ADVENTURES IN MANY LANDS

Told by

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD, WILLIAM WEBSTER,
ALFRED COLBECK, A. LEE KNIGHT,
And Other Writers.

WITH THREE COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS
BY F. GILLETT

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THE WOUNDED ANIMAL SUDDENLY SPRANG OUT AT ME

THE WOUNDED ANIMAL SUDDENLY SPRANG OUT AT ME. ***See page 59.***

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

ADVENTURES IN MANY LANDS

I

A TERRIBLE ADVENTURE WITH HYENAS

There are many mighty hunters, and most of them can tell of many very thrilling adventures personally undergone with wild beasts; but probably none of them ever went through an experience equalling that which Arthur Spencer, the famous trapper, suffered in the wilds of Africa.

As the right-hand man of Carl Hagenbach, the great Hamburg dealer in wild animals, for whom Spencer trapped some of the finest and rarest beasts ever seen in captivity, thrilling adventures were everyday occurrences to him. The trapper's life is infinitely more exciting and dangerous than the hunter's, inasmuch as the latter hunts to kill, while the trapper hunts to capture, and the relative risks are not, therefore, comparable; but Spencer's adventure with the "scavenger of the wilds," as the spotted hyena is sometimes aptly called, was something so terrible that even he could not recollect it without shuddering.

He was out with his party on an extended trapping expedition, and one day he chanced to get separated from his followers; and, partly overcome by the intense heat and his fatigue, he lay down and fell asleep—about the most dangerous thing a solitary traveller in the interior of Africa can do. Some hours later, when the scorching sun was beginning to settle down in the west, he was aroused by the sound of laughter not far away.

For the moment he thought his followers had found him, and were amused to find him taking his difficulties so comfortably; but hearing the laugh repeated he realised at once that no human being ever gave utterance to quite such a sound; in fact, his trained ear told him it was the cry of the spotted hyena. Now thoroughly awake, he sat up and saw a couple of the ugly brutes about fifty yards away on his left. They were sniffing at the air, and calling. He knew that they had scented him, but had not yet perceived him.

In such a position, as sure a shot and one so well armed as Spencer was, a man who knew less about wild animals and their habits would doubtless have sent the two brutes to earth in double quick time, and thus destroyed himself. But Spencer very well knew from their manner that they were but the advance-guard

of a pack. The appearance of the pack, numbering about one hundred, coincided with his thought. To tackle the whole party was, of course, utterly out of the question; to escape by flight was equally out of the question, for hyenas are remarkably fast travellers.

His only possible chance of escape, therefore, was to hoodwink them, if he could, by feigning to be dead; for it is a characteristic of the hyena to reject flesh that is not putrid. He threw himself down again, and remained motionless, hoping the beasts would think him, though dead, yet unfit for food. It was an off-chance, and he well knew it; but there was nothing else to be done.

In a couple of seconds the advance-guard saw him, and, calling to their fellows, rushed to him. The pack answered the cry and instantly followed. Spencer felt the brutes running over him, felt their foul breath on his neck, as they sniffed at him, snapping, snarling, laughing; but he did not move. One of them took a critical bite at his arm; but he did not stir. They seemed nonplussed. Another tried the condition of his leg, while many of them pulled at his clothes, as if in impotent rage at finding him so fresh. But he did not move; in an agony of suspense he waited motionless.

Presently, to his amazement, he was lifted up by two hyenas, which fixed their teeth in his ankle and his wrist, and, accompanied by the rest, his bearers set off with him swinging between them, sometimes fairly carrying him, sometimes simply dragging him, now and again dropping him for a moment to refix their teeth more firmly in his flesh. Believing him to be dead, they were conveying him to their retreat, there to devour him when he was in a fit condition. He fully realised this, but he was powerless to defend himself from such a fate.

How far they carried him Spencer could not tell, for from the pain he was suffering from his wounds, and the dreadful strain of being carried in such a manner, he fell into semi-consciousness from time to time; but the distance must have been considerable, for night was over the land and the sky sparkling with stars before the beasts finally halted; and then they dropped him in what he knew, by the horrible and overpowering smell peculiar to hyenas, was the cavern home of the pack. Here he lay throughout the awful night, surrounded by his captors, suffering acutely from his injuries, thirst, and the vile smell of the place.

When morning broke he found that the pack had already gone out in search of more ready food, leaving him in charge of two immense brutes, which watched him narrowly all through the day; for, unarmed as he was, and exhausted, he

knew it would be suicide to attempt to tackle his janitors. He could only wait on chance. Once or twice during the day the beasts tried him with their teeth, giving unmistakable signs of disgust at the poor progress he was making. At nightfall they tried him again, and, being apparently hungry, one of them deserted its post and went off, like the others, in search of food.

This gave the wretched man a glimmering of hope, for he knew that the hyena dislikes its own company, and that the remaining beast would certainly desert if the pack remained away long enough. But for hour after hour the animal stayed on duty, never going farther than the mouth of the cave. When the second morning broke, however, the hyena grew very restless, going out and remaining away for brief periods. But it always returned, and every time it did so Spencer naturally imagined it had seen the pack returning, and that the worst was in store for him. But at length, about noon, the brute went out and did not come back.

Spencer waited and waited, fearing to move lest the creature should only be outside, fearing to tarry lest he should miss his only chance of escaping. After about an hour of this suspense he crept to the mouth of the cave. No living creature was within sight. He got upon his faltering feet, and hurried away as fast as his weakness would permit; but his condition was so deplorable that he had not covered a mile when he collapsed in a faint.

Fortune, however, favours the brave; and although he fell where he might easily have remained for years without being discovered, he was found the same day by a party of Boers, who dressed his wounds, gave him food and drink (which he had not touched for two days), and helped him by easy stages to the coast.

Being a man of iron constitution, he made a rapid and complete recovery, but his wrist, ankle, arms, and thigh still bear the marks of the hideous teeth which, but for his marvellous strength of will, would have torn him, living, to shreds.

II

THE VEGA VERDE MINE

Jim Cayley clambered over the refuse-heaps of the mine, rejoicing in a tremendous appetite which he was soon to have the pleasure of satisfying.

There was also something else.

Little Toro, the kiddy from Cuba—"Somebody's orphan," the Spaniards of the mine called him, with a likely hit at the truth—little Toro had been to the Lago Frio with Jim, to see that he didn't drown of cramp or get eaten by one of the mammoth trout, and had hinted at dark doings to be wrought that very day, at closing time or thereabouts.

Hitherto, Jim had not quite justified his presence at the Vega Verde mine, some four thousand feet above sea-level in these wilds of Asturias. To be sure, he was there for his health. But Mr. Summerfield, the other engineer in partnership with Alfred Cayley, Jim's brother, had, in a thoughtless moment, termed Jim "an idle young dog," and the phrase had stuck. Jim hadn't liked it, and tried to say so. Unfortunately, he stammered, and Don Ferdinando (Mr. Summerfield) had laughed and gone off, saying he couldn't wait.

Now it was Jim's chance. He felt that this was so, and he rejoiced in the sensation as well as in his appetite and the thought of the excellent soup, omelette, cutlets, and other things which it was Mrs. Jumbo's privilege to be serving to the three Englishmen (reckoning Jim in the three) at half-past one o'clock precisely.

Toro had made a great fuss about his news. He was drying Jim at the time, and Jim was saying that he didn't suppose any other English fellow of fifteen had had such a splendid bathe. There were snow-peaks in the distance, slowly melting into that lake, which well deserved its name of "Cold."

"Don Jimmy," said young Toro, pausing with the towel, "what do you think?"

"Think?" said Jimmy. "That I—I—I—I'll punch your black head for you if you don't finish this j—j—j—job, and b—b—b—be quick about it."

He wasn't really fierce with the Cuban kiddy. The Cuban kiddy himself knew

that, and grinned as he made for Jim's shoulder.

"Yes, Don Jimmy," he said; "don't you worry about that. But I'm telling you a straight secret this time—no figs about it."

Toro had picked up some peculiar English by association with the Americans who had swamped his native land after the great war. Still, it was quite understandable English.

"A s—s—s—straight secret! Then j—j—just out with it, or I'll p—p—p—punch your head for that as well," said Jimmy, rushing his words.

He often achieved remarkable victories over his affliction by rushing his words. He could do this best with his inferiors, when he hadn't to trouble to think what words he ought to use. At school he made howling mistakes just because of his respectful regard for the masters and that sort of thing. They didn't seem to see how he suffered in his kindly consideration of them.

It was same with Don Ferdinando. Mr. Summerfield was a very great engineering swell when he was at home in London. Jimmy couldn't help feeling rather awed by him. And so his stammering to Don Ferdinando was something "so utterly utter" (as his brother said) that no fellow could listen to it without manifest pain, mirth, or impatience. In Don Ferdinando's case, it was generally impatience. His time was worth pounds a minute or so.

"All right," said Toro. "And my throat ain't drier than your back now, Don Jimmy; so you can put your clothes on and listen. They're going to bust the mine this afternoon—that's what they're going to do; and they'd knife me if they knew I was letting on."

"What?" cried Jimmy.

"It's a fact," said Toro, dropping the towel and feeling for a cigarette. "They're all so mighty well sure they won't be let go down to Bavaro for the Saint Gavino kick-up to-morrow that they've settled to do that. If there ain't no portering to do, they'll be *let* go. That's how they look at it. They don't care, not a peseta between 'em, how much it costs the company to get the machine put right again; not them skunks don't. What they want is to have a twelve-hour go at the wine in the valley. You won't tell of me, Don Jimmy?"

"S—s—snakes!" said Jimmy.

Then he had started to run from the Lago Frio, with his coat on his arm. Dressing was a quick job in those wilds, where at midday in summer one didn't want much clothing.

"No, I won't let on!" he had cried back over his shoulder.

Toro, the Cuban kiddy, sat down on the margin of the cold blue lake and finished his cigarette reflectively. White folks, especially white English-speaking ones, were rather unsatisfactory. He liked them, because as a rule he could trust them. But Don Jimmy needn't have hurried away like that. He, Toro, hoped to have had licence to draw his pay for fully another hour's enjoyable idleness. As things were, however, Don Alonso, the foreman, would be sure to be down on him if he were two minutes after Don Jimmy among the red-earth heaps and the galvanised shanties of the calamine mine on its perch eight hundred feet sheer above the Vega Verde.

Jim Cayley was a few moments late for the soup after all.

"I s—s—say!" he began, as he bounced into the room.

"Say nothing, my lad!" exclaimed Don Alfredo, looking up from his newspaper.

[Words missing in original] mail had just arrived—an eight-mile climb, made daily, both ways, by one of the gang.

Mrs. Jumbo, the moustached old Spanish lady who looked after the house, put his soup before Jimmy.

"Eat, my dear," she said in Spanish, caressing his damp hair—one of her many amiable yet detested little tricks, to signify her admiration of Jim's fresh complexion and general style of beauty.

"But it's—it's—it's most imp—p—p——"

Don Ferdinando set down his spoon. He also let the highly grave letter from London which he was reading slip into his soup.

"I tell you what, Cayley," he said, "if you don't crush this young brother of yours, I will. This is a matter of life or death, and I *must* have a clear head to think it out."

"I was only saying," cried Jim desperately. But his brother stopped him.

"Hold your tongue, Jim," he said. "We've worry enough to go on with just at present. I mean it, my lad. If you've anything important to proclaim, leave it to me to give you the tip when to splutter at it. I'm solemn."

When Don Alfredo said he was "solemn," it often meant that he was on the edge of a most unbrotherly rage. And so Jim concentrated upon his dinner. He made wry faces at Mrs. Jumbo and her strokings, and even found fault with the soup when she asked him sweetly if it were not excellent. All this to relieve his feelings.

The two engineers left Jim to finish his dinner by himself. Jim's renewed effort of "I say, Alf!" was quenched by the upraised hands of both engineers.

Outside they were met by Don Alonso, the foreman, a very smart and go-ahead fellow indeed, considering that he was a Spaniard.

"They'll strike, señores!" said Don Alonso, with a shrug. "It can't be helped, I'm afraid. It's all Domecq's doing, the scoundrel! Why didn't you dismiss him, Don Alfredo, after that affair of Moreno's death? There's not a doubt he killed Moreno, and he hasn't a spark of gratitude or goodness in his nature."

"He's a capable hand," said Alfred Cayley.

"Too much so, by half," said Don Ferdinando. "If he were off the mine, Elgos, we should run smoothly, eh?"

"I'll answer for that, señor," replied the foreman. "As it is, he plays his cards against mine. His influence is extraordinary. There'll not be a man here to-morrow; Saint Gavino will have all their time and money."

"You don't expect any active mischief, I hope?" suggested Don Ferdinando.

The foreman thought not. He had heard no word of any.

"Very well, then. I'll settle Domecq straight off," said Don Ferdinando.

He returned to the house and pocketed his revolver. They had to be prepared for all manner of emergencies in these wilds of Asturias, especially on the eves and morrows of Saints' days. But it didn't at all follow that because Don Ferdinando pocketed his shooter he was likely to be called upon to use it.

The three were separating after this when a lad in a blue cotton jacket rose lazily from behind a heap of calamine just to the rear of them, and swung off towards

the machinery on the edge of the precipice.

"Pedro!" called the foreman, and, returning, the lad was asked if he had been listening.

He vowed that such a thought had not entered his head. He had been asleep; that was all.

"Very good!" said the foreman. "You may go, and it's fifty cents off your wage list that your sleep out of season has cost you."

Discipline at the mine had to be of the strictest. Any laxity, and the laziest man was bound to start an epidemic of laziness.

Don Ferdinando set off for the Vega, eight hundred feet sheer below the mine. It was a ticklish zigzag, just to the left of the transporting machinery, with twenty places in which a slip would mean death.

Domecq was working down below, lading the stuff into bullock-carts.

Alfred Cayley disappeared into one of the upper galleries, to see how they were panning out.

The snow mountains and the afternoon sun looked down upon a very pleasing scene of industry—blue-jacketed workers and heaps of ore; and upon Jim Cayley also, who had enjoyed his dinner so thoroughly that he didn't think so much as before about his rejected information.

But now again the Cuban kiddy drifted towards him, making for the zigzag.

Jim hailed him.

"Can't stop, Don Jimmy!" said Toro. But when he was some yards down, he beckoned to Jim, who quickly joined him.

They conferred on the edge of a ghastly precipice.

"I'm off down to tell Domecq that it's going to be done at two-thirty prompt," said Toro.

"What's going to be d—done?" asked Jimmy.

"What I told you about. They've cut the 'phone down to the 'llano' as a start. But that's nothing. You just go and squat by the engine and see what happens. Guess

they'll not mind you."

To tell the truth, Jim was a trifle dazed. He didn't grapple the ins and outs of a conspiracy of Spanish miners just for the sake of a holiday. And as Toro couldn't wait (it was close on half-past two), Jim thought he might as well act on his advice. He liked to see the big buckets of ore swinging off into space from the mine level and making their fearful journey at a thrilling angle, down, down until, as mere specks, they reached the transport and washing department of the mine in the Vega. Two empty buckets came up as two full ones went down, travelling with a certain sublimity along the double rope of woven wire.

Jim sat down at a distance. He saw one cargo get right off—no more.

Then he noticed that the men engaged at the engine were confabulating. He saw a gleam of instruments. Also he saw another full bucket hitched on and sent down at the run. And then he saw the men furtively at work at something.

Suddenly the cable snapped, flew out, yards high!

Jim saw this—and something more. Looking instantly towards the Vega he saw the return bucket, hundreds of feet above the level, toss a somersault as it was freed of its tension and—this was horrible!—pitch a man head-foremost into the air.

He cried out at the sight, and so did the rascals who had done their rattening for a comparatively innocent purpose.

But when he and a dozen others had made the desperate descent of the zigzag, they found that the dead man was Domecq. Even the miners had no love for this arch-troubler, and, in trying to avoid Don Ferdinando, the sight of whom, coming down the track, had warned him of danger, Domecq had done the mine the best turn possible.

Toro's own warning was of course much too late.

The tragedy had a great effect. Saint Gavino was neglected after all, and it was in very humble spirits that the ringleaders of the plot confessed their sins and agreed to suffer the consequences.

Jim by-and-by tried to tell his brother and Don Ferdinando that if only they had listened to him at dinner the "accident" might not have happened. But he stammered so much again (Don Ferdinando was as stern as a headmaster) that he

shut up.

"It's—it's—nothing particu—ticu—*ticular*, Mr. Summerfield!" he explained.

Don Ferdinando was anything but depressed about Domecq's death; and Jim didn't want to damp his spirits. Of course, if Domecq had really killed another fellow only a few weeks ago, as was rumoured, he deserved the fate that had overtaken him.

III

A VERY NARROW SHAVE

One winter's day in San Francisco my friend Halley, an enthusiastic shot who had killed bears in India, came to me and said, "Let's go south. I'm tired of towns. Let's go south and have some real tip-top shooting."

In the matter of sport, California in those days—thirty years ago—differed widely from the California of to-day. Then, the sage brush of the foot-hills teemed with quail, and swans, geese, duck (canvas-back, mallard, teal, widgeon, and many other varieties) literally filled the lagoons and reed-beds, giving magnificent shooting as they flew in countless strings to and fro between the sea and the fresh water; whilst, farther inland, snipe were to be had in the swamps almost "for the asking." On the plains were antelope, and in the hills and in the Sierra Nevadas, deer and bears, both cinnamon and grizzly. Verily a sportsman's paradise!

The next day saw us on board the little *Arizona*, bound for San Pedro, a forty-hours' trip down the coast. We took with us only shot-guns, meaning to try for nothing but small game. At San Pedro, the port for Los Angeles (Puebla de los Angeles, the "Town of the Angels"), we landed, and after a few days' camping by some lagoons near the sea, where we shot more duck than could easily be disposed of, we made our way to that little old Spanish settlement, where we hired a horse and buggy to take us inland.

Our first stopping-place was at a sheep-ranche, about fifty miles from Los Angeles, a very beautiful property, well grassed and watered, and consisting chiefly of great plains through which flowed a crystal-clear river, and surrounded on very side by the most picturesque of hills, 1,000 to 1,500 feet in height.

The ranche was owned by a Scotsman, and his "weather-board" house was new and comfortable, but we found ourselves at the mercy of the most conservative of Chinese cooks, whom no blandishments could induce to give us at our meals any of the duck or snipe we shot, but who stuck with unwearying persistency to boiled pork and beans. And on boiled pork and beans he rang the changes, morning, noon, and night; that is to say, sometimes it was hot, and sometimes it

was cold, but it was ever boiled pork and beans. At its best it is not a diet to dream about (though I found that a good deal of dreaming could be done *upon* it), and as we fancied, after a few days, that any attraction which it might originally have possessed had quite faded and died, we resolved to push on elsewhere.

The following night we reached a little place at the foot of the higher mountains called Temescal, a very diminutive place, consisting, indeed, of but one small house. The surroundings, however, were very beautiful, and the presence of a hot sulphur-spring, bubbling up in the scrub not one hundred yards from the house, and making a most inviting natural bath, coupled with the favourable reports of game of all kinds to be got, induced us to stop. And life was very pleasant there in the crisp dry air, for the quail shooting was good, the scenery and weather perfect, everything fresh and green and newly washed by a two days' rain, the food well cooked, and, nightly, after our day's shooting, we rolled into the sulphur-spring and luxuriated in the hot water.

But Halley's soul began to pine for higher things, for bigger game than quail and duck. "Look here," he said to me one day, "this is all very well, you know, but why shouldn't we go after the deer amongst the hills? We've got some cartridges loaded with buckshot. And, my word! we *might* get a grizzly."

"All right," I said, "I'm on, as far as deer are concerned, but hang your grizzlies. I'm not going to tackle *them* with a shot-gun."

So it was arranged that next morning, before daylight, we should go, with a boy to guide us, up one of the numerous cañons in the mountains, to a place where we were assured deer came down to drink.

It was a cold, clear, frosty morning when we started, the stars throbbing and winking as they seem to do only during frost, and we toiled, not particularly gaily, up the bed of a creek, stumbling in the darkness and barking our shins over more boulders and big stones than one would have believed existed in all creation. Just before dawn, when the grey light was beginning to show us more clearly where we were going, we saw in the sand of the creek fresh tracks of a large bear, the water only then beginning to ooze into the prints left by his great feet, and I can hardly say that I gazed on them with the amount of enthusiasm that Halley professed to feel.

But bear was not in our contract, and we hurried on another half-mile or so, for already we were late if we meant to get the deer as they came to drink; and

presently, on coming to a likely spot, where the cañon forked, Halley said, "This looks good enough. I'll stop here and send the boy back; you can go up the fork about half a mile and try there."

And on I went, at last squatting down to wait behind a clump of manzanita scrub, close to a small pool where the creek widened.

It was as gloomy and impressive a spot as one could find anywhere out of a picture by Doré. The sombre pines crowded in on the little stream, elbowing and whispering, leaving overhead but a gap of clear sky; on either hand the rugged sides of the cañon sloped steeply up amongst the timber and thick undergrowth, and never the note of a bird broke a silence which seemed only to be emphasised by the faint sough of the wind in the tree tops. Minute dragged into minute, yet no deer came stealing down to drink, and rapidly the stillness and heart-chilling gloom were getting on my nerves; when, far up the steep side of the cañon opposite to me there came a faint sound, and a small stone trickled hurriedly down into the water.

"At last!" I thought. "At last!" And with a thumping heart and eager eye I crouched forward, ready to fire, yet feeling somewhat of a sneak and a coward at the thought that the poor beast had no chance of escape. Lower and nearer came the sound of the something still to me invisible, but the sound, slight though it was, gave, somehow, the impression of bulk, and the strange, subdued, half-grunting snuffle was puzzling to senses on the alert for deer. Lower and nearer, and then—out into the open by the shallow water he strolled—no deer, but a great grizzly.

My first instinct was to fire and "chance it," but then in stepped discretion (funk, if you will), and I remembered that at fifteen or twenty yards buckshot would serve no end but to wound and rouse to fury such an animal as a grizzly, who, perhaps of all wild beasts, is the most tenacious of life; and I remembered, too, tales told by Californians of death, or ghastly wounds, inflicted by grizzlies.

My finger left the trigger, and I sat down—discreetly, and with no unnecessary noise. He was not in a hurry, but rooted about sedately amongst the undergrowth, now and again throwing up his muzzle and sniffing the air in a way that made me not unthankful that the faint breeze blew from him to me, and not in the contrary direction.

In due time—an age it seemed—after a false start or two, he went off up stream, and I, wisely concluding that this particular spot was, for the present, an unlikely

one for deer, followed his example, and rejoined Halley, who was patiently waiting where we had parted.

"I've just seen a grizzly, Halley," I said.

"*Have* you?" he almost yelled in his excitement. "Come on! We'll get him."

"I don't think I want any more of him," said I, with becoming modesty. "*I'm* going to see if I can't stalk a deer amongst the hills. They're more in my line, I think."

Halley looked at me—pity, a rather galling pity, in his eye—and, turning, went off alone after the bear, muttering to himself, whilst I kept on my course downstream, over the boulders, certain in my own mind that no more would be seen of that bear, and keeping a sharp look-out on the surrounding country in case any deer should show themselves.

I had gone barely half a mile when, on the spur of a hill, a long way off, I spotted a couple of deer browsing on the short grass, and I was on the point of starting what would have been a long and difficult, but very pretty, stalk when I heard a noise behind me.

Looking back, I saw Halley flying from boulder to boulder, travelling as if to "make time" were the one and only object of his life—running after a fashion that a man does but seldom.

I waited till he was close to me, till his wild eyes and gasping mouth bred in me some of his panic, and then, after a hurried glance up the creek, I, too, turned and fled for my life.

For there, lumbering and rolling heavily along, came the bear, gaining at every stride, though evidently sorely hurt in one shoulder. But my flight ended almost as it began, for a boulder, more rugged than its fellows, caught my toe and sent me sprawling, gun and cartridge-bag and self in an evil downfall.

I picked myself up and grabbed for my gun, and, even as I got to my feet, the racing Halley tripped and rolled over like a shot rabbit. It was too late for flight now, and I jumped for the nearest big boulder, scrambling up and facing round just in time to see the bear, fury in his eyes, raise his huge bulk and close with Halley, who was struggling to his feet. Before I could fire down came the great paw, and poor Halley collapsed, his head, mercifully, untouched, but the bone of the upper arm showing through the torn cloth and streaming blood.

I fired ere the brute could damage him further, fired my second barrel almost with the first, but with no apparent result except to rouse the animal to yet greater fury, and he turned, wild with rage, and came at me. A miserably insignificant pebble my boulder seemed then, and I remember vaguely and hopelessly wondering why I hadn't climbed a tree. But there was small time for speculation, as I hurriedly, and with hands that seemed to be "all thumbs," tried to slip in a couple of fresh cartridges.

As is generally the case when one is in a tight place, one of the old cases jammed and would not come out—they had been refilled, and had, besides, been wet a few days before, and my hands were clumsy in my haste—and so, finally, I had to snap up the breech on but one fresh cartridge, throw up the gun, and fire, as the bear was within ten feet of me.

I fired, more by good luck, I think, than anything else, down his great, red, gaping mouth, and jumped for life as he crashed on to the rock where I had stood, crashed and lay, furiously struggling, the blood pouring from his mouth and throat, for the buckshot, at quarters so close, had inflicted a wound ten times more severe than would have been caused by a bullet.

I FIRED DOWN HIS GREAT, RED, GAPING MOUTH AND JUMPED FOR LIFE

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It was quite evident that the bear was done, but, for the sake of safety—it does not do to leave anything to chance with such an animal—I put two more shots into his head, and he ceased to struggle, a great shudder passed over his enormous bulk, the muscles relaxed, and he lay dead.

Then I hurried to where Halley lay. Poor chap! He was far spent, and quite unconscious, nor was I doctor enough to know whether his wounds were likely to be fatal, and my very ignorance made them seem the more terrible. I tore my shirt into bandages, and did what I could for him, succeeding after a time in stopping the worst of the bleeding; but I could see very plainly that the left shoulder was terribly shattered, and I thought, with a groan, of the fifty weary miles that one must send for a doctor.

Presently he began to come to, and I got him to swallow a little brandy from his

flask, which revived him, and before long, after putting my coat beneath his head, I left him and started for help.

It was a nightmare, that run. Remorse tore me for having let him start after the bear alone, and never could I get from my mind the horrible dread that the slipping of one of my amateur bandages might re-start the bleeding, and that I should return to find only the lifeless body of my friend; ever the fear was present that in the terribly rough bed of the creek I might sprain my ankle, and so fail to bring help ere it was too late. At times, too, my overstrung nerves were jarred by some sudden sound in the undergrowth, or the stump of a tree on a hillside would startle me by so exact a likeness to a bear, sitting up watching me, as to suggest to my mind the probability of another bear finding and mauling Halley whilst he lay helpless and alone.

But if my nerves were shaken, my muscles and wind were in good order, and not even the most morbid self-consciousness could find fault with the time spent on the journey. Luck favoured me, too, to this extent, that almost as I got on to the road, or, rather, track, about a mile from the inn, I met, driving a buggy, and bound for Los Angeles, a man whose acquaintance we had made a few days before, and who, with much lurid language, had warned us against going after bear.

His remarks now were more forcible than soothing or complimentary when I explained the matter to him during the drive to the inn, where he dropped me, himself going on for the doctor as fast as two horses could travel.

It did not take us long to improvise a stretcher, and, with the willing help of two men and of the landlady, in about three hours we had Halley in his room. But a hideous walk it was down the cañon, every step we made wringing a groan from the poor fellow except when he fainted from pain.

The doctor did not arrive till the following morning, by which time the wounds were in a dreadful condition, and it was touch and go for life, while the doctor at first had no hope of saving the arm. But youth, and time, and a strong constitution pulled him through, and in a couple of weeks he was strong enough to describe to me how he had fallen in with the bear.

He had gone, it seemed, not to where I had seen the animal, but up a branch cañon. At no great distance up he met the beast, making its way leisurely across the creek, and, in his excitement, he fired both barrels into the bear's shoulder; and then the same thing happened that had happened to me—those refilled

cartridges had jammed, and there was nothing for it but to run for his life. Luckily he had badly lamed the animal, or his chance of escape would have been *nil*, and, as it was, in another two hundred yards the bear would have been into him.

Some days after the accident, the first day that I could leave Halley's bedside, I went out to see if it was possible to get the skin of the bear, but I found it badly torn, maybe by coyotes, and all that could be got as trophies were his claws.

There they are now, hanging over the pipe-rack by the fireplace in my snuggery in dear old England.

IV

AN ADVENTURE IN ITALY

A Fourth-form Boy's Holiday Yarn

Last winter I had a stroke of real good luck. As a rule I'm not one of the lucky ones; but this time, for once, Fortune smiled on me—as old Crabtree says, when he twigs some slip in my exercise, but can't be quite sure that I had borrowed another fellow's, just to see how much better mine was than his!

It was this way. It was a beastly wet afternoon, and the Head wouldn't give me leave to go to the village. But I was bound to go, for I wanted some wire to finish a cage I was making for my dormouse, who was running loose in my play-box and making everything in an awful mess. So I slipped out, and, of course, got soaked.

I couldn't go and change when I came back with the wire, as Crabtree would then have twigged that I'd been out in the rain. So the end of it was that I caught a chill and had to go into the infirmary. I was awfully bad for a bit, and went off my head, I suppose—for the mater came and I didn't know her till I got better, and then she told me that the doctor had said I must go to Italy for the winter, as my lungs were very weak, and she was going with me, and we should be there till April or May.

The Head told me he hoped I would take some books with me, and do a little reading when I was better. You bet I did! The mater packed them, but they weren't much, the worse for wear when I brought them back to St. Margaret's again.

The Head also hoped I would use the opportunity to study Italian antiquities. I did take a look at some, but didn't think much of them. They took me at Rome to the Tarpeian Rock, but it wouldn't hurt a kid to be chucked down there, let alone a traitor; and the Coliseum wanted livening up with Buffalo Bill. The only antiquities I really cared for were the old corpses and bones of the Capucini, which everybody knows about, but has not had the luck to see as I did.

But I had a walk round so as to be able to say I'd seen the other things, and brag

about them when they turned up in Virgil or Livy, and set old Crabtree right when he came a cropper over them, presuming on our knowing less than he did. There was too much for a fellow to do for him to waste time over such rot as antiquities. You can always find as many antiquities as you want in Smith's Dictionary.

Before I went I swapped my dormouse with Jones ma. for his revolver. I couldn't take the dormouse with me, and I knew you were bound to have a revolver when you risked your life among foreigners and brigands, which Italy is full of, as everybody knows. Where should I be if I fell in with a crew of them and hadn't a revolver? Besides, I was responsible for the mater.

Jones ma.'s revolver wouldn't shoot, but it looked all right, and no brigand will wait to see if your revolver will go off when you present it at his head. All you have to do is to shout "Hands up!" and he either lets you take all the diamonds and things he has stolen from fools who hadn't revolvers, or runs away. I cut a slit in my trousers behind, and sewed in a pocket, and practised lugging the revolver out in a jiffy, and getting a bead on an imaginary brigand. I was pretty spry at it, and knew I should be all right. And it was just that revolver which saved me, as you will see.

We travelled through Paris and a lot of other places, stopping at most of them, for I was still rather weak, and the mater was fussy about my overdoing it till we settled down at Sorrento. That's a place on the Bay of Naples, and just the loveliest bit of it—oranges everywhere. It's ten miles from Castellamare, the nearest railway-station, but the drive along the edge of the bay, on a road cut into the cliffs hundreds of feet up, makes you feel like heaven.

Vesuvius is quite near too, only that was no good, for the mater wouldn't let me go there, which was a most aggravating shame, and a terrible waste of opportunity, which I told her she would regret ever after. The crater was as jolly as could be, making no end of a smoke, and pouring out lava like a regular old smelting-furnace; but she said she wasn't going to bring me out to Italy to cure a cold, only to have me burnt up like one of those Johnnies they show you at Pompeii who were caught years and years ago. As if I should have been such an ass as to get caught myself.

What I was going to tell you about, however, was this. We had been at Sorrento six or seven weeks, and I'd got to know the places round that were worth seeing, and a lot of the people too, who jabbered at you thirteen to the dozen, and only

laughed when you couldn't make out what they were saying. I'd picked up some of their words—enough to get what I wanted with, and that's the best way to learn a language; a jolly sight better than fagging along with a grammar and stupid exercises, which are only full of things no fellow wants.

So the mater had got used to letting me go about alone, and one morning she found she wanted some things from Naples, and wasn't feeling up to the journey. She wondered at breakfast if she could dare to let me go for her. I didn't seem eager, for if they think you particularly want to do a thing, they are sure to try to stop you. So I sat quiet, though I could hardly swallow my coffee—I was so keen to go.

However, she wanted the things badly, and at last she had to ask me if I would go for her. It's always so: it doesn't matter how badly *you* want a thing, but when the mater or sister or aunt think they want some idiotic trash that everybody in his senses would rather be without, you've simply got to fetch it for them, or they'll die.

She rather spoilt it by giving me half an hour's jawing as to what I was to do, to take care of this or that, and not to get lost or miss the train—you know how they go on and spoil a fellow's pleasure—as if I couldn't go to Naples and back without a woman having to tell me how to do it. I stood it all patiently though, for the sake of what was coming, and a high old time I had in Naples that day, I can tell you.

I nearly missed my train back, catching it only by the skin of my teeth, and when I reached Castellamare I bargained with a driver-fellow to take me to Sorrento for seven francs. He could speak English a bit. The mater had told me the fare for a carriage and two mules would be eight or ten francs; but I soon let him see that I wasn't going to be put on like that, and as I was firm he had to come down to seven, and a *pourboire*, which is what we call a tip. So, ordering him to wake his mules up and drive quick, for the January afternoon was getting on, I settled down thoroughly to enjoy the ride home.

I have already told you how the road follows the coast-line, high up the cliffs, so that you look down hundreds of feet, almost sheer on to the waves dashing against the rocks below. There's nothing but a low wall to prevent you pitching bang over and dashing yourself to bits, if you had an accident. There are two or three villages between Castellamare and Sorrento, and generally a lot of traffic; but, as it happened, we didn't pass or meet much that afternoon; I suppose

because it was getting late.

The driver was chattering like a magpie about the swell villas and places we could see here and there white against the dark trees, but I wasn't paying much attention, and at last he shut up.

There's one bit of the road which always gave me the creeps, for it's where a man cut his son's throat and threw him over the cliff, two or three years ago, for the sake of his insurance money. I was thinking about this, and almost wishing some one was with me after all—for there wasn't a soul in sight—when my heart gave a jump as the driver suddenly, at this very bit, pulled up, and, turning round, said with a fiendish grin—

"You pay me 'leven francs for ze drive, signor."

"Eleven? No, seven. You said seven."

"Signor meestakes. 'Leven francs, signor," and he opened the dirty fingers of his left hand twice, and held up a thumb that looked as if it hadn't been washed since he was born.

"Seven," I firmly replied. "Not a centime more. Drive on!"

"Ze signor will pay 'leven francs," he fiercely persisted, "seven for ze driver and four for ze cicerone, ze guide."

"What guide? I've had no guide."

"Me, signor. I am ze guide. 'Ave I not been telling of ze beautiful villas and ze countrie?"

"You weren't asked to," I retorted. "Nobody wanted it."

"Zat does not mattaire. Ze signor will pay for ze cicerone."

"I'll see you hanged first."

"Zen we shall see."

He turned his mules to the side of the road next the precipice. I caught a glimpse of an ugly knife in the handkerchief round his waist. In a moment I had whipped out my revolver, and levelled it straight for his head. My word, how startled he was!

"Now drive on," I said.

He did, without a word, but turning as white as a sheet,—and made his old mules fly as if they'd got Vesuvius a foot behind them all the way. I kept my revolver ready till we came to Meta, after which there are plenty of houses.

When we drew up at the hotel I gave him his seven francs, and told him to think himself lucky that I didn't hand him over to the police. He had partly recovered by then, and had the cheek to grin and say—

"Ah, ze signor ees a genteelman,—he will give a poor Italiano a *pourboire*."

But I didn't.

I've often wondered since if he really meant to do for me. Anyhow, my revolver saved me, and was worth a dormouse.

V

THE TAPU-TREE

"The fish is just about cooked," announced Fred Elliot, peering into the big "billy" slung over their camp fire. "Now, if Dick would only hurry up with the water for the tea, I'd have supper ready in no time."

"I wish supper were over and we well on our way to the surveyor's camp at the other side of the lake," was the impatient rejoinder of Hugh Jervois, Dick's big brother. "This place isn't healthy for us after what happened to-day." And he applied himself still more vigorously to his task of putting into marching order the tent and various other accessories of their holiday "camping out" beside a remote and rarely visited New Zealand lake.

"But surely that Maori Johnny wouldn't dare to do any of us a mischief in cold blood?" cried Fred.

"The police aren't exactly within coo-ee in these wilds, and you must remember that your Maori Johnny happens to be Horoeka the *tohunga* (tohunga = wizard priest), who has got the Aohanga Maoris at his beck and call. The surveyors say he is stirring up his tribe to make trouble over the survey of the Ngotu block, and they had some hair-raising stories to tell me of his superstitious cruelty. He is really half-crazed with fanaticism, they say, and if you bump up against any of his rotten notions, he'll stick at nothing in the way of vengeance. As you saw yourself, he'd have killed Dick this afternoon hadn't we two been there to chip in."

"There's no doubt about that," allowed Fred. "It was no end unlucky that he should have caught Dick in the very act."

"Oh, if I had only come in time to prevent the youngster hacking out his name on that tree of all trees in the bush," groaned Hugh. "The most tremendously *tapu* (tapu = sacred) thing in all New Zealand, in the Aohanga Maoris' eyes!"

"But how was Dick to know?" urged Fred. "It just looked like any other tree; and who was to guess the meaning of the rubbishy bits of sticks and stones lying at the bottom of it? Oh, it's just too beastly that for such a trifle we've got to skip

out of this jolly place! And there are those monster trout in the bay below almost fighting to be first on one's hook! And there's——"

"I say, what on earth *can* be keeping Dick?" broke in Hugh with startling abruptness. "Suppose that Maori ruffian——" and a sudden fear sent him racing down the bush-covered slope with Fred Elliot at his heels.

"Dick! Coo-ee! Dick!" Their voices woke echoes in the silent bush, but no answer came to them. And there was no Dick at the little spring trickling into the lake.

But the boy's hat lay on the ground beside his upturned "billy," and the fern about the spring looked as if it had been much trampled upon.

"There has been a struggle here," said Hugh Jervois, his face showing white beneath its tan. Stooping, he picked up a scrap of dyed flax and held it out to Fred Elliot.

"It's a bit of the fringe of the mat Horoeka was wearing this afternoon," he said quietly. "The Maori must have stolen on Dick while he was filling his 'billy,' and carried him off. A thirteen-year-old boy would be a mere baby in the hands of that big, strong savage, and he could easily stifle his cries."

"He would not dare to harm Dick!" cried Fred passionately.

Dick's brother said nothing, but his eyes eagerly searched the trampled ground and the undergrowth about the spring.

"Look! There is where the scoundrel has gone back into the bush with Dick," he cried. "The trail is distinct." And he dashed forward into the dense undergrowth, followed by Fred.

The trail was of the shortest and landed them on a well-beaten Maori track leading up through the bush.

The two young men, following this track at a run, found that it brought them, at the end of a mile or so, to the chief *kainga*, or village, of the Aohanga Maoris.

"It looks as if we had run our fox to earth," cried Fred exultingly, as they made for the gateway of the high wooden stockade—relic of the old fighting days—which surrounded the *kainga*.

The Maoris within the *kainga* met them with sullen looks, for their soreness of

feeling over the Government surveys now going on in their district had made them unfriendly to white faces. But it was impossible to doubt that they were speaking truth when, in answer to Hugh's anxious questioning, they declared that no *pakeha* (white man) had been near the *kainga*, and that they had seen nothing of Horoeka, their *tohunga,* since noon that day. They suggested indifferently that the white boy must have lost himself in the bush, and, at the same time, gave a sullen refusal to assist in searching for him.

Before the two young men wrathfully turned their backs on the *kainga,* Hugh, who had a very fair knowledge of the Maori tongue, warned the natives that the *pakeha* law would punish them severely if they knowingly allowed his young brother to be harmed. But they only replied with insolent laughter.

For the next two hours Hugh and Fred desperately scoured the bush, shouting aloud at intervals on the off-chance that Dick might hear and be able to send them some guiding cry in answer. But the only result of their labours was that they nearly got "bushed" themselves, and at last the fall of night made the absurdity of further search clear to them.

Groping their way back to their broken-up camp, they lighted the lantern and got together a meal of sorts. But Hugh Jervois could not eat while racked by the horrible uncertainty of his brother's fate, and he waited impatiently for the moon to rise to let him renew his apparently hopeless quest.

Then, while Fred Elliot was speeding on a seven miles' tramp round the shore of the lake to the surveyors' camp to invoke the aid of the only other white men in that remote part of the country, Hugh Jervois had made his way to the Maori *kainga*. "It's my best chance of finding Dick," he had said to Fred. "Horoeka is sure to have returned to the *kainga* by this time, and, by cunning or by force, I'll get out of that crazy ruffian what he has done with my brother."

Reconnoitring the *kainga* in the light of the risen moon Hugh stealthily approached the palisade surrounding it. This was very old and broken in many places, and, peering through a hole in it, the young man saw a group of women and children lounging about the cooking-place in the centre of the *marae* or open space around which the *wharés* (huts) were ranged. From the biggest of those *wharés* came the sound of men's voices, one at a time, in loud and eager talk. At once Hugh realised that a council was being held in the *wharé-runanga,* the assembly-hall of the village, and he instinctively divined that the subjects under discussion were poor little Dick's "crime" and his punishment, past or to come.

Noiselessly skirting the palisade, Hugh came to a gap big enough to let him squeeze through. Then he crept along between the palisade and the backs of the scattered *wharés*—very cautiously, for he dreaded being seen by the group about the fire—until at last he stood behind the big *wharé-runanga*. With his ear glued to its wall he listened to the excited speeches being delivered within, and to sounds indicating that drinking was also going on—whisky supplied from some illicit still, doubtless.

To his unspeakable thankfulness the young man gathered from the chance remarks of one of the speakers that Dick, alive and uninjured, had been brought by Horoeka into the *kainga* at nightfall, and was now shut up in one of the *wharés*. But a fierce speech of Horoeka's presently told the painfully interested eavesdropper that nothing less than death, attended by heathenish and gruesome ceremonies, would expiate the boy's outrage on the *tapu*-tree, in the *tohunga's* opinion.

The other Maori speakers would evidently have been satisfied to seek satisfaction in the shape of a money-compensation from the offender's family, or the paternally minded New Zealand Government. But, half-mad though he was, Horoeka's influence with his fellow-tribesmen was very great. The rude eloquence with which he painted the terrible evils that would certainly fall on them and theirs if the violation of so mighty a *tapu* was not avenged in blood, very soon had its effect on his superstitious hearers.

When he went on to assure them that the *pakehas* would be unable to prove that the boy had not lost himself and perished in the bush, they withdrew all opposition to Horoeka's bloodthirsty demands, though these were rather dictated by his own crack-brained fancy than by Maori custom and tradition. Presently, indeed, it became evident to Hugh that, what with drink and their *tohunga's* wild oratory, the men were working themselves up into a fanatical frenzy that must speedily find vent in horrible action.

If Dick's life were to be saved he must be rescued at once! No time now to await Fred Elliot's return with the surveyors and their men! Hugh must save his brother single-handed. But how was he to do it? For him, unarmed and unbacked by an authoritative show of numbers, to attempt an open rescue would merely mean, in the natives' present state of mind, the death of both brothers.

"If the worst comes, I won't let Dick die alone," Hugh Jervois avowed. "But the worst shan't come. I must save Dick somehow."

He cast desperate glances around. They showed him that the *marae* was completely deserted now, the group about the cooking-place having retired into the *wharés* for the night. If he only knew which of those silent *wharés* held Dick, a rescue was possible. To blunder on the wrong *wharé* would only serve to arouse the *kainga*.

"Oh, if I only knew which! If I only knew which!" Hugh groaned in agony of mind. "And any moment those fiends may come and drag him out to his death."

Just then, as if in answer to his unspoken prayer, an unexpected sound arose. Poor little Dick, in sore straits, was striving to keep up his courage by whistling "Soldiers of Our Queen!"

Hugh's heart leaped within him. The quavering boyish whistle came from the third *wharé* on his left, and, in an instant, he had reached the hut and was gently tapping on the door. Dick might not be alone, but that chance had to be risked, for time was very precious.

"It's Hugh, Dick," he whispered.

"Hugh! Oh, Hugh!" and in that choking cry Hugh could read the measure of his young brother's mental sufferings since he had last seen him.

In a moment he had severed the flax fastening of the door, and burst in to find Dick, securely tied hand and foot to a post in the centre of the *wharé*. Again Hugh's pocket-knife came into play, and Dick, freed of his bonds, fell, sobbing and crying, into his brother's arms.

"Hush, Dick! No crying now!" whispered Hugh imperatively. "You've got to play the man a little longer yet. Follow me."

And the youngster, making a brave effort, pulled himself together and noiselessly stole out of the *wharé* after his brother.

But evil chance chose that moment for the breaking up of the excited council in the *wharé-runanga*. Horoeka, stepping out into the *marae* to fetch his victim to the sacrifice, was just in time to see that victim disappearing round the corner of his prison-house. With a yell of rage and surprise he gave chase, his colleagues running and shouting at his heels.

Hugh Jervois, hearing them coming, abandoned hope for one instant. The next, he took heart again, for there beside him was the hole in the palisade through

which he had crept into the *kainga* an hour before. In a twinkling he had pushed Dick through and followed himself. And as they crouched unseen outside, they heard the pursuit go wildly rushing past inside, heedless of the low gap in the stockade which had been the brothers' salvation.

"They'll be out upon us in a moment," cried Hugh. "Run, Dick! Run!"

Hand in hand they raced down the slope and plunged into the cover of the bush. Only just in time, however, for the next instant the moonlit slope beneath the *kainga* was alive with Maoris—men, women, and children—shouting and rushing about in a state of tremendous excitement. It was for Dick alone they hunted, not knowing he had a companion, and they were evidently mystified by the boy's swift disappearance.

Presently the brothers, lying low in a dense tangle of ferns and creepers, saw a number of the younger men, headed by Horoeka, streaming down the track leading to the lake. But after a little time they returned, somewhat sobered and crestfallen, and rejoined the others, who had meanwhile gone inside the *kainga*.

Then, feeling sure that the coast was clear, the brothers ventured to steal cautiously out of earshot of the enemy and make their way down through the bush to the shores of the lake. There they were greeted with the welcome sound of oars, and, shooting swiftly towards them through the moonlit waters, they saw the surveyors' boat, with Fred Elliot and half a dozen others in her.

"You see they are trying to carry off the thing just in the way I told you they'd do," said the head surveyor to Hugh Jervois after their denunciatory visit to the *kainga* in the early morning. "Horoeka, the arch-offender, has disappeared into remoter wilds, and the others lay the blame of it all on Horoeka."

"Yes," responded Hugh, "and even then the beggars have the impudence to swear, in the teeth of their talk last night in their *wharé-runanga*, that Horoeka only meant to give the *pakeha* boy a good fright because he had done a mischief to the very *tapu*-tree in which lives the spirit of the tribe's great ancestor."

"Well," said the surveyor, "we've managed to give the tribe's young men and elders a good fright to-day, anyhow. My word! but their faces were a picture as we lovingly dwelt on the pains and penalties awaiting them for their share in their *tohunga's* outrage on your brother. I'll tell you what it is, Jervois. Horoeka has to keep in hiding for his own sake, and these beggars will have their hands so full, with a nice little charge like this to meet, that they won't care to make trouble for us when we come to the survey of the Ngotu block."

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," laughed Hugh. "But, all the same, Dick may be excused for thinking that your unobstructed survey has been dearly bought with the most horrid experience he is likely ever to have in his life."

VI

SOME PANTHER STORIES

The pages of literature devoted to sport and the hunting of wild game teem with stories and instances of occasions when the hunted, driven to desperation and enraged to ferocity by wounds, turns, and itself becomes the hunter and the avenger of its own hurts.

Of all wild animals perhaps the most vindictive, the most cunning, and the most dangerous to hunt is the panther; indeed, nine out of ten who have had experience of shooting in all parts of the world will concede that the pursuit of these animals is really more fraught with danger and hazard than that of even the tiger, lion, and elephant; and the following is one of many instances, of yearly occurrence, of the man behind the rifle not having it all his own way when drawn in actual combat against the denizens of the jungles.

It was drawing on towards the hot weather when my friend Blake, who had been very seedy, thought that I might try to get a few days' leave and join him in a small shooting expedition into the jungles of southern India, where he was sure he would recover his lost strength and vitality, and so face the coming hot weather with a fair amount of equanimity.

The necessary leave being forthcoming, we consulted maps, arranged ways and means for a fortnight's camp—always a considerable thing in India—and, accompanied by two Sikhs and a Rajput orderly, with horses, guns, rifles, and dogs galore, after a day's journey in the train reached the place from whence the remainder of our journey was to be done by road.

Our destination was a place called Bokeir, and constituted what is known in India as a *jargir*, that is a tract of land which, together with the rent roll and tribute of the villages therein comprised, is given to men whose services have deserved well of their State. Such are known as jargirdars, and enjoy almost sovereign state in their little domains, receiving absolutely feudal devotion from their tenantry and dependants.

We pitched our camp in the midst of a magnificent grove of mango-trees, which at the time of the year were covered with the green fruit. I was told that before

the famine of 1898-99 the grove comprised over two thousand trees; but at present there are about half that number.

We then received and returned visits with the jargirdar, a Mahratta, and an exceedingly courteous and dignified man. We asked for and received permission to shoot in his country, and in addition everything possible was done for our comfort, supplies of every description being at once forthcoming. So tenacious were the people of the villages in their devotion to their chief that not a hand would have been raised to help us nor a blade of grass given without an order from the head of this tiny State.

Then we commenced our jungle campaign. The footmarks of a tiger and tigress, of a very large panther, of bear, sambar, and blue bull abounded in a wooded valley some six miles from the camp. We tied up young buffalo-calves, to attract the large Felidæ, and ultimately met with success, for one morning we were having breakfast early when in trotted one of our Sikhs who had gone before the peep of dawn to look at the "kills." He reported that one of the calves had been killed at five that morning; so, putting a hasty conclusion to our breakfast, we called for horses, saw to our rifles and cartridges, and rode away to the scene of the early morning tragedy.

Arrived at a village called Sirpali, we left our horses and proceeded on foot up a lovely wooded valley filled with the bastard teak, the strong-smelling moha-tree (from which the bears of these parts receive their chief sustenance), the giant mango, pipal and banyan.

The awesome silence of the dense forest reigned supreme in the noonday heat. The whispered consultations and the occasional footfall of some one of the party on a dry teak-leaf seemed to echo for miles and to break rudely the well-nigh appalling quiet of the jungle. Here and there, sometimes crossing our path, were the fresh footprints of deer and of antelope, of pig and the lordly sambar stag that had passed this way last night to drink at a time when the presence of man does not disturb the domain of the beasts of the forest. Here was a tree with deep, clean marks all the way up its trunk, from which the sap was still oozing, showing us that for some purpose a bear had climbed up it in the early morning, though why we could not tell, as there was neither fruit nor leaf on its bare branches.

And then a turn in the path brought us to the kill, to the tragedy of a few hours ago. Surely this is the work of a tiger—the broken neck, the tail bitten off and

flung aside, the hind-quarters partly consumed? No, for there are only the marks of a panther's pads and none of any tiger. They lead away into some dense jungle in front, and from here we decide to work.

Leaving the beaters here, we went by a circuitous way until we arrived two or three hundred yards ahead of the direction the beat would take. Here we were nonplussed, for the jungle was so dense and the configuration of the ground such that there were many chances in favour of any animal that might be before the beat being able to make a very good bid for eluding the enemy.

However, we came to a place which appeared as good as any, and, as both of us seemed to think that it would suit himself exceedingly well, we drew lots, and, contrary to my usual luck, I drew the longer of the two pieces of grass and decided to remain, while Blake took up his position about fifty yards to my left.

When shooting in the jungle, it is the practice of most to shoot from a tree, not so much from a sense of added security—as both bears and panthers think little of running up a tree and mauling you there—but from the better field of view you get. Accordingly, as there was a small tree near, I ascended, and, because the footing was precarious and the position unfavourable for a good shot, I buckled myself to a bough by means of one of my stirrup-leathers. This is a device, by the way, which I can most thoroughly recommend to all, for it as often as not gives you free use of your arms, and even enables you to swing right round to score a shot at a running object.

I had not long disposed myself thus, when the beat sprang into life with a suddenness and intensity which made me pretty sure that they had disturbed some animal. The shouting, cat-calling, and tom-tomming increased in violence, when all at once I heard a quick and rather hurried tread, tread, tread over the dry teak-leaves, and, looking that way, out of the dense jungle into the sunlit glade before me came a large panther.

I put up my rifle. It saw me, and crouched head on in some long, dry grass. It was a difficult shot, but I hazarded it.

The beast turned and went up the bank to my right. "Missed," thought I, and let it have my left barrel as it was moving past. "Missed again," I thought, and growled inwardly.

I caught another glimpse of the brute as it went behind me, and to my relief a crimson patch had appeared on its right side. I howled to the beaters, who had

now approached, to be careful, as a wounded panther was in front of them, and, Blake joining me, we made them all sit down to keep them out of harm's way.

Accompanied by the two Sikhs, Blake and I began to stalk the wounded animal. Where had it gone? Into that dense bit of jungle in front, apparently. So we began to cast around among the leaves. They at first yielded no betraying footmarks, but at last a leaf was found with a large spot of frothy blood, showing the animal's injury to have been through the lungs.

"Put a man up that tree," I said; "the animal is badly hit and cannot have gone far." But my advice was ignored.

Then from a spot over which I had walked not a minute before there came a rush and a roar. Swinging round, I saw ten paces off Blake raise his rifle and fire two barrels, but, alas! apparently without result. Down he went before the savage rush of the beast, which began to worry him.

Blake had fallen back on his elbows, and in the curve of his neck and right shoulder I could just see, though so near, the dark-spotted body of the panther. There was no time to lose. "Can I hit it without killing Blake?" I thought in an agony of uncertainty, but the hazard followed quick upon the thought, and bang, bang, went my two barrels. At the same time the Sikh dafadar, Gopal Singh, with all the characteristic bravery of this magnificent race, ran in and beat the animal about the head with the butt-end of Blake's shot-gun, which he was carrying at the time.

All this was too much for the panther, who then left Blake and shambled away. I threw down my own rifle and ran to Blake's assistance, when the panther stopped and half turned towards us.

"He's coming at me again," Blake cried, and covered his face with his hands. We were all unarmed; like a fool I had left my rifle ten paces behind me, the Sikh's shot-gun was smashed to splinters, and Blake's rifle had fallen nobody knew where during the *mêlée*. But, fortunately for us, and more especially for me, who was then nearest her, the panther seemed to think better of it, and tumbled off into the jungle, as far as I could see very badly knocked about.

Then we attended to Blake's injuries, which consisted of a large piece torn from his left forearm, three great teeth-marks in his left thigh, and claw-marks all over his left calf. He was very brave, though bleeding a lot, and walked with our assistance towards the village until one of the orderlies galloped up with the

"charpai," or native bed, I had sent for immediately the accident had occurred. Then on to camp, where I re-dressed his wounds, sprinkling them with boracic acid, which was, foolishly, all we had provided in the way of antiseptics.

Then a "palki" or palankin arrived, lent by the jargirdar, who had also sent his ten private carriers, and, accompanied by the dafadar, we started for the railway, the nearest point of which was forty miles away, and reached it at five the next morning, having experienced thirteen hours of anxiety, dead weariness, exhausted palankin men, bad and in some places non-existent roads, and, to crown all, one river to ford.

Blake has happily survived his injuries—always severe when inflicted by panthers, as these animals' teeth and claws, from their habit of killing their prey and leaving it exposed for a day to the Indian sun, seldom fails to induce blood-poisoning, which few, if any, have been known to survive.

The panther was found next day, quite dead, with three bullet-wounds in her—one in the chest, one through the ribs, and one through the body from the front left ribs to the left haunch; and that she was able to do all the damage she did testifies to the proverbial tenacity of life and ferocity of these animals. The native of India will tell you, "The tiger is a janwár (animal), but the panther he is a shaitán (devil)."

Mr. Dickson Price, who had a narrow escape from a panther in 1905, thus described the occurrence—

Owing to the stricter preservation of the jungles round Marpha, beasts of prey appear to have greatly increased in number the last year or so.

Last November a travelling pedlar was killed on a path close by; while this year more than twenty head of cattle have been killed by tigers and panthers at Marpha and near by. This is a very serious loss to the people, who depend entirely upon their cattle for ploughing, etc.

On February 22, just after the mela, some villagers from Kareli—a village close to us—came to me asking me to shoot a tiger that had killed a fine plough-ox, and was causing great havoc.

On arriving at the spot where the kill was, an examination of the marks on the bullock showed that it was a panther and not a tiger that had been at work. The place was in sight of the village and on the skirt of a forest. We had a "machan" (platform) in a tree made, and at three o'clock in the afternoon I climbed up with my native shikari or hunter and watched and waited until dark.

About 8 p.m. it was pitch dark, and the animal could be heard munching beneath. I fired at a black object twice with no result, for we still heard the beast going on with his dinner. I found later I had fired at a bush, mistaking it for a panther in the darkness. The animal was either too hungry to notice the shot, or had mistaken the sound for thunder. Later on the moon rose, and at half-past three in the morning a third shot took effect, for the animal went off badly wounded. Some time before that a heavy thunderstorm had come on, but, sheltered beneath our rugs, we did not get really wet. We now slept, feeling our work was done. At sunrise the native hunter and I got down and examined the spot.

While we were looking at the blood-marks a tremendous roar was heard close by, and my native shikari calling out, "Tiger! tiger! tiger!" bolted and ran off to the village as fast as his heels could carry him. I climbed back into the machan, to watch the development of events. After some time about sixteen villagers came out to help, and we slowly followed up the blood-trail.

After piercing the thick jungle for about two hundred yards, at times having to creep under the brushwood, we came to a narrow nala, or shallow watercourse with sandy bed, and we found out the cause of the constant growling we had heard. A tiger also was tracking the panther, who every now and then stood at bay and attacked it. After some time the tiger, no doubt hearing us, turned aside. Suddenly I saw the wounded animal scaling a tall and almost branchless tree, which appeared as though it must have been at some time struck by lightning. The panther, no doubt, hoped to escape all its enemies in that way. It went to the tip-top, about forty feet or fifty feet from the ground.

I fired, but the range was too long for my shot and ball gun. The firing frightened the panther, which fell in descending when some fifteen feet from the ground. We all tracked on, hoping to get a chance of a further shot.

At last we came to a deep and thickly wooded nala, or watercourse, which curved like a horseshoe. The panther entered the watercourse at the centre and turned along the bed to the left. We turned to the right and skirted along the

outside of the course, as it was not safe to go nearer. We all advanced until we nearly reached the right limit of the horseshoe bend, and then, leaving the trackers, I approached the watercourse, hearing the beast at the other end about two hundred yards away.

After waiting about twenty minutes looking for a spot to cross the deep nala it appears that the wounded animal slowly and silently doubled back along the densely wooded watercourse and suddenly sprang out at me. I fired and stepped back, falling, as I did so, into the watercourse. The next thing I remember was the panther seizing me by the arm and pulling me down as I arose, and beginning to claw my head.

Then I saw on top of the panther my little fox-terrier Toby, tearing hard at the neck of the beast. The panther then left mauling me to attack the dog. I somehow jumped up, leaped out of the watercourse, ran towards the villagers, and fell down. They placed me on a charpoi, or native bed, and carried me to my bungalow three miles away. Express messengers were at once despatched through the jungle and across the hills to Mandla, sixty miles away, for a doctor, who arrived on the fourth day after the accident.

Meanwhile, all that could be done was done, and my wounds, of which there were fourteen, were dressed. Our good Dr. Hogan had me carried into Mandla, the journey taking two and a half days, and since then, I am glad to say, I have been making a wonderful recovery. It is a great mercy that my arm had not to be amputated, as I feared at first I should certainly lose it. But though it is still much swollen, and so stiff that I can only bend it a few inches, all is progressing well.

My little dog escaped with a few scratches, having saved my life. The panther has either been eaten by the tiger, or has died of its wounds. The villagers were far too scared to follow it up after my fall. Its bones, if not devoured by tigers or porcupines, will most likely be found higher up the nala than where we last saw it.

A Panther-hunt, which had a somewhat unexpected conclusion, is narrated by the Rev. T. Fuller Bryant:—

At the outset I may explain that strictly it was not a panther that figures in this

story, but that is the name—or more commonly "painter"—given to the puma, or cougar, of North America. At one time this animal was as common all the country over as the fox is in England at present, and even more so, but as the result of the increase and spread of population it is now found only in remote parts, and is becoming increasingly rare.

Thirty years ago, however, when I resided in America, and when the incident happened which I am about to relate, there were considerable numbers to be found in parts of the Alleghany Mountains, and not infrequently an odd one would travel farther afield on a marauding expedition.

At the time of which I write I was residing at Brookfield, about thirty miles north of Utica. It was near the end of October, when, according to custom, all were busy banking up the sides of their houses, and in other ways preparing for winter, when complaints began to be made by the farmers of depredations among their sheep, by, as was supposed, some dog or dogs unknown. Hardly a morning came but some farmer or other found his flock reduced in this way, until the whole neighbourhood was roused to excited indignation against the whole dog tribe. Suspicion fell in turn upon almost every poor cur of the neighbourhood, and many a poor canine innocent was done to death, some by drowning, others by poison, and more by shooting; until it seemed as if all the sheep and dogs of the countryside would be wiped out.

What served only to deepen the mystery was the fact that here and there a calf was killed and partly eaten, indicating that if it were the work of a dog it must be one of unusual size, strength, and ferocity. So exasperated did the farmers become at length, that a meeting was held at Brookfield, at which it was resolved to offer a reward of two hundred dollars, "to any one killing the dog, *or other animal*, or giving such information as would lead to its discovery." The words "or other animal" had been inserted at the suggestion of a man who had heard unusual noises at night proceeding from the Oneida Swamp, a desolate, densely wooded tract of country, extending to within a mile or so of his dwelling. This circumstance had created in his mind the suspicion that the cause of all the trouble might not, after all, be a dog, but this he kept to himself.

One morning my brother and I, with three others, started early for a day's shooting and hunting in some woods three or four miles north of the village; but having an engagement at home in the afternoon, I left the party soon after one o'clock. When within about two miles of the village I left the main road to take a short cut across the land of a man named John Vidler, an Englishman.

During the early morning there had been a slight fall of snow, barely sufficient to cover the ground, but as it was so early in the season Vidler had not taken his few sheep into winter quarters. These I found apparently in a state of alarm, huddled together in a corner of a "lot" through which I had to pass.

As I was about to climb the fence and leave the "lot," I observed blood on the ground, which probably would not have attracted my further attention but for recent events. On looking more closely, I could distinctly trace in the snow the footmarks of an animal resembling those of a dog, and which enabled me to follow the direction in which he had gone. It occurred to me at once that this was probably the work of the mysterious marauder. I knew of the reward of two hundred dollars, and my finances were not such as to render me indifferent to the chance of winning it, so, with the spirit of the hunter strong within me, I started off upon the trail, which quickly led me to the edge of the wood, where it disappeared.

It was clear that the animal had entered the wood. I suddenly reflected upon the extraordinary size of the animal's foot, and when I coupled that fact with the words in the offer of reward—"or other animal"—it occurred to me that I might be hunting bigger and more formidable game than a dog.

I confess to a strange feeling which made me pause. True, I had my trusty gun with me, and a good supply of ammunition, but after a moment or two of reflection I decided to suspend the pursuit and go and tell John Vidler, and seek to associate him with me in further proceedings.

In this I had no difficulty, for though Vidler, whose farm and abode were remote and lonely, had heard only rumours of the events which had so stirred the surrounding neighbourhood, it was enough for him that he was now among the victims, so he quickly went to the stables, or "barn," and brought out his old mare, and, throwing a buffalo skin, or "robe," as such are called, across her back, he mounted, and away we went.

I travelled afoot by his side. We picked up the trail where I had left it—at the edge of the wood; but here our difficulty began, it being broken and indistinct, owing to the leaves which the snow was not thick enough to cover.

We proceeded with great caution, and the trees being fairly wide apart, and the brush not very thick, Vidler remained mounted, whilst I continued at his side. It was evident from the tremulous excitement and frequent sniffing of the mare that she was aware that something unusual was up, and from this we inferred the

need of a keen look-out.

We had thus proceeded some three hundred yards, when we suddenly came upon a dip in the ground. We each lifted our eyes from the land, which we had continued to closely scan for traces of the trail, when we were startled by a snarl, and just ahead, lying under the trunk of a big tree which had fallen across the dip, was a huge panther, apparently just awakened from its sleep by our approach. The brute was lashing its tail and quivering with rage, and was evidently preparing to spring upon us.

Here, then, undoubtedly was the cause of all the recent trouble. For a moment the mare stood trembling with alarm, and the next she swung round, almost hurling Vidler from her back, and flew like the wind along the way by which we had come. Though it all took place in much less time than it takes to record, every detail is indelibly registered on my mind till this day.

There was no time, even had I had the necessary self-possession, for me to take aim and fire, and had I done so it would almost certainly have increased the danger, for my gun was loaded only with a charge for a partridge or woodchuck.

As the mare swung round away from me, I seized Vidler's foot, which was most fortunate both for him and myself, for it was my weight that prevented him from being thrown, and, holding on for dear life, I was dragged clear of danger. The suddenness of the movement jerked my gun from my grasp, and as Vidler possessed no weapon we were defenceless, and it would have been madness to think of returning for mine.

It seemed but a moment before we reached the open "lot," where with difficulty we reined the mare in. After a brief deliberation we decided to make our way to the village and organise a hunting-party. We made our way to the store of Wack Stillman, a favourite rendezvous for the loafers and off-works. Here we found Orson Clark, one of the best hunters in all the countryside, with two others with a large strain of the swashbuckler in their characters, who were always ready for excitement and adventure.

As we agreed to divide the reward should we win, and believing that we five were equal to it, we decided to keep the information and to confine operations to ourselves.

It was not long before we were off, each of us now armed either with his own or a borrowed weapon. Reaching the wood, we agreed that, after we had indicated

the direction of the trail, Orson Clark, as the most experienced, should lead the way, the rest of us following at his heels.

As we approached the tree under which we had left the panther lying, the tension became so oppressive that each felt that he could hardly breathe, nor were we much relieved to find our quarry gone, as we could not tell at what step we might come across him. "Keep close, men," whispered Orson, as we continued to creep on, each with his finger on the trigger of his gun.

He had scarcely spoken the words when a most terrific roar, which seemed to come from the tree-tops near by, rent the air, and at the same time a shot rang out. As neither of our band had fired, we were puzzled to know what it all meant, when a shrill, boyish voice shouted, from a little distance ahead, "I've got him, father. He's dead!"

Rushing to the spot whence the shout proceeded, we were astonished to find the thirteen-year-old son of Orson Clark standing, with an old blunderbuss in his hands, in a triumphant attitude by the panther, which lay as dead as a door-nail on the ground before him!

"What on earth does this mean?" exclaimed his father, as he took in the scene.

It transpired that when Orson went home to get his rifle he told his wife of the projected adventure, and the boy, who was in an adjoining room, overheard. The spirit of adventure inherited from his father was immediately aroused, and he determined to seek a share in the enterprise. Unobserved he took the old blunderbuss from its resting-place and slipped out of the house, but, fearing that his father might forbid should his intentions be known, he made his way to the wood, keeping the hunting-party within his view whilst concealing himself from theirs.

Entering the wood, the daring youngster hunted on his own account. Keeping a little ahead and wide of the party, he came across the panther up in a tree. He had no difficulty in attracting its attention, and, after contemplating each other for some moments, the savage brute was about to spring upon the boy as it gave the tremendous roar referred to. At the same moment the boy fired, the charge landing full in the heart, and bringing the great beast tumbling dead at his feet.

When the father realised the situation, his feelings may be imagined. His first look at the boy indicated vexation at his recklessness, followed by admiration at his pluck and thankfulness for his escape from almost certain death had the shot

failed to reach a vital part. However, matters were soon arranged. A rail from a snake-fence was procured, the panther's legs were tied to it, and in this way he was borne to the village.

The news quickly spread, and all the population, apparently, of the village assembled to see the sight and to hear the story. When the question came to be considered as to who was entitled to the reward of two hundred dollars, the verdict was unanimous that no one deserved it so much as Orson Clark's boy, and to him it was awarded.

The skin of the panther was presented to the landlord of the hotel in the village. He had it stuffed and placed in a large room in his house. For all I know, it remains there till this day.

VII

A MIDNIGHT RIDE ON A CALIFORNIAN RANCHE

It was in San Benito County, California, or, to be more explicit, in the Hernandez Valley, the nearest station to which is King City, "up country" from Los Angeles. My friend, Tom Bain, owned a cattle-ranche up there, right in the valley which lies between the hills forming the coastal range of California.

It is high up, this beautiful valley. I arrived at King City over-night, and my old school pal, who had asked me to pay him a visit, met me at the Central Saloon early next morning—so early, that we had breakfasted and were off in a pair-horse buckboard by seven o'clock. And then we had a fourteen hours' drive, climbing, ever climbing, with a dip here and there as we negotiated the irregularities of the high country, the air becoming cooler and crisper every hour, and so clear that you could see for miles over the plains beneath.

It is rather wonderful, this clearness of the atmosphere in Western America. In Arizona, I believe, the phenomenon is even more noticeable, at times. The trees stand out distinctly and almost individually on hills miles and miles away, and a camera speedily proves how really free is the atmosphere of all visionary obstruction. A photograph of a horse, a bullock, or of any such object out on the hills, will secure a reproduction of a background quite extraordinary in the extent and clearness of the picture.

And it is a sweet, pure air to breathe—life-giving, and capable of making the heart glad for the very joy of things. Driving over these hills, although it took us from seven in the morning until nine o'clock at night to complete the journey, was anything but tiring to the human physique. Around and beyond, Nature spread herself in a delightful panorama of scenic beauty—

> "And every living thing did joy in life,
> And every thing of beauty did seem living."

There were two or three other fellows on the ranche with my friend Bain. Fine, big fellows they were, too; loose-limbed and strong featured. Scarcely one of them was over five-and-twenty, yet you would have vowed that such

development in face, feature, and limb could not have been attained before the age of thirty-five years. Silent, unassuming fellows, too, not welcoming me with a smile even, nor with the slightest demonstration of friendliness beyond a grip of the hand that made me begin to feel glad that I had brought my "Elliman's" with me.

It is a peculiarity—at least, we think it a peculiarity—of the Western man, that he rarely smiles. Perhaps it would be fairer to say that he never smiles unless there is something very positive to smile at. He seems to have such large ideas concerning all things, and to suggest by his manner, especially when you are out on the plains with him, that he cares more for his cattle, and for his horse particularly, than he does for you. Yet no man is more ready with a helping hand—and a hand that is capable of doing most things a man's hand can do—than he; none more full of sympathy and sincere kindliness.

But he is an undemonstrative being, this man of the West, and you take a long time to find out whether he likes you or not. If you are a "tenderfoot" you can't do better than hold your tongue about the wonders of Europe and its cities, about your own various exploits here and there. You will learn a lot by not talking, and if you don't mind soiling your hands a little, and keeping an eye lifted to discover the way in which things are done, you will get on very well on a Western cattle-ranche.

There was another ranche not far away, owned by an old settler, who had his wife and daughter with him. These were the only women within our immediate ken. She was a real child of the West, this old settler's daughter, and as sweet and dainty as she was capable; about twenty years of age, I should think, and looked after as much by every man on my friend's ranche as she was by her own father. In fact, my friend Bain seemed to take more than a fatherly interest in her. She called him Tom, and he called her Edna, though in this particular respect Tom was not privileged more than any of the other fellows. But her eyes were always bright when Tom was near, and—but there, it was none of my business. Only, as I said before, I kept one eye lifted for most things.

Very soon I began really to enjoy the life very much, for its own sake. There were many things lacking in the matter of house accommodation and comfort, compared with my English home; but it was jolly, real jolly. I never felt so well and strong in all my life as when I was galloping over those hills, on occasion of a general inspection of the ranche. And it was a lark, I tell you, rounding up the cattle.

Of course, all the fellows on the ranche could ride like—well, they could ride anything. I got out of the road when there was any of the expert business on, such as "cutting out," and "corralling." But I began gradually to feel my way in accomplishing their many tricks of horsemanship, and I was able, in course of time, to take a small part in the work of the corral.

I essayed to throw the lasso, or lariat, of course, as one of the very first experiences in ranche life. It is one of the many interesting things you must learn on a cattle-ranche—to use the lasso. Every man carries his rope on his saddle, as a necessary—in fact, there, *the* most necessary—part of his equipment. A ranchero would as soon think of riding off without his lasso as an English sportsman would think of going partridge-shooting without his gun.

It looks so easy, throwing the lasso. You begin first on foot, and try to throw the rope over a post or something, not very far away. After many hours, at the end of which time you know what it is to have an arm-ache—it may be many days, even many weeks, before you are able to do it—you succeed in lassoing your object two or three times in succession. Ha! ha! You have conquered. You have discovered the knack at last. And you hastily mount your horse to see if you can manage the real thing.

You throw aside your practice rope, unwind the lasso from the horn of the saddle, and essay a "mounted" throw. Your patient animal remains perfectly still and quiet. He seems to know you are a tenderfoot, and to feel quite sure what is going to happen. You whirl your lasso round your head, and aim it at the horns of a harmless steer in the corral some yards away. But you look in vain to see the rope curl round your particular objective. Instead, it flops over your horse's ears, or smacks you on the side of your own head. Oh, it was so easy on the ground, too, when you left off!

And your horse is patient still. He even seems to be smiling quietly to himself. After many more attempts, and with an arm that acheth much, you succeed in affixing your rope round something, throwing from the saddle. At last you have managed it.

Later on an opportunity occurs for the display of your prowess. You are in the corral with a bunch of moving beasts. You single out one as your particular victim. This time the beast is not standing still, and you throw your lasso, carefully watching the fall as it whirls through the air. Poor animal! Instead of roping it by the horns, you nearly jerk its tail off! There are very many

accomplishments that seem easy in the hands of an expert and which prove most difficult to the uninitiated, but I think the throwing of the lasso can claim more mysteries than most others.

When out on an inspection of the ranche, reckoning up the stock, and seeing that all are able to secure sufficient food, it frequently happens that some of the cattle will be missing. They get away into all sorts of places, some almost inaccessible among the hills, and if they are not found and brought back to the pastures within easy reach of the corral, they become wild, and then there is mischief to pay. They sneak down late at night or in the small hours of the morning to the corn and wheat fields, break the fences, and trample the crops in a way that spells disaster to many a settler.

Some of the cattle belonging to my friend's ranche had gone astray in this way, and we were unable to locate them.

I remember we were sitting in our adobe house one evening, three or four of us together. It was about seven o'clock, and we had been talking over matters in connection with the decision of the "boss" to drive a bunch of cattle down to King City, where they would be entrained for 'Frisco. The "boss" was up at the other ranche. He had gone to ask the old settler to give us a hand with the cattle next day at the rodeo, or "round-up."

He hadn't offered to take me with him. I suppose that was Edna's fault. Anyhow, we had been sitting there discussing things, when we heard Bain coming in, after unsaddling his horse, in quite a noisy mood. He was muttering hard, and I wondered what Edna had been saying to him. But it wasn't Edna at all. He had come down from the other ranche, higher up the valley, and had passed the cornfields, in which he had noticed unusual movement. He had investigated, and had found that a bunch of wild cattle had broken down the fences, and were eating and trampling down the corn.

A hasty consultation decided that we should make a midnight raid on the beasts, and take as many of them as we could capture down to King City with our own bunch. We had been feeling rather sleepy, but this news made us at once very much alive. However, we decided not to undertake the raid until the next night. The wild cattle would be gone with the morning light, but they would return at dark.

We went to bed, which meant simply rolling ourselves up in our blankets on the floor. I lay awake for some time anticipating the excitement of the next evening.

It is not all play, this raiding of wild cattle. It is a risky business, and you must have expert lassoers to lead the way, or there will be trouble.

Next day we went up to the old settler's ranche, "Edna's house," as we called it, up the valley, and there we secured the help of some of our neighbour's men. We were there all the evening, waiting for the hour of midnight at which to sally forth. Edna had expressed a desire to come too! She was a fine horsewoman, and fearless, and she loved excitement of this sort. Tom promised to take care of her, so she was permitted to join our party. Lucky Tom!

As the little clock on the settler's mantelpiece struck twelve, we saddled our horses and set off for the corn-brake. I was keen on seeing how these fellows were going to capture the wild cattle, but I was too inexperienced to take a very active part at the time.

The corn-patch was right in the hollow of the valley, on a flat on the eastern bank of the dry bed of the river. We rode down together—never a word being spoken on the way—to where a group of oak-trees raised their stately heads, and there we held our final council of war. Bain, anxious to give a tenderfoot a chance of seeing as much of the proceedings as possible, directed me to get off my horse and climb the bank, from which I should obtain a view of the field and of the cattle as they were feeding. I was very quiet, for the beasts have ears rather sharper than anything. Tom had given me his directions in a whisper.

So I climbed the bank and looked over the cornfield, and there in the centre I could see a small black mass of moving things, about three hundred yards away. I went quietly back to the river-bed, and found that most of the fellows had dismounted and were "cinching" up their saddles.

A moment later I was told off with a vaquero (cowboy) to ride up the bed of a creek that ran at right-angles to the river and parallel with the cornfield. We were to try to "head" the cattle, and so prevent them from breaking out of the field, up the hillside, and getting away into the mountains again, where we should have had to leave them.

The creek-bed was low, and afforded us good cover for three parts of the way. Then it shallowed, and we soon were able to see, from our horses, the cattle in the corn. We thought we had been very quiet indeed, but we noticed a hurried movement among the beasts, and with a cry "They're off!" my companion dug his spurs into his horse and was off like the wind himself. And I after him.

We dashed into the corn, and raced like mad to head the stampeding beasts. It was the strangest sensation in the world, galloping in the moonlight through the waving corn, which was up to our horses' shoulders. It made me quite giddy for a second or two, but I galloped madly on after my companion, who, with his shrill cowboy yells, helped the roaring cattle to wake the midnight silences of the valley. I joined in the yelling, too, and, so soon as our voices were heard, there was a chorus in reply from where we had left the rest of our party.

"We shall never head them," I cried.

"Perhaps not, but we'll try," answered the vaquero, as we tore onward. I thought we had not the slightest hope of heading them. Up the hillside we tore to keep them on the flat ground, and at every leap over a rough incline I thought my horse would break his neck and mine too. But as surefooted as goats are those horses of the hills. At length, for some reason or other, the cattle wheeled and went back down towards the river, and we, of course, followed.

Suddenly, two of them broke away to the right, and I after them. I thought I might be of some little use, even if I were not an expert lassoer. But those two wild cattle knew too much for me. They tore across a gully, dashed up the other side and away at full gallop into the hills. I let them go. If I had pursued them farther most probably I should not be writing this now. As it was, it was a marvel I had not broken my neck. Only my splendid horse had saved me.

So I rode back to the oak-trees, and there—there was not a sign of life. All was as silent and still as if nothing had ever disturbed Nature's quiet. I remember how beautiful was the night. A half-moon shone out in a clear sky, like a semicircle of pure, bright silver, the tops of the mountains were silhouetted against the sky as if they were cut out of cardboard, and all was so calm just then. You don't get such lovely nights elsewhere. The moon has not the sterling brightness; the air not the clearness nor the stillness that it has there.

Where were my companions? I did not know. My panting horse was glad to get breathing-space, so I sat there in the saddle, waiting. I pulled my coat around my shoulders, for the air was chilly. It was then about 2 A.M.

A sharp sound disturbed my reverie—the sound of a horse's hoofs galloping over the rocky river-bed. The rattle was so clear, so distinct, in that atmosphere and at that hour, that I could hear it long before my eyes could detect anything, even in that bright moonlight. Then, in a few moments, there approached a horse at full gallop, with his head low down and neck extended—at first apparently riderless,

but as he came nearer I was startled to discover a black shape, hanging over the off-side, and, as the frightened steed tore past me, I saw it was a woman.

It was Edna. Who else could it be? Her left foot, still in the stirrup, had come right over the saddle with her as she fell, and she was clinging desperately with her hands to the horse's long mane, but so low down that, at the pace, it seemed to be impossible for her to recover.

Without a moment's thought of how I should save her, I galloped after her maddened steed as hard as I could go. I was on an English saddle and without a lasso—since to me such a thing would have been of little use on such a risky expedition as we had undertaken; but I urged my horse onwards and galloped him at his utmost in an endeavour to head the other, when perhaps I might be able to clutch a rein and stop the runaway. But Edna's horse was the fleetest of any on the ranche; moreover, her light weight was a comparative advantage, and so I gained not a whit on the horse with his imperilled burden. It was terrible. How long could the poor girl hang on like that? Not much longer, I was sure, yet prayed that she might have strength.

Then, ahead of us, in the distant moonlight, I discerned other galloping figures. A horseman was pursuing at full speed along the bank a huge steer that bellowed as it endeavoured to secure a free run up into the hills, there to be safe from its mortal enemy. I yelled at the top of my voice, with all the breath I had left.

Immediately the horseman pulled his horse back on its haunches and from the bank stared down at pursued and pursuer. In a twinkling he seemed to realise the situation, wheeled, and galloped down the bank at an angle calculated to make it easier for him to get within reach of Edna's horse. Then I saw it was Tom, and he must have guessed that it was Edna ahead of him, in a position of direst peril. How we had all become separated I could not guess, and there was no time to wonder now.

I saw Tom gather his loop in his right hand, holding the coil in his left, and begin to swing the loop round his head. What! was he going to take such a risk? To lasso the horse and check it suddenly when at a mad gallop like that? Surely the animal would come to earth with a fearful crash, most probably on the side on which it was weighed down with its burden.

Then I saw the rope whirl through the air, and though it could have been but a moment, it seemed to hang there for minutes without falling. This was the time for skill. If ever Tom should throw his lariat well, it must be now. With unerring

aim the rope was cast, and the loop settled over the head of the runaway, though the maddened animal was galloping with neck stretched full length and head low down.

Gradually the rope tightened round its shoulders, Tom galloping his own horse hard behind. By the most skilful manipulation of the lariat, Edna's horse was compelled to slacken its pace, Tom getting nearer and nearer by degrees and taking in the slack until he was right alongside. He soon brought the runaway to a stand-still, and directed me to release Edna's foot from the stirrup, which I did. She sank to the ground, completely exhausted. And little wonder. Her hands were cut and bleeding with the tenacious grip she had kept on the horse's mane, and it was some time before she recovered sufficient strength to move.

As soon as she was able, she told us that she had become separated from the other riders when galloping through the cornbrake, and a wild steer had gored her horse in the side. This had so startled the animal that he reared, and then dashed off madly up the valley in the way I had seen her coming. She had fallen over, and as her foot had caught in the stirrup, she clutched her horse's long mane, and so saved herself from being dragged along the ground, and, probably, from a horrible death.

We now were able to see that her horse had been badly ripped on the near side, and from loss of blood and as the result of his long, mad gallop, the poor animal was in a bad way. He was led back to the ranche and there cared for.

It appeared that the others had galloped along on the other side of the field until they had found that the cattle had turned. Then they waited until they could get behind them, and, when this was managed, they secured half a dozen of them with their lariats.

One man had let go his lasso. This sometimes happens. In cases of emergency a man has to let go his rope, and that is why the cowboys practise picking up things from the ground at full gallop. It is not done there for show; there is no gallery to play to. It is a necessary accomplishment. A man has lost his rope, the other end of it, perhaps, being round the horns of a steer. He gallops after it, as soon as he is clear of the bunch, and picks up the end at full speed. At the proper time he gives the lasso a turn round the horn of the saddle, pulls up his well-trained horse, and the steer is jerked to his feet. It is neatly done—and it takes doing.

Next day the cattle were all in the corrals, and the wild ones were placed in the

bunch to be travelled down to King City. But the newcomers were too unruly. They continually broke away *en route*, and gave so much trouble that before our destination was reached we shot every one of them.

I left my friend's ranche shortly after this. I had had some experience that was worth winning, and I had gained a little knowledge of ranche life of the West.

Lately I received a delicate little wedding-card, neatly inscribed, and figured with a design representing a coiled lariat. And from out of the coil there peeped the daintily written words—"Tom and Edna."

VIII

O'DONNELL'S REVENGE

Engineer Trevannion was annoyed; for the Works Committee at Berthwer, who managed the affairs of the new wharf in course of construction there, had written to announce that they had appointed an assistant engineer, and had added an expression of opinion that "Mr. Garstin would prove of exceptional aid in the theoretical department, leaving Mr. Trevannion more time for the practical work in the execution of which he had given such satisfactory proof of his ability."

Notwithstanding the sop to his feelings, Trevannion had grasped the significance of this communication, and resented it. He had been here, in sole charge, since the beginning; the chief engineer, who lived at the other end of the town, only came round once a fortnight, so trustworthy did he consider his subordinate. He had laboured at the detailed plans, wrestled with measurements to scale, until his eyes ached. He had stood about the works in all weathers, had exercised a personal supervision over the men, and had never made a slip in his weekly reports.

To write the latter correctly, to keep the Committee informed of the amount of cement used, of fresh piles driven, of water pumped out, of concrete put in, to notify casualties, as they occurred, in a manner that might suggest the Committee's obligations under employers' liability, but did not harrow their feelings; to be at the works by nine o'clock every morning and not to leave till five; to be either in the iron shanty called the engineer's office, or supervising the making of concrete, or clambering about the massive beams and piles, or shouting through the telephone, or interviewing the ganger, or doing one of the hundred other things that were in the day's work; surely this was all that was required to be done, and he flattered himself that he had done it very well.

And now the Works Committee were going to foist an assistant on him. Assistant! The very name was a slight upon his capabilities, a slur on his independence. Why had they treated him thus?

He thought he knew the reason, ridiculous as it appeared to him. The new wharf, which was to increase the already considerable importance of Berthwer as a river

port, had not proceeded very rapidly during the past few weeks. There had been difficulties—difficulties which Trevannion had attributed to unforeseen circumstances. It was possible that the Committee had attributed the difficulties to circumstances which ought to have been foreseen.

Herein lay the gist of his resentment at the new appointment. The Committee, while recognising his diligence, energy, and pluck, considered that he lacked some of the finer qualities of insight that enable a man to forestall such difficulties and, when they occur, to meet them with as small an expenditure of capital and labour as possible. So they had appointed Garstin to help him; in other words, to supply the brain qualities which they imagined he lacked. It was unfair and humiliating.

"Some puling theoretician!" he muttered to himself, as he walked to the works one winter morning. "Some dandy who can draw cubes and triangles and cannot do anything else except come here—late probably—in an overcoat and comforter. One of those sickly office-desk beggars who are ill half the time and useless the rest. Absolutely sickening!"

He strode along in a temper with which the weather harmonised. It was gusty, bleak, and wet. Great pools of water lay on the rough roads in the poor quarter of the town through which lay his route. In order to reach the works, he had to cross the river by means of a ferry-boat. When he reached the landing-stage on this particular morning, he could see the boat moored against the opposite bank, but there was no ferryman in sight, and there was no response when he shouted.

He shouted again and again. Then he turned up the collar of his jacket—he disdained a greatcoat—and pulled his cap over his eyes, and used strong language to relieve his feelings. He was still blaming the river, the ferryman, and anything else he could think of, when he became conscious of a light footfall, and, turning, saw a young man standing by his side.

"I can't make the ferryman hear," he remarked in an aggrieved tone to the newcomer, as if the latter was in some way responsible for the fact. "It's an awful nuisance—I am already late. I've never known him play this trick before."

"And I've been here ten minutes," was the answer. "The man has either gone away or gone to sleep. Hadn't we better get across some other way? There is a boat a few yards down. We might borrow it and scull ourselves across, that is, if you think——"

"Good idea!" exclaimed Trevannion. Then he hesitated. "You—you are not going to the wharf, are you?" he asked.

"Yes—for the first time in my life."

"Is your name Garstin?"

"That's it. Perhaps you can tell me——"

"I'm Trevannion," briefly. "I didn't expect you quite so soon. Er—I'm glad to meet you."

His eyes went to the heavy coat in which the lad—he was little more—was encased, to the fashionable bowler that contrasted with his own tweed cap, to the umbrella that protected the bowler from the dripping rain—ay, even to the comforter. It was as he had feared. Garstin was an office-desk weakling, and a mere boy into the bargain. The Works Committee had added insult to the injury they did him.

"Oh, you're Mr. Trevannion," said the "insult," shyly holding out a gloved right hand. Trevannion took it limply and quickly let it drop. "Come on," he said. "We will get across first and talk afterwards."

The gruffness of his tone did not tend to encourage expansiveness on the other's part, and little more was said whilst they unmoored the boat and rowed across, so the engineer had good opportunity for taking stock of his companion. The water was rough, and he judged from the clumsy way in which Garstin handled his oar and his apparent powerlessness to impart vigour to the stroke that muscular development had not formed part of his education. Trevannion stood six-foot-one in his stockings, and his frame was well knit with muscles that were supple as well as strong; naturally, he believed that physical fitness was essential to a good engineer, especially to an engineer in charge of a rather rough crew of workmen. He resolved by-and-by to recommend a course of Sandow to the new hand.

"Mind how you get out," he said, when the boat bumped against the slimy ladder that did duty for a stairway. "The steps are greasy, and those togs of yours are hardly suited to this job."

Garstin flushed but made no remark, and Trevannion flattered himself that the hint would not be wasted. He had already decided that the new engineer would have to be taught many things. This was Lesson No. 1.

Hardly had they scrambled on to the wharf when Trevannion's ganger came up.

"'Morning, sir. Can I speak to you a moment? There has been trouble between O'Donnell and Peters. O'Donnell was drunk—leastways so Peters says. Any'ow they got fighting and mauled each other pretty severe; in fact Peters is in hospital. Thought you'd better hear of it, sir."

"Quite right," said Trevannion judicially. It was a common enough story on the wharf, and he had heard it before without paying much attention, but now—he glanced at the slight figure beside him, who evidently required as many object-lessons as could be given—and decided that here lay the opportunity for giving Lesson No. 2. "Pay O'Donnell and sack him," he commanded.

"Very good, sir," said the ganger, moving away.

"That's the way we have to treat our fellows here," said Trevannion. "Summary justice, you know. They're a rough lot. Now come and see the office and the plans."

Whatever Garstin may have thought of these proceedings, he said nothing, but followed submissively along the wharf. Perhaps, without knowing the peculiar authority which had at the contractor's desire been vested in Trevannion, he wondered that any engineer should wield such powers. However, he had not much time for wondering, or indeed for anything except the task of keeping pace with his nimble, long-legged comrade. He kept stumbling over little heaps of granite and sand, over rails, along which the travelling cranes moved ponderously, over bits of tarpaulin and old iron instruments, over every object, in fact, that Trevannion avoided with such apparent ease.

Garstin was rather a distressful youth by the time the shanty was reached, for the pace had been hot, and he had been impeded by the fatal greatcoat and muffler. After divesting himself of these he stood still and breathed hard in front of a cheerful coke fire, while Trevannion unrolled the plans and pinned them to the long, sloping desk occupying one side of the room.

When all was ready the engineer began to explain the plans in detail, elaborating the explanation with simpler explanation, getting through the sections one by one with slow precision, repeating his elucidation of black lines, red lines, and green lines, of the length, breadth, and numbers of the piles, of the soil, subsoil, and sub-subsoil, that received them; all this in the manner of one who is instructing a child in the rudiments of engineering science, for he had made up

his mind that Garstin would want a lot of instructing.

Garstin seemed a patient listener, and Trevannion had almost begun to enjoy himself, when the former suddenly laid his finger on a certain spot and asked a question connected with water-pressure and the strength of resisting force. Trevannion was surprised into returning what he thought was the correct answer. He was still more surprised when the other proceeded to prove by figures that that answer was incontestably incorrect.

This was the beginning. Garstin quickly found more questions to put on other points, more criticisms of Trevannion's replies. The latter at first made desperate efforts to crush him by assuming the calm superiority of the older hand. But with Garstin's logic it was useless to be calm. It was worse than useless to try to be superior. The intruder stuck to his guns with respectful pertinacity. Perhaps the fire had warmed his brain into unwonted activity; Trevannion found himself wondering whether this was so, or whether it was a normal state—the last thought was horrible!

At any rate, there was no doubt that within these four stuffy walls Garstin was in his element. Trevannion clearly was not. In half an hour his treasured theories had been picked to pieces and his stock of argument was exhausted, whilst his rival appeared as fresh as the woodwork.

But the climax was reached when Section D came up for discussion. Things had not gone well with Section D in practice. Trevannion incautiously admitted as much when he said that Section D represented a point on the wharf where the river persistently—more persistently than at other points—forced its way into the cavity intended for good concrete. Garstin promptly demonstrated the probable reason why. This was too much. Trevannion shut up the demonstration by opening the door.

"Phew!" he said. "Let's go out and get a little fresh air. We'll have a look at the section itself."

He stepped out, followed by the other—meekly.

It was still raining. Under the leaden sky the works looked more dismal than ever. Lakes of water lay where there had been pools; rails and machinery glistened as if they had been carefully oiled. A thick light-brown river raced past. The echoing wind and the hoarse murmur of the gang at work on Section D mingled with the groaning and clattering of the cranes. Garstin missed the

warmth of the fire and shivered; he had forgotten his overcoat; and he experienced only the mildest curiosity in the surroundings. Trevannion walked rapidly and in silence. He was thinking mainly of how he could get his own back from this usurper.

They came to the edge of Section D. Below them yawned a huge pit with uneven walls sheer from top to bottom. Fronting them, on the river side, solid piles went down into an abyss that ended in black water; these were a barrier—a support to the wedge of earth that the mighty river pressed against their backs. From the land side to the tops of the piles stretched transverse beams, two and three yards apart; more beams lower down, constituting stays against the piles buckling; the whole a giant scaffolding embedded in the bowels of the earth. A few rough blocks of concrete peeped from the water below. Fountains spurted from between the piles and splashed into the basin.

Trevannion looked at the fountains and frowned. There would be work for the pumps very shortly; there was always too much work for the pumps in Section D, and so too little time and opportunity for more progressive labour. Then, disregarding the obviously slippery state of the transverse beams, he stepped on to one of them, and stood poised for a moment over sixty feet of hungry voidness.

"Come over to the other side," he said to Garstin. "You cannot see what is going on below from where you are. Why, what——?"

Garstin, after placing one foot on the beam, had drawn back, a leaden pallor showing unmistakably under his skin.

Trevannion stared at him. The laugh, the jeer, that had risen in his heart at this sudden failure of nerve never found expression. There was something in the young fellow's face that spoke of more than a qualm of nervousness. It was a pitiful terror that met Trevannion's eyes—the pleading terror of a dumb, helpless animal before a human tormentor.

For a moment the engineer stood irresolute. Two men, engaged in mixing cement a few yards distant, had laid down their spades, and, having heard Trevannion's invitation to cross the beam, were looking at "the new bloke" in mild wonder as to why he hesitated. A third was slowly trundling a wheelbarrow full of sand towards them. Trevannion took in these details in a flash—and realised their significance. Here was an easy chance of shaming Garstin before the gang, of convicting him of rank and unprofessional cowardice, of getting his

own back again from the office-desk theoretician, yet—an uncontrollable impulse of generosity prevented his seizing it. He stepped on to the bank and stood beside the fear-struck figure.

"You *must* come on," he said in a whisper that was little more than a breath. "Pull yourself together. I'll hold you."

An instant later, and for an instant only, the two stood together on the narrow beam, Garstin a shrinking form, his every limb shaken by something more potent than the gusty wind, his face turned anywhere but downwards. Trevannion did not hold him, but his hand rested reassuringly on the other's quivering arm. For an instant only, and then Garstin was pushed on to the firm bank again and hurried towards the office.

Trevannion talked jerkily as soon as they were out of earshot of the gang. "Sudden attack of funk—rather a bogie place on a slippery day—might happen to anybody—get used to it—dance a jig on top of the king pile one day, and wonder how you could ever have been such a——"

"Coward," finished Garstin quietly.

"No-o, that's not exactly the word," said Trevannion lamely, and waited for explanation or extenuation.

But none came. It was as if the boy was quite aware of the cowardice, and did not wish his companion to consider it anything else. Trevannion's mind marvelled at the seeming abasement.

A few days later Trevannion reported progress to his wife anent the new assistant, whom for some strange reason he had grown positively to like.

"Wonderfully brainy chap, Garstin. He has helped me no end with Section D—you know, where we have had all the trouble. With luck we shall have it finished in a week or two. At the same time"—with conviction—"he will never make a practical engineer. Wouldn't be any good in an emergency. No nerve—no nerve at all. Seems to go to bits directly he gets outside the office. Can't even look down into the section without holding on to something. If a crane starts anywhere near, it makes him jump, and as to being any good with the gang, why, he daren't speak to one of them. Only this afternoon, when O'Donnell came and blustered——"

"O'Donnell?" said his wife.

"Yes—a man I sacked for being drunk and fighting. He came to the office this afternoon and asked to be taken on again. He said he could get no other job, and his wife and children were starving. I told him that the regulations would not admit of his re-employment; besides, I had reported him as dismissed and filled up the vacancy. Then he started cursing and threatening that he would do for the wharf and for me too, unless I relented. Of course I didn't relent. I turned him out—he was half-drunk. And there—what do you think?—there was Garstin with his hands covering his face, shivering and shaking as if he had seen a ghost.

"'I am sure that fellow means mischief, Mr. Trevannion,' he muttered. 'I'm sure he does—I read it in his eyes. Hadn't you better take him back—just for the sake of his wife?'

"Of course I couldn't—wouldn't. But Garstin's a brainy beggar—oh, wonderfully brainy."

There came a certain Friday evening when the two men sat late in their office, compiling the weekly report. Trevannion was in high good-humour; for had not their joint efforts, as he liked to call Garstin's useful suggestions, proved successful in ousting the river finally from Section D? and was not that troublesome part of the wharf ready for good concrete as soon as it could be made? He had to record this gratifying intelligence for the Committee's benefit, and he did it with a relish.

"Nothing to fear now for the old section," he remarked cheerfully.

"Nothing but the unexpected collapse of a pile," said Garstin.

"Oh, that's impossible."

"It's improbable."

The report was finished and placed in its long envelope, and they prepared to go home. Trevannion began to busy himself with a heavy oil lantern. "I am going to have a look at the section on the way," he said; "just to see that the river has not come over the top," he added jestingly. "It's a whim of mine. But don't come if you'd rather not. I can join you at the steps."

"Oh, I'll come," said Garstin—without enthusiasm.

The pair stepped out into the night, Trevannion locking the door behind him. It was pitch-dark on the wharf. They could feel the presence of, rather than see, the river that flowed silently in front of them, and they could roughly locate the far bank by the myriads of starry lights that showed Berthwer town beyond. A single red lamp glowed dully far to the west; it belonged to a steamer that they had seen come to her moorings in the afternoon. There were no other vessels showing lights. The rest was black with a blackness sentient of vague forms—an impenetrable wall of darkness that seemed to stand between them and the outer world.

Picking their way carefully between débris and other impedimenta, they made their way towards the section, and had covered half the distance when Garstin stopped. "Don't you hear something?" he asked. "I am almost sure I was not mistaken. It was like the sound of blows. There cannot be anybody there now, can there?"

Trevannion halted and listened.

"I don't hear anything," he said presently. "Besides, who could be on the wharf now? You know the regulations, and the watchman is there to enforce them."

"I think—the noise has stopped."

Trevannion flashed the lantern on him suspiciously. "Nerves again" had come into his mind. However, he said nothing, but resumed his march, swinging his lantern this way and that, so as to gain a larger circumference of light. But suddenly he again stopped, as an unexpected sound fell on his ears.

"By jove—water!" he exclaimed, and broke into a run.

Garstin followed as fast as he could, but, deprived of the light, he quickly came to grief over some old metal. When he picked himself up, the other was yards ahead, and after that he had to content himself with keeping the lantern in view.

The engineer reached Section D and stopped breathless on the brink. He had forgotten Garstin—had forgotten everything save that water was again forcing its way into the unhappy section. But how and where? Anxiously examining the opposite side with his lantern, he soon discovered what the matter was, and the discovery caused him a thrill of amazed horror. The "improbable thing" had happened. One of the piles was buckling—bending inwards—and the earth dam was surely, if slowly, giving way at this point. He turned to shout to Garstin.

Then something hit him on the shoulder and he fell backwards into Section D, wildly and vainly clutching at a beam to save himself.

"Trevannion! Trevannion!"

The voice of Garstin, office-desk theoretician, assistant-engineer—Trevannion was clear about that. What he did not realise so clearly was what had happened to himself. He was lying face downwards on something, with his arm under his breast—his left arm, that is—his right seemed to have disappeared. Likewise, though he was conscious of a weight hanging downwards from his middle, he wondered vaguely what had become of his legs. He felt a curious disinclination to stir.

Yet the voice went on calling, and presently he was impelled to answer "Hello, Garstin." Then, while he was still listening to the unfamiliar echo of his own voice, he heard just behind him a *splash, splash, splash*, and his left arm jerked itself spasmodically from beneath his breast, the hand simultaneously touching a substance that was hard, cold, and slimy.

Then he realised.

He was somewhere near the bottom of Section D. His body lay across one of the lowest beams; his legs dangled in the water. Garstin was somewhere above him, and the river was pouring steadily into the section, splashing now with monotonous regularity. And the water was rising—creeping up towards the level of the beam where he lay.

Trevannion tried to raise himself by his right arm, but the limb gave way with an agonising shoot of pain; it was broken. He remained still and considered. Was the broken arm the extent of his injuries? The cold water had numbed his legs beyond all feeling. They were so much dead weight attached to his body. Both might be fractured for all he knew.

The main fact was that he was incapable of moving, of helping himself, at any rate until assistance came. And the water was rising, of course. Would rescue or the water arrive first?

He looked up painfully through the clammy gloom. Nothing save patches of sky, seen between the black beams, greeted his eyes. There was no sound save that of the water—*splash, splash, drip, drip*. For an instant the fear of death conquered him, and he almost shrieked.

However, as physical exhaustion renewed its hold upon him, he grew calmer. He began to recall what had happened. He had fallen into the section—no—he had been pushed in. There flashed upon him the vision of a sullen, black-haired labourer, whom he had refused to reinstate; this act was O'Donnell's revenge.

What had happened after that? The man would scarcely have had time to make his escape before Garstin came up. Well, it did not matter—he had heard Garstin's voice since in proof that he had survived any possible encounter. And the absence of Garstin, the oppressive silence now? Garstin had gone for help, of course. A boy like that could do nothing by himself even if he had the nerve; and Garstin had none. However, he would not be long in finding the watchman, and bringing him to the rescue. They ought to be here now. They certainly ought to

be here now.

Nervously anxious, he listened for any sound of footfall or voice. Did Garstin realise the danger of the black water that was rising, ever rising? Had he by any evil chance failed to find the watchman at his post?

A smooth wave flowed slowly over the beam, and he shuddered.

Suddenly—after hours, as it seemed—something flickered on the surface of the water in front of him. A shadowy white gleam it was. It danced before his eyes like a mocking spirit—and was gone. But shortly it reappeared, and with it a lantern and a rope, with somebody clinging to the end of the rope. Trevannion had just time to recognise the figure of Garstin, swaying slowly above him, before he lost consciousness.

Garstin got him out, of course. But it was many days before Trevannion learned the details of the rescue.

It appeared that Garstin had arrived just in time to witness O'Donnell's treacherous attack, and to confront the infuriated man as he turned to retreat. In a blind frenzy the boy sprang at his enemy, and the latter, taken by surprise, went down with a crash, striking his head on a heap of stones, and lay senseless.

Thereupon Garstin, with the one idea of rescuing Trevannion in his mind, hurried off to the watchman's hut—only to find that the fellow had left his post. However, he discovered there a lantern and a coil of rope, and, taking these, he returned to Section D, resolved to attempt the rescue by himself. Having shouted and received a reply, he hitched one end of the rope to a beam, and was about to lower himself down, when he discovered that the rope was so badly frayed in its centre that it could not be trusted to bear even his slight weight.

There was nothing to be done save to postpone the attempt till he had found a more substantial cable. He remembered that there was a length or two in the office, and thither he set out at once. The door being locked and Trevannion having the key is his pocket, he had to force the lock as best he could with the first implement he could lay hands on.

This occupied several minutes, and when he returned to the section, he was

tormented by the fear that he might find Trevannion drowned. He hastily affixed the new rope, and let himself down into the abyss, where he discovered Trevannion insensible, with his forehead almost touching the water.

It did not take long to make a noose and slip it over the latter's shoulders, but he had hardly done so when a gush of water swept over the beam, carrying away the lantern and plunging them into total darkness. For some subsequent seconds the boy clutched the rope and Trevannion's lifeless body in an agony of terror and doubt.

Then he started to climb up. The process proved exceedingly laborious, for the hemp was thin and damp, and it was difficult to obtain a grip. However, he managed to reach the summit and clambered over the brink, then paused awhile for some little breath and strength before essaying the hardest task of all—the hauling of Trevannion into safety.

How his puny strength enabled him to do this, he never could say. His foothold was none too secure, and the only available leverage was a narrow piece of masonry that jutted from the side. Yet, working inch by inch, he accomplished it, and when Trevannion had been brought sufficiently near the top, he made the rope fast to a convenient block of granite, and, kneeling down, regardless of his own peril, lifted him over the side. It was quite ten minutes before he could stagger with his burden to the office.

Safely inside, he made up the fire and telephoned for the doctor. Then he remembered O'Donnell, and spoke a message to the police-station, whence were presently despatched a couple of constables who found the man, stunned and considerably bruised. Neither did he forget Section D—with the result that there was a breakdown gang on the spot before midnight.

The buckled pile was found to have been nearly chopped through a few feet from the top, and there was no doubt that if O'Donnell had been undisturbed, he would have done the most serious mischief to the work. As it was, the completion of the section was delayed for two months.

Trevannion heard this story during his convalescence—a lengthy period, since two ribs were broken as well as the arm, and he had suffered severely from shock and exposure. In answer to a question Garstin said that at the time he had scarcely noticed the physical strain. The thing that was uppermost in his mind was the fear that Trevannion might drown before he could get to him. No, he had experienced no personal sensation of nervousness, when preparing to descend

into the section. Whereupon Trevannion thought deeply.

"I owe my life to your pluck, and I was a fool to faint at the critical moment," was all he said.

But, as has been remarked, his thoughts were many and profound. Nor was he ever again heard to reflect on Garstin's "want of nerve."

IX

MY ADVENTURE WITH A LION

I once served an apprenticeship on a New York newspaper, and some of my experiences as a reporter on the *Evening Smile* I shall never forget.

A reporter on an American newspaper is like a soldier—he is expected to obey orders implicitly, even at the risk of his life. For this reason he is paid well, but a nervous reporter often goes out of the office with his heart in his mouth and an "assignment" that makes him think seriously of taking out another insurance policy on his life.

One gloomy winter's morning I got down to the office at eight o'clock as usual, and had hardly reached my desk when the news editor—a kind man, who was always giving me opportunities of distinguishing myself—came up and began to speak at once in a very mysterious voice.

"Got a dandy assignment for you this morning," he said.

I looked up gratefully.

"I guess you carry a six-shooter, don't you?" he asked. "You may need it this trip."

"Oh!" I managed to gasp.

"A lion's escaped," he went on, in the quick, nervous American way of an American news editor.

"Has it really?" I said, wondering what was coming next.

"Jaffray's Circus came to town last night, the lion somehow got out, and they've been chasing it all night. Got it cornered in a stable at last, somewhere in East 19th Street; but it attacked and mauled a valuable horse there, and I understand is still at bay. That's all I know. Get up there as quick as you like, and get us a regular blazing story of it. You can run to a column," he added over his shoulder, as he returned to his desk to distribute the other morning assignments, "and let's have your copy down by messenger in time for the first edition."

No one ever disputed with the news editor, or asked unnecessary questions, but many a reporter did a lot of steady thinking when he got outside the office and safely on to the doorstep.

I crammed my pocket full of paper from the big heap at the middle table, and swaggered out of the room with my nose in the air, as though hunting escaped lions was a little matter I attended to every day of my life, and that did not disturb me an atom.

An overhead train soon rattled me up to East 19th Street, but it was some time before I found the stable where the lion awaited me, for 19th Street runs from Broadway down to the East River, and is a mile or two in length, and full of stables. Not far from the corner of Irving Place, however, I got on to the scent of my quarry, and I had hardly joined the group that had collected at the corner before a noise like distant thunder rose on the air, and every single person in the group turned tail and began to run for safety.

"What's the trouble?" I asked of a man as he dashed past me.

"Lion in that stable!" he shouted, pointing to the big wooden doors across the road. "Escaped from the circus. Savage as they make 'em. Killed a trotting-horse in there, and no one can get near it. They say it's a man-eater, too!"

Another roar burst out as he spoke, and the crowd that had begun to collect again scattered in an instant in all directions. There was no doubt about that sound: it was a genuine lion's roar, and it sounded deeper, I thought, than any roar I had ever heard before.

But news was news, and in this case news was bread-and-butter. I must get the facts, and be quick about it, too, for my copy had to be written out and in the office of the *Evening Smile* in time for the first edition. There was barely an hour in which to do the whole business.

I forced my way through the crowd now gathering again on the corner, and made my way across the road to where a group of men was standing not far from the stable doors. They moved about a bit when the roars came, but none of them ran, and I noticed some of them had pistols in their hands, and some heavy crowbars, and other weapons. Evidently, I judged, they were men connected with the circus, and I joined the group and explained my mission.

"Well, that's right enough," said one of them. "You've got a grand newspaper

story this time. Old Yellow Hair's in there, sure pop! And, what's more, I don't see how we're ever going to get him out again."

"The horse must be stiff by now," said another. "He was mauled half to death an hour ago."

"It'd be a shame to have to shoot him," added a third, meaning the lion. "He's the best animal in the whole circus; but he is awful savage."

"That's a fact," chimed in a fourth. "There's no flies on old Yellow Hair."

Some one touched me on the arm and introduced himself as a reporter from the *Evening Grin*—a fellow-worker in distress. He said he didn't like the job at all. He wanted us to go off and concoct a "fake story." But I wouldn't agree to this, and it fell through; for unless all the evening papers conspire to write the same story there's always trouble at the office when the reporters get back.

Other reporters kept joining the group, and in twenty minutes from the time of my arrival on the scene there must have been a good dozen of us. Every paper in town was represented. It was a first-class news story, and the men who were paid by space were already working hard to improve its value by getting new details, such as the animal's history and pedigree, names of previous victims, human or otherwise, the description and family history of its favourite keeper, and every other imaginable detail under the sun.

"There's an empty loft above the stable," said one of the circus men, pointing to a smaller door on the storey above; and before ten minutes had passed some one arrived with a ladder, and the string of unwilling reporters was soon seen climbing up the rungs and disappearing like rats into a hole through the door of the loft. We drew lots for places, and I came fifth.

Before going up, however, I had got a messenger-boy stationed in the street below to catch my "copy" and hurry off with it to the *Evening Smile* as soon as I could compose the wonderful story and throw it down to him. The reporter on an evening paper in New York has to write his "stuff," as we called it, in wonderful and terrible places, and under all sorts of conditions. The only rules he must bear in mind are: Get the news, and get it *quick*. Accuracy is a mere detail for later editions—or not at all.

The loft was dark and small, and we only just managed to squeeze in. It smelt pleasantly of hay. But there was another odour besides, that no one understood at

first, and that was decidedly unpleasant. Overhead were thick rafters. I think every one of us noticed these before he noticed anything else, for the instant the roar of that lion sounded up through the boards under our feet the reporters scattered like chaff before the wind, and scuttled up into those rafters with a speed, and dust, and clatter I have never seen equalled. It was like sparrows flying from the sudden onslaught of a cat.

Fat men, lean men, long men, short men—I never saw such a collection of news-gatherers; smart men from the big papers, shabby fellows from the gutter press, hats flying, papers fluttering; and in less than a second after the roar was heard there was not a solitary figure to be seen on the floor. Every single man had gone aloft.

We all came down again when the roar ceased, and with subsequent roars we got a little more accustomed to the shaking of the boards under our feet. But the first time at such close quarters, with only a shaky wooden roof between us and "old Yellow Hair," was no joke, and we all behaved naturally and without pose or affectation, and ran for safety, or rather climbed for it.

There was a trap-door in the floor through which, I suppose, the hay was passed down to the horses under normal circumstances. One by one we crawled on all-fours to this trap-door and peered through. The scene below I can see to this day. As soon as one's eyes got a little accustomed to the gloom the outline of the stalls became first visible. Then a human figure seated on the top of an old refrigerator, with a pistol in one hand, pointed at a corner opposite, came into view. Then another man, seated astride the division between the stalls, could be seen. And last, but not least, I saw the dark mass on the floor in the far corner, where the dead horse lay mangled and the monster of a lion sprawled across his carcass, with great paws outstretched, and shining eyes.

From time to time the man on the ice-box fired his pistol, and every time he did this the lion roared, and the reporters flew and climbed aloft. The trap-door was never occupied a single second after the roar began, and as the number of persons in the loft increased and the thin wooden floor began to bend and shake, a number of these adventurous news-gatherers remained aloft and never put foot to ground. Braver reporters threw their copy out of the door to the messenger-boys below, and every time this feat was accomplished the crowd, safely watching on the corners opposite, cheered and clapped their hands. A steady stream of writing dropped from that loft-door and poured all the morning into the offices of the evening newspapers; while the morning-newspaper men sat

quietly and looked on, knowing that they could write up their own account later from the reports in the evening sheets.

The men in the stable below, occupying positions of great peril, were, of course, connected with the travelling circus. We shouted down questions to them, but more often got a pistol-shot instead of a voice by way of reply. Where all those bullets went to was a matter for anxious speculation amongst us, and the roaring of the lion combined with the reports of the six-shooter to keep us fairly dancing on that wooden floor as if we were practising a cake-walk.

A sound of cheering from the crowd outside, swelling momentarily as the neighbourhood awoke to the situation, brought us with a rush to the top of the ladder.

"It's the strong man!" cried several voices. "The strong man of the circus. He'll fix up the lion quick enough. Give him a chance!"

A huge man, who, rightly enough, proved to be the performing strong man of the circus, was seen making his way through the crowd, asking questions as he went. A pathway opened up for him as if by magic, and, carrying a mighty iron crowbar, he reached the foot of the ladder and began to climb up.

Thrilled by the sight of this monster with the determined-looking jaw, a dozen men rushed forward to hold the bottom of the ladder while he ascended; but when he was about half-way up, the lion was inconsiderate enough to give forth a most terrifying roar, with the immediate result that the men holding the ladder turned tail with one accord and fled. The ladder slipped a few inches, and the ascending Samson, crowbar and all, very neatly came to the ground with a crash. Fortunately, however, he just managed to grab the ledge of the door, and a dozen reporters seized him by the shoulders and dragged him, safe, but a trifle undignified, into the loft.

Talking very loud, and referring to the lion with a richness of epithets I have never heard equalled before or since, he crossed the floor and began to squeeze through the hole into the dangerous region below. In a moment he was hanging with legs dangling, and a second later had dropped heavily into a pile of hay underneath him. We lowered the crowbar to him, breathless with admiration; and then a strange thing happened. For, while the lion roared and the pistols banged, and we reporters tumbled over each other to get a glimpse of the attack of the lion on the strong man, or *vice versa*, lo! a voice below shouted to close the trap, and the same instant a board from below shot across the opening and completely

obliterated our view.

"We'll have to fake that part of the fight," said a reporter. "Must all agree on the same yarn."

The sounds from below prevented the details being agreed upon just at that moment, for such a hoolabaloo as we then heard is simply indescribable—shooting, lion roaring, strong man shouting, crowbar clanging, and the sound of breaking wood and heavy bodies falling.

Outside the crowd heard it too, and remained absolutely silent. Most of them, indeed, had vanished! Every minute they expected to see the doors burst open and the enraged animal rush out with the strong man between his jaws, and their silence was accordingly explained by their absence.

At least half of the reporters were still among the rafters when the trap-door shot back in the floor, and a voice cried breathlessly that the strong man had caged the lion.

It was, indeed, a thrilling moment. We clambered down the ladder and out into the street just in time to see the great doors open and a procession emerge that was worth all the travelling circuses in the world put together to see.

First came the trainer, with a pistol in either hand. Following him was the man with the small crowbar who had sat on the division between the stalls. Then came a great iron cage, which had been in the stable all the time, but a little out of our line of vision in a dark corner, so that no one had observed it.

In this cage lay the huge exhausted lion, panting, on its side, with lather dripping from its great jaws.

And on the top of the cage, seated tailor-wise, dressed in a very loud check ulster, and wearing a bell-shaped opera-hat on the side of his head, was the proud figure of the victorious strong man. The expression on his face was worth painting, but it is wholly beyond me to describe it. Such exultation and glorious pride was worthy of the mightiest gladiator that ever fought in an arena.

His long curly hair, shining with oil, escaped in disorder from his marvellously shaped top hat, and the massive crowbar that had brought him his hard-won victory stood upright on one end, grasped in his gigantic hand. He smiled round on the gathering crowd, and the procession moved proudly up the streets till within half an hour the people following and cheering must have numbered

many thousands.

We reporters rushed off to our various offices, and the streets were soon afterwards lively with newspaper-boys shouting the news and waving sheets of terrible and alarming headlines about the "escaped lion and its fearful ravages," and the "strong man who had captured it after a ghastly battle for his life."

Next day the morning papers did not publish a solitary line about the great event; but in the advertising columns of every newspaper appeared the prospectus of the travelling circus just come to town, and in particularly bold type the public were told to be sure and see Yellow Hair, the savage man-eating lion, that had escaped the day before and killed a valuable horse in a private stable where it had been chased by the terrified keepers; and, in the paragraph below, the details followed of the wonderful strong man, Samson, who had caught and caged the lion single-handed, armed only with a crowbar.

It was the best advertisement a circus ever had; and most of it was not paid for!

"Guess you knew it was all a fake?" queried the news editor next morning, as he gave me the usual assignment.

It was my first week on an American paper, and I stared at him, waiting for the rest.

"That lion hasn't a tooth in its head. They dragged in a dead horse in the night. You wrote a good story, though. Cleaned your pistol yet?"

X

THE SECRET CAVE OF HYDAS

Chapter I.—The Fight and Theft in the Museum

A tall, muscular, black-bearded, dark-eyed, beak-nosed native strolled into the Lahore Museum, in the Punjab; he carried a massive five-foot-long stick with a crook handle, and studded with short brass-headed nails from handle to ferrule. He sauntered about until he came to a case containing ancient daggers and swords, which arrested his attention for some time.

About a dozen other visitors were in the room, and of these a couple strolled together from one object of interest to another; they were fine stalwart natives, and each possessed a stick of ordinary size.

These two men quietly walked about exchanging opinions on the various curios until they came face to face with the solitary man gazing at the antique weapons.

"What! art thou here, thou badmash (scoundrel)?" exclaimed one of the two.

"Ah, thou son of a swine, take that!" replied the tall man, and, with a quickness which proved him to be an expert in the handling of a stick, struck the native who had addressed him a vicious blow on the head, but, the said head being protected by many folds of his puggari, the stroke merely knocked him down without doing any serious injury.

In an instant the fallen man's friend struck at the assailant, and, the other man springing up, a fierce fight was quickly in full swing, two against one, and the noise of the sticks rattling together in powerful strokes, and the insulting taunts thrown at each other by the combatants, soon attracted the other sight-seers and the Museum attendants.

In a few minutes the fighters had been turned out of the building; they had done no damage except to themselves, and neither party would bring a charge against the other, so they scowlingly went in opposite directions as soon as they were outside.

"A family feud," said a bystander.

"Yes, I expect it is a vendetta," responded another.

These remarks, however, were very far from the truth, for the apparent enemies were the greatest friends and bound together by the most solemn vows, and in fact the realistic fight had been pre-arranged with a definite object, which was successfully attained, as indeed the Museum officials discovered later.

The day after the fracas Doctor Mullen, Government geologist, called at the Museum; he was accompanied by his son Mark, a sturdily built lad of about eighteen, who was preparing to follow his father's profession, and with them was Tom Ellison, the Doctor's assistant, a young man of twenty-four, tall and extremely active.

"Well, Ramji Daji, what's this I hear about a robbery at the Museum yesterday?" asked the doctor of the assistant curator.

"Ah, Sahib, I am very sorry, but the badmashes stole those pieces of strangely carved stones you found on the Salt Range mountains, and also another piece, which was lying near them on the table here," answered Ramji Daji.

"But what in the world did they carry them off for? They can be of no value to anybody," remarked the Doctor.

"I don't know, Sahib. There was a fight here yesterday, and some hours after we missed the five fragments of inscribed stone and one piece belonging to another set. Had they taken any of the gold or silver things we could have understood, but——" and Ramji Daji made a gesture expressive of the puzzled state of his own mind.

"There can be only two reasons for the strange theft—it is either a practical joke, or some one saw the stones who was able to decipher them—which we could not —but the joke theory seems the more probable," said the Doctor.

The pieces of stone referred to consisted of five irregular fragments of a slab, an inch or so thick, the largest being about seven inches long by four or five wide, and the smallest some four inches by two. These five parts would not fit evenly together, and in the Doctor's opinion they formed about half of the original slab.

The Doctor had taken a careful rubbing on paper of the letters on the stones, and sent it to a friend for the purpose of deciphering it if possible.

"I wonder, Doctor, whether any one from the Salt Range stole the stones? Do you remember that your tent was surreptitiously searched a few nights after you had found the pieces?" remarked Tom Ellison.

"I remember my things having been ransacked, and we concluded some thief had been disturbed, but we never for a moment thought they were after the bits of inscribed slab, which, by the way, I had sent off the day before when sending for stores for the camp," he replied.

"Well, if he was after the stones he may have followed us to Lahore and you to the Museum, when you came to take a rubbing of the lettering," said Tom.

"There must be a clue to something written on them, if any one took all the trouble to come so far for them," suggested Mark Mullen.

"To-morrow I hope to hear from Professor Muirson, and he will probably throw some light on the meaning of the inscription," said the Doctor. "But come, we must get back to work, for I have to finish my report before we start into camp again in a couple of days' time," he added, and they hurried away to their own office, but at least Mark's mind was full of thoughts concerning the stolen stones, and conjuring up all sorts of strange mysteries connected with them.

Doctor Mullen duly received from the Professor the expected letter, a part of which read as follows—

"There can be no doubt that the ruins in which you found the fragments of inscribed slab are those of a Greek settlement which was most probably founded on the Salt Range by camp followers, and possibly soldiers, of Alexander the Great's army who were left behind on his return from India.

"I can only conclude from the rubbing you have sent me that it is not from the original inspection, but that the slab of which you have found parts was inscribed from memory at a much later period, it being made up of three languages. The original sense may or may not have been retained, and as far as I am able to understand it the incomplete wording would in English read—' ... into thy charge ... guarded ... descendants with life ... of Hydas ... sacrifice ... the gods.'

"I have made no attempt to guess at the missing words, for, as you will see at a glance, the incomplete sentences allow of a variety of renderings, thereby causing great uncertainty with regard to the original meaning."

"I wish we had the other parts of the slab," exclaimed Mark, as soon as his father

had read out the letter.

"Yes, it is rather interesting. Well, we start to-morrow for the Salt Range to continue our work, and I will show you the exact spot where I found the pieces, and a diligent search there may be rewarded by the discovery of at least some of the other portion," said the Doctor; and both Mark and Tom Ellison hoped such might prove to be the case, little thinking what dangers they would be led into on account of those fragments of an old, broken slab.

CHAPTER II.—MARK MULLEN DISAPPEARS

"Now then, Mark, down you come," said Tom Ellison, as he shook the lad, who had lowered the upper sleeping-berth in the train and gone to sleep.

"What time is it? Where are we?" Mark asked drowsily.

"Near midnight, and we are at Gunjyal," answered Tom.

"What a beastly hour to turn out!" grumbled Mark as he scrambled down.

In half an hour the servants and a camel—which had been waiting—had started for the Doctor's destination, a place on the Salt Range some twelve miles away.

At daybreak three horses arrived, and the Doctor and his two companions started for their camp.

After breakfast the Doctor took his son and Tom Ellison, accompanied by a servant, to a small valley about a quarter of a mile from the camp.

"Here you are," said the Doctor; "this is the exact spot where I found the pieces of slab."

"Then I should say the rest can't be far away," remarked Tom, and they commenced poking around with the ends of iron-shod sticks. They had been twenty minutes at their task when a boy in charge of some goats planted himself on a rock not far away and keenly watched the Sahibs at work.

"Don't you think it would be a good plan, Doctor, if we got a few coolies to

loosen the subsoil and turn over some of these loose stones about here?—it would be easier for us to search," suggested Tom.

"Yes, we may as well make a thorough search now we are at it," replied the Doctor, who at once sent the servant to the village near the camp for some coolies and tools.

The boy had disappeared before the coolies arrived, for he had received a signal from a man who was secretly watching the search-party from the top of a cliff some seventy yards away.

The natives had not been long at work when one of them slipped, and his puggari pitched off exactly on to the spot where the next coolie had turned over a stone. The man picked up his puggari and moved a few yards off to wind it round his head again, and almost immediately the goat-boy appeared and asked him if he had seen a stray goat.

Tom Ellison happened to be standing up examining a strange fossil he had found, and as he casually glanced at the boy he saw the coolie hand him something, which he promptly hid in the folds of a kind of scarf hanging over his shoulder.

In a moment a suspicion flashed into Tom's mind, and he rushed forward and seized the boy before he could make off, and no sooner had he felt the lad's kupra (cloth) than he discovered that the youngster had hidden a newly found piece of the slab which had been picked up by the coolie.

The Doctor and Mark were at once by Tom's side examining the fragment and listening to Tom's explanation. In their excitement they forgot about the boy, and when they looked round became aware that both he and the coolie had disappeared.

The sides of the hills all about were covered with low shrubs, large stones, and nullahs, or ravines, and, although a quick search was made, neither man nor boy could be seen.

When the day was over they had met with no further success as regards finding parts of the slab, but they took away several other stones which they thought might possibly prove to be of some interest, and most of the evening after dinner was spent in discussing the reason which prompted the theft from the Museum, and the attempt to steal the stone found during the day.

"There can be no doubt I was seen examining the fragments I found," said the Doctor. "I remember now that three or four natives were watching me trying to place the several pieces together in my attempts to get an idea of the whole. Strange that these natives should take so keen an interest in an old, broken slab, for the pieces must have been lying there for years."

"I expect we shall have to keep a sharp eye on this piece, for they are sure to have a try for it, judging by what they have already done," said Tom.

"They seem to have a sharp eye on us. I shouldn't be surprised if they thought we came here purposely to hunt for the stones," said Mark.

"Well, I will take a copy of the letters on it at once, in case anything happens to the stone," said the Doctor.

Next day an official letter arrived which necessitated either the Doctor or Tom returning to Lahore for a few hours, and it was decided the letter should go.

"Now listen," said the Doctor as Tom was about to start on his journey. "Take the stone to the Museum and tell them to place it where they can watch any one who takes any peculiar interest in it. Further, get a description of those men who were fighting there on the day the stones were stolen; and don't forget to post my letter to the Professor, for it contains a rubbing from the last piece."

With these parting instructions Tom started on his ride to Gunjyal station so as to arrive there before dark, there being practically no road from the foot of the Salt Range across the miles of dismal tract of sandy plain to the station, although his train did not leave until midnight; but it was the only train in the twenty-four hours.

Tom was half-asleep when he got into the train; he had the compartment to himself, and he thought it likely he would remain alone until he arrived at Lala Musa, about eight o'clock, where he would have to change to get on to the main line, so he quickly spread his bedding, and, drawing the green-baize shade over the lamp, he was soon asleep.

He could not say where it happened, but when he roused up the train was in motion and he was just conscious he was not alone; but the instant he attempted to move, a rug was thrown over his face, and he knew he was being held down by at least two powerful assailants. In a very short time, notwithstanding his fierce struggles, he was bound hand and foot, a gag in his mouth, and

blindfolded, without having the slightest idea of the appearance of those who had attacked him.

Whilst Tom was in this condition the train stopped several times, but no one entered the compartment, and, as the Venetian shutters were down, it was impossible for any one to peer through the window and so become aware of his position.

He tried to knock his feet against the side of the carriage at the first station, but he was bound too securely to the seat which formed his bed to allow of the slightest movement, so wearily and painfully the hours dragged on until the guard discovered him and set him free at Lala Musa station.

The moment he was released he found that the only thing missing was the fragment of slab he was to have taken to the Museum.

"They followed me to Gunjyal and then slipped into my carriage at some station whilst I was asleep, and quietly slipped out at the next station when they had got what they wanted," mused Tom.

By the time he had given an account of what had happened to him he had only a few minutes in which to rush over to the refreshment-room and get some breakfast before his train was due.

When Tom arrived in Lahore he went straight to his office, and in a couple of hours he had completed the special work which had necessitated his journey; then he went over to the Museum.

"The thief has been caught, Sahib," said one of the attendants as Tom entered the building.

"When? Who is he?" asked Tom, in considerable surprise, for he had concluded that his late assailants were the men who had robbed the Museum.

"They caught him during last night, but I don't know much about it yet," replied the man.

Tom at once hurried off to the police-station to learn full particulars.

"Yes, we found a piece of stone with some strange device on it," said the Superintendent of Police. "This is it. Do you recognise it?" he added, as he handed Tom the stone.

"No, this is not the one the Doctor found," said Tom, after a moment's examination.

"Well, it is the only bit we got, and we are told it was stolen from the Museum with some others, during a fight," said the officer.

"How did you get this?" asked Tom.

"Well, in rather a strange way. The night after the stones had disappeared three clever burglaries took place in Lahore, and the thieves made valuable hauls in each case, but we could get no clue. Last night an anonymous letter came to us, and we decided to act upon it, so we searched a house in the bazaar and recovered this stone together with some gold and silver ornaments which had been stolen; we found them in the exact spot where we were told to look for them. The man says he is innocent, and that they were placed where we found them unknown to him. Now you know the whole case," said the police-officer.

"And the man you have arrested, do you think he is connected with the men who were fighting in the Museum?" asked Tom.

"He says not. He certainly is not one of the fighters. He does not bear the best of characters, however," was the reply.

Tom related what had happened to him in the train; several theories were advanced to account for the keen interest taken in the stones, and the police began exerting themselves to fathom the mystery.

The morning after Tom Ellison had left the camp a shikari went to Mark with the information that some oorial (wild sheep) were feeding about half a mile away, and Mark, who was a keen sportsman, promptly got his rifle and went with the shikari.

Mark was able to get a long shot, but missed, so sat down while the shikari climbed the peaks around to try and find the oorial again. In about ten minutes Mark heard a slight rustling in the bushes some twenty yards away, and he got a glimpse of a porcupine. He did not wish to fire at it lest he should startle the oorial if they had halted anywhere near, so he picked up a stone and threw it at the animal when next he saw it.

"I have hit it," he muttered, as he heard a peculiar cry, and he hurried forward, but he could find no sign of the porcupine, and he concluded it had entered a small cave he discovered.

Mark struck a match and went in a few feet, but it appeared to be very low, and when his match went out he decided to go no farther, for he had no desire to stumble on the top of a porcupine.

In a short time the shikari returned, and Mark thought no more about the animal until he had been back at the camp some time.

While Mark had been away on his shooting expedition, Harry Burton, the Superintendent of Police, had called, and during the afternoon Mark casually mentioned the incident of the porcupine.

"I think you are mistaken about it being a porcupine, my boy," said Burton.

"I don't think so. I saw it twice and hit it with the stone, for I distinctly heard it make a peculiar noise as though hurt," persisted Mark.

"That is exactly what makes me certain it was not a porcupine, for it is one of the animals without vocal cords, therefore cannot make a vocal sound. It was more likely a wild pig, for there are a number about here," said Burton, who was a great sportsman.

Mark, however, felt certain he had distinctly seen the animal's quills, so a little later he quietly left the camp without saying a word to any one as to where he was going.

At nine o'clock that night Mark had not returned to camp, and Burton, who had remained to dinner, suggested that he might have got lost, or met with an accident; so a search was at once commenced.

CHAPTER III.—THE MYSTERIOUS FAKIR

"Well, Burton, what is your opinion now?" asked Doctor Mullen on their return to camp about three o'clock in the morning, after an unsuccessful search for Mark.

"I am sorry to say I think he has met with a serious accident and is unable to help himself. Listen to those natives shouting 'Sahib! Sahib!' and far beyond them others are calling, and the boy would have replied if he could have done so. You

are sure he went alone?" asked Burton.

"Yes. He took his gun, which seems to suggest that he started for that lake about a mile from here after duck. Had he gone after oorial he would have taken his rifle and would have been accompanied by the shikari," said the Doctor, who was greatly distressed about his son's disappearance.

"As soon as it is light I will have every nullah and bush searched for miles round," said Burton, and then he mused without giving expression to his thoughts. "He may have fallen over a kud (precipice), or his gun may have burst, or he may have been bitten by a snake, or he may have run against those—well, fragments of slab"; and he left the tent and sent off messages to the headmen of the villages around.

Harry Burton was one of the cleverest officers in the Indian police; he was a few years over thirty, a dark-complexioned man of medium height, very agile and powerful, and was known to the Salt Range natives as Koj (tracker) Burton Sahib, owing to his smartness in following up the slightest clue.

Burton, at the Doctor's request, went to occupy Mark's empty tent for an hour or two, and as he stretched himself on the camp bed his busy brain was engaged in trying to form a connection between the broken slab and Mark's absence, and these thoughts kept him awake, so he was the first to hear the footsteps of an approaching horse.

"Hello! Is that you, Ellison?" greeted Burton, as the new arrival dismounted.

"Yes. I heard at Gunjyal about Mark, so, instead of waiting for daylight, I hunted up a horse, and, by all this shouting, I conclude Mark is still missing," said Tom, and in a very few minutes he had related to Burton and the Doctor his experience in the train and what he had learnt in Lahore.

"Ah, things are getting a bit more complicated," said Burton aloud, and then muttered to himself, "But I begin to get a better hold of the idea."

"Now you clearly understand me," said Burton when instructing the headmen. "You are to send out every available man and boy from your villages, and they are to search every nullah until they meet the men from the next village. We think the young Sahib has met with an accident, and if you find him you are to send word here immediately; and you, Appoyas, instruct your men to be most careful in searching those cliffs near your village."

"What's that man's name?" asked the Doctor as soon as the men had gone.

"Appoyas. It is an unusual name—certainly not a Punjabi one," replied Burton.

"I never heard the name before. He is a fine-looking man," remarked the Doctor.

"And a very wealthy man, according to report. That is his village on the very edge of those cliffs about a mile away. It is the most prosperous village on the Salt Range, and celebrated for its stamped-cloth work. Appoyas and his brother Atlasul—another uncommon name—buy up all the cloth made and stamped in the place, and give a good price too, and their camels frequently go off laden with bales. But come over here a minute," and Burton led the Doctor some short distance from the camp.

"I can scarcely credit it; surely it is too improbable, how——" began the Doctor when he had heard what Burton had to say.

"Never mind; kindly act in the manner I suggest," interrupted Burton, "and I think you will find I am right. Now I must be off, and—well, expect me when you see me, as they say"; and in a couple of minutes he was riding from the camp on a secret and dangerous expedition.

The search was continued all day, but not the slightest sign of Mark could be discovered.

If any one, about sunset, had been near the place where Mark was resting at the time he thought he saw the porcupine, a Fakir might have been seen sitting on the identical spot. He appeared to be in deep meditation, but, as soon as it was dark, he crept cautiously to the entrance of the cave into which Mark thought the porcupine had disappeared.

The Fakir paused, and after listening intently for a few moments he scrambled in; and after again listening he produced a bull's-eye lamp—a most unusual thing for a native to possess—and carefully lit it.

He next examined a revolver and a knife he carried in a girdle under a loose garment he had wrapped round him, and in addition to these weapons he had an iron rod about three feet and a-half long, similar to what many Fakirs carry.

He now advanced along a narrow passage which widened into a large cave, from which opened another narrow passage, and this he proceeded cautiously to explore, but when he had gone about a hundred yards it came to an abrupt end, the roof here being exceedingly high, and as he flashed his light around he could not see the top.

For the space of an hour he probed about with his iron rod, and felt in the cracks and crevices in the walls; then suddenly he sat down, and, had any one been near enough, they would have heard him chuckling to himself, for he had made a great discovery.

In a short time he made his way out of the cave and disappeared into the darkness of the night.

"What do you make of this, Ellison?" said the Doctor early next morning. "I have just found this note in my tent; it is written in Punjabi, and in English it reads: 'If the Sahib wishes to learn where his son is he will be told if you promise to give up the other pieces of stone you found. Let the Sahib write his promise on the blank part of this paper and place it on the small olive-tree near the salt spring. The Sahib's men need not watch, for they will not see who fetches it.'

"Do you think it is a hoax?" asked the Doctor.

"I don't know. I scarcely think so. I wish Burton was back," said Tom, who thought that Burton's experience might enable him to get something of a clue from the strange message. "They have got all the stones," he added.

"We took others that did not belong to the slab," said the Doctor.

"Of course, I had forgotten; and the writer of this is under the impression they are parts of the slab," remarked Tom.

"If this is genuine, then Mark is a prisoner, which is Burton's opinion; and I believe he is acting in some secret manner on his opinion," said the Doctor.

After a long consultation the Doctor tore off the blank piece of paper and wrote on it in the native language: "You must first give me some proof that you know where my son is before I promise to comply with your request. Let him write to

me."

"We both know where the salt spring is, Tom, so I will take the paper there, and you go to some place where you can watch the spring through your field-glasses," said the Doctor.

"Very good. By the time we get a reply Burton may be back," said Tom, and they left the camp.

Tom watched patiently all day, but, with the exception of a boy in charge of some goats, no one went near the spring, and the boy did not go within a hundred yards of it, though his goats were feeding all round and close to it.

"Glad to see you back, Burton," exclaimed Tom when he returned to camp and found the officer there.

"What luck, Tom?" asked the Doctor.

"Bad. I waited until it was too dark to see, and the message had not been taken when I came away," he replied.

"You are wrong, Tom, my boy, for I saw it taken," said Burton.

"How? Where were you?" asked Tom, in surprise.

"Not far from you, and I saw a goat sniff it and quickly walk off with the paper in its mouth, and five minutes later the boy had it in his hand. Here, smell this," and Burton held out the paper containing the message to the Doctor.

"A peculiar smell," said Tom.

"Yes, and the goat is trained to carry anything impregnated with that subtle odour," explained Burton.

"Do you believe the writer of this knows where Mark is, Burton? Have you discovered anything?" asked Tom.

"Yes, the man knows well enough, and I know to half a mile," said Burton.

"They why not try to release him at once?" exclaimed Tom.

"Easier said than done, and I am fully convinced it would be dangerous to force matters without careful arrangements. I practically know with whom we have to deal, and, if I am any judge of native character, I believe we are in conflict with

some of the most cunning and fearless men in India—men who had been carrying on their work for many years, and that, too, without raising suspicion, and who will not hesitate to risk life and cause death to accomplish their purpose, and——" Burton suddenly stopped speaking; then, almost in a whisper, he hurriedly said, "Go on talking about Mark," and noiselessly he left the tent.

In a few moments there was a sound of a scuffle at the back of the tent, followed by a thud and an exclamation from Burton; so they rushed out to see what had happened, the Doctor taking the lamp from the tent-pole as he passed.

"What's the matter, Burton?" asked Tom.

"Bring the lamp here," he answered, rubbing his knees. "They were too smart for me, and I got the worst of it this time," he added.

"What is that rope doing there?" asked the Doctor, as the light revealed a long rope extending from a tent-peg to a considerable distance into the darkness.

"Oh, it is there for a purpose, and it answers too well to suit me, for it has given me one of the heaviest falls I have had for a long time. A man was there listening to us, and it would have made no difference which way I had come round the tent, for the eavesdropper would have gone in the opposite direction. When I heard him making off I dashed after him, and his comrade, who was at the far end of the rope, jerked it taut when it was between me and the man I was after, with the result that I came a most terrific cropper; then they promptly fled, and are safely away by this time," explained Burton.

"But how did you know there was any one outside?" asked Tom. "I never heard a sound."

"I saw the side of the tent shake, and there is not a breath of air stirring. The man who was listening must know English, I feel sure; and I am afraid we have made a terrible mistake in not taking precautionary measures against being overheard. If they understood what I said about suspecting who they are, I may make up my mind to having a rather lively time." Burton said in a whisper, for he did not know but some one might still be listening screened in the darkness.

"They may have only come to watch us, and probably did not grasp the meaning of our conversation," said the Doctor, in a low voice.

"Let us hope so, for it may mean life or death," was Burton's serious reply, and that night guards were set over the camp.

Early next morning Burton left, but before going he slipped a letter into the Doctor's hand, saying as he did so, "Don't open it unless I am not back by eight o'clock to-morrow morning. Inside you will find full instructions what to do if I have not returned."

CHAPTER IV.—A CAPTURE

Soon after Burton had left the camp the Doctor received a letter from Professor Muirson in which he said, "The only word on the rubbing you sent me from the last fragment of slab you found means 'Cave,' and I think it should be placed before the words 'of Hydas'; thus you have a reference to the 'Cave of Hydas,' in which there is, or was, something to be carefully guarded."

"Then, putting two and two together, the men who hold Mark a prisoner are either anxious to learn where this Cave of Hydas is, or they know where it is and do not wish any one else to obtain the knowledge," said the Doctor.

"I am inclined to think that Mark is in that very cave at the present moment," said Tom.

"Quite possible. By the way, Tom, tell the natives who are crowding about the camp to continue the search for Mark. Burton wishes it to be kept up for some reason or other," said the Doctor as he went into his tent.

"Hi! Tom; come here a moment," almost immediately shouted the Doctor; and as soon as Tom had joined him he said, "I have just found this—listen: 'I have been asked to say that I am all right, and to advise you to do what my captors have requested you. Your reply is to be written on the blank part of this paper and placed where you put the last. Mark.' There can be no doubt about the writing—it is Mark's, and my mind is greatly relieved," said the Doctor.

"Mark knows one of his captors understands English or he would have written more; he was only allowed to write what he was told," said Tom.

The Doctor at once wrote the following reply: "Mark, you are to tell them that if one of their number will come with you here he may take away any of the stones we have found."

This answer was written with the object of delay until Burton's return; and, as before, the Doctor took the paper to the salt spring, while Tom went to a position where he could watch the goat carry away the message to the boy; and he had not long to wait, for within a couple of hours the boy and his goats appeared and slowly passed the place, and, as they quietly went along from bush to bush cropping the leaves, one took the letter, and in a few minutes the boy had taken it from the goat.

That night, as soon as it was dark, the mysterious Fakir again entered the cave he had examined a couple of nights previously. He lit his lamp as soon as he was inside, and went straight to the far end.

Here he stood for a time and listened; then he flashed his light up the chimney-shaped opening high above him, the top of which extended far beyond the reach of his light; then, having satisfied himself that all was quiet, he put his arm into a narrow crack in the side of the cave and his fingers grasped two thin ropes; he gave them a sharp jerk, and instantly there was a rustling, swishing noise as a rope-ladder came tumbling down.

The Fakir tugged at the ladder, and, finding that it was securely fastened above, he at once climbed up. When he had gone about forty feet he found the entrance to another passage; but before venturing to explore it he carefully drew up the ladder as it had been before.

The Fakir cautiously made his way, frequently stopping to put his ear to the floor to listen, and keeping a sharp look-out for any side galleries, of which he passed three, but they were much narrower than the one he was following.

He had proceeded about three hundred yards when he suddenly closed the shutter of his lamp; then, after listening a while, he went on in the dark, and it was well he had turned off his light, for the passage took an abrupt turn, and he saw the glimmer of a light in the distance and faintly heard the sound of voices.

Slowly and noiselessly he approached the light, for he concluded it came from some side cave, and this proved to be the case when he had gone a little farther.

"I tell you again that you have got all the stones if, as you say, you have stolen the one Ellison Sahib was taking to Lahore."

The words were spoken in a loud voice, and so suddenly had they broken the stillness of the dismal place that the Fakir started with surprise, and then

crouched closer to listen.

"What the Sahib says is not true, for we have only got one of the last you found the other day," said another speaker.

"Then get the rest if you can, for I know nothing about any more. How long is this farce going to last? My father says he will let you have any stones he has found if one of you will go with me for them, but I told you when you first captured me that you would get nothing of value by keeping me a prisoner," replied Mark, for he it was.

"Then you shall not leave this cave until the other parts of the broken slab are discovered and in our hands, and I may tell you that it is more than a hundred years since the slab was broken and some of the parts stolen and lost. Take him back to his cave"; and the Fakir could hear footsteps ascending steps and then die away in the distance.

"Now, brothers, hearken," began the speaker who had addressed Mark. "We have learnt that Koj Burton has almost guessed who we are, and if he follows up his idea he will surely track us down. Our forefathers through many generations protected the secret of their work and amassed wealth in the way we are doing, and, with the exception of the man who accidentally found his way into this cave and stole the inscribed slab, no outsider has ever known the secret of the Cave of Hydas—and that man met his death without having an opportunity of revealing what he had learnt, although he caused us to lose part of that on which was written the command to guard the secret of the cave with our lives.

"Are we now going to allow this Koj Burton to bring destruction upon us and thereby destroy our method of obtaining wealth?" asked the speaker fiercely.

"Never! never! never!" shouted fully half a dozen voices.

"Then he must die, and I will see that he does so, and in such a manner that his death cannot in any way be traced to us"; and as the Fakir heard these words he gripped his revolver more tightly, and a grim smile played about his mouth.

"If this Koj Burton suspects who we are, do you not think, Appoyas, that he may also have gained some idea of the Cave of Hydas?" a voice asked.

"It may be so, and we will have the cave well guarded. Do not forget that to-morrow night at ten o'clock it will be, according to the records, exactly fifty years since the offerings in the Temple of Atlas were removed to the Temple of

Hydas. This has been done every fifty years, and only on those occasions is the inner temple opened, and——" the speaker stopped abruptly, and then, after a moment's pause, continued—"and, brothers, you may now go."

On hearing the last words so suddenly spoken the Fakir began quickly and noiselessly to retreat along the passage, but, as no one appeared to be following, he stopped.

For some minutes he heard men talking, and dimly saw some figures come into the passage and go in the opposite direction, and in a short time the sound of footsteps died away and the Fakir was left alone in the silent darkness.

More than a quarter of an hour he remained motionless; then he felt his way to the entrance of the side cave in which he had heard the men, and, finding all still, he turned on his light.

It was a cave-chamber, about twelve feet square; the walls were fairly smooth, but the roof was uneven—it was evidently an enlarged cave. From this cave-chamber there was a flight of steps to a passage above, and the Fakir was on the point of ascending them when he heard quick footsteps coming along the passage towards him, which caused him to hurry back into the passage he had left; then, turning off his light, he waited and listened.

"One of the brothers must have come back for something," the Fakir heard some one mutter. "It is all right, though; I will return to my prisoner," and then he went away.

Without venturing to turn on his light the Fakir started for the rope-ladder; every few paces he paused to listen; he appeared extremely suspicious, for at times he would halt for three or four minutes and was constantly feeling his revolver.

At last he had nearly reached the ladder, when suddenly he saw a faint glimmer as though from a light in the passage below, so, inch by inch, he approached the edge until he was able to peer down, and almost at the instant he did so the light below went out; but he had learnt much in that one glance, and, as the sound of a severe struggle from below reached him, he quickly lowered the ladder and quietly slipped down.

No sooner had he reached the bottom than he turned on his light for an instant, which revealed Tom Ellison and a powerful native trying to get the better of each other, the latter having a knife in his hand, but Tom was holding him by the wrist

and preventing him using it.

In a moment the Fakir had twisted the knife from the man's grasp, and in a few seconds the man was bound and gagged.

"Well I'm——" began Tom, but the Fakir put his hand over Tom's mouth and, taking him by the arm, led him to the cave-entrance.

"Speak low, Tom," said the Fakir in a low voice.

"Marvellous! Is it you, Burton? I should never have known you in that get-up," whispered the surprised Tom.

"Seems like it. But quick's the word, my boy. We must have that man out before any of his comrades come along, and this must be done without his discovering who I am. We must blindfold him, for there is a rope-ladder hanging near him, and on no account must he learn that it is down, and that we are aware of its existence; as soon as we have him here I will return and place the ladder as I found it," said Burton.

"Ah, now I understand why you so promptly put out your light when you had secured the knife," said Tom. "But where shall you take the man? His comrades will hear about his capture if you take him to the camp," he added.

"That is the very last thing I wish them to learn. About an hour's walk from here—but two hours for us to-night, I am afraid—there is a salt-mine, and to-day I arranged—in case I needed it—to use part of it as a temporary prison until we make a grand coup on the rest of the gang. I have a couple of my men waiting near the mine now," explained Burton.

It was a difficult tramp they had with their prisoner. They kept him blindfolded, and his hands bound; and each held him by an arm as they stumbled over the rough ground in the dark, for Burton would not risk using his lamp lest the light, at that unusual hour, should attract the attention of the man's friends and cause them to try and discover what it meant.

When they had safely lodged their prisoner they started for the camp.

"What caused you to go to that cave, Tom?" asked Burton, as they walked along.

"Oh, the word on that last piece of stone turns out to be 'cave,' and when thinking the matter over I thought of the place Mark had entered after the porcupine, so I spotted the place before dark, and then quietly left the camp after dinner on a private exploring expedition. That man suddenly sprang upon me just before you so opportunely appeared on the scene," explained Tom.

"Then that's all right—you were followed from the camp; I was afraid they had placed a guard over that entrance," said Burton. "I branch off here, for I cannot enter the camp in this disguise; I want to use it again, and as a Fakir I do not wish to be seen near the camp; but I hope to turn up early in the—or rather this morning. I advise you to get all the rest you can, for I think I can promise you a very lively time before many hours are over."

As Burton went on alone, he muttered, "Yes, I must have all arrangements carefully made. I expect we shall have a dangerous tussle, for they are not the class of men to give in quietly."

Chapter V.—A Valuable Find in the Temple of Atlas

"It's what I call a tall order, Burton," exclaimed Tom Ellison, who, with the Doctor, had been listening to the police officer's plan to raid the Cave of Hydas.

"I am glad you turned up before eight o'clock, Burton, for it would be difficult to enter the cave and find our way about without your guidance. It seems a likely place to get one's head cracked in the dark," remarked the Doctor.

"It would not be easy for you to get in, but had I been caught last night you would have found a clue to my whereabouts in the letter I gave you. However, we are all here yet, and I expect we shall get the better of Appoyas and his gang if our plans work out properly, and if they don't, then, well—look out for yourselves," said Burton, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"What led you to suspect Appoyas, who you say is supposed to be one the wealthiest and most respected men on the Salt Range, Burton?" asked the

Doctor.

"Well, I saw him with that long brass-studded stick, and his general description answers to the tall man who fought the other two in the museum. Then I followed the goat-boy who got the message from the goat, and the boy handed the message to a man, and this man took it to Appoyas, and finally my suspicions were confirmed when I heard Appoyas addressed by name in the cave last night," explained Burton.

"It must have been pleasant listening to your own death-sentence!" remarked the Doctor.

"I am glad I heard it," said Burton, "for never was it more true than in my case that to be fore-warned is to be fore-armed. Two traps have been already laid this morning to get me away from the Salt Range, and—I believe here is another," he said, as a coolie came at the trot with a telegram in his hand.

"Come at once. Most serious. Mirkwort," read out Burton, as soon as the coolie had retired. "This pretends to be a message ordering my speedy return to headquarters, and I shall make a pretence of going, but I shall soon be back in this neighbourhood in disguise," he added.

"How do you know it is an attempt to get you away?" asked the Doctor.

"Because I requested Mirkwort to use a cypher in all his communications for some days, and this is not in cypher," replied Burton. "But to persist in staying here would only cause Appoyas to suspect that I am about to take some decisive steps. I have twenty men around here now, and as soon as it is dark to-night some of them will watch the house of Appoyas in the village on the top of the cliffs, for I feel convinced there is an entrance to the cave from his house.

"At the foot of the cliffs and immediately under the village there is another entrance through a house built against the rocks, and other men will watch there. I shall be near the camp at nightfall, together with some specially picked men who will have arrived by that time, and we shall enter the cave by what I will call the porcupine entrance, and, once inside—well, we have to rescue Mark and capture as many of the gang as we can. We must take all precautionary measures, for I do not know how many rascals we shall have to contend with, and that cave is like a rabbit-warren. Expect me as a Fakir at dusk. I will send for you when the time comes," and as Burton clattered away on his horse the camp understood that he had been called to headquarters on important business.

It was about nine o'clock and very dark when Burton, with a number of his men, though not in uniform, were sitting under the bushes a couple of hundred yards or so from the cave entrance.

"Ali Khan, go and meet the party from the camp and see that they make as little noise as possible," said Burton to one of his men; and then to another he said, "Sergeant, come with me; we must find out whether there is a guard placed at the entrance; if there is, we must secure him."

The two crept stealthily along, and, when some twenty yards from the cave, a man sprang up within a few feet of them and dashed off towards the cave, but he had not taken many steps when he tripped, and before he could recover himself Burton pounced upon him, and in a few moments the man was gagged and bound.

By the time the Doctor and Tom with the rest of the men had arrived, Burton had explored the cave as far as the rope-ladder without any further encounter.

Two men were left at the entrance of the cave with the prisoner, another was stationed at the foot of the ladder and two more at the top, and a man was left at each of the side passages opening from the main gallery.

"Now, Doctor," said Burton, when he had led the party some distance into the cave beyond the ladder, "will you remain here with the men whilst Tom goes with me to try and discover where Appoyas and his gang are, and how many we have to deal with? They have some special work on at ten o'clock in what they call the Temple of Atlas, and I don't know where it is. If you hear me whistle, then light your lamps and come on as quickly as possible. Now quietly, Tom," and they went ahead.

"She—e—e! See, there's a light. Some of them are in the cave-chamber where I heard them last night," whispered Burton to Tom.

Hearing voices, they silently crept nearer until they could hear what was said.

"I sent no message to the Doctor Sahib to-day, lest Koj Burton should remain to inquire into it. Brothers, Koj Burton is far away, and at the bottom of the river Hydaspes (Jhelum), I hope, if our men did their duty. Now, brothers, follow me to the Temple of Atlas and we will take the fifty years' offerings to the inner Temple of Hydas. By giving liberal offerings to the gods they bless us and we get much wealth. Come, it is the time."

The speaker was Appoyas, and under cover of the noise made in the chamber as his men lighted torches and prepared to follow him, Burton and Tom slipped some distance back along the passage, for they knew not which direction the men would take.

"Seven," whispered Burton as Appoyas and his men came into the passage and fortunately went the opposite way to where the Englishmen were watching.

Cautiously they followed; suddenly the men disappeared down a flight of steps, and when Burton and Tom peered below they were amazed at what they saw.

They were gazing into a large cave-temple, and at the far end was an enormous statute of a figure evidently representing Atlas with a large globe on his shoulders.

Burton and Tom were intently watching the men in the temple, when they were startled by hearing some on rapidly approaching along the passage. The man carried no light, and as the two Englishmen crouched close to the side of the cave to allow him to pass he knocked against Tom's arm.

"Strangers in the cave!" shouted the man, and he turned and fled.

For a moment the men in the temple were too amazed to move; then, simultaneously, they stamped out their torches.

"We have them trapped below if they have no other exit but the steps. That man's gone for help," said Burton, and blew his whistle. "We will have a look at them," he added, and turned on his lamp.

In an instant something flashed in the light and the lamp was knocked out of his hand and fell with a clatter down the steps, for Appoyas had crept up with his long brass-studded stick.

Next moment Tom felt himself hooked by the ankle, and before he could free himself his legs were jerked from under him and he fell on his back; then he felt a bare foot placed on his chest as some one trod on him and dashed down the passage.

No one else was able to pass, for Burton stood on the top of the steps, swinging his iron rod to and fro, and at the same time holding his whistle in his mouth and blowing until some of his men arrived with lights.

"Tom, you stop here with some of the men, and don't let any of these rascals escape. Listen! The Doctor is having a tussle; there is a fight going on all over the place, and I must discover where Mark is lest they should try to injure him." Taking a couple of men, he hurried away in the direction of the shouts which were ringing through the galleries.

"Hi! This way, Bur—r—r——" some one tried to shout in English.

"That's Mark's voice, and they are strangling him," said Burton. "Quick with your lamp, Sergeant, this way," he added.

Burton found Mark in the grasp of two men, who dashed the lad to the ground and then fled in the darkness, after showing fight for a few seconds, Burton pursuing them hotly, received a terrific blow on the head after being tripped by Appoyas, who was waiting in a side passage, and Burton lay partly stunned for some time.

Appoyas fought like a fiend, doing great damage with his stick, but at last he fled along a side passage.

In half an hour the fight was over, and Burton found they had eight prisoners; among whom was Atlasul, but Appoyas and some of the others had escaped.

Burton and Tom were exploring one of the narrow galleries when they suddenly came face to face with Appoyas, who, after throwing a knife at Burton, dashed down the passage followed by the two Englishmen.

They had gone about a hundred yards when Appoyas stopped, and his pursuers could see that he was standing on the very edge of a black chasm. For a moment he stood and faced them, his eyes flashing fiercely in the light of the lamp.

"You cannot escape us now, Appoyas," said Burton, covering him with a revolver.

"I will have a bitter revenge on you, Koj Burton. Here is the end of the passage, below is the Cave of Doom, but you have not got me yet," and, to the astonishment of Burton and Tom, Appoyas shouted a fierce cry of "Revenge!" and sprang into the fearsome black abyss.

"He must be dashed to pieces. I can't see the bottom," said Tom, holding his lamp over the gulf.

"I am doubtful. We will get a rope and make a search," said Burton.

Some time later a lamp was lowered, and far below, about six feet from the bottom, could be seen a strong net stretched the full width of the chasm.

"He dropped into that, and escaped by a secret exit," said Burton.

They proceeded to thoroughly explore the cave, and were astonished at the extent and number of side passages.

"I say, Burton, this globe on the shoulders of old Atlas is hollow and has a big slit in it like a letter-box, and has a lock on it," exclaimed Mark as they were examining the Temple of Atlas.

When the globe was opened it proved to be nearly full of gold and silver ornaments, precious stones, and coins.

"Ah, these are the offerings to the gods, a portion of the things stolen by these thieves during the last fifty years. A system of theft and sacrifice which has been handed down from father to son for many generations," exclaimed Burton.

The prisoners proved to be connected with burglaries which had taken place all over the Punjab and far beyond. The villains had been in the habit of placing a few of the things stolen in some innocent person's house, and had employed a variety of tricks to avoid suspicion resting on themselves.

The valuables recovered in the Temple of Atlas were restored to their rightful owners where they could be traced, and the balance was ultimately considered as treasure-trove, the Government claiming four annas in the rupee, thus leaving three-fourths of the value to be divided amongst those who had discovered it.

Many hours did the Englishmen spend in trying to discover the inner Temple of Hydas, but its secret baffled all their efforts, neither were they able to find any parts of the broken slab which might have aided them in their search. They were equally unsuccessful in getting any trace of Appoyas, who had so suddenly disappeared while his cry of revenge was ringing through the Cave of Hydas.

XI

AN ADVENTURE IN THE HEART OF MALAY-LAND

To the world-wanderer the confines of our little planet seem very limited indeed, and to him there are few regions within its boundaries which remain long unknown. Yet to the vast majority of people Old Mother Earth abounds in many a *terra incognita*.

Away in the East, where the Indian Ocean merges into the China Sea, where the sunny waters of the Malacca Straits are being ceaselessly furrowed by giant steamers and merchantmen, lies a land, which though spoken of glibly by every schoolboy, is to-day one of the least explored countries of the globe. The Malay Peninsula is a familiar enough name, and so it ought to be, for it skirts the ocean highway to the Flowery Kingdom and to some of our most valuable island possessions; still, it is a strange fact that this narrow neck of land is, geographically speaking, one of the world's darkest areas.

Its seaboard is generally flat and overgrown with mangroves to a depth of several miles, but the interior is an extremely mountainous region, containing elevations of over eight thousand feet. An irregular backbone connects all these great heights, and it itself is of no mean dimensions, being throughout well over three thousand feet above sea-level. Between the mountain-peaks, as may be imagined, there is little room for fertile plateaus, and the most settled districts in consequence are those farthest away from the towering ranges; of these Selangor is, perhaps, the most noteworthy. Here vast forests and jungle scrub extend everywhere, though the trees are being rapidly cut down by the numerous Chinese tin-miners in the settlement; and here also is the capital of the Federated Malay States, whose petty rulers within recent years have united their forces under a British Protectorate.

Perak, towards the north-west, and Pahang, stretching over to the sea on the eastern side, are the two most mountainous divisions in the Confederacy, and to the traveller they are also the most interesting because of the immunity of their interior fastnesses from the visits of white men. Numerous rivers reach the coast on both sides of the central watershed, many of those rising in the highlands of Pahang and Kelantan being absolutely untraced and unnamed. The entire

country near the coast, on the east as on the west, may be said to be given over to rank jungles, in which the lordly tiger, the one-horned rhinoceros, the wild pig, and tapir have their homes, and monkeys of almost every species are abundant in the wooded slopes.

One-half of the world's tin is produced in the Malay States; it is mined chiefly in Selangor and Malacca, and forms the mainstay of the country's prosperity, though, curiously enough, little or no stanniferous deposits have been found on the eastern side of the dividing range. But though very few people know it, the most valuable of all metals has been discovered on the upper waters of the Pahang River and tributaries. The Chinese swarm in their thousands on the western slopes, and outnumber the Malays by more than three to one. They are surely the bane of the wanderer's existence.

The Malays are not the aboriginal race of the Peninsula, though they have lived on the coast for centuries, and are descended from the bloodthirsty pirates who terrorised the Straits of Malacca. The real owners of the country are the Sakis, a wild race who in appearance vie with their brethren in Central Australia, and are very little different from the chimpanzees which infest the forests. They hold no intercourse with the coast-dwellers, and are rarely seen unless by the adventurous traveller, for their retreat is among the mountains, and as far away from John Chinaman's presence as it is possible to get.

The Sakis are a rude and miserably backward people. Like the Papuans of New Guinea, they build their huts in the branches of trees; but for this they have good reason—the prowling animals of the forest would otherwise soon obliterate the slowly dying tribe. Their only weapons are the *sumpitan*, or blow-pipe, and a club, which is not unlike the "waddie" of the Australian aboriginal; but with these they can do quite enough damage to deter all but the reckless from visiting their chosen haunts.

The charm of far-off countries has ever had a great power over all Britons; the true traveller's instinct is in their blood, and the noble array of red markings on our maps amply testify to the brilliance of their achievements. Knowing this, I speak with care of a country that I have traversed in my wanderings, so that if others who read these words may feel impelled to take up the pilgrim staff, they may at least rely upon my humble observations.

A few years back, after journeying through Achin in Sumatra—another little-known "corner" jealously guarded by the Dutch—I, with my five companions,

found it necessary to betake ourselves to British Dominions, having given offence to the Holland Government by our peregrinations through the hostile Achinese territory. So we embarked on a Malay trader bound for Klang, the port of Selangor, and commenced an expedition which I can recall now as being one of the most interesting of all my travels. The details of our progress across the Peninsula could not be given here, but I will relate one of our first experiences with the tree-dwellers of Kelantan, when we were camped on the head-waters of the Lebah River in that province, where, I believe, no white man had ever been before.

We had systematically prospected the various mountain-streams in the west for gold without result; but here we had discovered unmistakable traces of the precious metal; and our hearts being gladdened accordingly, we prepared to explore still farther into the mountains in search of the mother-lode.

"It's rather a curious thing," said Phil at this time, "that we have met none of the Sakis so far. I should like to see a specimen of the tribe before we leave their confounded country."

"They're like oorsel's," grunted Mac, "they canna abide the smell o' Cheeniemen; but A'm thinkin' we're near their special habitation noo."

There was considerable truth in Mac's observation. All along the Perak River, which we had followed for nearly a hundred miles before branching off across an inviting pass in the dividing ranges, we had met the almond-eyed Celestials in great bands clearing the forest growths and prospecting for tin in the most unlikely places. Perak, I should mention, is the Malay word for silver, it having been supposed that vast lodes of that metal abounded in the river valley; but, as a matter of fact, there has been very little silver located anywhere near its vicinity.

We had managed to shake off the yellow-skinned Mongols immediately we diverged into the mountains, and since that time we had been crossing luxurious upland forests, and struggling through long stretches of jungle country in turn. It was quite possible that the Sakis had seen us, though we had not seen them, for our time had been more occupied in evading reptiles and wild animals than in scanning the tree-tops for their imp-like denizens.

"I vote," said the Captain, who was the dead-shot of our party, "that we leave the Sakis alone. We're in their country now, you know, and there's such a thing as tempting Providence."

Phil smiled; he was young and enthusiastic, and he was also an ardent ethnographist. "We'll take things as we find them, Captain," said he, "but we usually manage to run across some odd specimens of humanity in our travels. Now, what did you think of the Achinese?"

"A thocht them wonderfu' bloodthirsty folk," grumbled Stewart, tenderly patting a slowly healing scar on his cheek. "They vera near feenished me, an' if Mac hadna come along in time A wad hae been cut into sausages——"

I interrupted his ruminations, and saved the company a harrowing description of what had happened in Sumatra. "We've heard that so often now, Stewart," I said, "that we think you might give us a rest."

Mac cackled harshly in agreement, but Skelton, the stalwart Devonian, who was doctor of our outfit, said rather grimly, "If you get a similar smash in this country, Stewart, my boy, I'm afraid you won't live to tell of it, for we don't seem to be getting into a healthier atmosphere, though we are a good few thousand feet above sea-level."

Stewart subsided gloomily, feeling his pulse the while.

"A believe ye're richt," he replied lugubriously, "what wi' malaria an' muskitties, an' Cheeniemen——"

He broke down, and sought sympathy from his compatriot, who was leisurely chewing quinine tabloids with an air of relish.

"Dinna be nervish, ma man," cheerfully spoke that worthy, "an' aye keep in mind that A'll mak' ye a bonnie moniment when A gang hame; a rale bonnie moniment, wi' a maist splendiferous inscreeption. Hoo would this look, for instance?" Here he struck an attitude, and recited solemnly: "Errected tae the memory o' puir auld Stewart——"

At this stage Stewart smote his Job's comforter with a force and fervour that showed him to be possessed of considerable muscular powers; then there was peace.

Our hammocks were swung near the river, on the edge of a dense forest in which areca and apia palms raised their stately heads among ebony and camphor trees, and a plentiful sprinkling of wiry bamboo growths. The foliage was so thick in places as to be almost impenetrable, and amid the clinging underscrub the guttapercha plant and numerous others with names unknown to us struggled for

existence.

The river was here a fairly broad and oily stream, with rather a dangerous current; below us it surged and roared over a series of jagged limestone rocks, but higher up its course led across a plateau which extended farther than we could guess, for the mountains faded back into the far distance and reared their gaunt peaks above a bewildering sea of luxurious tropical vegetation. It was these mountains we were anxious to reach now, but how to do it promised to be a question not easily answered.

After some consideration we decided to follow the river-channel as far as possible, and cut off the curves by blazing a way through the thicket with our axes. And so, on the morning following our discovery of gold, we packed a fortnight's stores in our kits and trudged off, first taking the precaution to sling our remaining provisions in an odd hammock from the limb of a tall palm, where we hoped to find them on our return. Travelling is not an easy matter in these latitudes, and we had succeeded so far only with great difficulty and much perseverance. Where the rivers were navigable we had usually progressed by means of hastily constructed rafts, but the stream now flowed too swiftly to allow of that form of transport, and we had therefore to work our passage in the strictest sense of the word.

For three days we forged ahead, now clambering along the banks of the swirling torrent, and again crashing through the darkened forest, using our axes energetically. More than once, in the stiller waters between the curves, huge crocodiles were seen disporting themselves cumbrously, and when we approached they fixed their baleful eyes on us, and came steadily on until the Captain stopped their leader by a well-directed bullet. The crocodiles of this region seemed extremely ferocious, and no sooner had one of their number been rendered *hors de combat* than the horrible carcass was carried off in triumph by a school of the late saurian's neighbours.

"They appear tae have vera healthy appetites," murmured Stewart thoughtfully, as he gazed at the ravenous monsters, after an exhibition of this sort. "A wunner," he continued, addressing Skelton, "if they bastes are affected by the climate?"

"You've got me there, Stewart," replied Skelton, with a laugh; "but they don't seem to need quinine to aid their digestion, anyhow."

Birds of the most beautiful plumage fluttered among the branches, and I had the

good fortune to bring down a gorgeous bird of paradise with my rifle. Mac, like the ancient mariner, insisted on carrying this bird round his neck rather than leave it for the tigers and bisons, though he repented of his resolution before he had gone far. Of the wild animals encountered on this march I could write much. Fortunately the lordly tiger seldom met us in an aggressive mood, but we had several experiences with "Old Stripes," nevertheless—at long range; and we were constantly stumbling over squeaking pigs and venomous reptiles of many kinds. Little brown animals of the bear family were especially ubiquitous, so that our time was kept rather fully employed on our long trail towards the supposed land of El Dorado.

As we neared the shadowy mountains, the river-channel narrowed gradually until it formed a deep gorge, in which the swirling waters dashed like the flood of some gigantic mill-race; and we were forced to keep the shelter of the forest rather than risk stumbling into the apparently bottomless abysses.

"I'm afraid we cannot go much farther, boys," I said, when we were struggling through the thicket, steering by compass, and with the river thundering noisily away to our left.

"The gold in the mountains won't help us much if we have to transport our goods over this sort of country," spoke Phil; and there was much truth in his words.

"I have been noticing," remarked Skelton, "that instead of reaching a finer climate we seem to be coming into a very poisonous atmosphere, judging by the odour of the vegetation."

It was certainly strange that the air should continue so dank and depressing at our high altitude, and several times a most extraordinary stench, as of decaying carcasses, would assail our nostrils and cause us to grow faint and sickly. Soon we began to notice that these poisonous vapours were most pungent in the vicinity of certain enormous cactus-like growths which we encountered here and there; but these huge plants looked so picturesque and beautiful that we found it hard to believe that they could taint the air so frightfully.

"It's rather odd," said Skelton doubtfully, "that where these giant spiky lilies grow there is always an open space clear around, as if nothing could live in their presence."

"Ah, mon!" howled Mac at that moment, sniffing the ether in disgust. "Could onybody believe—— A'll gang an' investeegate this meenit. Come on, Stewart."

They rushed off at once, and we followed hastily, for the evil exhalations were overpowering, and we meant to trace the cause. Sure enough one of the cacti, with wide-spreading leaves which trailed on the ground for several yards, proved to be the seat of the virulent fumes. None of us had ever met such a plant before. A vast bulb was suspended on a thick stem, which rose from the heart of the leathery leaves, and this we prepared to examine intently, though we were all but overcome by the foul gases given off.

"It's a big an' a bonnie flooer," muttered Stewart, extending his hand, and thrusting it into the massive blossom. Then he emitted a yell that would have done credit to a full-grown grizzly bear. "It's living!" he bellowed, "an' it's biting me. Cut its heid aff! Quick! Ough!"

"A carnivorous plant!" cried Skelton, decapitating the stem with one stroke of his axe; and Stewart hurriedly drew back his hand with the clinging flower attached. It was indeed a carnivorous plant, and when we had rescued our companion from its clutches, we held our nostrils and examined the depths of the odoriferous flower.

"No wonder it smells," said Phil, as the carcasses of birds and insects innumerable were tumbled out.

"What a grand thing it would be for Cheeniemen!" commented Mac.

"Let's go on, boys, for mercy's sake," implored the Captain. "I'd rather meet a tiger any day than one of these vile vegetable traps."

Stewart's wrist had been squeezed so tightly that it was some time before he could move it freely. "It would hae nippit ma hand clean off if you hadna beheided it sae quick," said the sufferer gratefully to Skelton as we resumed our march; and I think he was not far wrong.

Our progress now became slower and slower, and our first intention of reaching the mountain-range beyond the forest was in a similar degree growing less definite. I could not see how we were to gain our objective, judging by the myriad obstructions in our track, and on the fourth day after leaving camp we had almost decided to retrace our steps.

"I have given up hope of seeing the natives of this peculiar country," said Phil, as we tied up our hammocks after breakfast, "and if we go much farther we will cross down the Malacca slope, where there is nothing but Chinamen."

"If we do not reach a break in the forest before the day is finished," I said, when we had again got on the move, "we'll turn and get down the river to our old camp."

"What on earth is that?" suddenly cried the Captain, seizing his rifle and gazing into the gently swaying branches overhead. We looked, and saw an ungainly creature huddled among the spreading fronds, glaring at us with eyes that were half-human, half-catlike in expression.

"A chimpanzee, most likely," I said. "Don't shoot, Captain; it is but a sample of what man looked like once."

"I think it is an orang-outang," remarked Phil, "and he would make short work of us if he came down."

Mac gazed dubiously at the animal. "A'll slauchter him," said he, raising his deadly blunderbuss; but the huge ape seemed to understand the action, and with half a dozen bounds he had vanished, swinging from tree to tree like a living pendulum.

Again we went on, but we had not proceeded fifty yards when a harsh howling all around caused us to halt and examine our firearms nervously. Then a shower of needle-like darts whizzed close to our ears, and a renewed commotion among the branches arrested our attention. Looking up, we saw fully a score of wild shaggy heads thrust out from the clustering foliage; but before we had time to collect ourselves, another fusilade of feather-like missiles descended upon us, penetrating our thin clothing, and pricking us most painfully.

"Monkeys!" roared Mac.

"No. Sakis!" corrected Phil, as we hurriedly sought safety in retreat.

"If these arrows are poisoned, we're dead 'uns, sure," groaned the Captain, squirming on the ground, and endeavouring to sight his rifle on the impish creatures.

"They're not poisoned; they are merely pointed reeds blown through bamboo tubes," said Skelton, after a hasty examination. "They won't hurt much; but if they get near us with their clubs——"

Another hail of the pigmy arrows rustled through the branches to rear of us. "Give them the small shot of your gun, Mac, just to scare them," I cried.

"Sma' shot indeed!" retorted that fiery individual, and the boom of his artillery filled my ears as he spoke.

An unearthly yell of terror and surprise broke from the aborigines at the sound of the heavy discharge, followed by a series of piercing shrieks as a few stray pellets touched them.

"Make for the river, boys!" I shouted. "Get clear of the trees!"

The air was now filled with the tiny darts, and my thick pith helmet intercepted so many of them that, as Mac said afterwards, it looked like a miniature reed-plantation. Far on our left the deep rumble of the river was heard, and towards it we rushed blindly, closely followed by a yelling horde who sprang like squirrels from tree to tree.

"Where is the Captain?" roared Stewart suddenly, as we ran; and then I noticed that there were but four of us together. Without a word we turned and dashed back into the midst of the Sakis' camp; and there we saw the Captain lying on his face, with his gun resting loosely at his shoulder. A perfect inferno raged around as we reached his side, and my companions, roused to a pitch of frenzy, fired volley after volley among the yelping band.

"Get back, ye wretches," roared Mac; "A'll carry him masel'."

Skelton calmly picked several darts from the Captain's neck, then felt his pulse. "He has only fainted," he said. "These darts have gone pretty deep."

The Captain was a heavy man, but Mac gathered him in his strong arms like a child. "Tak' ma gun, Stewart," he directed, "and see that ye dae guid work wi' it if driven to it." Then we made a second break for the open by the river. The whole forest seemed to be alive with Sakis now; they yelled at us from every other tree, and shot their irritating arrows from every sheltered clump of brushwood. Luckily the range of their odd weapons was not extensive, and by skilful manœuvring we managed to save ourselves greatly, otherwise we should have been perforated from head to foot.

When we neared the river and could see the welcome light of day shining through the trees, our pursuers, probably deterred by our guns, grew less enthusiastic in the chase; and when the edge of the forest was reached they had apparently drawn off altogether.

"To think that we should hae to run like that, frae—frae monkeys!" snorted

Stewart indignantly as we halted. "It's fair disgracefu'."

The Captain slowly opened his eyes, and looked at me reproachfully.

"That chimpanzee that we didn't shoot," said he feebly, "is one of the same family, for the brute must have given the alarm——"

"There he is noo!" cried Mac. "Gie me ma gun, Stewart, an' A'll obleeterate him, nae matter wha's grandfaither he is."

I caught a glimpse of the huge ape swinging backwards into the thicket, then Mac's vengeful weapon spoke, and the Sakis' strange scout came tumbling to the ground. A yell of rage issued from the forest, and instantly a number of our late pursuers appeared and dragged the orang-outang back whence they came.

"I haven't had much opportunity of studying the beggars," said Phil, "but I'm not growling. They are the most apish people I could ever have imagined."

"Instead of gold," commented Skelton grimly, "we've all got a fair-sized dose of malaria——"

"And various other trifles," added Mac, as he extracted the darts from the more fleshy portions of his anatomy.

"We'll leave the gold alone this time, boys," I climaxed; "but we'll have another try when we can get a stronger party together. Meanwhile, we had better make tracks for the coast, and recuperate our energies."

XII

A WEEK-END ADVENTURE

For several years it has been my habit to spend my week-ends during the summer and autumn months in a small yacht called the *Thelma*, of about five tons, as a welcome change from the confined life of the City.

Many and many a happy, lazy time have I spent in her, sometimes by myself, at others with a companion, at various delightful spots round our eastern and southern coasts, occasionally taking short cruises along the seaboard, but more often lounging about harbours and estuaries, or even exploring inland waters.

On these occasions many little incidents and adventures have occurred, which, though full of interest to any one fond of yachting, yet are hardly worthy of print, and it was not until about a year and a half ago that the following events took place, and seemed to me of sufficient interest to record.

The *Thelma* was at the time at an anchorage in one of my favourite spots, a somewhat lonely East-coast estuary, within easy reach of the open sea, and, more important still in a way, fairly close to a main-line railway-station, so that I could get to her from town without wasting much of my precious time on the way. I had run down late on a Friday night early in September, rejoicing, as only a hard-worked City man can rejoice, in the thought of a good forty-eight hours of freedom and fresh air. I was alone, as my exit from town was rather unexpected, and I had no time to find a friend to keep me company; but that did not worry me, as I felt fully able to enjoy myself in solitary peace.

I found everything prepared for my arrival, having wired to the longshoreman and his wife, in whose charge I had left the yacht, and I should much like to describe in full detail all my enjoyment, but must pass over the little events of my first day—the Saturday—as they have nothing to do with my "adventure," though to me the day was brimful of thorough happiness.

It was one of those splendid bright days which are happily so frequent on the East coast in September—so calm, indeed, that sailing was out of the question, and I spent my time in the small boat or dinghy out in the open sea a mile or more, fishing in an indolent way for whiting, etc., and basking in the sun.

I saw no one all day, and there was little shipping about. A private wherry anchored opposite the village above the *Thelma* was the only craft in the river, and a few trawlers and coasting steamers far out were the only vessels to be seen at sea.

Nothing could have less suggested the likelihood of anything in the shape of "adventure," and I caught my whiting and dabs in blissful peace of mind.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, however, I was roused from my fishing by feeling the air suddenly begin to get chill, and on looking out to sea saw that a breeze was springing up from the eastward, and bringing with it a bank of thick white sea-fog, which had already blotted out the horizon, and was coming in rapidly.

This meant rowing home as quickly as possible, as I did not want to be caught in the "thick" before reaching my temporary home, as it might mean an hour or two's search for such a small yacht in a half-mile wide estuary.

So, hastily laying aside my fishing-tackle and hauling up the little anchor, I put my back into the task of "racing the fog," feeling intensely thankful that the tide was on the flood, and, therefore, an immense help to me.

Even as it was, I was in a glowing heat by the time I reached the *Thelma*, and only just in time at that, as the first chilly wreaths of mist were closing round me by the time I got on board. When all was "snug," and I was ready to go below into my little cabin for tea, a last glance round showed me that already the low hills on each side of the river were blotted out, and I could hardly distinguish the wherry anchored away up above me, or the houses of the village off which she lay.

Oh, how cosy and bright the little cabin looked when I settled down for a nondescript meal, half-tea, half-dinner, about an hour later!

The lamp, hung from the deck above, gave a mellow light, the kettle sang on the stove, and the fresh-caught whiting were simply delicious (I pride myself on my cooking on these occasions), whilst London, work, and my fellow-beings seemed far away in some other sphere.

This feeling of isolation was considerably increased later on, when, after a hearty meal and a dip into a story, I put my head out of the hatch to take a customary "last look round" before turning in.

I suppose it was about 10 p.m.; there was no moon, and I never remember a denser fog. At first, after the lighted cabin, I could distinguish absolutely nothing, except where the beam of light from the cabin lamp struggled past me through the open hatch into a white thickness which I can only liken to vaporous cotton-wool.

Even when my eyes got a little accustomed to the change from light to darkness, I could only just make out the mizzen-mast astern and the lower part of the main-mast forward; beyond these was nothing but impenetrable thickness.

Not a sound reached me, except the mournful muffled hooting of a steamer's syren at intervals; no doubt some wretched collier, nosing her way at half-speed through the fog, in momentary terror of collision.

I don't think I ever felt so cut off from humanity in my life as in that tiny yacht, surrounded as I was by impenetrable density above and around, and the deep rushing tide below in a lonely water-way.

No doubt this eerie feeling of loneliness had a great deal to do with my sensations later on, which, on looking back in after-days, have often struck me as being more acute and nervous than they had any right to be.

Be that as it may, I was not nervous when I closed the hatch and "turned in," for I recollect congratulating myself that I was in a safe anchorage, out of the way of traffic, and not on board the steamer which I had heard so mournfully making known her whereabouts in the open sea.

I think my "nerves" had their first real unsettling about half an hour afterwards, just as I was sinking off into a peaceful, profound slumber, for it seemed to me that I had been roused by a sound like a scream of pain or fear, coming muffled and distant through the fog; but from what direction, whether up or down the river, or from the shore, I could not tell.

I raised myself on my elbow and listened intently, but heard nothing more, and reflecting that, even if what I had heard was more than fancy, I was helpless, shut in on every hand by impenetrable fog, to render aid; I could do no more than utter a fervent hope, amounting to a prayer, that no poor soul had strayed into the water on such a night. It is easy, too, when roused out of a doze, to imagine one has only *fancied* a thing, and I had soon persuaded myself that what I had heard was no more than the shriek of a syren or cry of a disturbed sea-gull, and sank once more into a doze, which this time merged into that solid sleep

which comes to those who have had a long day in sea-air.

Somewhere in that vague period we are apt to call "the middle of the night," and which may mean any time between our falling asleep and daybreak, I dreamt that I was in bed in my London lodgings, that a chum of mine had come in to arouse me, and to do so had gently kicked the bedpost, sending a jarring sensation up my spine.

At first I was merely angry, and only stirred in my sleep; but he did it again, and I awoke, intending to administer a scathing rebuke to the disturber of my peace.

But I awoke on board the *Thelma*, and realised, with a feeling akin to alarm, that the sensation of "jarring" had been real, and the knocking which caused it came from something or *some one outside the boat*.

At first I could hardly believe my senses, and raised myself on my elbow, my whole being strained as it were into the one faculty for listening.

Again, this time close to my head, against the starboard bulkhead, came the sound, like two gentle "thuds" on the planking, causing a distinct tremor to thrill through the yacht.

I cannot imagine any more "eerie" sensation than to go to sleep as I had done, with a profound sense of isolation and loneliness, cut off from humanity by a waste of fog and darkness and far-stretching water, and to be awakened in the dead of night by the startling knowledge that outside there, in that very loneliness, only divided from my little cabin by a thin planking—was *something*—and that something not shouting as any human being would shout at such a time—but *knocking*—as if wishing to be let in to warmth and comfort, out of the chill and darkness.

Can I be blamed if my suddenly aroused and somewhat bemused senses played tricks with me, and my startled imagination began to conjure up the gruesome stories I had heard of weird visitants, and ghostly beings, heard but seldom seen, on the East Anglian meres and broads? Then again came the remembrance of the shriek or cry I had fancied I heard earlier in the night, and with a shudder I thought: "How ghastly if it should be the drowned body of him whose cry I had heard, knocking thus in grisly fashion to be taken in before the tide carried it away to sea!"

So far had my excited imagination carried me, when again the yacht shook with

the thud of something striking her, and a great revulsion of relief came over me as I recognised the dull sound of wood striking wood, this time farther aft, and I laughed aloud at my cowardice.

No doubt a log of driftwood, bumping its way along the side of the yacht, as logs will, as the ebbing tide carried it seawards.

However, by this time I had lighted the lamp; so, to satisfy my still perturbed though much ashamed mind, I thrust my feet into sea-boots and my body into a pea-jacket over my clothes, and went on deck, lamp in hand, to see what my unwelcome visitor really was.

Through the mist, dimly illumined by the lamp, I made out the shadowy outline of a boat, drifting slowly towards the stern of the yacht, and occasionally bumping gently against her side.

Another moment or two and the derelict would have vanished into the night. But the long boathook lay at my feet along the bulwark, and, almost instinctively, I caught it up with one hand, whilst setting the lamp down with the other, ran to the stern and made a wild grab in the dark towards where I thought she would be.

The hook caught, and I hauled my prize alongside; stooping down, I felt for the painter, which I naturally expected to find trailing in the water, thinking the boat had broken loose from somewhere through carelessness in making her fast.

To my surprise it was coiled up *inside* the bows. Puzzling over this, I made the end fast to a cleat on the yacht, then took the lamp and turned the light over the side, so that it shone fairly into the boat.

Then, for the second time that night, my pulses beat fast, and my scalp tingled with something approaching fear, and I wished I had a friend on board with me.

It seemed as if my foolish idea of a dead body asking for compassion was coming true. For there was a huddled-up form lying on the bottom of the boat, its head inclined half on and half off the stern thwart, its whole attitude suggestive of the helplessness of death.

I stood as if paralysed for a few seconds, filled with a craven longing to get back to the cosy cabin, shut the hatch, and wait till daylight before approaching any nearer that still form, dreading what horrors an examination might reveal. But more humane and reasonable thoughts soon came; perhaps this poor drifting bit

of humanity was not dead, but had been sent my way in the dead of night to revive and shelter.

Feeling that I must act at once, or I might not act at all—or at least till daybreak—I put a great restraint upon my feelings of repugnance, caught up the lamp, stepped into the boat, and raised the drooping head on to my arm.

As I did so, the hood-like covering which had concealed the face fell back, and in a moment all my shrinking and horror vanished once for all—swallowed up in pity, compassion, and amazement—for on my arm rested the sweet face of a young and very pretty girl, marred only by its pallor and a bad bruise on the right temple.

Even in the lamplight I could see she was a lady born and bred; her face alone told me that, and the rich material of fur-lined cloak and hood merely confirmed it.

Here was no horrible midnight visitor, then; but certainly what seemed to me a great mystery—far more so than the dead body of labourer or wherry-man floating down with the tide would have furnished.

A lady, insensible apparently from a blow on the forehead, floating alone in an open boat at midnight, on a lonely tidal water, far from any resort of the class to which she seemed to belong, and saved from long hours of exposure—perhaps death—by the marvellous chance (if it could be called so) of colliding with my yacht on the way to the open sea.

It was too great a puzzle to attempt to solve on the spur of the moment, and I had first to apply myself to the evident duty of getting my fair and mysterious visitor into my cabin, there to try to undo the effects of whatever untoward accidents had befallen her.

It was no easy matter, single-handed and in darkness, except for the hazy beam of light from the lamp on deck, to get her from the swinging, lurching boat to the yacht. But, luckily for me, my burden was light and slender, and I did it without mishap, I hardly know how, and then soon had her in the little cabin, laid carefully upon my blankets and rugs, with a pillow under her head.

I soon knew she was alive, for there was a distinct, though slight, rise and fall of her bosom as she breathed, but my difficulty was to know what remedies to apply. I have a little experience in resuscitating the half-drowned, but in this case

insensibility seemed to have been caused by the blow on her forehead, if it was not from shock or fear.

So all I could do was to force a few drops of brandy between the white teeth, and bathe the forehead patiently, and hope that nature would soon reassert itself with these aids.

After what seemed a long while to me, but which I suppose was not more than a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, one of the little white hands moved, a deep sigh came from the lips, and I thought she was "coming to."

But it was merely a change from one state of insensibility to another; for, though a colour came back into the cheeks and the breathing grew stronger and more regular, the warmth of the cabin had its effect, and she sank into a natural and peaceful sleep.

My greatest anxiety being now relieved, and my fair young visitor restored to animation and resting peacefully enough, my mind naturally turned to the consideration of the strange position I was so unexpectedly placed in; but in my state of absolute ignorance as to the identity of my charge, where she came from, what had happened, and of the whole chain of circumstances which led up to her strange visit, I came to the conclusion that I could only wait for her to awake and enlighten me before taking any steps whatever. It might mean losing valuable time to try to find out anything by going off in the fog and darkness; whilst, meanwhile, the poor girl might awake and find herself deserted, instead of finding me ready and waiting to take her instructions for her safe restoration to her friends.

So there was nothing for me to do but wait, and having made up the fire in the stove and put the kettle on in readiness for a cup of tea, I made myself as comfortable as I could in a corner and longed for daylight.

As I watched the face of the sleeping girl, now rather flushed from the warmth of the cabin and the unaccustomed drops of spirit I had given her, I thought I had never before seen a fairer and sweeter countenance, and even then began to bless the chance which had allowed me to become her protector.

Once she stirred, and a look of dread, almost terror, came into her face, and I heard her utter in an agonised voice the single word "Harold."

It may sound ridiculous, but, coming so soon after my feelings of tender

"protectiveness," I felt quite a pang of jealousy against the unknown owner of the name, and wondered in what relation she stood to him and why her thought of him should bring such evident pain. However, she did not awake as yet, and I had to possess my soul in patience for this and all the other enlightenment I longed for.

I must have slept at last, for the next thing I remember was seeing a faint daylight struggling through the skylight and realising that the fire was nearly out, in spite of my resolve to keep a watch over it. In making it up I clumsily dropped a lump of coal, and the girl stirred, opened her eyes, and sat up at once, evidently refreshed by her sleep and in full possession of all her faculties, and, of course, utterly bewildered at her surroundings and at finding a perfect stranger in charge of her.

It made my heart ache to see, as memory came back and she recalled the (to me unknown) events of the night, a cloud of dread and anxiety come over her, and her eyes fill with tears at the recollection; and if I had felt drawn to her before, I was doubly so now, when I saw her bravely brace herself to talk of them, and even smile up at me as she said—

"Will you tell me where I am, and how I got here? It seems to me I have a lot to thank you for!"

I told her as briefly as I could the happenings of the night as far as I knew them, and then said—

"Now I am burning to hear your adventures, and longing to help you to get back to your friends; but I beg of you not to tell me more than you feel inclined, nor to put any strain on yourself at present, but just tell me sufficient for me to know how to act for you."

She assured me she felt quite well, except for a headache (which certainly was only to be expected with such a bruise on her poor white forehead), and would like to tell me everything, as it would be a relief to her mind to do so, and with the most charming little blush she added—

"I feel so sure you will know just what is best to be done, and I should like to confide my fears to you."

So, whilst I busied myself in getting a sort of hasty breakfast ready, partly because we both needed it, but more for the sake of making it easier for her to

speak of things which might be painful for her to mention with my eyes upon her, she told me all, and it was quite amazing how simply everything was explained.

Her name—which she mentioned no doubt because I had carefully told her mine—was Lilian Burfield, and she and her brother Harold (I felt foolishly relieved to hear it was her *brother's* name she had called on in her sleep) lived with their father at a large house some three miles from the village up the river. A day or two before these events, some friends of theirs, a Mr. and Mrs. Small, had brought their wherry up the river to visit them, whilst on a cruise. On the Friday they had spent the afternoon on board, and she and her brother had been induced to stay to dinner, and play a game or two afterwards; but her father had been obliged to leave earlier on account of some engagement.

About 10.30 they left (although the Smalls pressed them to stop on board all night when they saw how thick the fog had become), feeling confident that they could not well miss the landing-stage, as it was not more than a hundred yards from the yacht.

However, it seemed that they *had* done so, as the boat took the ground on a mud-bank, and stuck fast.

Her brother was unable to push off, and asked her to help, so she stood up and, with the other oar, moved to assist him. The shifting of her weight must have loosened the boat, as at that very moment her brother gave a shove and they shot off the mud with a lurch, sending her with great violence into the bottom of the boat and stunning her.

As she fell (and here I heard a break in the low, sweet voice which was telling me the tale) she remembered seeing her brother disappear overboard, upset by the sudden movement of the boat beneath him, and believed she gave a cry at the sight; but knew no more till she awakened in the cabin of the *Thelma*.

The simple narrative ceased, and I wondered that when trying to puzzle out where she could have come from, I had never thought to connect the wherry I had seen in the morning with my visitor's sudden appearance.

How marvellous it seemed, though, that the boat with its helpless freight should have been carried by the ebbing tide straight into my care, and how deeply thankful I was that it had been so ordered, saving the poor girl from a terrible, lonely drift out to sea, from many hours' exposure, perhaps from being run down

by a passing vessel, certainly from grave danger in many ways!

Now I could see my way at last as to my next move, and hastened to assure my anxious visitor that I had little fear for her brother's safety, as I knew there were no mudbanks in that part of the river except those along the edge of the shore, and therefore he would almost certainly have been able to scramble out.

There were still one or two things I did not quite understand, however, so, whilst we ate a fairly hearty meal off the remainder of my whiting, I plied her with a question or two, and by-and-by we got very friendly and cheerful, and I quite disliked the idea of going out into the misty morning to make arrangements for giving up my fair and charming visitor.

As for Miss Burfield (as I now must call her), her spirits rose with my hopeful words, and as the food had its effect on her physically.

But in my mind was a sinister fear, which I carefully kept from her.

I had heard no shouts, no sound of any search, either in the night nor since daybreak, which seemed strange; and it had occurred to me that *if* the young fellow had been drowned this would be explained, for those on the wherry might know nothing, thinking their visitors had reached the shore, while those ashore might think they had stopped overnight on board on account of the fog, and so no search would be made, no alarm taken.

I asked whose was the boat they were in and which I had secured, wondering if it would be missed.

"It belonged to a man in the village," she said. "We borrowed it because the man who works the wherry for the Smalls was away for the night, and we thought we would save Mr. Small the trouble of rowing us ashore so late at night in his own boat."

"Was the owner waiting up for you to bring the boat back?" I asked.

"No, we promised to tie it up safely, so that he need not worry about it," she answered.

So, there again, they would not be missed till the man failed to find his boat, which might not be for hours yet. It seemed to me that I might have the terrible duty of breaking the bad news of the loss of the young man, instead of, as I had thought, the good tidings of the finding of the lost girl.

But that remained to be proved, and I could only hope for the best.

In any case my duty was now plain, and with a few cheering words to my companion, telling her that I was going to the village to report her safety, and to send a messenger to her home that they might come and fetch her, and would be back as soon as possible with (I hoped) the good news of her brother's safety, I set off, early as it was, and rowed myself ashore in the dinghy. I was glad to see that the fog was thinning even then, and by the time I had landed and run along the towing-path to the village, the sun was just visible through the haze, giving every hope of a lovely day.

With mingled feelings of dread and hope I approached the scattered houses of the little hamlet, half fearing to see groups of men by the river-side searching for some gruesome object, and, again, when all seemed still and peaceful, fearing that the absence of movement might mean the very thing I dreaded—namely, that the catastrophe had happened, and no one any the wiser.

There lay the wherry, without sight or sound of any living person on board; no one was moving in the little straggling street; not a dog barked.

I went straight to the old inn, which stood about a hundred yards from the landing-stage, opposite the wherry's anchorage, and knocked loudly at the door. No one answered, so I tried the latch, the door opened to my hand, and I walked into the brick-floored bar, and at first thought it was empty.

Then I heard a slight movement and the sound of a yawn, and, looking towards the large settle by the side of the hearth, saw my old acquaintance, the innkeeper, evidently aroused by my knocking from a sound sleep, rubbing his eyes and stiffly getting to his feet.

Much astonished he looked when he saw who his visitor was, as he did not know I had come down to the yacht, and certainly was not accustomed to such early rising on my part.

His first words gave me a cold feeling of apprehension, for on recognising me he said—

"Oh, sir, I am glad you are here; perhaps you will be able to help us in this dreadful business."

"What dreadful business?" I said, sharply enough, for I feared his answer, and dared not ask a more direct question, for the thought of the sweet girl I had left

behind in the *Thelma*, and the news it seemed I was to take back to her, was almost too much for me.

"Dear, dear, haven't you heard, sir?" went on the old man, thoroughly awake now in his eagerness to impart the news. "There's that poor, dear Miss Burfield, the sweetest young lady as ever I knew, gone floating down the river last night in the fog all alone, and goodness knows what has become of her, poor dear, by now—and her young brother, too, wet through as he was, gone off with the gentleman from yonder wherry in a boat to look for her, hours ago—and a poor chance of finding her, *I* say, till the fog blows off, even if they don't lose themselves as well as her. And the poor old squire, too, he be in a dreadful way, and sendin' messengers to all the coastguards for miles, he is, to look out for the lady——"

Here the old man paused for want of breath, and I—completely relieved by his rambling statement from my fear about the girl's brother, hastened to relieve him with my astonishing news that Miss Burfield was safe and sound in my yacht, and had been so for some hours.

Eager as I was to get back to the *Thelma* with my good news, I could not get away till I had told the good old fellow how it had happened that I had rescued her, and he in return told me how young Burfield had rushed, muddy and dripping, into the inn as they were all going to bed, and demanded help in the search for his sister. No boat was to be had at the moment, and so they had shouted till Mr. Small came ashore in his own boat, and had at once rowed away with young Burfield down the river, in the thick darkness, with the faint hope of finding the missing girl before she drifted into the open sea.

"I told 'em it warn't much good," ended the old man, "and that they'd best wait till daylight, but they would go. As for me, I reckon I've done the best thing, for I druv' over at once to the coastguards down yonder, and told 'em to keep a look out at the mouth o' the river. I ain't been back long, and was just takin' a nap when you found me, as I hadn't the 'art to go to bed."

Having arranged with him to send the good news to all concerned, especially to the Hall, where old Mr. Burfield must doubtless be in a terrible state of anxiety, I hurried back along the towing-path, rejoicing in the thought that I should now be able to relieve my fair visitor's mind of her anxiety.

I found her on deck, looking anxious, indeed, but so pretty and fresh in spite of her trying night's experiences, that my impressions of the night were greatly intensified, and I began to bless the unusual circumstances that had brought us

together and made us friends, as it were, from the first moment of our acquaintance; and I registered a mental vow that the bond thus created between us should never be broken, if it lay in my power to prevent it.

And when I had told her the good news, and we had at last an opportunity of friendly converse unclouded by forebodings and anxious thoughts, I for one thoroughly enjoyed the companionship, and allowed myself to hope that it was not altogether disagreeable to my charming visitor.

It did not seem long, therefore, to me before the arrival of Mr. Burfield, who overwhelmed me with far more thanks and gratitude than I deserved, and insisted on my spending the rest of that week-end at the Hall—an invitation backed up in irresistible fashion by his daughter. To complete the general satisfaction, whilst we were talking we heard the sound of oars, and saw a boat approaching, containing two of the most weary and dispirited-looking men I ever saw.

They proved to be Mr. Small and Mr. Harold Burfield, returning dead-beat and miserable after a fruitless and wretched search for the missing boat, to get food and to make arrangements for a further expedition. How can I describe their intense relief and astonishment when—summoned by a mighty shout—they pulled to shore, and saw the girl they imagined drifting helplessly miles out at sea standing on shore, safe and sound, and in infinitely better case than themselves, and heard that she had never been farther than where she now was from the scene of the accident the night before?

Later on I asked Harold Burfield why he had not shouted as he rowed down the river after his sister in the darkness, when I might have heard and answered.

He said that at first he thought it no use, as he knew his sister's boat must have had a long start of them; and later, when they had rowed some way, and considered they must have caught up with it, they had done so at intervals all night long, on the chance of her hearing.

So I suppose that, either they were past the *Thelma* before they began to call, or else in the fog had got so far over on the other side of the channel that their voices had not reached me, as I was shut up in my cabin.

So all the little mysteries were cleared up, and everything had "come right in the end," as such things should.

I have spent many a happy week-end since then at the Hall and on board the *Thelma*, and to my dying day I shall bless the fog of that September night, for Lilian has promised shortly to fix the day of our wedding, and we have both decided that part of the honeymoon at least is to be spent on board the *Thelma*; and I really believe that we shall both be rather disappointed if we do not get a bit of foggy weather to remind us how we first made each other's acquaintance, and made friends over "whiting and tea" in the little cabin at six o'clock in the morning.

XIII

THE DEFLECTED COMPASS

The paddle-steamer *Queen of the Isles* was alongside the quay at St. Mary's, and had already given one shrill intimation that she was prepared to leave the harbour. Sydney and I were ready, with our portmanteaux strapped and our caps on, but the Honourable John had not yet appeared. We were impatient. Very important was it that we should catch the mail out of Penzance that same evening, for the following morning we were all due in London. Any delay in our return would be taken from the holidays of the next batch, and we should never hear the last of it if we were late, to say nothing of the unfairness of reducing the well-earned rest of the next batch by our dilatoriness and lack of consideration. We had taken the precaution to settle the hotel accounts, because we knew the habits of the Honourable John, and we stood in the hall with the thunder gathering upon our brows, and threatening to peal forth in tones more loud than complimentary.

"If he isn't down in two minutes, Syd, I'm off," said I, pulling out my watch, and nervously noting the jerky springs of the spidery second-hand that seemed to be in a much greater hurry than usual.

"John!" bawled Syd up the stairway. "Do you hear? You'll miss the steamer."

"What's the fellow doing?" I asked, with irritation, as I observed that half a minute had passed.

"Waxing the ends of his ridiculous moustache," answered Syd; then, turning again to the foot of the stairs, "John! We're going. Hurry up!"

A door opened on the landing, and a voice drawled, "I say, you chaps, have you paid the bill?"

"Certainly," said I. "Come along. We've barely time to catch the steamer. Didn't you hear the whistle?"

"I heard something a little while ago, a sort of an ear-piercing shriek that startled me, and caused me to nick my chin with the razor. I shall have to put a bit of

flesh-coloured plaster over it. Was that the whistle?" asked the Honourable John in the most tantalising, nonchalant way, as if he had all the day before him.

We looked up the stairway, and there he was on the landing, in his shirt-sleeves, slowly adjusting the ends of a salmon-coloured tie.

"The two minutes are up," said I, replacing my watch, and stooping for my portmanteau. At that moment the whistle sounded again, and I hurried away, followed by Syd, both of us muttering that the dawdler deserved to be left, but none the less hoping in our hearts that he would be in time.

The hotel was near the harbour, and we were soon aboard. On the bridge, between the paddle-boxes, the captain stood with the string attached to the syren in his hand; beside him, glancing at the compass-card, grasping the spokes of the wheel, and silently awaiting instructions, was one of the men; the mate was for'ard with his whistle; and two little knots of islanders were gathered about the moorings on the quay, ready to cast off the hawsers as soon as the paddles moved and the captain gave the word.

Loungers and holiday-makers were stirred into mild excitement by our expected departure. Exchanges of farewells, amid occasional shouts and a continuous ripple of laughter, were passing between those on board and those ashore. The usually quiet life of St. Mary's was bubbling up in its periodical agitation. By the outgoing and incoming of the steamer the islanders touched the great world without, and thrilled at the touch and felt its importance.

It was a pleasant scene, or it would have been but for the inexcusable delay of the Honourable John. We began to fear that he would be left. The captain pulled the string again, and the syren sounded, with a peculiar urgency, as it seemed to me, ending in a despairing wail; then, stepping to the indicator, he signalled to the engineer, and the paddles began to revolve. The forward hawser was thrown off and fell with a splash into the sea; astern we were yet alongside the quay.

The Honourable John appeared, resplendent in all the glory of a silk hat and frock coat, with a flower in his buttonhole, his hands gloved in lemon-coloured kids, and his feet shiny with patent leather; the people parted to let him pass, and stared at him as if he were a marquis at the very least, but the porter flung his portmanteau over the bulwarks like that of any other common tourist; John himself, with more agility than I gave him credit for, sprang aboard only just in time, as the men shouted "All clear aft, sir."

Once more we heard the click of the bells in the engine-room, and away we went through the clear waters, with the white foam mingling in our wake and the other islands gliding rapidly into view.

"You donkey!" said I, surveying the delinquent from head to foot, and noticing particularly the round spot of plaster on his chin. "Why didn't you come earlier?"

"Call him a parrakeet," said Syd. "That will better describe him."

"He's both," I replied—"slow as the one and gay as the other. But we've got him, and we'll see that he does not defraud young Clifton of a single minute of the holiday he's waiting for—ay, and well deserves."

"You're always in such a desperate hurry," observed the Honourable John, ignoring the epithets with which we assailed him. He was never offended, and never perturbed. When the vials of our wrath were poured upon him, as they had been pretty freely during the holiday, they ran off him like the proverbial water from the duck's back. We simply could not have endured his foppishness and dandyism, combined with a temper always serene, if we had not known that at heart he was a very good fellow. "I was in time," said he.

"You were," returned Syd significantly—"nearly in time to be late."

"But I wasn't late," drawled John, "so what's the good of making a fuss about it. One of the pleasures of life is to take things easily; as my friend the Irishman once remarked, 'If ye cannot be happy, be aisy; and if ye cannot be aisy, be as aisy as ye can.' But, I say, I don't call this a specially bright morning; do you? Look there! We're running into a bank of fog."

So we were. A dense white barrier, clean and straight as a wall, rose from the sea to the sky, and in another minute we had plunged into it. We did not anticipate so sudden a change. Fog was far from our thoughts, for the morning had been bright and sunny all around the islands, and the air was very still. For two or three days scarcely a breath of wind had wandered across the brilliant summer atmosphere. Now, with the fog, came a softly moving breeze out of the north-east. The fog drifted before it in one immense mass; there was no ripple upon the sea.

Upon the passengers the effect was very curious; where, a few moments before, there had been ready repartee, interspersed with laughter, now there was low-toned commonplace conversation, or a dead silence. We were wrapped in a

cloud; moisture began to form in tiny drops upon the stanchions and the deck, upon the beards and moustaches of the male part of the voyagers, upon the woolly texture of the garments of all, even upon the smoothly brushed silk of the Honourable John's top hat; save for the swish of the paddles and the running of the engines, with a whispered exclamation here and there, we could hear nothing; and we could scarcely see the length of the ship.

It was the first bit of objectionable weather we had experienced during the holiday. We had spent a fortnight in the "Delectable Duchy." From Looe to Sennen we had not missed a single place worth seeing, and we had finished up with a week in the Scilly Isles. Making St. Mary's our centre, we had rowed and waded to St. Martin's and St. Agnes', to Tresco and Bryer and Samson and Annet, to Great Ganilly and Great Arthur, to Gweal and Illiswilgis, and a host of other places in that shattered and scattered heap of granite which forms the outstanding sentinel of our far western coast. The weather had been perfect. But now, having cleared the road and rounded St. Mary's, we were met by this thick mist, swaying down upon us like a vast curtain, and quickly enveloping us in its vapoury folds.

"You'll want a new topper, John, when we reach Penzance," said Syd, as he noted how the moisture was ruffling the silk and dimming its gloss. He laughed as he said it, but, in the silence, his laugh seemed to be an intrusion.

"You're mistaken, Syd," he replied; and, as he took off his hat and surveyed it, he continued, "In all weathers, there's no head gear so durable, and therefore so economical, as a good silk chimney-pot; and certainly there's nothing in the way of a *chapeau* so comfortable and becoming."

"Tastes differ," said I.

"They do," answered John, "and I speak about my own. I've tried others. Oh, yes, I have," said he, as we looked at him incredulously, "and I speak from experience. I tell you, they're cheap, if you will only give enough for them. Why, I know an old fellow who has worn the very same tile, in all weathers, for fifteen years; it has been in the height of fashion twice in that time, and it will soon come in again; and it is a very decent thing yet when it has been newly pressed and ironed."

"I prefer my deerstalker," said Syd.

"And I my golfer," said I.

"Which shows very plainly that your sartorial education has been neglected," returned John, "and I pity you. You are not living up to your privileges, and, worse still, you are unaware of the privileges you might live up to. But, I say, this is a sneezer!" and he looked about him into the fog, which was becoming denser every minute. "They're lessening the pace. I suppose it wouldn't do to drive along through this thick stuff. We might reach an unexpected terminus. What say you? Shall we go on the bridge?"

"The captain may not allow us," said I.

"Pooh! I know the cap. He's a forty-second cousin of mine. Come along. I'll introduce you now that we are out of the narrows and in the open sea."

"It seems to me as if the sea were shut," whispered Syd, as we followed the Honourable John to the bridge.

"Closed, at any rate," said I, "and with very moist curtains, through which we must push our way unpleasantly enough into the harbour."

We reached the upper deck, which was dotted with bulgy figures in cloaks and capes, damp, and silent, and melancholy. The bridge formed the forward part of the upper deck, where it terminated amidships; the helmsman, with his hands upon the spokes, shifted his eyes alternately between the binnacle and the bows, and gave the wheel a turn now this way and now that, while the captain paced cross-wise between the paddle-boxes, and searched the mirk above and ahead to see whether there was any likelihood that the weather would clear.

Abaft the funnel the deck was free to those of the passengers who held saloon tickets, but afore the funnel—that is, on the bridge itself—no one was allowed without the captain's special permission. This space was railed off, with a hinged lift in the mahogany on either side, both of which were now down and barred. We were not quite sure whether the captain were really the Honourable John's relative, or whether our comrade's proposal to join the captain was only one of those erratic notions which visited his aristocratic brain, and were often carried through with a confidence so complete as to be rarely unsuccessful. He was unmercifully snubbed sometimes, and he richly deserved it; but the curious thing about him was that the snubs were wasted. Where others would have retired crestfallen, the Honourable John held his head high and heeded not.

We were prepared to find that the forty-second cousinship was a fiction, and that the captain would quietly ignore him; but we were in the background, and it

mattered very little to us; the deck would be as welcome as the bridge.

"Well, cousin cap.," said John familiarly, placing his hand upon the wet mahogany rail, "and how are you?"

"Hallo!" exclaimed the captain, facing round. "Where have you tumbled from?"

"Hughtown, St. Mary's, was the last bit of mother earth I touched before I sprang aboard the *Queen of Paddlers*. May we venture within your private domain?"

"Why, certainly, John," and he lifted the rail and beckoned us forward.

"Two chums of mine," said John, naming us, and then he named the captain as his respected cousin forty-two times removed. The captain smiled at him, shook his head, and observed that the relationship was a little closer than that, but a puzzle, nevertheless, to work out exactly.

"I must have missed you when you came aboard," said he, "and yet in your usual get-up I don't see how I could very well. You look as if you had just stepped out of a band-box, except for the dampness, of course."

"Oh, you were busy when I joined you," said John, evidently pleased with the captain's remarks about his appearance. "I had to jump for it. But you haven't answered my question. How are you?"

"Tol'able, thank'e. And your folks—how are they? I need not ask how *you* are," and, while John answered him, he placed camp-stools for us, and said to Syd and me, "Sit down, gentlemen; and excuse me if I address myself mainly to this eccentric cousin of mine, and, I am sure, your very good friend. I do not see him often, and he never will let me know when he is coming my way"—a statement which Syd and I could easily believe. For, with all John's faults, and he had many of them, he was one of the least obtrusive of men where hospitality came in, and one of the most reticent about himself and his own affairs; and we, who worked with him, knew him almost exclusively as a good fellow in the department, and a capital companion for a holiday.

The captain placed John's camp-stool on the starboard side of the binnacle. Their conversation was broken into snatches by the captain's movements. As he paced the bridge, backwards and forwards, he halted each time just for a moment when he came to where John had propped his back against the binnacle and tilted his stool at an angle that threatened collapse. Syd and I sat quite apart, and left them alone to their semi-private conversation. We noticed, however, that the captain

appeared to be uneasy about the vessel's course and progress; he glanced more than once at the compass-card, and several times, in his perambulations, he lingered over the paddle-boxes, and intently watched the water as it slipped by. So that his conversation with the Honourable John became more fragmentary, and was more frequently interrupted the nearer we approached the land.

After some time the captain came to a sudden stand over the port paddle-box, and curved his left hand round his ear. For a minute or more he stood like a statue, perfectly motionless, and with his whole being absorbed in an effort to catch a faint and expected sound across the water. Satisfied with the effort, he stepped briskly to the indicator, and signalled to the engineer to increase the speed of the steamer.

"What is it, cap.?" asked John.

"The bell on the Runnel Stone," he replied. "Cannot you hear it?"

The captain's statuesque figure, intently listening, had been observed by the passengers, and there was a dead silence aboard, broken only by the thumping of the engines and the splash of the paddle-blades as they pounded the still waters. Presently the dreary clang of the bell, struck by the clapper as the sea rocked it, came to us in uncertain and fitful tones. It was a melancholy sound, but its effect was cheering, because it gave the people some idea of our whereabouts, and was an indication that we had crossed the intervening space between the islands and the mainland. We were making fair progress despite the fog, and should soon be ashore again.

A babble of talk began and ran the round of the passengers, breaking out among a group of younger people into a ripple of laughter. For a quarter of an hour this went on, then, to the amazement of all on board, the captain, after glancing anxiously at the compass-card, sternly called out "Silence!" Meanwhile the sound of the bell had become clearer, but was now growing less distinct; and, as the captain's order was instantly obeyed, we became aware of another sound—the breaking of the waves upon the shore.

For a moment the captain listened, straining his eyes at the same time to pierce the dense mist ahead; the man on the look-out, perched in the bows, who had been leaning forward with his hand shading his eyes, turned about with a startled gesture, throwing his arms aloft, and shouted to the captain that we were close in shore, and heading for it directly; the captain sprang to the indicator, and signalled for the reversal of the engines; but it was too late. With a thud that

threw us all forward the steamer grounded.

Instantly all was confusion. Some lost their heads, and began to rush about wildly. A few screamed. Nearly every one became visibly paler. Syd and I started from our seats, and gazed bewilderedly at an expanse of yellow sand softly revealed beneath the mist, and stretching ahead and on either hand into the white moisture by which we were encompassed. John walked over to us apparently unmoved.

"Well, this is a go," said he.

Before we could reply, the captain bawled out his orders that all the passengers must retire to the after-part of the ship, and help, so far as their collected weight might do so, to raise the bows now sunk in the soft sand. He assured them that there was not the slightest danger; the vessel was uninjured; we were ashore on a yielding and shelving beach; and that, if they would remain perfectly quiet, and obey orders, he had some hope that he might get the vessel afloat again.

There was a general move aft, and although signs of distress, and even of terror, were not wanting on some faces, the people gathered quietly enough into one solid mass. We three stood on the outer edge of the company. Syd and I were considerably excited, but John was as calm as a man could be. With tremendous uproar the reversed paddles began to churn the shallow water, but not an inch did we move.

The captain stepped to the binnacle, and read the compass-card. A swift change passed over his face; in mingled surprise and anger he pointed within the binnacle, and began to question the man at the wheel; but he was more surprised than the captain—so utterly amazed, in fact, that he could not be angry, and only protested that he had kept the vessel true to the course which had been given him, and could not explain why the card had veered three to four points farther westward since the vessel had touched the ground. It was no use contending about the matter then. The paddles began to throw up the sand as well as the water, and the captain saw that the vessel would have to remain where she was until the next tide.

"We are fast, sure 'nough," sang out the captain. "You had better gather your traps together, and prepare to leave the vessel. There will be conveyances in the villages to take you to Penzance."

The company dispersed and scattered about the boat, merrily collecting their

belongings now that they knew the worst, and that the worst was not very bad after all. We rejoined the captain.

"What's the name of this new port of discharge?" asked John.

"Not port, but Porth," answered the captain grimly, for it was no laughing matter to him. "Porth Curnow. And you may thank your stars that we have run clear in upon the sand, and not a few furlongs south or north, for then we should have been laid up either under Tol-Pedn or beneath the Logan Rock."

"I can follow your location admirably, cap.," said John. "We are eight or nine miles from Penzance—is not that so? Yes!" as the captain nodded gloomily; "and Porth Curnow is the place where the submarine telegraph chaps live. But, I say, why did you bring us here? We booked for Penzance."

"Goodness knows—I don't. Something's gone wrong with the compass. We were on the right course, and the compass was true until we grounded; then it swerved most unaccountably nearly four points to the westward, and there it remains."

"That's a curious freak, cap. You'll be interviewed by all the scientific folk in the kingdom, and I shouldn't wonder if you are not summoned to appear, and give evidence, before a select committee of the Royal Society. Four points out! Why, man, you're immortalised. I call it a most lucky deflection."

"Do you? I don't," growled the captain. "Others are welcome to the immortality. I prefer to do without, and steer by a compass that's true. And it *has* been true up to now."

"That's where it comes in," exclaimed John. "That's what makes it remarkable. If the compass *hadn't* been true, you would have gained nothing by this little adventure; but, as you say, it *has* been true, therefore—— Oh! dear, it takes a lot to satisfy some people. And you cannot account for it? Do you think the telegraph station has had anything to do with it—electricity, you know? Electricity is a queer thing, and plays pranks sometimes. No! Well, perhaps the hills are magnetic."

"Come, John, you're losing your head; and I have these people to see to," remarked the captain somewhat tartly.

"I believe I am," said John. "It's a habit I have, but I generally find it again. Well, cap., if you require any assistance in the unloading of the cargo, say the word, and here I am, your cousin to command"; and the captain was obliged to smile,

notwithstanding the disaster—an effect which John had been trying for all the while.

"Your suggestion about the telegraph station has put a practical idea into my brain, and I am thankful for that, John. I'll sound the syren, and bring the fellows down. They'll be willing to help in a mess like this, anyhow; and, if there are not enough conveyances to run the people down to Penzance, they can wire for a few to fetch them"; and, pulling the cord, he sent the shriek of the syren through the mist in resounding and ear-splitting tones.

By this time, the passengers had all pressed forward into the bows, with the easily transferable part of their luggage about them. The water had receded, and left the bows clear; but it was too long a drop into the wet sand for any one to venture down without assistance. The ladies especially were looking wistfully over the bulwarks. We three went forward also, but we left our portmanteaux to take care of themselves.

Soon two young fellows dashed down the sands, halloing in answer to the syren, and stood with wondering eyes beneath the bows.

"Who are you?" shouted one of them.

"Scilly people," piped a shrill female voice from our midst.

"That we are—very," said John drily; at which, notwithstanding our plight, there was a general laugh.

The two were speedily increased to half a dozen, and these were joined by quite a group of farm-servants and villagers, attracted by the unwonted sound of a syren floating across their fields. Some of the latter, scenting substantial gain, ran off to harness their horses to such conveyances as they could command in readiness for the drive to Penzance, while the rest remained, having also a view to the needful, to act as porters and guides.

One of the men, by the captain's orders, came forward with a rope-ladder, fastened one end securely within the bulwarks, and threw the other over the side. It hung about four feet from the ground. Immediately the passengers swarmed about the head of the ladder, and, although there was no real danger, pushed and jostled each other in the attempt to secure an early descent. A few thoughtless young fellows were claiming the first chance when the Honourable John interfered.

"Here," said he, "ladies first, and one at a time," and he shouldered the too eager males aside. He took off his hat, turned to the crowd below, and, picking out a telegraph clerk, said, "Catch my tile, will you? And, mind, don't sit on it! It may collapse. Thank you!" as the man caught it cleverly, and smiled at the instructions. Then he slipped out of his frock-coat, and flung it aside; undid his cuff-links, and rolled up his sleeves; bowed to the nearest woman of the party, who happened to be a stout Scillonian in a peasant's dress, and said, "Ready! Allow me, madam." As he helped her to the top of the bulwarks, and down the rungs, he sang out, "Below there! Steady this lady down, and help her to the ground."

Syd and I handed up the other ladies, and the Honourable John, balanced upon the bulwarks, gallantly helped them down the ladder as far as his arms would reach, where they were taken in charge by the telegraph clerks, and landed upon the wet sand. The captain watched the proceedings from the bridge with an amused expression. Before long all the ladies were disposed of, and we left the men to scramble down as best they could. John picked up his coat, and I held it by the collar while he slipped his arms through the arm-holes and drew it on.

When he flung the coat aside I noticed a peculiarity of the collar as it fell and lay upon the ground. While the waist and all the lower part was limp, the collar preserved an unnatural stiffness—a stiffness that extended to the breast; this part stood up as if within it there were some invisible form. Several times as I turned to assist the lady whose turn came next I noticed this peculiarity; and when I held the collar to help the Honourable John into this fashionable frock-coat, there was a hardness about it which made me wonder whether his tailor had stitched into it several strips of buckram, or cleverly inserted beneath the collar, and down the breast, a piece of flexible whalebone. Whatever it was that gave this part of his coat its rigidity, I dismissed it from my mind with the thought that the Honourable John was a greater fop than either Syd or I supposed.

Bareheaded he went to bid his cousin good-bye. We also shook the captain's hand, and expressed our regret, with John, at the misfortune which had befallen him because of the deflection of the compass. We were the last to leave by the rope-ladder, handing down our portmanteaux before we descended ourselves; and the captain waved his hand to us from the bows before we vanished into the mist. The heavy luggage would have to wait until the steamer floated off with the next tide, and made her way round to Penzance; but negotiations had begun before we left for the conveyance of the mails in time to catch the up train, by which we also intended travelling to London.

John recovered his hat, and we pushed through the yielding shell beach, preceded by our improvised porters, to the broken ramparts of Treryn Dinas; these we climbed, and made our way across the fields to the village of Treryn; and here we hired a trap, which ran us into Penzance in time to discuss a good dinner before we started on our journey by rail.

We were well on the way to Plymouth, and I was reading a newspaper of the day before, when a curious paragraph caught my eye.

"Listen to this!" said I to the other two, and I read: "'It has frequently happened that ships have got out of their course at sea by some unaccountable means, and a warning just issued by the Admiralty may perhaps have some bearing on the matter. Their Lordships say that their attention has been called to the practice of seamen wearing steel stretchers in their caps, and to the danger which may result from these stretchers becoming strongly magnetised, and being worn by men close to the ship's compasses. Instances have been reported of compasses being considerably deflected in this manner, and their Lordships have now directed that the use of steel stretchers in caps is to be immediately discontinued.' I wonder if the deflection of the compass of the *Queen of the Isles* can be explained in a similar way. Possibly the helmsman may have been wearing one of these stretchers."

"Whew!" exclaimed the Honourable John, giving his knee a tremendous slap. "I have it. I must write to my cousin. It is my fault—my fault, entirely. But I never thought of it."

"Thought of what?" asked Syd.

"What do you mean?" inquired I.

"This——" and the Honourable John for once exhibited a rueful face. "You saw where the cap. placed me; and how I tilted my stool and leaned against the binnacle. Well, look here!" and he folded back the lappets of his coat, and showed us a narrow band of flat spring steel that passed under his collar and down either side to keep it from creasing and to help it to fit closely to his body. "That patent thing has done the mischief, without a doubt. Oh, what a fool I am! I might have sent the whole ship-load of us to Davy Jones. I'll forswear this fashionable toggery henceforth when I'm away on holiday, and follow the innocent example of sensible chaps like you."

We made no comment, but we both observed that our companion was singularly

quiet all the way from Plymouth to London.

XIV

IN PERIL IN AFRICA

The attempt to open up new countries, the natives of which object to the process, naturally leads to adventures, often of a very dangerous kind. Nevertheless, explorers and traders take their lives in their hands, considering the possible results well worth the risk.

So does the missionary. In place of worldly fame and wealth, his efforts are likely to bring him suffering and death; but, while facing these, he may spread the faith which is dearer to him than life; he may bring the news of the love of God, with its uplifting power, to those who, sunk in ignorance and degradation, tremble before idols; and he, too, feels that personal dangers are not worth weighing in comparison with the glorious cause in which they are dared. As Bishop Hannington said just before going out as a missionary—

"If I lose my life in Africa, no one must think it has been wasted. The lives that have been already given for the cause are not lost. They are *filling up the trench so that others may the more easily pass over to take the fort in the name of the Lord*!"

That is the spirit in which he went out and in turn laid down his life—helping to fill the trench to such good purpose that his own son, in after years, baptised the son of his murderer! Hannington's life in Africa was a constant succession of dangers faced, difficulties overcome, and hardships endured, all of which his intense faith, and his gift of humour, enabled him to go through cheerfully.

He was a keen sportsman, ever eager to add to his collection of rare creatures, and his letters home give vivid account of some of his adventures. On one or two occasions he had narrow escapes from death—

"This part of the country abounds with game. On one occasion a herd of antelopes crossed the path as tamely as if they had been sheep, and tracks of giraffe and larger game were frequently seen. Guinea-fowl were so plentiful that one of the white men at Mpwapwa told us that he did not trouble to fire at them unless he could ensure killing two or three at a shot.

"I had two narrow escapes in one of my walks with a gun in search of game. I came to a belt of jungle so dense that the only way to get through it was to creep on all fours along the tracks made by hyenas and smaller game; and as I was crawling along I saw close in front of me a deadly puff-adder; in another second I should have been on it.

"The same day, on my return, I espied in one of these same tracks a peculiar arrangement of grass, which I at once recognised to be over a pitfall; but though I had seen it I had already gone too far, and fell with a tremendous crash, my double-barrel gun full-cocked in my hand. I had the presence of mind to let myself go and look out only for my gun, which fortunately did not explode. On arriving at the bottom I called out to my terrified boy, 'Mikuke Hapana,' 'There are no spears,' a most merciful providence; for they often stake these pitfalls in order to ensure the death of animals that fall into them. The pitfall could not have been less than ten feet deep, for when I proceeded to extricate myself I found that I could not reach the top with my uplifted hands.

"Undaunted by my adventures, and urged on by the monotony of nothing but tough goat on the sideboard, I started before the break of next morning in pursuit of game, and was soon to be seen crawling on hands and knees after antelope, I am afraid unmindful of puff-adders and pitfalls.

"By and by the path followed the bed of a narrow stream, which was completely ploughed with the tracks of buffalo and giraffe, as fresh as fresh could be. Our impression was, and probably it was right, that the former were lurking in the dense thicket close by. The breathless excitement that such a position keeps you in does much to help along the weary miles of the march, and to ward off attacks of fever. All experienced hands out here recommend that men should, while not losing sight of their one grand object, keep themselves amused.

"Your cousin Gordon and I, with our boys, had led the van all the morning. He, having lately had fever, complained of being tired, and begged me to continue in pursuit of game alone, merely taking my one faithful boy with me to carry my gun; but I refused to leave him, for never had I complained of an ache or pain but what he was at my side to help and comfort me. We sat down and rested, and the other brethren, with a party of a dozen or fourteen, marched on ahead. They had not gone many hundred yards before I heard the whiz of a bullet. 'They have found game,' said I. Bang went a second shot. 'It's a herd.' Then another. 'Yes, it must be a herd.' Then a fourth, and it dawned on me that they were attacked by robbers—the far-famed Ruga-Ruga.

"'Stay where' you are,' I cried, and dashed off, closely followed by my boys. The bangs had now reached seven, and we had not the slightest doubt it was an attack of robbers, and so it proved to be. My anxiety was relieved by seeing our men all intact, standing together at bay with a foe that was nowhere to be beheld. I soon learnt that as they were quietly proceeding a party of the savage Wahumba tribe had swooped down upon them; but seeing white men with rifles had fled with the utmost precipitation, without even discharging a poisoned arrow. To make their flight more rapid the white men had fired their rifles in the air; and one in grabbing his gun from his boy had managed to discharge it in such a manner as to blow off the sight of his neighbour's rifle. Finding that danger was at an end for the time being, I begged them to remain as they were, ready to receive an attack, while I returned with my boys to Gordon, and got the stragglers together, after which we all proceeded in a body. I have always thought that it was I who had the greatest escape of all; for had I gone on, as Gordon proposed, with only one, or at the outside two boys, I should most probably have been attacked."

A little later the Bishop had an even narrower escape from a justly-enraged lion and lioness—

"Presently, while hunting for insects in short mimosa tangle up to the knee, I disturbed a strange-looking animal, about the size of a sheep, brownish colour, long tail, short legs, feline in aspect and movement, but quite strange to me. I took my gun and shot it dead—yes, quite dead. Away tore my boy as fast as his legs would carry him, terrified beyond measure at what I had done! What, indeed? you may well ask. I had killed the cub of a lioness! Terror was written on every line and feature of the lad, and dank beads of perspiration stood on his face. I saw it as he passed me in his flight, and his fear for the moment communicated itself to me. I turned to flee, and had gone a few paces, when I heard a savage growl, and a tremendous lioness—I say advisedly a tremendous one—bounded straight at me.

"In spite of the loaded gun in my hand, it seemed to me that I was lost. The boy knew more about lions than I did, and his fear knew no bounds. I began to realise that I was in a dangerous situation, for a lioness robbed of her whelp is not the most gentle creature to deal with. I retreated hastily. No; I will out with it, children, in plain language—I ran five or six steps; every step she gained upon me, and the growls grew fiercer and louder. Do I say *she* gained?—*they* gained, for the lion was close behind her, and both were making straight for me. They will pause at the dead cub? No; they take no notice of it; they come at me. What is to be done?

"It now struck me that retreat was altogether wrong. Like a cat with a mouse, it induced them to follow. Escape in this manner was impossible. I halted, and just at that moment came a parting yell from my boy, 'Hakuna! Kimbia!'

"I thought he had seen and heard the lion and lioness, and that, speaking as he does bad Kiswahili, he had said, 'Kakuna Kimbia!' which might be roughly, though wrongly, translated, 'Don't run away!' instead of which he meant to say—in fact, did say—'No! Run away!'

"I have no hesitation in saying that a stop wrongly read but rightly made saved my life. I had in the second or two that had elapsed determined to face it out; and now, strengthened as I thought by his advice, I made a full stop and turned sharply on them. This new policy on my part caused them to check instantly. They now stood lashing their tails and growling, and displaying unfeigned wrath, but a few paces from me.

"I then had time to inspect them. They were a right royal pair of the pale sandy variety, a species which is noted for its fierceness, the knowledge of which by no means made my situation more pleasant. There we stood; both parties evidently feeling that there was no direct solution to the matter in hand. I cannot tell you exactly what passed through their minds, but they evidently thought that it was unsafe to advance upon this strange and new being, the like of which they had never seen before. I cannot tell you either how long a time we stood face to face. Minutes seemed hours, and perhaps the minutes were only seconds; but this I know, my boy was out of hearing when the drama was concluded.

"And this is how it ended: After an interval I decided not to fire at them, but to try instead what a little noise would do. So I suddenly threw up my arms in the air, and set up a yell, and danced and shouted like a madman. Do you know, the lions were so astonished to see your sober old uncle acting in such a strange way that they both bounded into the bushes as if they had been shot, and I saw them no more!

"As the coast was now clear I thought I might as well secure my prize, a real little beauty. So I seized it by its hind legs and dragged it as quickly as I could along the ground, the bushes quite keeping it out of sight. When I had gone what I had deemed a sufficient distance I took it up and swung it over my back, and beat a hasty retreat, keeping a sharp eye open in case the parents should lay claim to the body, for I should not have been dishonest enough not to let them have it had they really come to ask for it!

"I soon found the cub was heavier than I bargained for, being about the size of a South Down sheep, so I shouted for my boy. It was a long time, however, before I could make him hear. I began to be afraid I must abandon my spoil. At length I saw him in the far distance. Fortunately for me he did not know his way back to the camp, otherwise his intention was to return to the camp, and ask the men to come and look for my remains.

"The arrival of the cub caused a tremendous sensation among the natives; dozens of men came to see it, nor would they believe until they had seen the skin that I had dared to kill a 'child of the lioness,' it being more dangerous than killing a lion itself. I do not think that I was wise in shooting; but the fact was it was done, and I was in the scrape before I knew where I was, and having got into trouble, of course the question then was how best to get out of it."

"In some of the places I passed through they had never seen a white man before. They would gather round me in dozens, and gaze upon me in the utmost astonishment. One would suggest that I was not beautiful—in plainer language, that I was amazingly ugly. Fancy a set of hideous savages regarding a white man, regarding your uncle, as a strange outlandish creature frightful to behold. You little boys that run after a black man in the park and laugh at him, think what you may come to when you grow old! The tables may be turned on you if you take to travelling, just as they were with me.

"As with other travellers, my boots hardly ever failed to attract attention.

"'Are those your feet, white man?'

"'No, gentlemen, they are not. They are my sandals.'

"'But do they grow to your feet?'

"'No, gentlemen, they do not, I will show you.'

"So forthwith I would proceed to unlace a boot. A roar of astonishment followed when they beheld my blue sock, as they generally surmised that my feet were blue and toeless. Greater astonishment still followed the withdrawal of the sock, and the revelation of a white five-toed foot. I frequently found that they considered that only the visible parts of me were white, namely, my face and hands, and that the rest of me was as black as they were. An almost endless source of amusement was the immense amount of clothing, according to their calculation, that I possessed. That I should have waistcoat and shirt and jersey

underneath a coat, seemed almost incredible, and the more so when I told them that it was chiefly on account of the sun I wore so much.

"My watch, too, was an unfailing attraction: 'There's a man in it,' 'It is Lubari; it is witch-craft,' they would cry.' He talks; he says, Teek, teek, teek,' My nose they would compare to a spear; it struck them as so sharp and thin compared to the African production, and ofttimes one bolder than the rest would give my hair and my beard a sharp pull, imagining them to be wigs worn for ornament. Many of them had a potent horror for this white ghost, and a snap of the fingers or a stamp of the foot was enough to send them flying helter-skelter from my tent, which they generally crowded round in ranks five deep. For once in a way this was amusing enough; but when it came to be repeated every day and all day, one had really a little too much of a good thing."

Of the discomforts of an African march the Bishop made light, his sense of humour often enabling him to enjoy a good laugh at occurrences which would have irritated some men almost beyond endurance. Of some of the hardships, however, his letters and diary give glimpses—

"Our first experience in this region was not a pleasant one. We had sent our men on before while we dallied with our friends at Mpwapwa. When we reached the summit of the pass we could see various villages with their fires in the plains below, but nowhere was the camp to be discerned. It was a weary time before we could alight on it, and when we did, what a scene presented itself to our gaze!

"The wind was so high that the camp fires were extinguished, and the men had betaken themselves to a deep trench cut through the sandy plain by a mountain torrent, but now perfectly dry; hence our difficulty in making out where the camp was. Two of the tents were in a prostrate condition, while the others were fast getting adrift. Volumes of dust were swamping beds, blankets, boxes, buckets, and in fact everything; and a more miserable scene could scarcely be beheld by a party of benighted pilgrims. It was no use staring at it. I seized a hammer and tent pegs, forgot I was tired, and before very long had things fairly to rights; but I slept that night in a dust-heap.

"Nor did the morning mend matters, and to encourage us the Mpwapwa brethren prophesied this state of things all through Ugogo. It is bad enough in a hot climate to have dust in your hair and down your neck, and filling your boxes; but when it comes to food, and every mouthful you take grates your teeth, I leave you to imagine the pleasure of tent-life in a sandy plain.

"A day or two after this we arrived at a camp where the water was excessively bad. We had to draw it for everybody from one deep hole, and probably rats, mice, lizards, and other small animals had fallen in and been drowned, and allowed to remain and putrefy. The water smelt most dreadfully, no filtering or boiling seemed to have any effect upon it, and soup, coffee, and all food were flavoured by it.

"That afternoon I went for a stroll with my boy and two guns to endeavour to supply the table with a little better meat than tough goat. I soon struck on the dry bed of a masika (wet season) torrent. Following this up a little way I saw a fine troop of monkeys, and wanting the skin of one of them for my collection I sent a bullet flying amongst them, without, however, producing any effect beyond a tremendous scamper. My boy then said to me, 'If you want to kill monkey, master, you should try buck-shot'; so returning him my rifle I took my fowling-piece.

"Perhaps it was fortunate I did so, for about a hundred yards farther on the river bed took a sharp turn, and coming round the corner I lighted on three fine tawny lions. They were quite close to me, and had I had my rifle my first impulse might have been too strong for me to resist speeding the parting guest with a bullet. As it was, I came to a sudden halt, and they ran away. In vain my boy begged me to retreat. I seized the rifle and ran after them as fast as my legs would carry me; but they were soon hid in the dense jungle that lines the river banks; and although I could hear one growling and breathing hard about ten yards from me, I could not get a shot."

Like Moses of old, Bishop Hannington did not enter the land he had come so far to reach. The people of Uganda were alarmed and angry at his approaching their country from the north-east, which they called the back door to their land. Worn out with fever he was seized, dragged backwards over stony ground, and kept a prisoner for some days. On October 29, 1885, he was conducted to an open space outside the village and placed among his followers, having been falsely told on the previous day that King Mwanga had sent word that the party was to be allowed to proceed.

But he was soon undeceived. With a wild shout the savage warriors fell upon the Bishop's enfeebled followers, and their flashing spears speedily covered the ground with dead and dying. As the natives told off to murder him closed round, Hannington drew himself up and bade them tell the king that he was about to die for the people of Uganda, and that he had purchased the road to their country

with his life. Then as they still hesitated he pointed to his own gun, which one of them fired and Hannington fell dead.

His last words to his friends—scribbled by the light of some camp-fire—were—

"If this is the last chapter of my earthly history, then the next will be the first page of the heavenly—no blots and smudges, no incoherence, but sweet converse in the presence of the Lamb!"

XV

KEEPING THE TRYST

Maharaj was a very big elephant and Alec was a half-grown boy—an insignificant human pigmy—in spite of which disparity they were great pals, for Alec admired that mountain of strength as only an imaginative boy can, and elephants can appreciate admiration.

When Alec came across Maharaj he had taken up his quarters temporarily in the mango tope opposite the bungalow. He was pouring dust upon his head and blowing it over his back, both because he enjoyed a dust bath and because it helped to keep off the flies. With the quick perception of a boy, Alec noticed he had used up all the dust within reach, so he got him a few hatfuls from the roadside, for which he was very grateful, and immediately sent a sand blast over his back that annihilated quite a colony of mosquitoes. Then he admitted Alec to his friendship, and they became pals.

Hard by the mahout was cooking his dinner under a tamarind-tree.

"Did the Sahib ask if he was clever? Wait, and the Sahib shall see. Here are his six chapaties of flour that I am baking. Out of one only I shall keep back a handful of meal. How should he detect so small a quantity missing? But we shall see."

The elephant driver put on the cakes to bake—pancake-shaped things, eighteen inches across and an inch thick. They took their time to cook, for the fireplace was small, being only three bricks standing on the ground. When they were ready he placed the cakes before Maharaj, who eyed them suspiciously.

"He has been listening," explained the driver. "Those big ears of his can hear talk a mile away. Go on, my son, eat. What is there wrong with the food?"

Maharaj slowly took up a chapatie in his trunk, carefully weighed it and put it on one side, took up another and did the same. The fourth chapatie was the light one; this he found out at once and indignantly threw it at the feet of the mahout, grumbling and gurgling and swinging his head from side to side and stamping his forefoot in anger.

"What! son of a pig! is not the flour I eat good enough for thee also? Well, starve then, for there is no better in the bazaar."

They walked away; the small restless eyes followed anxiously; yet the elephant made no attempt to eat, but swung angrily from side to side in his pickets. Presently they returned, but he had not touched a chapatie.

"It is no use, Sahib," said the mahout, "to try and cheat one so wise as he, and yet folks say that we mahouts keep our families on the elephants' food, which words are base lies, for is he not more precious to me than many children?"

Then the mahout drew out an extra chapatie he had hidden in his clothes.

"Oh! Maharajah, King of Kings, who can deceive thee, my pearl of wisdom, my mountain of might?" and the mahout caressed the huge trunk as it wound itself lovingly around him and gently extracted the chapatie from his hands. Having swallowed this, the elephant picked up the scattered cakes and, piling them up before him, gave himself up to enjoying his midday meal.

After that Maharaj and Alec grew great friends. Alec used to bring him bazaar sweets, of which he was very fond, and sugar-cane. He was a great wonder to the elephant, who could never understand why his pockets were full of all sorts of uneatable things. He loved to go through them, slowly considering each in his elephantine way. The bright metal handle of Alec's pocket-knife pleased Maharaj, and it was always the first thing he abstracted from the pocket and the last he returned, but the bits of string and the ball of wax he worried over. The key of the pigeon-house, a peg-top, marbles, etc., I believe made him long to have pockets of his own, for he used to hide them away in the recesses of his mouth for a time, then, finding they were not very comfortable, he used to put them all back into Alec's pockets. The day the boy came with sweets Maharaj was delighted, for he smelt them a long way off, and never made a mistake as to which pocket they were in.

It was wonderful to see how gently he could play with the little brown baby of the mahout. He loved to have it lying between his great fore-feet, and would tickle it with the tip of his trunk for the pleasure of hearing it laugh, then pour dust upon it till it was buried, always being careful not to cover the face. But like a great big selfish child he always kept his sweets to himself, and would pretend not to see the little outstretched hand, and little voice crying for them, till he had finished the last tit-bit.

Tippoo—the cook's son, Alec's fag and constant companion, who was mostly a pair of huge pyjamas, was also admitted to the friendship of Maharaj. But there was one man that the elephant disliked, and that was the mahout's nephew, one Piroo, who was a young elephant-driver seeking a situation—a man not likely to be successful, for he was morose and lazy, and drank heavily whenever the opportunity came his way, and was very cruel to the beast he rode.

Sometimes the mahout would take Alec down to the river-side, he driving, while Alec lay luxuriously on the pad. There Maharaj had his bath, and the boy used to help the mahout to rub him over with a lump of jhama, which is something like pumice-stone, only much harder and rougher, and the old skin rolled off under the friction in astonishing quantities, till the look of dried tree-bark was gone, and the dusty grey had become a shining black. After the bath there was usually a struggle with Maharaj, who, directly he was clean, wanted to plaster himself all over with wet mud to keep cool and defy mosquitoes. This he was not allowed to do, so he tore a branch from a neem-tree instead, and fanned himself all the way home.

Now there was to be a marriage among some of the mahout's friends who lived in a village a day's journey from the station, across the river, and he promised that Alec, Tippoo, and his nephew were to accompany him. When the day came the mahout had a slight touch of fever and couldn't go, but he told his nephew to drive the boys there instead. Maharaj didn't like Piroo at all, and made a fuss at having to go without the mahout, for which he got a hot scolding. Then there were tears and pet names and much coaxing before Maharaj consented to go.

"Thou art indeed nothing but a great child that will go nowhere unless I lead thee by the hand, with no more heart in thy big carcase than my babe, who without doubt shall grow big and thrash thee soundly. Now hearken, my son, thou art going with Piroo to the village of Charhunse, one day's journey; thou art to stay there one day, when there will be great feasting, and they will give thee surap wine in thy food; and on the day following thou must return (for we start the next morning for the Cawnpore elephant lines); bring the boys back safely—very safely—or there will be very many angry words from me, and no food. Now, adieu, my son, salaam Sahib, Khoda bunah rhukha" (God preserve you). And the mahout passed into his hut with a shiver that told of the coming ague.

It was a grand day and the road was full of people of all sorts and conditions; and the boys, proud to be so high above the heads of the passing groups, greeted them with all the badinage of the bazaar they could remember, which the natives

answered with good-natured chaff. The road was one long avenue, and in the branches overhead the monkeys sported and chased each other from tree to tree; birds sang, for it was nesting-time; and the day was as happy as it was long.

At nightfall they reached the village, and the head man made them very comfortable. The next day the wedding feast was spread, and quite two hundred people sat down to it. After the feast there was racing, wrestling, and dancing to amuse the guests.

They enjoyed themselves very much. The wedding feast was to last several days, and instead of returning the following day as they had promised the mahout, Piroo determined to stay a day longer, in spite of all that Alec had to say against it.

Piroo was in his element, and sang and danced with great success, for the arrack was in his veins, and at such times he could be the antipodes of his morose self. His dancing was much applauded. But there was Bhuggoo, the sweeper, from the city, who had a reputation for dancing, and was in great request at weddings in consequence, and he danced against Piroo, and so elegant and ingenious were his contortions that he was voted the better. Then he changed his dance to one in which he caricatured Piroo so cleverly in every turn and gesture that the people yelled and laughed.

This so incensed Piroo that he struck the man; but the sweeper, who was generally accustomed to winding up his performance by a grand broom fight with some brother of the same craft, was quite ready for an affair that could only increase his popularity. Catching up his jharroo, or broom, he began to shower blows upon the unfortunate Piroo, yet never ceasing to dance round him so grotesquely that the fight was too much of a farce for any one to think of interfering. Yet the blows went home pretty hard, and as the broom was a sort of besom made of the springy ribs of the palm-leaf it stung sharply where it found the naked flesh.

It is a great indignity to be beaten by the broom of a sweeper, and Piroo, maddened with rage, flew at the throat of his rival. But Bhuggoo, the sweeper, was very nimble, and as the end of a jharroo in the face feels like the back of a porcupine, you may guess it is the most effective way of stopping a rush. So Piroo, baffled and humiliated, left the sweeper victor of the field and fled amid great shouts of laughter. But his rage had not died in him, and more arrack made him mad; else why should he have done the foolish thing that followed?

Finding Maharaj had pulled up one of his picket pins, he took a heavy piece of firewood and dashed it upon his tender toe-nails, while he shouted all the abuse that elephants know only accompanies severe punishment. Now Maharaj, who would take punishment quietly from Buldeo, the old mahout, would not stand it from any other; besides, he was already excited with all the shouting and tamasha going on, and he had had a good bit of arrack in his cakes that evening; so when the log crashed down on his feet he trumpeted with pain, and, seizing Piroo in his trunk, lifted him on high, preparatory to dashing him to earth and stamping his life out.

SEIZING PIROO IN HIS TRUNK, HE LIFTED HIM ON HIGH.

But fortune was in favour of Piroo for a time, and the big cummerbund he wore had got loose with dancing, so it came undone, and Piroo slipped down its length to the ground, while Maharaj was left holding the loose cloth in his trunk.

Then Piroo fled for his life, and ran into a grass-thatched hut that stood close by; but the elephant, pulling out his picket pins like a couple of toothpicks, reached the hut in a stride, and, putting his trunk through the thatch as if it had been a sheet of paper, felt round for the man inside and, seizing him, dragged him forth. The people yelled, and some came running with fire-brands to scare him, but before any could reach him Maharaj had knocked one of his great fore-feet against the head of the unfortunate Piroo, and he fell to the ground lifeless.

The villagers were terror-stricken and ran to hide in their huts. Tippoo, who was nearest the elephant, ran also, and Alec was about to run when he saw Maharaj single out Tippoo and chase him. The boy fled, and his flying feet hardly seemed to touch the earth, but Maharaj with long swinging strides covered the ground much faster, and in a few moments there followed a shriek of despair and Tippoo was struggling helplessly fifteen feet in the air in the grasp of that terrible trunk.

"Save me! Sahib, save me!" he shrieked, while Alec looked on powerless to help.

Maharaj seemed undecided whether to dash him to pieces or not. Alec seized the opportunity to imitate the driver's voice and cry, "Bring the boys home safely—very safely—my son." The elephant's great fan-shaped ears bent forward to listen, and he lowered Tippoo till he hung swinging at the end of the huge proboscis. Alec felt he dared not repeat the words, as the elephant would find out the cheat.

The great beast stood a few minutes thinking, and then, swinging Tippoo up, placed him on his neck, and came straight for the tree behind which Alec was hiding.

For a moment a wild desire to escape came to the boy, and the next he saw how hopeless it would be. The sal-tree he had sheltered behind was too thick to climb, and the lowest branch was twenty feet from the ground. To run would be

just madness, for Maharaj would have caught him before he could get to the nearest hut. So, taking confidence from the fact that he had not hurt Tippoo, Alec came out from behind the tree and ordered Maharaj to take him up.

He was surprised at the exceeding gentleness with which he did so, but when Alec was once seated astride of his neck with Tippoo behind him, he did not know what to do. He thought he would walk the elephant round the village and then tie him up in his pickets again. So he cried, "Chalo! Bata!" (Go on, my son), and tried to guide him with his knees; but Maharaj would not budge an inch, and stood stock still, considering. Then he seemed to have made up his mind, and started forward suddenly with a lurch that nearly threw the boys off.

He walked straight to the dead mahout and, carefully gathering him up in his trunk, wheeled round and set off stationwards. He had remembered his master's commands, and the journey to Cawnpore he must commence on the morrow.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening, and Alec had no desire to start travelling homeward at that hour. Besides, he had no food with him, and the pad was not on the back of Maharaj. It is almost impossible to ride an elephant bare back, and though these were only slips of boys there wasn't room enough for two to sit comfortably on the neck. Alec drove his knees into the elephant's head behind the ears and tried to turn him round, shouting, "Dhutt, dhutt, arrea!" (Go back!), but it was no use; the elephant had made up his mind to go home, and took not the least notice of the boy's commands.

The head man of the village ran after them, crying—

"Where are you taking him, Sahib?"

"We take him nowhere," Alec answered. "He is master to-night, and carries us home, I believe."

"But you cannot ride without the pad, Sahib, or the driving-hook, and there are other things you leave behind."

"We will stick on his neck till we drop," he answered (for an elephant is worth many thousand rupees to the Government, and must not get lost).

"At least command him to drop the dead body before he mangles it, so that we may burn it with decent ceremony," was the last request of the head man.

But Maharaj would not listen to the command, and made certain noises in his

throat by which he meant Alec to understand that he was going to carry the dead man home whether he liked it or no.

The lights of the village were soon lost in the distance, and Maharaj strode into the empty darkness, trailing a picket pin behind him and carrying that horror in his trunk.

Till that day Alec had loved Maharaj for his great strength and docility, his wisdom, and his endearing ways with children, but when he saw him in anger extinguish the life of a man as easily as one could pulp a gooseberry in the fingers, the elephant changed at once in his eyes, and Alec saw in him nothing but the grim executioner of the Moguls, and stamping out lives his daily task. The boy felt the touch of the beast almost loathsome, and longed to escape from his situation on its neck.

Soon the cramped position began to tell, for they were jammed together, and Tippoo felt like a mustard-plaster upon Alec's back. Alec tried to vary the discomfort by lying forward on the head of the elephant, and Tippoo tried leaning back as far as he could without being in danger of falling off, but they both felt they could not hold on the eight hours that the journey would take.

By-and-by they noticed that something was making Maharaj restive; twice he swung his trunk as if trying to drive away that something, after which he quickened his pace, then he turned round once in his tracks and faced his unseen tormentor. Alec wondered greatly what was worrying him, but he heard and saw nothing in the blackness that reigned. The elephant's restiveness increased, and again he swung round suddenly and charged that invisible thing in the dark; again Alec strained both eyes and ears to no avail. The only sound on the air came from the trailing picket pin.

"Whatever is worrying Maharaj?" he said anxiously.

"He sees that which our eyes can't see—an evil thing," answered Tippoo.

"What! do you mean the ghost of Piroo?" Alec asked.

"No, Sahib," said Tippoo. "It is a churail, an evil spirit that eats dead men, and it wants the body of Piroo."

"Nonsense," Alec replied.

"It is true, Sahib. Many have seen it at work in the graveyards of the Mussulman,

but to-night no one may see it but the elephant."

Alec laughed. Yet, ghoul or not, there was something the huge beast seemed afraid of and hurried to get away from, or attempted to frighten back, without success.

It was a most weird and uncanny situation, and the boys longed for it to end.

But a pleasant change was at hand. The heavens were rapidly lighting, and soon the moon commenced to rise on the scene. A feeling of relief grew with the strengthening light, for they were sure the ghostly terror would disappear with the dark. The moon had partly risen when Tippoo said, "Look, Sahib, there is the thing."

Alec looked, and in the uncertain light saw a shadowy something keeping pace with the elephant, but what it was he could not say.

Then on the other side of the road they saw there was another moving shadow as mysterious as the first. But they were not kept in suspense much longer, for the light suddenly brightened, and they saw each weird shadow transform itself into a number of jackals. The smell of blood had attracted the pack, and they had made an attempt to get the dead body away from Maharaj. The reaction on their strained nerves was so great that the boys laughed aloud in pure joy at the sense of relief, and wondered they had not guessed the cause of the elephant's restlessness before.

For nearly four hours they had been on that apology for a neck, and their limbs were painful and stiff from the discomfort of sitting so close, when, without any warning, Maharaj came to a stop under a big neem-tree, and they recognised it as the place at which they had taken their midday meal going down to the village. Maharaj carefully placed the body of Piroo on the ground and knelt down beside it, and the boys, only too pleased at the chance, scrambled off as fast as their cramped legs would permit. It needed some walking up and down to get rid of their stiffness, so they chased the jackals and pelted them with stones, which restored their circulation quickly, whilst Maharaj stood sentry over the dead man.

Tired out and exhausted, the boys were anxious for a little sleep, but they could not lie under the same tree as that gruesome thing, so they lay down under a neighbouring sal. Alec was on the way to dreamland when he felt he was being carried gently in some one's arms. He woke up and found that Maharaj had lifted him in his trunk and that he was taking him back to the tree where the dead lay.

Here he placed Alec on the ground alongside the mahout, on the other side of which was Tippoo snoring peacefully. How he had managed to move the boy without waking him was a marvel. As soon as Alec was released he tried to get away, but Maharaj would not allow it, and forced him to lie down again while he stood guard over all three.

They say boys have no nerves, but even at this distance of time Alec shudders to recollect his sensations on that night of horror caused by the poor crushed thing he lay shoulder to shoulder with. He feigned sleep and tried to roll a foot or two away, but Maharaj had grown suspicious, and rolled him back, so that he lay flat on his shoulder-blades between the forelegs of the elephant, watching the restless swing of the trunk above him. This was better than looking at what lay beside him, and he wanted no inducement to keep his gaze averted. A hyena laughed like an exultant fiend. Great flying foxes slowly flapped across the face of the moon, like Eblis and his satellites scanning the earth for prey, and the pack of jackals sat silently waiting for the body of the dead.

Maharaj was very quiet and vigilant, and seemed to understand the seriousness of his crime. The usual gurgling, grunting, and rocking with which he amused himself at night were wanting, and though there was a large field of sugar-cane near by, and he must have been hungry, he never tried to help himself as he would have done on any other occasion. In spite of the feeling of repulsion Alec began to feel a little pity for the remorseful giant, for it was most probable he would be shot for killing Piroo, whose drunken madness had brought about his own death.

But all things have an end, and even that night passed away like the passing of a strange delirium. About four o'clock Maharaj became very restless, thinking it was time to start, and pulled and pushed Tippoo till he sat up, rubbing his eyes and looking about in a dazed way. The elephant went down on his knees, and the boys took advantage of the invitation and were soon in their places. Then Maharaj slowly picked up his burden and they recommenced their journey home. The jackals were much disappointed, and followed listlessly for a short distance, then slunk off down a nullah to avoid the light of day.

A sleepy policeman was the first to notice the dead man in the trunk of the elephant. With a yell of alarm he sprang from the footpath where he stood, panting and staring till Maharaj had passed; then some confused notion that he should make an arrest seemed to occur to him, and he made a few steps forward, but the magnitude of the task made him halt again, dazed and bewildered, and

thus they left him. The consternation they caused in the bazaar is beyond words to describe. It is sufficient to say that the better part of the population followed Maharaj at a safe distance, looking like some huge procession, wending its way to the hut of the mahout. Maharaj walked slowly to the door of the hut and laid the corpse down.

"Hast thou brought them back safely, my son?" cried a fever-stricken voice from the depths of the hut.

"Goor-r-r," said Maharaj in his throat.

"That is well; but why didst thou not arrive last evening? Didst travel all night? Piroo, thou wilt find his sugar-cane in the shed; give him a double measure and drive his pickets in under the mango-tree."

But there was no answer from Piroo, only the frightened whisperings of a great number of people assembled outside. The old mahout, in alarm, staggered to the door, and saw the body at the feet of Maharaj and the crimson stains upon the trunk and feet of the elephant.

"Ahhi! ahhi! ahhi!" cried the old man aloud, "what madness is this? What hast thou done, my son? Now they will shoot thee without doubt—thy life for his, and he was not worth his salt. Ahhi! ahhi!"

Then the old man wept, embracing the trunk of the elephant, which was coiled round his master, while the people looked on, and the boys, worn and tired by the strain of that awful night, could barely cling to their seats on the neck of Maharaj.

Then the mahout, weak as he was, helped them off, and set about washing the dark red stains away.

"Ahhi! ahhi!" he sobbed. "I have lost a nephew. I have lost also my son, who will surely be shot by the sirkar for this deed. My Maharaj, my greatest of kings! What shall I do without thee! I will return to my country and drive no more. Ahhi! ahhi!"

But this happily was not to be, for a strange thing happened. The nephew recovered. Piroo had only been stunned by the blow, and the blood that covered his face had come from his nose. He was, after a time, himself again, but a wiser man, and Maharaj was not shot after all. Yet the boys do not like to think of that adventure even to-day.

XVI

WHO GOES THERE?

The world is but a huge playground, after all; and just as the sympathy of those who witness a fight between two boys—one of whom is a big fellow and a reputed bully, while the other is a plucky youngster but one-half his opponent's size—invariably goes with the smaller and weaker combatant, so it is even amongst nations. Thus, early in the past century, when the tiny States of Spanish America were keenly struggling with the mother-country in their endeavour to cast off the Spanish yoke, practically the whole world wished them the success which eventually crowned their efforts.

It seems ridiculous to call them "tiny" States when the smallest of those of which we are treating—the Republics of *Central* America—could find room for all the counties of Wales; while, if we were able to set down the whole of England upon the largest, we should find not only that it fitted in comfortably, but that the foreign State would yet have a goodly slice of land to spare—sufficient, at any rate, to accommodate three or four cities of the size of London. I call them tiny, therefore, solely because they are such when compared with other countries on the American Continent, such as Canada, the United States, and Brazil.

During the years 1820 and 1821 a very keen spirit of independence was manifested in those regions, and by 1823 the last link of the rusty chain which had bound those colonies to Spain was snapped altogether beyond repair; and then, for a time, Central America became part of the State of Mexico. One by one, however, the colonies withdrew, and in 1824 the independent Republic of Central America was formed, which, in its turn, was dissolved; and ever since the States have been continually at war—either with their neighbours or amongst themselves.

It is these incessant wars and revolutions which have given the country its present rather bad name, and have convinced those who happened to sympathise with the inhabitants when they were fighting for their independence that, after all, they had fared better even under the lame government of Spain than they have done under their own.

The present-day native of Central America can scarcely be said to be an improvement on the inhabitant of 1824. He still retains the fire and ire of the Spaniard in his blood—in fact, he is nothing short of an unfortunate mixture of the fiery Spaniard and the extremely restless Indian. Small wonder, then, that "peace" is quite a luxury in those parts, and that revolutions break out periodically.

In Nicaragua—the country with which my tale is concerned—this is especially the case. One year passed without a revolution is a rarity; and I have gone through certainly not less than four such outbreaks. While the trouble exists it is decidedly inconvenient and uncomfortable for the foreigner, but the real danger is often sadly exaggerated. During one of these disturbances, nevertheless, I narrowly escaped coming into serious conflict with the authorities—and all through a boyish freak, which at any time would have been boyish, but amounted almost to madness when played in the very heart of a town under martial law. When I first set foot on Central American soil, however, my majority was still many months ahead of me, and I had not yet done with that period of puerile frivolity through which most youths have to pass. Thus I will offer no other excuse, but will merely relate what took place.

A pig—a common or garden pig—was at the bottom of it all. The natives are very fond of pork indeed, and nearly every household boasts of at least one porker, which is allowed the entire run of the house and looked upon almost as "one of the family." The air in the town where I was staying at the time had suddenly thickened with rumours of war; and it was a well-known fact that some thousands of men were ready to shoulder their rifles at a given signal and, with a few well-tried veterans at their head, to make a mad and murderous rush upon anything and everything belonging to the Government.

In such cases nothing is too bad for either party, excepting perhaps interference with foreigners, whom, owing to one or two severe lessons received of late years, the natives have now learned to respect. Fusillades in the centre of a town, a sudden charge with the bayonet in a thronged market-place, the unexpected firing of a mine, and similar proofs of the "patriotism" of one party or the other, may be expected at any moment; and although pretending to inclusion in the list of civilised nations, either party will spurn the idea of notice or warning previous to the bombardment of a town. Every one is on the alert, and the tension is trying indeed if it happens to be one's first "revolution."

Bloodthirsty natives, speaking scarcely above a whisper, may be seen in small

groups at almost every street corner, and in such quarters of the town where reside known sympathisers with the attacking party much military movement is noticeable. Every few hundred yards are stationed pickets of gendarmes or barefooted *soldados*; and after dusk, no matter who you be or what your errand, you stand every chance of a bullet should you fail to give prompt satisfaction on being challenged with the usual *quien vive?*

And so it was on the occasion to which I have alluded. Everybody's nerves were strung up to a painful pitch, and any unusual noise—any sound, almost, above a half-smothered cough—would bring fifty or sixty reckless gendarmes, with fixed bayonets, to the spot in a very brief interval. It was generally looked upon as certain that an assault upon the town—in which one half the inhabitants were willing, nay, even anxious to join—would commence before morning; and an ominous silence prevailed.

Then it was that my "little joke" or scheme was hatched. I was indulging in a quiet game of "cannons" on a small French billiard-table in my hotel, and during the game had been several times annoyed by the proprietor's favourite pig, which insisted every now and then on strolling beneath the table, to emerge on the other side quite unexpectedly and bump heavily against my legs just as I was squaring for some difficult shot. The brute had done this at least four times, with the result that my opponent was many points to the good. I had often licked him at the same game before, so the reader must not imagine that I am merely excusing my own play—it was the pig's fault, without a doubt, and I was beginning to lose my temper.

"I'll teach that pig a lesson when the game is over," I remarked to my opponent; and, in effect, I had soon put away my cue, and, cornering the porker, fastened a piece of cord to his hind trotter. A large empty biscuit-tin and a bunch of Chinese crackers did the rest—the tin being secured to the other end of the line and the crackers nestling snugly inside the tin.

The natives who stood around watching these preparations evidently foresaw certain results which my boyish vision failed to reach, for they whispered and laughed to one another, and at intervals, rubbing their hands together with glee, would exclaim, "A good joke." "Eh! a good joke, you see!"

The whole town was startled a few minutes later by the uproar, and the shouts and laughter of those who witnessed the porker's departure from the hotel.

Lighting the tiny fuse attached to the crackers, I put them back again into the tin,

and a kick at the latter was sufficient to startle the hog off at a gallop down the street.

The slight pull on his hind leg caused by the weight of the tin evidently annoyed him, and, wishing to get away from it, he ran the faster.

Boom! boom! The biscuit-tin swung from side to side at every pace, and each time it struck the ground with a noisy report which in itself was sufficient to arouse the already alarmed town.

Then, the fuse having burned down, the crackers commenced business. Bang! bang! Burr-rr—bang! Burr-rr—bang-bang-BANG! they went, the vibrations of the tin adding volume to each detonation; and it would be difficult indeed to imagine a better imitation of a distant fusillade. The frightened hog only went the faster.

I was running behind, endeavouring to keep up with the pig, for I did not wish to lose any of the fun; but he soon out-distanced me, although I was fortunate enough to be within ear-shot when the crackers gave their final kick.

Bang! bang! Burr—rr—bang! Bang! BANG!

Then began the fun. The inhabitants crowded to their doors to inquire in which direction the attack on the town had commenced, and the military were tearing hither and thither, like so many madmen. Big generals in their shirt-sleeves galloped through the streets on little horses, collecting their men; pieces of artillery were rushed out of the barracks and held in readiness; scouts went out to reconnoitre in every conceivable direction, and the military band, playing all the national airs within their ken, paraded the public square, halting every now and then so that an officer might read to the public the Commandante's orders to the effect that all the inhabitants must remain indoors under pain of all sorts of outrageous and impossible penalties.

In view of the latter, however, I deemed it wise to give up my chase and return to my hotel, there to await developments; and as I retraced my steps cries of *El enemigo! El enemigo!* hailed me at almost every pace. Hundreds of questions as to the whereabouts of the attacking forces were hurled at me as I went, but I dared not stop to respond, or without a doubt I should have betrayed myself. At the onset, boylike, I had considered this a "splendid joke," but now the alarm was so widespread that I did not know whether to feel startled by the result or flattered to think I had succeeded in putting an entire town in an uproar.

I thought of the pleasure that would be experienced by the ordinary "romp" at home were he able to make so vast an impression with his everyday practical jokes; and it was to me a matter of tremendous wonder that a harmless biscuit-tin, a common or garden firework, and a "domestic" pig could possibly combine to cause such intense excitement.

With very great difficulty I managed to pass the various pickets stationed along the streets, being detained by each one for cross-examination; and ere I reached my hotel I was overtaken by half a company of *soldados* returning to barracks with a prisoner. Then my conscience began to prick me.

"This has gone rather too far," I thought. "I did not intend to do any one an injury, but only desired to teach that wretched porker a lesson." In fact, I felt distinctly uncomfortable as I trudged along, and somewhat alarmed at this new turn of events; and I resolved that in the future I would look ahead before attempting even the commonest practical joke.

When I reached the spot where the next picket was stationed, I was surprised to find that the men failed to challenge me. I was getting quite used to the "Who goes there?" which had met me at every street corner, and the absence of it in this case made me somewhat suspicious. The explanation was not long in coming. I found them all in fits of laughter; and, availing myself of the opportunity which their mirth afforded me, I made inquiries as to the name of the prisoner who had been marched past me a few minutes ago. My question provoked more mirth, but I eventually secured the information, which had the effect of adding my mirth to theirs, for I learned that the prisoner was—*a pig with a tin tied to his leg*.

This pig, I was informed, was the cause of the whole alarm. There was no attack—in fact, there was no enemy near enough to the town, as yet, to indulge in an assault. All was a practical joke—some one had let this pig loose with a biscuit-tin tied to his leg, and this had started the alarm. The porker had been run down and lassoed by the military on the outskirts of the town, so that it was all over now—*excepting that the authorities were looking for the perpetrator*, or the originator of the scare.

Realising now the extent of my folly, I, who hitherto had been laughing up my sleeve at the discomfiture and alarm of others, was in my turn genuinely alarmed, and all the way back to my hotel I was wondering as to what would be my best course of action—foreseeing, whichever way I turned for a solution,

visions of heavy fines, probable imprisonment, and possible banishment from the country altogether.

On reaching the hotel I was hailed by many of those who had witnessed "the start," and consequently knew my connection with the affair. They soon posted me as to what had happened during my absence.

Ere the pig and myself had been gone five minutes, a picket of soldiers made a rush upon the hotel, went inside, and, closing every exit, informed the occupants that every one must consider himself under arrest until the real originator of the "scare" was discovered. The officer remarked that he knew for a fact that the matter began there, and although the pig had not yet been caught it had been recognised as "*belonging to the proprietor's family*."

Then, to the surprise of every one concerned, a certain Colonel Moyal, a native keenly opposed to the Government and a suspected revolutionist, stepped forward and declared that he had carried the whole thing through from beginning to end, so was prepared to take the consequences.

Needless to say, my champion was arrested and marched off to the Cabildo; and I was informed that the plucky fellow had done this to shield me, merely to keep me out of trouble because he had taken a fancy to me.

Not for this, however, would I let him remain in his unenviable position. It did not take me long to resolve that, to be honourable, I must myself bear the consequences of my own folly; and in a very short time afterward I was interviewing the Commandante. That official, in whose favour I had long since made it my business to firmly establish myself, informed me that it was then too late at night to take any evidence, or, in fact, to move at all in the matter; but that he would attend to me at eight o'clock next morning.

The following day at the appointed hour I waited on him, told him I was the real culprit, secured the colonel's release, paid a fine of a few dollars, and by nine o'clock was back again in my hotel; and when I sat down with the Colonel that night to a special *cena* to which I had invited him—intending in some measure to prove to him my gratitude for his generosity and esteem—I made a rather boyish speech in which I regretted tremendously the Colonel's having passed an exceedingly uncomfortable night in prison on my account, and my inability to release him the night before.

Moyal, to my intense surprise, replied that he had to *thank me* for the

opportunity I had given him. "Of course," said he, "I should not like to see you in trouble, and would have done anything in my power to keep you out of it, but I must admit that my motive was not the generous one that has been attributed to me. It was a rather selfish motive, you see, between you and me. I am a moving spirit in this revolution which is brewing, and I have important business with the Government soldiers inside the Cabildo. In the ordinary course, since I am known as a revolutionist, I cannot possibly get into open or secret communication with them—so of course I had to get arrested, and you gave me that chance!"

I was about to ask him, boylike, whether he was successful in his mission, when he added, "The only pity is that you didn't let me stay there a bit longer—but you were not to know, so I appreciate your promptness."

However, I had reason to believe afterwards that he had not succeeded in his object, which, I have no doubt, was to "buy" all the *soldados* over to his side, for up to this day the political party to which the Colonel belonged is out of power, though it has repeatedly made efforts to get in.

XVII

A DROWNING MESSMATE

It is as one of the most popular sea-novelists of all times that Captain Marryat is best known to his countrymen—oldsters and youngsters alike. The whole life of this gallant seaman, however, was made up of one long series of exciting adventures, both on land and sea, many of these experiences being made use of in after years to supply material for his sea-romances.

One of Marryat's most characteristic acts of self-devotion was his springing overboard into the waters of Malta Harbour in order to save the life of a middy messmate, Cobbett by name, who had accidentally fallen overboard. What made this action an especially noble one was the fact that Cobbett was one of the greatest bullies in the midshipmen's berth, and had specially singled out Marryat for cowardly and brutal treatment. Again, we must remember that sharks are often seen in Malta Harbour, and any one rash enough to enter its waters takes his life in his hands.

Thank God the gunroom of a British man-of-war of the present day is managed in an entirely different manner from what it was in Marryat's day. Says that gallant officer: "There was no species of tyranny, injustice, and persecution to which youngsters were not compelled to submit from those who were their superiors in bodily strength."

The entire management and organisation of the Royal Navy at that period was rotten to the core, and it speaks volumes for the devotion, skill, and bravery of the gallant officers of the fleet that they so magnificently upheld the glory and honour of the flag in every quarter of the globe in spite of the shortcomings of the Admiralty Board.

As an instance of this general mismanagement of naval affairs, Marryat, who had been sent to join the *Impérieuse* frigate as a young middy, thus writes in his private log—

"The *Impérieuse* sailed; the admiral of the port was one who *would* be obeyed, but *would not* listen always to reason or common-sense. The signal for sailing was enforced by gun after gun; the anchor was hove up, and, with all her stores

on deck, her guns not even mounted, in a state of confusion unparalleled from her being obliged to hoist in faster than it was possible she could stow away, she was driven out of harbour to encounter a heavy gale. A few hours more would have enabled her to proceed to sea with security, but they were denied; the consequences were appalling, and might have been fatal.

"In the general confusion, some iron too near the binnacles had attracted the needle of the compasses; the ship was steered out of her course. At midnight, in a heavy gale at the close of the month of November, so dark that you could not distinguish any object, however close, the *Impérieuse* dashed upon the rocks between Ushant and the Main. The cry of terror which ran through the lower deck; the grating of the keel as she was forced in; the violence of the shocks which convulsed the frame of the vessel; the hurrying up of the ship's company without their clothes; and then the enormous waves which again bore her up and carried her clean over the reef, will never be effaced from my memory.

"Our escape was miraculous. With the exception of her false keel having been torn off, the ship had suffered little injury; but she had beat over a reef, and was riding by her anchors, surrounded by rocks, some of them as high out of water as her lower-yards, and close to her. How nearly were the lives of a fine ship's company, and of Lord Cochrane and his officers, sacrificed in this instance to the despotism of an admiral who *would* be obeyed!

"The cruises of the *Impérieuse* were periods of continual excitement, from the hour in which she hove up her anchor till she dropped it again in port; the day that passed without a shot being fired in anger was with us a blank day; the boats were hardly secured on the booms than they were cast loose and out again; the yard and stay tackles were for ever hoisting up and lowering down.

"The expedition with which parties were formed for service; the rapidity of the frigate's movements, night and day; the hasty sleep, snatched at all hours; the waking up at the report of the guns, which seemed the only key-note to the hearts of those on board; the beautiful precision of our fire, obtained by constant practice; the coolness and courage of our captain inoculating the whole of the ship's company; the suddenness of our attacks, the gathering after the combat, the killed lamented, the wounded almost envied; the powder so burnt into our faces that years could not remove it; the proved character of every man and officer on board; the implicit trust and the adoration we felt for our commander; the ludicrous situations which would occur even in the extremest danger and create mirth when death was staring you in the face; the hairbreadth escapes, and

the indifference to life shown by all—when memory sweeps along those years of excitement even now, my pulse beats more quickly with the reminiscence."

A middy's life was no child's play in those days, was it?

But it is time that I told you the story of how Marryat saved the life of his messmate Cobbett, in the Mediterranean.

The *Impérieuse* was lying at anchor in Malta Harbour at the time the incident happened. It was about the hour of sunset, and the officer on duty had turned the men of the second dog watch up to hoist the boats to the davits. The men ran away smartly with the falls, and soon had the cutters clear of the water and swung high in the air.

At this moment, Cobbett, who was off duty, went into the main-chains with some lines and bait in order to fish. In endeavouring to get on one of the ratlines of the lower-rigging his foot unfortunately slipped, and he fell headlong overboard into the waters of the Grand Harbour. Several persons witnessed the accident, and the prodigious splash the middy's body made in striking the water immediately made known to every one else that a struggle for life had commenced.

Cobbett could not swim a stroke, and was much hampered by his heavy clothes and boots. At the first plunge he was carried far beneath the surface, but quickly rose again, puffing and blowing like a grampus, and making desperate efforts to keep himself afloat.

The officer of the watch promptly called away the lifeboat's crew, and these men quickly scrambled into one of the quarter-boats, which by this time had been run up to the davits. Life-buoys too had been thrown overboard, but not one of them had fallen near enough to the struggling boy to enable him to grasp it. Young Marryat happened at the time of the accident to be standing in the waist of the ship conversing with the captain of the main-top of the watch below. Hearing the splash and the excited cries of "Man overboard!" which rang out fore-and-aft, he rushed to the gangway to see if he could be of any assistance in the emergency.

One can imagine his feelings on beholding his arch-enemy, the bully of the midshipmen's berth, struggling desperately for life under the frigate's counter. Being an admirable swimmer himself, Marryat saw at a glance that his messmate was helpless in the water, and indeed was on the point of sinking. Without a moment's hesitation, and without waiting to throw off coat or boots, the plucky

youngster boldly plunged overboard, and quickly rising to the surface, struck out for his now almost unconscious enemy, and fortunately managed to seize him and keep him afloat, whilst he shouted to those on board to lower the cutter as quickly as possible. The men were only too eager to go to his assistance, and the instant the lifeboat was safely in the water, her crew got their oars out, and, pulling vigorously to the spot, soon hauled both midshipmen, wet and dripping, inboard.

Cobbett was unconscious, his face being as pale as death, but it was only a matter now of a few seconds to get him aboard the frigate, where he soon revived under the care of the surgeons, and was able to return to duty in the course of a day or two, much humbled in spirit, and very grateful to the courageous young messmate who had so gallantly saved his life at the risk of his own.

Writing home to his mother on the subject of this adventure, Marryat concluded his account by saying: "From that moment I have loved the fellow as I never loved friend before. All my hate is forgotten. I have saved his life."

A ludicrous adventure in the water once befell Captain Marryat. In the gallant officer's private log occurs this entry: "July 10th.—Anchored in Carrick Roads, Falmouth. Gig upset with captain."

Florence Marryat in her father's memoirs thus relates the incident: "When this gig was capsized, it contained, besides Captain Marryat, a middy and an old bumboat woman. The woman could swim like a fish, but the boy could not, and as Captain Marryat, upon rising to the surface of the water and preparing to strike out for the ship, found himself most needlessly clutched and borne up by this lady, he shook her off impatiently, saying: 'Go to the boy! Go to the boy! He can't swim!'

"'*Go to the boy!*' she echoed above the winds and waves. 'What! hold up a midshipman when I can save the life of a captain! Not I indeed!' And no entreaties could prevail on her to relinquish her impending honours. Who eventually did the 'dirty work' on this occasion is not recorded, but it is certain that no one was drowned."

As is well known, sailors are devoted to animals, and Marryat was no exception to the rule. He has left on record a story of a pet baboon, which was on board the *Tees* with him—

"I had on board a ship which I commanded a very large Cape baboon, who was a pet of mine, and also a little boy, who was a son of mine. When the baboon sat down on his hams he was about as tall as the boy when he walked. The boy, having a tolerable appetite, received about noon a considerable slice of bread-and-butter to keep him quiet till dinner-time. I was on one of the carronades, busy with the sun's lower limb, bringing it into contact with the horizon, when the boy's lower limbs brought him into contact with the baboon, who, having, as well as the boy, a strong predilection for bread-and-butter, and a stronger arm to take it withal, thought proper to help himself to that to which the boy had already been helped. In short, he snatched the bread-and-butter, and made short work of it, for it was in his pouch in a moment.

"Upon this the boy set up a yell, which attracted my notice to this violation of the articles of war, to which the baboon was equally amenable as any other person in the ship, for it is expressly stated in the preamble of every article, 'all who are *in*, or *belonging* to.' Whereupon I jumped off the carronade and, by way of assisting his digestion, I served out to the baboon *monkey's allowance*, which is more kicks than halfpence! The master reported that the heavens intimated that it was twelve o'clock, and, with all the humility of a captain of a man-of-war, I ordered him to 'make it so'; whereupon it was made, and so passed that day.

"I do not remember how many days it was afterwards that I was on the carronade as usual, about the same time, and all parties were precisely in the same situations—the master by my side, the baboon under the booms, and the boy walking out of the cabin with his bread-and-butter. As before, he again passed the baboon, who again snatched the bread-and-butter from the boy, who again set up a squall, which again attracted my attention. I looked round, and the baboon caught my eye, which told him plainly that he'd soon catch what was not at all *my eye*; and he proved that he actually thought so, for he at once put the bread-and-butter back into the boy's hands!

"It was the only instance of which I ever knew or heard of a monkey being capable of self-denial where his stomach was concerned, and I record it accordingly. This poor fellow, when the ship's company were dying of the cholera, took that disease, went through all its gradations, and died apparently in great agony."

XVIII

THE PILOT OF PORT CREEK

The sun, low in the west, was sinking behind a heavy cloudbank, which, to nautical eyes, portended fog at sea.

A mariner, far out in the Channel, in a small boat, was shading his eyes with his hand and gazing towards the south-western horizon.

The lad—he was not more than eighteen—was calculated to attract attention. He was of fine physique. His hair shone like burnished gold. His eyes were deep blue, clear, and bright. A marked firmness was about his mouth and chin; and when he seized the oars and rowed to counteract the boat's leeway caused by the tide, the grip of his hands was as that of a vice.

He was the pilot of Port Creek—no official title, but one given him by a lawless set of men amongst whom, for many years, his lot had been cast.

Astern, faint and indistinct, loomed the low-lying coast-line. One could only judge it to be a wild, inhospitable shore.

The sun disappeared, and the shades of night began to fall. Suddenly the clouds parted, and a ray of sunshine shot obliquely down towards the south-west.

The pilot immediately muttered: "That's well!"

The bright ray had struck the dark sails of a lugger, and in her he had recognised the craft he had come out to pilot to a fateful destination.

Smartly he ran up a small lugsail, and set his boat's head towards the stranger. She was black hulled, and with a rakish rig that gave her the appearance of being a fast sailer.

At the critical moment, when it appeared the lugger was about to cut him down, the pilot suddenly ported helm, and ran his boat under the lugger's side. Smartly he lowered his sail and fastened on the vessel with his boathook.

"Heave a rope!" called he. "I'm coming on board."

"And who are you?" asked a swarthy man, who had been watching from the lugger's bows.

"I bring a message to your captain."

"Catch, then!" and a coil of rope went curling through the air.

The pilot deftly caught it, and hitched the end to the bow of his boat.

"Carry it astern, and make fast!" ordered he, like one accustomed to command. "She'll tow till I want her."

The boat dropped astern, but the pilot nimbly boarded the lugger.

A powerful man in reefer jacket, sou'-wester, and sea-boots greeted him with—

"You seem pretty free with strangers, my lad."

The pilot held out a piece of paper. The captain took it and read—

"*It is by our order and for the good of the cause that the bearer is authorised to act.*"

The signature was a rude hieroglyphic. The captain's manner immediately showed that he recognised it, and respected it.

"Am I to understand that you take command?"

The pilot bowed, and tendered a second paper. The captain read—

"*Should the bearer fail to accomplish that which he has undertaken, it will be for the captain of the* 'Swift' *to see that he gives no further trouble.*"

A wicked gleam came into the captain's eyes.

"If you fail in that which you are instructed to do—and which I know nothing of at present—this is your death-warrant?"

"It is."

"Then see you fail not."

"Rely on it, I shall not fail!"

The words were spoken in such cold, deliberate tones that the captain—a man

who boasted he knew not fear—shivered as though from the touch of an icy hand.

"What are your orders?" presently asked the captain, eyeing him keenly.

"To pilot the lugger to the head of Port Creek, where friends await her cargo. The old landings are played out; but who would suspect a lugger to effect a run in the creek *after dark*?"

"No human hand could steer that course!"

"Yet I am here."

"The thing is impossible!"

"The tide flows at midnight. My orders are to go in with the rising tide and bring you out on the ebb, that you may make a good offing before dawn."

"It cannot be done! I'll not have the risk——"

"You have your commands, I my orders," coldly interrupted the pilot.

"Then I'll execute mine to the letter!"

"And I—we shall see."

He bent low over the binnacle, afterwards glancing swiftly shoreward.

"Keep her away a couple of points. We'll come about presently and fetch the creek on the other tack, just after dark, and with the tide half made."

Long and intently the captain studied the boy's fearless face. Then he began to recall an almost forgotten memory.

"Boy," said he suddenly, "you remind me of some one I have known."

The pilot's gaze remained as steady as his own, but there was a slight expression of cynicism playing about his mouth.

"Ay!" continued the captain, seeming to speak his thoughts aloud. "The eyes are the same, just as they looked that night when I—— Bah!" recovering himself. "What a fool I am! This new venture unmans me."

The pilot did not seem to hear, but his eyes seemed to glow with a green sheen, as the gathering gloom obscured his face. A violent emotion was possessing him.

"Boy!" again cried the captain, "you interest me. How comes it that one so young holds so responsible a position in the cause?"

"By past services have I been judged."

"Come, tell me the story."

"As you will."

"You will find me a ready listener."

"Be it so; but not yet. Now set the course north-west. A single light here at the binnacle, and no other to show from anywhere on board. As soon as we are in the creek, see that the sails are smartly trimmed to my order. There'll be little time to spare."

The captain passed the word, and began to moodily pace the deck. He had never thought to question the genuineness of the two papers. There stood the pilot, his life forfeited by any failure tending to bring disaster upon the lugger; and it was a good guarantee.

Anon the captain glanced at the pale, set face of the pilot, on which the diffused light from the binnacle lantern feebly shone. For the second time that evening the captain shivered, and without being able to define the cause. He felt strangely ill at ease. Accustomed to daring ventures, the present seemed sheer recklessness. Who was this determined boy? Why did his presence bring back a fateful memory of the past?

The darkness deepened, and was further intensified by the cold, grey fog. The wind was light, but a steady up-Channel draught. The lugger was creeping in under mainsail and jib, her other sails being furled.

The pilot took over the helm, and ordered the man he relieved to go forward. At the same time the captain came and stood by the binnacle.

"What is our position?" shortly asked he.

"We are within the creek," replied the pilot. "Hark! Don't you hear the grinding of the shingle away over the port bow? As soon as the sound comes from windward we'll have her on the port tack, and thus we'll clear Boulder Ledge."

"It sounds fair sailing; but I liken it to going blindly into a trap," retorted the captain.

"Haul on the main-sheet! Steady, forward, with the jib!" And the pilot starboarded his helm.

Again the captain shivered. Who was this, who held death so lightly? His own gloomy forebodings came upon him with redoubled force. What manner of pilot was this, to whom night was as day?

"Boy!" he cried shortly, "why are you here?"

"You read my orders."

"Yes; but——"

Again the pilot caused an interruption by shifting helm.

"Who are you?" hoarsely cried the captain.

"Well, sixteen years ago to-night—steady, cap'n!" for the man had staggered as though from the effect of a mortal blow.

"Avast! Who and what are you?" The captain's voice was deep and menacing.

"The pilot of Port Creek. I have no other name—at least, it suits me to forget it."

"What was your father?"

"A mariner."

"His name?"

"Wait!" and the pilot luffed till the sails shook. A peculiar vibration passed throughout the lugger's timbers, and her way was gently arrested.

"We're aground! You have failed!" cried the captain, and drew a pistol from his belt.

"Wait!" And again the pilot spoke in cold, disdainful tones. One might have counted a hundred. It was terrible suspense. The captain's finger was toying with the trigger of his pistol. The pilot stood immovable, the disdainful smile deepening upon his lips. "Ease off the main-sheet!" cried he, as he turned his ear to windward. There came a stronger puff of wind, a bigger wave rolled up under the lugger's stern, she lifted, and immediately glided forward—free!

"You lost your reckoning, my lad!" cried the captain.

"A slight error of judgment. The tide has made somewhat less than I anticipated."

"What is our position?"

"We scraped on the Sandstone Ledge," grimly. "'Twas a close shave—for me!"

"And did you doubt——"

"No. But put up your pistol and I'll get on with my story—unless you'd rather not listen."

"No, no! Go on!"

The pilot stood steady at the helm, his eyes fixed on the binnacle, each movement of the compass-needle a sign for his ready hands to obey. Anon a concise order to shift a sail fell from his lips, for in spite of his interrupted conversation with the captain his every action showed a trained alertness.

Again he took up the thread of his story—

"'Twas my father's death made me—what I am." The pause was ominous. "He was one of us—a smuggler."

"Ah!"

"A run had been planned——"

"I——"

"My father was young and daring. To him was entrusted the most venturesome part of the night's work. But I am anticipating. He had a rival—a man who sought my mother. But she was true to my father."

"I remember——"

"Steady, cap'n! You may have known him—perchance he was once your friend?"

"No, no!" hoarsely. "He—I——"

A bright light suddenly flashed through the fog, and from right ahead.

"A signal?" cried the captain.

"From a friend," and the pilot ported helm. "'Tis a dangerous spot hereabouts, so

nothing has been left to chance. We're now abreast of Green Point. Steady, lads, for the next tack!"

Shortly another light flashed right upon the lugger's bows. The pilot jammed over the helm to starboard. There was a slight shock, and something grated along the lugger's side.

"All clear now, cap'n; but 'twas a narrow go. We grazed Rudder Rock! The fool stationed there with the light flashed it a full minute too late!"

"Boy, you must have dealings with——"

"Steady, cap'n! Your nerves are unstrung. Perhaps the conclusion of my story 'll steady them. Well, the venture that was planned was no less than to take the goods in under Black Rock, and have them hauled up the face of the cliff. In the end 'twas safely done—to all but my father. He had been lowered down to fasten on the bales. Those who were out that night came back saying he had fallen from the cliff. They recovered his body the next day, and they found the piece of rope around the mangled corpse had been cut."

"Ay, by the rocks."

"No, no! A poor fellow who witnessed the act was shot by the hand that cut the rope; but he lived long enough to tell my mother the truth."

"Or a parcel of lies."

"Dying men don't lie, cap'n! I was born that same night. Years afterwards, when I was old enough to understand—when my mother was on her deathbed—she told me the story; and my last word to her was a promise to hunt down my father's murderer."

"And you have failed!" cried the captain.

"Let go the anchor!" cried the pilot. "See, cap'n, I'll bring her head up into the wind, and she'll ride with her sails set. Off with the hatches, my lads!"

A bright light flashed three times from left to right. The pilot took the lantern and waved responsive signals.

"All's well!" cried he. "Cap'n, you will see to the getting up of the goods."

Taken off his guard, the captain stepped to the hatchway, gave a few orders, and

seemed to recollect something. But the binnacle light was out, and the pilot had disappeared! The captain caught at the rope by which his boat had been towing astern. It came in without resistance; it had been cut!

"We are betrayed!" cried the captain. "Hark! Friends or foes!" as a number of boats came quickly alongside.

"Surrender in the King's name!" was the response.

The desperate encounter that ensued is written in the history of those lawless times. Suffice it that the captain and his crew paid the full penalty of their many crimes.

The pilot, having fulfilled his vow, was no more seen upon that part of the coast. To have remained would have been to forfeit his life, for the betrayed smugglers had many friends.

But the old chronicles from which I have compiled this story go on to say that he secured a berth in the navy, and years afterwards trod the quarter-deck of a man-of-war.

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