

THE LEOPARDS OF N'TUMBO'S TOWN!



A thrilling yarn of adventure in Central Africa, featuring the Boys of the Bombay Castle.

*By
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THE FIRST CHAPTER The Signal Drums!

Boom! Boom! The native drums were talking to-night, signalling from village to village, over three hundred miles of the dark sherry-coloured river which Mr. Pugsley, the celebrated boatswain of the Bombay Castle, called the "Sewer of Africa."

"Stinks of fever," said Mr. Pugsley, looking at the dark banks of the forest which were sliding by, a quarter of a mile distant on each side of the long, grey launch.

The boys of the Bombay Castle had been plugging up the dark M'Bongo River for six days now, but they were all as cheerful as when they started. In spite of Mr. Pugsley's gloomy foreboding, they declared that they were fever proof, and laughed at malaria.

"You'll laugh on the other side of your Seven Dials when you get it!" said Mr. Pugsley, shaking his head. "Well, never

mind! In for a penny, in for a pound, and the more we are together the merrier we will be!"

"Cheer up, Puggo!" said Dick Dorrington, who, stowed in a snug corner close by the engine, was looking to the oil feeds.

Mr. Pugsley shook his head.

"I'd sooner be navigating up to the Ring in the Blackfriars Road," said he, "to see a nice bit of sparring, in a nice Carnceil tram, with the ole Elephant an' Castle to starboard, and not a mosquito within hail!"

"Peep!" whispered a mosquito in Mr. Pugsley's ear, and was knocked flat by a practised hand as large as a ham.

"That's another skeeter gone to glory!" mumbled Mr. Pugsley, lighting a pipe of shag calculated to make every mosquito within hail cough himself inside out. "But I don't like the sound of these drums, Master Dick!"

"Why not?" asked Dick Dorrington.

"Why," replied Mr. Pugsley, steering

round the tail end of a sandbank which showed white in the glare of the strong acetylene headlamps of the launch. "Don't you notice that we haven't seen a nigger about on the banks of this river for the past two days. And not a canoe coming down river!"

"Well," said Dick, "what about it?"

"There's something wrong up at the cross-roads," said Mr. Pugsley. "We haven't seen a blackbird out netting fish. And what's the meaning of all this drumming going on in the woods?"

"Perhaps all the niggers have gone dancing," suggested Dick. "Maybe there's a sort of nigger bank holiday on!"

"Niggers don't dance for three hundred miles," said Mr. Pugsley. "They don't all go out on the toot at once. And they dance to the little land drums, not to the big war drums. Those are all chief's drums that are sounding along the river. They are signalling. That's what they are doing. Signalling us all up the river. And there's something doing up the river, somewhere about Fort Victoria."

"Perhaps we shall see some fun!" said Dick hopefully.

"I don't know what you call fun," replied Mr. Pugsley, "but I don't call it fun to be pushed through with a fish spear jagged all the way down like a circular saw, with the teeth set the wrong way. The sort of spear that goes in easy and comes out hard, so that they have to put their feet on your chest to pull it out. And if it comes to shootin', I don't want to be shot with the brass knob off a second-hand bedstead either. It's a silly idea, I call it, coming up the M'Bongo at all!"

"But Dr. Crabhunter particularly wanted to see the ruins of these ancient African cities," said Dick.

"That's what I say," replied Puggo gloomily. "One fool makes many. Your worthy 'eadmaster 'll find himself a master without an' 'ead, if 'e don't watch it! These niggers up here are a funny lot, and they won't think any more of choppin' the headmaster of a public school than they would of doing in a two-pound nigger!"

Dick stared at Mr. Pugsley by the dim light of the shaded binnacle-lamp.

"You don't mean to say——" he began.

"I mean to say that you can buy a pretty good nigger up 'ere for a couple of quid," said Mr. Pugsley, "and not many questions asked either!"

"But it's under British government!" said Dick.

"As much government as a couple of officers with a hundred nigger soldiers can give a bit of country as big as England, and full of swamps and rivers!" said Mr. Pugsley. "Lummy, Master Dick, it would take half the Navy to properly patrol what we've seen on the trip. You could turn every rozzar in England loose in this country, and you wouldn't meet a policeman once in six months. They do what they can up here, and leave the rest. And if it gets too thick, they send for an expedition from the Coast. Then they 'ang a king or two to encourage the others, and there's quiet on the ole Potomac for a year or two. Then off they go again!"

"I begin to understand, Puggo," said Dick more soberly. "But Dr. Crabhunter has got a letter of introduction to a king up the river—N'Tumbo. We ought to be all right."

"What?" demanded Mr. Pugsley, in a voice of unbelief. "Old Crab'unter got an intro. to N'Tumbo?"

"That's what Mr. Lal Tata told me this morning," said Dick.

"Who gave it to him?" demanded Mr. Pugsley.

"A society in London," replied Dick. "The Society for Something or Other Amongst the Native Tribes. Crabbo told old Lal that N'Tumbo is a most enlightened nigger, and that he's hoping to have a long and instructive talk with him."

"He'll get that all right!" said Mr. Pugsley drily. "I never 'eard of such a thing in my life! If I'd only known, I'd have told old Crabhunter a bit or two about his pal. I know a thing or two, because a mate o' mine was up this way!"

"What do you know about N'Tumbo?" asked Dick.

"Why," answered Mr. Pugsley, standing the launch a bit off the white gleam of the sandbank. "This 'ere N'Tumbo is one of those smooth-tongued, plausible sort of niggers that's playing coddams all the time with everyone, white and black. All things to all men, N'Tumbo is, and he's biding his time till he can throw off the mask and show his real face. He palavers and argybargays with every stray missionary and trader that comes up the river, and they all go

"I mean a Leopard," replied Mr. Pugsley. "When I say Leper, I mean Leopard." "What's a Leopard?" asked Dick.

Mr. Pugsley lowered his voice as he looked almost timidly at the dark, mysterious banks of the river.

"Don't shout it, Master Dick," said he. "No one dares talk about the Leopards in this and in many other parts of Africa."

"Lummy!" exclaimed Dick. "They sound pretty awful!"



There was a whoop of triumph, and a moment later they saw Sleeping Bear coming along the sands, leading a smallish nigger by the ear, whilst his friends all danced round, whooping and swinging their tomahawks. (See Chapter 1.)

away saying: 'What a nice man!' But that's only one side of N'Tumbo's ugly dial," added Mr. Pugsley. "'Is real name is Mr. Cross, of the Cross-roads, and this nice talk is only a blind-oh for the biggest arrant robber and slave trader and ivory pincher in all Africa. And it was my mate's belief that he was in with them Lepers—that 'e was a Leper 'imself!"

"A leper!" exclaimed Dick. "We don't want to go and see a leper!"

"They are!" replied Mr. Pugsley. "And a lot of people would like to know a bit more about them than they do. But to put the Leopard Society in a nutshell, Master Dick, it's a sort of secret society that stretches from one side of Africa to the other, and which works from the Niger down to the Cape. It pops up now and then, and then it disappears underground. There's wild niggers, half-wild niggers, and tame niggers in it, and they do say that it reaches out as

far as London, Marseilles, Shanghai, Valparaiso, Singapore—everywhere. But it's mostly in this part of Africa that the Leopards go strong. It was started in these parts, and it spread to Nigeria, and gave the authorities a lot of trouble."

"But what is it?" asked Dick.

"My dear boy," replied Mr. Pugsley, "nobody can tell you that. Once a Leopard always a Leopard. It's arf religious, arf Vudu, and all crime. It's mixed up with Obi and Black Magic, and there's no end to its ramifications. It's the cancer of Africa, and they keep it dark!"

"Why?" asked Dick.

"Because that's the only way of tackling it," replied Mr. Pugsley. "Didn't you read in the papers about that poor French rozzar that was found down by a wood pile in the old 'arbour at Marseilles, just at the bottom of Rue Cannebiere, where the motor-boats start for the excursions round the 'arbour—the one wiv 'is froat torn out?"

"No," replied Dick.

"Well, I did," answered Mr. Pugsley. "They thought it was some wild beast what done it—escaped from a ship. A ship's pet maybe. One o' them mascots, y' know. But I know better. And the French police know better—the 'eads. That was a two-legged leopard what done that, I'll bet a week's pay!"

Mr. Pugsley tapped his pipe out and filled it again.

"The Belgians got half a dozen of 'em a few years back," he continued. "Up the Congo, that was. They 'ung the lot after offering free pardons to anyone that'd turn King's Evidence. But not a word! Every man jack o' them chaps what was 'ung—and they were all chiefs, mind you—died without giving 'is pals away. Game, as you might say."

"Why?" asked Dick.

"Because they was all more afraid of squealing than of getting 'ung!" replied Mr. Pugsley. "Stands to reason. Every one of them chaps knew that if 'e squealed 'e'd only be saving himself up for a worse death than hanging. Why, hangin' would be a treat to what the rest would give him!"

"But couldn't he hide away?" asked Dick.

"Hide away!" replied Mr. Pugsley. "You can't hide away from a click that's got their spies everywhere. Why, in these countries the very boy what's giving you your chop may be one of these Leopards. And if you was up against his society, 'e'd very soon slip you something that'd disagree with you—the red berry, or powdered glass in the ground rice, or you might be found in your bed one morning wiv a sore froat that couldn't be cured by any pastilles or gargles. That's the Leopard's trade mark when they want to show who did the victim in."

"But why do they call 'em Leopards?" asked Dick, immensely interested, for he loved stories of mysterious crime.

"Well, first of all, Master Dick," replied Mr. Pugsley, blowing through his pipe, "'if you find a gent. with a pair o' leopard gloves on 'im, like a pair of garden gloves, and with sharp steel claws sewn on the fingers that cut like lancets, you can shoot 'im or 'ang 'im, and no authority of any nationality will ask you any questions. Any chap found with a pair of those gloves in 'is 'ut, or on 'is person, is condemned outright. That's what they think about Leopards in these parts!"

"Why, they are like the Thugs, that used to scare India!" said Dick.

"You've said it," answered Puggo. "But what the Thugs used to do with a silk string these chaps do by springing on the unfortunate victim, as you might call 'im, and taking 'is tonsils out for 'im through 'is neck. They work like the head-hunters of the Solomons. They dress up like leopards in leopard skins, and they hunt their man in parties of six to nine. They hide up in trees over the native paths and drop on him!"

Mr. Pugsley wiped the perspiration from his forehead with a nice clean piece of cotton waste.

"I tell you it's a bit of all right," said he, with a slight shudder. "Imagine yourself a nigger, Master Dick—a quiet, easy-going nigger, that's never done anyone any 'arm, and who's paid his 'ut tax, and played the

game all is puff, not thinking that 'e's got an enemy in the world."

"Yes," said Dick. "I can imagine myself that sort of nigger."

"Well," continued Mr. Pugsley, "just think of yourself coming along one of these native paths through the woods with a nice pot of pombe, or native beer, on your 'ead, thinking only of sitting up with your neighbours, and asking a few nice friends in for a song and dance. And then, just because some dirty dorg has named you in the Leopards' meeting, a silent devil, dressed in these ere leopard gloves, with a leopard's tail 'anging down be'ind 'im where 'e oughter be kicked, drops down on your back and gets 'is gloves in on your Adam's apple an' makes a mortuary jorb of you!"

"I should call that rotten!" said Dick.

"Well, that's what these Leopards do," said Mr. Pugsley. "And you can well understand that all the big Powers that, more or less, manage Darkest Africa are doing their best to stamp it out! But listen to those young nibs be'ind. They are not thinking about Leopards!"

The echoes of the dark M'Bongo River were awakened by a merry chorus, "The more we are together the merrier we will be," led by the mouth-organ of Chip Prodgers.

All the old companions were there in the canoes, towing behind the powerful launch as she plugged doggedly up against the swift, dark current of the M'Bongo, or Mother of Waters.

There was Chip Prodgers, fluent in Hindustani, and a champion player of the mouth-organ; Arty Dove, the strongest boy of his size in England; Algy Cuff and Willie Waffles, who set all the latest fashions in the Bombay Castle, and who shuddered when they saw a soft collar fastened with a safety-pin. There was Jim Handyman, the son of Captain Handyman, the commander of the famous school ship. There were Angus Macpherson and Hamish MacCosh, the Scotch members, who hated porridge worse than they hated poison, and who could play ragtime on the bagpipes. And, theoretically in charge of this canoe, which was

towing astern of the launch, was Mr. Chatterjee Lal Tata, the Master of Hindustani and Mathematics of the school ship.

Lashed alongside this canoe was a large trading-canoe, filled with stores, and carrying a load of galvanised sheeting, a present from Dr. Crabhunter to one or two native chiefs, including N'Tumbo.

Dr. Crabhunter had heard that the native chiefs liked galvanised iron, and found it an acceptable present. He thought they wanted it for building meeting-houses. He had yet to learn that galvanised sheets cut up nicely into war shields that will stop any spear or arrow, and will even flatten a soft lead bullet, projected by the dud native powder.

But Dr. Crabhunter had yet a lot of things to learn about Darkest Africa.

Seated in this canoe was a silent group of dark figures.

These were pure-blooded Red Indians, sent out on the famous school ship to see the world by the paternal Government of the United States.

There was Ta-ton-ka-ig-oton-ka, or Chief Sitting Bull, of the Sioux Nation, a stolid, hatchet-faced youth, with dark, beady eyes that shone like diamonds in his copper-coloured face. He was great-grandson of the famous Sitting Bull, the old enemy of the equally famous Buffalo Bill.

Sitting Bull, when he joined the Bombay Castle, did not know much about his illustrious great-grandfather. But since then he had acquired the finest library of Buffalo Bills in the ship, and now knew more about Red Indians than he had ever known in his life before. Sitting alongside him on the sheets of corrugated iron was Ta-num-nhawit-to-hay, which, being translated into Paleface words, means Wolf-Who-Never-Smiles.

Wolf-Who-Never-Smiles was quite a cheerful sort of chap, but his stern face was like that of the King of England who never smiled again. None the less, there was no boy who enjoyed more the antics of Pongo Walker, the finest monkey impersonator in the school.

When Pongo was pulling his mugs and

giving his famous imitation of a sick monkey who has just been given a dose of castor oil, Wolf-Who-Never-Smiles would watch his schoolfellow in rapt enjoyment. But he would never relax a muscle of his face. All he would say was: "Heap good! Do um again, Pongo. I have spoken."

In the canoe, perched on the sheets of iron, were likewise Sleeping Bear, chief of the Pawnees; Tired Horse, chief of the Apache Nation; Chief Deer-Who-Leaps, of the Soshones, who range upon the salt deserts of Nevada and California; and Chief Ba-ooo-kish, or Closed Hand, the young Chief Paramount of the Crows.

They were a silent group, and they sat in a circle, handing round the great carved stone pipe of peace, taking a puff, one after the other, of a mixture of shag tobacco and willow bark, which from time immemorial has been smoked by the Nations.

They listened to the singing in the other canoes without joining in. None of them could sing. They could only howl. And in their charmed circle sat Cecil—rare old Cecil, the orang-outang mascot of the Bombay Castle, who had lived so long in the company of boys that he had long forgotten that he was ever an orang-outang.

Cecil was very fond of the company of the Redskins. He knew that, by the custom of their nations, they were allowed to smoke the pipe of peace, and Cecil always liked to be where there was a bit of quiet company and tobacco, for he hated being alone, and he liked a smoke.

Mr. Pugsley nodded at the group in the darkness as they sat hunched up in their blankets, solemnly sending the peace pipe round.

"I'm glad we've got those Redskins here, Master Dick," said he. "If it comes to bush fightin', I'll back one of them against a dozen Leopards for artfulness. The nigger ain't in it with them Red Indians! How long d'ye think this sandbank is going to be?"

"I should say we've passed about three miles of it now," said Dick, peering into the darkness at the long white line of the sandbank which here divided the river.

There were dark shapes on the bank which looked like logs, but which, at the glare of the launch's powerful headlamp, slid swiftly into the dark waters of the river.

"See them crocodiles dropping off the bank there!" said Mr. Pugsley, looking at a huge cricket bag that was strapped along the after deck of the launch. "I don't like them things! I'd like to let ole Gus loose amongst them. I back he'd put paid to some o' 'em."

In the cricket bag reposed the first mascot of the Glory Hole gang of the Bombay Castle. Years ago they had caught Gus in a tiddler net in the Nile, above Khartoum. And he had been thrust into a cricket bag of ordinary size, which they were then carrying. They had carried Gus off to see the world, and, what with high living and sea air, old Gus had now grown to a huge brute, twelve feet long.

They had shoved him in the London Zoo between trips, but Gus always pined, and would not eat, though he would scrap any other crocodile he came near, chewing them up like rubber inner tubes. He had outgrown his cricket bag years ago. But he was accustomed to be carried about in a cricket bag, and was happy in no other form of box or cage. Gus would lie happy in his cricket bag for weeks so long as he could hear the boys about him. He knew that he was no ordinary crocodile.

The boys had had him painted up in China and Japan by native artists till he was the most magnificent reptile in the world. His hideous head was sky blue, picked out with vermilion, and scrolls of the best gold leaf to give him the look of a real, old-fashioned Chinese dragon. His legs and stomach were orange and vermilion, picked out in scales of pure gold, and his body was decorated in the bold black-and-white stripes of Newcastle United, to which team the Glory Hole Gang had always been faithful since the Bombay Castle had taken her refit in Newcastle.

The boys reckoned that there were two hundred books of gold leaf varnished down to Gus's hide. And as it costs half-a-crown a book, Gus was a regular millionaire.

And alongside Gus, tied up in a canvas bag to keep him quiet, was the other great mascot of the Bombay Castle, Horace, the powerful Egyptian goat, who had stuck to them through all weathers, and who had seen more trouble than any goat on earth.

Horace was not in a good mind. He did not like being tied up in the great canvas sack, with the mouth lashed about his neck with a strong lashing of tarred rope. It was not good enough to try to secure Horace with a bit of cotton or manilla, for he would eat rope like sugar-sticks. But he hated the taste of Stockholm tar. So tarred rope was his.

Horace's eyes were gleaming green in the darkness as he sat in his sack, and Mr. Pugsley, smitten by a sudden pity, gave him a plug of Irish roll chewing tobacco. Horace liked that, and the green devil died out of his eyes.

"We'll let that goat have a run ashore when we can," said Mr. Pugsley as he steered round a floating snag, which came bobbing down on the swift current. "His coat is coming out something awful, and he's looking as if 'e'd got the morth. Now, Master Dick, I think I can see the end of the sandbank ahead, with the usual pile of snags. So we'll just drop the killick for ten minutes, and get them Redskins ashore to cut up a bit of that driftwood for firewood at the camp. Oil-stoves are all right, but they don't keep off mosquitoes!"

He steered the launch and her tow to an eddy at the head of the bank, and Dick let the anchor go, the chain rattling up from the chain locker with a rush that set something howling dismally in the forest ashore.

"Is anything wrong with the launch, Mr. Pugsley?" called the voice of Dr. Crabhunter from the sternmost canoe.



"Now, cough it up, cocky!" said Mr. Pugsley, in reassuring tones. "Tell us all about it!" Partly by dialect, mostly by sympathy, Mr. Pugsley got a correct report from the native fisherman inside two minutes. (See Chapter 1.)

"No, sir," answered Mr. Pugsley. "She's runnin' as sweet as a sewin'-machine. We are just stopping to get a bit of firewood off this bunch of old snags at the head of the bank."

"I am glad to hear that," replied Dr. Crabhunter. "I am very anxious to get to my friend N'Tumbo's town to-night some time. He will doubtless be expecting us, as I hear the sound of drums signalling our coming up the river."

"Yes, sir," agreed Mr. Pugsley, as he ordered the crew of smoking Redskins to cast off from their company canoe and to haul up on their tow-rope to the launch.

"It is a very delicate compliment, Mr. Pugsley," continued Dr. Crabhunter, "to herald our coming in this fashion."

"Yes, sir," agreed Mr. Pugsley as he unlashd the ten-pound axe from the launch and prepared to join the wooding party.

"I don't think!" he added sotto voce, as he stepped into the canoe, followed by Dick.

"Now, O great Red men," he added, turning to the Indians, "I want you to push ashore with your tommy 'awks and 'elp me to cut a bit o' kindling. And mind where you land the canoe. I don't want to 'ole 'er on a snag! I 'ave spoken!"

"We hear thee, O Great Chief Puggo!" replied Wolf-Who-Never-Smiles, without a change of his immovable face. "We will give the big axe to Cecil. He will cut heap plenty wood, plenty quick. The Red man will sit and smoke the pipe of peace."

"Yus," replied Mr. Pugsley. "You Red men are very good at smoking the pipe of peace. Never knew a Red yet that was fond of work. Sooner lie in bed arf the day spottin' the winners and readin' abart the flyin' men in the 'Daily Mirror' picters! Shove ashore!"

He took the steering paddle, and the Redskins paddled and poled the canoe to the wild tangle of naked tree-trunks which the river had piled up in the last rise at the head of the sandbank.

Bleached and dried by the sun, these snag branches made splendid kindling and firewood. Old Cecil was soon at work, swinging the ten-pound axe like a feather.

There was no need for the rest to do anything. They stood in the white glare of the launch's headlight, watching Cecil as he lopped off log after log, each five inches thick, with a single stroke of the mighty axe, sending the chips flying afar, and piling his logs neatly in cords as he cut them.

Plonk! plonk! plonk! went the axe, waking the echoes of the river. Grumble, grumble, grumble went the distant throbbing of the signal drums.

Mr. Pugsley listened to their sinister note throbbing through the dark forest like the pulsation of a fever pulse.

"I think ole Crabbo's off his nut," said he, "thinkin' of callin' on this nigger king afore we've got up to Fort Victoria, to see how the land lies!"

"Why don't you tell him about it?" said Dick, standing with his hands in his pockets and watching Cecil at work.

"What's the good of me giving 'im the wire?" demanded Mr. Pugsley. "'E got 'is rag out when I kicked them couple of thievin' niggers down the side on the Coast. They got past the quartermaster on the gangway, saying that they was missionaries. And I knew the sort of missionaries they was—a couple of light 'orsemen what had sneaked aboard to get a chance of pinchin' from the deck cabins. And when I kicked 'em down the accommodation ladder, ole Crabbo didn't arf crack on. And when I told 'im a thing or two about these coast niggers, 'e said that I was narrow-minded and prejudiced, and that a black man was just as good as a white man. Now, there's a silly thing to say!" added Mr. Pugsley helplessly. "What can you do with a man of education, mind you, that tells you that a nigger is as good as a white man? Stands to reason! 'E's off 'is chump!"

Dick laughed. He knew about the fashion in which Mr. Pugsley would discuss the colour question with the worthy headmaster of the Bombay Castle.

"But that need not prevent you from warning him that you don't think everything is all right with N'Tumbo!" said he.

"It'll prevent him listening to me," said Mr. Pugsley. "Thinks I got a fair down on niggers now, 'e does. And, of course, I 'ave to go a bit slow, wiv ole Lal Tata always 'angin' about, 'cause Mr. Lal Tata ain't exactly what you call a white man, is 'e?"

"Lal doesn't mind being called a nigger," laughed Dick. "What he don't like is for a nigger to call him 'hubshee,' or black man. That gives him the spike at once. But why don't you speak to the doctor, Puggo!"

"Look 'ere, my boy!" replied Mr. Pugsley. "There's nothin' in the world so obstinate as a learned man when he gets a maggit in 'is 'ead. Some goes potty on spiritualism, some goes potty on brown bread, some goes potty on niggers. And ole Crabbo is the last sort of looney. He's taken the niggers to 'is 'eart, and all his niggers is white angels! And that is that!"

The Redskin boys were beginning to drift over the sandbank. It was their nature to hunt about at once for trails and spoors, and they were moving like shadows, their needle eyes fixed on the sandbank and the debris that littered it from the last rise of the river.

"Look at them Apaches," said Mr. Pugsley indulgently. "'Avin' a look round, they are! What's born in the bone comes out in the flesh, and they can no more 'elp smelling about in the dark than a lot o' blood'ounds."

Then he raised his voice.

"Hey, you Red men!" he cried. "Come back along 'ere at once! Don't want you driftin' all over the sandbanks among them logs. Some of 'em ain't logs. They're crockydiles, and you'll get pulled into the river afore you know where you are!"

But Sleeping Bear was moving swiftly across the bank, crouching low. Soon he dropped and disappeared in a shadow of the sand as if it had opened and swallowed him up.

"Now, what's young Charley Peace up to now?" demanded Mr. Pugsley. "I'd sooner be a keeper in a loonatic asylum than 'ave to look after such a click!"

As he spoke, Sleeping Bear gave a war-whoop which brought all his pals racing to the spot.

"Coo, lummy!" exclaimed Mr. Pugsley. "'E's trod on a crockydile!"

But Dick knew better. The whoop was a whoop of triumph, and a moment later they saw Sleeping Bear coming along the sands, leading a smallish nigger by the ear, whilst his friends all danced round, whooping and swinging their tomahawks.

"'Ere, stop that mobbin'!" yelled Mr. Pugsley.

And there was silence as Sleeping Bear led his prisoner up to Mr. Pugsley.

"Me catch 'um nigger!" said Sleeping Bear proudly.

"That's all right, young fly-by-night," said Mr. Pugsley. "But you mustn't go picking up friendly niggers as if they was enemies. If this party was dossing out in the sand, 'e's got a perfect right to do so without being disturbed by a Buffaler Bill show. You got no right to go pulling the Wild West stuff on him. 'E can bring you before the magistrate, you know. And the beak only comes round ere once in six months. You might 'ave to stop in quod for six months afore they bring you into court. An' that'd be a nice thing, that would!"

The light now shone on the nigger the boys had brought in. He was unarmed, and Mr. Pugsley saw that what he had thought was perspiration was blood, which was flowing from a number of small cuts.

Mr. Pugsley turned with sudden suspicion on the Redskins.

"You dirty little dorgs!" said he severely. "You been choppin' this poor beggar!"

"Red Man no chop!" said Sleeping Bear quickly. "Man chop himself with shell. I have spoken."

The nigger was crying, and there were wood ashes in his woolly head, and, on examination, Mr. Pugsley found that in his hand he held the shell of a river clam, which has an edge as sharp as a razor.

"Beg your pardon, boys," said he handsomely. "My mistake. This chap's got family trouble of some sort!"

"Hey, Sambo," he added to the weeping native, "what's your trouble? You M'Bongo man?"

The nigger nodded, the tears running down his black face. He had been badly frightened by the Redskins. He knew they were savages of some sort, but they were a new sort of savage to him. And he had suffered from savages enough in his time. But he was not frightened by Mr. Pugsley or by Dick. They were white, and English.

He was a river man. His short stature, his long body, and his undeveloped legs showed him as a fisherman, one of those river beachcombers who get their living by catching the small fish of the rivers in fine nets and potting them in jars with nut oil, which they sell to the more war-like niggers of the forest.

As a rule, the fishermen are harmless folk, and are looked down on by their more powerful neighbours, who sometimes buy their native sardines, and sometimes pinch them and the owner as well.

"Now, cough it up, cocky!" said Mr. Pugsley, in tones that would have reassured a frightened horse. "Tell us all about it! Stand back, boys, and give the chap air. 'E's got a bit of trouble on at 'ome. He don't want you staring at 'im as if 'e was a street accident. Stand back! I'm ashamed of yer!"

The boys stood back, and the nigger, reassured, poured out a flood of guttural M'Bongo dialect.

And Mr. Pugsley, who had an extraordinary smattering of all the native dialects of the world, got his story in a few seconds. Partly by dialect, mostly by sympathy, Mr. Pugsley had as correct a report as any policemen in two minutes.

"It's all right, boys. I told you so. 'Is brother's been murdered and chucked in the river, and this chap's come down in 'is little canoe to find 'is body. And he's found it caught up in the branches of one of them big snag trees at the head of the bank. But, poor chap, 'e couldn't get it out with his old trade axe, and he was working on it when he heard us, an' 'e was frightened and hid.

"What's yer name, Archibald?" asked Mr. Pugsley of the nigger, who was no longer trembling.

"O great white chief," replied the man, "I see you. The name of your slave is Umtutu."

"Right, Too-Too!" replied Mr. Pugsley. "Come along, and we'll get your pore brother's corpse out of the snag for you. Then we'll tow you up the river with your canoe."

The man leaped back as he saw Cecil approaching the group, huge, magnificent, and terrible, as he marched up with the great, gleaming axe-blade on his shoulder.

"Umbimzulu!" he cried, and he fell on his face. "Umbimzulu!"

Mr. Pugsley regarded Dick meaningly.

"There's more in this than meets the merry optic, Master Dick!" he muttered.

He lifted the little nigger man to his feet, but Umtutu hid his gashed face in his hands, not daring to look at Cecil.

"Umbimzulu!" he cried again. "Oh, mercy, O great one!"

"Look 'ere, Too-Too!" said Mr. Pugsley. "This ain't Umbimzulu! This is only ole Cecil, our ship-mate. Come 'ere, Cecil, and shake 'ands with this little okeyblo. 'E's frightened of you!"

Cecil, thinking that the nigger was afraid of his axe, laid down that weapon, and came up friendly and grinning, with his great, hairy paw outstretched, making pleasant whickering noises, as though he had swallowed a horse.

But the little nigger nearly went mad with fear.

"'Orlright, Cecil!" muttered Mr. Pugsley. "Stand back! Don't worry 'im! It's plain there's something about you 'e don't like. I think it's yer face!"

Cecil picked up his axe, and the little man threw himself on the ground at his feet in an attitude of abasement and of worship.

"Now, that's a rum 'un, Master Dick!" said Mr. Pugsley. "Too-Too is worshipping Cecil. Now, I can understand Cecil frightening one of these niggers to fits, 'cause they never seen an orang-outang afore. They've heard of the gorilla, but a 'rang-

'tang is more of a man than a gorilla. There's something be'ind this. I tell you this Africa is a land of mystery.

"Come on, Cecil! Let's come and 'ave a look at 'is pore brother's body. I know what it's like to lose a brother myself," added Mr. Pugsley. "My poor brother Fred died of convulsions when 'e was only a month old. If 'e'd grown up he'd have been a 'eavyweight champeen by now!"

With these remembrances of his deceased brother, Mr. Pugsley led the way to the enormous abattis of dead trees which had piled up at the head of the bank.

These were large trees, which had fallen in with the caving banks of the river up above in the recent rise. They had been swept down, and had caught up here so that the water, receding, had left a pile of naked, gnarled branches and bleached trunks twenty feet high.

No human being could have worked his way into this. But old Cecil, after a look at it, started climbing into the tangle, swinging his mighty axe.

Mr. Pugsley told the boys not to take any notice of Too-Too.

"Let 'im foller if 'e likes, poor feller!" said Mr. Pugsley.

And Too-Too timidly followed at a distance, creeping up slowly as Cecil disappeared into the terrible tangle and started chopping with his axe.

In five minutes he emerged, bearing in his arms a body, which he laid at the feet of the nigger.

Umtutu nodded with all the sorrowful patience of a race of slaves.

Then he kneeled and rubbed his head in the sand before Cecil.

"O great Umbimzulu!" he cried. "Thou hast been given my brother, and thou hast given him back to me! Great and dread one!"

Mr. Pugsley looked at Dick meaningly. Then he pointed to the throat of the poor corpse.

"Who done that?" he demanded.

Too-Too looked up. He was not afraid of Mr. Pugsley now. His answer came clear and direct.

"N'Tumbo!" he answered.

"There you are, Master Dick," said Mr. Pugsley. "I told you so. That's the dirty dorg what's done it! A Leopard! That's what 'e is. Wrap up that poor chap in a bit of sailcloth, boys. This chap's got a light canoe on the other side of the bank. Carry it over, and put this poor deceased party in it. I want him for King's Evidence."

And these things were done.

THE SECOND CHAPTER The Temple of the Leopards!

"WHAT have you got in that canoe, Mr. Pugsley?" called Dr. Crabhunter as the big canoe, with the little canoe of death lashed alongside, pushed out on the dark river, and came floating back to her station behind the launch.

"A corpse, sir," replied Mr. Pugsley.

"A corpse!" exclaimed Dr. Crabhunter, with horror.

"I got 'is brother 'ere, too, sir," reported Mr. Pugsley through the darkness. "Tells me that 'is brother was done in by that black gentleman you are going to visit to-night—N'Tumbo!"

"Nonsense!" replied Dr. Crabhunter.

"Well, I don't want to argue the matter, sir," replied Mr. Pugsley patiently. "But it looks to me uncommonly like it."

"My dear Mr. Pugsley!" replied Dr. Crabhunter, in tones of protest. "You must not bring these terrible charges against a gentleman whom I have every reason to hold in the highest esteem, a gentleman to whom I carry a personal letter of introduction from one of the most learned societies of Great Britain."

"Well, sir, I should want to know a bit more about 'is ticket afore I presented any letter of introduction to 'im," replied Mr. Pugsley. "In these parts, when a corpse, with its froat all torn same as if a wild beast had got it, comes floating down the river, the first thing you arks yourself is: 'Who lives up the river?' and the answer is N'Tumbo. Stands to reason, now, don't it?"

"I will have a look at this poor man," said Dr. Crabhunter.

The canoe was floated down to Dr. Crabbhunter's house, and a light was thrown upon it.

"That is the work of an animal, not of a man," said Dr. Crabbhunter decisively. "This unfortunate man has been killed by a leopard!"

"You've said it, sir," answered Mr. Pugsley as he stood in the little canoe, looking down on the poor remnants of mortality. "It is the work of an animal, and that animal is your pal N'Tumbo. And it's the work of a Leopard. That's the trade mark of N'Tumbo's secret society on this poor chap's neck!"

"Upon my word, Mr. Pugsley, you are incorrigible!" exclaimed Dr. Crabbhunter, who had one of his obstinate moods on him. "You use every possible means of maligning the negro!"

"I'd malign that particular nigger with a bullet if he came my way!" said Mr. Pugsley. "And if you'll take my advice, sir, you won't stop at N'Tumbo's town at all, but you'll keep on all through the night, following the other bank and out of shot, till you make Fort Victoria. We can make it soon after dawn. The engine's running beautiful!"

"Fiddle-dee-dee!" exclaimed Dr. Crabbhunter. "Do you realise, Mr. Pugsley, that this particular chief knows the secret paths to the very thing which we have come here to see, a sight not yet opened to any white man, the foundations of three ancient cities, more venerable than the Moabite remains? Are you aware that the discovery of these cities is enough to make us all famous? Do you understand, Mr. Pugsley, that if we pass up the river in the night, sneaking—yes, sneaking—past the town of this admirable chief, to whom I am properly accredited by a letter of introduction——"

"And ari a bargeload of corrugated iron," added Mr. Pugsley.

"And half a bargeload of corrugated iron, if you care to put it that way—the chief may well take umbrage, and refuse to conduct us to the sites of these wonderful cities? Pray consider that, Mr. Pugsley, and do not

bring me any more cock-and-bull stories of murder and of Leopards! It is not just! It is not kind! It is not in the spirit of a great public school to suspect one's host before one has met him, on the evidence of a stray fisherman of low caste," added Dr. Crabbhunter.

Mr. Pugsley pulled the sailcloth over Too-Too's brother.

"These are things which we must all deplore," said Dr. Crabbhunter, pointing to the canoe. "But you have not a tittle of evidence to support this other man's suggestion. For all we know, he may not be the man's brother at all, and he may have murdered him himself."

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Pugsley, "in the first place, 'e couldn't 'ave put the corpse where it was found. Only Cecil could get it out. It 'ad been put there by the river. In the second place, I know that they are brothers—and twin brothers, too—of the Bungwe branch of the M'Bongo tribe."

"How?" asked Dr. Crabbhunter, always ready to acquire information.

It was Mr. Pugsley's turn to become obstinate.

"I know, and that is enough, sir," said he. "You think I don't know anything about niggers. And you are very fond of telling me so. But I 'ad a M'Bongo man as lampman for six trips, one of this very tribe, what had been washed down the river and got to sea in ships. And 'e would 'ave been on the Bombay Castle with me now, but 'e married a 'arf-caste woman what kept a tobacco and minerals shop up in Hoxton, and now 'e's actin' on the films. You wouldn't believe me. So what's the good? 'Ave it your own way. I don't know nothink, I don't!"

And Mr. Pugsley paddled the little canoe back to the Redskins' canoe, and climbed on to the launch, where he settled down with Dick.

"Schoolmasters," said Mr. Pugsley bitterly when Dick had got up the anchor and the flotilla was once more chugging up the dark river—"schoolmasters are a pig-headed, obstinate lot. They get so used to tickin' orf boys what can't answer back that they

want to tick orf
grown men, and
men of experi-
ence, and men of
the world! Why,
what's ole Crabbo
ever done but
chase shrimps and
put wheels in
spirits o' wine?
Why, nothin'!
And 'ere's me
been knocking
round the sea,
man and boy, for
forty years, seein'
life and meetin'
all sorts of
people! Lummy,
it makes me
sick!"

"Don't lose
your wool about
old Crabbo, Pug,"
pleaded Dick. "I
think his liver's a
bit wonkey.

That's what makes him so obstinate. And
he's fearfully keen on seeing these old ruins,
or whatever they are—just heaps of dirt.
He'll get the F.R.S. for the paper he writes
on them!"

"'E'll get 'is bloomin' sheep's 'ead off
'is shoulders if 'e don't watch it!" said
Mr. Pugsley. "Strikes me 'e'll get 'isselt
elected a member of the Royal Society o'
Stiffuns, like poor old Bill towing along
in that canoe. But, Lor' bless yer, Master
Dick," added Mr. Pugsley, lowering his
voice as the launch clove through a clear
stretch of dark waters—"bless you, it's
always the same on these African rivers.
There's something in the air that turns good
men into devils. Stanley found it when 'e
was working up the Congo, and you remem-
ber the Congo atrocities that there was such
a song about! The chaps what did that
was white men, good enough men when they
came out, but the climate got at them, and
the ways of the dark river got 'em.
Lummy, I wish we 'adn't come up 'ere!"



Old Cecil, after a look at it, started climbing into the terrible tangle swinging his mighty axe. (See Chapter 1.)

And just at the moment that Mr. Pugsley
uttered this sentiment, it was echoed by
another white man sixty miles farther up
the river.

In the mud-walled orderly-room of Fort
Victoria, Major Hatteras was standing by
his junior officer, Lieutenant Gilbard-
Jones, a red-headed young man, with a
single eyeglass sustained in his eye, without
a cord, in a manner which would have
aroused the admiration of Algy Cuff and
Willie Waffles.

The lieutenant was exactly what Algy and
Willie would grow into when a few short
years had passed over their immaculate
heads.

He was taking in a message on a Morse
telegraph, and the major anxiously watched
the tape as it reeled off the machine.

The message was coming through badly,
for it was being transmitted by a sergeant
of Hausas, who, in the depths of the forest
between Fort Victoria and N'Tumbo's town,
had tapped a cut wire.

"'Found three bodies of friendlies, all chopped,'" read Lieutenant Gilbard-Jones, ticking the message down on a form with a rapid pencil. "'Wire cut five miles from N'Tumbo's town. Retiring on the fort.'"

"What does that mean, sir?" added the lieutenant, turning in his rush-seated chair, and handing the paper to his commanding officer.

Major Hatteras read the message with a grim look on his fever-worn face.

"It means what I have warned our people about for a long time, and what they would never believe," said he. "That double-faced scoundrel N'Tumbo has declared war!"

"Bai Jove, sir!" said the lieutenant. "And that tow of school kids from the Bombay Castle are coming up here! They are due at least by noon to-morrow. They will get chopped, sure as sure!"

"That's what has been worrying me," said his chief. "Tried to intercept them, and to tell the silly old fool who has them in charge that the river is not looking healthy just now. I sent him a very guarded wire to Banana Crossing, and got no answer. I sent him another to Tunga. But I have an idea that both messages have been suppressed by that black-and-tan clerk in the office at Tunga. If anything happens to these boys, he will be for it! I have long suspected him of being one of N'Tumbo's spies down the river, and I have collected near enough evidence to get him."

The lieutenant leaned back in his chair and stared thoughtfully at a lamp that was burning dimly in the veranda.

"What's this old bean coming up the river for, sir?" he asked.

"Why, I have had a letter," replied Major Hatteras. "He wants to see the buried cities, and go digging about amongst them for history."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed the lieutenant in alarm. "Why, sir, if N'Tumbo suspects that he wants to get into those old ruins, that's as good as asking for a chopping!"

"Of course it is," answered the major fretfully. "The old innocent does not dream that the scoundrel uses those taboo sites for stowing his plunder, and if he goes

asking N'Tumbo to take him to his cities, N'Tumbo will think that he has found out all, and will chop him and all his party to prevent them giving evidence. This is a pretty kettle of fish!"

"Of course, sir," said the lieutenant reasonably, "we can't very well be peevish with the old chap for butting in when we only got the information two days ago. But it makes it very awkward. I think I'd better take the steamer and twenty Hausas and get down the river. I might be in time to prevent them from calling on N'Tumbo. If not, I shall be in time to pick up the pieces. And, coming to think of it, I have heard a bit about this school ship. I have a young cousin called Dick Dorrington aboard her. If I remember rightly, they are rather a brainy lot of boys, and N'Tumbo may find trouble on his hands if he tries to fight them or to make them prisoners!"

"I am glad to hear it," replied Major Hatteras. "Take the sternwheeler and a couple of Maxims and thirty men. If, by any chance, N'Tumbo moves to attack us, we can stall him off with the rest of the garrison. It leaves us very short. And since he has declared war, there is nothing to prevent you attacking him from the river. In any case, you can sink all his canoes on sight. Get things moving, and I will prepare your orders."

The major sat himself down at the typewriter, and started typing rapidly, whilst the lieutenant hastened forth to call up his little army.

Thus were things up-river as Mr Pugsley steered the launch up the dark M'Bongo, at eight-thirty in the evening.

Looking at the rough map he had made under the instruction of a river pilot, he calculated that they would reach N'Tumbo Town, as they called it, about eleven at night.

Mr. Pugsley was by no means easy in his mind.

"I got a foreboding, Master Dick," said he. "I've just got the same sort of feeling as I had the night when my Uncle William fell through a cellar flap and broke both his

legs. The ole man says to me: 'I'm just goin' down the street for arf-ounce o' Norton's. I won't be long.' 'Let me go,' says I, 'cause I got a 'unch that if you go out to-night you'll get into trouble—knocked down by a motor-bicycle or something.' But no, Uncle William was an obstinate ole cuss. Would 'ave 'is way. And 'e got it. Fell through the cellar flap at the Coach an' 'Orses, and was laid up in the infirmary for months an' months. Cost me a lot of money, Uncle William did, in grapes and 'bacca," added Mr. Pugsley gloomily. "Never got any of it back, I didn't, neither. When 'e died we found 'e'd bought 'imself an annuity, and 'e lef' nothin' be'ind 'im but an ole horsehair sofa with morth in it"

Mr. Pugsley remained gloomy

They pulled up for supper on a sandbank, and the crocodiles in the river were scared by the lighting of great cooking fires and the loud songs of the boys, whilst a long-suffering gramophone blared out: "It made you happy when you made me cry," and "Bye-bye, Blackbird," and "When the red, red robin comes bob, bob, bobbing along."

And all the time, far away through the forest boomed the great village drums, trunks of hollowed wood that are hung under a thatched pent-house, and will send their warning messages flying over ten miles.

"Let 'Orace out of his sack, Master Dick," said Mr. Pugsley. "'E wants to stretch his legs, pore thing! And I like to 'ave 'Orace loose when there's niggers about. That's one thing that me and 'Orace has got in common. We can't abide niggers!"

Horace was very good when the boys released him from his sack. He was a bit stiff and grumpy, but he took no notice of the strange nigger, Too-Too, but browsed hungrily on the leaves of the bushes that were growing in the crown of the sandbank.

Dr. Crabhunter did not ask Mr. Pugsley why he had moored at a sandbank in the middle of the river instead of on the bank, which was much handier for getting ashore. He sat in dignified silence at the central fire, whilst Mr. Pugsley kept himself to him-

self, as he put it, making his coffee at another fire, and giving Too-Too a tin of bully beef to cheer him up.

"There you are, Too-Too," said he, giving the nigger the bully beef and a bag of biscuits. "Get that under your pinny, and you will feel better."

Too-Too gazed at Mr. Pugsley with adoration in his eyes. It was plain that he thought Mr. Pugsley the greatest man in the world.

He was not afraid when Horace strayed up to him and pinched a biscuit out of his bag. He patted Horace's nose, and, strange to say, Horace did not biff him into the middle of next week.

"I never see anyone get on with Horace like that before," said Mr. Pugsley, sitting down by Too-Too on a tree-stump and eating a large sandwich of bread and meat. "Now, tell me, O Too-Too," he added, in Umtutu's own tongue—"tell me something of this great chief, N'Tumbo."

Too-Too started to gabble away in his dialect, and Mr. Pugsley sat and nodded, and noted all that he said, like a policeman taking evidence for a police-court case.

No one heard what passed between him and Umtutu, but before supper was finished Mr. Pugsley discreetly retired to the flotilla with Cecil, and when the party returned to the canoes again they found each canoe nicely shuttered with sheets of corrugated iron, so placed that they would protect the occupants from arrow shots and spears without impeding their navigation.

"What does this mean, Mr. Pugsley?" asked Dr. Crabhunter, rather sternly.

"It means reasonable precautions, sir," replied Mr. Pugsley. "And I am in charge of these craft!"

Dr. Crabhunter gave an exclamation that sounded rather like "Tush!" But Mr. Pugsley was, indeed, in charge of the canoes, and round the gunwale of each canoe he had nailed strips of canvas before starting, just the sort of strips which are used in boat-work for covering weapons from spray, dew, and observation.

Not a word more was said as the flotilla held on its way up the river, and Mr. Pugs-

ley held his peace, keeping a watchful eye on the river till the flotilla entered the long four-mile reach on which N'Tumbo's town was situated.

A glare of fires showed red on the fringe of the forest, and, like a telephone, the water brought down the sullen, monotonous sound of drums.

There were lights like the lights of a fishing fleet strung out right across the half-mile width of the river.

"Ha, Mr. Pugsley," called Dr. Crabhunter, who had forgotten his little grouch, "I see we are expected!"

"Oh, yes, sir," called Mr. Pugsley from the launch. "No doubt about that! They ain't closed the pubs yet!"

"And we shall get a warm welcome!" said Dr. Crabhunter.

"Oh, yes, sir, we shall get a warm welcome!" replied Mr. Pugsley. "A very warm welcome! Shouldn't wonder if they don't bring out their jazz band to meet us!"

Then he whispered to Dick as Dr. Crabhunter loudly admired what he called the "illuminations," strung across the river.

"Silly ole josser! Those are not illuminations. That's a string o' canoes with palm oil cressets, put across the river to stop us going up. I think it's about time, Master Dick, that you gave the lads the wire to man and arm ship."

And Dr. Crabhunter never knew what happened in the flotilla when, through the music of "The more we are together," Dick whistled a clear call, understandable by every member of the Glory Hole Gang.

The boys of the Bombay Castle were not supposed to carry arms. Even Pongo Walker had had his Little Wonder air-gun taken away from him when he had tickled up a few of the crocodiles sleeping on the mudflats below.

But at Dick's secret call there was a slight stir in the dark canoes, so slight that it was unperceived by Dr. Crabhunter and unnoticed by Mr. Lal Tata.

But from cricket bags and golf bags rifles were quietly drawn and laid under the canvas flaps, with bags of ammunition, and

the Redskins, fishing out their bowstrings from their pouches, where they kept them to guard against damp, strung them into the notches, all ready for action.

But the singing kept on, and presently, tuned into its strains, there came from all the boats the code whistle of the Glory Hole Gang.

"Manœuvre completed, sir," reported Dick. "They are all armed!"

"Well done!" said Mr. Pugsley. "They got more sense than their master, what's playin' 'Will you walk into my parlour? said the spider to the fly' with Mr. N'Tumbo."

As they drew nearer to the town, they saw a low bank crowned with white mud walls and a large archway. There was a wharf of piling along the river front, and to the canoe stakes here were moored a number of large canoes. Right across the river, a little farther up, were stretched a whole line of smaller canoes.

"That's N'Tumbo's navy," said Mr. Pugsley, in a low voice—"light cruisers across the river, the heavy war canoes alongside, ready to go for us if we showed fight. We are going into the lions' den proper!"

There was no lu'luing or sound of welcome as the launch sheered towards the wharf, and there were no women or children about. Anyone versed in African affairs might have seen that their reception was not friendly.

A crowd of silent niggers lined the wharf, armed with spears and arrows and trade guns, lit ruddy red by the flares of the palm oil cressets, which made the whole of the white walls of N'Tumbo's town look as if they were stained in blood.

Most of the party were struck by the sinister look of N'Tumbo's town, with the exception of Dr. Crabhunter, who, full of his one idea, thought only of interviewing N'Tumbo, and seeking guides to his hidden cities.

Poor Dr. Crabhunter did not realise that his request was something like walking into a burglars' kitchen and asking to be shown the last lot of swag.

Mr. Pugsley sheered his tow along the red-lit waters by the wharf skilfully, so as to

bring Dr. Crabhunter's canoe close alongside a small projection.

"That's N'Tumbo," he whispered, and he indicated an enormous fat nigger, seated on a barrel. N'Tumbo was white-robed, but, to Mr. Pugsley's horror, he wore a cocked hat which was plainly some discarded uniform of the British Navy.

courtiers, watched with sullen eyes the launch and the canoes as they ranged alongside the wharf, Mr. Pugsley skilfully avoiding any mooring by bringing Dr. Crabhunter's canoe close along by the landing.

There was an evil-looking old witch doctor at N'Tumbo's elbow, a filthy figure, wrapped in a leopard skin, and strung all over with



The eyes of N'Gama nearly started from his head as Cecil leaned over him. "O mercy, O great one!" he panted. (See Chapter 2.)

"That N'Tumbo?" asked Dick, in horror. "What an awful-looking brute!"

"Keep down, Cecil!" whispered Mr. Pugsley to Cecil, who was crouching under a tarpaulin, holding Horace, the goat, in a grip of iron. "We don't want any of these nibs to see you yet."

N'Tumbo, surrounded by a group of

feathers and dried snake skins, which formed a pendant to a skull.

This was N'Gama, who was the evil genius to N'Tumbo. He had whispered to the suspicious chief that these were spies, and that they had come too late to learn that the great N'Tumbo had declared war against the British. They must all be

killed, but first N'Tumbo must learn the cause of their coming.

N'Tumbo, full of suspicion, waited for Dr. Crabhunter to land on the little projecting platform.

Even now the worthy Doctor was not suspicious of his host. He leaped lightly on to the pier, and approached N'Tumbo with outstretched hand.

"My dear chief," he exclaimed, "this is indeed a happy moment! I have so long wanted to meet you! I bring you greetings from your friends in London, and this letter of introduction!"

N'Tumbo tried to grin a friendly smile, and succeeded in looking as if he had a pain in his stomach.

He took the envelope, ripped it open, and held the letter upside down, muzzily pretending to read it. Then he rose from the stool on which he was seated, and waved his hand towards the gate, indicating by a gesture to Dr. Crabhunter that affairs of State were too exalted to be conducted on the wharf.

The Doctor tamely followed him through the city gate, to be saluted by the roll of a hundred hand drums and the deep booming of the great war drum, which was hung under a roof by the great Speak House.

"We make palaver inside," said the witch doctor, N'Gama, as he limped along by Dr. Crabhunter. "Me big doctor, like you," he added.

"Certainly, my dear sir," replied Dr. Crabhunter, though he could not help taking a side-glance at N'Gama, and thinking that he was the dirtiest beggar he had ever clapped eyes on.

The groups in the canoes watched the Doctor disappear through the doorway, and Mr. Lal Tata called to Dick.

"I say, Dick, dear boy, I do not like looks of this place too much. But the Doctor would insist to pay visits to his Excellency."

Dick laid his finger on his lips to urge Lal to silence. The Redskins sat stolidly on their perch of corrugated iron sheets, smoking the pipe of peace, but all the same fingering the razor edges of their tomahawks under their blankets.

Only Sleeping Bear made any comment upon the sullen armed crowd who were watching the string of canoes.

"Plenty nice friend, I don't think!" said Sleeping Bear.

Mr. Pugsley was quietly performing a very remarkable feat. His engine, running slow, was holding the fleet of canoes alongside the wharf against the swift current of the river, so that their position was not shifted by six inches. He kept the canoe from which Dr. Crabhunter had landed exactly opposite the landing-place.

And at the same moment he was whispering to Umtutu, who lay flat on the deck of the launch in the shadow of the tarpaulin which was stretched over the engine.

"O man, I see you!" said he.

"O great chief, I see you!" mumbled Too-Too, who was lying face down on the deck.

"Over the side quietly. Dive under the keel, get up amongst those piles, and find out what has become of the great chief who has just landed!" ordered Mr. Pugsley.

"I hear and obey," answered Umtutu, and, like a shadow, he slipped over the far side of the launch and under her keel.

Umtutu could swim like a fish, and soon he was moving like a water rat under the slimy piles of the wharf.

There is nothing to teach a M'Bongo man in working his way along the rotten banks of a river, and in a few minutes Umtutu had worked round the town ditch to a spot where a wash-out had occurred in the great wall of mud. Here the wall had cracked through subsidence, and through the crack the spare little nigger climbed like a rat into the squalid town of mud huts.

Mr. Pugsley waited the longest ten minutes he had ever waited in his life. Then a woolly head popped up under the shadowy side of the launch, and Too-Too climbed aboard. His report was brief and to the point.

"Lord," he whispered, and he drew himself up dripping and flopped like a sea-lion on to the plankway of the launch, "the Leopards have got the great chief in the Speak House. There will be dancing, and he will be sacrificed to Umbimzulu the

Mighty, and to Mwangana, the great crocodile, even as happened to my brother. But the great chief is a great prize, and there will first be dancing."

"Hey!" demanded Mr. Pugsley, his brain working overtime.

"There will first be dancing," replied Too-Too. "And, further, these people have declared war against the white men, and they have cut the magic wire through which the white men talk through the forests!"

"Ho!" said Mr. Pugsley, rubbing his chin as he translated the news to Dick. "Now, let me see where we are! N'Tumbo is at war with the British. He's cut the telegraph lines, which is a declaration of war in itself. And 'e's pinched ole Crabbo and is goin' to sacrifice 'im, in the Leopard's Lodge, afore Umbimzulu. Now, Cecil was taken by our good friend 'ere for Umbimzulu. So Umbimzulu in the Speak 'Ouse must be the statue of a monkey that they've fished up out of them old ruins! So far, so good! And when they've done ole Crabbo in, they propose to throw 'im to the river to Mwangana, who is the crocodile god, supposed to protect them from inundations and to favour the crops. Lummy, but ole Crabbo ain't arf got 'imself into a prize-pack of o' trouble—and us, too!"

"We've got to get him out of it," said Dick.

"You've said it," replied Mr. Pugsley. "We will declare war at once on N'Tumbo, and, as they teach in the Navy that the essence of strategy is attack, we will attack straightway as soon as we see their hand. Pass the word to the boys to get a spanner in every canoe, and unscrew the caps of twelve tins of petrol. These will be passed to the stern canoe and poured on the water, giving time for it to float well down on N'Tumbo's navy astern. Then chuck a match on the river, and the enemy's fleet is, as you might say, done in!"

"Oh, Puggo," whispered Dick, "that's splendid!"

"Not arf what I got in my 'ead," answered Mr. Pugsley, calmly lighting his pipe and keeping his station as he kept the launch running against the river. "But

mind that light does not go till I sound the 'orn!"

"Right-ho!" said Dick, and he passed the message to the canoes astern.

The order came back, confirmed in proper style.

"Nex' thing, Master Dick, is to hand over the military command to you," said Mr. Pugsley. "There's only one person what can keep this string lying exactly where it is. And that's me. I must 'ave the canoes ready for you to do a quick pierhead jump. I am the Navy covering your land operations. Savvy? Now, we will wait till that witch doctor comes out at the gate to invite us in, as 'e will do in a few minutes."

Mr. Pugsley had hardly spoken the word when N'Gama came hobbling out of the gate, and advanced to the end of the pier.

Mr. Pugsley let his string of canoes fall back, and brought the launch alongside the platform as N'Gama advanced, with a persuasive grin on his ugly dial.

"This is where we declare war, Master Dick," he whispered. "When ole Loby Toby comes to the end of the platform and starts 'is palaver, swop him one just be'ind the knees with a good 'ard swing of the boat'ook, and that'll drop 'im on 'is coker-nut in the well 'ere. 'E's our 'ostage for ole Crabbo. Fair exchange is no robbery. They've taken our ole blighter, we'll take theirs! Are the straps loose on the cricket bag?"

"Yes," breathed Dick, getting a hold of the boathook.

"Two toots of the 'orn, and you shove Gus ashore, and let 'im run!" was the order.

"Right-ho!" said Dick.

In the red glare of the fires the treacherous N'Gama came limping down the projecting gangway to the launch.

He stood looking down on Mr. Pugsley, and his grin was the grin of a devil.

"O man," he began in greeting, "I see you."

"O man," said Mr. Pugsley in reply, "I see you."

"It is the will of my lord N'Tumbo that these white boys shall come to his Speak House and feast with their great master,"

said N'Gama. "And it is the will of my lord N'Tumbo that these canoes shall be moored to his piers, and that his guards shall be placed aboard, so that there shall be no stealing from his friends, who come"—and here N'Gama gave an awful leer—"to see the buried cities."

"Right-ho!" replied Mr. Pugsley, in English. "Sock him, Dick! Quick! 'E's jus' set right."

N'Gama, delivering his message, had advanced to the very edge of the platform, and, quick and suspicious though he was, he was not looking out for the swipe of the heavy boathook behind his crooked knees that sent him flying on his head into the launch below.

"We ain't all suckers in Suckerville, y' know, N'Gama!" said Mr. Pugsley as he snicked a pair of handcuffs on to his prisoner, whilst Cecil, under the tarpaulin, lashed his legs.

The eyes of N'Gama nearly stared from his head as Cecil leaned over him.

"Umbimzulu!" he panted. "O mercy, O great one!"

"We got the clue!" called Mr. Pugsley in triumph as an angry roar broke from the crowd on the shore.

He leaped up on the bows of the launch, his hands in his pockets on the butts of two Service revolvers.

"O people," he cried, "thy lord has declared war on the British, wherefore thy gods are angered! The great Umbimzulu hath spoken, and the great Mwangana hath spoken. They are angered because of the treachery of N'Gama, and they are angered wherefore—behold, thy river burns!"

Mr. Pugsley sounded his foghorn.

The crowd, who were rushing forward, suddenly stopped, aghast. They saw a lick of blue flame run along the dark waters of the river, and then a huge sheet of flame rising on the water which was held by the hulls of the great war canoes, enveloped these in a furnace. These were rubbed over with a varnish of resin and lampblack, and as the petrol flames leaped up around them, they caught and flared up like torches, that could have been seen for miles around.

A yell of anger and fear went up from the mob as Mr. Pugsley executed his first naval manoeuvre, which was to pull up a little and let another flood of flaring petrol go flying down the river on to N'Tumbo's war canoes.

These were large vessels and of great price, and they went up like fireworks, sending showers of sparks, which fell like golden rain upon the thatched roofs within the walls of the town.

There was a rush towards the canoes and a rush back. Then the crowds stood irresolute.

"Behold Umbimzulu the Mighty!" roared Mr. Pugsley, in a voice of thunder.

Something like a wail went up from the armed mob as Cecil, huge, grim, and terrible, rose from the launch and leaped on to the platform of the pier.

"Behold Mwangana!" cried Mr. Pugsley.

There was a howl as old Gus was shot out of the cricket bag on to the pier.

There was a rough wooden carving of Mwangana in the Temple of the Leopards, painted up in rough daubed colours. But this were nothing like rare old Gus, painted up fit to kill by the best artists of China and Japan, golden, blue-headed, and striped with the black-and-white stripes of New-castle United.

Spears were dropped and guns were dropped, and the cry went up:

"Lo, our gods are angered! Let us run, brothers, to our women and children in the woods!"

Gus did one of his little runs forward, which always gave him a quaint resemblance to those little tin crocodiles which are sold on the streets.

Cecil stood there, swinging the great club which had been presented to him down in the Solomon Island. Gone was his glossy top hat, his Eton jacket, and his posh striped trousers. Cecil was naked as he was born, grim, terrible, and primitive.

The niggers took one look at him, and there was a rush into the gate of the town and a fighting jam of black bodies. It was like the gallery door of the Splendide Picture Palace on a Saturday night.

Then Mr. Pugsley handed over.

"There you are, Master Dick! They are on the run," said he. "Straight to the Speak 'Ouse! And if you see any lads in leopard-skin gloves, shoot 'em for the vermin they are!"

Dick leaped ashore, and Mr. Pugsley neatly drew up the canoes as Horace, bounding after Dick, landed on the platform. It was a masterpiece of navigation when Mr. Pugsley landed his party. Mr. Chatterjee Lal Tata was still bewildered.

"What is happening, my dear Dick?" he demanded. "This is terrible, and I am a timid man!"

"Don't worry," said Dick as they pressed forward into the gate of the town. "They've got old Crabby in their Speak House, and if we don't get him out quick, he'll be murdered!"

"I tried to persuade him," said Mr. Lal Tata. "I hate these foolish expeditions, and I don't like adventures—except in books."

The thatches had caught inside the mud walls, and the town was brightly illuminated as Dick and the boys of the Bombay Castle raced across the great square, with four hundred niggers flying before them.

There was no mistake as to the Speak House. It was a huge barn, as distinct as the Houses of Parliament, in London town.

No one resisted them. No nigger stood before them, for on one side of Dick stalked Cecil, grim and terrible, club in hand, and on the other side scuttled old Gus, frisking like a two-year-old to find himself free of his cricket bag.

The niggers who ran saw in these only their outraged gods, Umbimzulu of the Forests and Mwangana of the Rivers, the givers of all prosperity and good luck.

They hardly stopped to look, for to look on the gods is death. They went through the town and over the walls, and raced for the forest, to tell of the disaster which had fallen upon N'Tumbo and his capital city. N'Tumbo, who had dared to raise his hand against the white men!

They went over the walls like cats, fall-

ing into the ditch beyond and racing for the forest, covered with mud.

Dick led on to the door of the Speak House. Drumming was going on inside—a terrible, ominous drumming, which drowned the ears to those in the Temple of the Leopards against all that was passing outside.

Dick pointed to the great closed doors, and called to Horace, the goat.

"Horace!" he called.

Horace took one glance at the doors from his shining green eyes, that glowed like star-board lights. He measured his distance, and retreated a few paces.

Horace had measured his biffing powers against some rough stuff in his time, but the gates of the Speak House were the roughest proposition he had ever tackled.

But Horace was not downhearted.

Down went his head and up went his tail, and, with a superb bound, he hit the centre of those closed doors of murder with a biff that sounded like the crack of doom.

The doors flew open, and Horace recoiled, sorting himself out in penny numbers, and the boys were brought to a halt for an instant at the sight before them, a sight for which the rulers of Africa would have paid a king's ransom.

For there, lashed on a wooden log before the grim statue of an orang-outang, carved by a Greek hand, lay Dr. Crabhunter, and at the base of the statue sat N'Tumbo, his supposed pal, looking scared to death at the earthquake which had just taken place.

And, frozen in the act of dancing round their victim, were twelve evil-looking niggers, dressed in leopards' skins and tails, each bearing on his hands the death sentence of the steel-clawed gloves of the Leopards' Society.

Old Crabbo was still keeping his end up, even in this awful strait.

"I protest, Mr. N'Tumbo," he was saying—"I protest!"

"At 'em, Cecil!" cried Dick.

There was hardly need to call on Cecil. At the sight of Dr. Crabhunter lashed there Cecil seemed to go mad, and at the sight of

the statue of himself, lit by the red glow of the palm oil braziers, Cecil was transported.

He sprang at the frightened Leopards, who raised a howl of terror. He picked them up and hurled them one after another at the statue, toppling it over from its base. And when he had finished, there were twelve badly-damaged Leopards on the ground, and N'Tumbo lying on the floor before the empty pedestal, with about as much backbone in him as a Chivers' jelly. In fact, all that N'Tumbo wanted to complete him was the raspberry flavour. He had got the lemon all right.

"Quick! Out of it, boys!" called Dick. "They may come back. Pick up those twelve chaps—they don't want any more—and shove old N'Tumbo along! Come along, Doctor! You are all right, sir. A miss is as good as a mile. Quick—to the wharf!"

And they pushed back through the blazing town, shoving N'Tumbo in front of them.

Mr. Pugsley gave a yell of triumph as he saw them come out at the gate of the blazing city.

"Well done, boys! Well done!" he cried. "And look! Here they come from Fort Victoria!"

There was the rattle of a Maxim gun as the sternwheeler from Fort Victoria came crashing through the chain of canoes which guarded the river.

"I believe that's my cousin bringing her down," said Dick, his eyes shining. "Isn't he pasting them?"

"We'll go and meet 'im," said Mr. Pugsley, "and let 'im 'ave ole Tumbo and his young cubs!"

As the flotilla pushed off, Dr. Crabhunter grasped Mr. Pugsley's hand.

"Mr. Pugsley," said he, "I have been a foolish man. I——"

But Mr. Pugsley cut him short.

"Hush, Doctor!" said he. "Not a word! All's well that ends well."



The boys were brought to a halt, for there, lashed to a wooden log before the statue of an orang-outang, lay Dr. Crabhunter. "At 'em, Cecil!" cried Dick. (See Chapter 2.)

A DAY in the LIFE OF A PAGE!

By **TOBY MARSH**

(Of St Jim's).

IT was a bad day for me when I chose the perfession of page-boy at a public school. It's an overworked and under-paid job, with more kicks than pence. I'd much rather have a job like Taggles, the porter's—overpaid and underworked, with more pence than kicks! Old Taggles thinks he's hard done by, but his job's a sinnycure compared with mine. All he has to do is to crawl out of bed and ring the risin'-bell, and then crawl back between the sheets again and snooze until break-fast-time. For the rest of the day he just dawdles and dithers about jinglin' a bunch of keys, and moanin' that he's the hardest-worked cove in the wide world!

Taggles is up with the sparrow, but I'm up with the lark! My first job is to clean dozens of pairs of boots and shoes; for I'm not only a "buttons," but a bootblack, an errand-boy, a window-cleaner, a groom, a valley, and a "maid-of-all-work"—all rolled into one!

It's a perfect nightmare, cleanin' all the boots and shoes. Young gents like Master D'Arcy always insists on havin' a prize polish put on their shoes, so that they can see their faces in 'em. And by the time breakfast comes I'm sufferin' from "boot-black's elbow," which is like "tennis elbow," only a jolly sight more painful!

Breakfast with me is a lightnin' snack. I have to take it standin' up; and I marvel at myself for takin' it lyin' down! A page-boy ought to have his breakfast in peace and comfort, like everybody else.

All the mornin' you'll see me racin' and chasin' all over the place, runnin' errands for all and sundery. It's "Toby, just pop here," and "Toby, just pop there," until I wonder I don't pop off altogether, and find a better job! If I dare to dawdle, and



wander along the road readin' my favourite paper, "The Gem," it's a cuff or a lecture—or both!—waitin' for me when I get back.

Dinner is another lightnin' meal, taken in the servants' quarters. And then it's more errands and more odd jobs, such as riskin' my neck cleanin' the dormitory windows, or caddyin' on the links for one of the masters, or cleanin' the silver, or beatin' the carpets, or spring-cleanin' the Head's study. The Head's got quite a mania for havin' his study spring-cleaned. He seems to think that spring comes every week!

Not until the evenin' can I call my time my own. And then I make my miserable life happy by visitin' the Wayland Cinema, and forgettin' the cares and burdens of the day. Or I stay at St. Jim's and listen-in to a wireless concert. Master Merry has lent me THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL, and it's a really ripplin' book when a fellow is in the dollars. (I don't mean rollin' in money, but down in the dumps!)

I retire to roost early, and it seems that my head has scarcely touched the pillow when it's time to get up and start a new day of toil and trouble.

Pity the poor page-boy!

THREE SMART TRICKS

Next time you give a party, amuse your audience with these tricks. They are very effective, easy to perform, and will be sure to go off well.

THE LOCKED AND ROPED BOX ESCAPE.

ONE of the most baffling and interesting illusions is the escape of a "magician" from a locked and roped box. It never fails to impress you; and yet, when the secret is known, the clever trick is one which any boy or girl might do. Here is a description of the illusion as it appears to the audience.

A large box is brought forward, and anyone is allowed to examine it. Particular attention is drawn to the fact that the box has *not* got a false bottom. Then the illusionist enters the box, which is at once closed and locked. A strong rope is then tied all round it, and the knots are sealed. The illusionist's assistant draws a curtain round the box, and in a few moments the illusionist himself appears, pulls back the curtain, and shows the box, from which he has just escaped, still securely corded and sealed!

Anyone who is at all handy with tools

can construct one of these boxes in this way. The box certainly has no false bottom, but one of its sides works on a pivot. When the rope is tied around the box, the assistant, who, of course, is looking after the illusionist's interests while the latter is in the box, sees to it that the rope goes round the box in the same direction as the pivot works.

You make the box as shown at Fig. 1, leaving a space where the false side is to go. Cut a piece of wood of exactly the same size and appearance as the corresponding side of

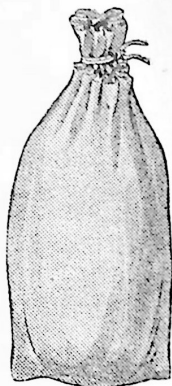


Fig. 3. This shows how the bags are arranged one inside the other, the innermost bag then being tied and sealed.

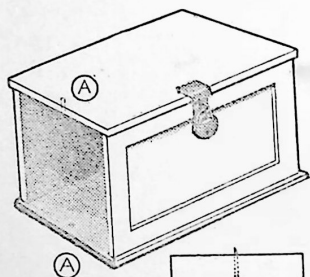


Fig. 1 (left). The false side is fitted to the box, A, with two nails, which act as the pivot.

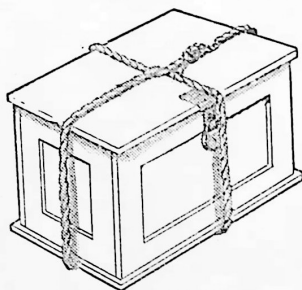
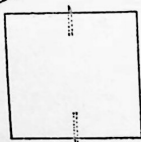


Fig. 2. The box (right) locked and bound with rope.

the box. That makes the false side. Fasten this in position with two very large nails, which between them will act as the pivot.

Be careful to see that the box is large enough to enable you to crawl through one half of the false side, for that is all the space you have.

Once you are inside the box, lie in it with your head towards the false side. Your assistant must see that the rope is fastened around the box as shown at Fig. 2, and he should rap on the box just as he draws the curtain in front of it as a signal to you that you can begin to "escape."

When the curtain is drawn, simply push the false side open, and worm your way out! Of course, you will close the false side after you are out. Let people examine the box as much as they wish, but take care that you stand all the time by the false side, just in case someone should start prying there!

ESCAPING FROM A SEALED BAG.

ANOTHER simple trick is the escape from a bag which has been tied and sealed by the audience, after the illusionist has got into it. The curtains are drawn, and in a few moments the illusionist reappears, bearing with him the bag, which is still tied and sealed.

For this trick, you need two bags, exactly similar to each other, and both big enough for you to get into. One bag is placed inside the other—without the audience being aware of the fact, of course. When you get into the bag, you grip the second bag and push the top of it up through the open neck of the one in which you are. Your assistant conceals this by gathering the top of the bag in his hands. When members of the audience are asked to tie and seal it, they do not realise that they are tying and sealing another bag—not the one which really contains you!

When the curtain is drawn, you simply step from your bag, and hide it or leave it behind the curtain, showing the sealed (the

second) bag to the audience. Fig. 3 shows you how the tops of the bags are arranged, and where they should be held by your assistant, who must see that the audience do not notice what he is up to when the tying and sealing is being done.

AN EFFECTIVE CHAIN ESCAPE.

FOR our third simple escape, you require a short length of chain, with a ring at one end and a padlock at the other. This is an "escape" that can be done without a curtain to screen you from your audience, for you can manage it by merely turning your back on them.

Any person from the audience is invited to fasten your hands together with the chain, as tightly as they possibly can. No matter

how tightly the chain is fastened on your wrists, you simply turn your back for a moment, then face around again with your hands free and the padlock still locked!

The whole trick depends on the way in which your hands are fastened. You must see that the audience fasten the chain in the manner

Fig. 4. How an "escape" is made from manacled wrists.

you desire, which is as follows: First of all you slip one end of the chain through the ring, and thus make a noose of it. This is slipped over one wrist and pulled tight. Take care that the ring comes at the top of your wrist, as at Fig. 4. Then allow the chain to drop between the wrists, give it a swing, and bring it over the top of the right wrist.

This done, the person who is manacled you may wrap the chain as tightly as he wishes around your wrists, and padlock it. All you have to do when you turn your back is to raise your left hand slightly, turn it palm downwards, slip it over the right, and the chain will have become so slack that it is an easy matter to slip it right off your wrists.

