORNINGSTAR swung along with a vigor which seemed to scorn the heat and the heavy going. In fact, my own heaviness vanished after the first mile or so and slowly the feel of the desert came back to me as I recognized old landmarks and breathed the clean air of the open country. Bill trudged on steadily, with never a word until we reached the Red Rock Springs, a water hole a piece off the road and marked by a lone cottonwood and the usual litter of tin cans and bottles.

"Here's where I found him," said Bill, leading me to a spot a few yards back from the spring. "All tracked up now, account of the folks comin' for the body. Wonder if anybody caught that there burro?"

While Bill puttered about, I gazed at the spot. The scene of a tragedy always inspires curiosity in me. I endeavored to visualize the prospector's evening camp, the approach of a visitor and the final dire and treacherous assault. Somehow, I imagined the prospector had been killed while he slept. This theory, however, was soon to be eradicated.

Bill, prowling about, stooping to examine that which seemed trackless ground, presently called to me. I came to where he knelt before a clump of greasewood. In his huge hands was an old black felt hat. Beneath the greasewood was a shallow hole in the sand. Without a word, he handed the hat to me. Across the crumpled crown was a ragged cut, fresh made, for the edges of the cut were clean black, the color of the hat itself a greenish black—the fading due to sun and weather.

"He wasn't asleep when it happened," declared Bill.

"He was struck on the back of the head?" I queried.

"The same. The hat tells the story," said Bill. "The papers said: 'Some blunt instrument.' I say a automobile wrench, a big one. Suppose I was to go crazy and say that this here Simmons drives up and stops at the spring and commences to monkey with his car and say it is busted or somethin'? The old prospector watches him tinker with it and pretty soon Simmons asks him to lend a hand and mebby the prospector is bendin' over heavin' at somethin' when the other guy swings the wrench. Course, nobody knows, but the man what did it. I'm only guessin'!"

"And, after all," I said, as Bill straightened out the crumpled hat and gazed at it, "why are we out here looking for the murderer? We didn't know the prospector and his enemy had never harmed us—that is, so far as Bob and I are concerned. Yet we are keen to hunt him down. Why?"

"Well," began Bill, frowning judi-

cially, "all he done to me was to try and get me hung. He's just tryin' to save his own hide by stretchin' mine. But that ain't why we come here. We come for the game of seein' that what is stole is paid for. He stole that old man's life and he's got to pay for it. You see, I got to collect to show that I didn't do the stealin'."

"And incidentally save your own neck?" I suggested.

Bill Morningstar snorted vigorously.

"Nope! Aloisius Brandstatter, of Chicago, is me friend. He's got more millions than they is dill pickles in a quart jar. And he knows I ain't no murderer. Do you think Aloisius would let 'em hang me? I'm tellin' you, no!"

"Then why——"

But Bill forestalled me.

"Because court proceedin's cost a lot of money, and unless it was to come to a show-down, I wouldn't ask me friend Aloisius to spend his money.

"Why, just as soon as them lawyers knowed a millionaire was back of me, they'd string it out to the tune of thirty or forty thousand dollars—and I ain't worth that much to Aloisius, or anybody else!

"But we got a job to do. Bob ought to be along pretty soon. Wonder what kind of a idea he is workin' on? He's got somethin' goin' in his head. He was right pleased that we didn't go on into Daggett with him."

"I can't see a sign of him," I said, as I stepped to a low rise and surveyed the afternoon desert. "However, there are a couple of men off there. They seem to be coming this way."

Bill Morningstar, used to seafaring, came beside me and gazed toward the two figures far down the desert.

"You're wrong," he stated finally. "It's a man and a burro—not two men."

And without pausing further, Bill led the way to a natural shelter of brush, some three or four hundred yards beyond the spring. The man with the burro came steadily on. The late afternoon sunlight discovered that the burro was packed and that the man occasionally prodded him with a stick to hasten him along. From our concealment we watched the other approach the spring, wondering who he might be and why he had left Daggett so late in the day.

ARRIVED at the spring, the burro stopped. The man gazed round, seemed puzzled. He took off his hat and wiped his forehead with a white handkerchief. We could see the flicker of white against the dark-colored shirt he wore. Bill seized my arm, and with a heave pulled me to my feet.

"Might 'a' knowed he'd pull somethin' unexpected," he said. "It's Bob!"

"Sure?" I asked.

"Ever see a real desert man use a *white* handkerchief?" queried Bill.

"But the car?" I asked.

"That's it," said Bill as we started toward the spring. "You was listenin' and lookin' for a automobile—all fixed to see one. Which same made it kind of hard for you to see Bob, on foot an' punchin' a burro.

"Coo-eee!" called Bill.

The figure at the spring swung its hat in acknowledgment of the call.

"But it ain't the gray-and-white burro," said Bill, as we approached the spring.

His tone suggested disappointment. Bob had begun to unpack the burro. Bill Morningstar accepted the situation without a word. I took the cue. Finally Bob told us that just before he reached town he had deliberately disconnected one of the spark-plug wires, stuttered into town and stopped in front of the one and only garage—and all this merely to awaken local curiosity.

A disabled machine is always a subject of interest and comment in any small community. Bob had let it be

known that he was anxious to get out to the Twin Butte Mine and while he and a mechanic were discussing the possibility of quick repairs, he had noticed a car parked in the garage and bearing the license number which Bill Morningstar had scribbled on my table. Bob said he then wished that he had used different tactics, but that he made those he had assumed serve his turn.

In short, Bob bribed the mechanic to discover that this car could not be repaired in less than three or four days. The interest of the citizens immediately evaporated. Left alone with the garageman, Bob asked if he could not rent a car and continue his journey. The garageman had nothing he could spare. Bob suggested the car which he knew belonged to Simmons. The garageman couldn't rent that, as Simmons had stored it for three weeks, when he expected to return to Daggett.

By avoiding any appearance of curiosity, Bob finally learned that the man Simmons had left Daggett with a burro-and-pack outfit, three days ago, but had left no word as to where he was going. So, having paid the mechanic liberally, Bob had pretended great disgust for the facilities afforded by Daggett's garage and had purchased a burro, pack outfit and supplies necessary for an extended trip, scandalously overloading the burro, much to the amusement of the sun-dried inhabitants.

"I played the tenderfoot," concluded Bob. "Only the mechanic suspects my innocent demeanor and he's bought and paid for."

Meanwhile, the burro was unpacked, staked out and fed grain. This was no extravagance. A little grain, once a day, will purchase the loyalty of the average burro.

We were all much in need of sleep, yet the novelty of the sudden transposition from town to the desert and the increased interest in our quest kept us talking long after sundown. The man, Simmons, was somewhere back in the hills, undoubtedly searching for the dead prospector's mine. That the mine could not be reached by automobile was evident from the fact that Simmons had left his own car in Daggett. And this fact eliminated the districts lying north and west of Red Rock Spring, both districts traversed by desert roads. Of course he had not gone south.

BUT even so, there was left the eastern reaches of flat and desert range wherein a man might spend a lifetime searching for a lost mine and never find it. Bill Morningstar suggested that we circle the spring and if we picked up comparatively fresh burro tracks leading east, to follow them. Bob shook his head.

"Burros come in for water, occasionally. There are not many strays as near town as this, but there may be one or two. No, we can't waste time trailing stray burros over the country."

"But Simmons would be punchin' the burro and his tracks would show," declared Bill.

"Perhaps," said Bob.

"Perhaps nothin'!" remarked Bill Morningstar, snorting. "Simmons would have to pack water and grub and his tools."

"Simmons is wily," said Bob. "He'll cover his tracks as far as possible.

"Sure he will!" agreed Bill. "But that mine is out there, somewhere."

"We're after a man, not a mine, aren't we?" I asked.

"I'm looking for neither," declared Bob. "I'm looking for a gray-and-white burro with zebra stripes on his forelegs—an unusual combination. Burros that show zebra stripes are usually dun color or brown, not light gray and white."

"Hear the zoo-ologer!" scoffed Bill Morningstar.

"And the coyotes," said Bob, laughing.

As there were no coyotes singing at the time, Bill looked hard at Bob but said nothing.

Bill declared that he would turn in and his suggestion appealed to Bob and me. We felt sleepy. As for myself I felt that we were following a rather blind lead. Bob, however, was softly whistling a tune as he spread his tarp' and blankets.

Bill observed this. "Got somethin' more than your arm up your sleeve, ain't you?" he remarked.

"And something more than hair under my hat," retorted Bob pointedly.

Presently we were all stretched out, Bill snoring like the tide on Portuguese Bend, Bob very quiet, but I could not sleep. My pulse was pounding and I turned and twisted, wondering why, now that I ought to sleep, I could not. The night was pleasantly cool, the silence almost oppressive.

Suddenly, our burro began to circle his picket. I raised on my elbow and watched him. In the dim light of the stars I could catch little more than his movement and attitude, but I noticed that he stopped occasionally and slanted his long ears toward the east. I was about to call Bob, when from somewhere out of the darkness came the hee-haw of another burro. Bob turned out and was on his feet instantly.

"Sit tight," he whispered. "I filled the dead prospector's hat with grain and planted it as a bait, out there beyond our burro. Bill thinks I'm crazy, but I have hopes—for both of us."

"It's a long chance—that the stray burro is the one you want," I said.

"Yes, but when a long shot pays, it pays big," returned Bob. "Who wants to bet on a sure thing?"

"There is no argument about that," I replied. "I hope you are right."

Meanwhile the stray approached camp cautiously. We could just discern a moving blur that seemed to appear and vanish as we peered into the starlit dusk. Presently we heard the stray stop.

"He has found the grain," whispered Bob.

And then, much to my surprise, Bob stooped and picked up his flash light from his blankets. A shaft of light tunneled the darkness. Like a magic-lantern picture thrown suddenly upon a screen, the head and shoulders of a shaggy burro leaped into view. The animal had been munching the grain. Its head came up, the eyes glowing like green fire. With a snort the stray turned and pattered away.

"Gray and white," said Bob.

"Make it black and white and I'll join you," came the voice of Bill Morningstar. "I saw him and it's the gentleman we're after."

"And making for the hills on high!" I remarked.

"He'll come back," said Bob. "He'll slip in and eat the rest of the grain in the hat. And he'll come back for more, in the morning."

"Bob ought to know all about jackasses," said Bill.

"That's right! We've traveled together a lot," retorted Bob.

And as I rearranged my blankets and settled down again, I pondered the seeming levity of these friends of mine, who could find time to spar with each other under conditions that did not at all inspire humor. And yet I realized that their joshing was merely a mental relaxation, a sharpening of wits that kept their minds alert and served to cheat the monotony of serious endeavor.

"Poor devil!" Bob murmured. "He and that old prospector were friends. They must have been. Now the old man has vanished. The gray burro doesn't know what it's all about. He keeps coming back to the spring, of course, because there's water here. But he's looking for the prospector, at the same time."

"Think so?" I asked.

"Sure of it!" Bill told me that he wouldn't have discovered the buried hat if he hadn't first noticed that a burro had been pawing at the sand where it was buried. Saw the tracks. The burro knew the smell of that hat, the same as a dog would know. There is a new theory that all animals have souls. And why should the human animal be preferred in that regard?

"The human animal preferred himself," I suggested.

"Correct! Call me at daylight, James. I have an appointment with Mr. Longchance." And Bob turned over and went to sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE BURRO'S HANDS.

WE were up at daybreak, anxious to make the experiment of trailing the stray burro to the hidden mine, provided that the burro could be captured and induced to travel in the right direction, a matter, as Bob observed, "entirely in the hands of the gray-and-white burro."

Meanwhile, the strange burro stood a few yards from the animal we had picketed, watching us. Bob was for walking out slowly and putting a rope on him. Bill Morningstar vetoed the suggestion.

"If you watch that donkey's ears you'll notice that he's all set to turn and trot off the minute you make a wrong move," declared Bill. "He ain't wild, but he's been chased, recent. If we scare him, just once, we'll never catch him."

"What do you suggest?" queried Bob.

"Well, if you guys'll just move out of camp a couple of hundred yards and stay there, I'll try my scheme. If it don't work, you can try yours. And whether I catch that donkey or not, I won't scare him."

"Go ahead," said Bob. "Walter and I will pack the hardware over to those greasewoods and make breakfast while you work your magic."

"Nope!" said Bill, shaking his head. "I'll need the cookin' things, right here. You'll have to wait for your flapjacks —but you can smoke, if you like."

"How generous! Can we watch you?" said Bob.

"Yes, and mebby learn something," replied Bill Morningstar.

SO Bob and I marched over to the greasewoods a hundred yards or so from the spring and sat down. Bill Morningstar walked out and gathered dead greasewood roots for a fire. With what seemed to be unnecessary deliberation he puttered about, evidently preparing breakfast, for presently we could smell coffee and I imagined I also detected the fragrance of frying bacon.

Still no sign from Bill Morningstar that he was at all interested in anything but his immediate task. In fact, he proceeded to eat his breakfast, quite as though we did not exist.

I was watching the dawn creep across the eastern hills when Bob grasped my arm.

"Second act," he said. "Watch him."

Bill was sitting by his breakfast fire, apparently drinking coffee, for we could see the glint of the cup as he tipped it. The stray burro had left the other burro and was standing a few yards behind Bill, as though curious as to what he was doing. Bill seemed oblivious to the burro, lowered his cup and seemed to be gathering the dishes together. Presently, he got up, walked over to his bed roll and a little later we saw him make the motion of striking a match.

Then he walked back toward the fire, stooped, straightened up and again walked back to where we had put the provisions and grain. Meanwhile the burro stood watching him. Then the burro took a step or two forward and

lowered its head. Bill moved about slowly, picking up things as though getting ready to pack and travel.

"He's fed the burro," said Bob. "But he hasn't caught him—yet."

"Perhaps it won't be necessary," I suggested.

"Looks as though he'd win," said Bob. "Old Bill has imagination, or he wouldn't be alive to-day. Just now, he's playing the part of the former owner of the burro, puttering around camp as though he had all the time in the world. Horses and burros are creatures of habit. If it were not so, they couldn't be handled by man. If Bill doesn't make a false move, he'll get the burro, all right! What's he up to?"

Bill Morningstar had walked over toward the other burro, was evidently feeding him grain. Presently Bill strode back toward the fire, turned and, walking up to the stray, laid a tie rope over its neck, as though he were hanging the rope carelessly on a fence. I felt a tingling in the back of my neck. If the burro drew back, swerved sideways or reared, our chances of catching him again would be pretty slim. But the little animal made no effort to get away, stood quietly while Bill Morningstar carefully laid the saddle blankets on him and as carefully placed the packsaddle and cinched it.

"Good work!" said Bob. "We'll go over and congratulate Bill—after we eat."

It was quite evident that Bill was a bit pleased with himself and he had a right to be. Bob pretended to take the whole affair as a matter of course, simply to get a rise out of Bill Morningstar.

"Got him, eh?" said Bob. "Why didn't you get ahead and finish packing him? You've had your breakfast."

Bill Morningstar's keen blue eyes gleamed with suppressed triumph. He shrugged his huge shoulders expressively.

"Just for that," he said, grinning, "you can pack both burros and get your own breakfast. Me, I sit and smoke and see that you do it right."

Bob ignored this pleasantry.

"Let's look at the trail maker," he said, stepping toward the burro. Then quickly: "What in thunder are you wearing that ghastly hat for?"

In our excitement we had not noticed that Bill was wearing the dead prospector's hat.

" 'Cause it's the only thin' this here little hee-haw savvies—the only thin' that's left of his old boss. Do you know, that little cuss was half scared of me until he smelt of this hat when I was stoopin' down to pour his grain on the tarp? After he smelt the hat he acted different. He knows I ain't his boss, but he knows the hat. You fellas goin' to stand admirin' him all day?"

"Going to stand and hold him all day?" queried Bob.

"I'm his anchor, till he's packed and on the way. I don't risk tyin' him, yet."

WHILE I searched for more fuel, Bob made coffee and presently we were munching bacon sandwiches. Bill had ignored the loaf of bread Bob had fetched from Daggett, not because he preferred flapjacks, but because, as he explained, the smell of frying flapjacks, bacon and coffee would make the stray burro feel more at home. As we ate our breakfast Bill elaborated.

"My idea," he said, "was to act the part, as near as I could, of that poor old man what was murdered. So I takes it easy, moochin' around, careless-like and slow and all the time watchin' that burro, what was watchin' me. Just one quick move and he'd left. But it ain't all in how you act—outside. And don't you think a horse or a mule or a burro don't know it! You got to think, easy and slow, and forget you're scared

to death you won't catch him. Why, honest, mate, I got so interested in playin' I was that old man, that I commenced to figure on how soon I would be back at the workin's with my pick and pan and wonderin' if anybody had been there since I left.

"It was kind of like mesmerizin' myself—and when I come to feed that burro and then put that tie rope on him, I wasn't thinkin' of catchin' him at all—just thinkin' of goin' ahead, regular, like I was used to packin' him and hittin' the trail.

"And seein' as how I felt that way, *he* felt that way, and as me old friend Bill Henderson used to say: 'Nothin' could be fairer than that.' So here we are. But gosh! my insides are fair boilin', what with wonderin' if our little friend here will stand and let us admire him the rest of the day, or if he'll back track for them diggin's when we get packed and ready."

"Let's all of us just take it for granted he will do his part," said Bob.

"I'm willin'," declared Bill. "And I got just one idea left. Which same is: you fellas pack the other burro and wait. Me and me little friend here will start out, with nothin' to bother him, like another animal followin' or tryin' to lead. He's a kind of single-track gent, what you would call a one-man burro, and he don't like strangers nohow."

We had no extra packsaddle, but he had an extra pack cloth or two and plenty of rope, so Bob and I packed the bedding and a few of the lighter things on what we eventually called "our burro," while Bill took care of the provisions, the tools we had fetched along and the canteens.

The sun was well over the eastern hills and the air noticeably warmer when we made that which we thought was our final experiment. Bill Morningstar lighted his pipe, picked up a stick, and told the burro to "mooch along!" The burro paid no attention to the command. Bill promptly whacked him with the stick. The burro turned from the spring and marched deliberately toward the east. We wanted to cheer, but didn't.

"Give us time to get goin' right," said Bill as he passed us.

So we waited until Bill had traversed a half mile or so of the flat east of the spring and then we swung into his trail, our own burro evidently anxious to overtake the leader. We felt as though we had accomplished a lot and yet we had accomplished nothing. We were blindly following a strange burro across the desert. We had no idea as to when or where our journey would end. We were taking the long chance.

The stray burro might stop suddenly and refuse to be driven farther. He might recall some grazing ground in the hills and lead us to that. He might make it to the next water hole and decide to stay there. Or he might circle and return to Red Rock Spring, after a few hours' meandering. We appreciated all of these possibilities as we hiked along behind our own pack animal, with Bill several hundred yards in the lead.

"I *have* drawn the fourth ace, once or twice," said Bob.

As it grew hot, we ceased talking and plodded along, finally overtaking Bill on the other side of a ridge. He had stopped to take up slack in the hitch.

"George seems to know what he's doin'," declared Bill. "He's goin' somewhere. He ain't just wigglin' his legs. 'Cause why? Two-three times he sniffed at the trail, if you can call it a trail. I'm callin' him George, because I'm lettin' him do it."

But George would not budge when Bill told him to mooch along again. Bill whacked him, but still the burro refused to start. Bill scratched his head.

"Somethin' wrong," he said. "And at that there's kind of a trail windin' down this ridge and over yonder. Suppose you fellas start off north or south and leave me and George marooned here for a spell."

"Anything to oblige," said Bob, and he swung our burro round and we set off toward the north.

We had gone but a rod or so when we noticed that Bill was under way again. Evidently the old prospector's burro did not like company. So we did not swing back into the trail until Bill was well ahead again.

CHAPTER V.

THE BURRO'S TRAIL.

WE were not following a visible trail. Wind plays havoc with a mere burro trail on the wide sandy reaches of the desert. However, we came upon one or two signs that spoke of a trail: first, when the burro that Bill was punching skirted the edge of a dry lake, instead of making directly across it, indicating that at certain seasons there was water in the lake bed—and along the edge of the smooth, flat surface were the tracks of a burro; again, in the foothills, we came upon distinct evidence that the burro had an objective. It was late in the afternoon, no signs of water, and nothing in sight but low, barren desert hills and ridges—a sullen, chaotic land, tinged with the red warning of the descending sun.

"Water?" said Bob. "Or what have you?"

"A dry camp—unless this little fella changes his mind right soon," said Bill, patting the burro.

"Well, here are some matches," I said, as I pointed to a smooth spot beyond the monument. "Burned matches—but a desert rat would hardly pack wood to make a cooking fire here. And there are no ashes."

Bill Morningstar gazed hard at the ground, scratched his head. Bob prowled about restlessly, saying nothing. The two burros stood as though waiting our pleasure. Bill lighted his pipe, sat down and smoked.

"I been thinkin' most all day," he observed. "Now I'm going to stop thinkin' and mebby something will come to me."

When Bill lighted his pipe, he had flicked the match away and it fell on the smooth spot where we had discovered the scattered and burned matches. A desert monument, a small space of especially hard and smooth ground and a dozen or so match ends; and no other sign of previous human existence. But why the match ends?

Bill rose and stretched.

"Guess we might as well unpack," he declared.

"Unpack?" exclaimed Bob.

"This was his camp," said Bill. "Only, where is the water?"

"Camp!" said Bob, shrugging his shoulders.

"The same," replied Bill. "We made about twenty miles to-day. And seein' that the old prospector camped here regular, I figure that we got another big day ahead of us. If his diggin's had been anywhere near, he wouldn't 'a' bushed down on this here flat."

"Of course he never ate anything, or drank water, or fed the burro when he camped here," said Bob.

"But he smoked his pipe," declared Bill, gesturing toward the evidence on the ground. "He didn't stand here and light matches just to see 'em burn."

And straightway Bill began to unpack his burro, while Bob and I, with some hesitancy, unpacked the other. Free of his pack, Bill's burro, George, turned and marched south with the calm deliberation of his kind.

"Here! Where you goin'?" called Bill, striding after the burro. "Hang onto the other one," he called back to us.

And then Bill followed the gray-and-white burro, but made no attempt to catch him. Across the smooth plateau they went, while Bob and I watched them, at first inclined to smile and then, glancing at each other, we nodded.

"Of course!" said Bob. "Head as thick as a rock. Might have guessed it."

"But we had better lead this one," I suggested, indicating our burro.

So we led him, following in Bill's tracks. Before we could overtake him he had disappeared, vanished as though he had literally dropped off the edge of the plateau. And arriving at the edge, we saw immediately why the burro, George, had not gone directly to water from the monument. The way down into the barranco was too narrow and altogether too steep to admit of travel with a pack.

Gingerly, I led our burro down the difficult way to the spring below, determined that if some rattler happened to be coiled on a ledge close to my head as I passed, my passing would be swift. I would not pause to "look him in the eye."

"I guess I know why he camped up on the flat," said Bill as he watered the burro, after a careful inspection of the immediate vicinity. "This here hell hole is what you might say glutted with snakes. Two of 'em in two minutes! I'm leavin' here, right now."

I watered our burro. No more rattlers appeared. We scrambled up the steep trail and made our way back to the monument. We staked out the burros, fed them and ate sardines and crackers. Bill grumbled because we could not make coffee.

TURNING in early, we lay and watched the light flicker and fade along the red hills. We planned an early start and, during our talk, tried to convince ourselves that the stone monument was a readable water sign. Yet we knew it was not. It stood somewhere near the middle of the plateau and pointed toward the sky, which, so far as a chance traveler was concerned, contained the nearest water.

"The old boy monumented this trail, but only for his own benefit," said Bob. "Water is notoriously scarce in this region. If it hadn't been for that burro——"

"Some of them old desert men get so they think the whole desert belongs to 'em, 'cause they're mostly alone in it and nobody to tell 'em different. Like up here. Who ever comes up this way?" And Bill, reclining on his blankets, waved his hand. "That old man didn't have to stick up a water sign for to help the next fella into his country and mebby to his private diggin's."

"Nevertheless, I'm going to rearrange that monument, so that it shows where to find water," declared Bob.

"And snakes," said Bill, shrugging.

"Well, a man has to take chances in this country," said Bob.

"Exactly what the old prospector thought when he didn't make a sign pointin' to water," returned Bill.

"And he's dead—murdered within a few miles of a town. And this mine is lost." Bob sat up as though to continue the argument.

"A whole lot he cares," declared Bill. "But, mate, nothin' in this here world is plumb lost. Somebody is always interested in thin's what was and thin's what is and some folks is interested in thin's what ain't. Provin' which, we're here, ain't we?"

"Coffee," said Bob to me, "strangely enough, puts Bill to sleep if he drinks it at night." He turned to Bill. "I noticed a stunted cottonwood down by the spring in that barranco. There was enough deadwood to make a fire, Bill."

"You're talkin' to yourself, not to me," said Bill.

And presently our camp was still.

The desert stars seemed to glow and expand and then shrink to poniard shafts of silver flame. Somehow, as I drifted to sleep, I felt that our presence was an insult to the scheme of things—and yet, we had a purpose, nor was it altogether selfish.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ABANDONED TENT.

WE packed the burros by starlight—three o'clock in a thin drift of wind from the eastern hills. Bob was exceptionally quiet, nor did Bill Morningstar or I have much to say. Our quest had begun to assume its actual, grim proportions. We were out of touch with civilization, far from any law save conscience and facing eventual possibilities not pleasant to contemplate. In town, one leans heavily on convention and the safety of numbers. In the desert, these stays are not. The law of self-preservation becomes paramount. In the desert silences a man thinks, hence he is not likely to say much.

East we plodded, traversing the plateau, led by the gray-and-white burro. Slowly the dawn crept out across the hills, brushing the darkness aside, leaving us a pigmy cavalcade in an emptiness which grew and spread to shimmering golden levels, edged by crimson-scarred and broken ranges, hard and sharp against the encircling sky.

From this vista, I was suddenly drawn back into myself. We were working down the edge of the plateau into a cañon, as yet shallow, its bottom strewn with huge boulders. And at the bottom we came upon a dead cottonwood, torn from its hold by some cloudburst in the hills above. We made a fire and ate a hurried breakfast. We trudged on up the cañon, which broadened and became deeper, its red-rock walls reaching far above us.

"Glad it isn't July," said Bob. "No chance, if a cloudburst hit here." And he gestured toward the gray, high-water mark on the cañon walls.

"Must be another way out," said Bill. "That old prospector wouldn't risk usin' this trail durin' the rainy weather. But what I'm wonderin' is if Simmons is ahead of us an' still lookin' for the lost diggin's? We, havin' this here burro for a guide, might get in ahead of him, at that."

"And he might never show up," I suggested.

Bill Morningstar, plodding ahead, stopped. His red face was streaming with sweat. The air in the cañon bottom was hot, close and less dry than that of the open desert. Bill waved his hand.

"Does a man kill a harmless old fella just for fun? Simmons is a prospector. That old man was likewise a prospector. Folks said the old man had a rich mine up here somewhere, accordin' to the newspapers. Some thin's you know, but can't prove." Bill took a drink from one of the canteens and hung it back on the pack.

We followed on up the cañon, which angled abruptly as it worked deeper into the hills, until finally we came to a spot from which we could survey its farthest extension—a bleak wall of rock, streaked with the whitish gray of a once active waterfall. The barrier was impassable. The gray-and-white burro had stopped. It was high noon, the air sultry, the heat intense.

"Come, on, little fella!" said Bill, poking the burro with his stick.

The burro plodded on and we had begun to fear that our faith in the little animal had been sadly misplaced, when he turned in the gravelly bottom of the cañon and struck diagonally across a sandy delta toward the north. Presently we realized that the delta had been formed by the high water of another stream bed which wound tortu-

ously up and into the hills, angling away from the box cañon toward the stunted timber of the crest. The going was rough and slow. The stream bed was strewn with large boulders and occasional dead timber.

A half hour, and Bill, several rods ahead of us, stopped. When we came up, the burro was drinking at a shallow pool among the rocks. Our own burro crowded up and drank. Bill looked at us. We nodded. We felt that we were near the end of our journey. Bill reached in his pack outfit and drew out the heavy automatic I had loaned him. In spite of my assurance that it was loaded, he drew the magazine and examined the gun, which he finally returned to the holster and strapped it on.

"Just hang back a piece and keep George company," he said.

And straightway he proceeded on up the rugged river bed while we rested and smoked.

Presently came a faint "Co-eee!" long drawn and significant.

"Nobody home," said Bob.

We got up and punched the burros along, winding among the rocks and climbing the narrow way until suddenly the gorge opened out on either side of the stream and, turning, we gazed toward the west.

Beyond and below lay the immense plateau of the desert, grayish brown and hazed by the hot sun. Far to the west rose the peaks of San Gorgonio and San Jacinto.

"Didn't know one could see those peaks from anywhere out here," said Bob.

We moved on across the eastern side of the stream to a spot where Bill stood gazing at an old, weather-darkened tent. Beyond the tent, against a ledge, was a small stone corral and a lean-to under which were a few tools, a packsaddle, harness and a nose bag. A rough table, fashioned of pieces of boxes, was built against the ledge; and above the table on a natural shelf of rock were a few cooking utensils and cans. Near the table was a stone fireplace, roofed with two pieces of heavy sheet iron—a handy outdoor stove.

"I took a look in the tent," said Bill, gesturing. "Everything shows that the old boy expected to come back."

WE stepped into the tent and not until then did I realize that a human being had been snuffed out of existence while going about his legitimate business, harming no one and content with his very few, simple possessions.

The meager home had been neatly kept. The blankets on the homemade pole bedstead were folded back. The floor was clean. On a line running just beneath the ridgepole hung several garments. The usual cupboard made of canned-goods boxes contained a suit of underwear, neatly folded, and some clean socks. A pair of rubber hip boots hung on the farther tent pole. In one cupboard we discovered a few old books: a treatise on minerals; an almanac, the dates checked here and there with a pencil mark; a paper-covered novel; a small dictionary; and several topographical maps of the region.

Viewing this inanimate evidence of the old prospector's thrift and neatness, realizing what few demands he made upon humanity for his existence, I became suddenly conscious that he *had* existed and was not merely a name, a vague some one whose tragedy I was aware of, yet of whose personality I knew nothing.

"It's hell," said Bob, gesturing round about. And I knew exactly what he meant.

"His mine was up the draw a piece," said Bill Morningstar, as we came out in the sunlight.

"Hang the mine!" exclaimed Bob. "It's the other man——"

He was interrupted by Bill Morningstar, the practical.

"We got grub and plenty time. The other fella—he mebby got a hunch and is hidin' out. But he'll come back and he'll hunt for this mine. We'll wait!"

"Here?" said Bob.

"Nope. He might see us first. My ideas is to camp up above, where there's timber and water and mebby some grass for the burros. If he don't show up in a week, I guess we'll have to pull out and start all over again."

"This man Simmons left Daggett with a burro and pack," said Bob. "That ought to mean that he's prospecting. If he had been going to leave the country he wouldn't have taken a burro. He would have taken his car and hit for Nevada, or somewhere up North. Our only chance is that he hasn't the faintest idea he is suspected of the murder. Of course, he may never find this camp. If we hadn't had the gray-and-white burro we wouldn't have found it in a year."

"Well, she's found," declared Bill. "And from what I seen of placers, in Australia and Mexico, she ain't so rich, at that. Anyhow, we are leavin' thin's just like we found 'em. I'll tie up the tent flaps again."

"How about our tracks?" queried Bob.

"A little sand will fix that," said Bill.

And after he had tied the flaps, Bill took a shovel from the lean-to, came to the edge of the stream, scooped up some dry sand and walked over to the tent. Then walking backwards he sprinkled the fine sand over our tracks and his own as he backed up.

"One set of tracks won't mean nothin'—but three different sizes might look suspicious," said Bill as he shouldered the shovel, which he left at the workings farther up the stream. "And the sand will settle and look natural in a day or two."

WE trudged on up the stream bed, dodging patches of sand and of gravel and leading the burros. The burro, George, seemed reluctant to proceed farther than the camp until we branched from the stream to a long and wide bench that sloped up toward the sparse timber. Then he proceeded almost briskly, noticing which, Bob laughed.

"There's a meadow tucked away up there somewhere and the little fellow knows it."

With a permanent camp in view, we did not stop to rest or eat, although it was long past noon. Finally we crossed a tiny, snow-fed stream, the headwaters of the stream which ran past the old prospector's camp. Beyond the water, we came upon an opening in the timber, thinly carpeted with new grass. We made camp on the southern edge of this meadow, where the mountainside dropped, steep and rugged, to the desert level below. We cooked and ate a hearty meal, rigged a windbreak with the pack cloths, and gathered wood for a night fire.

Bob disappeared. Presently he returned to camp, informing us that at the edge of the timber below was a point of rocks from which the old prospector's tent was plainly visible.

About eight o'clock that evening, as we sat round the fire, Bill Morningstar entertaining us with a vivid yarn from the skein of his many and multicolored experiences, Bill stopped talking abruptly and held up his hand.

"Listen!" he said, gesturing over his shoulder.

We could hear nothing but the soft drone of the wind in the pine tops.

"Both burros here?" queried Bill.

"Regular fog all over the meadow," replied Bob, rising and stepping out beyond the glow of the fire. "Can't see a thing!"

Bill Morningstar got up and, rummaging among our equipment, finally

poured some grain into the aluminum stew pot and shook the pot briskly. Presently the head of a burro poked through the mist, its long ears slanted forward expectantly. Bill kept on shaking the grain. Out of the mist loomed the shape of the other burro.

"Get a rope," said Bill, as both burros tried to shove their noses into the pot.

Bob and I haltered and tied both burros while Bill fed them from his hand.

"Why the bonds?" queried Bob, yet Bill only shook his head.

"Mebby I imagined it," he said, shrugging his huge shoulders.

"Imagined what?" asked Bob.

But before Bill could reply, an answer came out of the black depths below the mountainside—the long-drawn, melancholy hee-haw of a burro, distant, yet distinct in the soundless air. We glanced at each other, at the tethered burros, at the red, palpitating embers of the fire. Almost instantly the burro, George, stopped munching, but before he could pump up an answer to the call from below, Bill Morningstar had seized its blunt nose and shut off its wind.

"Ought to put one of them Maxim silencers on you," said Bill, as the burro fought to free itself.

"If there's a burro down there," and Bob gestured, "there's a man down there."

"But we won't be able to see anything until the fog lifts in the mornin'," said Bill.

"Why not drop down now, and investigate?" suggested Bob.

Bill shook his head.

"Hand me a bit of rope and I'll fix these here megaphones so they won't toot." And as he noosed the burros' noses with a sort of Spanish bridle, Bill kept on talking. "Nope, we won't do no investigatin' in the dark. If that man Simmons is down there and he hears us prowlin' around, most like he'll shoot first and look afterwards. Them kind always does. And even if we plugged him, we wouldn't get what we're after. Me, I figure to make the man what killed the old prospector give himself away before there's any more killin'."

BILL MORNINGSTAR came over to the fire and squatted. He filled his pipe and smoked for a while, gazing at the fire.

"It's like this," he said finally. "If it is Simmons down there, why, he knows what I look like. And if he's been readin' the papers, he knows I was pinched for murderin' that old man. So if I showed up, sudden, most like he would take a shot at me and mebby I'd have to kill him, which ain't on the books. If you fellas are willin', why, I figure it would work out all right for you to drop down, after daylight, with one pack animal, like you was a couple of tenderfeet that had been campin' in the hills for some while and was out of grub.

"You can act like you was in a hurry to get out to the railroad and all you wanted was some grub and a line on how to get to Daggett. You ain't interested in minin', nohow, and you're off your trail, havin' figured to keep on down the range. But you seen his camp and changed your mind. While you're talkin' you can size up his artillery and if you get a chance, get hold of it. But look out he ain't packin' a gun in a shoulder holster, under his shirt. About then, I show up, comin' into camp through the brush and not down the stream bed. Then he'll have to do some explainin'."

"How about it, Walter?" said Bob, turning to me.

I nodded. The plan was simple enough, the part we had to play not difficult. We had vouched for Bill Morningstar and it was up to us to

make good. Technically, Bill was our prisoner; actually, he was the backbone of the expedition.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN SIMMONS.

BILL and Bob said they had slept well—when we arose in the morning. I had not. I know I dozed and dreamed occasionally. At the first hint of daylight I had a small fire going and made coffee. The mist still hung in the pines and the air was sharp. After breakfast we packed our burro, careful to throw a rather poor hitch and otherwise advertise our lack of familiarity with camp and trail methods. Meanwhile Bill climbed down to the point of rocks to survey the distant camp. He was gone but a short time when he returned, puffing from his climb.

"Get that pack off the burro and get busy eatin' some more breakfast and foolin' around. I'm headin' back in the brush, with George. There's a fella comin' up the stream bed below the bench. He's headed for here, all right. I told you what Simmons looks like. If it *is* Simmons, keep him talkin' as long as you can. I'm goin' to tie George back in the brush and work down the slope to the mine. I'll be in the tent when you fellas show up. Course you'll drop down the hill with him, askin' him to show you the trail out to Daggett. Get that pack off your burro and spread things around careless."

And Bill got busy, packing the other burro, taking his blankets, the shovels and pick and about all of the provisions.

Bill seized George's tie rope and plunged into the brush. Bob and I spread the pack cloth, dropped the kyacks and blankets on it, threw some wood on the fire and filled the coffeepot. Bob was slicing some bacon and I was thrusting some twigs under the coffeepot when a man hailed us from across the meadow. We answered his hail heartily, as though overjoyed to see him. He approached our camp slowly, until about halfway across the meadow, then his step became brisk.

He wore the usual overalls, brogans and cotton shirt of a prospector and also that which a prospector near his home camp seldom bothers with—a heavy gun and a belt filled with cartridges. He was a short, stocky man of about forty years of age. His eyes were light gray, his features commonplace. He would have passed for a farm hand, or cowboy, or stableman. There was nothing especially characteristic of the prospector about him.

"Ain't you fellas lost up here?" he asked, eying our equipment.

"I guess we can take care of ourselves," said Bob, adopting the tenderfoot's attitude. "We came clear across from Rosedale. Been hitting the trail a week. We're headed for Daggett. Map shows a trail that goes south from somewhere around here. Perhaps you could show us. We aren't lost, but we are about out of provisions."

"Did your other burro get away from you?" queried the visitor.

"Other burro?" said Bob, raising his eyebrows. "Oh, you mean that stray animal that hung around our camp last night. I thought it was a mountain lion, at first. Kept prowling around and bothering us till I chased him off, this morning. Did you lose a burro?"

"What color was he?" asked the stranger.

Much to my surprise Bob told him that the burro was a gray and white.

"He seemed to be hungry," said Bob, "but I guess burros are always hungry."

"Wasn't a man prowlin' around your camp, last night, likewise?" asked our visitor.

"Now that's strange!" exclaimed Bob, glancing toward me. "Walter swore he saw something that looked like a man, just after we made camp

yesterday afternoon. He said he saw him moving along through the woods, near the edge of the meadow. I told him it probably was a bear."

"It wasn't a bear made them tracks up from my camp," declared the visitor. "You guys hunting, or fishing, mebby?"

"No, we're just traveling through, to see the country," said Bob. "We're going to hike through to Los Angeles and get a job in the movies. Crossed the desert on foot, regular old-timer stunt, great publicity. But say, could you let us have some bacon and flour and some sugar? We'll be glad to pay you for it."

"Might let you have a little. Your coffee is boiling over."

"That's right!" said Bob, lifting the coffeepot off the fire. "Have a cup?"

"Don't mind if I do. Did I get your name right?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Bob. "My name is Collins. This is my chum, Mr. Paige."

OUR visitor did not mention his own name, nor did Bob ask him what it was. And so far as we were concerned, the name he might give would have made no difference. Bill Morningstar had described Simmons, laying special stress upon his light-gray eyes and expressionless face. Without a doubt, it was Simmons. Meanwhile Simmons drank the coffee, tossed the grounds out of the cup and set the cup down by the fire.

"Pack your stuff and I'll show you a quick way out," he said.

Yet he did not sit down, but kept watching us as we gathered our things and packed the burro. I felt uncomfortable, yet in spite of it I had to admire Bob's assumed awkwardness which, together with his utter disregard for a decent hitch and a balanced pack, marked him for the veriest tenderfoot. I caught Simmons gazing at the ground —at a huge boot track near the fire and then I knew that we had not deceived Simmons in the slightest. I wanted to warn Bob, but he was so busy playing his part that I had no chance. Finally I decided that I might be mistaken.

The man Simmons was stolid, his face expressionless. About to start, Simmons took the lead, a clever move on his part and one which all but set my suspicions at rest. We followed him across the meadow and down the easy slope of the long bench to the edge of the shallow ravine leading to the placer below. Here, in the ravine, the going was rough. At one spot the walls narrowed and we were forced to take to the stream to get through. Simmons kept on at a steady gait. The burro, however, fiddled slowly among the slippery rocks. By the time we had reached the opening beyond the narrows, Simmons was out of sight. I was directly behind Bob and took this opportunity to warn him.

"You didn't fool him any," I said.

Bob hesitated, half turned round to reply, when Simmons stepped from behind a shoulder of the cliff.

"No. You didn't fool him any," said Simmons.

And back of the leveled gun which covered us, his face was as stolid as ever, his gray eyes expressionless. We were literally pinned in that narrow cañon. We realized that Simmons could get both of us before we could make any kind of a move to defend ourselves. He was not over six feet from us, his gun held at his hip. If either of us showed fight, he would shoot and keep on shooting until we were both down. The burro had stopped, had turned its head and was regarding us as though wondering why we had halted.

"What's wrong?" said Bob, wisely thrusting up his hands. I had already done so.

"Plenty," said Simmons. "Keep standin' still." And he stepped round behind us and took first Bob's gun and then mine.

"Now step along," he commanded. "Never mind that burro."

WE marched on down the stream bed, past the sluice boxes, across to the delta of gravel toward the camp. The burro walked over to the little stone corral and stopped. I glanced at the tent, wondered whether or not Bill Morningstar was there, listening, waiting to step out and confront Simmons. I was so intently watching for a chance to turn the tables on our captor, that I did not realize that Bill, if there, might be watching us.

Would Simmons run us out of the locality, with a warning not to return? Or would he haze us out to some spot far from the camp and murder us? I thought then and still think that Simmons was not altogether certain that we were after him, that he wished to satisfy himself as to our identity before he weighted his conscience with another murder.

"I want to talk with you guys," he said. "Step into the tent."

Bob raised the flap and stepped inside. I followed. Out of the corner of my eye I glimpsed a huge figure standing to one side of the opening. Simmons was immediately behind me, his gun trained on my back. I could feel myself trembling. Bob had seated himself on the edge of the bed. The air in the tent was hot, stagnant. Bob, with admirable coolness, had begun to roll a cigarette.

A shot crashed out. The concussion stunned me. I saw a splinter jump from the edge of the cupboard at the head of the bed. I remember turning and backing away from the two figures that thrashed back and forth, as Bill Morningstar forced Simmons' arm above his head. Again Simmons' gun roared and a tiny hole sprang into view, near the ridgepole. Simmons fought like a fiend, but Bill Morningstar's weight and tremendous strength were too much for him. Suddenly Bill thrust Simmons away from him and, even as the other swayed back, Bill's fist shot out, did not seem to travel more than a few inches, yet Simmons went down, slumped down almost as easily as though going to sleep.

"Get a bit of rope," said Bill.

Bill tied Simmons' hands and heaved him up onto the bed.

"Now let's set down," he said.

"I think I'll get a drink, first," said Bob. He stepped out, returned with a pail of water and a dipper. Meanwhile Bill tied back the tent flaps. He glanced over toward the bed.

"That's the fella that left me at Red Rock Springs," he declared. "He's a bad actor. How did he come to stick you up?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE ARE WAYS OF DOING THINGS.

WE told Bill just what had happened from the time Simmons appeared until we arrived at the tent. Bill had no comments to make, or if he had, he kept them to himself. Results interested Bill more than methods. Both Bob and I supposed that Bill planned to take Simmons out to the railroad as soon as we could get under way, but Bill had no such intention.

"If he gets to a lawyer," said Bill, as we discussed the matter, "there's a chance he might get clear. My word wouldn't go no further than his, with a jury. He stuck you fellas up, but that don't prove he killed that old man. I'm goin' to give him a chance to come clean, or——"

"Or what?" queried Bob.

Bill Morningstar waved his hand.

"The third," he said.

"You're not going to torture the man?" queried Bob.

"Me? No, sir! He tried to hang this killin' onto me. It's between me and him out there, as far as you can see." And Bill pointed toward the shimmering barrens west of the camp. "When he comes to, he is goin' to eat, if he wants to, and drink all the water he wants. I do the same. Then we're goin' to set out for Red Rock Springs, afoot—just me and him."

"Without water, or food?" queried Bob.

"We take nothin' but the clothes on our backs: One canteen, but no gun, no grub—just the two of us, and the eye of God lookin' down and lookin' down hard."

"Bill, are you crazy?" said Bob, staring at Bill's big red face which had lost its familiar devil-may-care expression and had become grim with the intensity of his purpose.

"Just the two of us," reiterated Bill Morningstar, ignoring Bob's interruption; "and we start even, unless he's packin' the thoughts of killin' that old man. If he is, he'll have to get rid of that load, or go crazy, or mebby both."

"But, Bill," argued Bob, "why take such a risk? You've got your man. And the law——"

"That's just it!" said Bill Morningstar. "The law had me jailed for somethin' I didn't do. It was me wrote to the law, tellin' as how there was a dead man over by Red Rock Springs. Would I be tellin' that if I'd 'a' murdered the old man? But the law can't play horse with me out here. Anyhow, this ain't a case for anybody to monkey with, not even you fellas—now. Was it this here Simmons, or me, murdered that old man. You don't know? But if Simmons and me ever get to Red Rock, you'll know which of us done it."

"But if you don't get through?" said Bob.

"That's the chance I'm takin' to prove I didn't do the killin'."

"Hell! Bill, we know that!" declared Bob.

"By provin' this fella did," said Bill Morningstar.

AND in spite of our endeavors to turn him from his purpose, he remained immovable as the Sphinx. So intent had we been on persuading him to adopt the obviously rational course of keeping together and taking the prisoner in by the railroad, that we had all but forgotten the prisoner himself. Simmons had regained consciousness and lay staring at Bill Morningstar's broad back. Bob, happening to glance over toward the bed, rose and offered Simmons a dipper of water. Simmons drank and asked Bob if he would not untie his hands. Bill Morningstar swung round.

"Not yet," he said. "I don't want to hit you again. If I did, you might not wake up in time to start for Red Rock Springs and we're startin' right soon."

"How about the gray-and-white burro and the pack?" asked Bob.

"I left the stuff up there," replied Bill, gesturing toward the hills. "The burro, I turned him loose when I started down to this camp. Most like he's grazin' up in the meadow."

And Bill stepped out to the lean-to. Bob took occasion to speak to Simmons; told him that we were special deputies sent out to arrest the murderer of old man Peterson and, without going into details, suggested that he—Simmons—tell what he knew about it and, by so doing, possibly avert another tragedy.

But Simmons would not talk, save to ask for another drink of water and that his hands be untied. Bob gave him a drink from the dipper and then went outside to talk with Bill Morningstar. I stepped to the doorway of the tent to get a breath of fresh air, but I kept an eye on the prisoner. He had swung

his legs round and, with a quick twist, sat up.

"Gimme a smoke," he said. "It'll keep the flies off my face."

I made a cigarette, put it between his lips and lighted it. After a few puffs he spat the cigarette out.

"Are you going to let that big guy kill me?" he asked. "I could 'a' got you two fellas, up there in the cañon, but I let you live."

"Why didn't you 'get us,' as you say?" I asked.

"I wanted to find out first what you were doing up here. I thought you were trying to jump my claim."

"This claim? Is this your placer?" I said.

"Sure it's mine! It's been mine for going on ten years."

"What is your name?" I asked him.

"Peterson—Alec Peterson. What did you think it was?"

ALEC PETERSON was the name written across the fly leaves of several books we had previously examined on our arrival in the camp. I was about to ask him who Simmons was, if he were Alec Peterson, when Bill Morningstar appeared in the doorway of the tent, a plate in one hand and a cup in the other.

"This man says he is Alec Peterson," I told Bill.

Bill Morningstar set the cup and plate on the box cupboard. He took off his hat, the black hat he had found buried near Red Rock Springs.

"Then this must be your hat," he said, "seein' as Alec Peterson's name is wrote on the inside of the band in indelible pencil, the same as on them books."

"Sure it's my hat!" said the prisoner, much to my surprise.

"Then let's see how she fits," said Bill, and he put the hat on Simmons' head.

The hat came clear down to his ears, was most evidently two or three sizes too large for him.

"And there's a piece of newspaper folded inside the band, at that," said Bill Morningstar.

Even then Simmons would not give in. I could not help admiring his nerve. Bill lifted the hat off and put it back on his own head.

"We're goin' to eat," he declared. He told Simmons to stand up. He untied his hands.

"Bob is fryin' some more of the old man's bacon," Bill said to me. "Go and eat."

Then Bill sat down on a box and, pulling the automatic from his holster, cocked it. I stepped outside. Bob was over by the outdoor fireplace stirring some canned corn in a skillet.

"What are we going to do about it?" I asked.

"Why, eat, in a minute or two," said Bob, smiling.

"I mean, about Bill and the other man?"

"Why, nothing. I know Bill. He'd go through hell for any one he likes and he'd double back again to get a man he hates. He's what I call 'cold mad,' right now. All we can do is to hope that the sun doesn't finish him when he takes the 'Judgment Trail,' as he calls it."

"But what good will it all do, even if this man Simmons does make a confession, out there on the desert, with no other witness than Bill, nothing in writing, even?"

"That's what I asked Bill," said Bob. "He gave me a queer answer. He said: 'I got another witness.' And that was all I could get out of him."

"Don't you think Bill is a little touched in the head?" I asked.

"We're all a bit up in the air," declared Bob. "Simmons is the only one among us who has a grip on himself and that's because he's as cold-blooded as a snake. But when the cold-blooded

kind do break, they go all to pieces. You've seen a rattler cornered and teased with a stick until he went mad and bit himself? Well, Simmons is cornered. He knows he can't get away from Bill Morningstar. In court, Simmons might bluff it out. But, being a desert man, he knows what he'll be up against, out there in that sun, without water——"

"But how about Bill, himself?" I asked.

"If anything happens to Bill," said Bob, "it will be his funeral And after all, it's their own fight. Let them scrap it out."

Meanwhile, Bob and I had managed to make a meal of canned corn, bacon and coffee. When I went back to the tent, I found that Simmons was sitting on the edge of the bed, his hands again bound, the plate and cup empty. Bill Morningstar gave me the automatic. I sat down on the box. Bill stepped out to get something to eat and have a smoke.

Simmons was stolidly staring at the doorway of the tent. Occasionally he raised his bound hands and brushed at the flies. The stagnant heat was stifling. I wiped the sweat from my face. Bill Morningstar's figure loomed in the tent doorway.

"We're goin'," he said.

Simmons stood up. Bill Morningstar gestured to him to step through the doorway.

Bob asked me to go back up the cañon and get our guns, which Simmons had left at the foot of the narrows. When I returned, Bob had repacked the burro, taking enough of the old prospector's provisions to see us through. Simmons sat on a rock, staring across the desert. Bill Morningstar stood just behind him.

"Better change your mind and come along with us," said Bob.

Bill shook his head.

"Simmons came in this way, across the flats over there and that's the way we're goin' back."

Yet we hesitated, waiting for Bill to start. We meant to follow him, even if we had to follow at a distance, a decision which Bob and I had arrived at while eating dinner. But our plan was abruptly thrust aside by the appearance of the gray-and-white burro, which came pattering down the cañon as though fearful of being left alone in the hills. The burro stopped near the stone corral, cocked its ears toward us and then, probably realizing that we were leaving camp, came and stood alongside the other burro. Simmons had turned and was looking at the burros.

"Know him?" queried Bill.

"He's mine," said Simmons. "You guys stole him."

"Where's the burro you packed in here?" And Bill's face grew set with a purpose which was all too evident as his huge hands clasped and unclasped as though it was all he could do to keep from jumping on Simmons, bound as he was, and virtually tearing him to pieces.

For the first time since we had seen him, Simmons showed terror. He began to shiver as though stricken by a sudden chill.

"He's over there, in that arroyo, east of the camp."

"Tied?" queried Bill.

Simmons, watching Bill Morningstar's hands, nodded.

BILL turned and strode toward the arroyo. He had disappeared round the shoulder of rocks which hid it from view, when Simmons jumped to his feet and began to run toward the open desert. Bob's hand was on my arm as I turned to call to Bill.

"Let him go," said Bob. "He can't keep up that gait long in this heat. He'll wear himself out. And then——"

I watched Simmons as he lunged on

across the barrens. Already he had slowed to a dogtrot. Once he turned his head and glanced back. A little later he slowed down to a walk, his figure growing smaller as he drew away from the foothills, until presently he became a manikin, a tiny, grotesque thing that moved mechanically.

Bill Morningstar came from the arroyo, leading a mouse-colored burro. As he strode up to us, Bob gestured toward the desert.

"There's your man," he said.

Yet Bill showed no surprise. He lifted one of the canteens from our pack and slung it across his shoulder. Without a word he turned and trudged out toward the open—and I felt as though I were actually losing my grip on reality and getting a little queer, myself, when the gray-and-white burro turned its head, watched Bill Morningstar plod across the rocky ground west of the camp and then, wheeling awkwardly, began to follow him. I looked at Bob. He shrugged his shoulders dubiously.

"Perhaps," said Bob, "the gray-and-white burro is the other witness Bill mentioned."

"Bob," I said, regaining a sort of half grip on things real, "I feel sorry for that man Simmons."

"Who wouldn't?" said Bob. "But there's only one cure for him and his kind—and I guess he'll have to take his medicine."

And taking the halter off Simmons' burro, that the animal might either follow us or take to the hills where there was grazing, we struck out across the open, following in the tracks of Bill Morningstar. He was perhaps a half mile ahead of us, trudging steadily along, the burro following him. Beyond them, tiny in the distance, moved the figure of the other man. The afternoon sun pounded hard. The heat, refracted, struck our faces, burned our eyes. Simmons' burro, hesitating at the edge of the actual desert, finally brayed dismally and then turned back toward the hills.

HOUR after hour we kept on, stopping occasionally to drink; hour after hour Bill Morningstar and the burro plodded ahead of us, slowly gaining on us in spite of our efforts to overtake him. And as we gradually drew down to a lower altitude, the heat became almost unbearable. I imagined the torture Simmons was undergoing, without water and aware, as he must have been, of the black Nemesis that dogged his trail. Presently, Bob, who was leading, stopped and pointed across the shimmering levels.

On a distant rise we saw three tiny figures silhouetted against the brazen sky line. Evidently Bill Morningstar had overtaken Simmons, or the latter had turned back, possibly to beg for water. We punched our burro along, but soon realized that with a pack he could not go faster than he was going. The tiny figures disappeared over the rise.

"We ought to be more than halfway to that plateau where we camped coming in," said Bob. "We're headed that way."

I was so intent upon reading the tracks which we followed that I did not acknowledge the remark. Simmons' tracks showed that he was hitting a steady pace. Bill Morningstar's were more irregular and more strongly defined. The little hill on which we had last seen the three seemed as far away as ever. Yet we reached it, passed over it, saw the three figures moving on beyond, a mile or so distant, and accepted it all casually. At the time, fighting the heat as we were, if the three had vanished utterly I doubt if we would have been surprised. I did have energy enough left to notice, however, that Simmons' tracks had stopped just west of the rise and that he had

turned back and then, with Bill Morningstar, had gone on again.

Slowly the sun burned down to the edge of the world. The desert level seemed to tilt up toward a thin edge of reddish-brown rock strung along the edge of a plateau. Just as the red edge of the sun drew down beyond the horizon, we reached the gravelly top of the plateau. Far across it, near its southern rim, we beheld the three figures we had been following. They were motionless.

"That's where we camped," said Bob. "I guess Bill and the other man are all in."

CHAPTER IX.

PRIMITIVE JUSTICE.

WE punched our weary burro on across the plateau. Bill was standing beside Simmons who was sitting on the ground, bareheaded. He had the dead prospector's hat in his hands. He kept turning the hat round and round, occasionally thrusting his finger through the rent in the crown. He was muttering to himself—paid no attention to us as we came up. Bill swung his canteen from his shoulder.

"For God's sake go down into that snake hole and get some water. I give most of mine to this here crazy man."

"Is he——" Bob hesitated, staring at Simmons.

"He busted—back there, about a mile beyond the plateau," said Bill. "Told me he did for old Alec Peterson, laid him out with a piece of broken automobile spring what he used for changin' tires. But get some water, or gimme some of that you're packin'."

Bob handed him one of our canteens.

"The water is hot," he said. "You had better wait till I get some from the spring." And Bob began to unpack our burro. Taking the three canteens he hazed the burro to the edge of the plateau and disappeared in the ravine. The gray-and-white burro had already found his way down to water. I stretched out, face down on the pebble-sprinkled ground, too exhausted even to spread a blanket. I heard a faint murmur of voices. I drifted to sleep.

I AWOKE, ravenously hungry. It was dark, the sky brilliant with innumerable stars. On either side of a tiny fire sat Bob and Bill Morningstar, their faces ruddy in the glow, their figures indistinct in the immediate, surrounding darkness.

"Better sit in," said Bob, as I raised on my elbows. "Coffee, beans and bacon—again."

I found a canteen and drank. Then I joined my companions at the fire. Simmons lay on a tarpaulin, a few yards away.

"Is he sick?" I asked.

"Not the way you mean," said Bill. "He had another bad spell, just after you went to sleep. I had to quiet him down. He's tied so he can't do any damage."

"Where did you get the firewood?" I asked. I did not care to discuss Simmons just then.

"Dead cottonwood, in the ravine."

"And he killed three of them rattlesnakes while he was gettin' it," said Bill, shrugging his shoulders. "I wouldn't go down in that hole, after dark, for—for Simmons."

"Bill had to have his coffee—he earned it," said Bob. "This is the second pot and Bill hasn't quit yet."

"It's better than liquor," declared Bill, as he emptied the pot and drank the steaming cupful straight. And presently he seemed to relax, assume his old, carefree manner. He lighted his pipe and puffed contentedly a while. Bob gathered up the few dishes and rinsed them, in spite of Bill Morningstar's protest. Bill was fearful that some one might have to go down into the ravine again for more water.

"And don't you believe that snakes don't travel at night, when the weather is hot. I've seen 'em and killed 'em around camp in the moonlight," he declared.

"No argument," said Bob. "So have I."

I was about to suggest that the subject be changed, when I was startled by a shriek from the shadows where Simmons lay. I could dimly discern Simmons turning and twisting on the tarpaulin.

"Let me go!" he cried, his voice hoarse with terror. "Let me go! He's coming to show me the hole in his head, again! For God's sake, make him go away!"

"Who is comin'?" called Bill Morningstar, rising.

"Old Alec Peterson. You said he wouldn't come back!" The voice rose to a wail.

Bill Morningstar strode over to where Simmons writhed and strained.

"Get out o' here!" cried Bill Morningstar. "You dust out o' here and don't you come back or I'll take you apart!"

And thus Bill humored Simmons' insanity as one might humor a frightened child. Simmons quieted down and asked for water. Bill took it to him and raised his head that he might drink.

"You wouldn't quit a guy, would you, Bill?" asked Simmons, his voice ingratiating and obviously unnatural.

"Not on your life!" Bill assured him. "Nobody is goin' to lay a hand on you, Simmons. You take a sleep for yourself and you'll feel better in the mornin'."

"That's right!" said Simmons. "I never thought of that."

FOR a while, Bill sat near Simmons, occasionally assuring him he would see that no one bothered him—and there was no intentional sarcasm in Bill's assurance, although the situation was bitter with irony. Finally Simmons seemed to have fallen asleep. Bill came over to the fire, which was now but a few red embers in a feathery nest of ashes.

"The hell of it is," said Bill abruptly, "he's callin' me his friend. I could tell him most anything and he would believe it. Ever since he busted, back there"—and Bill motioned with his pipe toward the outer darkness—"he's acted like I was the only friend he's got. And me, I got to take him in."

"They won't convict him, now," said Bob.

"Perhaps he was crazy when he killed old Alec Peterson," I suggested.

Bill Morningstar shook his head.

"I don't think he was. 'Cause why? 'Cause he didn't act any more crazy than I am, till he come back to that little hill and asked me for water. I give him a drink, me hangin' onto the canteen for fear he'd snatch it and run, or empty it, or somethin'. That there gray-and-white burro was follow'in' me, and just about the time Simmons let go of the canteen the burro comes pluggin' up the hill and Simmons sees him.

" 'There's old Alec Peterson,' he says to me, kind of offhand. 'But how can he travel with that hole in his head?'

" 'Dam'd if I know!' says I.

"And I seen they was somethin' wrong about Simmons' eyes. It was like he seen somethin' 'way off, the same as if he was lookin' right through me and that burro. I was all set to hit him if he started for me, but he kep' starin' at that burro and kind of talkin' to himself. He was lookin' at the ground and quicker'n a snake he grabs up a piece of rock and heaves it at the burro. Now that burro didn't hardly move—just kind of turned his head away. The rock took him in the ribs. But he just stood lookin' at us. And that is when Simmons busted.

"Seems he must of thought he seen

old Alec standin' by the burro, for he sure had the fear of a dead man in his face when he dropped on his knees and prayed like hell that I wouldn't let old Alec kill him. I was commencin' to feel kind of queer myself, what with Simmons on his knees, clean crazy and beggin' me to save him; and the sun poundin' down, and half blind with the kick back from the white light on the sand. Then Simmons takes to cursin' that dead prospector and if it had been anywhere near the time of rains, I reckon a stroke of lightnin' would 'a' got him. And all the time that little burro stood starin' at us, never makin' a move, till I was commencin' to wonder if I was seein' things the same as Simmons.

" 'We got to get out of this,' I says to Simmons. 'Alec Peterson ain't here. He's dead, over by Red Rock Springs.'

"And at that Simmons quit cursin' and kind of gets to his feet and starts off again. Thinks I, sometimes crazy folks tell the truth. So I catches up to him and starts talkin' about prospectin' and placers and hard-rock minin' and how I seen a hunk of gold once, over in Australia, as big as my head. And by talkin' of gold I got Simmons started to talk; and he said he could go from Red Rock to a placer that nobody knowed about except him. Said it was rich—coarse gold and nuggets. Seein' as he was clean crazy, I worked round to suggestin' to him we go pardners and work that placer together.

" 'That is,' says I, 'if old Alec don't object.'

"And then Simmons says as how he won't. That he fixed old Alec with a piece of automobile spring what he used for changin' tires. He told me how he stopped at Red Rock and that old Alec was camped there, with his burro; and how one of the tires on his machine was busted and he asked the old man to lend a hand and help him change the tire. Seems the old man was kind of a easy-goin' friendly sort and he helps Simmons and was stoopin' over, when Simmons, havin' the piece of spring in his hand, swung it up and done for him.

"We was pluggin' along, all this time, the burro followin', but I reckon Simmons had forgot the burro. Anyhow, he talked like all he cared about was placer minin' and strikin' it rich. Said he'd been tryin' to locate old Alec's diggin's for two-three years, but never could find 'em; old Alec bein' too slick, what with keepin' his mouth shut and watchin' out that nobody followed him in. And he said he wouldn't 'a' found the diggin's at that, if he hadn't seen our fire, up in the hills, the night we camped above the placer. Seems Simmons was cruisin' around, somewhere west of the placer, and had made camp when he noticed our fire that night.

"Next mornin' early, he struck over that way and stumbles onto the placer. Then he seen our tracks in the cañon and follows 'em up, to see who was campin' in the hills. Said he knowed if it had been deputies they wouldn't 'a' made a fire like that and showed where they were. You see, Simmons was like most crazy folks, rememberin' and talkin' about somethin' what was sensible, along with his crazy ideas about old Alec followin' him.

"The next time we stopped and took a drink from the canteen, Simmons seen the burro and went off his handle again, beggin' me to keep old Alec from gettin' clost to him. I told him everythin' was all right and how we would trek to the springs and he could stay there while I went to town for some grub and tobacco; and then we would be all fixed to go back and work his placer. I got him steadied down again, and we made it to this here camp. And I'm willin' to say I was glad to see you boys show up."

"Could he be pretending that he is crazy?" asked Bob.

Bill Morningstar knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"If he is, then I am," he declared. "Anyhow, he's sleepin', right now. And it would be a blessin' if he never woke."

THAT night I was awakened by something like a scream. I sat up. Bob was awake, although Bill Morningstar was snoring heavily.

"Hear anything?" I asked Bob.

"Yes. Sounded like a scream. Must have been a wild cat, over in the foothills." And Bob turned over and, I suppose, went to sleep again.

For a while I lay looking up at the stars. Aware of something moving toward camp, I sat up again. Presently the shapes of the two burros loomed close in the starlight. They came within a few yards of where we lay, stopped and stood there. I thought that perhaps a mountain lion had frightened them, that they had come into camp for protection.

"It must have been a mountain lion, or a wild cat," I told myself, as I again drifted to sleep.

The next thing I knew some one was shaking me and telling me to get up. It was broad daylight. Bill Morningstar was bending over me, his hand on my shoulder.

"On deck, matey," he said. "Man overboard."

I jumped up, dazed, wondering what had happened.

"Simmons got loose, last night," said Bill. "Sawed the rope off his hands against a bit of rock. Then he untied his feet—rope's over there. That poor, sufferin' idiot crawled out of camp, last night—and nobody knowed it till Bob wakes up this mornin' and sees he is gone."

"But where is Bob?" I asked.

"Me and Bob tracked Simmons over to the edge, there. Bob has gone down into that hell hole, lookin' for him," said Bill.

"Did Bob take a gun with him?" I queried, as we walked over toward the edge of the plateau.

"Yes. Bob had enough sense to do that," said Bill.

I told Bill that Bob and I had heard some one or something scream during the night, that we thought it might have been a wild cat or a lion. And that if that horrible screaming had any connection with Simmons' leaving camp, he must have left about midnight. As we came to the trail leading down to the spring, Bill stopped.

"Don't go down in there, yet," he said. And he raised a call that ran out into space, its echoes dying along the foothills like the sound of distant galloping. No answer came. The succeeding silence seemed doubly intense.

"We got to find Bob," said Bill Morningstar. "He's down in that gorge somewhere."

"Bob is all right," I assured him, although I did not feel altogether confident that he was safe. "I'll go down to the spring and look around."

"If you're goin', you better take the canteens and fill 'em," said Bill.

And he turned back toward camp, returning with the canteens and the stout alder stick which we used to punch the burro with. I was careful in working down to the spring, alertly scanning each ledge and jumble of rocks, yet no warning buzz broke the stagnant, hot silence. I filled the canteens and returned to Bill. His red face was covered with sweat, as though he had been undergoing severe physical stress. I took the smallest canteen and started down the trail again.

"If you find him," said Bill, "fire a shot. If you need help, fire twice."

BELOW the spring, I found a sandy patch and along the sand tracks of Bob and the other man. The stream bed was dry, narrow and wound down a tortuous channel, deepening between red-

clay walls that held the heat rising from the mud-encrusted boulders and sandy hollows. The going was slow and difficult. I lost the tracks among the rocks, found them again in stretches of silt and finally came to where the cañon, angling from the hills, swung toward the desert.

The walls dropped away, the cañon broadened, spread to a fan-shaped and wide opening, down the middle of which ran a gray line of boulders and gravel. Farther along the widening watercourse, where its low, sloping banks melted into the level of the desert, I came suddenly upon Bob seated beneath a clump of greasewood. Beside him lay an inert figure, the soles of the boots toward me and there was something stiff and queer in the attitude of the figure, something that sent a chill racing up and down my back. Bob rose and picked up his hat; then turned toward me.

"A rattler got him. Must have happened some time last night."

I handed my canteen to Bob and he drank.

"Remember that scream we heard? Well, whatever it was, it wasn't far from camp. Simmons was struck twice, once in the hand and once in the cheek. He was dead when I found him. Poor devil, he has paid for all the mistakes he ever made and then some."

I stepped past Bob and stared down at the swollen and horrible thing which had been Simmons. I shivered and turned away.

"I killed three rattlers on my way down, this morning," said Bob. "You better go back and get Bill. We'll need both burros."

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF THE TRAIL.

LATE that evening we pulled into Red Rock Springs, fed and watered the burros, rested a half hour or so and then pushed on toward Daggett. We had been on our way not more than fifteen minutes when the headlight of a car appeared, creeping toward us far down the road. We stepped aside to let the car pass, but it stopped and we stood in the dazzling glare of a flash light.

"What you got there?" queried a voice, and two men climbed down from the car.

"Not bootleg, if that's what you're searching for," replied Bob. "What name, please?"

The spokesman displayed a badge, mentioned his office. Bob gave our names and our business. The deputy listened, nodded, seemed to accept Bob's account of our quest and its result casually.

"You saved us a tough job," declared the officer finally. "You see, we traced up the number of Simmons' machine, located it and went through it. We found that tire iron you spoke of and it had some gray hair and dried blood on one edge. That was about all we needed—except the man and you got him."

"No," said Bob, "we didn't get him. We found him."

"GAS" MEANS GASOLINE—AT TIMES

"Gas Course at Columbia. Experts to Lecture on its Manufacture and Distribution" announces a newspaper headline. What a relief to learn that this course will be given by the department of chemical engineering—not as a part of the course in political science.

China Coast Skippers

BY Berton Braley

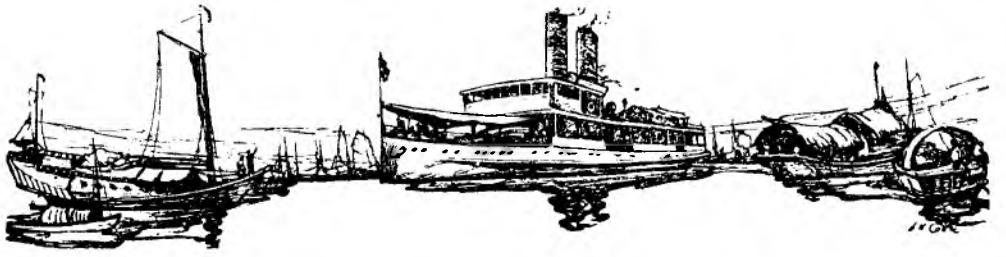
CHINA coast skippers—a hard-bitted lot.
Sailing the seas that are sticky and hot,
Shanghai to Bangkok—or north to Tientsin,
Where the air's cold to a tropical skin.
Loaded with coolies, rice, millet, or tea,
Plugging along on a treacherous sea,
Swearing by Jardine or serving Tai-Koo*,
China coast skippers—here's lookin' at you!

China coast skippers—grown gray in the trade,
Wise to the tricks that the heathen has played,
Wise to the ways of malevolent seas,
Which hide a menace when sleekly at ease.
China coast skippers can scent a typhoon
On the soft breath of the breezes that croon—
They know the signs when barometers fall,
China coast skippers are wise to them all!

China coast skippers—a hard-bitted gang,
Full of strange oaths with an Orient tang,
Sailing their tubs to make cash for the boss,
Proud of a profit and sad at a loss,
Driving chink crews with a masterful hand,
Czars on the bridge and good fellows on land,
Hard-headed drinkers when not on the job,
China coast skippers—a hard-bitted mob!

China coast skippers—a hard-bitted crowd,
Keeping their coolie load properly cowed,
Ready for pirates—and ready for storms,
Fearless of trouble in all of its forms;
Loyally, faithfully waiting the day
They can go "home" on their pensioners' pay,
Swearing by Jardine and serving Tai-Koo,
China coast skippers—here's lookin' at you!

*Tai-Koo—Chinese name for the China Navigation Co., also known as Butterfield & Squire.



Mrs. Sweeny's Boss

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "A Link of the Chain," "Q-U-E-R-T-S," Etc.

At times in stories, we meet a character who is very human, who is not impeccable, and yet, who reflects in some way an ideal. Mrs. Sweeny is an ideal of whimsical good humor, of sound common sense, and of uncanny understanding of things human; she will hold your heartstrings.

SO," began Mrs. Sweeny, "I got gulpy in the neck, and pretty soon I was hangin' on to my Danny like a plain drunk to a lamp-post."

The Boarder's attitude was that of one who realizes that the end is not yet. His experience with this gambler's widow had taught him that the climax of a story from her lips might come at the beginning or at the end, or betwixt and between. To her, construction was a matter of indifference. Her mission was satisfactorily accomplished, once the pent-up information was somehow liberated.

"And you just take it from me, mister," she went on, "if men only knowed what bluffs women is, they'd walk over the whole feminine population like the police stoppin' a riot. My Danny done it, only he used what you might call the gumshoes of diplomacy. I tell you, he pretty near picked up a college course in human nature when he was takin' in bets at the race track. He figured that all women is children; and as for me—well, I wasn't out of my gocart yet."

"I see," admitted the Boarder. Mrs. Sweeny's cynical opinion of her sex did not appeal to him, however. He was, as Mrs. Sweeny characterized him to her associates, an "educated guy." And, as such, he was inclined to idealize conditions and things. He contemplated women from a higher plane. To him they were wonderful, complicated human contrivances, somewhat given to frippery and giggling, but nevertheless

deeply steeped in wisdom. Indeed, many of the editorials which he devised for the *Age* were founded upon the chatter of clever women. So he was inclined to regard Mrs. Sweeny's forthcoming dissertation with suspicion.

"There was a time," persisted Mrs. Sweeny, "when I thought I knowed as much as any man. That was b'fore I was married and was posin' as a lady clerk in West Baden, Indiana. Then Dan and me got to breakin' ourselves in to teamwork and I got disengaged from the know-it-all habit. My Danny was too smooth for me and I just couldn't help lovin' him more for keepin' me guessin' and bein' my boss."

"Ah!" mused the Boarder, making a note on the corner of his blotter.

MRS. SWEENY, ignorant of the fact that she had given him an idea for an editorial, continued:

"We had set up housekeepin' here in Central Park West when I got my first look-in on how a real wise gent'man can manage a lady and her never know it. We was as comfort'ble as two mice in a bandbox, with nothin' to bother about but what to order for to-morrow's dinner. Them days Danny was comin' home from the track with so much money that we both got color blind lookin' at green all the time. The days was goin' by dreamy-like, me dressin' in silk—Danny said that only the silk wove by pedigreed worms was good enough for me—and my husband eatin' and drinkin' so much that he got awful painful dyspepsia. I tell you, mister, them was lovely times.

"But such things can't last. After you've bet on one good winner, you're sure to get your money down on an also-ran. Ain't that so? Anyway, that's how it worked out for me. You see, I went and spoiled all my peace of mind and happy times by gettin' jealous. Men is men, mister, and——"

"It often happens," interrupted the Boarder, "that women jump at conclusions, especially in such matters. They don't stop to think. For instance, I could live a perfectly upright life for ten years and then do something that merely looks suspicious. My women friends would condemn me first and try me afterward."

"Oh, I wasn't gettin' pers'nal," Mrs. Sweeny assured him. "No woman would never get jealous of you. It's the big, strong, husky men that women gets jealous of. You're what I'd call perfectly safe—kind of a family horse. A woman'd say 'Giddap!' to you and you'd giddap. You're part of them 'bulwarks of the nation' that the papers is alwus talkin' about. The other fellows has all the fun and gets into all the trouble."

"H'm!" muttered the Boarder. Sometimes he found Mrs. Sweeny's direct habit of expression embarrassing.

Before he could argue the question, however, she had once again launched enthusiastically into her reminiscence.

"My Danny was one of them strikin' men that women is alwus makin' eyes at, mister. If you'd of turned him and a thousand-dollar dog loose in Fift' Av'noo, somebody would of been kidnaped and it wouldn't of been the dog. So I never was real sure of my husband, considerin' the life he led. W'y, honust, 'Sure Thing' Coogan's adopted daughter kept runnin' after him like a old maid shooin' flies out of the house. And the 'Plunger' Eppsteins was doin' their best to make him stay away from his home nights, b'cause he could drink more'n any four men and that made him prom'nunt and desir'ble socially.

"I watched all these things, mister, and I kept gettin' jealouser and jealouser. But nothin' really worth while happened till one day when I was sortin' out his clothes to send 'em to a presser. I just loved to do that. I'd take note of the spots and wrinkles and I'd say to myself: 'This here crease

in his pants was made when he set readin' his paper so lovely and comfort'ble last night—the dear!' or, 'I guess he must of spilled some champagne on his vest to make this spot.' You see, mister, I was awful fond of him and all the things that b'longed to him was real umport'nt and lov'ble to me.

"Well, this time, when I was goin' through his clothes, I poked into his pockets. That was a reg'lar habit with me. You see Danny was careless and he was forever stowin' away papers with poker debts scribbled on 'em. And, of course, I didn't want him to lose money by forgettin' to c'llect 'em; so I used to clean out his pockets and remind him of the fellows in that Broadway crowd that owed him money. Just wait here a minute, mister, till I get the note I found in his pocket that day. I've got it put away in my bureau drawer, somewheres."

She swept past him with a snappy rustle of skirts and was out of the room.

THE Boarder tapped idly with his pen upon the sheets of paper lying before him. The opening paragraph of an editorial beckoned, but he did not seize the opportunity. Instead, he gazed out of the window at the gayly clad women in the automobiles which were entering the park. Many times he had contrasted Mrs. Sweeny with these people of evident refinement.

She was, he knew, only a year or so removed from the gaudy society of the race track, the crew of nondescript men and women who batten on the sport of kings for revenue. Gamblers and tricksters they are, pausing at nothing in their hysterical scramble for gold. Mrs. Sweeny's life with her roistering husband had stamped her with a hard, worldly-wise cynicism; but a wealth of goodness in it had triumphed against tremendous odds. The generous, dark waving hair framed a beauty of features that was fierce, imperative and loud; yet back of it all there was intelligence and personality and an open frankness that invited confidence and compelled respect in the most cynical.

"Here," she cried, returning, "here's that note! You just read it and see if you wouldn't of kicked the flowers off the wall paper if you found such a thing in your husband's pocket." She extended the bit of paper to the Boarder.

As he opened it, he saw that the writing was black and bold like that of a man. Assurance stood forth in every line. Evidently the writer had no fear that Mrs. Sweeny's husband would disregard the summons contained in the document.

The Boarder read the missive with interest.

DAN: I'll be in a taxi somewhere between Twenty-third and Thirty-fourth Streets, on Broadway, about four o'clock this afternoon. I have got to see you and I don't want anybody to get next that you and me are together. It might make a lot of talk—you know it as well as I do. Square it with your wife so you won't have to go home for dinner and we'll go some place where we won't be seen and have a talk. New York's worse than a small town for gossip, especially where people like you and me are concerned; so we have got to be careful. Meet me sure. I'll be looking out of the window and when you see me just holler to the driver. I'll tell him to be on the lookout for a man with a complexion like you have got.

DOLLY.

"Now," exclaimed Mrs. Sweeny, as the Boarder looked up, "what do you think of that?"

His face showed that he felt a deep sympathy for this woman who stood before him, baring her old wounds. In a measure he could comprehend the cutting heartache which the loose-principled gambler had brought to his girl wife.

"That thing," she resumed, "made me

madder than a cop that has had his number took. I was for packin' up Dan's loaded cane and two bricks and goin' out to tell that scand'lous Dolly what I thought of her. I'd of did it, too, only I didn't know who she was or where she lived or anything. She was my little guessin' contest, as you might say, and the prize was a gold brick. But honest, mister, if I could of saw her then, I'd of made her face look like what's left of a broiled lobster that's been interviewin' a hungry chorus girl. I was mad enough to—to—well, I got mad.

"Then I begun to cry. That's the way women does, mister. I cried like a baby in church. And then, after a while, it all come over me that I didn't have no chance with them Dollys and Gertrudes and Mames of the track. They haven't got no conscience at all. Most of 'em don't care nothin' about nothin' except havin' a good time and they ain't particular about who suffers for it, just so's it ain't them. They're used to winnin' money from people that can't afford losin' it—people that goes and shoots theirselves afterward because they can't stand the disgrace of bein' caught bettin' on horse races with other people's money.

"No, sir, them track people ain't educated up to carin' about other people's troubles. W'y, once Danny took me to a big champagne party that 'Piker' Mitchell was givin' b'cause he win fifteen thousand dollars on The Skipper. When things was pretty well along, Ike the Shine begins to spout some of the po'try he was alwus makin' up. Here's some of it that'll show you the idea them folks has got of the race-track business:

"Here's to the clerk that places a bet,
And works all day in a grocery store;
Yes, here's to the clerk that's sure to lose—
And tap the till for a ten-spot more.

"Everybody alwus stamped and yelled when Ike recited that one and some bookmaker was sure to sing out: 'I'm waitin' to annex that new ten.'

"There was more verses to it. One of 'em was this:

"Here's to the widow whose only boy
Was scheduled to hear the jail gates clang,
Because of the money he swiped and bet.
But he got him a gun, and—
Bang, Bang, Bang!

"All of 'em usta come in on the 'Bang, bang, bang!' like it was a chorus. They didn't care nothin' for the widow lady, nor what the po'try meant. You see, mister, they was a heartless bunch. They was just heartened to all sorts of trouble that their gamblin' ways brought to themselves and other folks. I was just beginnin' to know them then and when I got to thinkin' over the note business, I knew I didn't have no chance against women that was hardened as them women is. They would of swiped my Danny as quick as they would of stole six yards of lace off a department-store counter."

"Mrs. Sweeny," protested the Boarder, "you made a mistake in associating with them. Why didn't you give them up?"

"SOME of them was just lovely," she hastened to explain. "There was Mrs. 'Gold Dollar' Cohen. She was just fine, only she did have a tur'ble thirst. And the blond Swede lady that 'Lucky' O'Hara was ingaged to was all right, too, barrin' her shoplliftin' habits. Such things makes people talk sometimes.

"But I was tellin' you how bad I felt when I caught my Danny with the goods on him. I got to thinkin' about revenge and gettin' a divorce and all them foolish things that women dopes out when they get mad at their husbands. I seen all my happiness oozin' away like a bank roll at the race track. The idea that my Danny was runnin' aroun' in taxis with a strange lady was more'n I could stand. Honust, mister,

I could shut my eyes and see him lyin' back comfort'ble, like he loved to do, and makin' that lady think he was the o'rig'nal perfec' gent'man. Think of that, mister, and tell me—wouldn't it make you crazier than a married man out of a job?

"Well, when I got to the point where I was thinkin' about pullin' a fire-alarm box, or somethin', the tel'phone rung and it was Danny.

"'Say,' he says, 'I won't be home for dinner.'

"'Oh, indeed,' says I, 'I s'pose you got some very umport'nt business comin' off.'

"'Tut, tut!' says he, 'what's the matter? You talk as haughty as if you was lookin' at yourself in the glass with a new hat on.'

"'You seem familiar with ladies' habits, Mr. Dan Sweeny!' I shot at him.

"'Good-by,' he says in a kinda funny voice.

AND, what with talkin' to him and him seemin' so close and my troubles and everything, it was me to Weepville again. Take it from me, mister, I'll move to Hoboken to-morrow if I didn't howl like a bricklayer on a busy day callin' for 'more mort!' It was tur'ble, it was.

"The tears was droppin' so thick that I remember wonderin' why the janitor didn't come up and want to know if the bathtub was runnin' over. For hours I kept at it, picturin' Danny out whoopin' it up with that Dolly woman and plannin' revenge on her, one minute, and swearin' I'd forgive them both if he'd only come home, the next.

"I guess most married women knows what I went through in them few hours. Them that hasn't sat on the job, waitin' for some one to show up, is mighty scarce. The time goes by, you don't hardly know how, except that there's more agony in every minute of it than there is in a week stand of neuralgia. But the one good thing about it is that it don't last forever and this here spell of watchin' the clock came under the wire for me at about nine twenty-seven and a quarter in the evenin'.

"Danny came in then. I noticed that he give me a searchin' glance, like a trainer lookin' at a horse's feet. Of course, he couldn't help seein' that things was all to the bad with me; and as for me, I was real certain that he looked guilty. When he seen that my eyes was all red, like a can of paint, his own eyes got shifty, and there wasn't that happy look in them that there generally was. There was some trouble in the air and he wasn't the boy to miss it. You might say that he seen it first, before it seen him. But he didn't make no remarks just then. He left that for me, and I took it up.

"'Uh-hum!' I says, sort of clearin' my throat for action.

"Danny didn't say nothin' back. He just began to pace up and down the room—gettin' his excuses ready, so it struck me. All the time my indignation was risin' higher and higher, the way the bubbles does in a coffeepot when it's goin' to boil over and spoil the polish on the stove. Then I couldn't keep in no longer and I let fly that bumshell that most all married ladies touches off at some time in their lives.

"'Dan Sweeny, where you been?' I inquiries, in a voice like the coatin' of a ice machine. For a minute I just glared at him; and then, mister, I felt all the fight goin' out of me.

"Dan didn't say notñín'—not a word. He just looked. Honust, I never seen nothin' so awful as them eyes! They sort of jabbed through me and I was all done as far as fightin' was concerned. I just crawled down behind myself, as you might say, and was ready for the count.

"'Belle Sweeny,' says Dan at last,

'none of that!' Them words cracked out, mister, like the way the radiator goes on a frosty mornin'. I could see that there was somethin' on my husband's mind—somethin' that I didn't know nothin' about. Women has got a sort of a sense that lets 'em in on those things, somehow, without nobody bein' put to the trouble of explainin'. And the longer Dan kept walkin' the floor and seemin' to be doin' heavy thinkin', the surer I got that somethin' was doin'. And I wasn't what you might call real s'prised when he opens up on me.

"'I want you to know that I ain't no narrow-minded man, Belle,' he says, kinda slow and sad, "but I ain't above knowin' who that swell guy was that staked my wife to the eats in Stanley's rest'rant this afternoon.'

"Gee, mister, I wasn't expectin' that! Was you ever standin' on a rug and somebody give the rug a jerk? Well, I felt kinda like that—just about half upset. Right at that minute I wasn't ready with any answer and you can bet Danny noticed how I didn't make good.

"'I want to know,' he went on in a voice that was gettin' shaky, like a great big man's voice gets when he's growin' madder and madder, 'b'cause I've got a idea that Dan Sweeny had better go out huntin' a gent'man and take a gun along with him.'

"'Why—why—why,' I hollered, findin' my voice, 'what are you talkin' about, Mr. Sweeny?"

"'Ha, ha!' he laughs, in a way that made him look foolish. 'Ha, ha, ha!' Honust, mister, he was so wild-eyed, and he sang it out so loud, that I thought he was gettin' batty in his dome. I began to feel scared.

"Pretty soon he stopped his laughin' and took to ravin'. 'Listen to her deceive her husband!' he yells. 'Listen to her try to fool the wisest bookmaker on the big circuit! Why did I ever get married?' he wants to know. 'They all told me not to do it, b'cause women is all a bunch of hypocrites and false as the complexions they wears. I wisht I had listened to you, Piker Mitchell, and you, too, Ike the Shine, and the rest of you!'

"Honust, mister, you could of brought off a three-ringed circus in my mouth, it was open so wide. I was clear paralyzed by the way things had been turned around. Here I was, a-thinkin' how to defend myself, when I had planned it all out to jump on Danny like a lady jumpin' from a burnin' buildin' into the firemen's net. I was goin' to make him explain; and here I was, backed up into a corner, for I didn't know what, and tryin' to square myself for that same. I hadn't counted on no such business as was doin' in the Sweeny homestead that minute. It seemed to me that I was bein' cheated out of somethin', but a little voice inside me just kept sayin' for me not to insist on my rights if the matter on hand could be got straight again.

"'Danny,' I says to him, as soon as I could get my thoughts arranged right, 'I ain't been away from the house this afternoon. I don't know nothin' about no swell guy, or no rest'rant or nothin',' I says. 'Take it from me, Danny, I got my hand up in the air and I plead not guilty, see?'

AT them words, mister, that man began to act like a gent'man that lost his collar button. My gee, he just gagged and stuttered somethin' fierce; and I wasn't feelin' real safe.

"'You—you—you—you traitor-*css!*' says he; and I hope to be caught downtown without no car fare, if he didn't just hiss. That's right, mister—he hissed. Then he began wailin' round about some kind of a poison reptile or bug or somethin' enterin' his family circle and stingin' him fierce.

"'Once,' he informs me, 'I was a happy man—this noon I was—but now I s'pose I might's well put the furniture in storage and roam the wide, wide world all by my lonesome. I would of swore that I seen you, Belle, sittin' in Stanley's with a strange gent and talkin' confidential.'

"The idea of that sort of thing got his head to goin' round worse than ever, for he began stampin' and kickin' the furniture and scrapin' his feet on the floor. My gee, it was dreadful—dreadful! And it got on my nerves so I couldn't stand it no longer. I wasn't guilty of nothin', and I knew it; and I realized that if Danny didn't know it, too, pretty soon, there wouldn't be no more flat left. When them great big men gets mad, they're liable to forget that they are gent'men and start somethin'. So I got behind the chair that Mr. and Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen gave us for a weddin' present and stood up before that great, big, powerful man of mine without tremblin' any more'n than I had to.

"'Danny,' I begged of him, 'stop them East Side wife-beater acts and listen to me. I wasn't nowhere with no one to-day—honust,' I says.

"'Oh, gwan,' he says, 'they didn't print my birth notice in the paper yesterday,' he says, 'nor the day b'fore.'

"'Take it from me,' I went on, just about crazy because he wouldn't let me clear myself, 'take it from me, I was here all the time! Oh, Danny, won't you please believe me?'

"'How can you prove it?' he wants to know. It seemed as if he was relentin'; and just then I got a flash on how to prove that I wasn't no traitoress to him.

"'You ask the hired girl,' I says, kinda sobby. And, my gee, that idea struck me strong as the only way out. 'Ask the hired girl—ask her, Danny!' I began to almost jump up and down, I was so excited; and then I began to set up a holler for the lady. 'Mame—Mame—Mame!' I yelled.

"If she hadn't of come, mister, I don't know what I would of done. But it happened that she hadn't sneaked out that night and pretty soon in she come, like a lady runnin' to a fire. Danny stopped kickin' the piano and looked her over like a gas man readin' the meter, solemn and important.

"'On your soul,' says he, 'did you see a ten-dollar bill on the table yonder?'

"'Me?' she says.

"'Yes, you!' thundered Danny.

"'No, sir,' she says, holdin' up her head, proud as a cloak model in Tracy's store.

"'Very well, then, that's about all from you. Here, take this dollar for your honesty,' he says.

"Well, you could of pushed me over with a sober breath, mister. I looked, wonderin', at Danny. He didn't say nothin' till Mame had got out of the room.

"'It ain't right to fight in front of servants,' he kinda crooned, in that soft, winnin' voice that he wound me round his finger with, 'and besides, Belle, I didn't want her to know that I suspected you from anything. And I thought it was a wise move to give her that dollar so she wouldn't quit. I'm alwus thinkin' of you, Belle, even if you do go——'

HE kinda began to choke and just stared. I'll leave it to you if the way he handled Mame wasn't the grandest thing. It went straight to my heart—honust. The tears was all ready to come into my eyes; and Danny seen it, I know. He alwus was the slickest gent'man to spot them little things. And then he comes over and grabs my hands.

"'Let's forget it, Belle; I believe you.' That was all, but it was enough; and, as I told you, I got gulpy in the

neck, and, as them prize fighter fr'en's of Danny's usta say, we went to a clinch. And honust, mister, I just wouldn't of minded another big fuss if it would of ended with his big, strong arms grabbin' me that way."

"What about the note?" asked the Boarder, as Mrs. Sweeny paused to sniff rhythmically and dab her handkerchief in her eyes.

"Oh, my gee!" cried the tearful woman, "I was so glad to be made up with him that I didn't feel like sayin' anything about that note then. You see, Danny was a diplomat. He seen that there was trouble and he went and made some of his own to stall off mine with. He hit first, so to speak, and he had me dodgin' around, tryin' to defend myself. But I couldn't get the Dolly business out of my mind. The next mornin' I was goin' to say somethin' about it; but Danny was called away in a hurry and I didn't get a chance. It wasn't till afternoon that I found out what a fool I had been."

"As I said," remarked the Boarder, "women jump at conclusions——"

"You just wait and let me tell it," she interrupted. "After Danny had gone, Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen called for me to go downtown with her. At Forty-second Street and Broadway she interduced me to Mr. Dolliver, that famous horse owner—'One-Eyed' Dolliver, they called him.

"This is Mrs. Sweeny," she says. "Her husband is a fr'en' of yours, Dolly." Then she remarked about how them two was in lots of fixed races.

"And he says: 'Glad to meet you. Me and your husband was to dinner last night.'"

THE UNSELFISH PRESIDENT

THE executive offices were crowded with an unusually large band of sight-seers who had been admitted to shake hands with the President. Mr. Coolidge, having greeted several hundred of them, giving each one a smile and a hand pressure which in the mass called for the expenditure of considerable energy, had begun to notice that his lips felt wooden and his right hand cramped. He was wondering how much longer the line was.

At this juncture a stout and jovial-looking man, one of the slap-'em-on-the-back and you-know-me tribe, grasped the presidential hand and, looking into the presidential smile, began tumultuously:

"Mr. President, I remember the time your father was in our town looking for some horses to buy. My uncle—I expect your father will remember him the minute you mention his name—my uncle took dinner with him at the old Hoffman House up on Main Street. It's still standing there. And we want you to come up there to make a speech for the sake of old——"

Mr. Coolidge stood for three minutes of this, and then, with a thin smile, exclaimed in a tone of consternation:

"But, my dear sir, I'm monopolizing you!"

By

ELLERY H. CLARK

Carib

CHAPTER I.

STRAIGHT SHOOTING.

ON the coast of New Jersey, some twenty miles south of Barnegat, lies the little village of Straitsmouth. To the eastward a promontory guards the town from winter gales; but except for this barrier you will see, to north and south, nothing save barren sand dunes stretching away for mile on mile, bleak and untenanted, a very picture of desolation. Here and there a hawk, soaring on motionless wing, surveys the land beneath him for his prey; and sometimes from the margin of the woods, rabbits steal timidly forth.

Straitsmouth was, of necessity, an isolated spot. Eight miles to the north of us, Cedar Inlet had grown, as we were forced to admit, into "quite a town" with wharves and shipping and a brisk trade with many points in the interior. To the south of us, Norton's Cove had flourished also, though partly, I own with shame, from a thriving traffic in "black ivory" from Bonny and Calabar on the African coast. Though in the privacy of our village we hoped somewhat vaguely for similar growth, yet this notion as a matter of fact was merely a delusion and we remained what we had been for nearly a hundred years, a peaceful fishing hamlet with a daily routine as colorless and monotonous as the dunes themselves.

Amid these quiet surroundings, in a little white cottage tucked away at the base of a low hill, I was born, in the year seventeen hundred and forty-nine. My father, like nine tenths of the citizens of Straitsmouth, was a fisherman; an upright, God-fearing man, not overlarge, but sturdy and strong. He was not blessed, I think, with much imagination, but was content to do his daily tasks as they came to him with his thoughts centered first of all upon the weather and after that upon the affairs and fortunes of the town.

My mother, on the other hand, must have been an unusual woman, but my memories of her are faint and dreamlike, for she died when I was ten years old. I recall her as always happy and

A story of piratical greed and adventure in the West Indies of American Colonial days.

In Four Parts—Part I.

Gold

smiling, singing as she tended the garden or busied herself about the house; and in the long evenings she would read to me from the huge, gilt-clasped Bible that stood on the sideboard and would impress upon me, with an earnestness which I still call to mind, that I must "grow up to be a good boy."

Alas, how many a lad must say, as I do: If my mother had only lived! Not that I am trying to excuse myself in any way, but I think nothing could have made more difference to me than her death, for it was the next nine years which formed my habits and my character. Fortunately, I met no great temptations; but my father, a heart-broken man, took little interest in me, with the natural result that I did chiefly those things which I liked to do and omitted many others which I should have done.

Thus, at the time my story begins, I was in many respects below the average for boys of my age. For one thing, I was not a good scholar, nor was I fleet of foot, though I was large and strong and at wrestling could throw anybody in the town. Yet since I had followed shooting and fishing all my days, I had acquired one accomplishment to a really remarkable degree, namely, a deadly accuracy in the use of firearms.

I had a splendid rifle, which had been my grandfather's; it was of English make, clasped and ornamented with silver, and would speed a ball true and straight with scarcely the deflection of a hairbreadth from the mark. That rifle was my pride.

I do not claim that I was a marksman by instinct; my progress was one long course of experimenting and of profiting by my mistakes. First, I mastered the art of shooting at a stationary mark, trying charges of different strength and calculating, at various distances, how much I should allow for the drop of the ball.

THEN I studied the handicap of cross currents of wind, blowing steadily or in sudden gusts; and next I proceeded to turn my knowledge to practical account by shooting at living

game. Soon no squirrel, no matter how tall the tree in which he sought refuge, was safe from my aim; then wild ducks swimming on the water out of reach of my shotgun paid tribute to my skill; and at last, after innumerable failures, I began to acquire the really difficult art of bringing down, with a single bullet, wild fowl actually upon the wing. Not, of course, that I could do this at every attempt, but I succeeded often enough to prove that it was no accident, while no one else in the village could do it at all.

It was about four o'clock on an evening in late October, in the year seventeen hundred and sixty-eight, when I left the cottage and as usual, with a rifle on shoulder, bent my steps toward the wharf. For the last two days I had been visiting my cousin at Cedar Inlet and I was thinking now of how fine a place it really was, with its stately houses and its shops and the stir and bustle of the wharves, with the bark *Eastern Star* loading for a trip to the West Indies and due to sail on the morning following.

That, I reflected, would be a glorious adventure and in a vague way I began to picture to myself what the West Indies were like. Geography was a weak point with me and I think it must have been India that was really uppermost in my mind, for I remember that I peopled the woods with elephants and tigers and the ocean with tall vessels laden with treasure, keeping a wary outlook for gentlemen of fortune flying the black flag. But if my tigers and elephants were some distance from their native haunts, yet my pirates were located with propriety, for here was an industry which had existed for many years in the Caribbean and in spite of the march of progress still flourished as handsomely as of old.

But, as I strolled along, gazing forth at the horizon with its shadowy blending of sea and sky and seeing, above it, the white wings of the gulls showing clear and bright against the blue, I felt, with the proper pride that a boy should feel in his home town, that there was no prettier spot than Straitsmouth in the whole wide world.

I found the wharf almost deserted. Aaron Parker, old and silver haired, but still with the fresh and ruddy complexion of a boy, was as usual fishing at the end of the pier, his long legs dangling over the edge, his tin can filled with bait, by his side. Half a dozen perch, several flounders and one small cod showed that he had at least procured his supper.

Propped against a stanchion close at hand was his old, disreputable-looking shotgun and I soon perceived that his thoughts were equally divided between fishing and gunning; for he turned at my approach and pointed out to sea to where, perhaps a hundred and twenty-five yards distant, a flock of half a dozen sea ducks were swimming slowly along, every now and again diving in search of food.

"There, Dick, my boy," Aaron said tactfully, "is what I'd like for to-morrow's dinner. They've just set my mouth watering. A dozen times I've started to get into my boat and scull down on them, but I've tried that trick so often that I know it's no use; they would take wing before I got within range. And I was just saying to myself, 'Wouldn't it be fine if Dick Lindsay should come along and shoot me one with his rifle!' And then I look up and sure enough, here you are, just in time."

I was pleased at this, for I was still at that age when we like to feel that we amount to something and are of no small importance to the world. Though I blush to own it, I was really exceedingly proud of my reputation as a marksman. While at Cedar Inlet I had been somewhat ruffled at hearing of a young man named McAllister, who

lived farther up the coast and of whose prowess with gun and rifle marvelous tales were told.

THUS it was pleasant to hear my own praises sung again in my own town and I was ready enough to gratify the old man's wish, though at first, to tease him, I pretended unwillingness.

"You don't want one of those old sea ducks, Aaron," I answered. "If they were scaups, now, or blacks, or widgeon, then you would have something worth eating, but an old white wing, who lives on mussels—why, I wouldn't waste a bullet on him."

As I anticipated, for I knew the old fellow's taste in food, this roused him at once.

"Ah, but they *are* worth eating, boy," he replied. "Those other ducks you talk about are all very well, but a white wing has a tang about him; you get him in a stew with plenty of onions and dumplings and there's a dinner fit for the governor himself. Rest your rifle on the rail, Dick; wait till they draw together a little and I'll bet you'll get me one."

I was about to comply when the sound of voices made me turn around and I saw two of the hunters of the village, Isaac Holmes and William Ogden, coming down toward the wharf, rifles on shoulders, Isaac with a bunch of gray squirrels in his hand. As they joined us, Aaron seemed to forget his beloved sea ducks for a moment, for he inquired eagerly:

"Has your man come back, William?"

Ogden shook his head. "No," he answered in a tone betraying some anxiety, "and here it is almost five o'clock. A little after noon was what he said. And yet he appeared to be an honest man."

"What is it all about, William?" I asked. "What man are you talking about?"

Ogden leaned his rifle against the railing and sat down, propping his back against a supporting post. Clearly he did not intend to let anxiety interfere with his comfort.

"Why," he explained, "day before yesterday a stranger came to town and said he wanted to hire a horse and buggy for two or three days. He said he would take good care of the rig and would return to-day, probably a little after noon. And I let him have the white mare and the best buggy."

"I think you were foolish," I said bluntly, "to trust a stranger like that."

"Well," Ogden defended, "he gave me a fancy price and paid half of it down. In fact, I told him for a little more I'd sell him the rig, but he laughed and said that wouldn't suit his plans and that I should have to gamble on his honesty. So after that I didn't exactly want to say no, especially as he had the money right in his hand and had a pleasant way with him besides. I think he'll be back. What do you say, Isaac? You saw him."

"I say he'll keep his word," returned Isaac comfortingly. "I'll venture he's an honest man. Give him until sundown. If he doesn't come then, why ——" He broke off suddenly to listen, for Isaac had the sharpest ears of any hunter in the town. "I'll be mightily mistaken——" he went on slowly; then, shading his eyes with his hand, he peered down the road and cried in sudden triumph: "Thought so! There he is now!"

"I fear I am late," the newcomer acknowledged, speaking to William, but as it seemed to me taking us all in at a glance. He had a pleasant voice and a prepossessing manner, was quietly dressed and was perhaps forty years old; but as a matter of fact it is not easy to describe him for the reason that there was nothing about him which struck me as out of the ordinary, save that his face was bronzed,

as from exposure to wind and sun, that he had a pair of bright and penetrating eyes and that although he was not tall, he possessed an excellent breadth of shoulder and looked in all respects like a man who could take care of himself without help in the world.

HE walked down the wharf as if glad of a chance to stretch his limbs. All at once his eyes became riveted on the sea.

"There's a pretty sight," he said.

It was clear to me that if he were not a sportsman he at least possessed a sportsman's instincts, for what had attracted his attention was a flock of perhaps twenty white wings, flying close to the shore.

"They will decoy the others," I cried instantly. "See if they don't."

The matter of the white mare out of the way, Aaron's interest in his next day's dinner was again revived.

"There's your chance, Dick," he begged. "You couldn't miss one now."

The ducks, indeed, as the two flocks massed close together, offered a tempting mark. But instead of shooting I turned, with what for me was unusual deference, to the stranger. I do not think it was politeness on my part, for I was not overburdened with that quality; but rather that I had sense enough to see that this man, in spite of his quiet dress and quieter manner, in some way difficult to explain, was distinctly above the rest of us. Accordingly I did not feel at my ease in attempting to display my skill before him. So I said:

"Perhaps this gentleman will try the shot."

He looked at me rather approvingly, I thought, and with a glance that seemed to be taking stock of me. But he declined my offer with a smile.

"I thank you," he returned, "but I am only a humble merchant. Of such matters"—and with a gesture he indicated the guns stacked against the rail—"I am ignorant. If you wish to insure the safety of the game, I will shoot. But as our friend here seems anxious to have one for dinner, I think I had better not make the attempt."

He spoke as if he were telling the truth and yet, in some way that I could not quite have explained, I felt that he was not so ignorant as he appeared—that he knew enough, if he chose to admit it, about guns and rifles and how to use them. But this I could not very well say and Aaron was quick to assent.

"That's well spoken, sir," he agreed. "Now, Dick, something may frighten them. Go ahead and shoot."

"All right," I said. "And Isaac and William will fire too. With three bullets we ought to get at least one duck."

But Aaron did not wish to run the slightest chance of losing his dinner.

"No, Dick," he objected, "no disrespect to the others, but you're the boy to do the shooting. They will lend you their rifles; put them side of you and when you've fired your own piece lay it down and give 'em two more shots as they go off. You'll do that for an old man, won't you, boys?"

To my embarrassment, both Isaac and William responded by doing as Aaron suggested. The stranger eyed me curiously.

"You seem to enjoy quite a reputation," he observed; and added, I thought a trifle mockingly: "But a reputation has its drawbacks. It's not always easy to live up to it."

SOMEHOW his words nettled me. They were courteous enough, but in his whole manner I seemed to read disbelief—a feeling that I was not nearly such a marksman as my friends made me out to be. And I determined that if I ever drew a bead straight in my life, I would do so now.

To begin with, I leaned the rifles of Isaac and William against the rail where I could easily grasp them and then did not scruple to take advantage of the added steadiness to be obtained from shooting with a rest. To be honest, I could scarcely have asked for a finer opportunity, for the light breeze had died away almost to a calm and the flock of ducks, floating peacefully in the waning light, made a perfect target.

On the other hand, only the man familiar with a rifle knows how easy it is to miss what appear to be the simplest shots, where, instead of the scattering charge of the shotgun, one has but a single ball on which to depend. It was, therefore, with no feeling of overconfidence that I leveled my piece, waited until I had three big black fellows in line and, carefully noting the position of the rest of the flock, pressed the trigger.

Then, without waiting to note the result of my shot, I put down my own piece and seized Isaac's rifle. It took a moment for the thin cloud of smoke to dissolve and when it did I found, as I had expected, that the frightened ducks were already taking wing. They are, however, in comparison with a widgeon or a black duck, slow flyers and I had ample time to focus on four birds close together and to direct my aim, by allowing the proper headway, at them.

Once more, without an instant's delay, I laid down the second rifle, grasped hastily for the third and though, by this time, the ducks had not only gained considerable speed, but considerable distance as well, my good angel stood by me and I dropped a gray bird from the center of the flock.

Then and then only, still holding the smoking rifle in my hand, I looked not without apprehension to see whether my earlier shots had reached their mark. I shall never forget the sight that met my gaze. There, an equal distance apart, three birds, two blacks and the gray, floated stone dead on the quiet water.

Not one of them even so much as fluttered or stirred. Probably not once in a thousand times would I have done as well. But there it was; I had done it; and I had shown the stranger that there were boys in Straitsmouth who knew how to handle a gun.

I was the center of quite a demonstration. Aaron, with a glorious dinner before his eyes, was naturally the most delighted, but the stranger was a close second and as if desirous of making amends for his disbelief, complimented me most handsomely on the accuracy of my aim.

Isaac and William, too, though never effusive, admitted that they had witnessed a clean bit of shooting. And our diplomatic visitor crowned the occasion by insisting that we should all adjourn to the tavern where he could complete his payment to William and at the same time, as he was kind enough to phrase it, "drink a health to the straightest-shooting young man he had met in many a day."

Naturally, we all accepted with alacrity; all of us, that is, excepting Aaron, who was too intent on retrieving his coveted game to go with us at once, but who earnestly assured the stranger that he would be with us directly and would make an honest effort to dispose of his fair share of the ale.

CHAPTER II.

SAMPLE OF HIS SKILL.

ONCE seated at the round table in the tavern, with two or three of its regular patrons added to our group and with an unlimited supply of ale for all, it was not long before tongues were wagging freely. The stranger, I remember, soon became, or at least appeared to become, very talkative and

confidential. He was a merchant, he told us, and admitted that these were times when a trader could make excellent profits, provided he was willing to run some risk.

But—and he lowered his voice and glanced apprehensively about him—he had heard—we must remember that he was but a simple merchant and knew nothing of the sea—he had heard lately much talk of villainous pirates who were leaving their usual haunts in the Caribbean and working farther and farther north, so that shipping along the Atlantic seaboard was no longer safe. With this introduction of the subject, every one began talking in concert.

Aaron, who had deposited his sea ducks in a corner and was doing his utmost by inroads on the liquor to make up for lost time, began to tell the stranger of "Bloody" Carleton and his brig; Isaac was recounting horrid tales of the notorious Starkey; and finally some one, I know not who, for by this time the strong ale was humming in my ears, mentioned the name of "The Black Panther."

"Aye," cried the stranger, "what of this Black Panther? I have heard the name more than once in the last few weeks and always it is a different story. I should be glad to learn the truth."

"The Black Panther," Aaron said, "is the name they give to one of the most bloodthirsty of these gentlemen of fortune. He is a man of dark complexion—some say a mulatto, some say not—and like a beast of prey, he slays most savagely and wantonly, sparing neither man nor woman nor child. Hardly ever, they say, does a victim escape to tell of the disaster.

"Only now and then, by a miracle, some one has managed to hide in the hold of a vessel till the pirates have gone, or when the attack was in the darkness some strong swimmer has contrived to leap into the sea and keep afloat until some vessel has rescued him. And from survivors such as these, we have learned the name and the cruelties of the dreadful Black Panther."

After this explanation, Aaron made haste to moisten his throat again, thus giving Isaac a chance to take up the tale.

"Aaron may speak truth," he admitted, "but as for me, I hear another story. What they may call the captain I know not and I care not, but 'tis the ship herself that is named *The Black Panther* and instead of the skull and crossbones, she flies a white flag with a black panther embroidered thereon. And all agree that while the other emblem is bad enough, yet when honest folks see the black panther at the peak they abandon all hope and commend their souls to God."

NOW this, for Isaac, was a speech of great length and when he had finished he made haste, as Aaron had done, to refresh himself with another mug of ale. But at once, and this time to my surprise, a third speaker was ready to add his version of the affair.

This was Abner Moody, the village drunkard, who spent all his waking hours in the taproom of the tavern.

"Begging your worship's pardon," he began in his high, shrill voice, "this is the way the story comes to *my* ears." He stressed the pronoun as if to imply that by the very process of reaching Abner's ears, rumor was thereby transformed into truth. "Yesterday, at about this hour, I chanced to be right here, in this very room and two gentlemen were here, all the way from New York, and I listened to their talk, which was of The Black Panther. And thus the story comes to my ears that The Black Panther is neither the name of the captain, nor of the vessel, but of something else."

At this Aaron looked highly indignant, as most of us are wont to do when any of our theories are doubted.

"And what the devil," he inquired tartly, "do you mean by 'something else?'"

Thus, while of course neither Abner nor Aaron had so intended it, it happened that Abner's pause and Aaron's question were dramatically most effective, for every eye was now turned expectantly on Abner. He knew enough to take advantage of his opportunity.

"By something else," he answered slowly and impressively, "I mean something else. I mean that the Black Panther is the beast itself; that the captain of this vessel has captured, somewhere in outlandish foreign parts, a black panther; and that he has tamed it and trained it to fight. And in a battle it slays more enemies than all the rest of the crew. One crunch of its jaws—and a man is gone. And it wears a gold chain round its neck. And it minds the captain. And that's what the Black Panther is!"

Those of us who did not laugh outright could not help but smile, for this was indeed a "traveler's yarn" with a vengeance. But Abner did not seem to mind our incredulity, but added defiantly:

"Oh, you may laugh, but that's the truth. That's how the story came to *my* ears. Then, following the good—or bad—example of the others, he took refuge in another drink of ale.

Thus the stranger had not only one answer to his question, but three. Yet he skillfully managed to keep the good will of all, for instead of selecting one explanation as the true one he said:

"Well, I should say that we had best keep clear of all black panthers, be they man, ship, or beast. If these tales be true, I think I shall refrain from venturing a cargo by sea."

"Don't fear," Aaron cried. "Our ships go armed. They have their brave carronades and their brass six-pounders. They'll prove a match for these vil-villainous pirates."

"Indeed, I believe so," the stranger assented heartily enough. "With the stout lads I see about me here, I would risk any venture. But no vessels set out from your snug little port. There's a harbor to the north of you, though—what do they call it? Cedar Inlet, that is the name. How soon, I wonder, could I ship some goods on some craft bound for the Indies?"

Proud to be of service, it was I who answered this query.

"You would have to wait," I answered, "because the bark *Eastern Star* sails from the Inlet to-morrow bound for Jamaica and probably there won't be another vessel clearing for some little time."

He looked his disappointment.

"Are you sure of that?" he asked. "They may not have finished loading her. Do you really think she sails so soon?"

"I'm positive," I maintained, "for I was at the Inlet only this morning. She sails deep laden; they could not take more goods if they would. And she sails shortly after midnight, on the turn of the tide."

This evidently convinced him. "Then I lose my chance," he said regretfully. "Well, what can't be cured, as they say, must be endured. And now I must be going. Master Ogden, I am much in your debt for the loan of your white mare and my score with you I believe is settled in full. And as for you, young man"—and he singled me out flatteringly from the rest—"I shall not soon forget your prowess with the rifle. I should not like to be the duck that comes within your range."

"Aye," Aaron broke in, "and he can wrestle too. Can throw any one in the vil-village."

The stranger regarded me with admiration.

"I have always wondered at the craft of wrestlers," he said simply. "Would you object to showing me a sample of your skill?"

More gratified and proud than ever, I assured him that I would gladly comply with his request.

"But most of them," I explained, like the young cub I was, "don't like to try it any more. Because they always get the worst of it."

"I would not think of troubling them," he declared. "You may throw me instead. Let us go outside on the turf, where I may fall softly. And take care that you don't break my bones."

Nothing loath, I followed him outside and the others, nudging one another slyly, formed a ring about us. I removed my coat and waistcoat and the stranger did likewise, his breadth of shoulder and depth of chest showing to advantage as he stepped briskly forward. Indeed, if I had not known that he was but a peaceful merchant, unused to athletic sports, I might readily have regarded him as a worthy antagonist.

TRULY the bout was an unequal one, though not in the manner I had anticipated. Exactly what really happened I have never been able to recall with distinctness; in fact, I cannot take oath that I ever laid hands on the stranger at all.

But that he laid hands on me was certain, for the next moment I found myself flat upon my back with both shoulders pinned neatly to the ground; while my conqueror, with an agility unusual among the peaceful members of the merchants' profession, leaped lightly to his feet, leaving me to follow suit as best I might.

If I had not been completely overcome with surprise, I am sure that I should have enjoyed the expressions on the faces of the audience, for their countenances displayed varying degrees of amazement and consternation. Finally Aaron spoke with hesitation, as though doubtful whether he was telling the truth.

"Dick got thrown," he announced; and as no one contradicted him, he concluded that the phenomenon had actually occurred and immediately hazarded: "Try it again, Dick; try it again."

But the stranger shook his head, and began putting on his outer garments.

"We would if I had the leisure," he said, "but unfortunately I must be on my way. The lad is a born wrestler, though; any one could see that. His foot slipped on the grass; otherwise I should have been the one underneath."

This diplomatic explanation removed all traces of gloom from the faces of my friends; and although it did not deceive me, I concluded wisely enough that if he chose to put it in this light, that was his concern and not mine; and so followed his example by slipping on my coat.

Forthwith he thrust his arm through mine and drawing me a little to one side, he said in a low tone:

"I have driven the mare some distance; it would scarcely be right to use her again. But I have just remembered a matter of importance. Have you, by chance, a horse and wagon and could you drive me a few miles before sundown? If so, I shall be glad to pay you well."

I answered that I had a conveyance such as he desired and that I would gladly drive him as far as he wished to go, but that I had no wish to be paid.

Twenty minutes later, we were jogging to the southward along a road that ran parallel to the sea, for the most part with woods on either hand but now and again emerging so that the ocean lay spread before us scarcely a stone's throw away. The stranger had fallen

silent and as I knew enough not to chatter, but to wait until spoken to, we were both of us left free either to enjoy our own thoughts or to delight the eye with the beauty of the evening.

YET after we had traversed some miles in this manner, my attention was suddenly attracted elsewhere as we came abreast of Curlew Island, a long and narrow strip of land about a half mile from the shore. This island had a wide margin of sand, but farther inland was fringed with reeds and overgrown with low shrubbery of storm-beaten cedar and juniper; and since it contained several small ponds it was an ideal spot for ducks and shore birds of all descriptions.

Ever since we had left home, indeed, I had noted the shrill whistling of curlew and plover and had realized that a great flight of these birds was in progress. Now, as we came opposite the island, I could see, even at that distance, that many of these flocks were alighting there for the night. Immediately I resolved to rise before daylight the next morning and secure a bag of these long-legged waders, delicious enough to delight the most exacting epicure.

Leaving the island behind us, we jogged along for another three or four miles. The stranger, for some time, as it seemed to me, had been watching the coast line with close attention and all at once he laid a hand on my arm.

"My boy," he said, "I am greatly in your debt, but the hour is late, the road none of the best and I cannot have you risk an injury in the darkness to the legs of your good horse or to your own neck. Also, for reasons of my own, I wish to enter the cove on foot. So here we will part."

I made no attempt to dissuade him, for there was that in his manner which made me feel that he had a reason for all he did and that it would be an impertinence for me to cross him. Once in the road, he thrust his hand in his pocket, drew out a couple of large coins and handed them to me.

"Not as payment, my lad," he observed, "but as a token from one man to another, and in memory of your shooting, at which," he added with a smile that spoke volumes, "you are even more expert than you are at wrestling. Good-by! Perhaps some day we shall meet again."

He waved his hand, walked off briskly down the road and left me gazing after him, until presently I glanced at the coins, which I learned later that evening from my father were the beautiful golden doubloons of Spain.

CHAPTER III.

OUT OF THE FOG.

BY the time I had reached home and eaten my supper, thoughts of the morrow's sport had driven all else from my mind. Any boy of my age, fond of shooting, would have felt a thrill at the prospect before him, for the island was a paradise for the wading birds. When a flight was on, both the sandy margin fronting the sea and the marshy ponds in the interior would be filled with restless flocks of great sickle-billed curlew, willet and yellowlegs; together with golden plover and the beautiful variety known as black breasts.

With a relish, therefore, which any hunter can appreciate, I made ready my shotgun, powder flask and shot pouch and after reflection laid beside them my favorite rifle, for in the shallow water between the island and the shore huge flocks of wild fowl would sometimes congregate, or overhead in the clear blue a marauding fish hawk or eagle would tempt me to try my skill. These preparations completed, I walked to the beach to look at my dory and finding that everything was in its proper place, I returned home and went to bed.

I was not romantically inclined, nor could I have begun to put my feelings into words; but the sea always has enchanted me and the sound of the waves, as they plashed gently on the long sand beach, was more delightful to my ears than the loveliest music or the most beautiful poem. Toward morning, however, keenly alive as I was to the weather and its varying moods, I sensed even in my sleep that a change had come. When I next opened my eyes I saw that the starlight had faded and was conscious that a faint, almost imperceptible chill permeated the room.

"Fog," I thought to myself, and hastening to the window I found that we had experienced a sudden sea turn and that a light northeast wind had blown in from the ocean this chilling, all-pervading blanket, covering everything with its mantle and blotting from sight every landmark around the house.

At first, with that ebbing of courage which comes with the early dawn, I decided to abandon my trip; but when my eye chanced to fall on my gun and rifle, they fired my enthusiasm anew and with a shrug of my shoulders I determined to make the best of it, calculating that the sun, later in the day, would in all probability burn away the fog.

In any event, I was now broad awake and figuring that the light air would make sailing a slow and tedious process and that I should consequently have to resort to the oars, it seemed wise to make as early a start as possible. I therefore dressed as quickly as I could, breakfasted with great relish on some pilot biscuit and a glass of milk and with gun and rifle under my arm made my way out of doors and down to the beach.

THERE I found the dory, her rail and thwarts gemmed with moisture and as I had done so many times before, I seized her bow with joy in my own strength, ran her down to the water's edge and a moment later had seated myself at the oars and was pulling away, with long and steady strokes, for the island; taking care, for the present, to keep close to the shore, which was dimly outlined through the fog. I knew from experience how easy it is in such weather to lose one's bearings completely in a very short time.

After I had traversed some distance, however, in this fashion, a cool and vigorous breeze suddenly struck in from the north and since I was not rowing either for the fun of it or for exercise, I pulled in my oars, shipped my rudder and setting my leg-of-mutton sail, was soon proceeding comfortably on my way, the water rippling musically under the bow.

In these conditions, I had more time to pay attention to whatever sounds were going on in the world, which had not yet awakened to another day of toil and of which I might, as it seemed to me, have been the only living inhabitant, shut in as I was from all observation on every hand. Far inland, from some distant farm an irrepressible cock, after the immemorial custom of his kind, shouted aloud that day had come; and almost at once a rival, with no less vigor, flung the challenge back again.

Then suddenly, far away from the eastward, there came to my ears, dim and faint, another sound which I could not comprehend, but which seemed, had such a thing been probable, like the muffled reports of firearms. Instantly the memory of the previous day's talk in the alehouse came to my mind.

"The Black Panther!" I repeated whimsically to myself. "He is lurking and prowling out there in the fog."

This sound, however, whatever it was, soon died away and I continued without more thought of it to cover the distance in fine style, passing one by one each familiar headland and inlet,

until I had reached Holloway's Cove, from which the island bore due east. Here I luffed into the wind, unshipped my rudder and lowered my sail, and setting my compass on the stern thwart, I laid my course straight for the island.

DAWN was, or should have been, near at hand, but in this mist there seemed to be no change of any kind save that the tint of the surrounding veil appeared perhaps to lighten from gray more to a pearly white, but without permitting me to see more than a few boatlengths on either hand.

Presently, with great suddenness, as is always the case with objects in a fog, the shore of the island sprang into being before my eyes. An instant later I had driven the dory's bow deep into the yielding sand and, jumping out, had hauled her a boatlength up the beach and had planted the anchor at the base of the reeds.

A gunshot away, at the edge of the undergrowth, I scooped out for myself a narrow blind just deep enough so that, when seated, my head was below the tips of the surrounding reeds. Then I loaded both gun and rifle with the utmost care and at last was ready for what might befall.

For some time yet, however, I was doomed to wait with ill-concealed impatience. I knew that it was either sunrise or very near it, but no light as yet could penetrate this barrier of fog. To render me more restless still, the ceaseless whistling of the shore birds told me that, though they were hidden from my sight, they were all about me in myriads.

Presently, only a few feet above my head, two dim forms rushed by like cannon balls. An instant later, for even in the shadowy light their keen eyes must have glimpsed the little pond behind me, they came winging back and dropped with a splash into the quiet water.

Out of the corner of my eye I watched them, a pair of handsome scaup ducks, the male beautiful with his glossy head of greenish black contrasting with his bill of pale blue; the female only less striking in her quieter plumage, with a round white spot at the base of her bill on either side of her high-held head. With a low, contented quacking they began feeding in the shallow water, not being forced to dive, but merely dipping their heads under and turning their tails, in comical fashion, straight up to the mist-covered sky.

No temptation to shoot them came over me. Ducks were not my game that morning and unless actually in need of food I never stooped to the ignominious pot shot, but made it my custom to shoot only on the wing. Yet in these unusual conditions I was tempted, a moment later, to break my rule. Through the thinning fog a band of half a dozen majestic curlew came into view just beyond the decoys, leisurely following the curve of the beach and constantly bending their long necks to feed on the spoils brought in by each advancing wave.

Such a mark, indeed, did they present that I was between two minds whether to let them pass unscathed or test my skill; and wiping the moisture from the barrel, I threw my shotgun to my shoulder and sighted at the flock.

Momentarily my finger curled around the trigger; in another instant I think I should have pressed it, but I hesitated just long enough to hear, above the whistling of the shore birds, above the faint ripple of the water on the shore, the unmistakable and not-far-distant "clink-clank" of oars against tholepins. Hardly believing my own ears I sat stock-still, my gun still at my shoulder; and then again: "Clink-clank; clink-clank." Without doubt, a boat was passing in the fog.

IN another few seconds, the sound of oars ceased. There came instead the crunch of a boat's bow upon the beach; then voices, low and guarded; and out of the mist three forms came dimly into view.

The foremost, even allowing for the magnifying properties of the atmosphere, I could perceive to be a man of giant stature and doubtless of corresponding strength, for he was carrying, in an attitude that showed that his burden taxed him to the utmost, a large chest or box. Behind him, one to the right and one to the left, came two other figures, men, I judged, of average size, one bearing a spade over his shoulder and the other unencumbered by any burden at all.

Doubtless I seem to describe all this in a very calm and matter-of-fact way, but I can assure you that at the time the impression it made on me was one of a different sort, vivid enough to set my eyes to staring and to make my blood leap faster in my veins. From the tales I had heard around the fire at the inn, I had no doubt—in spite of the talk that there were none in our waters—that these men were pirates; and that since for obvious reasons they did not give their money into the custody of the bankers on the shore, they had come to the island to deposit it in the good old-fashioned way, according to the custom of freebooters since their trade began.

Yet excited and thrilled as I was, I experienced other emotions as well, chief among which was a very lively fear; for though I knew of course that I was quite invisible, still the trio advanced straight for me as though their destination was the very spot where I lay concealed.

Fortunately for me, however, they came to a stop some fifty feet from the edge of my blind; he whom I took to be the leader of the party gave a curt word of command and at once the huge man, with great alacrity, set down his burden and began rubbing his arms as if to restore the circulation. Thereupon the leader flung another word to the man with the spade and he at once laid down this implement beside the box and the two withdrew from their companion, coming so far in my direction that soon they were nearer to me than they were to the chest.

Apparently they were searching for a mark of some sort, for presently the man who had carried the spade stopped near a low, gnarled cedar and observed:

"Why not this tree, captain, if you may call it such? At all events, it's larger than its mates."

At these words, I experienced another thrill, but of a different kind. Naturally these three men were all unknown to me and I had not traveled enough to have made many acquaintances in other towns; yet I could have sworn that I had somewhere heard this man's voice, or at least a voice almost exactly resembling it.

Before I had time to perplex myself further, the man addressed as captain made answer, and although I had never seen the fine gentlemen who attend at court, yet his tone, languid and somewhat bored, was such as I imagined these gentry to affect.

"'Twill serve," he said. "Now the line, Burford, and cross bearings. And then," he added, so low that I could barely hear the words, "and then for Tom."

What followed I could not well observe, for the fog, which had seemed to be lightening, now shut in thick again, and their maneuvers took them first to the westward, for which I was duly thankful, and then back in my direction, which made me crouch and cower like a hunted hare.

There was measuring, I judged, and placing of marks and the man who had borne the spade was continually jotting down figures in what I supposed

to be a small book. All this time the big man sat on the chest quietly, as if glad to be let alone and without, as far as I could see, evincing the slightest interest in what was going on.

Many and many a time, since that morning when I lay crouched amid the reeds, I have debated with myself what I should then have done, for I had such an opportunity as might never come again in the course of a lifetime.

At such close and point-blank range, I could have fired my shotgun full in the face of one of the men, then have seized my rifle and shot down another and then, taking to my heels and protected by the smoke and by the mist, I could have crouched in the shelter of the undergrowth until I had reloaded my rifle and returned to take my chances with my remaining foe. Here, with fortune favoring me, I would have put out of the way three pirates and would have gained for myself a chest of treasure.

But such arguments I should answer as follows. In the first place, I did not know that these men were pirates.

In the second place, even if I had some means of assuring myself on this point, the fact remains that pirates in those days were not regarded with the horror and loathing which they merited.

If these two reasons are not enough to explain my inaction, there remains a third, that I was only nineteen and that my mind did not then work—nor has it since worked, I fear—with any great celerity. All my life I have been able to see afterward, when it was just too late, what I should have been doing at the time.

So now, when perhaps I should have been bold and keen and wide awake to make my fortune for life, I continued to crouch there in the reeds, my eyes staring, and so fascinated with what I was seeing that I could only gaze like a great booby with never a thought of gun and rifle at my side.

CHAPTER IV.

PIRATE'S MERCY.

AFTER a few minutes of these evolutions on the part of the two men who seemed to be the leaders in the enterprise, they stood for a moment in silence at a point midway between me and the third man; then gave him a curt order and at once, without a word, and as it seemed to me somewhat reluctantly, he heaved his huge bulk upright, picked up the box and brought it to the spot where they stood.

Then, going back and recovering the spade, he proceeded to dig; and though the soil, as I well knew, was hard to excavate because of the many twisting roots of shrubs and trees, his strength was so great that he made short work of it and soon had a large pile of earth and sand thrown up by his side. His companions evidently wished to insure the security of their hiding place, for presently I saw him get down into the pit and make the dirt fly even faster than before.

Then, at the word of command, he stopped again and reaching out over the side of the hole, he half dragged, half carried the chest, the size of which was hard to determine in the darkness, and swung it down to the bottom, after which he emerged and began filling in the pit.

Over this matter the whole party spent much time; the surplus earth was carried away and dumped into the pond and as nearly as I could discern, they were at great pains to smooth out all traces of their footprints around the spot where they had buried the chest, gradually retreating until, to my discomfort, they again had approached quite close to my hiding place.

I was now in a state of the utmost excitement; dreams of fabulous wealth were darting through my brain and I could hardly wait for them to finish their task and disembark, for surely a

chance like this would never be mine again. Then, wholly without warning, a terrible thing happened.

The big man, who had done the bulk of the labor, now stood leaning on his spade, gazing blankly into the fog, when to my surprise I saw the man whom I deemed the leader steal quietly up behind the dreaming giant and crouch down until he was fairly on his hands and knees, his back level with his follower's legs.

At once I recognized the maneuver—I had seen the same thing done and had done it myself, scores of times in the rough play of the Straitsmouth boys; for given an active confederate, this is a trick against which there is no guard; if your ally gives the victim a good hard shove, he is bound to lose his balance, reel helplessly backward and sprawl at full length upon the ground. While this was a favorite trick with boys, to see it employed in this place and with grown men as actors puzzled me and made me feel that, instead of jest, it boded deadly earnest.

My fears were, as it proved, only too well grounded, for without loss of an instant the third man walked boldly up to his unsuspecting victim and without a word or a sign to reveal his purpose, suddenly gave him the violent push which I had been dreading to see. Without uttering a sound the surprised giant flung up his hands and fell heavily upon his back, whereupon, to my horror, the man who had shoved him leaped, without loss of a second, full on top of him and I saw a great knife gleam and plunge, once—twice—thrice—into the unresisting body of the fallen man.

Meanwhile the man who had knelt had risen to his feet again and I saw that he held a pistol in his hand, ready to fire. For an instant, indeed, it seemed that there might be need, for the fallen man, whose vitality must have been prodigious, now succeeded in spite of his wounds, in throwing off the man who bestrode him and in dashing him to the ground. The next second, to my terror, the giant came plunging straight for my blind, a most horrible and ghastly sight, with head thrown back and mouth gaping and distorted in agony.

PLAINLY, even to me who was unused to sight of violence, it was his last half-conscious, half-instinctive effort to flee from his murderers. He ran aimlessly, reeling from side to side, with arms pitifully outstretched before him and with body inclining farther and farther forward until at last, whether from tripping over a root or whether from loss of strength, he crashed prostrate not ten feet from where I lay cowering.

With a bound his betrayer was on him and I could have fainted dead away when he turned the prostrate body and as if to make assurance sure, plunged his knife with a kind of diabolical savagery full into the giant's throat. Then, more slowly, he rose to his feet and even in my terror I experienced a still further shock as I saw that in spite of his change of dress this murderer, beyond all question, was none other than the peaceful merchant, the affable stranger with whom I had talked and laughed at Straitsmouth only the day before.

He stood motionless, the dripping knife still in his hand, looking around him as if seeking a tuft of grass with which to clean it, while I crouched low amid the reeds, hoping and praying that he would not see me. But as he glanced hither and thither, to right and left of him, all at once—and I could have screamed aloud as I saw what was coming—his eyes, drawing nearer and nearer, at length looked squarely into mine. Frozen with horror, I made no movement of any kind but remained staring as if turned to stone.

Nor was he, on his part, more active. He must of course have been a man accustomed to all kinds of excitement and adventure and not easily to be surprised; but the sight of a face looking up at him out of the reeds on an island which he confidently believed to be uninhabited, save for himself and his partner in crime, clearly staggered him.

WHICH of us would first have awakened from his trance, which would first have seized gun or pistol, I do not know; but before either of us could act, the man who had been in the background had stepped forward and he, at least, was quick as lightning itself. With a gesture so rapid that the eye could not follow it, his hand leaped up and I found myself gazing into the round muzzle of a deadly looking pistol, while he said, without raising his voice, but in a tone like steel:

"Come out of there!"

With a sinking heart I realized that my opportunity had passed. Whatever I might have done, had my wits been as quick as his, was of no import now. The sight of that pistol settled everything and abandoning all hope I obeyed his command.

I shall never forget that first sight of Captain Francis Barclay. He was not a large man, but I have never in my life met another who gave such an impression of power. His figure was lithe and well proportioned; his face, thin and aquiline, was very dark and clean shaven, save for a small coal-black mustache; his hair, also jet black, curled negligently beneath his cocked hat with its sable plume.

Nor was his dress less noticeable than his face and figure, for in spite of the hour and the occasion he was clad in knee breeches and silken hose, with long slashed boots; his waistcoat was of some light sprigged stuff and his coat was scarlet, with ruffles at wrist and throat.

He had, as I have said, shown that he was proof against surprise and yet, as I came forward, I distinctly saw his expression change. What there could be to amaze him in the sight of a desperately frightened boy I could not then imagine, yet he glanced at me as if thoroughly taken aback, crying out:

"In God's name, Burford, what is this? I thought we had left him on the schooner."

My friend of yesterday—now, I had little doubt, my enemy—had advanced to my blind and had thoughtfully taken possession of my gun and rifle. Now he resumed his place at the captain's side.

"I was startled when I saw the other," he answered, "but this is not he. This is the boy I spoke of, who drove me down the shore."

Then, in a tone vastly different from his friendly geniality of yesterday, he asked:

"How come you here, lad, eavesdropping?"

I explained as best I could. My interlocutor listened gravely and looking at me, not, as I thought, without a glint of compassion in his eyes, asked quietly:

"And how much have you seen? The fog is thick; perhaps you have seen naught save my quarrel with my friend. Perhaps you could not see, in the darkness, that he struck me first."

Why I did so, I do not rightly know, except that I think I have inherited from my good parents a strong love of the truth; and I dare say also that I may have felt that even if I cared to tell lies, these men were clever enough to detect me; so I answered directly enough:

"I saw everything. I saw you bury the chest and I saw what followed."

His expression altered when I spoke of the chest. Then he turned to his companion, who still held his pistol leveled at my breast.

"A fine, outspoken lad," he said with an irony that even I could understand. "But I fear of too roving a nature. Home, after all, is the only place where a boy is really safe."

At these words, the import of which there was no mistaking, I felt a sudden sinking of the heart. At the same time I experienced that sensation which comes to all of us at times, that all this could not be true, that I was not the same boy who had left his home so light-heartedly but an hour or so before, without a care or worry in the world.

The whole aspect of the day with its chill, persistent fog, the unlooked-for coming of these strange men, the cold-blooded murder I had witnessed —surely, I thought, I could throw off this nightmare, waken and find myself in my bed at home. Yet that silent bulk at my feet was real enough. And that dark-visaged figure with the pistol was real enough, too; and as I looked, without any melodramatic flourish but as coolly and naturally as if he were about to shoot at a mark, he raised his weapon still higher until it pointed at my forehead and I knew that the hand which held it was as firm as a rock.

I had no doubt that he was about to fire, that I was as good as dead at that moment and there fell upon me that absolute calm which comes when all hope is past, when one has, in anticipation, already suffered the agonies of death. Now, thought I, as long as I must die, I can at least die like a man and let him see that we breed no cowards in Straitsmouth; and thereupon I straightened myself erect, let my arms fall loosely at my side and looked him squarely in the eye.

I dare say that I might have had far nobler thoughts, but what did pass through my mind was a great yearning for the village where I was born—I felt the love of it, the warmth of the summer sun, the brown of the ledges, the sparkle of the long white beach, the blue of the beckoning sea—never more than at that moment have I felt a greater desire for life or a greater regret at leaving its loveliness behind.

The silence lengthened; from the far distance the whistle of a flock of curlew came to my ears. How strange, I reflected idly, that that should be the last sound I would hear; and then slowly, deliberately, this dark pirate lowered his weapon until its muzzle pointed toward the ground.

THEN came the reaction. A momentary faintness seized me; I felt myself sway, almost threw out an arm for support. Then with a great fear lest these men should mock my cowardice, I bit my lip savagely, thrust my nails into my flesh and the weakness passed.

Burford turned inquiringly toward the man in the red coat. The captain's face was alight with some emotion that I could not fathom; the dawning of some new idea was there and whatever it was it must have pleased him hugely, for all at once he began to laugh, not openly and heartily as I was accustomed to see men laugh, but silently and as it seemed to me evilly.

His lips were parted; his eyes gleamed; and his shoulders shook convulsively in this spasm of soundless and devilish mirth. Presently, since he did not communicate to his companion the reason for it, my friend of yesterday inquired with some sharpness:

"What cause for laughter?"

"Cause?" answered the captain, becoming grave again. "Much cause. What if we sent this one in place of the other?"

What he meant by this was unknown to me, but evidently Burford understood, for he seemed to ponder for a moment, then queried:

"What gain?"

"What gain?" Barclay repeated. "All

the gain in the world. I spare his life; hence he goes as my man. He will be welcomed without suspicion; the fatted calf, perhaps, will be killed for him. And at a time appointed he delivers my enemy into my hand."

What they were talking about I had not the remotest idea, but I could see that what red coat said impressed his henchman. For an instant Burford stood in silence, then glanced at me with a scrutinizing and critical air.

"The other is taller," he objected. "Taller by at least an inch."

The captain in turn looked me over and gave the slightest perceptible shrug. "Near enough," he said airily. "Considering they have never seen either of them, quite near enough."

Again Burford stared at me and he objected: "But they have the other's picture and he has a scar."

Once more Captain Barclay, smiling as if at some humorous thought which I could not comprehend, answered:

"A simple enough matter, my dear Burford, simple enough."

Again there was silence. Burford appeared to have no more objections and I was beginning to think that for some mysterious reason I was going to be saved after all, when suddenly the captain gave a sharp exclamation of disappointment.

"Ah, I forgot!" he cried. "The other is a dead shot. That, in fact, is the main reason for his coming—to drill the bodyguard. The old fox adds other reasons, but if I know my man it's the marksman and not the nephew he wants. So unless this lad can shoot like the devil himself, we must give up our plan."

Again I shuddered, partly at his words, but even more at the business-like way in which he once more raised his pistol, as if to complete his work where he had abandoned it. But this time, for a change, it was Burford who was to come to my aid.

"But he can shoot like the devil himself!" he exclaimed. "I saw him only yesterday kill three sea ducks with three bullets and two of the birds were on the wing."

The captain hesitated; finally his fingers, to my great relief, left the handle of his too-ready pistol.

"It may have been chance," he remarked, gazing at me as if suspicious of my merits as a marksman. "Still, we can see. Go to the gig, Burford, and bring me my gun."

Burford departed. The dark captain stood waiting silently until his follower returned and handed him his piece. Gradually, while we had been talking, the mist had begun to fade, so that now, while it was still impossible to see to any distance, yet for a space of perhaps one hundred yards around us the air was tolerably clear and the faint light of the sun could be seen, painting the gray a pale and beautiful gold. From the mainland, where they had spent the night in the fresh-water ponds and streams, flocks of ducks were passing continuously out to sea.

INDEED, the captain had no sooner taken the gun from Burford's hand than, heralded by a rapid beat of wings, a single black duck hurtled by overhead. Like a flash, the piece leaped to his shoulder and the bird, struck dead in mid-air, turned over and over and crashed heavily upon the sand. Without the slightest emotion, the captain handed me my gun.

"Do likewise," he commanded. With a significant touch of finger on pistol, he added curtly: "No tricks, mind."

I was in no mood for tricks. Nor to be honest was I eager to enter this trial of marksmanship, for I knew that my nerves had been sorely tried and I knew also how simple a matter it is for the best-aimed charge to scatter and fail to strike a vital spot. However, there was but one thing to do and a

second later a widgeon shot out of the fog and catching sight of us began towering upward with the speed and elusiveness for which a wild duck is noted.

It was not an easy shot; to be truthful, I should have waited for a fairer chance; yet so strong was the fowler's instinct in my heart that without thought I swung on the bird and, hitting him with the very center of my heavy charge, fairly drove him upward through the air before he turned over and dropped lifeless within a dozen feet of where we stood.

The captain said nothing, nor from the expression on his face could I tell whether he was pleased at my display.

"Load," he commanded curtly, and handed his own piece to Burford to be recharged.

Once again we stood prepared and before a minute had passed a pair of low-flying pintail drakes swept by us, separating as they glimpsed us and passing one to our right, one to our left, giving us a close but none-too-easy cross shot. At once the cautious Burford dropped flat to escape the chance of being hit and the captain, picking the bird on the right, shot him neatly out of the air.

I took the one on the left, but to my horror, though I felt that I had held straight and true, he flew on as if untouched. From the corner of my eye I could see the captain's hand reaching for his pistol.

"No, no!" I cried. "Wait!"

FOR many a time I had known a duck to fly on as if unhurt, then collapse stone dead. Fortunately for me this was to prove one of those instances, for before the drake had reached the borders of the encircling fog, all at once his wings folded to his sides and darting downward through the air he splashed, lifeless, into the sea.

The captain gazed at me as if uncertain whether it was luck or skill that was aiding me and would, I think, have tested me yet again, but as he handed the gun to his subordinate a flock of about twenty scaup duck, closely massed, passed overhead but well out of gunshot. With a sudden exclamation, he stooped, seized my rifle from the ground, leveled it and fired.

I fairly held my breath; if he made a shot like this, then in all probability my doom was sealed. For a second I thought he had been successful, for one of the flock started to fall, then, to my intense relief, recovered and flew strongly on after his companions, while through the clear, transparent air a single feather floated down.

The captain pointed upward, not, I felt, without pride.

"A feather, at least!" he exclaimed. "Can you better that, my young cockerel?" He handed me my rifle.

I felt that it was now or never. What might be the humor of this strange man, I knew not, but I sensed instinctively that he was inordinately vain of his skill and that whatever might be the object of this difficult test, he was most eager to prove that he was a finer shot than a mere country boy.

Yet oddly enough, so keen in most men's minds is this desire to excel, that even now while my life hung on the result of the next shot and while I was of two minds whether it would be to my advantage to win or lose, still, illogically enough, while I felt my better chance to be to humor the captain's pride by missing and thus perhaps continue to live, I nevertheless stood ready to do my best and if I had to die, at least to die with the memory of a shot well sped to lighten my pangs.

I had not long to wait. Again a whistle of wings and a half dozen redheads emerged from the fog. Unlike the shyer black ducks or widgeon, they

took no notice of us but passed directly over our heads, at almost precisely the same range as the flock at which the captain had fired. I shall never forget, as I raised the rifle, how handsome they looked in the increasing light and how the dark breasts of the drakes contrasted sharply with the white of their under parts.

Two beautiful birds were flying close together and almost directly in line and as they passed overhead I sighted at the leader, swung ahead and pressed the trigger. The report of the rifle cut the air like the crack of a whiplash and never in my life have I felt a keener thrill than when from out of the flock a beautiful drake dropped onto the sand and lay there, beating his wings in his dying agonies.

"Fetch it!" cried the captain imperiously; and I obeyed.

The bird was dead by the time I had reached it and, bringing it back, I handed it in silence to the captain. Through the dark breast and out on the back at the base of the neck the ball had sped. The captain looked, first at the duck, then at me.

"A good shot," he admitted half reluctantly; then, as if realizing that this was inadequate praise, he added, more heartily: "An excellent shot!"

I MADE no answer. It has always been one of my failings to permit my emotions to show too readily in my face, and this must have been the case in the present instance, for the captain, eying me keenly, abruptly inquired:

"Why should you be gloomy? Are you not satisfied with your aim?"

"I am gloomy," I answered, "because I missed my bird. They were flying faster than I thought and they were higher than I thought; the fog deceived me. I held on the leader of the two; this drake was just behind. I deserve no praise; I missed."

"Here at last we have honesty!" cried Barclay, when he could speak. "Rampant, roaring honesty, the greatest handicap to a man in the whole wide world." Yet he did not seem ill pleased either, perhaps because he felt that his reputation was restored; but in any event to my great joy his hand kept clear of his pistol butt. Evidently, for the time at least, my life was saved.

Every moment the fog was thinning beneath the rays of the sun, and now, observing the captain cast a quick glance out to sea, I followed the direction of his gaze and saw, some distance away, a handsome black schooner, hove to. That this was his vessel I had no doubt; and evidently he thought it time to be rejoining her, for pointing to the corpse of his murdered follower, he said curtly, "Set that carrion adrift," and without more ado walked off in the direction of the gig.

I turned to my task, but so huge was the bulk of the dead sailor that I should have fared ill had it not been for the assistance of Burford. Between us, we managed to drag the body to the westerly shore and cast it adrift, I half sick, Burford unconcernedly humming a tune. Then, as we turned to retrace our steps, he laid a hand on my arm and made a gesture in the direction the captain had taken.

"Captain Francis Barclay," he said quietly, "is better known, in the Caribbean, as 'The Black Panther.' One of your friends in the tavern was right."

Here was one more surprise in this morning of grim adventures, but by this time, as it seemed to me, nothing in the world could greatly have startled me; I accepted the news almost as a matter of course and walking on by Burford's side, I found the captain waiting for us in the stern of the gig.

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands October 20th.*

Grandpa Addicks

By Arthur Colton

You've seen the sign "Rooms to Rent" in the windows of boarding houses. Behind this sign was a tragic story. If you've ever wondered about the thoughts of people you see on the street, or if you've ever chewed the end of a penholder while thinking, you'll find this unusual mystery yarn interesting.

AN elderly and subdued house was jammed in between the brownstone fronts of Liston Street. The placard in the window said: "Rooms to Rent." I rang the bell and interviewed the landlady, who was elderly, too, and subdued.

"Yes, sir. Front sitting room and hall bedroom." She went before me up the stair. "They *must* be healthy, bein' so sunny."

There was a ghost of an emphasis on the "must" and she seemed to speak in a plaintive and yet argumentative manner. I imagined my predecessors had been captious. What infinite petty worryings had worn down the woman's voice to that peculiar note of feeble protest!

But the rooms were well enough. A door connected them. The sitting room had a gilt molding and dull paper, an iron grate, a bookcase, and a large cherry-wood desk with a multitude of little drawers. The landlady's voice ran on mournfully:

"There's a gentleman that owns the desk, but he hasn't sent for it, only for his inkstand and penholder, and I couldn't find them; and he lived in the rooms quite a time before and they always gave satisfaction and the neighborhood is very healthy. Would you wish three meals, sir?"

"The rooms will do——"

The front door closed behind me; I went down the steps completing the sentence: "Very well, but the landlady's spirits argue underdone biscuits,"

and ran into a man named Otis, a young doctor of East Side practice and fellow member with me of the St. Nicholas Club.

"Hello, C.!"

"Hello, doctor!"

"What's up?"

"I am. Up one flight, front rooms."

"Oh!"

"Surprised?"

"I room here, too. H'm! of course she'd be likely to rent them. No, I'm not surprised; still—— Shall I drop in on you to-night?"

"Do. Ten o'clock. Good-by."

"Ten o'clock."

That doctor didn't seem cordial. It might be he saw a difference between club and boarding-house acquaintance and disliked them mixed. There was something in that.

I drew an easy-chair to the window in the evening, put my feet on the sill, and fell to wondering why Otis was so offish.

There was a woman's dress in the back of my closet. It had belonged to a large-framed woman, and not to the landlady, who was small, nor to the gentleman to whom the rooms had always given "satisfaction." I wondered who she was, who had left her dress to fill my closet with alien associations.

The big cherry-wood desk had many drawers, and in one of them I found the metal inkstand and penholder, which the mournful landlady could not find. There was a mass of clotted ink in the stand. The penholder was large at the upper end and carved in fanciful lines. The user had had the habit of chewing his penholder, by the marks of teeth upon it.

What a history the rooms of such old boarding houses must gather and conceal about them! Yet this room seemed to have nothing to say for itself. That dress hung incongruously among my coats and made no comment. The penholder and inkstand were quite secret about all they had been up to in their time—all they had conspired together to write.

Otis came in and soon had his feet beside mine and I told him of my speculations, wondering if he were a companionable man and able to appreciate. He said nothing for a time, but looked at me curiously and broke out at last to ask if I were "morbid."

"No."

"It's playing it low on the landlady if I'm going on to induce you to move," he said. "I haven't any reason for thinking these rooms unhealthy; but, on the other hand, I've a notion you'll be sort of impersonally interested—the way I am—and I'm that superstitious that if anything did happen to you here, I should feel—well, badly."

"You interest me already, doctor."

He smoked hard for some minutes, then laid aside his pipe.

"I'm not impersonally interested. I'm in it. I'm the victim of a fixed fancy. I'm a pathologist by profession. Shouldn't you think me a hard case for a mere fancy?"

"It comes to us all, doctor. Love is inevitable."

"What?"

"Is inevitable."

"Oh! That's not it. There were two who were in love, but they're dead. I'm neither."

"If you want my opinion on your case, I should say your fancy isn't a fixed one at all. It appears to wander."

But he only looked at me without smiling, and went on:

"I'm going to tell you all I know about it—about them. It must have occurred within a few feet of where we are sitting now."

He took up his pipe again and smoked slowly while he talked.

"It's this way. When I came here a year ago, an old gentleman by the name

of Addicks lived in these rooms. He had boarded with our mournful landlady a number of years and some of the other boarders seemed to be on jocose terms with him and called him 'Grandpa Addicks.' He was a serene old party, with the general air of a benediction. I went to his office downtown a week ago. 'E. S. Addicks' on the door. First time that I knew his initials.

"About the tenth of last March he told the landlady that he had a niece coming up from Delaware and wished to give his rooms to her. This niece came a day or two later. Her name was Julia Addicks. She was a large, handsome girl, or woman, of twenty-five or thirty, a full head taller than the little old gentleman who introduced her. Grandpa Addicks went somewhere else and did not, I believe, show up at the boarding house. I understand he has never been seen here since. I presume Julia went to see him, wherever he was.

"This Julia Addicks was a very handsome girl. The more I think of it, the more it seems tragical that she went off so suddenly. She looked like a person who intended to have her own way and to enjoy living, but on the morning of the fourteenth of May, she was found dead, lying face down on her bed.

"I didn't hear of it till I came in at night. She appeared to have died in a sudden convulsion. Old Addicks, it seems, was very sick, but his doctor came up—I don't know his name—and he thought it probably heart disease. Her face was distorted; that sometimes happens in heart seizure, so they said, and she was buried somewhere about the city. Old Addicks didn't show up, being sick, as I said.

"Next, on the twentieth of May, the rooms were taken by a man from Delaware named John Campbell. He was a square-built, honest-looking man and I liked him on sight, for some reason. The next morning he also was found dead, in the same position. I found him. At least, I met the chambermaid coming out of the room yelling and I went in. He lay across the bed, face down, with his face distorted and hands clenched.

"Now—Campbell had taken poison. I know the smell of aconite, naturally, as any doctor ought to. It's commonly called 'blue rocket.' Half a grain will produce heart contraction and kill in three minutes; but in such a small quantity the odor is hardly perceptible, unless you're looking minutely for something of the kind. I was looking for something of the kind. I can't imagine what he did with the bottle or paper that contained it, but before the coroner I testified that he died, probably by his own hand, of poison.

"I found old Addicks at last in his office to-day. He has had a stroke of paralysis or something and looks badly. I don't know but it was playing it low on the old man to tell him what I suspected about all this affair, but he took it calmly enough. The fact is, he didn't agree with me. He said he hadn't known Julia to be threatened with heart disease, but that her mother had died of it. Certainly, so far as he was aware, there was no motive for suicide.

"Mr. Campbell, on the other hand, was his niece's lover—he believed, her accepted lover. There was a motive for him. A very sad affair. He said he had been a lover himself, long ago, and remarked that young people died sometimes in a great hurry, whereas, old people, who had the best of reasons to hurry, were sometimes very slow about it. He himself was an old man and hoped I would forgive him if he could not talk about this matter. I came away feeling ashamed. Evidently his niece's death had broken him—that and his shock, whatever it was.

"He's in bad shape. His complexion

is green and his eyes dull. Doubtless you don't know it, but these are peculiar symptoms, connected, as they seem to be here, with paralysis. I wanted to study his case, but I came away instead and studied my own, which consisted in feeling ashamed.

"Now, those are all the facts I know, and Mr. Addicks' idea seems to be the most probable, that Julia died naturally, and Campbell by his own hand on account of her. I have only two objections: First, that there are certain foreshadowings of heart trouble and I never saw them in Julia Addicks. But there is nothing conclusive in that. The second is not an objection for any one but myself. It is that I don't like these rooms. I seem to scent something in them. I have a fixed fancy."

The doctor rose here and walked thoughtfully about the room. He stopped a moment before the desk and then went on, running his eye along the moldings.

"It irritates me. There's no sense in it. I'm in earnest, C. I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll give up your rooms, I'll give up mine and we'll take some together, elsewhere. I'll pay the old lady a month's rent for both, if you'll let me. A man should pay for the luxury of his own nerves."

He continued his pacing, glancing about the room.

"We are strange things, we human beings—a tangle of threads, of cross instincts, of imperious fancies. So much is hidden. I have known men to act as if there were a blind, unreasoning force in their souls that drove them on. Three fourths of every man's mind is unreason, or fancy, but a fixed fancy is dangerous. It is the germ of monomania.

"What do I know of all that goes on within me? Almost as little as I know of Julia Addicks and John Campbell. Is it a medical instinct that scents something wrong here, or am I to turn spiritualist and suppose the dead are trying to warn me; or is it suspicion taking a fanciful turn? A fixed fancy is dangerous, for it's the germ of monomania, and I don't like it."

After that he said good night, and left me alone.

WHO is it that, insisting on the eternity of every event, concludes that inanimate things, by a figure of speech, may be said to remember? But we know, in the plainer cases, how they are induced to speak—as the grooved valleys speak of the ice age, or your worn-out shoes, of the steps your feet have taken. Could those dull walls and gilt molding be induced to tell what they saw the tall girl and the man Campbell do on the nights of the fourteenth and twentieth of May—how they looked—what they wrote at that desk?

The figures of those who had lived there seemed vivid to me, as I sat alone, after Otis had gone. It seemed as if the dull walls and gilt molding were helping me to see them—Julia, tall, handsome, and determined; John Campbell, with his square shoulders and honest face; old Addicks, whose face came to me as Otis had seen him last, shaken and worn, with greenish complexion and dull eyes. I tried to realize still more how they had looked and acted. They had all sat in this chair and written at this desk.

The inkstand and the carved and bitten penholder lay before me as I sat in front of the desk and pulled out drawer after drawer—all empty but one.

That contained one letter in an envelope and one sheet of an unfinished letter. I searched in the pigeonholes. Thrust back in a small one to the right was another sheet of another unfinished letter. The envelope of the first letter was addressed to "Mr. John Campbell, ——, Delaware."

If these were letters of the two lovers, still the writers were dead, and

might I not read what they had written?

The gas jets flickered on the chandelier and the light fell over my shoulder. It seemed to my nervous fancy that the three faces were looking over my shoulder in the wake of the light; that Julia and John Campbell, with their faces pressed together like the faces of two who were united after parting, looked over my right shoulder; and the face of old Addicks, greenish and dull-eyed, looked over my left. I thought all three were warning me not to do something. Could it mean the letters?

The mind is full of fancies. Even the five senses we trust so well will lie at the bidding of fancies. Fixed fancies, said the doctor, are dangerous, for they are the germ of monomania.

March 15th.

DEAR JOHN: I was to tell you in my first letter why I came. I didn't tell you before, because I didn't think you would like it, and I meant to come, and I didn't want to do it that way and against your wish, for this seems so sordid, you see; but it's this way, I knew Uncle Addicks was quite rich and quite old, and I thought he might have other relatives, but I didn't know; or he might do something else with, well—with a will. But if I came, he might like me. Why shouldn't he, John? Oh, I know you'd say it was vulgar and heartless, if it were any one but me, to work one's way into somebody's affections and calculate all the while how long he'll live and how much money he has; to put one's arms around his neck and kiss him and think "that means about so much when he dies." But you won't say that about me. Besides, it's a success. Uncle Addicks is very nice. He has given me his rooms. I shall go to see him every day and he's to adore me almost as much as you do. I am writing at the desk he left here, with the fountain pen you gave me, and sending you so much love that you can't imagine it.

JULIA.

May 14th.

DEAR JOHN: Did you get my last week's letter? You're not nice to me, John. I'm feeling so lonely. I lent my fountain pen to Uncle Addicks, with the end all chewed up, and he lost it. You laugh at me for chewing things up, but you do it yourself, John, I've seen you. Uncle Addicks has given me this great carved penholder that I'm writing with. I feel lonely and sorry, John. Uncle Addicks can't be well. He looks very queer. I went to see him to-day and asked him if he wasn't ill and he kind of grinned at me and asked if I would like to be his bookkeeper. I think he must be breaking down. I think I shall come home. I'm sorry I came here. It wasn't nice. I want to see you, John——

This was the unfinished letter from the drawer.

The third letter, also unfinished, from the pigeonhole, was in a man's handwriting.

May 20th.

DEAR EVAN: I am here in Julia's rooms. I was stunned by her sudden death and thought it might relieve me to come, but I can't say it has. It seemed unreal and intolerable before and now it seems real, but still intolerable. They have sent her things to her uncle's, who has had a stroke of some kind. One of her dresses was left behind. Here is the inkstand she used, a penholder with the marks of her teeth on it and a letter which she began to me that night.

I shall come home on Friday and take up the old grind. I'll try to see her uncle. But it's no use staying here. I'll get over it, more or less, in time. It's no use. She was so splendid in her vigor. I never knew she had heart trouble.

It is stranger than I can tell you, to be here in her rooms. They seem full of her. I feel as if Julia were looking over my shoulder and warning me not to do something, I don't know what. I'm in bad shape, and had better come away. I shall, on Friday. It is very late. The gas flickers badly——

These were the three letters. They seemed first to throw light on the story of the room and then to darken it. It was very late. The gas did flicker badly.

But John Campbell was no suicide, surely. Yet they each broke in the middle of a letter. They sat at the desk, as I was sitting—the same silence, the same flickering gas. Then something came upon them and they suddenly died. What could it have been that had come out of the darkness—

that might be lying in wait still—in wait for me?

I went and looked out of the window a moment on the street, then walked about the room as Otis had done, glancing at the walls, the moldings, ceiling, bookcase and back to the desk. They might have been sitting there when it came, this thing. I took up the inkstand; then the penholder, and tapped it absently on the desk, on John Campbell's last letter.

A little, fine, gray, powdery dust fell on the letter. I tapped it again and stopped, staring at the fine gray dust. In one moment I was up the stairs, knocking at the doctor's door. There was no answer. I went in, groped to his bedroom and dragged him from his bed.

"Come along! Come quick!"

He resisted, half blindly, but he was awake when I stood him before the desk and pointed.

"What's that?"

He sat down and sniffed at the gray dust and said slowly:

"Where did it come from?"

"From this penholder."

"Oh! What are these?"

"Letters. Read them."

He read the letters through and said: "Will you lend me a pair of shears?"

He pressed between the shears the sides of the penholder, where the marks of the teeth were, half an inch from the end. The end of the penholder sprang apart and a little heap of the gray dust lay on the paper.

Otis leaned back in his chair. "That's the aconite, you know. That's what they died of, but I don't get on to it."

I thought he did not refer to the mechanism of the penholder which I held in my hand. It was simple enough. The wood was tough and flexible and even the shears had made but a slight dent. The cavity would contain about four grains; and a sharp compression, anywhere from a quarter to a half an inch from the end, on the flatter sides of the penholder, would open it. There was probably a spring bedded below, for when the pressure was removed the two parts closed precisely. I thought of certain penholders with the marks of my own teeth on them and felt cold.

"You don't know Grandpa Addicks," Otis went on. "I don't see him in this rôle and I don't see the motive."

"Doctor," I said, after a pause, "you made some remarks that seemed to me curious, on the subject of 'unreason,' and 'fixed fancies.'"

"I was speaking of myself," he said absently. "He gave her the penholder. But suppose he bought it in a second-hand curio shop. Suppose him a collector. About one person in twenty chews his penholder. Then, it might have passed through twenty different hands, all ignorant except the first, whose game was played long ago and maybe missed its aim and maybe not. It is possible. But Grandpa Addicks sent to the landlady for it. Well, why not? It doesn't seem to have worried him, for he waited three weeks. But then, only one person in twenty chews a penholder. He might take the chances. Besides, he had a shock. But again, there's no motive. She would have gained by his death, not he by hers. He's an old man, broken down in health; possibly by the shock of his niece's death. I don't see it. Suppose that thing has been loaded forty years. Why not?"

He was pacing the room and talking half to himself.

"Still, doctor," I persisted, "I was impressed by what you said. You were speaking of things that move within us secretly and unexplained. I have something to add. It seems there are upper facts and under facts in things, as well as in men. You handle a common article daily. Twenty people handle it and call it a penholder. It happens to be a death trap, but that's

the under fact. Or you sit opposite a nice old gentleman at table and the other boarders call him Grandpa Addicks, but it only proves the upper fact."

He stopped and looked at me.

"True. It's a question between under facts in the thing and under facts in the man. That seems clear. I'm glad to have facts—instead of fancies. A fixed fancy——"

"Is the germ of monomania."

"Yes," he answered. "But under facts—— You mean, either the penholder or the man has a secret history?"

"Or both."

"Or both."

"Perhaps," I said, after a silence—"perhaps Mr. Addicks had fancies."

We spent the night talking it out. We decided that the landlady should send a note to Mr. Addicks in the morning which should state that she could not find the stand and holder and that the gentleman now occupant locked his room during the day, but if Mr. Addicks would call in the evening, the gentleman would be in before eight and Mr. Addicks would no doubt be able to find them himself. We decided to have an officer in the bedroom, thinking there should be some kind of an official eye on the affair, because it seemed possible that something might develop on the spot.

THE day was a restless one for me and I could not shake off the memory of the past or the thoughts of the coming night. They hung about me, so that at last I put my work aside and wandered aimlessly around the city all the afternoon, dined at a restaurant to avoid seeing the boarders and went home about seven.

Presently Otis came in with a man whom he introduced as Sergeant Williams—a large man with a heavy mustache, who gave us a few bits of sensible advice and went into the bedroom a little before eight. He darkened it and left the door open some few inches.

It seemed as though he waited a long while. I remember looking at my watch several times and being surprised to find that only some five minutes had passed, instead of twenty. I was looking at my watch when the knock came. It was thirteen minutes past eight.

Mr. Addicks, who came in, appeared even older than I had figured him. His clothes hung about him as if they had belonged to a stouter man, and he walked so feebly that I thought: "It's our luck, and not our cleverness, that he's here at all." His eyes were dull and his manner almost torpid.

"This is Mr. Addicks?" I said with emphatic cheerfulness. "I found your property, sir. The landlady didn't look very hard. Won't you sit down?"

He looked straight at me, and answered quietly:

"Thank you; I cannot stay."

Otis moved over by the desk and took up the penholder in his hand. I stood in front of the window, Sergeant Williams behind the bedroom door, Mr. Addicks in the middle of the room.

Otis held up the penholder in his right hand, while his left, behind him, softly felt for the shears.

"It has an odd shape," he said; "so large at the end. Looks as if it were hand carved."

Mr. Addicks stood motionless.

Suddenly Otis swept his left hand forward and clipped the penholder with the shears. Addicks screamed and jumped for it, but Otis met him with flat hand on his chest and he staggered, fell back in a chair and lay breathing heavily and half unconscious. Sergeant Williams put his head through the door and nodded. Otis sat down, put his hand on the man's pulse and said quietly:

"Were you speaking of your niece, Julia?"

Addicks started, grasped the doctor's knee and began to talk in a loud, rapid whisper and the sergeant turned his ear to catch the sound.

"I thought it a fancy, doctor. No, you're my friend, doctor. She was a devil. She came every day and looked at me. She wanted my money. I thought she would get tired of waiting, but she came every day and I was afraid. I dreamed of her at night—that she came to my bed. Then I saw things in her eyes, and I knew she wouldn't wait for me to die. She watched and she planned."

"You bought a penholder," said Otis softly, and Addicks lowered his whisper.

"I fooled her, my dear. I got that years ago, doctor. Some one else used it some time. Doctor, it must have been for a woman who sat and looked at him. She was strong, doctor. I don't remember. But she comes every night still and yet she's dead. I'm not very well, doctor."

The loud whisper died away brokenly. He lay back and blinked at the gas.

I drew nearer to Otis. He was looking at the man and speaking to himself.

"Do you see it?" I asked.

"Yes; she caught herself wishing he would die and that's what scared her. Then she wrote the second letter."

"What about him?" I asked, pointing to Addicks.

Otis shook his head.

Old Addicks died in the hospital shortly and there was no trial, but Doctor Otis wrote an article on "Monomania," in the *Medical Journal.**

*See *Medical Journal*, Vol. XXVIII, page 60.

EVENTIDE

THE shadows of the pines grow long; the sun goes down.
A cool, soft wind draws inward from the quiet sea,
Across a darkening plain that stretches to the lea.
And twinkling lights shine dimly from the distant town
The world is weary and would rest
At eventide.

And so the day span of our lives draws to its close;
Its lights and shades are but the fading hues of years
Whose far-off joys gleam brighter as the darkness grows.
While borne on the night wind from the sea, comes to our ears
The welcome call to endless rest
At eventide.

The Strange Affairs of the Texan Wasp

By James Francis Dwyer

Author of "The Fear Drunkard," "Some One Had Blundered," Etc.

III.—THE BLUE HOUSE BOAT OF MUSKINGUM ISLAND

It was a baffling task, that of finding one small house boat on the tremendous reaches of the mighty Ohio River. But The Texan Wasp was shrewd and determined and spurred on by the hidden clews so cleverly dropped by a charming girl.

THE soft charm of a dying summer had fallen upon Manhattan. A bluish veil, the gift of a sun god, shrouded the Hudson and the Jersey shore. Skyscrapers took to themselves infinite charm through their backgrounds of coral pink and flaming amber.

Robert Henry Blane, looking out from the wide windows of his bachelor apartment at The Montespan, surveyed with a certain ecstatic joy the city spread beneath him.

A gentle tap at the door roused The Texan Wasp from his daydream. His ordered "Come in" brought the negro servant, Peter, whose face, from too close proximity to the stove at which he was preparing his master's dinner, hinted at an oil well in his interior.

"What is it, Peter?" asked Blane.

"A tallygrem, suh," answered Peter. "I'se tole the boy to jest wait an' see if there's anny answer."

The Wasp took the message, opened it and read it slowly.

The message ran:

If possible catch St. Louisan Express for Pittsburgh leaving Penn Station at six two. Lady and gentleman on train will speak to you. They are in great trouble and I have recommended you as one person I know who could help them out. Please make great effort. Regards. THIRTY-SEVEN.

Robert Henry Blane softly hummed a verse while Peter hurriedly prepared the valise.

Peter, valise in hand, reported. "All ready, suh. I'se tallyphoned for a keb."

IT so happened that Robert Henry Blane was the last person to board the train. As the smiling porter escorted him to his seat, Blane wondered at what point on the run would the two persons mentioned in the telegram of the great man hunter make themselves known to him. The sleuth had supplied no descriptions. He had simply said "lady and gentleman," and beyond this Blane knew nothing except that the pair were in great trouble.

Blane, not instructed to do the seeking, remained in his section. Voyagers strolled through the cars, showing that queer restlessness of travelers, and The Wasp examined them in a languid way as they passed. He had a belief that he would immediately recognize the persons who sought him, recognize them because their questing spirit would come out and touch his receptive soul.

And one of the two came. As the express scurried by Rahway, a tall, slender woman with a patrician face, curiously and exquisitely shadowed by grief, slipped into the car like a timid spirit in doubt as to its whereabouts. Her large, brown eyes fell upon Robert Henry Blane and clung to his face for a long moment as if they found in the well-cut features of the Texan an anodyne for the pain that had brought the veil of sadness to them.

She passed, leaving The Wasp certain that she was one of the two who sought him. He thought of the man hunter's wire regarding trouble. Some great grief had brought to the wonderful face that strange spiritual quality that we see sometimes in the portraits of persecuted saints and martyrs.

Dinner was announced, and Blane went forward to the dining car. He looked for the woman as he passed along. He was quite certain now. He felt that her desire for his help came to him as the train roared along. He thought it curious.

The conductor of the dining car led the tall Texan to a seat into which he dropped easily. The chair immediately opposite was unoccupied, but its companion on the same side held an elderly man whose sun-tanned face was ornamented by a gray mustache.

Instinctively Blane glanced at the occupant of the chair beside him. It was the lady of the big, brown eyes.

The meal progressed with that strange jumpiness common to railway dining cars all over the world. The man and the woman exchanged remarks in quiet tones. They were ordinary remarks. The people commented on the service, on the towns through which the train fled like a pursued demon. Blane's keen ears told him they were not American.

They finished their meal. The man ordered a cigar, then, leaning forward, he addressed the Texan.

"Pardon me," he murmured, his cultivated voice lowered so that it was barely audible, "may I ask if you are Mr. Robert Henry Blane?"

"That is my name, sir," replied The Wasp quietly.

The questioner gave a little sigh of relief as he took a card from a small sealskin case and handed it to Blane.

"We were afraid that you could not come," he said, his voice still low and rather tremulous. "We are delighted at finding you. I am Lord Ruthvannen, and this lady is my daughter, Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke."

The Wasp bowed to the owner of the big, brown eyes, and she, in turn, expressed the joy that she and her father experienced in finding him upon the train. Into the soft liquid tones there came a note of thankfulness that made the adventurer from Houston blush as he listened.

"But I was only too glad to come," he said gallantly. "I was bored at having nothing to do."

A sweet smile appeared for an instant on the beautiful face of the

woman. It was there for an instant only. Grief pounced upon it and it vanished. Robert Henry Blane wondered what tremendous sorrow had fallen upon the two persons to whom he had been recommended by the great man hunter.

Between Philadelphia and Harrisburg, The Texan Wasp heard the narrative. A queer narrative. The low, tremulous tones of Lord Ruthvannen that were drowned out at moments by the roar of the flying express seemed to make it more unbelievable.

The husband of Lady Carisbrooke had been killed leading a charge of Gordon Highlanders in the last days of the war. Of the marriage there was one child, a girl, sixteen years of age at the time of her father's death. And it was around this girl that the story centered.

In the years that had elapsed since the death of the father extraordinary attempts had been made to kidnap the daughter. Amazing and deep-laid plans by persons whose motive was a mystery. The terrified mother and the alarmed grandfather had moved from place to place in an effort to dishearten the gang who were endeavoring to abduct the girl, but the unseen pursuers followed.

Ruthvannen and his daughter fled England and crossed to the Continent. The stealthy kidnapers were close on their trail. An attempt to seize the girl in the Avenue de Trianon at Versailles was foiled by a miracle. Cold fear at their hearts, the mother and grandfather fled to Florence and registered under assumed names. On the second day the girl was attacked on the Lungarno by masked men who were beaten off with the aid of three American tourists who came in response to the mother's cries.

The mysterious attempts continued. The shadow followed to Venice and Milan. In despair the mother and grandfather rushed to Genoa and took ship for the United States. Ruthvannen's wife had been a beautiful Kentuckian who took the English nobleman's heart by storm during her first season in London, and Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke, with all the admiration of America instilled in her by her dead mother, thought that in the country of freedom she would find protection against the devils who followed relentlessly.

"We occupied an apartment in Central Park West," came the whispering voice of the elderly lord. "We thought no one knew of our arrival. We were beginning to breathe freely for the first time in months, then—then——" He paused and looked with moist eyes at Blane.

It was Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke who took up the narrative.

"Five days ago my daughter, Evelyn, was kidnaped," she said gently. "We were in Central Park when an automobile swooped down upon us. I was knocked down by the machine, and before I could get to my feet Evelyn was dragged inside the car. It disappeared around a turn in the driveway and we haven't seen her since."

Robert Henry Blane was looking at Lady Dorothy. The large brown eyes were swimming in tears. The swift recital of the happening was agony to her.

"And now you have been acquainted with the motive?" asked the Texan.

Ruthvannen nodded.

"Yes," he murmured. "We have been told the motive."

He paused for an instant, then went on. "I think I had better show you the letters we have received, then you will know everything."

From his pocketbook he took a small bundle of letters, one of which, written on paper of a bluish tint, he handed to Blane.

The Texan Wasp opened it and read

it slowly. The handwriting was that of an uneducated person, and the epistle bristled with mistakes in grammar and spelling. It ran:

The rite honnereble the earl of ruthvannen. You ole hound. you arrystocratick blighter you doant remember me i bet. Ime Bill Staggers an you handed me a little bit of orlrite at derby assizes. youole mucker you give me a stretch o ten years fur jest choking a fat chump to get his poke. my wife jane Staggers an her littel girl died when i was in the pen an arfter i came out i went away to australia an made a fortune on the goldfields at coolgardie then i sed to meself ile go back an give that ole blighter a shake up and ime doin it not arf am i. Ive got yer grandorter an i doant no yet what ime goin to do with her. maybe Ile marry her to a nice young chap who belongs to my gang. cheerio. ile let you no later.

Robert Henry Blane lifted his head and looked at the old nobleman. "Do you remember this fellow?" he asked.

"Perfectly," answered Ruthvannen. "I sat at Derby assizes some sixteen years ago and I recall a case in which I sentenced a red-headed man to ten years' imprisonment for garroting. I have forgotten the name, but I suppose it is Staggers. I'm sure it is. Here is the second letter."

The Wasp took the second communication from Mr. William Staggers, one time of Derby, England, and later of Coolgardie, western Australia. It read:

Call off the bulls or miss evlin wil be tootin with the angils. she woant marry that young chap i tole you of so i doant no wot to do with her jest yet. i mite kill her if you doant mussil the cops. she wants to let you no she issent ded so ime lettin her rite you a line you ole swine you dident worrey that much over jane staggers an my littel girl. but call off the bulls or this mite be the larst letter she is goin to write.

"Did you call off the police?" asked Blane.

Lord Ruthvannen nodded. "I told them that my granddaughter had eloped," he murmured. "I was afraid, horribly afraid. I managed to keep it out of the papers when the kidnaping took place."

"And the inclosure?" asked The Wasp.

The nobleman handed over a scrap of white paper, evidently torn from a notebook. Both sides were covered with writing, the penmanship bold and of that peculiar angular style adopted by well-educated Englishwomen. Blane read with interest the following:

DEAREST MOTHER: Do not use the police. It is dangerous to me. I am well treated. Oh, honey, I often rise in violent exasperation resenting greatly grandfather's cruelty to Mr. Staggers! Best love unto every one.

EVELYN PRIMROSE CARISBROOKE.

Lord Ruthvannen spoke while The Wasp was still reading the message.

"The person who was good enough to wire you to help us solved the message contained in Evelyn's note," he said. "You will possibly see the secret if I tell you that Evelyn never calls her mother 'honey' and that she has no claim to the name Primrose."

The gray eyes of the Texan were fixed on the sheet and each word was subjected to a fierce scrutiny. At the beginning of the fourth sentence he discovered the clew. The first letters of the words that followed made "Ohio River." The same principle applied to the fifth sentence gave the word "blue."

Blane lifted his head and looked at Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke.

"And what does Primrose convey?" he asked.

"It was the name of Evelyn's house boat at Staines," answered the mother.

A little smile slipped over the handsome features of the adventurous Texan. He conceived a sudden liking for the kidnaped girl who, under conditions that must have seemed terrible to her, had possessed the sang-froid to write a message that gave her terrified relatives a clew to her whereabouts.

Blane looked at his watch. It was

ten twenty-five. The express was plowing by Marysville.

"I will wish you good night," he said, bowing before the old nobleman and his daughter. "It is always nice to think of to-morrow when to-day has been full of pain."

Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke rose quickly and gave her hand to the Texan.

"I—I have confidence in you," she murmured. "Hope came into my heart when I saw you in the carriage before dinner. Oh, I knew it was you! You look—you look as if you could do things! You will help, will you not?"

Robert Henry Blane stooped and lightly kissed the fingers that he held.

"I will do everything I can," he said quietly. "I am at your service till we find your daughter."

A BLUE house boat on the Ohio! A needle in a haystack! A grain of wheat on the dusty road to Mecca!

The Texan Wasp stood on the Sixth Street Bridge and watched the waters of the Allegheny hurrying to join those of the Monongahela at Wabash Point. There they lost their identity and became the splendid, broad and muscular Ohio that goes rolling and tumbling for nearly a thousand miles till it tips its offering into the Mississippi at Cairo Town. A great stream!

A man standing beside The Wasp, whose eyes were turned lovingly upon the rolling stream, spoke in the friendly manner of one riverman to another.

"It's great, isn't it?" he gurgled. "Say, she's a stream! Cussed at times, but the best river in America. I know her! Run the *Powhatan* up and down her for years."

"And where is the *Powhatan* now?" asked Blane.

"Broke her back on a lock wall!" snapped the other. "I'm Captain Haggerty an' there isn't an island or a government light, crib dike, run, landing, or sand bar 'tween here and old Cairo that I don't know. I could feel my way down this river with my eyes shut. Some of these pilots have got to take a rabbit's foot in every one of their pockets or they'd pile their old stern-wheeelers up, but not me! Give me a twenty-foot plank an' a pole an' I'd make the Mississippi quicker'n a steam packet."

The Wasp offered a cigar. "I love modesty," he said softly, then, as the captain looked at him suspiciously, he added: "You might be helpful to me. I was thinking of drifting down the river in a house boat. Just an ordinary house boat with a small kicker to get her through the locks."

Captain Haggerty spat viciously.

"Don't!" he snarled. "That isn't a game for any one! I know 'em! There's chaps as live on leakin' pill boxes on the Ohio that'd kill a man to get his teeth stuffin'. I know 'em an' they know me. When I ran the *Powhatan* I useter stand in close to 'em an' heave their pill boxes onto the corn patches with the old girl's wash. One o' 'em shot at me once, the blamed river rat! Came out of his box an' unloosed a charge of buckshot at me. Only he was tossin' like a cork he'd 'a' got me."

"A friend of mine from New York took to the river," said Blane. "A tough baby. He had a house boat, a blue one."

"Oh, some of 'em may be all right," admitted Haggerty grudgingly. "There are fellows who keep out of the way of packets. A chap is a fool to think he owns the whole stream, isn't he?"

"Maybe," said The Wasp. "This friend of mine that had the blue house boat was contrary. You may have had a run in with him."

Captain Haggerty considered for a moment, his red eyes filmed as he turned them inward and looked down the river of memory etched within his brain.

"The last time I was down I saw a blue house boat at the mouth of the Little Beaver."

"He might be my friend," commented Blane. "He was never what you would call a quiet citizen."

There was an interval of silence, then the captain, after a furtive examination of the well-fitting suit worn by Robert Henry Blane, spoke.

"Don't go down the river in a house boat," he said. "'Cause why? 'Cause all the skippers of packets an' towboats hate 'em. That's why. Some night you'll find your pill box tossed into a West Virginny tater ground, an' if they don't do that to you they'll make kindlin' of you against a lock wall. Now I know where there's a forty-foot motor boat with a new engine an' sleeping accommodation for six. She's at Price's yards at the foot of Federal. You can get her cheap."

The Wasp surprised Haggerty by his reply.

"Let's look at her," he said quietly. "A motor boat would be better, I believe."

In the hour that immediately followed, Captain Haggerty of the *Powhatan* formed the opinion that the dashing person he met on the Sixth Street Bridge was a whale for action. Blane bought the motor boat *Alequippa* after a swift but thorough survey; he engaged Haggerty as a pilot and agent with orders to get the boat ready with all possible speed; then he dashed back to the William Penn to report progress to Lord Ruthvannen and his daughter. In the brief interview that had taken place between the nobleman and Blane after their arrival in Pittsburgh, Ruthvannen had handed over the conduct of the pursuit to the Texan.

"My daughter has implicit faith in you," he whispered. "She thinks that you will find Evelyn."

"I'll try," said Blane. "I'll try hard."

The Wasp sprang from a taxi at the door of the hotel as a well-built young man came sauntering up the avenue. For an instant the young man stared at the adventurer from Houston, then he unloosed a wild yell of delight and sprang toward him.

"Glory be!" he cried, as he clutched the hand of The Wasp. "Who'd have thought of meeting you? Don't you know me? James Dewey Casey, the 'Just-So Kid!'"

Robert Henry Blane gripped the shoulder of the little fighter whom he had met in the long ago at Monte Carlo, Seville, and other places, and rocked him gently backward and forward. The meeting gave him exquisite pleasure.

"Why, Jimmy, this is great!" cried Blane. "I thought that you were doing the European vaudeville circuit with your fighting billy goat."

"Some blighter stole Rafferty in Berlin," growled Mr. Casey. "Stole him an' eat him! They're cannibals, they are! If I'd have caught the fellows that chewed up old Rafferty I'd have cut their livers out. When I lost him I got disheartened an' I came home to see my mother in Brooklyn. She has a boarding house in De Kalb Avenue."

"And what are you doing here?" asked The Wasp.

"I hoped to get a scrap next week, but it's off," said the Kid.

"Do you know anything about engines, Jimmy?"

"Do I?" cried the pugilist. "Why, I drove machines during the war that were held together with pieces of string and court-plaster. I had an engine that was made up of parts of twenty-six other engines, an' it was——"

"You're hired, James," interrupted The Wasp. "First engineer on the motor boat *Alequippa*. She's at the foot of Federal Street. Report on board while I get our passengers."

"I like boats," said the pugilist. "That's why my mother put Dewey be-

tween James and Casey. She thought I'd——"

"Beat it, Jimmy!" cried The Wasp. "This is a hurry job."

The *Alequippa* cast off from her float above the Sixth Street Bridge at exactly twelve o'clock, and two minutes later the first evidence that Mother Trouble rode with the five voyagers was made evident.

The motor boat passed under the bridge on the north side of the channel and Blane at the wheel received a greeting as she slipped through. A man, leaning out over the bridge rail, fired at the Texan, the bullet striking the cabin roof some twelve inches in front of him, and at the same moment a stone wrapped in paper narrowly missed the head of Lord Ruthvannen, who was standing on the little deck.

The Wasp swung the boat around, his eyes upon the bridge. The half stagnant crowd had taken on tremendous activity. The sharpshooter had dashed toward the north side and the bridge loafers were streaming after him as if a monster vacuum was sucking them into Federal Street.

The *Alequippa* held her position against the current, all hands upon the deck. The commotion on the bridge died away. Men came running back to report.

A fellow climbed on the bridge rail, cupped his hands and shouted the news.

"He got away!" he yelled. "Got around the depot and escaped. Do you know him?"

"Never saw him," answered The Wasp.

"Fellow with a big felt hat!" screamed the man on the bridge. "Well, he got clean away. Here's a cop coming."

The policeman climbed up beside the man and demanded information. Who were they? Why did the man fire at the boat? Why didn't they return to the float and tell what they knew?

Robert Henry Blane glanced at Lord Ruthvannen. The nobleman made a gesture that signified his dislike to all publicity. The Wasp took the cue.

"We're scientists," shouted the Texan, as the cop leaned out and helped his ears by enormous palms. "We are taking a trip down the river to inquire into the family life and habits of mussels and other animals. Why the fellow shot at us is a mystery. And we are too busy to come back and chat with you. We're off. Good-by."

The *Alequippa* turned in her own length and headed downstream at a fifteen-knot gait, leaving an astonished policeman and an unsatisfied crowd upon the bridge. It was then that Lord Ruthvannen made a discovery. He picked up the stone that had grazed his head and examined the sheet of paper in which it was wrapped.

"There's writing on it!" he gasped. "Look!"

Blane turned the wheel over to Haggerty and took the wrinkled sheet of paper from the hand of the nobleman. The message was written in pencil and the creases made it somewhat difficult to read. Slowly The Wasp deciphered the following:

> You'll get a bullet in your head, Bob Blane. You ain't better than anybody else. You were called some pretty warm names when the bulls were chasing you over there in Paris. Look out! The fight is on! Cut it out before we fit you for a wooden box.

Robert Henry Blane's jaws tightened. The old scar that temper made noticeable showed white against the tan. He pushed Haggerty away from the wheel, swung the *Alequippa* to the right of Brunot Island and headed for the first dam on the river. Mr. Blane was annoyed. Mr. Bill Staggers and his gang had declared war and war it would be.

Vanport appeared, and The Wasp edged cautiously toward the right bank

as he approached Raccoon Shoals. A blue house boat lay above the shoals.

A tall man with a bushy black beard fended off the *Alequippa* as she slipped alongside the house boat. His bright of drinking water to spare?" asked the reason for the visit.

"I wonder if you have a pint or so of drinking water to spare?" asked Blane. "Our barrel has leaked."

"You can get water at the dam," drawled the black-bearded one. "I've got to haul mine from the spring half a mile away."

"Is that so!" laughed the Texan. "Well, well!"

There was a moment of awkward silence, then from the inside of the house boat stepped a plump, fresh-faced woman carrying a tin vessel full of water which she handed to Lady Dorothy with a smiling bow.

"Bill is like that," she explained, as the Englishwoman took the offering with both hands. "He's so gruff, but he doesn't mean anything."

Friction was wiped away by the gesture. Even the gruff and unfriendly Bill smiled as his wife asked Lady Dorothy if she wished to inspect the floating home.

The invitation was accepted. Ruthvannen and his daughter climbed aboard the house boat and were shown with much pride the inside arrangements. There were two bunks, tables and chairs, a cooking stove and plate racks and everything was scrupulously clean and in perfect order. Lady Dorothy felt a little confused and ashamed as she returned to the *Alequippa*. The house boat was the home of two peaceable citizens and she conveyed this impression to Blane as she came aboard.

The Texan made an offhand remark about the color of the house boat as the *Alequippa* cast off. The house-boat owner grinned.

"I like blue," he shouted. "Lots of people like it. There are scores of boats painted blue."

Scores of boats painted blue! The *Alequippa* went on. There was no house boat at the mouth of the Little Beaver River. A farmer on the bank supplied this information.

"One's headin' for New Orleans, mister," shouted the farmer. "Lots of 'em are driftin' down now to dodge the cold weather."

He guessed there were other blue house boats. Not exactly round there, but downstream. He didn't know where. He hated the folk who lived in them.

Lock masters, lockmen, dredge hands, fishermen, farmers on the banks were questioned. The throats of Blane, the Just-So Kid and Haggerty were hoarse through continuous questioning. A blue house boat? Couldn't say whether it was small or large. Couldn't say anything about the occupants. There might be a young lady aboard, also a red-headed man. The brown eyes of Lady Dorothy were moist as she listened to the inquiries and the empty answers.

They found false clews by the score. A lockman at Dam 8, just above Wellsville, Ohio, was certain that there was a blue house boat tied up above Deep Gut Run—absolutely certain.

A water-logged scow on which a shack of flattened kerosene cans had been erected greeted the occupants of the *Alequippa* as they nosed into the West Virginia shore. A crazy river hermit in tattered rags and bent with age informed Blane that there was no other boat tied up there, and, by Jiminy, he wouldn't let any other boat tie up.

"There's only fishin' for one!" he screamed. "I don't want any one else here. Push on! I don't mean to starve to death!"

They came to Steubenville as the night fell and they tied up above the dam, a locking being refused.

A LITTLE after midnight the Just-So Kid aroused Blane.

"Say, boss, we're adrift!" he cried. "Some one has cut us loose from the float!"

Jimmy was right. The startled Texan found that the *Alequippa* was out in the middle of the river, the current carrying her swiftly downstream.

"Quick!" he roared. "Start the engine! We'll be over the dam!"

The roar of the falling waters came plainly to the ears of the roused occupants of the motor boat. The dam was up, and the *Alequippa* was drifting swiftly toward the "bear trap" through which thundered the water of the throttled river. The three warning lights at the head of the lock wall and the two red lights at the foot shone in the thick darkness like the eyes of exulting demons.

The Just-So Kid started the engine. It faltered and died away as the speed of the drift increased. A startled scream came from Lady Dorothy as the moon, slipping for an instant from the enveloping clouds, showed the lip of the dam. The Wasp breathed a prayer and whispered encouragement to Jimmy.

The engine coughed spasmodically, then settled into a sweet roar of contentment, challenging the noise of the dam. The Wasp put the wheel over and inch by inch fought the clutching current.

He drove the *Alequippa* upstream, clinging to the West Virginia shore and steering by the chain of government lights that are strung along the dangerous passage from the head of Brown Island to Dam 10. He drove the motor boat into the shore below Light 560 and anchored under the high bank.

Haggerty reported that the ropes tying the *Alequippa* to the float had been neatly severed and a consultation was held in the cabin.

"It is certain that some one is following us," said Blane. "No one knew that we would tie up at Steubenville to-night, so the chances are that one of Staggers' gang has followed us from Pittsburgh. The betting is that he is somewhere near here now. We'll have to keep watch."

The Wasp took the first trick, ordering the others back to their berths, and as he stood on the deck, his eyes upon the river and the distant lights of Steubenville, Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke slipped out of her cabin and came to his side.

"I wanted to tell you something," she whispered. "To-night before this happened I had a dream in which I saw you crossing a great stretch of mud, and—and you were carrying Evelyn to me. I had a great desire to tell you. I know it will come true! I know!"

"I hope so," said Blane. "If we could pick up some clew, I would be relieved."

"We will!" gasped the mother. "I know we will!"

She slipped back to the cabin, leaving Robert Henry Blane alone with his thoughts. He was a little afraid of what might happen to Evelyn Carisbrooke now that Staggers knew there was an attempt being made to find the place where she was imprisoned.

Rain came with the dawn, a thin, misty rain that obscured the Ohio shore. A tow with four great coal barges came hooting downstream, whistling for a locking. It was a lumbersome big thing that looked rather frightening in the murky light.

Blane drove the *Alequippa* cautiously along at the heels of the tow. Terrifying things to delicately built motor boats are the lurching coal-laden barges of the Ohio. Those barges possess a devilish desire to horn small boats against the lock walls and grind them into splinters.

The *Alequippa* was locked through

with the tow and Blane questioned the lockmen while being dropped to the lower level. Had a motor boat gone through since the moment he asked for a locking on the previous evening? The lockmen shook their heads.

The *Alequippa* followed the tow out of the lock, but, disregarding the channel, edged over toward Steubenville. The river mist had thickened. It was difficult to see the town.

Below the highway bridge that spans the river Blane crept in beside a junk boat that had used a half-sunken scow as a snubbing post. The junkman, a hunchbacked fellow with no claims on beauty, took the line that Haggerty flung to him and the *Alequippa* rested.

"Dirty weather," said The Wasp.

The hunchback nodded. River life had made him uncommunicative.

"Going down?" asked Blane.

The junkman shook his head. It was easier than speech, and if he wasn't going down it would be plain to the inquisitive one that he was coming up.

A woman with a strange peaked face came out of the cabin of the junk boat and stared in a fascinated way at the trim motor boat. Her eyes were red, suggesting recent tears; a small child had a strangle hold on her neck.

Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke found an apple and created a diversion by attempting to make the youngster accept it. The mother smiled; the junkman remained moody and solemn.

When the child was at last induced to accept the gift, Robert Henry Blane fired another question at the silent hunchback.

"Wonder if you noticed a blue house boat anywhere along the river as you came up?" he asked. "A friend of ours is down here somewhere, but we don't know the exact spot."

The junkman regarded the river. He shifted his gaze to the *Alequippa,* examining in turn Lord Ruthvannen, Haggerty, the Just-So Kid, and Lady Dorothy, then his gaze came back to Blane.

"In my business I only see junk," he said solemnly. "'S matter o' fact I never see the folk as sell it to me. A chap comes with a hunk o' brass or lead or iron an' I just see what he's got an' nothin' more. Cops have asked me if I remember the fellers who 'as sold me certain things an' I've never obliged the cops once. That's why I'm a success. I hate cops."

Blane laughed.

"I'm not a cop," he said.

The junkman gave no intimation that he had heard. He had gone into the silence and refused to be baited into a controversy. He walked slowly to the small barge that acted as his repository for the things he collected.

The red-eyed woman regarded the five on the *Alequippa.* Her thin face showed a fleeting smile as Lady Dorothy tried to gain the attention of the youngster who was munching the apple. The Englishwoman asked the age of the child; the mother told with pride. She said he was big for his age. Lady Dorothy agreed

A boy carrying a few scraps of iron climbed along the plank that bridged the scow and hailed the junk boat. The hunchback became immediately alert. He walked toward the prospective vender as Blane signaled Haggerty to cast off.

For the space of a few minutes the junkman was hidden by a makeshift structure that housed the cheap glass dishes and toys that he gave in exchange for the stuff brought to him, and the peak-faced woman seized the opportunity made by the temporary disappearance of her lord and master. She made a quick dash to the side of the *Alequippa,* her head thrust forward as she hissed a question addressed to Lady Dorothy.

"Did you—did you want to find a blue house boat?" she gasped.

"Yes, yes!" cried the Englishwoman. "Oh, yes! Please!"

"There was one at Rush Run as we came up day before yesterday," cried the woman. "Big blue house boat with a gas boat pullin' it."

Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke could not speak, but Blane flung a question at the woman.

"Did you notice the occupants?" he asked. "Did you see a red-headed man or a girl?"

The hunchback screamed for his wife and she fled in terror without replying. The *Alequippa* drifted away from the junk boat; the mist obscured the floating home of the collector of antiques.

Blane had seized the chart and was running his finger down the river, softly muttering the names of the towns, islands, and runs marked thereon.

"Follansbee, Mingo Junction, Lazearville, Midway, Wellsburg," he murmured. "Brilliant, Beach Bottom Run——" He paused, his finger upon the chart, his eyes turned to Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke, who stood beside him.

"Rush Run!" she whispered. "Oh, oh!"

The Wasp shouted to the Just-So Kid and the *Alequippa* streaked downstream. Rush Run was barely ten miles away. She scooted by Wellsburg and whistled for a locking at Dam 11.

The lock master pointed to the rules that gave only hourly lockings to pleasure boats. The gray eyes of the Texan Wasp fell upon him like a flame.

"Pleasure boat!" cried Blane. "Pleasure boat? I want an immediate locking in the name of the law!"

THE gray river rolling by Rush Run was bare of boats of any kind. Five pairs of eyes searched in vain for a vestige of the blue house boat.

The Wasp questioned an old man fishing from a stringpiece.

"There was a blue house boat here, mister," croaked the ancient. "She lay for a day or two on the other bank. She slipped away in the night. Right by that tree clump she tied."

Blane swung the *Alequippa* around and headed across the river. He had a fixed belief that if the house boat was the one that held Evelyn Carisbrooke an unwilling passenger, the girl, so clever at sending the first message as to her whereabouts, would make a further attempt to help the rescuers that she knew would take up the trail. The girl would find a way.

They found the spot where the house boat had tied up. On the bank were blackened rocks that had served as a fireplace; scattered about were tins of all kinds—sardines, beans, corned beef, peaches.

Blane ordered the four to examine everything with infinite care. If the girl was on the house boat, there would surely be some evidence around the camp. If she was clever enough to give a clew to her whereabouts in the letter sent to her mother, there would surely be some indication of her presence at this spot.

Blane's guess was correct. The Just-So Kid found a scrap of paper skewered with a thorn to a blackberry bush, and the wet scrap carried a message from the kidnaped girl. A message pricked with a pin on a dirty leaf torn from a book entitled: "Knight's Small-boat Sailing on Sea and River."

With infinite care the message had been pricked on the leaf. Blane, holding it high, read it to the listening four. It ran:

"Am kidnaped. Blue house boat bound south. Three men, one woman. Tell Lord Ruthvannen, care of British Consul, State Street, New York. Reward. Am in great danger. EVELYN CARISBROOKE."

Lady Dorothy clutched the piece of

paper on which the pathetic words had been laboriously pricked by the girl and pressed it to her lips. Her great brown eyes were wide with alarm as she stared at the deserted camp. She seemed stunned.

They helped her on board the boat and once more the *Alequippa* took up the pursuit. The misty rain became a downpour. It blotted out the banks. The river became a caldron of gray steam that made navigation dangerous. Day marks were indistinguishable.

The message from the girl increased the horror brought by the thought that they might pass the house boat. The river was unfriendly. Haggerty whispered of backwaters as they slipped by Yorkville, backwaters like that at the rear of Pike Island, where a mile stretch of water would give shelter from the keenest eyes using the straight channel.

"We've got to take a chance!" snapped Blane. "We can't explore every hole and corner on the river. Hail everything that passes and question them."

A boat of the *Eagle* fleet was hailed off Burlington as she came slowly upstream. A tall-swearing captain, annoyed by low visibility and dictatorial lockmen, answered Haggerty's questions. He hadn't seen a blue house boat. He didn't wish to see a blue house boat and, furthermore, if he did see one he would run his packet over the blamed thing and tell no one what he had done. A congenial and friendly fellow was the captain.

Dam 12 was down, the river running wide, so there was no checking of boats that passed through. The *Alequippa* crept by Wheeling, standing close in to the left bank, Blane, Haggerty, and the Just-So Kid shouting questions at every one within hearing distance.

The blue house boat was ahead. A float owner at Wheeling Creek confirmed the news. Red-headed man and two others. A fat woman, but no girl. A gas boat pulling it. Passed through two days before.

From Clarington to Baresville Station no person that they hailed had seen the house boat, but at Baresville the numbing thought that they had overshot the mark was wiped away. The blue phantom was ahead of them. Lashed to its small motor boat it was scuttling madly down the river!

Two wet river rats, huddled beneath a miserable shelter, gave the information.

"Yes, mister, a blue house boat pulled by a small gas boat," they chorused when Blane questioned them.

"Did you speak with them?"

"Yes, mister, a red-headed guy chinned us about gas."

"Did you see a girl on the boat?"

"No, mister. A fat woman was with 'em, but no girl. Leastwise we didn't see none."

Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke made a gesture to Blane as he threw over the wheel. She leaned out and tossed a fifty-dollar bill to the wet outcasts whose information had lifted a great fear from the heart of the five.

Dusk found the *Alequippa* below Petticoat Ripple. Blane, supported by Haggerty, advised a stop. The river was tricky; the channel narrow and dangerous by Bat and Middle Island. Besides, there was no possibility of seeing the house boat if she sought shelter and there were few persons abroad who could give information. The Wasp brought the *Alequippa* into the West Virginia shore and tied up.

The Just-So Kid, who had discovered that Lady Dorothy could not drink black coffee, gallantly offered to walk to a farmhouse about half a mile away in an effort to procure milk, and he started while the others made camp.

The farmer's wife, suspicious of river folk as all the dwellers along the

banks of the Ohio are, was wheedled into selling a pint of the precious fluid to Mr. Casey and the Kid started back to the *Alequippa*.

He had reached a point not more than a hundred yards from the boat when he halted abruptly and dropped to his knees. In the dim light he made out the figure of a man who was scouting cautiously along the ridge that commanded a view of the camp, and the actions of the fellow told the little pugilist that he was not friendly to the campers. He had the air of a Pawnee on a scalp hunt.

The Just-So Kid cached his milk and proceeded to stalk the stalker. Thoughts of the happenings at Steubenville came into his mind. Some one was evidently following the *Alequippa* down the river in a speed boat with the intention of delaying or crippling the pursuit.

To the mind of the pugilist the fellow on the ridge contemplated an attack. An attack on whom? The Just-So Kid refused to think that any person on the *Alequippa* outside of Robert Henry Blane was worthy of such careful stalking. The Texan Wasp was the hero of James Dewey Casey. The tall adventurer from Houston had saved the Kid from starvation at Marseilles in the long ago and had earned his admiration in many ways since that day.

The stalker had spread himself out on the top of the rise in the attitude of a sharpshooter. The poor light made it impossible for the Just-So Kid to see whether the fellow carried a weapon, but he had a firm conviction that he did. The rear view—legs far apart and body resting on the elbows—led Mr. Casey to think that the barrel of a rifle pointed in the direction of the *Alequippa*.

The Kid crept closer. The unknown's interest in the camp made him deaf to the slight noises that Jimmy made as he crept forward. The belief that the fellow was awaiting a favorable moment to pot some one grew in the mind of Casey. And that some one would surely be Blane.

For an instant as the Just-So Kid wriggled forward he had a view of the *Alequippa* and the camp. Blane and Haggerty had made a fire and the figure of the Texan was plainly outlined against the blaze.

James Dewey Casey was close to the unknown. Close enough to see the barrel of a rifle as the fellow's head snuggled down upon the stock. The Just-So Kid lifted himself and sprang.

Jimmy landed on the sharpshooter's back an instant before the rifle exploded. He landed with a jolt that knocked the breath out of his antagonist. Mr. Dewey's temper was at boiling point.

The man with the gun was no baby. With a grunt of rage he wriggled free and swopped punches with the supple person who had attacked him. The two rose to their feet, slammed each other for a few minutes, then clinched and rolled down the slope. The sharpshooter was a heavyweight and a rough-and-tumble fighter of no mean caliber.

The Just-So Kid had no opportunity to use the uncanny ability of evading punishment that had made him champion of the A. E. F. The other was more of a wrestler than a fighter. He got a strangle hold on the pugilist as they tumbled into a muddy hole at the foot of the ridge, and it was only a question of time regarding the outcome.

Shouts from the camp saved the life of the Just-So Kid. Blane and Haggerty came charging up the slope and the sharpshooter gathered himself up and took to his heels. He plunged down the shrub-covered bank to the river as Blane came over the ridge, and the muffled explosions of an engine shattered the silence.

The Wasp, plunging through the

bushes, took a shot at the small speed boat that swung from the sheltering bank out across the darkening river. The shot was returned; a jeering laugh floated back from the water as the boat was swallowed up in the gloom.

The Just-So Kid, revived by Haggerty, told of the happening and Blane listened quietly.

"I guess you saved my life, Jimmy," he said gently. "The bullet from that fellow's rifle lopped off a branch directly above my head. By hopping on his back at the moment he pulled, you spoiled his aim. I thank you."

"Thank me nothing!" snapped Mr. Casey. "If I paid you for everything I owe you I'd be in hock till Judgment Day. Wait till I get a bottle of milk I cached up here."

Unfortunately the fleeing sharpshooter had placed a big boot on the bottle of milk that the champion of the A. E. F. had hidden, and a tiny stream of milk trickled down the hillside.

"Never mind," said Blane, as the Kid poured maledictions on his late antagonist. "I don't suppose Lady Dorothy has any appetite now. Come down to camp."

They kept guard through the night. Only the old nobleman and his daughter slept. Blane, Haggerty, and the Just-So Kid watched the river for an attack.

Robert Henry Blane was doubtful as to the success of the expedition. Staggers' desire for vengeance was rather terrifying. The fellow had nursed his longing for revenge till his soul had become poisoned, and at bay he would think nothing of murder. But to come up with him and fight him hand to hand was the only method available. Ruthvannen's horror of police intervention could not be combated. The Wasp had a belief that the situation had partly deranged the old fellow.

Before dawn, the *Alequippa* nosed out into the gray mist that covered the river.

A riverman at Stewart's Landing had seen the blue house boat. A light tender at Brother's Light confirmed the statement. The *Alequippa* was gaining. The light tender thought that something had happened to the engine of the boat dragging the blue phantom, which had caused them to swing into French Run and make repairs.

"When did they go on?" cried Blane.

"Yesterday afternoon," answered the man. "Couldn't have been more than four o'clock at most."

Four o'clock! The surprised information giver stood and looked after the *Alequippa* as she tore downstream. He gurgled with astonishment as he noted her speed. Over a bad stretch of water the motor boat was speeding like a destroyer.

At Dam 17, one hundred and sixty-seven miles from Pittsburgh, there was more news. The pursuers were hot on the heels of Mr. William Staggers, one time of Derby, England. The five on the motor boat scanned the shores with unwinking eyes. The quarry would be seeking a hiding place.

They came to Marietta, where the Muskingum River flows into the Ohio. Blane considered the possibility of the house boat, finding the pursuers hot on her heels, swinging off into the tributary and making upstream toward McConnelsville. He lost precious minutes in questioning the lockmen on the smaller stream. No blue house boat had gone up the Muskingum.

"There was," said the wizened old man who worked the lock gates, "a blue house boat below Reppart's Bar this mornin'. Saw her meself."

The *Alequippa* was speeding downstream before he had finished speaking.

Reppart's Bar lies at the foot of Muskingum Island. It chokes the channel, making it necessary for boats to hug the Ohio shore closely. Below the bar the river runs wide, throwing

a backwater up behind the big island which is over two miles in length.

The *Alequippa* nosed into a landing below the bar, where a barefooted youth stood expectantly. He grinned as Blane hailed him. He was a fount of knowledge. Yes, yes, a blue house boat had tied up there for the night. Yes, a red-headed man. And a girl. Some looker too.

He hopped aboard the motor boat, took a sheet of folded paper from his pocket and approached Lord Ruthvannen.

"I guess this is for you," he said. "I was told to wait an' give it to you. The red-headed chap give me a dollar for doin' it."

The old nobleman dropped the sheet in his excitement. The Wasp picked it up and placed it in the trembling hands of the Englishman. Ruthvannen made a stammered protest.

"You read it!" he gasped. "I—I am afraid."

Robert Henry Blane opened the sheet and read the message that was scrawled thereon. The handwriting was identical with the writing in the letters from Staggers which The Wasp had read on the way to Pittsburgh. The note ran:

If you foller me anny further ile do in miss evlin so jest cut back agin as smart as you like. we issent goin to be cort. miss evlin knows wot we is goin to do to her if you catches up an it dussen make her grin a bit. ile let her rite a word on this to show yer wether she thinks it helthy.

Beneath the ungrammatical scrawl came the message from the girl, reading:

DEAR MOTHER AND GRANDFATHER: Mr. Staggers is sincere. All your carefulness only menaces. EVELYN.

Blane, as he read the words written by the kidnaped girl, felt a thrill of admiration for her courage and intelligence. The letter "i" in "is" was the beginning of a secret message formed by the first letters of the words that followed. It read: "I say come."

The Wasp drew the attention of Lord Ruthvannen to the brave contradiction, but the old nobleman was in a state of collapse.

"We—we must go back!" he gasped. "We must! We must! He—he will kill Evelyn! He is a desperate man!"

"But Miss Evelyn wishes us to go on!" protested Blane.

"She is foolish!" cried Ruthvannen. "Turn back! She—she will be killed! I—I——"

Words failed him and he sat gasping for breath, his thin hands clawing at his collar. Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke glanced at the Texan. The big brown eyes of the mother seemed to plead for help and advice.

The Wasp looked at the barefooted youth who had brought the note from Staggers, and who had now returned to the landing where he watched with a certain degree of interest the commotion brought by the message. The youth caught the eye of the tall adventurer and winked slowly. It was a wink that suggested information for sale and the Texan sprang from the motor boat to the landing.

"Do you know anything?" he asked abruptly. "Hurry up. Tell me and you'll get paid."

The youth grinned.

"How much?" he inquired.

"Whatever you want," snapped Blane. "Out with it!"

"Will a dollar an' a half bust you?"

The Wasp quickly slipped a ten-dollar bill into the hand of the youth.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"The red-headed chap tried to fool me that he was goin' down the river," grinned the youth. "He made for the dam, but he didn't go through it. He just turned after he got by Brisco an' came up the river again. He's in behind the island, but don't tell him I said so. He's a bad un."

Blane sprang back to the *Alequippa*. The old nobleman had recovered his speech and was now more than ever intent upon having his own way. A great and appalling dread of Staggers was upon him. Imagination pictured Evelyn Carisbrooke a victim of the murderous devil who had her in his power.

"Turn the boat around!" he shrieked. "No, no! I will not go into the cabin! I will sit here and see that my orders are carried out!"

Blane conveyed the order to Haggerty. The *Alequippa* backed out from the landing and started upstream toward Marietta. Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke's sobs were the only protest against the orders of her father.

Blane glanced at the chart. A stone dike blocked the left channel at the top of Muskingum Island, making it impossible to enter the backwater from that direction. And each revolution of the screw was taking him farther from the girl who in the face of death had been collected enough to write a message bidding her friends to take no notice of the madman's threat.

Blane walked astern as the *Alequippa* headed up by the island. He signaled the Just-So Kid, who came up.

"Jimmy," said the Texan, "I'm going to drop over and swim to the island. If any one asks you where I am, say I am lying down. Tell Haggerty if he gets a chance to hire another boat at Marietta and look me up in a couple of hours. Not before."

"Can't I go with you?" asked the little fighter.

"No, you cannot," growled The Wasp. "Go away now or that old idiot of a lord will think we are playing tricks on him. I never took much stock in the intelligence of folk that wear titles. I would advise you, Jimmy, never to take one."

"Me?" cried the Just-So Kid. "Why I'm a Demmycrat!"

"Beat it!" grinned Blane, as he kicked off his shoes. "Remember what I said. Tell Haggerty to come back in two hours."

The Kid turned and glanced back. Robert Henry Blane, in trousers and undershirt only, had dived into the yellow waters of the Ohio.

THE WASP landed on the upper end of the island, below the stone dike that connected it with the West Virginian shore. Through half-submerged bushes and stretches of sticky mud he crossed the isle to the backwater and then worked his way south toward the open river.

It was a difficult and unpleasant promenade. At times The Wasp sank to his waist in the tenacious mud; at times he swam across brier-choked inlets covered with green scum. Before his eyes as he pushed hurriedly forward were the three words which Evelyn Carisbrooke had cleverly built into her message.

"I say come!"

He repeated them to himself. They became a slogan. There was something extraordinarily courageous and self-reliant about the statement. Blane had a great desire to see the girl who could send such a command in the face of death. He thought old Ruthvannen a fool.

The stillness that was upon the island was shattered by the report of a revolver. There came another and another. Blane, surprised by the sounds, splashed madly through the mud. Something was happening in the backwater. A great fear clutched him. Had the crazy Staggers carried out his threat?

The Wasp thrust his way through a barrier of bushes and came in view of the navigable section of the backwater. Immediately opposite the point at which he stood, her blunt snout driven into the bank, was the blue house boat and the

little motor boat that had dragged her down the river. The crouching Texan stared at them. They seemed deserted.

Blane slipped into the water and swam across the backwater to a point above the house boat, where his approach would not be noticed. He landed and crept along the bank toward the blue craft. The silence that was upon the place was a little terrifying. It suggested a sudden elimination of life. It brought a queer quality of horror, of nausea.

On hands and knees the Texan crawled to the forward deck of the house boat. He dragged himself up and peered within the big cabin.

The place was in wild disorder. It looked as if a tornado had swept through the boat, upsetting everything. The floor was strewn with broken crockery, cooking utensils and battered chairs.

Revolver in hand Blane rushed through the cabin to the smaller compartment at the rear. The matchboard division had been partly carried away by something bulky that had collided with it, and this evidence suggested to The Wasp that the combatants, in the final round of the combat, had crashed through the separating wall and tumbled into the smaller cabin.

His surmise was correct. Upon the floor, locked in a death embrace, were two men, their unshorn faces pressed close to each other, their legs intertwined. Upon the breast of one, black and vicious looking, lay a snub-nosed automatic that resembled a Gaboon viper attempting to warm itself on the body of a victim. It had dropped from the lifeless fingers of its owner.

One glance told Blane that neither of the men resembled the description he had of Staggers. William of the gangrened soul was not there. Neither was the girl, Evelyn Carisbrooke, or the fat woman that had been reported on the boat.

After a quick glance at the stern deck of the house boat and the empty cockpit of the speed boat, the Texan dashed back to the nose of the blue craft. He sprang to the bank. Tracks showed in the mud, tracks that led southward in the direction of Briscoe.

Running with body bent double, Blane followed the trail. The heavy prints of a man's shoes showed beside those of a woman's that left nearly as deep an impress in the mud, while beside the two were hardly discernible marks that told of the passing of some light-footed creature shod exquisitely.

The trail swept up the bank. It was lost in the grass. Like a questing hound the Texan ran up and down seeking it. A scrap of paper caught his eye. He pounced upon it. It was part of a leaf from Knight's book on "Small-boat Sailing," the book from which Evelyn Carisbrooke had torn the page on which she had pricked the message that had been found at Rush Run.

Twenty feet farther on Blane found another scrap. He understood! The girl had not lost her head in the dreadful circumstances. Possibly foreseeing a flight from the house boat, she had torn up leaves of the book and thrust them into her pocket. These she was dropping at intervals to guide her ressuers.

The trail was difficult. The trio had forced their way through thickets, holding close to the bank of the river; Staggers evidently afraid to make a break across the road and the electric line connecting Marietta and Parkersburg.

Blane burst through a clump of bushes into a bare bluff immediately above the river. A growl like that which might come from the throat of a wounded beast halted him. Standing on the extreme edge of the bluff, a straight drop of some twenty feet between him and the yellow waters, was Staggers, holding with his right arm a tall girl whose brown eyes, large like

those of her mother, were fixed upon The Texan Wasp.

Staggers spoke in a thick voice.

"Not another step!" he growled. "Another inch an' we go over together!"

Blane, gun in hand, stared at the two. The big, red-headed man clutched the slim girl so that her feet were off the ground. Her weight seemed nothing to him. He swayed backward and forward within a few inches of the abyss.

Mr. Staggers was not a pretty sight. A wound on his forehead was bleeding.

The eyes of the Texan examined the face of the girl. He could see no trace of fear. She waited patiently, seemingly prepared to accept anything that might come to her.

There was an interval of silence, broken only by the sobbing of some one who was crashing through the bushes in the direction of the road. The fat woman was escaping.

Blane, gray eyes upon the wound on the forehead of Staggers, spoke.

"It will do you no good to jump into the river," he said quietly. "It will not harm Miss Carisbrooke."

A murderous grin appeared upon the face of the man. His right arm brought the supple form against his body with a jolt that startled the girl.

"Won't it?" he asked. "If she can get clear of me before I choke the life out of her, she's a good un. Bill Staggers is goin' to get even with the ole blighter that gave him a ten stretch in the jug."

Blane sighed softly. Ostentatiously he started to put away his revolver. He thrust it into the leather belt around his waist, then, apparently dissatisfied with its position, he pulled it out again, the red eyes of the madman watching him intently.

The Texan seemed to consider the matter of the revolver, glancing at it as it lay in the palm of his right hand, then, as if he had suddenly made up his mind as to where it should go, he swept it toward the back pocket of his trousers.

The movement was followed by an explosion. A look of intense agony appeared on the face of Blane, for an instant he stood upright, horror showing in the gray eyes, his mouth open, then he crumpled and fell forward, face downward. The girl screamed.

Bill Staggers loosened his clutch on the girl so that her feet touched the ground. He took a step forward, another and another. His red eyes were upon the gun that had exploded as Blane was thrusting it into his pocket. A grin of delight showed on his face as he stooped.

Something that had the clutching power of a thousand tentacles shot out and gripped the ankle of William Staggers. He was jerked from his feet, and, as he fell, one hundred and seventy pounds of Texan manhood rolled on top of him. A fist ripped upward to Bill's chin and the affair was over.

THE sobbing Miss Carisbrooke, sitting on the grass, watched Robert Henry Blane tie up the madman. He did it neatly with the aid of Mr. Staggers' belt, then he seated himself on William and looked out across the river. Round the foot of Muskingum Island came the *Alequippa*.

The girl spoke after Blane had pointed to the boat.

"You—you Americans are so practical," she murmured.

"There's a little fellow on the boat that you'll like," he said. "I had a difference of opinion with your grandfather and I told this chap never to take a title and he said he couldn't, because he was a Demmycrat."

Evelyn Carisbrooke smiled. "Some of the titled people are silly old beans," she said softly. "I—I think I'd like to stay all my life in America."

THE END.

A Chat With You

THIS year more Americans toured Europe than at any time within our memory. Most of them traveled in bands and were under the escort of guides. This is well enough, but our idea of the truly satisfying European trip would be something like this: To get four or five fellows who liked each other and were dependable both in the sense of good company and character, to hire a schooner yacht cheap in England and to cruise the Mediterranean.

* * * *

STILL better would such a vacation be if it had a definite object. To be on some quest, to be on the trail of some discovery, some find of buried treasure, some aim that makes the grown-up vacation seem as important and earnest as the games of children—this gives a man a sense of superiority to the average tourist who is just going hither and yon on the well-beaten trails.

* * * *

WE can conscientiously recommend this vacation as we have taken it ourselves. Not in the flesh, it is true—we did not leave the office—but it was real and vivid—an experience if you please. We skirted the African coast, we found a lovely lost Greek city under the waters of the inland sea, we rescued a boatload of antique art treasures, we had a hundred adventures in the Ægean and off the Italian coast, we played a desperate game of bluff, we were in peril for our lives and treasure, but finally we won safely home. The story is "The Town in the Sea," a full-length, two-dollar book, the author is Stacpoole. The place to find it complete in one issue for twenty-five cents is any news stand two weeks from to-day. The name to remember is THE POPULAR.

* * * *

OTHER authors in a good number of a good magazine are Chisholm, Charles R. Barnes, Frederick Niven, Roy Norton, Dan Carey, Ellery H. Clarke and George Bruce Marquis. It is always well to order THE POPULAR from your dealer in advance.

A Story Told by Thousands

How they corrected their ills—regained the vitality of youth —through one simple food

NOT a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense —Fleischmann's Yeast is simply a remarkable fresh food.

The millions of tiny active yeast plants in every cake invigorate the whole system. They aid digestion—clear the skin—banish the poisons of constipation. Where cathartics give only temporary relief, yeast strengthens the intestinal muscles and makes them healthy and active. And day by day it releases new stores of energy.

Eat two or three cakes regularly every day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices or milk—or just plain. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before breakfast and at bedtime.* Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

And let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-21, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.

This famous food tones up the entire system—banishes constipation, skin troubles, stomach disorders. Eat two or three cakes regularly every day before meals.

"THIS SPRING, desperate from years of constipation and unavailing attempts to cure its resultant evils, I read this definition by a physician: 'Yeast is an antiseptic and is effective in all diseases in which there is threatened putridity.' I began taking one cake in warm water before breakfast and at bedtime. My looks a month later demonstrated a release from cathartics. Continuing the treatment, I gained daily in vigor. Years of intestinal poisoning take their toll of youth; so I shall continue to drink my yeast."

MRS. CARRIE M. CREMA, Philadelphia, Pa.

"ABOUT EIGHTEEN MONTHS AGO I was a complete wreck: could not eat or sleep, was anemic and my color had faded to a sickly green. My friends began to exchange pitying glances, and one day, an old lady insisted on giving me her seat. That was the crowning humiliation. I decided to give yeast a trial. I started eating three cakes daily. In about six weeks found I could eat a real meal once more; in two months my natural color began to return. I kept on, and now, thanks to Fleischmann's Yeast, I am a well woman."

MRS. F. R. CONNER, Florence, Ky.

To find things in the dark—*use your flashlight!*

CLIMB the garret stairs without stumbling. Use your flashlight! Find what you're after without fumbling. Use your flashlight! Eveready Flashlights lay a path of safety with their bright, white light. Use your Eveready to burrow into trunks or closets without fear of fire. Use it wherever you want to see in the dark. There are 365 days in a year—365 reasons for owning one or more Evereadys. Improved models meet every need for light—indoors and out. There's a type for every purpose and purse, and an Eveready dealer nearby.

The type illustrated is No. 2816, the Eveready 2-cell Broad-beam Flashlight. Handsome, ribbon black-metal case. Safety-lock switch, proof against accidental lighting. Octagonal, non-rolling lens-ring.

* * *

Eveready Unit Cells fit and improve all makes of flashlights. They insure brighter light and longer battery life. Keep an extra set on hand. Especially designed Eveready-Mazda bulbs, the bright eyes of the flashlights, likewise last longer.

Manufactured and guaranteed by

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.

New York San Francisco

Canadian National Carbon Co., Limited, Toronto, Ontario

EVEREADY HOUR
EVERY TUESDAY AT 9 P. M.
(Eastern Standard Time)

For real radio enjoyment, tune in the "Eveready Group," broadcast through stations—

WEAF	New York	WSAI	Cincinnati
WJAR	Providence	WWJ	Detroit
WEEI	Boston	WCCO	Minneapolis
WFI	Philadelphia		St. Paul
WGR	Buffalo	WOC	Davenport
WCAE	Pittsburgh		

EVEREADY
FLASHLIGHTS
& BATTERIES
—they last longer

SCIENCE has conquered the air surrounding the earth. It has also conquered the hair surrounding the face. The former is called aviation, the latter dermutation.

The airplane, like Mennen Shaving Cream, established new standards of speed. But flying is still nerve-wracking, expensive and dependent on Nature's mood.

Shaving, thanks to Mennen, is now comfortable, economical, and divorced from natural conditions such as weather, or the temperature and hardness of water.

Ask any Mennen user which invention is more vital to his well-being and happiness—aviation or Mennen Shaving Cream.

Jim Henry
(Mennen Salesman)

Regular type tube with threaded cap

YOUR CHOICE OF TUBES 50c

New-style tube with non-removable top

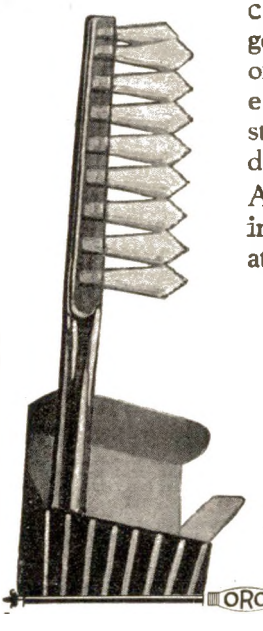
Two brushings a day—
Teeth free from decay.

R
TOOTH BRUSH

ORO

the best tooth brush on earth for a quarter

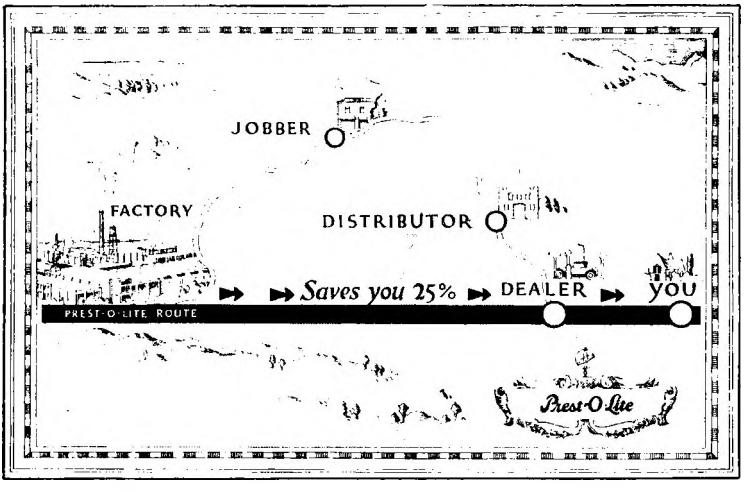
A sterilized brush that is skillfully made to clean teeth. In its own individual carton—free from handling. ORO is outstanding in quality. The one standard nationally advertised 25c brush that you can buy at any good dealer's. An official "warranted perfect" stamped on handle of each ORO. A substantial saving; ask for ORO at your dealer's.



PRICE
25¢
In sanitary carton

Prest-O-Lite

takes the short cut—*saving you 25% on battery costs*



IN ACTUAL money—this means that for only $15.50 you can get the same Prest-O-Lite Storage Battery for your car that cost $20.50 a short time ago. Remember, it's the same twenty-dollar battery—only the price has been changed. Not the quality or the service.

A Prest-O-Lite costs you less today because it costs us less to get a Prest-O-Lite to you.

We send Prest-O-Lite Batteries to you by a short cut. Right from our factory to your dealer or service station. We have eliminated the two profits that result when batteries are sent over the expensive, round-about road through jobbers and distributors.

The saving is *yours* and it's a saving that you can't afford to pass up.

No matter what size Prest-O-Lite you need, the saving will be the same—about 25 per cent.

When you need a new battery for your car, see the Prest-O-Lite man near you. You'll save money, you will secure honest, satisfactory service and you'll have in your car an efficient, rugged, well-made, long-lived battery that has a real name back of it. A battery perfected in the world's largest electro-chemical laboratories.

For more than 20 years the name "Prest-O-Lite" has stood for the highest quality, for constant progress and for better all-round service to the motorist.

You'll find Prest-O-Lite Service—"The Oldest Service to Motorists"—better than ever. Take advantage of its friendly help any time, no matter what make battery you are using. You're never very far from a Prest-O-Lite Service Station.

THE PREST-O-LITE CO., INC.
INDIANAPOLIS, IND.
New York San Francisco
In Canada: Prest-O-Lite Co. of Canada, Ltd.
Toronto, Ontario

FOR RADIO—*Prest-O-Lite Radio Batteries—both "A" and "B"—are especially designed for radio, and combine many improvements that insure long life and satisfactory service. Buy them and save money.*

Write for Free Road Map

We have prepared up-to-date road maps of every state in the United States. These maps show all towns and principal highways and which of the roads are hard surfaced. Ideal for tourists. We'll gladly send you the maps of any states you specify—free upon request. Address Prest-O-Lite Company, Department B, Indianapolis, Ind.

It was a lesson to her

SHE certainly learned something that evening. And that was: Never to accept an evening's invitation to dance unless she had danced *before* with the man who asked her.

He seemed very fond of her and almost monopolized her dance program.

By the end of the evening she not only disliked him cordially but he was almost revolting to her.

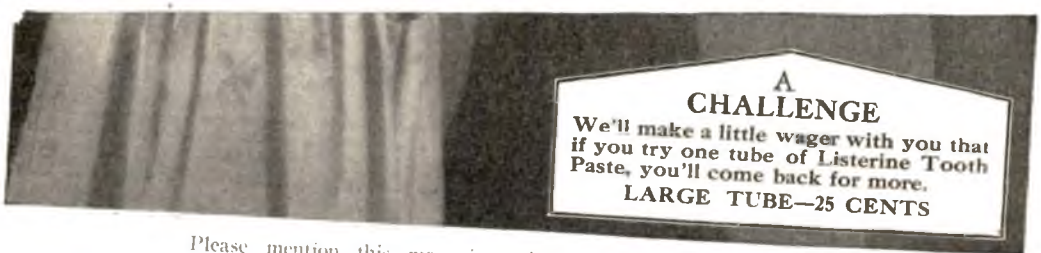
* * *

You, yourself, rarely know when you have halitosis (unpleasant breath). That's the insidious thing about it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

Sometimes, of course, halitosis comes from some deep-seated organic disorder that requires professional advice. But usually—and fortunately—halitosis is only a local condition that yields to the regular use of Listerine as a mouth wash and gargle. It is an interesting thing that this well-known antiseptic that has been in use for years for surgical dressings, possesses these unusual properties as a breath deodorant. It puts you on the safe and polite side.

Listerine halts food fermentation in the mouth and leaves the breath sweet, fresh and clean. *Not* by substituting some other odor but by really removing the old one. The Listerine odor itself quickly disappears.

This safe and long-trusted antiseptic has dozens of different uses: note the little circular that comes with every bottle. Your druggist sells Listerine in the original brown package only—*never in bulk*. There are four sizes: 14 ounce, 7 ounce, 3 ounce and 1¼ ounce. Buy the large size for economy.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*



With a few strokes of a pen American patriots registered their Independence

A Waterman's Pen—with one filling—would have written many times the entire Declaration of Independence. It would have startled these patriots into an appreciation of its remarkable efficiency.

IN MILLIONS of homes and offices today it is freeing men and women from pen-discomfort and aiding them in "the pursuit of happiness."

FOR THE sake of independence try a Waterman's. We recommend the model illustrated. Black, mottled or cardinal holders; fitted with pen points that write as you would write.

Illustration is exact size of $4 model

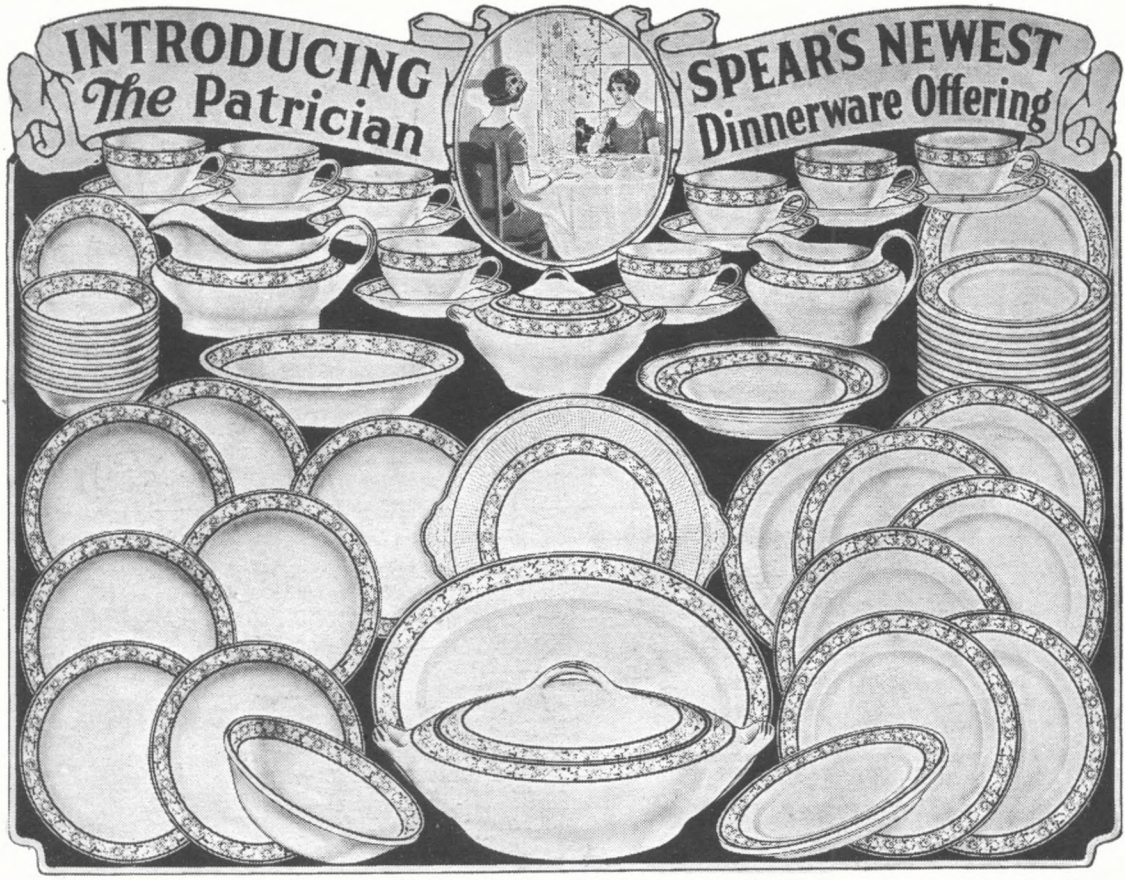
From $4 to $6.50, according to size

Sold and guaranteed by 50,000 merchants

Waterman's Ideal Fountain Pen

INTRODUCING The Patrician

SPEAR'S NEWEST Dinnerware Offering



$1 → 30 Days' FREE Trial

THE refined beauty that is ever-enduring—the dainty simplicity that is true art—the excellence of quality that brings pride in possession—these are the outstanding attractions of this, my newest dinnerware offering. Because of its graceful design and its refined coloring; because it is exactly right for every occasion, formal or informal, I have called this dinner service "The Patrician." Every one of these 58 pieces is made of good quality semi-porcelain. Every piece is beautiful, even-toned, lustrous white, decorated with a wide, artistically designed floral band in rich gold, and with gold stripes on all handles. Can you imagine a more desirable, a more attractive dinner service? This complete service for 8 people will be sent on 30 Days' Trial.

$1 WITH ORDER
Brings 58 Beautiful Useful Pieces A Complete Service for 8 People

$1 MONTHLY

If you are not Convinced that you Save $5.00 you may Return The Set

THE Shape of the Covered Vegetable Dish, the Cake Plate, the Butter Dish, the Cream Pitcher and the Sugar Bowl is Strikingly Graceful and Unusual. These are pieces of Outstanding Character and Beauty. No picture can do them justice. You must see the actual pieces. From the friendly cup of tea with a guest or two, to a big, important dinner, the Patrician Dinner Set is both appropriate and ample.

30 DAYS' FREE TRIAL: Send for the 58 Pieces Now, Today, at my risk. Use them as if they were your own, for 30 Days. If you are not convinced that you save $5, if you are not satisfied with quality, price, and terms, return the set. I will refund your first payment and all transportation costs. The trial will not cost you a penny.

These 58 Pieces, a Complete Service for 8 People

8—9 in. Dinner Plates; 8 Cups; 8 Saucers; 8—8 in. Soup Plates; 8—7 in. Pie or Lunch Plates; 8—5 in. Fruit or Dessert Dishes; 1 Covered Vegetable Dish (2 Pieces) 1—9 in. Open Vegetable Dish; 1 Cream Pitcher; 1 Sugar Bowl (2 Pieces); 1—13-½ in. Platter; 1—10 in. Fluted Cake Plate; 1 Gravy or Sauce Boat; 1—8 in. Fancy Butter Dish. **Order No. TA2997. Introductory Sale Price $14.95. Terms: $1 with order, $1 monthly.**

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You can have NOW the Home Beautiful that will be one of the finest in your neighborhood. All you have to do is to take advantage of my Remarkably Easy Terms. Send for my Big Free Book Today. It shows Thousands of Bargains in Furniture, Furnishings, and Everything for the home. Remember, you don't take a single chance when you deal with Spear. My prices are the Lowest, My Terms the Easiest; I give the Longest Time to Pay, *and our business relations will be Strictly Confidential.* Be sure to send for my FREE Catalog Now. *NATHANIEL SPEAR, Pres.*

Spear & Co. ← **Dept. S-701 Pittsburgh, Pa.**

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Send me at once the 58 Piece Dinner Set, as described above. Enclosed is $1.00 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of the 30 days' trial I am satisfied, I will send you $1.00 monthly. Order No. TA2997. Price $14.95. Title remains with you until paid in full. **Please print or write name and address plainly.**

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