

A LONG, COMPLETE STORY.



LIFE for GOLD.

A THRILLING KLONDYKE STORY.



The animal was racing along furiously. Bob's position was one of terrible peril.

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LIFE FOR GOLD.

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PROLOGUE.

The semi-Arctic summer was drawing to an early close, the short nights were lengthening, ragged cliffs of ice were beginning to fringe the northern waterways, while the sun no longer loosened the masses of snow on the mountain sides.

A cold, grey twilight, which would presently merge into 'he long, black Arctic night, was the silent harbinger of the rigour of winter to come.

Twenty thousand gold-seekers were on the road to frozen Klondyke; three thousand had already got in, others were toiling nearer day by day; but the majority had got no further than Dyea or Skagway, and there, bitterly lamenting their fate, were fated to face with—starvation!

Many would have turned back to the homes they had left, but lack of means prevented them. They were hopelessly trapped. To go forward, either by way of the Chilcoot Pass or the White Horse Pass, without provisions, in face of the coming winter, they knew was inviting certain death. Pitiably was their plight.

Others, who had started earlier, had surmounted these initial difficulties on the journey. They were pressing on in a continu-

ous string down Lake Bennett, over the mountains beyond, by the caribou crossing of the river, then on portage up a weary stretch of mountainous country. On, still, by way of Mud Lake, down Miles Canon to White Horse Rapids. From thence over a succession of lakes into Louis River, where a stretch of two hundred miles brought the forerunners to the golden land buried deep in snow round Dawson City.

From Dyea the journey was nearly five hundred miles.

There was one other way of reaching that northern goldfield—by steamer up the mighty Yukon. But this was a long and costly journey, and accommodation limited. Impossible after the middle of September. Besides, the steamboat company found it more profitable towards the close of the season to transport hardware and provisions than to carry passengers.

Thus, a whole army of desperate gold-finders, cut off from the rest of the world, was left to prey upon itself, and, unseen, fight out the bitter struggle for existence.

It is with this same struggle that the present story purposes to deal.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOAT ON LAKE TAGISH, ITS FREIGHT AND ITS OCCUPANTS—A BRAVE REFUSAL—THE "ACCIDENT" AND ITS CONSEQUENCE—GEORGE ROPER SHOWS HIS BUSINESS—THE CURSE—MICHAEL FLACK UNEASY.

A boat-load of five miners, carrying their packs and provisions, was slowly making headway across Lake Tagish. They were approaching an almost perpendicular mountain chasm against a strong head current. It was bitterly cold. The sides of the rudely fashioned craft were rimmed with ice. A hummock of ice clustered right up the bow; it cemented together the

bales and packages which the boat contained. Three men seated in the centre were concentrating all their attention and all their strength on the three oars, by which means they propelled the craft along.

In the stern sat a fresh-faced youth, and a grizzled, hard-featured man. The latter was steering the vessel with a broad canoe oar. Both were warmly clad in furs and oilskins. Owing to the arrangements of packages of freight they were completely hidden from the three rowers.

"Well, sonny," drawled the man, "I reckon yew'd be savin' trouble now to tell me straight where yewr boss has got his pile fixed up?"

"You had better ask him, George Roper. I don't know, and if I did I should not tell."

"Yew're one of them high-notioned Britishers, ain't yew?" sneered the man.

Bob Little made no reply.

"Look here, yew little British pup, is it to be a friend or enemy yew're going to make of George Roper? He's a whip-creation Yank, and no mistake. Yew'd better tell me all yew know, or—thunderation! I'll rip yew're gizzard open!"

Although Bob Little knew the bully's bark was a good deal more formidable than his bite, he was, nevertheless, uncomfortable.

His employer, Mr. Shefback, a prospector, and American like the rest, had been indiscreet enough to furnish his present companions with an inkling of his intentions in pressing forward in such haste to Klondyke.

His business did not lie exactly with the camp, for some fifty miles further up he had previously discovered a rich "pocket" of gold in the heart of a mountain torrent. He had been content to locate the spot, since it was impossible to extract the gold without assistance. To which end he had gone south; but, falling sick, had been for many anxious months detained while the rush to Klondyke began.

He had offered Bob Little a handsome salary and a share in the gold, which inducement had been sufficient to make the adventuresome young Englishman eager to accompany him.

They had covered the distance of a thousand odd miles from



Bob prepared to cast the rope. It was his only hope of safety from the waterfall. His fate hung verily by a thread!

Vancouver to the headwaters of Lake Bennett alone, having hired a dozen Indian carriers to transport their traps and provisions through the long and dangerous Chilooot Pass. At Lake Bennett, Mr. Shefback had met George Roper, and the latter's two cronies, Michael Flack and Braith Killrat, a trio of the very worst ruffians the States could produce. They offered him accommodation in the boat they had just constructed, which offer he had accepted, and gladly fell in with their suggestion to help him along with the transport to the goldfields.

George Roper had not been many hours in the prospector's presence before he cleverly wormed out enough of Mr. Shefback's secret to whet his appetite for more. To obtain the rest firsthand he knew would only rouse Shefback's suspicion, so he proceeded on the first opportunity to question Bob Little.

"D'ye hear!" he repeated, "I want to know where the boss has got his pile stuck up? If yew can't tell me, yew're useless luggage, and overboard yew go!"

He spoke in a low, nasal whisper, with his hard, cruel face bent over the recoiling youth.

His left hand still retained the paddle, but his right one had stolen to his pocket.

"I don't know, and if I did I should not enlighten you!" declared Bob.

"Curse yew!—is that yew'r answer?" demanded the American.

"Yes, it is!" replied Bob loudly. "Drop that knife! Help, hel—"

"I reckon you won't horlar agin, my beauty!"

Roper let the knife fall, and made a sudden grab at the Englishman's collar, who, taken by surprise, could offer but a very feeble resistance.

The boat gave an ugly pitch. The ruffian, seizing his advantage, tilted his victim up, and plunged him overboard into the icy water.

Suddenly immersed, and swept away by the force of the current, Bob could only gasp for breath. The cold almost froze his blood.

He could see George Roper mocking his misery from the stern of the boat. The latter's evil visage wore a cruel smile when, seizing a coil of rope, he flung it out intentionally beyond his victim's reach. The end struck the water some distance below Bob, who, feeling this was his only chance, put forth a stupendous effort to reach it.

By this time Roper's movements had attracted the attention of his companions, who, quickly shipping their oars, hurried round the packages to the stern.

A quick look passed between Roper and his two rascally comrades, who prepared to play into his hands.

"Bring the boat round; we must reach the lad!" cried Mr. Shefback quickly.

"Can't, sir; too dangerous!" responded Roper.

She was already drifting back; but not in Bob's direction.

The prospector threw an appealing glance at the two men with whom he had been rowing.

"Lengthen the line!" he said sharply.

A queer smile, which boded no good, flickered round Roper's mouth as he hastened to obey.

Mr. Shefback, who had fixed his eyes on the struggling form of his young friend, suddenly cried:

"He's got it! Now, lads, haul in for all you're worth. Eh? What's the matter?"

George Roper, falling intentionally, let go the rope, which began to pay out over the side at lightning speed, his companions, apparently riveted to the spot with horror, remained inactive. This was their cue.

With a sharp cry of dismay, Mr. Shefback himself seized the end of the line, and succeeded in partly checking its outrush. There were still some yards of it in the boat, when, gripping it with both hands, he strained his utmost to draw it in. Flack and Killrat assisting him, while Roper, with the agility of a practical hand, made a slip-noose at the end.

It was growing dark, and the shadow of the great mountain chasm practically hid Bob from view. He was struggling bravely against the furious wash of the current, which, when the line became taut, swirled round and above him, sometimes completely engulfing him beneath its icy surface.

The boat by this time had lost considerable way, and was slowly turning broadside on the stream. Roper realised their danger.

"Quick!" he cried, speaking in an undertone to Killrat and Flack. "I guess we'll go to the bottom messing over that tarnation Britisher. Cut round, and put her head up. Leave him to me!"

The two rascals understood his meaning, and let the rope go simultaneously. Mr. Shefback, unprepared for the extra strain, gave a dangerous lurch forward. He must have gone over, but Roper, quick as lightning, flung the noose over his head and slipped it tight about his arms.

"Let her go, curse yew!—let her go!" he yelled.

And the poor gentleman, dazed and confused by the sudden-

ness of the disaster, lost his presence of mind, and with it that portion of the line which he had by his exertions managed to pay-in.

When this slipped out, he felt himself jerked suddenly over the stern, and half precipitated into the water.

Roper gave a harsh laugh.

"I guess that serves yew right, mister, for foolin' over that miserably Britisher. Anyway, I reckon yew're as near a gone'un as any George Roper's come across."

He had seized the prospector by the top of his jacket, and thus supporting him, knelt over the stern, and with one swift cut of his knife completely severed the line.

Mr. Shefback was for the moment too horrified to speak. He shuddered when a faint moan came over the water. It was the last cry he ever heard uttered by Bob Little.

There was just sufficient light for him to discern his companion, who was still supporting him. Glancing up, he met the latter's eyes fixed upon him in a manner that caused him to shudder anew. Danger had sharpened his perceptions, and in a trice the whole horrible truth flashed upon him.

"You did that purposely!" he gasped.

"Yes. I guess I'll tell yew why. He wouldn't peach!"

"You scoundrel!"

"Hold a bit, mister; this ain't no time for wasting compliments!" drawled the ruffian, making a feint of releasing the prospector, who was completely at his mercy.

"Me and yew have got a deal on hand. I reckon me and my mates is agreed there. Now, about that little secret. Where's the 'pocket' of gold?"

"You want to know?"

"I guess I'm bound to know, or—"

The break was significant. Mr. Shefback felt the iron force of the ruffian's grip thrust him beneath the surface. When, after a short period of immersion, he was dragged up again he had to fight for breath. He was greatly startled and unnerved, for darkness had completely fallen.

He heard Roper call to Flack to light him a lantern, and presently Flack joined his companion over the stern, and peered down at their almost frozen victim.

"Strikes me, mister, if yew don't speak I'm letting go!" said Roper.

"For mercy's sake don't leave me!" implored Mr. Shefback.

"Lift me aboard. We'll discuss the matter then."

"No, mister, we'll discuss it now! Just locate that tarnation 'pocket,' will yew?"

Again the prospector caught his breath, as Roper, giving him a dip under the surface, shook him like a rat. It was some time before he could give utterance to intelligible speech. His face had gone an ugly blue from cold, his lips had become tight and swollen, while his eyes wore a look of abject terror.

In a low, faltering voice, he gave the required information, ending with an appeal to be removed into the vessel.

"What's it to be, George?" muttered Flack.

"The usual, sonny. I calculate that 'pocket' 'll just suit us three down to the ground."

"Then, yew're going to stop his whining?"

"I reckon so."

The wretched victim seemed to grasp the meaning of their whispered exchange, for he clutched the frame of the boat firmly with both hands. They made a weird sort of trio, with their faces illumined by the yellow light from the lantern, which sent a sickly splash over the water by the stern.

"Hold off, mister; we've got no room. Sorry!" laughed Roper.

A look of desperation leapt into Mr. Shefback's eyes.

"You scoundrel!" he cried, catching at his words, for the cold was very great; "you shall remember this; it shall return to you! The day will come when an injured man's bitterest curse shall meagrely approach the measure of your sufferings! George Roper, you may prosper for awhile, but you shall never reach the outer world again. The hand of death has sealed you! Ah!"

George Roper had listened to his victim's taunts with blanched cheeks. He was even a bigger coward than bully; the surroundings gave emphasis to Shefback's words; he tried vainly to force him away from the vessel with the canoe oar. But Shefback was desperate. His struggles, however, were growing weaker. Just as he uttered the last exclamation, Roper planted a pistol between his eyes and fired.

A shudder convulsed the prospector's figure, his fingers spasmodically gripped the stern of the boat. Once more Roper fired the contents of his barrel into what was now a corpse. It rolled over, and disappeared beneath the rushing torrent with a horrible gurgle, which haunted the murderer for long afterwards.

Michael Flack raised the lantern from over the water, and met Roper's shrinking eyes.

"I guess you're boss now, George," he remarked. "You're pretty clever; but if yew'd plugged that Britisher with a bit of lead—well, we'd all been kind o' safer!"

CHAPTER II.

THE TANGLE OF DRIFTWOOD—HOW BOB FARED THROUGH THE TERRIBLE NIGHT—A FISSURE IN THE MOUNTAINS—FRESH DANGERS—IN THE GRASP OF THE WATERFALL—HOVERING BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH!

When Bob Little felt the line run slack, his heart gave a big jump. He could do nothing to help himself, and was borne swiftly back by the current. He heard and saw quite plainly all that followed up to the murder of Mr. Shefback. Then for the first time he lost hope.

He dared not call for help, and the darkness prevented him distinguishing any of the masses of driftwood which floated about the lake. He did the next best thing, however, and that was to struggle as hard as he could against the force of the current. It was a battle royal, and on the part of the solitary lad almost a losing one; but it set the blood circulating freely in his chilled body, and thus kept him alive.

For more than an hour he fought with the current, when suddenly he was thrown in violent contact against a tangle of drifting logs.

This was just the opportunity he had hoped and longed for. He managed to clamber up into the midst of the heap with the aid of the rope—ah!—he had fortunately secured one end round his waist. He knew that he must kindle a fire, regardless of the danger of discovery attending it; otherwise the intense cold would certainly freeze him to death.

He had learnt the bushman's art of making a fire from damp wood, and in a short while produced a roaring fire in the midst of the tangle of logs and bush. By its genial heat he was able to dry his clothes and safely snatch a few hours' sound rest before dawn.

When he awoke the fire had burned through to the water, and was almost out. The sun was feebly shining through a thin, grey mist, giving a bleak and terribly dismal look to the lines of towering mountains, snow-covered from summit to base. The long slip of water disclosed no sign of life, while a death-like silence increased the bitter hopelessness of the scene.

The tangle of logs must have struck a fresh current during the night, for in place of the northern extremity of the lake, which Bob knew, he found himself travelling perilously close to the base of an enormous perpendicular ridge, forming a part of the mountain chain. His ears were soon assailed by a faint, distant roar. For a time he was unable to discover how or where it originated; but, on rounding a rocky promontory, he was whirled by the increasing speed of the current towards an immense fissure in the mountain side.

The sight startled him. About five hundred yards ahead a huge ragged archway bent across the width of the stream, which narrowed considerably at that point. It was shrouded in a ghostly white canopy, which rose and fell in misty clouds. Its greatest density was below, and Bob saw at once that it was caused by the spray rising from some terrific waterfall.

The speed of the current had become frightful; it bore the tangle of logs on at a rate that almost took the solitary lad's breath away. He realised, with a shudder, that he was being whirled towards those unknown falls, towards certain speedy death. There seemed no chance of escape. Even if he plunged into the water, and breasted the current, which was unlikely, the walls of the chasm were smooth and perpendicular for a thousand feet up. He rapidly scanned both sides as he raced along with the tangle of logs toward the rearing cataract ahead.

Three or four hundred yards away on the right, and about fifty feet above the water, the rocky wall for some little distance had been hollowed out. There was possibly a narrow shelf behind the frowning exterior. If only it had been forty or fifty feet lower!

Bob fixed his eyes hungrily on that narrow chance of life, then let them wander towards the great uprising clouds of spray. The roar of the waterfall was deafening. But for this and the clouds of spray no danger would have been apparent, for the surface of the swiftly flowing flood was as smooth and glassy as any millpond. It converged where it reached the abyss, and seemed to rise there slightly above the surrounding level.

While confronted by this terrible danger, Bob gave his wits full play. There was nothing to prevent him casting the rope, which he had already wisely noosed at the break in the rock. No sooner did the idea occur than he put it to the test.

The driftwood was tearing down the middle of the stream about thirty feet from either side of the chasm. As Bob braced himself against the broken fork of a giant redwood, and cast the line, the tangle of logs shot past the narrow ledge. The other end of the line was fastened to his waist. It was a long one, and thus afforded the noosed-end full play. It cut the air in a graceful curve, and struck the rock a few feet above the ledge. Bob's fate hung verily by a thread. For a moment the noose remained suspended, then, scraping down the side of the rock, caught a smooth, round, polished piece of granite.

The lad riveted his eyes on the spot. The line was still very slack. Would the noose hold when it drew taut? As if in answer to his question, a movement which he could not account for caused the rope to glide off the small round pinnacle, and trail loosely away behind.

A cry of despair rose from his lips, for the attempt had failed. He looked round with a sudden, horrible dread. So closely had his attention been fixed on the ledge now far behind him that he had failed to notice the swift descent of driftwood which now hovered on the very brink of the chasm.

It rode the flood for one moment, shivered, and went over. He clung with frantic energy to one of the logs, and caught his breath, for there was nothing that could snatch him from the grasp of the mighty fall now. Far down beneath the spray he caught a momentarily glimpse of a lip of green water, which seemed to be drawn tight from rock to rock. A pulsing, intermittent roar, the voice of many waters vibrated in his ears, and, half-dazed, he waited for the end.

Suddenly, to his amazement, he felt the cord tighten about his waist. There was a violent jerk, tons of falling water engulfed him, his coat was literally stripped off his back. Battered and beaten, he was torn from off the log to which he had clung with all the energy of despair.

Blinded by the spray, it was some time before he realised his extraordinary position. The rope around his waist was pressing painfully against his ribs, his nether limbs were numbed and useless. He struggled hard to seize the extended portion of the rope, and, having succeeded, partly relieved the strain on his waist. It was then that, glancing upward, he chanced to see the noose of the rope fastened tightly round the claws of two great eagles.

It quickly occurred to him that in throwing the noose he must have unconsciously lassoed the pair of birds in their mountain eyrie. How the noose had secured their powerful claws only the laws of chance could explain. Luckily the birds had broken his headlong fall down the abyss.

Having once realised his true position, Bob was not slow in taking note of his other surroundings. The ragged archway which bent across the width of the stream did not bridge it where the flood fell into the gorge, but at a point one hundred feet further on. It was composed entirely of ice. The water dropped for nearly a thousand feet into a seething bed, which further on widened out into a fair-sized river. At the further extremity the whole weight of the river cannoned off a ledge of glittering quartz, and, shooting off swirled in a smother of foam out of sight.

Bob was dumbfounded by the sight of such enormous mineral wealth displayed before his astonished gaze. The walls of the unknown stream fairly glittered with gold, in quantity sufficient to make a thousand men millionaires. But, irony of fate—it was inaccessible!

This he soon had reason to know. For the time being he was a helpless prisoner, hovering between life and death, poised in mid-air between a seething flood below and a vast waterfall above, supported by a hempen line over a hundred feet long, attached to the imprisoned claws of a pair of eagles!

The force of Bob's descent had torn the captive birds from their mountain eyrie. They were now almost motionless in mid-air. For some minutes Bob swung like a living pendulum from side to side. To his horror, it was clear that the extent of this movement was increasing. Nearer, and even nearer he approached the thundering falls; he was not likely to escape their cruel power a second time if once they enveloped him.

A blast of wind swept down the gorge, and blew a cloud of spray over the hapless lad. In the midst of it he felt the line drop. A sickening fear seized him. The voice of the waters grew louder and louder, the spray almost choked him; then, when it seemed that he was doomed, the line jerked violently, he was shot upwards for some distance, dropped again, and swung along down the gorge in the mountains.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIGHT IN MID-AIR—IN THE TEETH OF THE BLIZZARD—A MERCIFUL DELIVERANCE—FOOD AND SHELTER IN THE LONE PASS—A STRANGE DISCOVERY—AN UNEQUAL STRUGGLE.

For a considerable distance Bob was borne along through the impassable mountain gorge at a terrible risk of being dashed to pieces against abutting ledges and jagged crags. The eagles struggled incessantly to be free, but the noose was a strong one, and held more firmly than ever. At times they would soar up amid the cloud-hidden peaks of the great mountains, and the cold, rare air threatened to freeze the life out of their helpless and startled burden.

Partly to induce some warmth into his numbed limbs, and partly to avoid the terrible risk of being dashed against the obstacles in the way, Bob Little began to swarm painfully up the line. At every ten feet of distance he looped the rope round

his waist, and in this manner contrived to reduce the distance between himself and the eagles considerably.

More than once the birds made ineffectual attempts to pounce upon him; but he knew he had nothing to fear on this score while the line supported him.

He must have travelled thus for a period of three hours. When he all at once became aware that the birds above were attracting others of their kind by their deep, harsh, and continuous cries. He first made the discovery while passing through a cloud of mist. Something brushed heavily against his legs, and he felt the rope agitated violently above.

In passing once more out into the fresh sunlight, he was horrified to find himself surrounded by three fierce, powerful-looking eagles.

The birds began to fly round him in ever-narrowing circles, watching him the while from their keen, small eyes. Every time their steel-like beaks opened, Bob had difficulty in repressing a shudder. They could with ease sever the rope, or attack and kill their defenceless prey.

It was only a question of time. The boldest would make the first stroke, and the rest would instantly join issue.

Bob, however, managed to keep them at bay longer than he dared to hope by continually shortening and increasing the distance of the rope. But these manoeuvres sadly exhausted his already much-tried strength. His agility was perceptibly slackening, and this fact his fierce and strange foes appeared to realise.

At length the largest and oldest flew at him with a harsh, angry croak.

Fortunately Bob had some feet of rope in his hand at the time, and he brought this with a sounding "Whack!" against the bird's head.

It dropped through the air, giving a broken scream.

The two other birds apparently expected to share a like fate, for they suddenly swooped off, and followed at a respectful distance.

Bob did not notice their movements; his whole attention was riveted on the eagle which he had partly disabled.

Stunned by the blow it had received, the great bird dropped for fifty feet without a movement of its enormous wings, which were half furled. Then Bob, watching, saw it make several ineffectual struggles to breast the air. Its downward course was now slower and more irregular. Sometimes it succeeded for a moment, and remained partly still. At last, when it looked like a mere speck in the vast void below, it all at once swept round and began to soar upwards.

Bob's heart pulsed with fear, for, as the eagle once more gained his level, he beheld the two offstanding birds sweep right and left towards him.

A hoarse note of defiance was sounded by the great bird he had lately stunned. It hovered some distance over him at a level with the pair above the rope; then, without a moment's warning, its great wings seemed to narrow in, and, with head thrown down and back extended, it swooped down, making for his face.

Instinctively he raised his left arm to receive the bird's charge. In doing so his right slipped from the rope. He made a desperate clutch to regain it, but instead, seized the off wing of the second bird on his right. With a scream of anger the eagle swerved round, and received a deadly stab from its first mate's knife-like beak.

It all happened in an instant, as the length of rope which Bob had coiled about his body began to unwind.

In some manner the fatally injured bird became entangled in the line, and afforded Bob a momentary protection from its enraged mate's next attack.

By this time, Bob Little had become dizzy and sick by the circular motion of his descent. He could only distinguish the blurred form of his feathered antagonist swoop with lightning speed towards him.

Next moment, a heavy blow on his right shoulder, and a swift succession of sharp, desperate struggles told him the terrible truth—the eagle was attacking him at close quarters.

He could offer no resistance!

Almost as soon as he realised his terrible position, he felt an icy blast strike him on the side attacked by the eagle. It cut like a knife through his limbs, and he was dimly conscious of feeling the rope abruptly slacken, and himself and his feathered aggressor whirled helplessly through the air.

What actually happened was this. A storm of snow caught Bob Little and the eagles in its fierce embrace. Everything went before it; very soon it developed into a terrific blizzard, and Bob was carried in an incredibly short space of time over a vast track of impassable country. In the dim gloom he found himself at last enveloped in a mass of snow, plunged on to a slowly moving mass on the very verge of a giant precipice.

The snow wrapping him round was the means of saving his life in more ways than one. It kept the warmth in his body, and saved him from being dashed into a shapeless heap against obstacles encountered in his wild passage through the air in the van of the blizzard.

The storm ceased almost as suddenly as it had begun. Then Bob, to his unspeakable horror, saw that the mass of snow upon which he had been cast was moving swiftly down the mountain chasm. Slowly at first, but increasing in speed every second, the vast load went rumbling down the side of the mountain—down, down—down into the chasm below.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE GATEWAY OF THE MOUNTAINS—A BITTER PROSPECT—TERRIBLE DISCOVERIES—THE MARCH THROUGH THE DARKNESS—A BURNING SHANTY—A HORRIBLE REVENGE—CANADIANS TO THE RESCUE—DEATH'S FACE!—THE MURDER—THREE VILLAINS VANISH.

The avalanche, for such the fall of snow very soon became, struck the extreme bottom of the chasm, and went bounding along between its narrow towering walls. For a long time Bob dared not move for fear of liberating the mass of snow upon which he lay. At last the movement ceased, and then, staggering from his strange bed, he bravely plodded on amongst splintering turrets and pinnacles of ice, with spires of dead-white crystals. Countless crevices of immense depth seamed all the lower surface of the chasm, and at the bottom of these frightful gaps streams of pure, clear water found their way.

Just as the short period of daylight was fading he reached the end of the chasm, to find a vast mass of broken ice grinding slowly down to the open bay beyond. He had reached the Yukon.

Here, between two grinding-floes of ice, he found a miner's boat smashed to atoms. Five frozen bodies lay beside it, as well as a quantity of provisions and mining tools.

With a heavy heart he set about kindling a fire, and relieving the excruciating pangs of hunger. He was fain to confess that in spite of his terrible adventures fate had dealt kindly with him. He found many scores of dead bodies as he continued the journey northward over the ice, which covered nearly the whole of the great waterway. A week later, when the period of darkness was daily relieved by a few hours twilight, which increased rather than lessened the cruel bleakness of that great northern wilderness, Bob Little struck the frozen banks of Klondyke River.

Plodding on through the darkness over hummocks of ice, he came in sight of some human habitations. They loomed darkly before a reddish-yellow background of flames. One of the shanties was afire!

Bob quickened his pace as well as he was able, and, after barking his shins and vainly trying to attract attention, he ran into a group of miners, who were watching with evident satisfaction the destruction of a long, low, log shanty.

The lower part was on fire. There was a second floor above with two windows, out of which the smoke was pouring in dense volumes. Above, the sloping, shingle roof had been almost destroyed on the right, while to the left, where the flames were circling up, the extraordinary spectacle of a man lying wounded on the roof, at the mercy of a great grizzly bear, presented itself.

Bob uttered a sharp cry of surprise, which brought the eyes of several miners upon him. They appeared startled, and cast furtive looks at one another; but their attention was quickly withdrawn by a sharp, agonised cry from the man on the roof.

"I reckon the miserly old scoundrel has kept his bear just a bit too long!" growled an American on Bob's right.

"Guess he wishes now he'd closed with George's price," replied another; while the rest gave a savage shout, in which curses and invectives were freely hurled at the helpless wretch on the roof, whose name was Gregson, the keeper of the "store" now on fire.

Bob gathered that the victim was known as Miser Gregson, and had refused to supply the present miners with food except at prohibitive prices. The store had been broken open by the hungry men, but no provisions had been found. It was supposed Gregson had hidden these. When the baffled and hungry crowd realised this they had set the building on fire. Their victim had sought refuge on the roof, where the bear he had kept for his protection (muzzling it by day, and leaving it to watch over his goods and chattels by night) had followed him.

For some moments the man and animal were hidden by a volume of smoke, which, dispersing, disclosed the frightened brute in the act of attacking its master.

As the bear grappled with the defenceless wretch the Yankees raised an ironical cheer. A score of rifles were raised, not to bring down the animal, but in the event of the brute failing to make sure of the store-keeper's death. However, the ringleader of the rioters, who had just set the empty store on fire, lowered his rifle when he perceived Gregson was likely to fall a speedy victim to the animal's ferocity.

Another scream of agony burst from the man on the roof. The bear had tasted his master's blood, and begun to maul him

terribly. Suddenly the flames burst through the roof, and enveloped both the man and animal.

Honest flesh and blood could stand the terrible spectacle no longer. Bob, who had shouldered his way through the shouting and cursing wretches around him, broke through the first rank of cowardly spectators, and disappeared with a rush through the burning door of the building.

A deep silence all at once fell on the miners; then hurried questions were passed. Who is he? The agent? Questions which none were able to answer; but which engendered an amount of uneasiness that was surprising.

All at once in the distance sounded the crashing of wood; a cry, swelling into a faint cheer, startled the riotous Yankees into immediate activity.

A yell was raised. "Those cursed Britishers have broken loose! Make a fight for it boys; it's neck or nothing now!"

The ringleader, whom Bob had previously observed, brought his men round into the shadow behind the burning house.

Through the barricaded doors and windows of one of the largest and most distant buildings a crowd of men were breaking loose. Though but one or two carried weapons, all were coming on helter-skelter towards the burning store.

"Fire!" yelled the Yankee ringleader. And immediately an irregular volley swept into the midst of the new-comers, some of whom fell wounded and dead in the deep snow.

But their advance was only momentarily checked, others rushed on in spite of the hail of bullets. Those who had firearms retaliated sharply, and brought down two or three of the Yankees.

The latter began to waver, although the voice of their leader urged them savagely to wipe out the new-comers, who were mostly unarmed Canadian miners.

The climax arrived when the Canadians made a gallant rush right into the ranks of their cowardly opponents. A hand-to-hand struggle took place, in which the Americans were forced slowly but surely back. So impetuous and desperate had become the struggle that those who carried firearms were unable to reload them. Suddenly the Canadians raised a hoarse cheer. It was echoed back, and at that sound the Yankees turned and fled precipitately, for on their flank they dimly distinguished the approach of a detachment of the North-West Mounted Police.

The gallant little force, consisting of ten strapping, handsome fellows, all well-armed, soon came up with the victorious Canadians, who rapidly proceeded to outline the state of affairs.

"I guess we've had as near a shave as fifty unarmed men could hope for," said one of the Canadians. "This is the work of that rogue George Roper. Fifty of us had got up a kind o' concert in the Maple Leaf down yonder, when, in the midst of it, one of the lads cries out that the windows and doors had been barricaded. We guessed at once the Yanks did it. We burst through after a bit, and then we saw the mischief they'd been up to. Look! old Gregson's pile's come down!"

The speaker had no need to emphasise that fact, for as he concluded the roof and walls of the burning store collapsed with a great blaze.

"Where's Gregson?" asked Captain Margot, in command of the police.

"Can't tell! We didn't see him!" was the reply.

The officer turned to a couple of his men. The others had dispersed, and were hunting round the blazing embers, or tending to the wounded and dying.

"Arrest George Roper and his two companions, and find, if you can, if aught has befallen Gregson!"

Meanwhile Bob, when he first plunged into the burning store, had mounted by a ladder to the upper floor. He found the flames rapidly extending from end to end; but, nothing daunted, he darted forward into the midst. An agitated mass disclosed the whereabouts of Gregson and the bear.

The brute was lying with its back on the burning rafters, snapping and hugging its master's right hand. The livid light showed that, apart from severe burns, the wretched man was wounded terribly. His agonised shrieks were drowned in the bear's mad roars. These particulars Bob took in at a glance.

If he could attract the fierce brute's attention, he thought he might then be able to snatch the storekeeper from its deadly hug. His eye chanced to fall on a burning beam detached from the rest. Seizing this, he ran to Gregson's side, and thrust the blazing end into the grizzlie's mouth.

The brute flung out its great arms, and, giving a frightful howl, partly staggered on to its hind feet.

Snatching Gregson away, Bob recoiled just in time to avoid the brute as it plunged over on its side and burst asunder the blazing rafters beneath. In a twinkling its great body disappeared down the lurid void.

The brave lad, without a moment's hesitation, snatched up Gregson, who was still conscious, and ran towards the ladder, only to find it consumed by the flames.

There was not a moment to lose. On the left at the rear of the house a part of the log wall had fallen away. Still bearing his dying burden, Bob leapt the aperture, and landed on a soft bank of snow. He caught the sounds of the struggle proceeding between the two factions of miners, but deemed it prudent to make from the building as quickly as possible; but as he rounded the further corner he ran into the arms of one of the Canadians.



Another scream of agony rang out. The bear had tasted its master's blood, and began to maul him terribly.

Gregson recognised the latter, and addressed him by name; whereupon the man, bidding Bob to follow, led the way quickly to a small shanty out of the line of the rest.

George Roper chanced, however, to perceive the fugitives, and, calling aside Flack and Killrat, slipped unseen from the presence of the rioters, and, followed by his two mates, crept stealthily after Bob and his guide. The latter, having shut Gregson and his rescuer in the hut, turned back to acquaint his companions with the storekeeper's escape. He never reached them, for he was suddenly seized from behind, and in a moment his throat was cut from ear to ear.

"I vote we make tracks, boys," observed Roper, wiping his bloodstained knife on his victim's body.

"What about Gregson's secret?" whispered Flack.

"That's safe here."

And Roper, accompanying the action by a brutal oath, pointed to his head.

The others gave a low, horrible chuckle, and crept off after their villainous comrade.

CHAPTER V.

ACCUSED OF MURDER—CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE—A BRAVE FRIEND IN NEED—DELAYED TIDINGS—THE MASKED MARAUDERS—AGAIN CAPTIVE—GEORGE ROPER SHOWS HIS TEETH—SURPRISED BY WOLVES—A TERRIBLE SITUATION—THE SEVERED ROPE.

Things went dead against Bob Little after his plucky rescue of Miser Gregson, the storekeeper. He was found by the Canadians in the act of extracting the miser's secret. Bob protested that Gregson had of his own free will disclosed it to him before he died. There his explanation stopped, for he would give no inkling of its nature. And these facts, in conjunction with the finding of the murdered miner and Gregson's bloodstained knife in Bob's possession, contributed to support the charge of murder preferred against him.

Save the rioting already described, his was the first serious crime that had taken place in the locked goldfields, and therefore Bob's trial created a big sensation. Every large and small settlement along the tributaries of the Klondyke river sent representatives.

Moreover George Roper, although he had fled the camp, still possessed a good deal of influence amongst the American portion of it, which he contrived to throw in the scale against his victim.

The upshot of it all was Bob Little was adjudged guilty of murder, and condemned to be hung by the neck until he was dead, at a spot outside the settlement, in ten days from the passing of the sentence.

Although both the Yankees and British were convinced of his guilt, Bob found an influential friend in Captain Margot, who believed in his innocence. This brave and energetic Canadian gentleman made no secret of his convictions.

But as day succeeded day, and the time for the execution drew near, without public opinion altering one tittle, Captain Margot had reluctantly to admit that unless something very unforeseen happened in the course of the next twenty-four hours, the unfortunate young English lad would have to suffer the dread penalty of the law on the morrow.

Something unforeseen did happen. Not even Captain Margot, who had racked his brains for discovering some possible means for postponing the execution, could have anticipated it.

The camp was in a dead slumber, when two masked men crept into the hut where Bob Little was confined.

"Steady!" whispered the first. "Don't, for mercy's sake, disturb the camp, or you'll spoil everything! Have the gag ready. Now—so!"

The gag was thrust over the sleeping lad's mouth.

Bob awoke with a violent start, to find himself sitting up between two masked miners, the muzzle of whose revolvers were pressed against each of his ears.

He was powerless to utter a cry, or make a sound. In a moment he was carried softly out of the hut, the door being securely fastened up by the marauders, who proceeded with their burden at a sharp pace through the northern outskirts of the camp till they came to a dog sled.

A long journey through the winter darkness followed. Then the gag was removed from the lad's mouth, and he was addressed by a voice he knew too well, to his cost.

"Guess we're goin' tew take the law inter our own hands, sonny. We'll shrift yew off sharp, and give yew a nice, decent burial. There ain't no time to waste, so we reckon yew'll excuse hurry."

Bob's legs and hands were securely fastened round, a noose was slipped about his neck; then a small lantern was produced, and by its light he saw he was standing beneath a large redwood tree. The rope was trailing over from one of the branches.

Roper and his two mates were busy completing the arrangements. When these were finished, and Bob was about to be strung up, he turned to his relentless enemy and asked quietly why he had taken this hurry to anticipate the legal execution a few hours later on.

"I reckon it'd never come off," responded the villain. "If yew want to know badly, well, I'll tell yew. I don't mind doing that. What say, boys?"

Flack and Killrat were apparently hugely amused at the suggestion, for by way of replying they burst into a gruff laugh.

Bob's heart sank at the brute's next words.

"'Twas a matter of necessity," continued Roper. "My mates have got to hear of an Indian scout, named Red Lip, who happened to see me slit that Canadian's gizzard. I guess it's no harm, lad, if yew do know who did the deed. Yew Britishers

are pretty cute in bringing it home to the ruffian, only this ruffian guesses he'll suffer by proxy. There ain't much more to tell. Seems this sly Indian, guessing how things would be, took his message down the Yukon, and struck back inter Dawson City early last night. He's kind o' run after Captain Margot. A good fellow that, but too pig-headed, I reckon—don't know his mind when he ought to. I reckoned yew'd have been slung up over a week ago, and then I wouldn't have troubled yew; but now—ugh! Waal, the captain thought he'd delay it by going down the settlement. 'Twasn't wise of him; anyway, I guess he's back sharp by this, if Red Lip's got hold of him. Curse that Indian! It's lucky I heard him telling his story to one of the police-boys—lucky for me, but not for you, my bully Britisher!"

"You rogue! And is that all?" demanded Bob, with quivering lips.

"Waal, sonny, not exactly. Yew see, there's Gregson's secret!"

Bob gave a start. He had almost forgotten it.

"And, yew see, it wouldn't have been convenient for me and ye to be on that same lay."

"You lie, you scoundrel!" retorted Bob. "The unhappy man swore that not another soul knew the nature of the secret he confided with me. You could not have overheard the disclosure, for his voice was too weak and low."

"Exactly; but I guessed it. And I may as well tell yew, sonny, that it was because I knew his secret that I got the boys to burn his wretched old store down. I guess I wasn't rid of yew and old Shylock for nothing! Now do yew understand? Your very honourable master had filched Miser Gregson's secret, and was coming up to get the gold for himself. I guess I've opened yew eyes now. Up with him, bully boys!"

Bob was suddenly jerked five feet off the ground; then another pull at the rope on the part of Flack and Killrat raised him a couple of feet higher.

At this juncture two things happened—the rope in some manner got entangled in a second branch of the tree, and would move no further, either up or down, while the noose, remaining slack, did not strangle the victim, as Roper had intended. Almost at the same moment, while all three men were cursing the accident, a succession of savage yelps in the near distance turned them ashen white.

"Wolves!" cried Roper, with an oath, making a spring towards the tree, up which he scrambled in frantic haste.

Michael Flack took to his heels, and was swallowed up immediately by the darkness.

Killrat, who carried the lantern, losing his presence of mind, flung the light at what he took to be the advancing pack of wolves, but which was the packs and provisions which Roper had previously managed to convey to the spot.

The lamp tilted over, and a small flood of burning oil blazed over the stores.

With a scream of fright and dismay, the wretched man made an attempt to follow Roper up the tree; but a hungry, snarling army of wolves surrounded him. One of the largest flew at his throat. He tore it off; but an instant later he was borne backward into their very midst, and was literally devoured before Bob and Roper's horrified eyes.

For some time the wolves remained feasting on their prey, and fighting each other with ravenous ferocity when nothing more remained of the wretched man.

It was then that they turned their savage attention upon the lad and the man in the tree.

Roper, whose abject fears had frightened him to a pitch of madness, began to fancy the brutes might succeed in reaching him, unless their fierce appetite was further stayed.

In order to affect this purpose, he began to crawl cautiously along the branch of the tree from which Bob was suspended.

A convulsive shudder passed through the lad as he watched him.

"Sorry to disturb yew, sonny; but I guess it's either yew or me now!" remarked Roper, when he reached the rope, and drew forth his fatal knife.

Apparently he enjoyed the lad's misery, for he toyed for some time with the weapon, until at last the brutes beneath, leaping and scrambling over each other in their fruitless endeavour to reach the victim, again startled him.

Then the scoundrel actually raised a mocking laugh, as, bringing his knife as low as possible, he cut through the rope, and Bob, a helpless prisoner, dropped towards the snarling wolves!

CHAPTER VI.

RED LIP'S DISCLOSURES—IN HOT CHASE—THE BATTLE WITH THE WOLVES—IN TERRIBLE DANGER—A VILLAIN'S ESCAPE—HOW BOB WAS CARRIED OFF IN THE FACE OF HIS FRIENDS.

George Roper had been well-advised of the Indian scout's move-

ments. He had by chance overheard the latter's communication to one of the members of the North-West Mounted Police. This officer had not the authority to liberate Bob Little offhand; but, realising the serious nature of the scout's news, he hastened with him towards one of the lesser settlements whither Captain Margot had gone early the day before.

The captain made Red Lip repeat his story twice before half a dozen witnesses. In substance it was briefly this. The scout on the night of the riot had been imprisoned with the Canadians; but, like them, had managed to get out. He was one of the last, and carried an important message to a British official on the Alaskan frontier. Being satisfied that the Canadians were overpowering the rioters, Red Lip had not joined in the struggle, but made with all dispatch towards the north portion of the camp. In passing along, he had actually seen the murder committed by George Roper; but naturally supposed, owing to the presence of the others, that it had been witnessed by them. He had returned in the very nick of time, and no sooner was his statement made, than others found no difficulty in corroborating certain facts concerning it which he related.

Bob's disappearance was next discovered, and roused the miners to an intense pitch of excitement. In the midst of it all the scout pointed to the trail made by Roper and his companions.

Gathering his little force together, Captain Margot started off immediately, relying upon the sharp eyes of the Indian to follow the marauders to their place of concealment.

After proceeding a considerable distance, the pursuing force suddenly beheld a blaze of light straight ahead of them. It was the reflection cast upon a distant ridge of ice by the burning packs.

Presently they strained every nerve to increase their pace, for their ears caught the sound of the barking wolves, and presently the footfalls of a flying man became momentarily more distinct.

Michael Flack at last burst into their midst.

"Save me!—oh, save me!" he panted. Then, observing the official character of the pursuers, he abjectly confessed all.

The news of Bob's terrible danger urged the captain on at a run, until the Indian scout warned him that he would be throwing his life away and the lives of the men with him to attack the wolves so impetuously.

"Let every man carry a lighted torch!" urged Red Lip. "Keep together, and charge the wolves in line. 'Tis the only chance!"

Having kindled the torches, the little party, numbering fifteen, dashed through a belt of redwoods, and swept along towards the wolves as Bob Little dropped into their midst.

Red Lip raised a yell, which attracted the fierce brutes, and practically saved Bob's life; for George Roper had dropped his knife in fright, and seizing it, Bob, whose hands had been torn to shreds by one of the hungry brutes, dealt the animal a sidelong blow with the weapon. It leapt into the air, howling its death-dirge. For a moment or two the pack wavered, and seemed inclined to break up. But unluckily, one of the miners, more reckless and daring than the rest, waving a torch in one hand, and holding a knife in the other, dashed headlong into their ranks.

He thrust the spluttering flames into the mouth of one of the fierce brutes, who, with a howl of terrible pain, bit the end of the torch clean off. At the same moment the miner ripped open the shaggy chest of another.

Meanwhile, a dozen of the largest and fiercest of the wolves sprang at the unfortunate man, who was borne back by their weight, and almost instantly torn to pieces.

Maddened by the taste of blood, and half terrified by the flaming packs and spluttering torches, the rest of the pack dashed frantically at Captain Margot's force. A number of revolver-shots rang out, and several yelping wolves dropped, writhing in death agonies upon the snow.

All at once Red Lip's trained ears caught the sound of a series of barks away to the right.

"My white brothers must take to the trees!" he cried. "We are surrounded. Look!—look!—look! Everywhere the wolves upon us!"

This was true. The red glare of the blazing packs flickered over a wide circle, and disclosed in the distance a black, moving line, every instant drawing nearer.

Quick as thought the party dashed back to the shelter of the belt of redwoods, some clambering up into the branches, while those below held the hungry brutes at bay.

Presently the swiftest of the on-coming pack leapt in amongst the snarling band which the devoted little band of white men were doing their utmost to keep off.

The captain had realised the danger from the first, but still he was loth to give the order to his own men to ascend the trees, for he felt that such an order would sound Bob's death-knell. The lad had planted his back against the tree supporting George Roper, whose face seen in the broad glare of the flames was ghastly white with horror and despair.

Bob was fighting bravely with the knife that his would-be murderer had dropped.

The captain caught sight of him in the act of hurling back one of the largest and fiercest of the attacking brutes. He was surrounded by a score of others—some dead, many wounded; but, alas! the majority were scrambling over their fallen companions to seize and devour their struggling prey.

"Well done, Bob Little; well done, lad!" he shouted. "Keep a brave heart; we'll save you yet!"

Bob heard, for he replied by a faint cheer.

"Red Lip," said the captain, turning to the scout, whose hands and clothes were wet with the wolves' blood, "I have five brave fellows behind me, and you and I make seven. Shall we make a dash for it, and reach yonder lad?"

The scout shook his head.

"No; my white brother does not understand the danger. Ah, look! the other dog-fiends have closed in. Up into the tree as my brother and his brothers value their lives. There is another way to reach him across the branches. And, yes; why does my white brother hesitate to shoot that dog of a Yankee?"

The scout raised a rifle as if to carry his words into execution. "No—no, not that!" cried the officer sharply. "We have him safe; he cannot escape! We must save yonder lad first!"

He spoke between a desperate fight with a wolf that had seized his left arm, and was snapping its fangs into dangerous proximity to his throat.

Red Lip fired the contents of his rifle into the brute's skull, and then, at a bound, seized one of the lower branches, drew himself half up, and snatched up the captain.

The latter had given the order to his men to seek refuge with the miners above. With admirable skill and precision, each of the five police-officers clambered after him. Many of them were frightfully mauled; but they bore the pain of their wounds unflinchingly. Nor were the miners and the remainder of the party a whit behind in showing the stuff they were made of. They continued to pour a deadly hail of bullets into the midst of the howling mass beneath, thus in some measure lessening the attack on Bob, whose position had become well-nigh desperate.

When Captain Margot, following Red Lip, gained the safety of the redwood branches, he bade his party engage the wolves from their point of vantage, while he crept forward along the overlapping branches in the wake of the Indian scout. It was his purpose to reach the tree below, which Bob was struggling heroically for life.

There was one of the party, however, who did not understand his object—that one was Michael Flack. He had seen amongst the first to reach the shelter of the tree, and had placed a convenient distance between himself and the desperately pressed miners.

Perceiving the leader of the little party and the scout crawling towards him, he grew livid with fright, and springing towards one of the upper branches, missed his grip and fell back. He came a terrible crash against the branch supporting Red Lip and Captain Margot. For a moment the limb, which was neither very strong nor very safe, plunged down, and then recoiled like a spring-board.

"Quick! Jump for your life!" cried the Indian, suiting the action to the word.

Fortunately Captain Margot was equally alive to the danger, and equally agile, for as Red Lip sprang from the dangerous branch, and seized one of the upper ones, he, too, managed to grip the one which Flack had attempted to clutch but failed. Next moment the limb which they had quitted snapped off from the trunk of the tree, and precipitated Flack on to the fighting wolves. The poor wretch gave no cry, for he was unconscious, if not already killed by the fall.

Instantly his body was the centre of a struggling, yelping mass of wolves, who, sure of their prey, rushed in scores from all parts, and fought each other with horrible ferocity in order to secure a morsel of the wretched man's torn and mangled remains.

To Bob's surprise, he found himself suddenly freed of his brute antagonists. But he was too exhausted to attempt to climb the giant redwood. As he cast his eyes despairing upward, they were suddenly arrested by George Roper's movements.

The latter had just perceived Captain Margot and his Indian companion, and, like Flack, supposed they were bent on effecting his capture. A wild thought entered his head. He might escape. He caught a momentary glance of the wolves struggling over the mangled remains of his companion, then he glanced swiftly at the two men who were drawing nearer and ever nearer to him. Instantly his mind was made up. Rising swiftly to his feet, and aided by the branches on either side, he ran lightly along till he reached a point which no longer supported his weight. Then, to Bob's utter amazement, he gave a mighty leap and cleared the burning pack beyond.

But his manoeuvre had been witnessed by others besides Bob. A terrific shout was raised, half a dozen rifles spoke after the fugitive, who, however, had gained his feet, and was speeding on into the darkness beyond.

Suddenly the wolves pricked up their ears and yelping loudly wheeled round. They had scented the fugitive.

Bob heard a rush behind him. An instant later he was carried off his feet, and felt himself borne along on the back of a huge, iron-grey wolf, while a score of others snapped and yelled about him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FLIGHT IN THE DARK—A BRAVE STRUGGLE—HOW BOB DISABLED HIS FOE!—THE SOLITUDE OF THE NORTHERN WILDERNESS—THE SCALPING BRAVE—SAVED BY A MIRACLE.

Bob heard a shout of horror, and next moment one of the



He drew his knife, severed the rope, and Bob dropped down among the snarling wolves.

wolves on his right leapt into the air with a wild death-scream. A shot had pierced the brute's skull. One or two other shots struck the pack; but it was evident to Bob that the miners were afraid to fire repeatedly in case of striking him.

His head was in a whirl. At first he scarcely realised his terrible position, although clinging for dear life to the shaggy back of the startled brute which carried him. He heard the snarls of the wolves on either side, and sometimes felt their hot breath strike his cheeks. His clothes were torn to shreds, yet so great had been his struggles that he did not feel the icy-chill against his ill-clad body.

The cries of his friends grew fainter and fainter, and presently, when the darkness swallowed him up, he heard no sound but the barking of the wolves and the swift patter of their feet upon the hard, frozen snow. He still clung to the back of the iron-grey wolf, which repeatedly tried to dislodge him; but Bob had now become fully alive to his frightful position. He knew that his one slender chance of safety rested on his ability to retain his hold on the angry creature. While he remained on its back it would be impossible for the brute to seize him. At the same time his weight hindered its progress, and thus enabled him to fall behind the pack now in full cry after George Roper.

After a while his limbs began to grow numb, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he retained his hold.

Suddenly the wolf carrying him stumbled, and Bob pitched headlong over its head.

It was quite dark; but as he scrambled up he saw the brute's lowering eyes coming swiftly towards him. He was kneeling, and swiftly dodged aside to avoid the blow of the creature's weight. At the same moment, he staggered sideways to his feet.

The jaded but desperate animal endeavoured to turn and face him. Bob almost imagined he could see its cruel fangs, he felt its hot breath against his outstretched hand, and shuddered from head to foot.

His life hung on the merest thread. Without a weapon, tired and numb, he was ill-matched for the encounter. Suddenly he bent down, and his fingers fastened tightly round the brute's neck.

The wolf gave a howl of rage and terror, and struggled to get free, but Bob Little was fighting for life. To relinquish his hold meant sealing his death-warrant, while his strength was nearly exhausted. Mustering to his aid every ounce of muscle, the brave lad risked his life on one last desperate venture. Still holding the brute securely, he partly raised it with a jerk, and swung it sharply back.

The animal gave a wild, guttural yell, and rolled over and over on the snow in a mad effort to reach its antagonist. But the fall had broken one of its legs and dislocated its left shoulder.

Bob, not daring to linger, took to his heels, hoping by daylight to be able to strike the trail which would lead him back to Dawson City. At last, after what seemed like an eternity, a dim, cold twilight began to dissolve the darkness, and herald the approach of the short Northern day.

The cold was becoming intense, and caused him frightful suffering. His clothes were literally in shreds, and he was quite alone in a wilderness of snow and towering mountains. He had lost his way. The thought struck a chill horror into his heart, and for awhile his courage almost gave way.

Still he bravely plodded on through the cold twilight, which seemed to accentuate the awful silence and solitude of the Northern ice-bound land. As the day wore on, he became desperately hungry, but without the means of appeasing his appetite.

At last he reached a frowning gorge, and perceived in the distance, a little way up the mountain side, a cluster of redwoods. The twilight was rapidly deepening, and he had not the remotest idea which way to turn.

In the midst of this plight, he suddenly chanced upon the dead body of a miner. The corpse was clothed in fur leggings, fur jacket, and fur hat. A couple of huge fur gloves, as well as a bent and twisted fowling-piece, lay beside the corpse, which was unrecognisable owing to the complete obliteration of the features caused by an Indian's tomahawk. Evidence of a severe struggle having taken place there was not wanting. Clearly the miner, whoever he was, had not been murdered for his personal belongings, which were strewn about in the shape of United States coin and dollar-bills.

Save the bent and useless fowling-piece, Bob found no other weapon. He quickly removed the clothes from the dead man, and drew them over his own.

A little way off a cluster of stunted redwoods reared their snow-clad branches over a sharp bend in the precipitous side of the pass.

Bob reached them after a good deal of hard climbing, and in a short time managed to make a fire with the aid of a tinder and flint which he found in the unknown miner's pockets. He was able to cook and partake of a hearty meal off a tin of provisions which he found beside the dead man. It could not be described as a choice morsel or tender one; but it was food, and to a hungry and tired traveller in those black regions that was

everything. Bob was no backwoodsman, otherwise he would have observed more caution when building his fire on the outskirts of the clump of trees.

It did occur to him suddenly that the man who had met his death down in the pass might have been slain by some of the wild Alaskan Indians, who were notoriously bloodthirsty and dangerous. For all he knew, he might now be in United States territory. The prospect was not pleasant. One thing, however, was certain—unless he encountered Indians or miners, he stood a very slender chance of reaching the diggings. He had no means of ascertaining in what direction he had that day been travelling, whether north, south, east, or west.

Owing to the warm fur clothes he had secured, he bore the intense cold better than he had hitherto done.

Leaving the fire to burn itself out, he hollowed out a small tunnel in the snow, and passed the night inside. He was roused at last by the faint sound of voices outside. More snow had fallen during the night, and the entrance to his sleeping-place was almost choked up. This proved a blessing in disguise, for it had sheltered him from the keen eyes of a party of Indian braves.

Crawling very cautiously to the narrow gap of light, Bob perceived a dozen Redskins standing round two sledges drawn by five reindeer. The fifth and largest animal was unharnessed, and browsing amongst the trees close at hand.

Unfortunately Bob made a movement that attracted the attention of one of the braves. The Redskin wheeled swiftly round, and fastened his eyes on the narrow rift in the bank of snow.

Bob saw that he was discovered.

Next moment the Indian raised a loud whoop, and, seizing a large hatchet, sprang nimbly up the slight slope of the bank.

The English lad being without arms of any kind felt that his only means of safety lay in trying conclusions at close quarters. Bursting through the snowdrift, he was just in time to dart between the Redskin's legs and avoid the crushing blow which the brave aimed at him with the hatchet.

Before Bob could assume the defensive, however, his agile foe had wheeled about and attacked him hotly.

At sight of the unequal contest the rest of the braves gathered round in a semi-circle.

The Indian's weapon had twice struck Bob, once on the shoulder, and the second time on the left hip; but owing to the lad's agility the blade had glanced off, and he suffered only from the heavy blows. At last, swinging the hatchet above his head, the Redskin made a feint to cleave the white lad's skull in two. Bob recoiled, lost his balance, and fell heavily to the ground.

In a trice his savage foes seized him; he knew that his life was hardly worth a moment's purchase. His late antagonist dropped the hatchet, and drew from his moccasins a long, keen scalping-knife. Seizing the fur cap, he tore it off the lad's head.

Bob saw the knife descend with a flash; he was conscious next of a swift pain above his left ear.

Suddenly one of the Indians, who had assisted in holding him down, sprang to his feet, and dragged the scalper back. A sharp altercation followed. The cap was thrust into the first Indian's hand, he turned it over, gazed at it for a moment in stupefied silence; then, giving a horrible cry, dropped on his knees before his victim. The second Redskin caught up the hatchet, and, giving it a violent twirl, hurled it at the kneeling brave. The blade cut the wretched creature's nether jaw in two, and buried itself deep in his neck. Without a cry he fell over, and his blood dyed the snow a deep crimson.



Three enormous eagles attacked him furiously. He had no better weapon than the rope, but he used this effectively.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REDSKINS' CAMP—STRANGE PREPARATIONS—THE ADVENT OF THE STRANGER—BOB HEARS UNPLEASANT TIDINGS—A NARROW SHAVE—CAUGHT IN THE STOCKADE—A RACE FOR LIFE—SUPREME PERIL—A LEAP WHICH FAILED—DOWN TOWARDS THE CHASM.

On the right bank of a nameless river, which falls into the upper reaches of the Yukon, not more than thirty miles distant from Klondyke, a belt of vast trees, thickly interlaced, afford shelter in winter for bands of Indians, who still roam the greater part of the undiscovered North.

It was here, after a period of three weeks, that Bob Little was taken by his captors, who treated him with extraordinary respect. He was quite at a loss to account for this; for, while they supplied all his wants, he was uncomfortably aware that they kept a sharp eye on all his movements. One other thing puzzled him, the sleds belonging to the party when he first encountered them had not been seen since; yet he had reason to know they must have been brought into or somewhere near the camp, for he had seen the reindeer teams and recognised them as being the same.

The braves arrived at their forest camp, and set about erecting a rude, small hut, which Bob was given to understand belonged to him. It did not take long to complete, and, if roughly put together, the skins placed round the walls served to keep out the intense cold, and in the light of the guttering, resinous fire, kept continually burning in the centre of the little apartment, looked not uncomfortable.

Outside this erection the Indians accumulated piles of snow, which they proceeded very nimbly to fashion into a low, narrow snow-house, wherein it was evidently their intention to pass the most trying portion of the winter.

These preparations had almost reached the stage of completion, when a circumstance occurred which made Bob anxious to be quit of the hospitality of these apparently friendly savages.

He was passing towards early evening through one of the deepest glades of the great forest, when a movement in the boughs of one of the largest trees drew his eyes upon the half-hidden figure of a strange Indian crawling stealthily along from branch to branch.

Bob uttered an exclamation of surprise.

The figure disappeared in a twinkling. But his cry had been heard by two of the friendlies, who gliding through the gloom came up with him, and signed to know the cause of his un-

NEXT
WEEK.

"THE SLAVER CAPTAIN."

By
Chas. Hamilton.

business. As he pointed upwards, the cracking of a twig put the braves on the alert. One of them began to climb the tree. Several minutes passed, then the silence was broken by a sharp, angry snarl, followed almost immediately by the sound of a heavy fall.

Bob and the second brave ran forward in time to see the stranger plunge his knife into the heart of his assailant. Before he could withdraw the weapon, the second brave grappled with him, and after a short, hard struggle, flung him violently to the ground.

The stranger fought desperately. He was an old Indian, hardened to all the perils of the North, and would have proved the better man but for the Englishman's intervention. Still Bob and his companion had some difficulty in overpowering him. Twice he almost broke away, and, although wounded in the left arm, managed to inflict with that hand a nasty knife-cut over the Redskin's scalp.

At this point, however, fresh help arrived, and the stranger was carried by three braves into camp. At sight of him the rest raised a fierce shout. Their rapid and excited speech was unintelligible to Bob; but not so to the prisoner, who suddenly gave the English lad a swift, startled look.

"Save me!" he whispered in good English; "you can claim me for your prisoner! It will give me time, and may save your life as well, for they mean to kill us both!"

The speech, no less than the words, startled Bob. "Who are you?" he asked in the same low, quick undertone.

"Red Lip, in the service of the Canadian Government. An Indian scout. These men are Alaskans—the Hatawalls, or self-torturers! Save me quickly! Red Lip will not forget!"

Thus directly appealed to, Bob interposed. The chief of the Hatawalls had seized a large knife, and had raised it to strike his prisoner. As Bob stepped quickly before him, the Redskin's arm faltered; a dark scowl settled on his face. Bob seized the prisoner's fur-clad shoulder.

"He is my prisoner!" he cried.

"I arrest him in the name of the Canadian Government!" suggested Red Lip in a quick whisper.

The lad repeated the words. Their effect was magical. The scowling chief drew off, and his action was followed by the rest, save the two braves who continued to hold the stranger in their powerful grasp. After a short delay they bound him with leather thongs, and placed him for the night in the little log hut beside Bob Little.

To all intents the English lad and the stranger were alone. There was no door to the hut, for the narrow opening was protected by a bearskin tightly stretched from side to side.

When the last of the braves withdrew, Bob addressed his companion in English. To his surprise, however, the Indian motioned him by a significant gesture to remain silent.

An hour dragged slowly on, at the end of which time Bob saw the Indian wriggle close up to the fire, and appear to lie down to sleep. Bound as he was, his movements were so cautious that he made no sound until in a whisper he bade Bob follow his example, and lie down as close to the fire as he could.

After that occurred another torturing pause. The heat of the fire made Bob sleepy, and he was beginning to doze when he was next addressed.

"The paleface is in dangerous hands," whispered the prisoner. "Does he know the character of his friends?"

In a moment Bob was alert.

"No," he answered.

And then he proceeded to explain the adventures that had led up to his present condition.

The listener heard him through, and for a long time remained silent. Finally Bob began to show signs of impatience.

"Hist!" whispered his companion. "Speak or move now, and maybe we are both lost! The Hatawalls are listening. Two are standing behind the bearskin at the door; the rest have fixed their eyes upon us through the openings in the log walls. The skins do not hide us; they shelter the treacherous braves."

"But they cannot understand. They don't speak English," protested Bob.

A cunning smile for a moment wreathed the old Indian's features.

"They understood the paleface when he claimed Red Lip," he said. "Let my master beware! The old scout knows these braves well. They are bad Indians. This is not their hunting-ground. They are afraid of the Government, or they would have killed the paleface long ago."

"Indeed they nearly killed me when we first met," said Bob.

"The paleface was lucky; he was saved by the Government badge!"

Bob's thoughts quickly recurred to the incident of the fur cap and the murder of his would-be scalper.

The Indian continued:

"That cap had a silver button in the lining; it should have been outside. Stamped on it were the words, 'Dominion of

Canada: Commissioner of Land.' They mistook you for the Commissioner, whose power is dreaded by all the Indians in these parts. They made a scapegoat of the brave who would have scalped you to save themselves. You did not understand this. You should have demanded a guide, and he would have taken you wherever you desired to go. They would not have refused, for they had good reason to wish to be rid of you."

"And now I am here, possibly they think that I have come to watch them?" suggested Bob.

"Yes, partly; but they are becoming suspicious. The Government agents here are never inactive. They know this, and are beginning to suspect you."

Here the Indian broke off suddenly. A movement without—so slight that Bob did not hear it—had alarmed him. He remained in an attitude of listening for some minutes; then continued hurriedly, but in the same undertone:

"My master, be warned! Your friends are but waiting the arrival of another party. They will be here before the dawn breaks, for I have followed them, and in the Black Pass slipped round ahead, in the hope of defeating their purpose. These new-comers are many and desperate, because they murdered the Government agent whose clothes you are wearing. They will discover the deception; you will be frightfully tortured, and put to death!"

"We must escape," faltered Bob.

"Yes; but not together. I have an object here," answered the scout. "That is to regain the two sleds which you believe to be in the vicinity of the camp. They were stolen by an American from Dawson City. He was pursued by the agent. Whether he is dead or alive I cannot tell. He is not likely to reappear in the goldfields again."

Further discussion was cut short by the sound of a succession of fierce yells outside.

"The second party has arrived," whispered the scout. "Hark! they are coming! The deception has been discovered!"

Quick as thought Bob seized a faggot from the fire and burnt away the thongs of the Indian, who, springing to his feet, made a dash for the bearskin door.

Bob followed close behind.

Suddenly the skin was torn away from its fastenings, and two of the Hatawalls leapt into the room. At the same moment Red Lip flung the skin over the hindmost, who dropped his hatchet and made a desperate attempt to extricate himself. The light from the fire was very faint, and Bob, with the scout, stepped out of the hut unseen by the pair of invaders.

Red Lip had managed to secure the Hatawall's weapon, and for a moment seemed undecided whether to slip back and surprise the struggling pair; but before he could settle the point his sharp eyes detected a movement in the darkness ahead.

The two Indians in the hut had scattered the fire between them, and in the uncertain light must have mistaken each other, for they were fighting with all the tenacity of their race. The bearskin had in some manner become fastened round the weaponless Indian's shoulders and head. The fact that he had no weapon made his assailant fancy it was the old scout with whom he was struggling, while owing to the unfortunate brave's encumbrance he was unable to call upon his companion to desist.

Both were pretty evenly matched so far as strength went, but the armed Redskin possessed an advantage, which he very promptly used.

A sickening thud told the listeners that the weapon had done its deadly work. Almost at the same moment five or six figures crept up to the doorway, and, giving a fierce yell, broke into the small room.

"Now follow me—to the left!" whispered Red Lip.

Bob needed no second urging. Although it was pitch dark, and the way was unfamiliar to both the fugitives, they nevertheless contrived to find their way out by the belt of trees, and strike a narrow, sloping track of hard-frozen snow. A great fire was burning merrily some distance ahead, and, guided by its light, they were presently standing on the outskirts of the new arrivals' camp.

To Bob's surprise, the two sleds he had first seen were not far off. They were loaded, as though ready for a long journey. The reindeer were penned up beneath the trees.

"Get them out," whispered the scout. "Quick! the Hatawalls have been attracted by the sounds of the struggle there. They may return at any moment. It's only a question of minutes before they discover our escape."

Bob did not stay to question his new-found friend's order, but did his best to obey it. He was destined, however, to fail. Before he could release the whole of the animals Red Lip glided up to him.

"Never mind now," he whispered hoarsely. "They have discovered us. See! Quickly—quickly! we are surrounded!"

As if by magic, a number of Hatawalls appeared on all sides amid the trees, their figures thrown into relief by the flashing

camp-fire. They began to approach in an ever-narrowing circle, making never a sound, which induced Bob to believe that they fancied their presence had not been discovered.

All at once he was seized from behind, and almost flung on to the back of one of the reindeer. His assailant proved to be Red Lip, who bade him in a whisper cling for his life to the back of the animal.

"I'm going to set her off," the Indian scout added. "The braves will probably let her go, in the meantime centring their whole attention on the stockade. It is but a chance; still, your life hangs on it!"

"But how do you mean to escape?" asked Bob hurriedly.

"I shall scale the trees. They are the best protection for me," replied Red Lip, giving the deer a blow which made the animal bellow loudly, as it dashed off through the glade, and past the moving figures ahead.

Bob very soon discovered that his position was attended by other dangers as well as the anticipated attack from the Indians. The deer, unused to carrying a burden, made frantic efforts to dislodge him as it sped along. He was forced to lie as well as he could quite flat along its back in order to avoid detection when the animal lashed right through a group of half a dozen Hatawalls.

Bob held his breath in suspense. Two Indians tried to stay the animal's flight. They failed, but discovered the presence of the fugitive. A great shout rose from the rest, who, wheeling round, tried to outrace the deer. For some distance the struggle resolved itself into a neck and neck chase, but gradually the animal's fleetness began to tell on the pursuers. Still the Indians showed no signs of relinquishing the chase.

At last the darkness gave way before a twilight dawn, enabling the lad to make out his surroundings.

The deer was mounting a steep mountain path, whose surface seemed to narrow as it wound round the precipitous side of the mountain. On the right hand it overtopped a great ragged chasm.

Close behind a dozen or more redskins still stuck to the chase.

It happened, as Bob was in the act of looking round, the reindeer stumbled, thus throwing its rider over towards the precipice.

Bob lost his grip on the animal, and for a moment it looked as if he must go over. One of the Indians had anticipated the accident, and shot an arrow at the deer. It badly grazed the animal's neck. Rearing up, the deer staggered back upon its haunches.

In a twinkling, grasping for some means of support, Bob managed to seize the animal's right-hand horn.

The poor brute gave a startled cry, and started blindly up the ever-narrowing path, with Bob hanging over the chasm.

Presently it reached the sharp bend in the path above. Then for a moment Bob's heart stood still at the terrible prospect before him. His pursuers had gained rapidly in the ascent. An arrow whizzed by; then another buried itself just under his right arm in his fur jacket. It was doubtless poisoned. He was not quite sure whether it had penetrated his skin or not; but the uncertainty was torture. He feared every moment that the deer, already wounded, might reel and fall over the yawning precipice. He must in that case be crushed beneath its weight in the bottom of the chasm, thousands of feet below. He was hanging over the brink, and could see the cruel rocks gaping up at him, as if in mockery.

At this supreme moment an inspiration seized him. He would swing from the faltering animal's horns on to the jutting path three feet ahead. His life depended on the attempt, for the Indians were now not more than ten yards behind, while the deer, no doubt poisoned by the arrow, was swaying dangerously.

One, two, three. Bob drew a deep breath as he swung forward with all his might, and let go the deer's horns.

He heard a faint yell as he plunged down, missing the ledge, and dropping, with frightful velocity, into the dark chasm beneath. At last he struck something that yielded to his weight. Half dazed, he staggered up, face to face with George Roper!

It was difficult to say whose amazement was the greater, his own or Roper's. The latter seemed dumbfounded. Not so, however, the nine or ten Americans who were grouped round the camp-fire, and who instantly leaped to their feet.

They made a rush at Bob; but he had by this time gained his presence of mind. Giving one of the ruffians a knockdown blow, he darted out of the circle, and, speeding along the bottom of the gorge, was lost to sight in the darkness.

The Americans, headed by Roper, gave chase; but Bob managed by hiding to elude them. He heard them return to their place of encampment, and then, once more alone, he set out towards Klondyke.

After a day's march, however, he found himself, to his great astonishment, in the very gorge where he had first encountered

the Hatawalls. But this was not the only surprise in store for him.

Just as twilight was closing in he was startled by the sound of a rapidly approaching sled. It was driven by Red Lip, whom he instantly recognised, and forthwith hailed.

The scout greeted him with undisguised delight, and explained how, when the Hatawalls had started off in pursuit of Bob, he had contrived to harness the reindeer to one of the sleds, and in this manner escaped himself.

Bob next related how he had encountered George Roper and ten American miners. At the mention of the villain's name the scout's lips tightened, and his eyes blazed with wrath.

"He has escaped once," he said; "but he shall not escape again!"

Very little passed between them until they drove into Dawson City, where Bob met with a right royal reception. His innocence had been fully established. He learnt that the party who had attempted to rescue him had, save one unfortunate miner, managed to return to the settlement safely.

Captain Margot was overjoyed by the return of his young friend, whom he admitted he had never hoped to see again alive.

CHAPTER IX.

IN QUEST OF THE OUTLAW—THE ENCOUNTER WITH GEORGE ROPER'S SPY—THE MYSTERY AND WONDER OF THE NORTH—THE EXPLOSION—GEORGE ROPER CLAIMS ANOTHER VICTIM.

Exactly two days later Red Lip reported that a party of ten Americans, headed by Roper, had plundered and destroyed a lonely hut five miles up the frozen stream. They had taken advantage of the absence of the mounted police, whose presence had been acquired to quell a disturbance on the Stewart river.

Bob suggested to Red Lip the advisability of capturing the outlaw, and very quietly and unostentatiously they made their preparations, finally setting forth in the dead of night together.

The Indian had obtained a small sled, and a team of Arctic dogs to drive it. The sled contained sufficient provisions for a month, a couple of firearms apiece, a small quantity of ammunition, as well as some blasting-powder.

A little after dawn they met a stray Indian, who told them that he had come across the white men's tracks about a day's journey north-west, in the direction of Fort Reliance.

"That man," said Red Lip, after the Indian had departed, "is one of the paleface Roper's spies. He means mischief, and is bound to follow us. While twilight lasts we will push ahead in the direction he has indicated; then we must strike directly north, for the bad paleface has reached the gateway of the mountains."

"What is that?" asked Bob curiously.

"A dangerous pass, where nine rivers meet," replied the scout, lapsing into a gloomy silence, which Bob made no attempt to break.

The short period of twilight deepened into night a little after three o'clock in the afternoon. An icy wind was blowing down across the mountain slopes, shoring up enormous ridges of loose snow, and here and there bringing down, with a splintering crash, a mighty pinnacle of glittering ice. Belts of stunted redwoods, deeply covered in snow, wound up some of the slopes, while rusty dark patches against the eternal white disclosed vast acres of the hardy reindeer moss.

The dark, pitchy night presently swallowed up everything, but after a time the blackness gave place to brilliant streaks of light on the northern horizon. They seemed to shiver out of the wintry heavens, and merge again into the impenetrable canopy overhead.

Bob felt a little startled, for his companion began to display signs of uneasiness. Red Lip had already built a large fire on the left, and no sooner was it burning merrily than he turned the team round, and retraced part of the distance they had so laboriously covered. At length the dogs would go no further, and they were compelled to halt. The icy wind dropped all at once, and, to Bob's surprise, the temperature seemed to grow perceptibly warm. Suddenly the shivering lights in the heavens vanished; but it was not pitchy dark as before, for a ghostly white phosphorescence glimmered on the vast billows of snow.

Red Lip hastily lighted a torch, seized a mesh of leather thongs, and soundly lashed the tired dogs.

"Lead them off towards yonder slope!" he cried, indicating a shelter formed by a smooth ledge of ice, fifty feet high.

Bob seized the leader's harness, and, after some difficulty, induced the stubborn team to start afresh. But their pace was so slow that at last the scout urged Bob to make for the shelter alone.

Bob refused, and Red Lip was in the act of urging him again,

when in the space of a flash the strange phosphorescence blazed into vivid light. Far away in the distance the ice-jagged peaks shone in a moment's brilliance against the pitchy black heavens. Floor and ridge and valley were equally illuminated.

The lad caught his breath. For all the world it looked as if the universe was afire.

Even the weary team of dogs seemed to realise the presence of some subtle danger, for they required no longer urging, but, straining every muscle, slowly dragged the sled towards the sheltering ridge of ice.

The light lasted for about half a minute, during which time it varied in degree considerably, and just before it finally vanished a quantity of fine snow began to fall.

"Haste!" cried Red Lip; "we have been overtaken by a fall of cold fire. Hist!"

Bob, who was now obliged to run hard to keep pace with the startled dogs, heard a faint roar, which resembled a distant explosion, or, rather, a number of successive explosions merged into one. It came nearer and grew louder, and appeared to pass right over, and then surround them.

The snow began to fall faster. Bob noticed in amazement and fear that the flakes discharged tiny lights on coming in contact with the hair of the dogs. Each moment the flakes fell thicker and faster, and each flake emitted its spark as it sank into drifts of the snow, or settled on the clothing of the travellers.

"Quick—quick! we are lost if we do not reach yonder shelter before the storm bursts upon us in all its fury!" cried Red Lip. "Help drag the sled for your life!" he added, suiting the action to the word himself.

They had to cover a slope of some two hundred yards, and about three parts across the storm did burst in all its fury. At the same time the flakes became smaller. Each of the icy particles appeared as a trailing blaze of ghostly white light. They looked like drops of fire. Electric sparks fell in streams from the travellers' clothing. Every movement of their arms or legs resembled the sweep of a flaming sword through the air, for every point of snow touched gave out its little snap and flash of light. The phenomenon lasted for hours.

Crouching under the shelter of the ice ridge, Bob watched it with bated breath. His companion, trembling with fear, explained that these storms, though rare, were terribly fatal to human life. The mysterious flakes, when they fell, were bound together by the action of the weird fire, and formed a hard cement.*

They had gained shelter not a moment too soon, for Bob presently began to grow intensely drowsy. He was conscious of a warm, pleasant glow suffusing his body. A state of delightful restfulness, unattended by a single thought of danger, crept over him. Red Lip suddenly found him lapsing into unconsciousness. This was the danger.

Without a second thought, the scout kindled a pine-torch, and thrust the spluttering end under Bob's face. The lad stirred uneasily, choked down a quantity of the acrid smoke, and woke up, spluttering and coughing violently. Every nerve and muscles in his body seemed to be dragged with excruciating pain back to life. Whereas he had felt warm before, he now experienced a dreadful chill. His arms and legs had become numb, his head throbbed, and he found it difficult to breathe.

It was almost an hour before these symptoms passed away, and by that time the snow had ceased to fall. Red Lip unwound the tangled harness of the dogs, and prepared to start forth. The snow being crisp and hard, and the team rested, they began the journey at a brisk pace. Notwithstanding, the dogs required a deal of handling. Their two drivers were proceeding on either side of the sled, when Bob was startled by hearing a tremendous report. At the same moment he was hurled amongst the frightened dogs, and saw Red Lip shot armless into the air. Almost at the same moment the torch affixed to the head of the sled spluttered and went out.

The contents of the sled had been scattered in a wide circle over the ice and snow. A terrible thought flashed through Bob's mind—the blasting-powder which they carried had exploded. The scout dropped with a heavy thud at his feet.

Bob addressed him anxiously, but, alas! the Indian was dead. In the dreadful stillness that succeeded, the horrified lad thought he heard stealthy movements proceeding from the right. They might have been caused by the dogs, which had become detached from the sled and bolted. But these sounds were suddenly drowned by the terrific echoes of a fall of ice. Something very like a human scream reached Bob's straining ears. Then he felt certain it was the work of his relentless foe George Roper.

* This phenomenon, though rare, has been witnessed several times by travellers. Some are inclined to think it due to a kind of phosphorescence. Lieutenant Finley, U.S. meteorologist, declares that each snowflake is charged with static electricity.—ED.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER SIX WEEKS—FRESH DISCOVERIES—HOW GEORGE ROPER REACHED THE MOUNTAINS—THE FORCED MARCH—AN UNEQUAL STRUGGLE—TRIUMPH—LIFE FOR GOLD—A TERRIBLE END—NEMESIS.

"Heaven be praised! you have come at last!"

This fervent exclamation proceeded from Bob Little, who had passed six terrible, solitary weeks under the shelter of the ice-ridge, where he had built a small snow house. He addressed Captain Margot particularly, but his cry was answered by five stalwart troopers, and about a dozen miners, who accompanied them.

Hearty greetings were exchanged by all, who were sincerely glad to find Bob alive and safe.

"I meant to follow you," explained the captain aside, "and you see I have embraced the first opportunity. We are a large party, for most of the men are prospecting. I think," he added quietly, "they have shrewdly guessed the nature of Miser Gregson's secret, and are coming north in search of that wonderful bed of gold."

"It has been discovered already, and probably claimed."

"Discovered?" faltered the captain, regarding Bob narrowly.

"I am inclined to think so. You remember the Yankees who fired Gregson's store, and subsequently looted the solitary hut up the river?"

"Yes."

"Well, they were practically led by Roper. They followed Red Lip and me. We were overtaken by a storm, and found shelter under this ice-ledge. At the further end a natural tunnel existed in the ice. We did not know it at the time, but I have discovered it since, and in it nine crushed bodies. After the storm Red Lip put the team to our sled; but we had scarcely started before our blasting-powder exploded, killing the Indian and liberating the dogs. That was Roper's work. He must have fused the powder. Nine of his companions were crushed by a fall of loose ice. But he must have had others, who escaped, for I soon discovered the marks of a large sled and reindeer tracks."

"And how long since did this happen?" asked Margot quickly.

"Nearly six weeks ago."

The captain remained in deep thought for a time, then he turned to one of his men who had approached, and recounted Bob's story.

"What do you think of it, Nelson? Is it possible these rogues have contrived to join forces with the Hatawals, who murdered the Government agent, and made off with the stolen packs?"

"It looks very like it, sir. Red Lip reported that he had followed the tribe over Sixty-Mile Creek, after this gentleman had escaped them. They must have crossed the Yukon; and, if so, their presence is a dangerous menace, for under the American's leadership they will murder and pillage indiscriminately. The country is not safe."

"We must try conclusions with them without any further delay. The season is opening, and shortly we shall have hundreds of men making up hers. Get the party ready to start at once. There is one road open, and we must follow it, keeping a keen look out," said Margot.

A week's hard journey passed, however, before the captain's followers reached the Gateway of the Mountains—a mighty, snow-capped pass of ragged, clustering ice, which glistened with all the colours of the rainbow in the early summer sunlight. Beyond rose an immense ridge, with absolutely precipitous cliffs three thousand feet high on all sides. There was only one way of approach, by ledges running right under a gigantic frozen waterfall.

The little party of nineteen all told halted awe-struck at the sight. Was it possible their wily foes had climbed that almost insurmountable fastness?

They not long remained in doubt. Half-way up, the ledge running beneath the frozen waterfall was hidden by several huge boulders. As the little party halted below, a mighty piece of loose rock started with a terrible clatter down the precipitous side.

"Look out! They're showing their fangs!" shouted Captain Margot.

The men sprang aside as the boulder crashed against the ice at the bottom, and broke into a hail of fragments. One unfortunate miner was smashed into a shapeless heap, while two others were badly wounded.

The rest carried their wounded comrades out of danger, while Margot, at the head of ten brave fellows, made a gallant dash up the side of the ledge. But they were observed by the Hatawals a couple of thousand feet above. The ascent was naturally slow, for apart from the danger overhead, the ledge in some parts was as slippery as glass.

At a height of seven hundred feet from the bottom of the

pass, Bob suddenly seized his friend from behind, and flung him down upon the ledge.

"Look!" he cried; "they have dislodged the greatest boulder. It is racing down towards us!"

"Great heavens!—the men!" cried the captain, starting up.

Bob, crouching between a crevice in the ledge, heard him issue some hurried orders to his followers. He looked down, and saw the poor fellows rush to the edge and drop over, trusting to the sharp fragments of rock and ice, which they frantically clutched to support them.

On, ever nearer rushed the boulder, leaping from point to point, and splintering off great fragments as it gathered fresh speed in its downward flight.

Bob trembled for the captain's safety; then turned sick with fright as the giant boulder leaped overhead, and for a moment the captain's agile figure was hidden.

The boulder continued its downward course, shaking off four of the unfortunate men who were hanging to the edge of the ledge for their lives. Margot, following Bob's example, had dropped flat across the path and thus escaped. But another danger threatened the little party. The Hatawalls, to the number of fifty, were rushing down the path towards them.

As the white men rose to their feet, a shower of poisoned arrows swept through their midst. Two were killed outright, and a third wounded, leaving but four, including Bob and Captain Margot, to face the furious Redskins.

The men below were powerless to assist, and to turn and fly was impossible, owing to the unsafe nature of the descent.

"We can never withstand that rush!" faltered Bob.

"No, we must prevent it," said the captain.

"For your lives, men!" he cried, "empty every ounce of powder you carry here in this fissure! Right. Cartridges as well. We'll blow them up!"

With feverish haste his followers proceeded to obey, while the oncoming Redskins continued to fire with deadly accuracy into their midst, until when they had gained a point within a dozen yards only Bob and Captain Margot were left to face them.

At this point, Margot and his young companion dropped flat, and slid swiftly some distance down the ledge. Their movements made the pursuers pause. The captain had anticipated this. Swiftly leaping to his feet, he fired the train, and then, dropping back, waited breathlessly for the explosion.

The suspense was terrible. At last a deafening roar and a wild chorus of yells echoed from crag to crag along the pass, as to a man the Redskins were dislodged, and flung headlong into the gaping void below.

A long strip of the path had been destroyed by the explosion; but after a short delay this was bridged by the remainder of

Captain Margot's party, who had started up to his rescue the moment the last boulder reached the bottom of the path.

Accompanied by Bob and three miners, the captain pressed forward, and after a terribly trying ascent reached the top of the cliff safely. They encountered no Indians, though signs were not wanting of their presence in the locality. The cliff proved to be an immense tableland, supporting mountains of ice and snow, and everywhere betraying evidence of enormous mineral wealth.

Having made these discoveries, the party began to proceed cautiously, half expecting to find Roper attack them at the head of his Indian allies.

They had passed down a slight declivity, two or three hundred yards from the brink of the cliff, when Bob clutched the captain's arm.

"I'll swear that's George Roper yonder in the distance, standing in an attitude of listening!" he whispered.

The party proceeded quietly and quickly along the frozen torrent, in the middle of which their quarry was standing motionless with his back towards them.

It was Roper; but he was beyond their vengeance. In the act of blasting the ice in the bed of the frozen torrent, he must have liberated a quantity of water. For his inanimate body was covered completely in a thin layer of ice. They found him standing upright, with his left hand pressed convulsively over the region of the heart. In his right hand, slightly extended, was a large nugget of pure gold. The head was bent slightly forward, and the features were frightfully contorted.

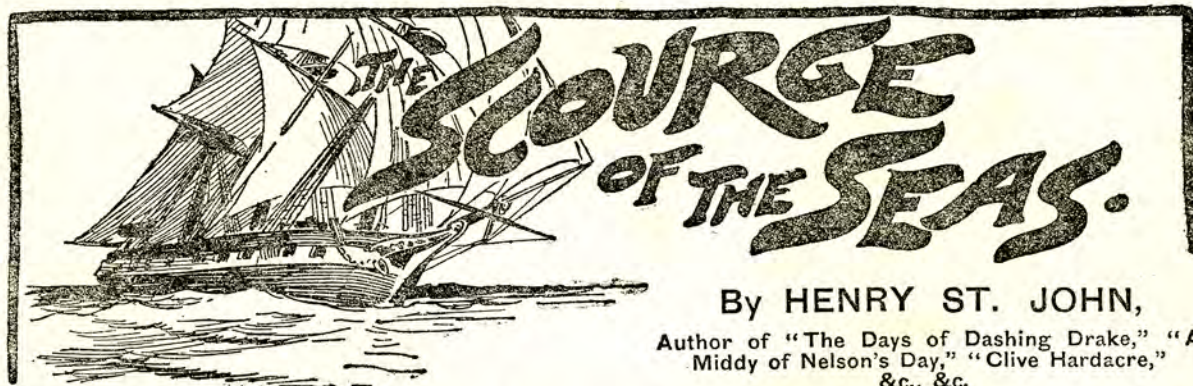
It was a grim sight in that lone northern wilderness to behold this solitary evildoer, frozen to death where he stood, upon the very threshold of vast wealth.

The party approached awe-struck, while Captain Margot ascertained the cause of death. He found a splinter of ice, as sharp as any razor, had pierced George Roper's heart, and penetrated through his back.

His unholy greed for gold had been truly the cause of his death. By anticipating Miser Gregson's secret, however, the ill-fated wretch unwittingly enabled Bob Little to drive in the discovery-post, and peg out the first claim on the table-mount diggings of Klondyke.

At present there is little more to add, for Bob Little is still building up his pile in the far-off frozen North; while Captain Margot, supported by a hundred troopers, still retains order in that wild land. This tale is the true story of an English lad's adventures in the great North-West, and the incidents described have actually occurred. To English lads, who are fired by a zeal to go, take the author's advice and—don't!

THE END.



By HENRY ST. JOHN,

Author of "The Days of Dashing Drake," "A Middy of Nelson's Day," "Clive Hardacre," &c., &c.

You can begin this Story now by reading this.

This is the story of Frank Farleigh, a boy who has been brought up to believe himself the son of a simple fisherman. He saves the life of Captain Wilfrid Curzon, commander of the "Fearless," and Captain Curzon promises to make him a middy on his vessel. This promise, however, is never fulfilled, for Frank and an old sailor, by name Bill Woshem, are lured on to a pirate vessel, in the commander of which they recognise, to their astonishment, the very captain whose life Frank had saved.

They sail against their will in the pirate vessel, the "Vulture," known better under the title of the "Scourge of the Seas," and on board that ship Captain Curzon tells Frank that they are father and son. This Frank steadfastly refuses to believe. They then arrive at the pirates' stronghold, a lonely island in the Indian Ocean, from which place Frank and Bill, accompanied by a small negro boy, Quacko—who has already saved Frank's life twice—manage to escape.

They get safely on board a French man-of-war, which is, however, almost immediately wrecked in a storm. Those of the crew who have escaped destruction in the storm seize the ship's cutter and put off, leaving the captain, the lieutenant, a middy, and Frank, Bill, and Quacko behind. These six then manage to secure a small quantity of provisions, among which is a keg of brandy, and they put off in a small cutter just as the ship founders.

The cowardly sailors who have previously escaped from the sinking ship then come up, and demand a share of the provisions, which consist only of a very small keg of water, a bag of biscuits, and a sack of spoiled flour, beside the keg of brandy.

THE REBELS OF THE CUTTER—HOW THE PROVISIONS WERE SHARED—PIERRE JAQUAND OFFERS ADVICE.

One could hardly blame them, or call Bill's speech a selfish

"THE SLAVER CAPTAIN."

NEXT WEEK.

"THE SLAVER CAPTAIN."

one. The miserable drop of water that they had was all insufficient for their own use, for many days might pass before some passing vessel would bring them rescue; and divided with eight or nine others it would scarce suffice to give a draught to each.

In a few minutes the cutter had ranged alongside, and it was clear to see from the manner of the men in her that they meant to have, by fair means or foul, what they pleased to call their rightful share in the provender.

The captain whom they had been wont to obey with almost servile alacrity held no authority over them now. He was like a dethroned monarch—his ship, his kingdom, gone, his subjects felt that they could turn against him with impunity, and without fear of punishment to follow.

After all, he was but a man, as they were. Why, then, should he, and those who were with him, reserve all the food and drink to their own share, while they, the worthy mariners who thus argued among themselves, might starve and die of thirst? It was not to be thought of. They forgot that it was their own fear of death that had urged them to fly the sinking ship without first providing themselves with the necessities of life. They forgot that, but they remembered that they were the stronger party, and with them might was right. If the captain and his companions would not give them what they demanded, they would help themselves; and if opposition was offered—well, so much the worse for the captain.

The sides of the two boats grated together, and then a brief parley was held.

The mutineers—for they were nothing more nor less—demanded that all food and drink should be divided into three equal shares; that two of the three shares might be given to them—for their numbers being greater, so were their wants—while the third share, so they generously said, might be retained by the captain and his followers.

Captain Courvoisier sat silently listening to what was passing, but taking no share in it.

It fell, therefore, to M. Durand's lot to parley with the men, who exhibited their determination of having their own way by menaces and threats which were unmistakable.

"My children," began M. Durand mildly.

But his words were drowned in a shout of derision.

"Hark at him. He thinks to put us off with those pretty words. Sacristi! does he think that we will swallow his humbug, and fatten on it? Give us our due, or we will help ourselves!"

"Men of France, are—"

"He tries us on another line now, does he? He thinks that we will go away content with our emptiness because he has reminded us we are men of France! Out on the fool! Shall we have to batter sense into his head with our oars?"

"Men!" cried M. Durand, trying for the third time to make himself heard above the babel of voices, "we are as poor, as badly off as you! That—," he said, pointing to the large cask of brandy.

"Tell 'em it's poisoned!" cried Bill, who, though unable to understand what the lieutenant said, yet by following his motions knew what was passing.

"Tell 'em it's poisoned," he repeated; "and it'll be no lie, either. There's none more deadly under such a sun as that aloft!"

"That," continued M. Durand, taking Bill's cue, "is of no more use to you than it is to us—it is poison!"

Some of the men in the cutter burst into loud, derisive laughter, but others, enraged at the thought that the lieutenant was trying to befool them, picked up their oars, and, brandishing them in an aggressive manner, told M. Durand that unless the cask was immediately transferred to their boat, they would send the captain's boat to the bottom.

"You called us your children a while ago," cried one; "ma foi! you must truly take us for children, if you think we can swallow such lies as that! Ha, ha! since when have French ships of the line taken to carrying casks of poison? Does the Government intend, then, that we should take to poisoning its enemies, instead of despatching them with lead and steel?"

M. Durand stood with his arms folded. He was quite unmoved.

"You mistake my meaning," he said quietly. "The contents of that cask would not be poisonous under all circumstances, but in our situation nothing could be deadlier to the body and mind. It is brandy!"

Brandy! The word was caught up with a shout of exultation.

"There now!" muttered Bill ruefully; "I'll bet my chance of promotion—and it's a poor chance at the best—that he's let the cat out of the bag!"

And that was exactly what M. Durand had done.

The men seemed almost maddened with delight at the thought of possessing the fiery spirit.

"Tiens!" cried one, "that is the stuff to put life into a man! It is the drink of kings!"

"Brava—brava! Water is the drink of dogs! Men like we can drink brandy, and fatten on it. It is food and drink, too, mes camarades!"

"Think—think!" urged M. Durand; "think how it will scorch the blood in your veins, inflame your mouths, burn you to the very heart, under this scorching sun; and not a drop of water—"

"Peste! the fool tries to frighten us with his croakings! The brandy, quickly! Vive la cognac! The brandy, mon lieutenant; or do we help ourselves?"

"We would have thrown it into the sea!" cried M. Durand despairingly. "It is not fit that we should drink it!"

"Infamous dog, to dream of wasting good liquor!" shouted the boatswain, a burly, red-faced scoundrel, whose appearance bore unmistakable signs of his intimate acquaintance with good liquor and with bad.

"They will have the brandy," said M. Durand, turning to the captain. "They will have it, or our lives!"

For the first time the captain addressed the unruly men, beseeching them to think twice before giving themselves up, soul and body, to the demon drink. He conjured them, by all their hopes of again seeing their native land, of again befalling the shores of La Belle France, to refrain.

But cries of "Brandy—brandy! The brandy, quickly!" drowned his words, and he seated himself again, beaten and baffled.

"If they will have it, they must have it!" said Bill. "Better that they should kill themselves than kill us."

"Stand by, there, you lubbers!" he continued, addressing the French seamen, and interlarding his speech with a few good honest English oaths, which the Frenchmen did not understand.

But they understood what he intended, and a number of eager hands were held out to help the precious cask into their boat.

It was done in a few minutes, and then, like a pack of wolves around their prey, the Frenchmen fought and struggled around the cask, each anxious lest the others should have a larger share than himself.

It was Pierre Jaquand, the boatswain, who was the first served. He felled two men with his brawny fists, and the rest drew back respectfully while he drank his fill.

"And now for food!" he cried, when he had done. "What else have ye, eh, mes camarades?"

"Only this—a sack of flour, drenched with sea water, and unfit for food," replied M. Durand. "Why," thought he to himself, "should we throw away our only chance of life by telling these scoundrels of our little store?"

"Bah!" cried Jaquand. "You are not lying, mon lieutenant!"

"Do I usually lie to you?"

Ma foi, no! You are an honest fellow enough. But come, over with that sack! Bad as it is, we may be glad of it, if it is only to put in our hour to make us smart."

The others roared at his wit, for it was in the days when gentlemen wore powder in their hair.

"We will be the aristocracy!" cried Jaquand, delighted at his own smartness. "Yes, we will drink the best cognac, and wear our hair powdered. Think of it, my comrades! When we are picked up, we will say that we are all counts and marquises. A boatload of the old noblesse, with powdered hair and breaths that reek of cognac!"

They shouted with laughter while they dragged the sack of flour into the cutter.

"And now," cried Jaquand, taking off his cap and making a sweeping bow, "we will wish you adieu, and bon voyage. Ha, ha! bon voyage, mon capitaine; and you, too, lieutenant! And, harkes, here's a word of parting advice from Pierre Jaquand. When you get hungry, kill the English swine that you have with you. They say that there is but little difference between the flesh of the Englishman and the pig! And when you kill, send us the invitation, and we will come and dine with you!"

Both the captain and the lieutenant shuddered at the coarse jest.

"Cast off, Durand!" whispered the captain. "Pah! I cannot bear to remain near them!"

They pushed off, amidst a volley of pleasantries from the cutter.

"Holla, there!" cried one: "before you go, leave the little blackskin with us. There will be good picking on his bones!"

And poor Quacko, whose knowledge of French permitted him to understand what was said, flung himself down in the bottom of the boat in an agony of terror; nor could he be prevailed upon to rise and release his hold of the captain's knees, until the cutter and its crew of wretches had been left far behind it.

ALONE ON THE WATERS—THE DAWN OF THE FOURTH DAY.

Bill had settled himself down to the oars, while Frank took the tiller-lines.

THE EDITOR'S ADDRESS IS

They had no compass to steer by, nothing but the course of the sun to guide them.

Their exact position was also unknown to them; but it mattered little, for they all realised that their only chance of life lay in being picked up by some vessel. The nearest land they knew was very far beyond their reach, with the slender stock of provisions they had at command.

As a matter of fact, the nearest land to them must be, they knew, the pirate island, and not one of them thought of endeavouring to reach that inhospitable shore; indeed, Frank, as far as he was able, endeavoured to steer the boat in a direction contrary to that in which he imagined Red Rock Island lay.

Bill pulled steadily for upwards of an hour, then he resigned his place to M. Durand, who, for an officer, and, moreover, a Frenchman, was possessed of no mean skill as an oarsman.

Then Captain Courvoisier insisted upon taking his share of the work.

"We are all comrades now," he said, in answer to his lieutenant's protest; "and comrades in misfortune, *n'est ce pas, mon petit Quacko?*" (is it not so, my little Quacko?), he said kindly to the little negro.

Quacko nodded his head and grinned; the ogres who had spoken of picking his bones had been left so far behind now that they were completely beyond the range of sight, and Quacko began to feel more assured of the safety of his small person.

It was late in the day, judging from the declining of the sun, when they took their first meal; and, frugal though it was, they could not yet help noticing what great inroads it seemed to make upon their little store.

Only a bite and a mouthful of water for each. Two bites and two mouthfuls for Quacko, so insisted Captain Courvoisier, and the rest unhesitatingly agreed; and as long as their little hoard held out this arrangement was faithfully adhered to. The same was offered to the little middy; but the brave boy refused to fare better than did his superior officers.

They were alone now, upon a boundless expanse of sea, which glittered like molten metal in the still fierce rays of the setting sun.

All traces of the furious tempest which had robbed them of their all had passed away; the sea had sunk into repose, and rocked their little craft as gently upon its broad bosom as though it had never known the passionate outbursts of fury that had convulsed it but a few hours before.

Almost as soon as the golden disc of the sun had sunk into the blood-red waters, darkness fell, for twilight in the tropics is so brief as to be almost non-existent.

They divided the night into four watches, resolving that one at least should remain awake in the hopes of sighting some vessel before dawn.

Bill Woshem took the first watch of two hours, Frank the second, the lieutenant the third, while Captain Courvoisier, who insisted upon standing on the same footing as the others, took the first two hours of dawn. The two lads were exempted from this duty.

In this fashion the first night was passed.

They gave Quacko a taste of the water and biscuit at daybreak, and watched him while he ate it. That was their only breakfast.

Their first meal that day was not partaken of till nearly sunset, and then it was no more than on the preceding day. Just a taste of the sun-warmed water, hardly enough to moisten their cracked lips and parched tongues, and a fragment of biscuit, which made scarcely a mouthful.

Frank ate his portion ravenously, then turned his face to seaward, so that he might not see the others eat their share. They, wiser than he, eked theirs out, nibbling at the morsel of biscuit so that it should last them for a long time.

They were alone still, horribly alone, with the glittering line of horizon stretching away unbroken all around them.

Frank swept it with his eyes, as he had done many and many a time that day. Then he started as he felt a touch on his shoulder.

It was Bill who had attracted his attention. The old man still held his meagre portion of food untasted in his hand.

"Somehow," he said in a faltering voice, "I—I don't seem to fancy biscuit to-day; it goes agen my stummick it do. Besides," he went on in a pleading voice, "I ain't the least bit hungry. It's—it's too hot to eat, and I never was much of a chap for my vittals." Then he tried to push the morsel into Frank's hand.

"Eat it, Frank lad; you're young and growing, and want it more'n I do!"

Scalding tears came into Frank's eyes as he thrust the tempting morsel from him. "No—no—old friend—I know, I understand! Heaven bless you for it; but no! I am not hungry either!"

They both lied, and both knew the other knew he was lying; but they were novel lies they told that day.

The next morning, when Quacko took his solitary meal, Bill carefully measured what remained of their store.

"We've bin a bit reckless like, I'm afeard!" he said sorrowfully. "We've been livin' too well the last two days past. At

the rate we're goin' on there won't be enough to see us through another two days, and then—and then, Heaven help us!"

"We are in His hands!" said M. Durand, reverently lifting the tattered remnants of his once gold-laced cocked hat.

Frank grasped the hot gunwale, and looked hungrily over the sea. "Are there no vessels still sailing the seas?" he asked.

"Did they all go down in that fearful storm?"

"Patience, lad, patience; it's because we're out of the track o' the traders that it seems so lonesome like. Howsomedever, somethin' 's bound to turn up—bound to turn up, sooner or later!" said Bill hopefully.

"Later? Perhaps too late!" said Frank bitterly. "After to-morrow, Bill, what then? Oh, for a drink, a long, long, cool—"

"Shh, lad!" said Bill in a whisper. "It—it ain't fair, not to the others!"

Frank held out his hand, and laid it in the old sailor's withered brown one. "Forgive me!" he said. "I was wrong, and selfish! It is you who are right to hope!"

Then came the third night, which passed with nothing fresh to break the awful monotony, and another day, the fourth, dawned, another day of torment of thirst. They felt no great craving for food now; it was thirst, awful, torturing thirst, that makes the tongue cleave to the parched roof of the mouth, that makes the blood run like molten lead through the aching veins, that glazes the eyeballs and makes the brain reel and imagine strange fancies.

Thirst! No pen can describe the horrors of it; none can imagine it; it is indescribable, the pangs of a thousand ills in one great agony.

As the fourth day broke, they sighted a speck, a distant speck, upon the horizon, which they fondly hoped to be a vessel; but as the light grew clearer, and the object more visible, their hopes were dashed, for, though the object grew larger and larger, there were no tall masts and glistening sails. It lay low in the water—a ship's boat—the boat of some vessel that had perhaps gone down in the storm as theirs had.

Towards noon it had drifted so near to them that they could see it was still tenanted, perhaps by some poor, thirsting wretches like themselves.

To all their signals, however, there was no reply.

Then Bill, for the first time for two days, put out the oars, and pulled weakly towards the object of their curiosity.

At their approach one of the figures rose slowly up in the boat, and, raising his hands above his head, gave vent to the most horrid howls and cries that could come from a human throat.

"It is the cutter!" cried Frank.

They were so close now that Frank's voice must have reached the ears of the wretch standing there alone in the sun-bleached boat. He turned towards them, and gazed at them with lustre eyes, in which there was no recognition, no understanding.

Then they saw that it was Pierre Jaquand, he who had jested, and whose horrible words of advice still sounded in their ears.

They had barely time to recognise the fleshless face of the once robust boatswain, when, on a sudden, he sprang up on a seat, and with one yell, that re-echoed over the water, he flung himself into the sea.

He swam a few strokes towards them, then ceased from his exertions, and before they could reach him, he had sunk far from their sight.

Frank, standing up in the bows, gazed down into the cutter.

He gave a shuddering cry of horror, and pressed his hands before his eyes as though to shut out the thing that he had seen.

"Back!—back!" he cried. But too late came his warning, for already his companions had seen.

Dead bodies lay about the thwarts—dead bodies which lay in positions that told of fearful struggles and desperate fights.

In the heart of one a knife was buried to the hilt; but that was not the worst. The worst was too horrible, too ghastly and inhuman a thing to speak of—to think about.

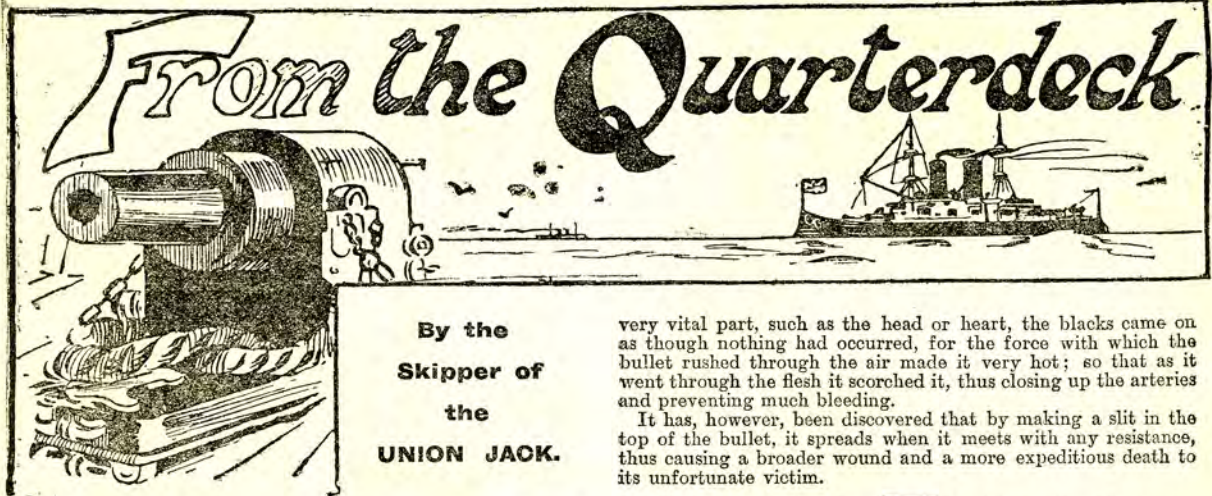
And with his little remaining strength, Bill pulled away from that ghastly boatload, while he struggled with the awful nausea which threatened to overcome him.

(To be continued in next week's UNION JACK.)

The Slaver Captain

in Next Friday's

"UNION JACK."



By the
Skipper of
the
UNION JACK.

How is it none of you readers send me grumbling letters? I really want a few. I have so many laudatory ones that a "slating" one would be quite welcome, by way of a change.

Candidly, though, I wish that, instead of merely saying, "Your paper is the best I ever read," and so forth, you would tell me which stories you like best, how you like the serial, whether you would like an article every week, and things of that sort. I cannot find out your likes and dislikes without some help from you, can I?

J. C. Dickinson asks me if there were any Sexton Blake stories published before the "Soul of the Shah." Certainly there were—a large number. He also asks me if I can supply him with them. I am sorry to say I cannot. They all went out of print long ago. Perhaps Mr. J. Richmond, 11, Alma Road, Lock Lane, Enfield Wash, could oblige him.

This gentleman informs me that he has a large number of UNION JACKS, which he will be pleased to send to anyone applying for them, provided the applicant pays the carriage.

By the by, I am in want of two complete sets of the UNION JACK myself. If you have this paper from No. 1, clean, and in good order, write and tell me what you want for them.

I trust you will repay me for the great expense gone to in producing the Klondyke story in this number by showing it to your friends.

Here is what you wish for, "M." (Dublin). "One arm, one ammunition" has been adopted by the War Office as its motto, and in consequence the Lee-Metford rifle has been served out to all regiments of the standing army, and is now being served out to the auxiliary forces. It replaces the Martini-Henry, over which it possesses many advantages. Although 11b. heavier than the old arm, it is so splendidly balanced that it is very easily manipulated.

The great merit of the rifle is that it can fire a more powerful explosive than any rifle at present used by any other European Power. This is due principally to the fact that its cartridge-ejector works with a straight pull-back, thus allowing a solid metal cartridge-case to be used.

The next advantage the Lee-Metford gives is perhaps that, using cordite, the cartridges are much smaller and lighter, so that a soldier can carry more of them at a time. Then there is the magazine, which allows a number of shots to be fired without reloading. Several other Powers possess magazine rifles, notably France and Germany, but their efficiency in actual warfare has not yet been tested.

The Lee-Metford rifle is sighted up to one thousand eight hundred yards, but it will carry, and even kill beyond this.

Another great merit of the Lee-Metford is the bullet, which for piercing powers surpasses anything yet invented. The bullet of the Martini was made solely of lead; that of the Lee-Metford is of lead with a white metal casing.

The Martini would pierce sheet-iron one-eighth of an inch thick at five hundred yards. Judge, then, what a Lee-Metford would do with a much stronger bullet, propelled by an explosive more than double as powerful as gunpowder.

Indeed, it was found in the Chitral campaign—the first time the Lee-Metford was used on active service—that the bullet was really too piercing. It simply made a clean hole through a man, bone and flesh alike, and unless it happened to strike a

very vital part, such as the head or heart, the blacks came on as though nothing had occurred, for the force with which the bullet rushed through the air made it very hot; so that as it went through the flesh it scorched it, thus closing up the arteries and preventing much bleeding.

It has, however, been discovered that by making a slit in the top of the bullet, it spreads when it meets with any resistance, thus causing a broader wound and a more expeditious death to its unfortunate victim.

WANTED, more readers to join the UNION JACK League.

Fill in the coupon I give below. Put it into an envelope, together with another envelope, stamped and addressed to yourself, and the signatures of three new readers you have obtained, and I will enrol you, and send you the dainty little badge I give to all the members.

I, ...

of.....

hereby declare my wish to be enrolled as a member of the "Union Jack" League, and promise to do all in my power, by means of the "Union Jack" and otherwise, to exterminate the "penny dreadful."

The authorities have raised the standard of height and weight for would-be officers in the Army.

A boy of sixteen who seeks admission to Woolwich or Sandhurst must in future be 5ft. 4in. in height, and must weigh 8st. 8lb. At eighteen he must be 5ft. 5in., and must weigh 9st. 4lb., and at twenty-one he must be 5ft. 5in., and must weigh 9st. 12lb.

The rule is that officers wear their sashes on the left shoulder, and that sergeants wear it on the right, "T." (Durham). There is an exception in the Somersetshire Light Infantry. In this regiment the sashes of sergeants are worn in the same way as those of officers, because, when all the officers were killed at Culloden, the sergeants took their places, and performed the duties of officers until the end of the battle.

*Don't miss this,
The Skipper*



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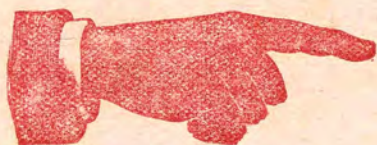
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