



THE FIRST CHAPTER

BLACK PAINT!

UNDER white tropic sunlight the great aircraft-carrier "Kestrel" dropped her bow anchor with a mighty crash and rumble of paying-out chain. Orders were shouted and the bo'sun's pipe shrilled as the men ran to swing out a gangway.

A mile away to port lay the coast of British Guiana, which the "Kestrel" had orders to visit for a day or so during her tour of the British possessions.

Now a smart pinnacle came ploughing out, leaving a diamond wake tumbling behind her across the heaving waters. She was brought along-

side neatly, and a tall, bespectacled man in a white linen suit clambered up the gangway on to the "Kestrel's" deck.

Squadron-Commander Wagstaff met him at the ladder-head and exchanged greetings. On the after-deck, behind the two, a group of young pilots were entertaining themselves by feats of physical strength. There were shouts of laughter as one of their number, wearing a strained

expression and a gold-rimmed monocle, sought to climb, monkey fashion, to the top of a tall signal-mast.

Wagstaff gave a rather irritated glance towards them, for the noise was considerable. But, at the same

THE PRISONER OF DEVIL'S ISLAND

Once he was a famous pilot in Britain's crack fighting squadron—Baldy's Angels. Now, years after the Great War, he is a prisoner in one of the worst penal settlements in the world.

time, he had to pay attention to the newcomer's words.

"Your arrival is providential—absolutely providential," said the bespectacled gentleman. "As I have already told you, the Government wanted a special survey of this coast, and so they sent me out a pilot with a small, mobile airship. But, unfortunately, the man is down with fever. He is not seriously ill; he will be quite recovered within a week. But this survey is urgent, and must be carried out at once!"

"Quite so, Mr. Tanson," said Wagstaff, looking slightly more irritated as the yells of laughter from the after-deck became still louder. "I take it that you wish me to provide you with an airship pilot who can assist you for a few days? Well, as a matter of fact, I happen to have several men on board who have done airship work."

"Thank you," said Mr. Tanson, in obvious relief. "I had hoped that such might be the case. As Government surveyor, I have carried out this work in many of our possessions, and it is one of my proud boasts that there has never been any delay about my reports."

He smiled rather self-consciously.

"I will not detain your man any longer than I can help," he said. "Indeed, it is quite possible that I may collect enough information in one day's flying to keep me busy in my office for best part of a week. I may be able to release your officer after just that one day."

Wagstaff nodded and turned to lead the surveyor up on the bridge of the great ship. But as he did so the uproar from the after-deck went far beyond the bounds of discipline and good order.

Mr. John Henry Dent—he of the

monocle—only reached the top of the flagpost after superhuman efforts and weird and wonderful muscular contortions. Below him, on the deck, half a dozen young pilot officers yelled with mirth, and one especially gave forth a bull-like roar of delight.

Lieutenant A. P. Tarlan, indeed, had a voice in proportion to his size, which was considerable. He was a towering youth of really unusual strength, and, in the queer ways of young men, he was John Henry's most hated rival in all matters that concerned them both.

The warfare between the two was never-ending. It afforded the squadron quite a lot of amusement. Tarlan waved his arms in the air and howled his joy to the high heavens.

"Look at him!" he roared. "Look at the eye-glassed idiot! He can't climb a flagpole without going black in the face! Here, come down, J. H., and I'll show you how it's done!"

Young Mr. Dent came down. He slid to the deck, looking heated and haughty at the same time. Although an athletic youth, he had not Tarlan's enormous strength, and he knew it. He felt, now, that he was going to be "scored over." But suddenly he perceived an object standing near by on the planks, and his eyeglass glittered.

"All right!" he panted. "All right, jolly old Tarzan! You climb the pole. Dash it all, you ought to be able to do it quite naturally! But what I mean, I'll bet *you* can't do it without going black enough!"

Tarlan yelled with laughter again. He jumped at that post and went up, hand over hand, with a strength that certainly no other pilot in the squadron could match. But as he rose higher and higher, shouting down jibes with every foot that he climbed, young Mr. Dent got busy below.



"That's how to climb you glass-eyed tailor's dummy!" exclaimed Tarlan to John Henry. Then he began to slide down the flagpole again—but not as he intended. As he reached the part John Henry had painted he slid more swiftly, and came down on his face!

He picked up that object which had first taken his attention. It was a large pot of black paint, left under cover of one of the lifeboats by a seaman who had been at work.

Young Mr. Dent took the brush and painted that flagpole with swift liberal strokes.

The surrounding pilots suddenly saw the point of the joke and laughed uproariously. Tarlan took about four minutes to reach the flagpole summit—and during those four minutes, John Henry worked industriously.

He covered more than four feet of the pole with liberal supplies of the black, shining paint. Then he put down the pot, adjusted his eyeglass happily, and awaited events.

"What-ho, you glass-eyed tailor's dummy!" howled Tarlan from the

summit of the pole. "That's how to climb! That's how anyone who isn't a narrow-chested, fourpenny rabbit can nip up a pole, without going black in the face. What's your answer to that?"

John Henry clapped applaudingly.

Mr. Tarlan grasped the pole affectionately and slid down.

He slid rather more swiftly when he reached the last six or seven feet; so swiftly, in fact, that instead of landing on his feet he came down on his face! He staggered up and looked down at his once-white uniform with an expression of blank, dazed horror.

His legs, knees, chest and arms were shining, dripping black! There were traces of it on his chin! Some had streaked his rather sandy hair!

John Henry walked away airily,

and whistled a nonchalant tune. Suddenly, however, his whistle broke off short, as he made a wild plunge forward! His plunge was occasioned by a bull-like roar which punctuated the yells of laughter from the others!

John Henry, in fact, ran like a hare. Young Mr. Tarlan ran, too, scattering black traces over the spotless "Kestrel" decks as he went! The rest of the pilots streamed out behind the chase, almost weeping with delight.

And up on the bridge, the spectacled Mr. Tanson looked distinctly interested—whilst Wagstaff fumed! Wagstaff, in fact, excused himself a second, and went aside to call up a group of duty officers, to whom he gave fiery instructions. The result of those instructions was that the wild chase all over the ship suddenly became interrupted. A couple of grinning duty-officers collared young Mr. Dent and then hauled him, with some difficulty, away to the wardroom.

Three more—armed with protective stretches of canvas—fell upon Mr. Tarlan. They conducted Mr. Tarlan to a bathroom and flung him inside, locking the door. They sent an orderly for a fresh uniform, and they told Mr. Tarlan that when he had once again reverted to the correct colour, as laid down in King's Regulations, for young officers, he was required to interview the commander.

The result was that, within half an hour, two rather sheepish officers faced Wagstaff in the wardroom. A small portion of hard, black paint still adhered to the end of Tarlan's nose—and it appeared to annoy Commander Wagstaff.

Commander Wagstaff, indeed, spoke for ten minutes without repeating himself, or making any great

pause for breath. Then he squared his shoulders.

"I repeat, I've had enough of it!" he said. "You two young idiots have got to give up this insane rivalry. You've got to stop larking about like a pair of incorrigible schoolboys. In short," went on Wagstaff, "you've got to go ashore in five minutes' time, and undertake mobile-airship work with the Government Surveyor. And, by gosh, if I hear one word of complaint of any kind when you come back, I'll run you both up for court-martial!"

John Henry groaned, and tried to speak—but Wagstaff gave him no opportunity. The two were dismissed to go and collect their kits. But as they went, John Henry looked so crestfallen that he seemed on the verge of tears.

He hated airships. During the war, he had had one very unpleasant period of work with this type of craft over the North Sea, and he had hoped never to touch one again.

In heartrending tones, he now confided to Tarlan that airships were unsafe; that the smell of gas made you feel dizzy; that their motion in the air was rather like being tossed into a vat of oil when you were feeling bilious; that all government surveyors should be choked at birth; and that, in his opinion, Mr. Tarlan ought to put his head in a bucket three times and only take it out twice!

It was only the whistle of a boat's crew from above that prevented immediate warfare between the two—which was perhaps fortunate for Tarlan, for John Henry was a one-time middle-weight boxing champion of the Flying Corps, and he had no fear of Tarlan's size and strength in any way.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

THE ESCAPED CONVICT!

Two hours later, the rivals were swinging away from the small air-station ashore, in the narrow car of a small airship. John Henry, in command, sat at the controls, whilst Tarlan, for the time being under his orders, attended to minor matters in the stern.

The bespectacled Mr. Tanson sat in the middle, surrounded by cameras, maps, and a weird array of strange-looking instruments. Binoculars were hung round his narrow shoulders, and several pencils on clips decorated his flying-coat pocket, rather like a row of Orders.

At his instructions, John Henry flew the swaying airship far away up and down the coast, and even out to sea about a cluster of small islands. Not, indeed, until the sun began to sink, and evening fast approached, did Mr. Tanson order a return. But then he was looking satisfied.

"This has been excellent," he shouted, above the roar of the engine. "Excellent! I could not have hoped for better results. Indeed, I think, now, that I shall be able to do without any further flying until my own pilot recovers. Let us now land."

With a sigh of infinite relief, John Henry swung the ship about, and headed towards the ten-mile distant coast, where a faint smudge of smoke showed the position of the "Kestrel" and the town. But as he did so, a tiny object on the sea, far below, caught his eye.

At first, it looked like a lump of wreckage; but as John Henry swayed down lower, it proved itself to be a boat.

"Golly!" gasped Tarlan. "Look—look—there's a chap in it! He seems to be dead—he's making no movement!"

Mr. Tanson lifted his binoculars excitedly, and made a clearer report.

"Dear me!" he said. "Dear me! The poor fellow is a negro! He's not dead—he moves slightly. But, dear me, he is terribly emaciated! He appears very ill——"

John Henry swung that airship down to within a few feet of the surface, and throttled back the engine. Running waves now and again slapped against the car—and Mr. Tanson covered his papers excitedly, fearful of their getting wet.

But, slowly, against the prevailing breeze, the airship came up level with the drifting boat, and willing hands reached over to grasp its exhausted occupant.

The negro seemed to be absolutely on the verge of collapse, but he had just enough strength to make the effort that made his transfer possible. Then, gasping and groaning, he collapsed in the bottom of the car, whilst the airship rose slowly again, and got under way.

Tanson and Tarlan bent over him, making him as comfortable as possible, whilst John Henry bent round to watch, as often as he dared take his eyes off the controls.

For some little time the castaway rambled in broken French, but then his eyes seemed to clear, and he spoke fairly good English.

"Don't take me back!" he murmured. "I won't go back! I rahder die dan see dat Debil's Island agen! I reck'n I'm dyin' now!"

"Devil's Island!" gasped Tanson. "Why, dear me, that's the French penal settlement. This man must be an escaped convict."

"Devil's Island!" echoed John Henry and Tarlan together.

Both of them had heard, many times, of that terrible French convict-

settlement to which long-sentence men are sent as a punishment for their misdeeds. They had heard that Devil's Island is one of the most dreaded institutions in the whole world; that convicts there undergo a regime of hardship only to be equalled by the legends of the middle ages.

They are worked like slaves, and driven to their work in the plantations. They are fed on starvation diet, and are ravaged by fevers. Any convict who manages to escape from Devil's Island is seldom sent back, if he lands in territory owned by any other country. For no other country approves of French ideas of punishment in this way.

John Henry suddenly altered the course of the airship, and made straight for the "Kestrel."

"Dash it all!" he gasped. "I'm not going to take any chances! We'll get this poor beggar on a ship of the British Navy—an' he'll be safe enough there! No beastly French consuls or people will be able to collar him and send him back. By Jove, we can land easily enough on the "Kestrel"—an' they'll take him down to the sick-bay an' look after him. Great snakes—look at his back! Dash it all, he's been flogged like a galley-slave!"

The negro's back was certainly a grim sight—and even the naval surgeon on board the "Kestrel" grimaced over it, when the fellow was handed over to his care after the airship had been moored.

The negro was put in a sick-bay berth, and carefully tended. He was soothed with skilful drugs, and made comfortable. And then, at length, he looked up at Wagstaff and his saviours, who were standing over the bed.

Although very weak, his head

seemed to be clearer. Gratitude filled his glazed eyes.

"You English fellers, good fellers!" he said. "All you English good fellers! Me had English pal on Devil's Island—good feller who tol' me he once rode in bird-ships, like you."

"An Englishman on Devil's Island?" gasped Tarlan. "What the dickens was he doing there? D'you mean he was a convict—sent there by the French?"

"Dash it all—a flyin' man?" asked John Henry. "What was his name, my dear old Snowball? What was he there for?"

The negro breathed deeply.

"English feller, name Jameson," he said. "He good to me! He tol' me French debils sent him prison, becos he took photographs near dock-yard. He tol' me he didn't mean no harm—but French t'ink him spy! Send him Debil's Island an' not say nothin' to no one! He sick feller, too. He die soon, if he don't get away from dat place!"

"Jameson!"

Two voices rapped that word out—and John Henry and Wagstaff stared at each other incredulously.

Lieutenant William James Jameson had been a member of the old Angels' Squadron, in which they had both served during the days of war. When peace came, "Billjim"—as he was nicknamed—went to the South of France for a holiday. They remembered this fact quite clearly, for "Billjim's" relatives afterwards wrote to both of them.

He had disappeared. Nothing had been heard of him for months, and no inquiries in France could trace his whereabouts at all. He was thought to have been drowned while bathing.

"Billjim!" said John Henry.

"Dash it all—why, Wagstaff, the whole

thing fits in ! You know how quiet all matters about spies are kept ? The rotters would send him to jug without savin' anythin' to anybody ! Even just after the war everyone was still jumpy about spies ! Dash it all, look here——"

He made a feverish gesture.

"Look here, Wagstaff," he gasped, "we can't leave him there ! See what a state this poor nig is in ! An' he

a French penal settlement ! No—I'll get on to our diplomatic people at once, and have the question raised."

"But," gasped John Henry, "that may take months ! You know how fearfully slow the awful idiots work ! And poor old Billjim's dyin' ! Good heavens——"

"Now, listen !" snapped Wagstaff. "Get this clearly ! You're going to make no move of your own at all—in



Slowly, against the prevailing breeze, the airship came up level with the drifting boat, and, leaning over, John Henry and Tarian lifted the exhausted negro into the car.

says Billjim's dyin' ! Dash it all, we must flip over there, an' get him out of that ghastly place ! "

Wagstaff's face had gone white, but he interrupted rather curtly.

"Don't be a fool, John Henry ! " he said. "We couldn't possibly do such a thing. Why, you young idiot, it might create an international quarrel ! We can't have the English Royal Air Force going and rescuing convicts from

any way. I order you to put the whole thing out of your mind ! I'm just as keen to get poor Billjim back as you are. But I can't take the risk of raising what might develop into a war between two countries, for the sake of one man ! The whole of Europe is frightened at the moment. There have been rumours of war all over the place ! One 'incident' like this might cost the lives of thousands of men ! "

He turned away abruptly.

"Get that airship ashore," he said. "And stay ashore until Mr. Tanson releases you to come back here."

Without another word he strode above decks to the wireless-room, where he began dictating messages to a high diplomatic authority in Whitehall.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

ON DEVIL'S ISLAND!

MR. TANSON elected to go ashore in the pinnace. The wind had now freshened considerably, and was blowing half a gale, so Mr. Tanson decided that aerial travel might perhaps be rather more unpleasant than a passage by sea.

It was this fact which gave John Henry furiously to think, as he and Tarlan slipped moorings in the airship, and made heavy going on the way back to the shore.

Tarlan also appeared thoughtful—but John Henry put this down to his inexperience of airships in general, and his undoubted dislike of this one in particular.

They reached the shore safely, and dropped a bow mooring-rope which was caught and fastened to a winch by the landing-crowd on shore.

John Henry's mind worked swiftly, and he motioned Tarlan to take control.

"Keep her head-on to wind," he said. "She'll yaw about a bit, but keep her as steady as you can, whilst I attend to this head-rope."

John Henry attended to the head-rope. He had a good experience of airships and knew all their most unpleasant little ways. He knew that if the rope were tautened too much, when a gust struck the vessel in a certain way, things were likely to happen.

The rope, in fact, was more than likely to snap. John Henry worked carefully, keeping his efforts out of sight of those below, who were standing about the winch, winding the vessel down.

The airship, under Tarlan's unskilful control, bucketed wildly. It swayed from side to side—and John Henry saw his chance. He whipped in the slack of that winding rope—and jammed it.

There was a sudden twanging crack—and a wild yell from below!

John Henry rolled on his back in the bows of the car, and Tarlan was nearly unseated at the controls. When they had righted themselves, they looked down in the twilight, to see that the ground had already dropped away a couple of thousand feet! The winch-men were running about, like frantic ants from an overturned nest.

"Dash it all, we've broken away!" gasped John Henry—although the large and spreading grin on his face somewhat belied his words of alarm.

"We've broken away, dear old boy!" he repeated. "We're sausagin' miles away out to sea! Heaven alone knows where we shall come down! Dash it all, we might even hit Devil's Island!"

Whilst he had been speaking, he ripped open one of the canvas water-ballast tanks, and sent a stream of liquid falling down towards the ground and the sea below.

It was seen by the alarmed watchers on the earth. John Henry hoped it would be. It was all part of his little plan!

"Shall we start the engine?" bawled Tarlan, swaying in his seat, but seeming not unduly alarmed by the whole procedure.

"Not yet," said young Mr. Dent solemnly. "We must wait till we get

to a higher altitude, dear old boy. Airships have dangerous ways. Dash it all, if we started the engine now, the people on the "Kestrel" might hear—I mean, the airship might—might get out of control! You don't understand these things!"

Tarlan stared at him, but said nothing. The coastline receded swiftly as that thirty-mile-an-hour wind bore them upon its breast. The airship rose to 10,000 feet, whirling and swaying giddily.

John Henry took control and steadied it skilfully once or twice, at the same time carefully examining the compass, together with a large chart which was amongst the equipment.

At the end of an hour, he announced that it would be safe to start the engine, and once the propeller was working he set a careful course and began to hum to himself a low tune.

The whole thing had gone off exactly as he had wanted it to! No one could say that the airship hadn't broken away by accident. Its engine had not started whilst it was within hearing of the "Kestrel."

John Henry intended to tell Wagstaff, at some future date, that the petrol-tank had been wrrenched open with the force of the breakaway—so that the fuel had fallen out, and the engine was useless.

Meanwhile, when the engine had served its purpose, he was actually going to wrench the side of the petrol tank out, as evidence that his story was true!

That was why he had dropped the water-ballast immediately the escape had occurred. He wanted that water to be mistaken for falling petrol!

In all these things, young Mr. Dent was very successful, as events afterwards proved. But now that he

had got the airship started, he flew steadily through the night until, far away in the distance, he saw the star-like gleam of a lighthouse illuminating the early greyness of dawn.

John Henry shut off his engine, after carefully gauging the wind. The lighthouse now showed more clearly at the extremity of an island.

Young Mr. Dent manœuvred the airship carefully, so that it was being carried directly towards that island by the prevailing wind. Once again he gave over the controls to Tarlan, and went forward to perform his little efforts on the petrol-tank, which he accomplished quite successfully.

"Now, Tarzan," he breathed as he worked, "there are one or two things I'm goin' to say to you, dash it all, when we've got time for a quiet chat. Meanwhile, I'm going to try to land on that island there. But when we *do* land, we mustn't let 'em know we were able to use our engine at all! We can't have these French fellers gigglin' at the British Royal Air Force. Dash it all, it's not to be borne. I think, by a mistake, I've navigated over Devil's Island, instead of gettin' back to the coast!"

Mr. Tarlan chuckled.

"That's not surprising," he said. "Unless you were blind lucky you couldn't navigate a team of white mice across a suburban back garden! Still, what d'you want me to do with the ship now? Shall I try and steer it?"

John Henry waved him away from the controls and took over. At the same time he tugged on the gas-release valve, so that the airship dropped down almost to water level, and approached the island swiftly.

At his orders, Tarlan threw over two or three more trail-ropes, and, as they approached the coast, young

Mr. Dent drew attention by firing flares, which all airships carry for such purposes.

The French Penal Settlement was just awake. Luckless convicts were being driven out of their hovels, to start their daily terrible labours in the fever-ridden plantations and in the quarries.

The clearing light of dawn showed the airship approaching, and the bang and glare of the flares drew attention to its presence. There were yelled orders, and considerable commotion reigned over the main square of the prison settlement.

Guards organised the convicts swiftly in parties—and as the airship swept low over their heads gangs of men grabbed those trail-ropes and hung on, sliding and kicking in the dust to gain a foothold.

With such a power on the ropes the airship was pulled up within a matter of yards. It was hauled down, pitching, as John Henry leant over the side and bawled directions in the best French he could manage.

Finally it was got to ground level. And then, at his advice, some of the gangs were set to work, swiftly filling large sacks with earth and sand, whilst the rest held the airship in place.

Prison officials flocked round John Henry and Tarlan, and, in the manner of their kind, all talked at once and all waved their hands violently.

The governor himself appeared on the scene with a revolver in each hand—having imagined, by the commotion, that there was a mutiny. But directly he announced himself, young Mr. Dent at once became astonishingly polite.

He used his very best French to thank the governor for heroically saving the life of himself and his friend! He said that the airship had broken loose from a British base, and

that they had both spent an awful night, fearing that it would drop into the shark-infested seas—which made escape from Devil's Island almost impossible.

The governor was pleased. He hadn't taken the least part in the rescue, but he liked being called a hero. He realised, also, that when these officers were picked up by the British warship which they said would come to look for them, he would be rewarded.

The English might give him a medal! There would, no doubt, be all kinds of pleasant courtesies.

So the governor made much of the visitors. Directly half a dozen enormous sandbags had been filled and attached to the airship's mooring ropes, he invited the pair into breakfast.

He placed his extremely comfortable house at their disposal, and begged them to rest after they had eaten. He also sent out wireless calls to the "Kestrel" to notify the British authorities that they were safe.

But young Mr. Dent purposely informed the wireless operator of an entirely wrong wavelength. He didn't want that message to get to the "Kestrel" too soon!

Nor did he consent to rest. He assured the governor that he and his friend were too overcome with personal relief for sleep to be possible. And he said that, since they had landed in such an unusual place, they would very much like to take advantage of that fact. They would deem it an honour to be shown round the settlement.

The governor agreed readily. After breakfast he took the two out and led them, through the growing heat of the blazing tropical sun, into the plantations where the prisoners were at work.



The governor yelled out wildly as the airship suddenly swept into the air above his head. But he little knew that in the sandbag dangling from the car was one of the prisoners of Devil's Island whom John Henry and Tarlan had rescued!

He assured them that each prisoner was a desperate, terrible character, who more than deserved every detail of the punishment he received. French punishments, he said, were designed to fit crimes.

But as John Henry and Tarlan made the rounds of those steaming, humid plantations, they could think of very few crimes which would merit such ghastly punishment as was there shown before their eyes.

All the prisoners seemed in the last stages of emaciation—and all of them showed the vicious marks of the warders' lashes across their bare backs.

Their work was labour of a hardness known in no English prison. Their food was rank and scanty. And the hovels in which they slept were not fit to keep pigs in.

John Henry scanned each strained, sweating face as he passed. His heart fell when he recognised no one—caught no sight of the man he had actually come to find.

But then, when the party reached the quarries, he saw a thin, wasted individual staring at him in utter, blank astonishment.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

THE RESCUE!

THE man was white, but his skin was burned brown by the beating rays of that brazen sun. He was so thin that his bones seemed merely covered by a skin of parchment. But there was something about his eyes—some vague expression that made John Henry halt suddenly with a gasp.

The governor was walking ahead with Tarlan, and the warders who were scattered about had eyes only for that group just at that special moment.

John Henry made a swift movement. From beneath his tunic he jerked a folded sack which he had managed to pick up and hide during the excitement immediately after the airship's landing.

Furtively he tossed that sack at the man's feet and spoke as loudly as he dared :

" Dear old Billjim ! " he breathed. " Keep your pecker up an' grab that sack ! There are four sacks holdin' the airship down. If I saw *five* of 'em tied to it this evening, just after you go back from your work, the airship might break away ! It might carry that fifth sack along ! D'you understand what I mean, Billjim ? D'you think you can do it ? "

The emaciated man let out a long breath, and then whipped up that sack, tying it round his waist, apron fashion. Many of the other convicts were wearing rags of sacking in this way, so that it would attract little notice.

" I—I understand ! " he gasped. " Great heavens, John Henry, I can hardly believe my eyes ! But I understand. I'll do it, if I get shot in the attempt ! "

John Henry walked on without another word, for at that moment he saw a warder turn. But nothing was observed. Young Mr. Dent caught up with the governor and Tarlan, and so eventually came back to the residency, where a most excellent lunch was served.

After lunch John Henry at last elected to rest, and he and Tarlan were given separate rooms. As evening fell they could hear the un-

fortunate convicts being herded back to their miserable hovels after that back-breaking day in the heat.

John Henry woke Tarlan and came downstairs in time for the evening meal. At that meal he interested the governor by a long talk on airships and all their ways.

The outcome of this was that John Henry offered to show the governor their especial craft and explain all its various mysteries. The governor was very willing. He provided a few electric torch-lamps, and the three went out, climbing up into the moored ship and spending some time over the various dials, instruments and levers at the control seat.

John Henry's French was not very good on that occasion. He had seen that *five* sacks, in line, were now mooring the ship ! He climbed up last—and gave the end sack a light kick as he did so.

It yielded—not at all in the manner of packed earth or sand !

John Henry finally clambered down and led the governor and Tarlan beneath the ship itself. In the dark he spent some time in explaining details of construction. And, in the dark, he toiled at the knotted ropes which bound the other four sandbags. He got the first and second clear—and above them, the airship pitched alarmingly.

The governor noticed it, and remarked that the wind must be rising—suggested that extra bags should be filled, so that it could be held down more safely.

In the middle of his words John Henry got that fourth rope free—and the governor yelled out wildly as the airship suddenly swept into the air above his head !

It swept up, with one " sandbag " still dangling on the end of a rope.

It shot up into the blackness and swept away over the island, making swiftly for the sea beyond!

The governor yelled orders and warders came running. Lights flashed everywhere. There was a scene of wild confusion.

And, in the middle of it, Tarlan stood swearing vividly. The grinning John Henry heard him, and chuckled outright.

"Dear old boy," he said, "why this heated brow? Does it *matter* that the darned airship's got away again?"

"Of course it matters!" snapped Tarlan sulphurously. "Ever since I caused the darned thing to break away the first time, I've been racking my brains for a way of getting to this island and getting Billjim away! And now the darned thing's gone, and we can do nothing!"

"You broke the ship away?" gasped John Henry. "Why, dash it all—"

"Of course I did!" snapped Tarlan. "I kicked the rudder about, whilst we were being hauled down, because I guessed too much strain would break the rope! I thought you'd twigged the idea, too, when you fooled about with the petrol tank, and navigated us here. But now—why, I never even caught sight of Billjim!"

John Henry tottered to his feet.

"But—but, dash it all, you've never met him," he said. "You were never in the old 'Angels' Squadron'!"

"Of course I wasn't!" almost roared Tarlan. "I wasn't old enough to join the Air Force until immediately after the war. But then, Billjim was my instructor at a Home aerodrome, immediately before he went for that holiday in the South of France. Good heavens, don't be such a thickhead!"

John Henry suddenly laughed. He tried to restrain his laughter, but in the prevailing general uproar there was really no need.

"Tarzan," he said; "jolly old Tarzan! Dash it all, I'll ask you one thing. When is a sandbag not a sandbag?"

Tarlan's answer was expressed in no polite terms. He was not at all in the mood for merry jest.

But meanwhile the officials on Devil's Island spent a very trying evening. The governor was wildly angry at the fact that the airship had been tied so insecurely that it broke free. He was also angry at the fact that a prisoner was reported missing.

He ordered the warders out, with guns and rifles, all round the coasts of the island, to catch this convict before he could try to make a raft and get to sea.

He swore violently, and apologised to John Henry and Tarlan with almost tearful emphasis. He said he should never forgive himself for the airship's escape. He said that he felt especially humiliated that a prisoner had made a break for escape whilst such distinguished visitors were there. He said that if he had not been in the car of the airship, a moment before it got away, he would have suspected that the scoundrel had got up in it and made his escape that way. But that, of course, was impossible.

The two agreed that it was impossible. They sympathised with the governor—said that his gallant warders would no doubt round up the fugitive quite soon. And at length they went to bed.

The following morning was made eventful by the arrival of a large seaplane which came to rest just off the island. The governor sent a

boat out and the boat brought back Wagstaff—looking as grim as an impending thunderstorm.

Directly he arrived, however, the governor once again plunged into abject apologies for having lost the airship. He told how it had got away—how his fools of men had not moored it securely enough.

He said nothing about an escaped prisoner—not in the least wishing to advertise that fact to a high officer of another country.

Wagstaff's expression cleared, and a grim imp of laughter came into his eyes as he assured the governor that the loss of the airship was a small matter compared with the saving of his two officers' lives.

The two officers stood behind the governor and winked cheerfully.

Young Mr. Dent even went so far as to put out his tongue.

Wagstaff, feeling that he could not keep a straight face much longer, refused the governor's invitation to lunch with polite excuses. And then he took his two subordinates out to that large seaplane, which was immediately started up and flown away.

In the main cabin of the plane, Wagstaff faced them.

"You've disobeyed orders," he said, trying to keep grim. "You've taken an appalling risk of plunging armies into strife. You've—you've——"

"Dash it all, we've done nothin'," said John Henry. "Absolutely nothin', dear old Wagger. We couldn't help landin' there—when the airship's found, you'll see that the petrol tank was busted. We couldn't use our engine. And *we* couldn't help it if jolly old Billjim fixed himself up in a

sandbag, and wound one of the mooring ropes round his body, inside it! What I mean, if he floated away like that, we couldn't help it, could we?"

"Good heavens!" gasped Wagstaff, wild relief fighting for pride of place with alarm in his eyes. "Good heavens, d'you mean——"

"I mean," said John Henry cheerfully, "that all's well that jolly well ends well! The governor was on that airship a moment before it broke loose, so he's certain that no convict could have hopped aboard. Now all we've got to do is to scout round, an' find the airship, and pick up dear old Billjim."

Wagstaff drew a deep breath.

"You——" he said. "You——"

He found himself at a loss for words.

Tarlan also seemed at a loss for words.

Five minutes afterwards, however, the small, noisy cabin of that seaplane echoed to a greater noise—that of three voices raised in wild laughter.

Five days afterwards three officers paid a visit to a small hospital in British territory, where an emaciated man was slowly being nursed back to health by the care of doctors and nurses. "Billjim" had made good his escape in the airship after climbing up the mooring-rope to the car, and he had come down safely at the landing-ground on the coast of British Guiana.

The interview between William James Jameson and Wagstaff, John Henry and Tarlan was jubilant, and the conversation ranged about the subject of "getting the sack" from Devil's Island!

THE END