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THE POISONED GLOVES.



The mysterious man swung the spade he had been using over his head and sprang towards him.

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THE POISONED GLOVES.

By J. G. ROWE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CORONER'S INQUEST—THE DOCTOR'S STARTLING EVIDENCE—A DARK MYSTERY—WALTER CROSTYN, REPORTER—WALTER'S STRANGE DETERMINATION.

The little town of Hawksley, on the border of Marston Moor in Yorkshire, was thrown into the utmost consternation and horror.

The dead body of Mr. Clarence Kenyon, one of the most influential landed proprietors of the neighbourhood, had been found by some farm labourers on one of the wildest and least frequented parts of the moor.

How the unfortunate gentleman had met his fate was a puzzle. There were no marks of violence whatever upon the body, which was that of a hale and healthy, well-nourished man in the prime of life.

The coroner's jury, sitting in an upstairs room of the Bull's Head Inn, had already been adjourned to allow of Dr. Robert Hemsworth, the one medical man the little town, or rather village, could boast of, to hold a post-mortem examination, and it was expected his evidence would now throw considerable light upon the mysterious affair.

It had already been ascertained that it was the custom of the deceased to take long walks alone on the moor, and on the night previous to the discovery of his dead body he had been seen strolling about just about dusk by some workmen returning

home. But the total absence of any wounds or bruises upon the corpse disposed of the idea that he had been molested and done to death by any ruffians on the moor.

The interest in the extraordinary case was, therefore, at fever heat, and the three reporters representing the local papers settled themselves more comfortably before their little table, and took up their sharpest pencils, when Dr. Hemsworth's name was called. All in the room were eager to hear the result of the post-mortem examination, and a dead silence prevailed as the medical gentleman stepped forward.

"Gentlemen," he began, addressing the jury, "in accordance with the coroner's orders I have held the post-mortem examination. I must say that, while I found all the organs in a perfectly healthy and sound condition, I also found unmistakable traces of a deadly poison permeating the whole system."

There was considerable sensation in the room at this startling announcement, and one of the reporters, a handsome, well-built young fellow of twenty-two, whispered to one of his colleagues:

"There, Dick, what did I say? That there was more in this case than simply met the eye. I would not be at all surprised if it turns out to be one of the most extraordinary murder cases on record."

"I agree with you now, Walter. But hist! The doctor has not finished."

The medical man had allowed the coroner and his jury a little time to recover from their astonishment at his unexpected declaration, and he now went on:

"The poison that has been administered to the deceased belongs to the most subtle class of poisons—those known as nerve poisons. I do not happen to be acquainted with either the name or the characteristics of this particular drug; but there is undoubted evidence of the presence of such in the tissues. I have kept the fluids obtained from the tissues, in case you think it advisable to submit them to an expert in poisons. It is my own private opinion that this is some exceedingly rare and little-known drug, and I would personally advise the police authorities to take up the case, and call in a skilled toxicologist. That the deceased did not drink the poison I can safely assert. It must have been introduced into his system in some strange and unnatural manner, exactly how I cannot pretend to say. I have made the most complete search for even the smallest scratch or bruise on the body, but without finding the faintest sign of one. The mystery then is, how the poison has got into the man's system, and I would strongly urge the police to take the matter up, for there is not the slightest doubt in my own mind that there has been some foul play."

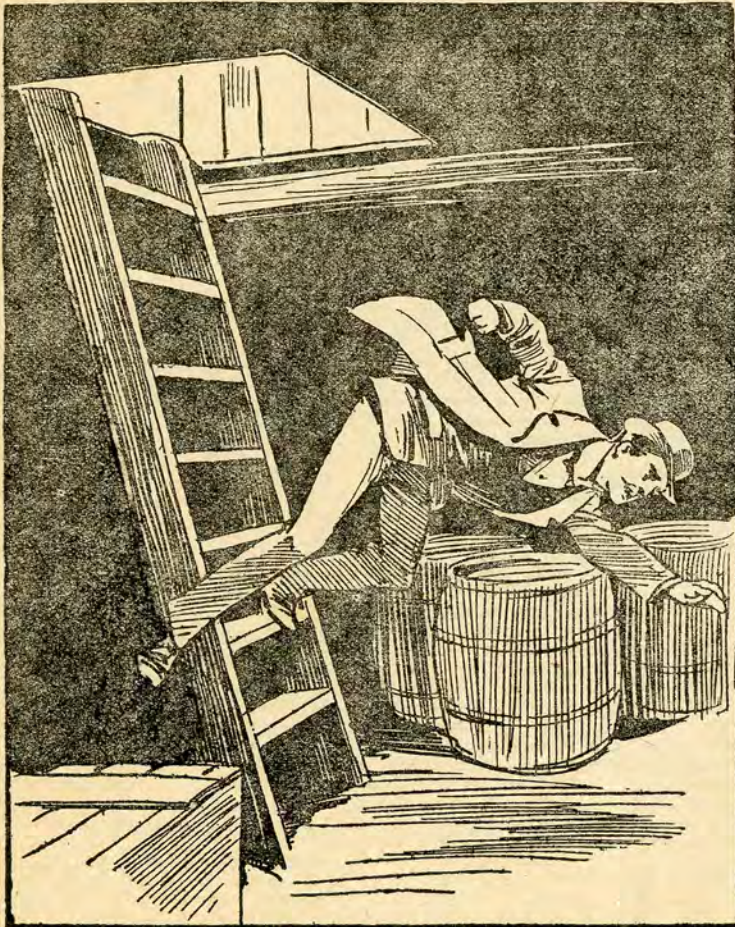
Again the young reporter, Walter Crostyn, exchanged a meaning glance with his brother pressman, and a deep, horrified murmur rose like a sob from the jurors and auditors in the crowded court-room.

There was a long and impressive silence after the doctor's evidence, broken at length by the voice of the coroner addressing the jury.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you have heard Dr. Hemsworth's statement, and it is clear he speaks with certainty as to the cause of death. That is all that must concern us. Traces of a deadly poison have been found in the body of the deceased, and it remains with you now to bring in a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence."

The jury put their heads together, and after a few minutes the foreman rose and announced that they found a verdict of "Death due to the administration of poison."

"Very good, gentlemen," returned the coroner; "and now I will follow Dr. Hemsworth's advice, and suggest that the police employ a skilled analyst to discover the name and nature of the poison administered. Gentlemen, you are dismissed."



His foot caught and, losing his balance, he pitched head-foremost down the stairs.

The jurors rose from their seats, the witnesses and others filed out, and the reporters gathered up their notes and "copy" paper.

"It is my firm conviction," remarked Walter Crostyn to his fellow-journalists, as they left the inn together, "that this case is going to be the sensation of the hour. I am going to make a big thing of this inquest."

"Why not turn private detective, Walter," laughed Dick Harrison, the reporter for the "Hawksley News," "and try and track down the murderer? It would make fine 'copy.' And fancy the placards, bearing in huge type the legend, 'The Hawksley murderer tracked down by our own reporter!' Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not a bad suggestion of yours, Dick, by any means," returned Walter, joining in the laugh against himself. "By Jove, I think I shall turn detective!"

Laughing heartily at what they thought was a fine joke, his brother journalists parted from him to repair to their respective offices and send in their reports of the inquest.

Walter Crostyn, however, as he bent his steps in the direction of the "Hawksley Daily Budget," to which paper he was attached, seemed sunk in the deepest reflection. When he entered the reporters' room, he found it deserted, and inquiring if the editor, Mr. Pierce, was in, and learning that he was, Walter at once proceeded to that gentleman's sanctum sanctorum.

He found Mr. Pierce lolling back in an armchair, looking over a "proof," and as his chief glanced up inquiringly at his entrance, he plunged at once into what he had to say.

"Mr. Pierce, I have just come from the inquest on the body of Mr. Kenyon, and I must tell you the case has taken a most extraordinary turn. Dr. Hemsworth, who held the post-mortem examination, declared he found traces of poison—a mysterious and subtle drug, the name of which he himself could not give. I scent here some deep mystery, and the case is likely to create a tremendous sensation. But if you have a few minutes to spare, I will just read to you from my notes Dr. Hemsworth's evidence."

Mr. Pierce looked interested, and the young reporter turned over the pages of his notebook, and read his verbatim report of the medical evidence at the inquest. When he had finished, he looked up and saw that the editor's face expressed the greatest professional satisfaction.

"Bravo, Mr. Crostyn!" he said, "that will make a splendid thing for the evening edition. Write it out at once, 'double head' it, and see Black puts it on the contents bill."

"Mr. Pierce," replied the young fellow eagerly, "I take my summer holidays, I believe, next week, and I will tell you what I intend doing. I mean to go quietly to work, and try on my own account to penetrate the mystery surrounding the death of Mr. Kenyon. If I fail no harm will be done, I will merely have had my labour for nothing; but if I succeed, look at the 'copy' we should have. Why, our circulation would go up by thousands."

Mr. Pierce stared at his subordinate for a minute as though the latter had two heads; then, throwing himself back in his chair, he burst into the heartiest peals of laughter.

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho! Mr. Crostyn, are you joking, or what? You cannot surely mean what you say in all seriousness?"

"I was never more serious in my life, sir, I assure you. I intend, during my fortnight's holiday, to devote all my efforts, as I say, to trying to get at the bottom of this mysterious poisoning—to, in fact, discover the murderer and bring him to justice, if it lie in my power to do so. You may laugh, sir, but I feel confident that I will not fail in my purpose, and I feel equally confident that this affair is going to prove one of the most mysterious and sensational cases on record."

Mr. Pierce straightened his countenance, and a look of newly awakened interest crept into it as he surveyed the reporter.

"Well, of course, Mr. Crostyn, you are at perfect liberty to do what you like with your own time, but if I were you I would give up the foolish idea, and take a trip to the Continent instead. You will only lose your time to no good, though I certainly admire your professional eye for good and stirring 'copy.'"

"Mr. Pierce, my mind is made up, I shall take up my amateur detective work next week. I shall not consider my time wasted in any case, for I shall have plenty of healthy excitement and flying about, I have no doubt. I would request of you to keep my intention a profound secret. Don't mention it to anyone else, and let us hope that, at the end of the fortnight, I will not have had my trouble for nothing."

"You may rest assured I shall not mention it," replied his chief, a little more solemnly, but with still a twinkle of amusement in his eyes; "and you have my heartiest good wishes for your success."

Walter returned to the reporters' room and wrote out his account of the inquest for the evening edition of the paper, then left the office to hunt up more "copy."

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING GLOVES—WALTER CONSULTS WITH HIS FRIEND HEMSWORTH—COULD THE GLOVES HAVE BEEN POISONED?—WALTER VISITS "THE THORNS"—HE FOLLOWS THE HINDOO TO HULL—WHO IS THE STRANGER SULAJEE MEETS?

Walter Crostyn did not wait until the following week to commence his strange quest. The first hour he had at liberty he sought out Dr. Hemsworth at his private residence, confided to that gentleman his intention to try and get at the mystery, and asked the latter to assist him.

The doctor was naturally somewhat surprised, but readily promised every co-operation in his power. He took the young reporter into his laboratory, and explained to him upon what he had based his theory of poisoning in the case of the deceased.

He also lent Walter several standard works on toxicology, and the young fellow sat up till a very early hour in the morning studying these. But he could find no mention in any of them of such a subtle drug as Hemsworth was certain had been used.

Next day, in accordance with his professional duties, he called at the police-court, and learned that the authorities meant to institute the most rigid inquiry into the affair.

One very important piece of information he gleaned. The gloves that had been found on the hands of the corpse had disappeared in a very strange and unaccountable manner.

They had been, along with the deceased's other clothing, in the possession of the police until the day after the inquest, and their loss had only been discovered a few hours before the reporter made his call. Their disappearance was quite unaccountable; but, as the clothes of the dead man had been rather carelessly left on a table in the outer office for a whole day and night, it was quite possible someone had slipped in during a temporary absence of the sergeant in charge and purloined them.

Still, on their disappearance, the police were inclined to base the theory that in some way the gloves, if recovered, might prove a clue.

Walter, too, was strongly of this opinion, and so also was Dr. Hemsworth, upon whom he called again as soon as possible.

"Yes," said the medical man, lying back in his chair and joining the tips of the fingers and thumbs of his hands, as was his wont when engaged in deep reflection, "it is quite possible those missing gloves carry the elucidation of this mysterious poisoning. It is well known that in the sixteenth century the science of poisons was at a height it has never since been able to attain. The infamous Borgia family, for instance, are said to have been able to administer poisons in the most subtle and mysterious manner to those they wished to get rid of. I have seen it somewhere that they would present their victim with a bouquet of flowers, and that if he smelt it he would die in horrible paroxysms within a few hours. Fortunately, though, the secret of such terrible drugs has been lost, and modern chemists have never been able to discover them. It would seem as though the gloves of the dead man have played just such another terrible part as the bouquet of the Borgias. Certainly in some equally remarkable way the poison has been introduced into his blood!"

"Perhaps," suggested Walter, "the gloves were saturated with the poison, and the heat of the wearer's hand caused it to act and work into the pores of the skin. I fancy I have also read somewhere of such things occurring."

The doctor looked up quickly.

"By Jove!" he said, "it is quite possible. I never thought of that. Ah! but"—and his brows knit in deep reflection—"what poison would act in such a manner? I do not know either the name or nature of the drug that has been used in this case; but, then, the Orientals use many preparations unknown to us, and the secret of which they keep most religiously."

"Did you know Mr. Kenyon very intimately, doctor?" asked Walter, after a few minutes' thoughtful silence.

"Yes; I attended his wife for some months before she died of consumption, and he and I were old friends. We were at college together, and he was my fagmaster."

"Do you know if he had any enemies, or any relations who might profit by his death? I have been given to understand he lived quite alone, with only an old manservant to attend on him, since his wife's death."

"That is quite true. He never seemed the same man after her death, and seemed to become quite a misanthrope; but I never heard that he had any enemies. The poor old man was pitied rather than disliked by his tenants, to whom he was not a bad landlord, despite his misanthropy. As to his relations, I believe he had not a soul in the world belonging to him. Ah! stay, I had forgotten! There was a nephew of his wife's, I believe—a graceless ne'er-do-well—whom he turned

out of his house some years before his wife's death, and who went out to, I fancy, Australia, and was never heard of again."

"H'm!" said Walter. Then, after a minute's silence: "Who is at present in charge of his house?"

"His faithful old manservant, the Hindoo who gave evidence as to his master's habits at the inquest."

"Ah, yes! Sulajee was his name. Well, doctor, thank you very much for what you have told me. I will not take up any more of your valuable time. I suppose you will be going your round shortly?"

"Yes; but any time I am free you may come and see me. I will be only too happy to assist you in trying to bring the murderer of my poor friend to justice!"

Walter left Dr. Hemsworth's in a brown study. He seemed as yet no nearer the solution of the mystery surrounding the poisoning of Clarence Kenyon.

Suddenly a thought struck him. Dr. Hemsworth had casually said that the Orientals were skilled in the science of poisons, that they possessed many powerful drugs which were quite unknown to Europeans.

Sulajee, the dead man's servant, was a Hindoo, and therefore also an Oriental. Could it be that he had had anything to do with his master's murder?

Walter felt almost ashamed the next moment for what he believed was an unworthy suspicion, when he remembered the man's deep and apparently genuine grief while giving evidence at the inquest. But who was to say that his grief was not feigned?

If Mr. Clarence Kenyon had had a Hindoo servant, it was very probable that he himself had resided in India, and who could say he had not made some enemies while in that country?

At the first opportunity he determined to see Sulajee, and try and obtain a little more information with regard to the dead man's past history.

Accordingly later in the day he visited The Thorns, as the murdered gentleman's handsome residence on the border of the moor was called, and found the house silent and empty-looking. The blinds were all drawn, the gates locked, and there was not a sign of a human inmate.

A few persons were peeping in at the lodge-gates, doubtless out of that morbid curiosity which draws a certain class of people always to the scene of a gruesome tragedy, or to any place associated with it.

Walter rang the bell, and a policeman made his appearance, who seemed at first inclined to refuse the reporter admission; but, finally, on the latter producing his card, permitted him to enter.

Walter ranged through the silent, gloomy rooms and passages in company with the constable, who was the only occupant of the place. But there was nothing to gain from such a survey of the premises presumably; so at length, with some curiosity, he inquired how the officer came to be alone in the place—where was the Hindoo, Sulajee?

"Oh, he's gone to Hull for the day, sir! He said he had a brother on one of the ships in port, and now he has lost his employer, he may leave England and return to his own country."

The suspicion of the Hindoo came with fresh force into Walter's mind, and he determined there and then he would follow him to Hull. There was no saying what clue Fate might not throw in his way, and there were not likely to be very many vessels in that port with lascars aboard; so that he had no doubt he could easily meet with Sulajee.

He was soon spinning on his way by rail to Hull, and an hour or so later stepped on to the platform at his destination.

Quitting the station, he turned towards the docks, and was about to inquire of one of the dock-policemen what East Indian boats were in port, when he beheld the white turban and swarthy face of a Hindoo amongst a crowd of dockers and coalheavers returning from their work.

A second glance satisfied him the man was none other than Sulajee himself; but he was walking and talking excitedly with a white man—an Englishman undoubtedly, and not one of his own colour.

CHAPTER III.

WALTER OVERHEARS A SUSPICIOUS CONVERSATION—WHO IS THE MURDERER?—THE RENDEZVOUS ON THE SCHOONER—WALTER CREEPS ABOARD, AND WITNESSES THE MEETING BETWEEN COLTER AND SULAJEE—HE INADVERTENTLY REVEALS HIS PRESENCE.

Walter at once turned his eyes upon the Hindoo's companion, and took in every detail of his appearance. He was tall and broad-shouldered, with a face tanned by the sun of

some foreign clime. He was dressed as a seafaring man, and altogether looked as though he had roughed it, either on the ocean or in some distant part of the world.

Walter decided to follow the pair, who had passed on with the crowd of dockers, too deeply interested in their conversation to have noticed him.

The Hindoo was all gesticulation, and appeared to be urging his companion to some course which the latter would not hear of, for he shook his head in decided negative several times.

Walter followed them along the road, keeping them easily in sight, for they walked slowly. They entered a cheap coffee-house not far from the docks, and, after taking a cautious peep through the window, and seeing the place was pretty crowded with all sorts of customers, Walter too entered the place.

He saw his men had taken one of the few empty boxes, and that there was a seat vacant in the adjoining one. He slipped into this, and, after ordering a cup of the vile mixture sold for cocoa, strained his ears to catch something of the conversation of the pair in the next box.

Try as he might, however, he could only catch an occasional scrap, and that only of what the Hindoo's companion said:

"You are a fool, Sulajee, for your pains! Nonsense! Who can ever connect me with it? I tell you he was a hard-hearted old miser; he— No, I tell you I am going to claim my rights! I have had quite enough of this rough hand-to-mouth existence."

The Hindoo seemed to be expostulating with the man; but beyond a faint murmur Walter could not overhear a word he said.

The other continued:

"All right, I'll not speak so loud. But who can overhear us here?"

The speaker dropped his voice, and thenceforth the conversation of the pair was inaudible. Walter sat waiting, however, until the two men rose and left the place; then he, too, got up and went out.

He saw them a little way ahead, still deep in animated conversation, and presently they halted at the corner of a street, as though about to part.

Walter ventured to draw near them, as they were apparently so wrapped up in themselves as to be oblivious to all around, and, loitering within a yard or two of them, as though waiting for somebody, he was overjoyed to hear Sulajee say:

"Will the Sahib Colter meet me to-night, then, somewhere?"

"Very well. I will be the only one aboard to-night. Come, and we can thresh this matter out. But I tell you I shall lay claim to my uncle's money. It is mine by every right, and that miserable incident of my past is buried in the grave now. You may safely come to the ship. You know her name?"

"Yes, sahib; the 'Kangaroo.' I will come."

Walter lounged off in the opposite direction as he saw the two shake hands and part, the seaman bending his steps towards the docks again and Sulajee turning up a by-street.

Walter's excitement was now at fever heat. The scraps of conversation he had managed to catch left no doubt now in his mind that he was on the right track.

This mysterious stranger, whom the Hindoo had come down to Hull to see, could be none other than the murdered man's scapegrace nephew, who had been turned out of doors by the old man some years before.

The inevitable suspicion at once shot athwart the young reporter's brain that this man was the murderer. By the death of his uncle the young fellow had everything to gain. He was next-of-kin—in fact, the only relation to whom Clarence Kenyon's money could revert. His presence in England so soon after the tragedy was grimly suggestive, too. And, then, why all this mystery and secrecy? If he were not guilty of his uncle's murder, why did he not make his presence in the country known to the authorities? Why not boldly claim his uncle's wealth?

A sentence he had let drop—"that terrible incident of my past is buried in the grave now"—burned itself into Walter's brain.

To what else could the man refer but his own cold-blooded murder of his uncle? And Sulajee was an accomplice, either before or after the deed, that was evident.

Walter felt, certain he had solved the mystery surrounding Clarence Kenyon's death, when suddenly he paused in his train of thought.

This man Colter, as Sulajee had called him, did not seem the sort of man that would resort to such an out-of-the-way mode of killing his victim as presenting him with a pair of poisoned gloves.

A passionate, quick-tempered fellow—for that such was his nature could be seen at a glance—he was far more likely to have killed his uncle with a blow of his powerful fist, or even, perhaps, in his mad fury, to have stabbed or shot the old man; but to kill the latter in so cold-blooded, fiendishly-conceived a

manner as by poisoning his gloves—no, Walter felt the man could not be guilty of such a dastardly, treacherous crime.

But, then, his connection with the Hindoo—a man, perhaps, skilled in the science of poisons and poisoning, as so many of his race are!

Ah! Walter thought he saw the whole vile plot now revealed before him.

Sulajee had procured the poison, saturated the dead man's gloves with it and thus effected the murder in a more subtle and less risky method than the other and bolder spirit advocated. The fiendishly ingenious means of killing the victim would be quite in accordance with the dark cruelty and treachery of Indian nature.

Walter felt that this was the true reading of the affair, and at first he thought of immediately proceeding to the nearest police-station and laying information against the pair; but then he remembered the arrangement the ruffians had made to meet again that night.

He decided finally he, too, would be present at their meeting, and then again was in doubt for a few minutes whether he should go alone or take a couple of police-officers with him.

He settled it he would go alone. He would try and overhear their conversation, and satisfy himself that they were indeed the murderers.

Then he could give information to the police, and have the pair arrested.

The afternoon was already pretty far advanced—in fact, twilight was beginning to fall—so Walter resolved to walk about until it was dark, when he would learn from one of the policemen in what dock the "Kangaroo" lay.

The time was not long in passing, and as soon as it was dark he presented himself at one of the dock-gates, having already made it his business to learn in what basin the "Kangaroo" was lying.

She was a large schooner, without a single light showing upon her deck, and a narrow gangway stretched from her side to the deserted wharf. Cautiously moving amongst the bales and boxes of merchandise that littered the quay, our hero approached the gangway, and, after a sharp look round to see that he was unobserved, quickly though noiselessly stepped across it and gained the schooner's deck.

There were several huge barrels rolled into the waist of the vessel, and Walter hastily concealed himself behind these, from which coign of vantage he would be able to see anyone who came aboard by means of the gangway.

He had not been long in his hiding-place, when he heard the heavy footsteps of a man coming along the deck from the after-cabin, and he cramped himself into the smallest possible space, lest he should be seen.

The man came nearer, until Walter could see his tall form outlined against the sky, and recognised him as Colter.

"Hump!" the fellow muttered; "he ought to be here now, if he is coming at all. Ah, here he is!"

And, looking in the direction of the gangway, Walter saw the form of the Hindoo about to step across it.

"I thought you were never coming!" growled the seaman surlily. "What kept you?"

"I waited until it was quite dark, sahib, as I thought it safer."

"Bah! what are you afraid of? One would think you had murdered my uncle, and were afraid of your own shadow, from the way you act. Ha, ha! ho, ho!"

"Don't, sahib—don't!" cried the Hindoo, shrinking back, as though in mortal terror.

"Why, dang me, if I were a police-officer," continued Colter, "I'd nab you at once as the old chap's murderer! Your face now is the very embodiment of guilty terror. Bah! pull yourself together! Do you see my uncle's ghost, or what, that you look like that? Come, enough of this! Let us go to my cabin; we can talk better inside."

They moved aft, and Walter, now entertaining not the slightest doubt but that these two were the murderers of Clarence Kenyon, determined, if possible, to try and overhear the whole of their conversation.

As they disappeared down the cabin-stairs he crept from his hiding-place and softly approached the scuttle. It was open, and he could see by the light of a swinging lantern the doors of two or three cabins at the foot of the companion.

He could just hear the faint murmur of voices proceeding from behind one of these, and, carried away by the excitement everyone feels in hunting down anything, from game to human beings, the intrepid young fellow did not hesitate to even steal softly on tiptoe down the companion-ladder, with the intention of listening outside the cabin door.

The stairs creaked loudly as he descended them, and kept him in agonies of suspense, lest he should attract their attention.

He was half-way down, and already the voices sounded louder and more distinct, when he caught his foot in a knot in one of

the stairs, and, losing his balance, pitched head-foremost down them, falling with a mighty crash.

CHAPTER IV.

WALTER'S SCUFFLE WITH COLTER AND THE HINDOO—HE ESCAPES TO THE DECK, SLIPS, AND STUMBLES OVERBOARD—PICKED UP BY WATCHMEN—THE POLICE RAISE THE HUE-AND-CRY—COLTER ARRESTED—THE TRIAL BEFORE THE MAGISTRATE—THE PRISONER'S DECLARATION—WALTER'S AWFUL DOUBTS—CAN COLTER BE INNOCENT?

Walter struck his head rather badly against the bulkhead, and lay stunned and helpless, and the next moment the cabin door flew open and out rushed Colter and the Hindoo.

"By Heaven, it is some cursed 'tec!" panted the former; while the latter, with a face white from terror, fell back against the door for support.

"Ah! he is stunned! Quick, Sulajee, help me! Let us get him inside the cabin. We must bind and leave him there, and I must get away as soon as possible."

"Oh, sahib—sahib, I knew it must come to this!" groaned the Hindoo.

"Don't be a fool, man, but help me! You won't see your old master's son taken, will you?"

"Oh, sahib—sahib!" moaned the terrified Hindoo.

But he stepped forward to help his companion nevertheless, and between them they lifted the unconscious reporter, and carried him into the cabin. They threw him down on the floor and began to hunt round for ropes to bind him. When Walter's senses returned, he attempted to rise to his feet; but, with a cry of fury, Colter turned at the noise he made and threw himself upon him.

Walter struggled desperately to free himself, and tried to shout for help; but his antagonist was a powerful man, and compressed his throat with strangling force.

"Quick, Sulajee, lend a hand! By heavens, I will throttle the life out of him before I am taken!"

The Hindoo hastened to his companion's assistance; but, with the strength born of despair, Walter struck out fiercely with his clenched fist, catching Colter full in the face and knocking him backwards.

Then, ere the ruffian could recover himself, the reporter leaped to his feet. But like a cat Sulajee launched himself upon him.

Walter met him with a terrific blow full in the face, and sent him reeling, then with a bound reached the door, and darted up the companion-ladder.

He gained the deck, and rushed towards the side, to suddenly slip his foot and fall against the low bulwarks. In vain he attempted to recover his balance.

Tottering backwards, he tumbled overboard, and fell between the schooner's side and the wharf, just as Colter and Sulajee rushed upon deck.

With a loud splash Walter struck the black water, and sank deep below the surface. He was a powerful swimmer, however, and, with ready presence of mind, dived deeper still, and swam far out under water, so as not to strike his head against the keel of the vessel.

He came to the surface well into the middle of the basin, and, guessing that there would be steps at the lower end, he made in that direction.

With considerable difficulty in the inky darkness, he found them at last; but he was now so utterly exhausted by his efforts that he was barely able to drag himself on to them. Some time elapsed before he had sufficiently recovered to mount to the quay and stagger towards the dock-gates. He tumbled over coils of rope and heaps of rubbish in the dark, finally falling upon his face and knocking his head again rather badly. His senses once more left him, and he lay for nearly an hour where he had fallen.

He was found by some watchmen, who carried him to the policeman's hut, and brought him round after some time. Then, when memory reasserted itself, he told his extraordinary tale to those around; but at first they thought he was wandering in his mind.

When at last he got them to credit his story much valuable time had been lost, and he learned from the officer on duty that two men—one a Hindoo—had passed out over an hour ago. The man added that the pair certainly seemed in great haste.

A couple more police-officers were summoned; but they, too, seemed inclined to look with suspicion upon Walter's story.

Eventually, however, they agreed to accompany him to the nearest police-station, and here again he related his startling adventure.

The inspector in charge was a shrewd-headed man. He saw

that, though somewhat excited, Walter was in nowise intoxicated; so, though he scarcely knew what to make of it all, he determined to detain the reporter until the morning, while our hero, knowing that nothing could be done to capture Colter or the Hindoo that night, was perfectly willing to stop in the station.

He employed the time in writing out a full and graphic account of his night's adventures, and the clue he had worked upon, not only for the benefit of the police, but also for his own, recognising, with the true journalistic instinct, what magnificent "copy" they would make. He already saw in his mind's eye the contents' bill, or placard, of the "Budget" bearing the inscription:

**"THE KENYON MURDERER TRACKED DOWN
BY OUR OWN REPORTER!
STARTLING ADVENTURES AND SENSATIONAL
REVELATIONS!"**

The police had wired to the "Daily Budget" office, and were now satisfied as to Walter's identity, as well as to the truth of his certainly remarkable story, and early next day the whole

He was brought in custody to Hawksley, and lodged in the prison to await his trial. His accomplice, the Hindoo Sulajee, however, was still at large; but the police felt assured he could not escape arrest for long. Every ship that carried a Lascar crew was subjected to the most rigorous search, and the well-known haunts of these men were placed under police surveillance. Still, strange to say, he was not to be found.

Colter was brought up before the magistrates, and charged with the murder of Clarence Kenyon. Walter had to appear as a witness against him, and his account of how he had tracked the Hindoo to Hull, overheard the conversation of the latter with the prisoner, and his subsequent terrible adventure on the schooner "Kangaroo," created the profoundest sensation.

There was not a man present when he stepped down from the witness-box that had not already convicted Colter in his own mind as the murderer. He might not have been the actual man to present Kenyon with the poisoned gloves, that atrocious deed seemed more in keeping with the treacherous and cruel nature of an Oriental. Sulajee, the Hindoo, might have conceived the idea of poisoning the victim's gloves, and owing to his connection with the latter could easily have done so; but it seemed clear that Colter was an accessory to the crime, if not its instigator.

Other evidence was given, to the effect that the prisoner had been the bane of his uncle's life, until the latter had turned him out of doors, and that, when this happened, Colter had sworn to be revenged in some way.

There seemed not the faintest glimmer of hope for the prisoner, when all the evidence had been taken, and the magistrate sent the case to the assizes.

Throughout the trial, James Colter had preserved a demeanour which rather puzzled Walter, who scarcely took his eyes off him.

It was not the defiant, callous attitude of one practically caught red-handed, nor yet was it cringing or terrified.

Colter seemed rather stupefied with amazement and horror, as he listened to the evidence against him, and his lips twitched nervously from time to time as though he were a prey to the keenest emotion.

He had answered "Not Guilty," when asked the question, in a loud and clear voice, but there was a look of deep horror and anxiety in his large and handsome eyes.

Walter Crostyn had attended many murder trials in his professional capacity, yet he had never before seen any prisoner under such a terrible charge bear himself so strangely.

An awful doubt rushed upon the reporter's mind.

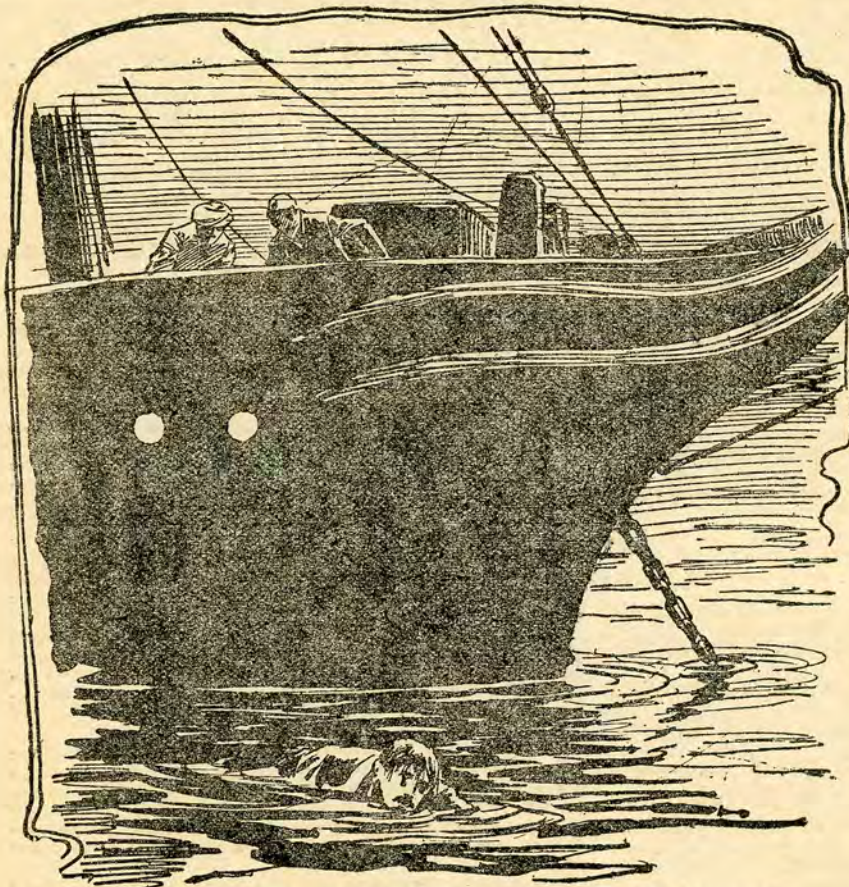
Suppose this man were not guilty, suppose he were innocent of the crime alleged against him, then he (Walter) would have it upon his conscience that he had sent the unfortunate wretch to the gallows. This thought disturbed Walter dreadfully, and he began to almost regret the part he had taken in casting the rope around the prisoner's neck.

The magistrate sent Colter for trial, as we have said, at the assizes, and the case was over.

No, not quite, for as the constables were about to remove the prisoner to the cells below, he threw off their grasp with a sudden muscular effort, and, springing forward to the front of the dock, he shouted:

"I am as guiltless of the murder of my uncle as any man in this court. I swear it before high heaven! 'Tis true, I resisted capture and would have fled the country, because—I thought I was to be arrested for another and far less serious crime. I am guiltless of murder!"

He was struggling desperately with the policemen, who had again seized him, and were attempting to drag him from the dock, while he thundered forth these words. And when he had finished speaking, he ceased struggling, and resigned himself quietly to the officers' charge.



Guessing that there would be steps at the lower end, he swam in that direction.

country was ringing with the reporter's stirring adventure. The papers were full of it, and the authorities were exerting themselves to the utmost to trace Colter and the Hindoo.

Walter experienced the highest feelings of triumph in the knowledge that it was entirely owing to his astuteness and courage that the crime had at last been fixed upon the right individuals. He returned to Hawksley a proud and self-satisfied man, and he received quite an ovation from his brother journalists and fellow-townsmen.

He felt that his work was done, and he could now leave the pursuit of the murderers to the police.

A couple of days later, it was stated in all the papers that James Colter, the alleged murderer of his uncle, had been smartly detected on the Liverpool landing-stage, about to step aboard an American liner. He was cleverly disguised at the time in a false beard and moustache, and had taken out a ticket for New York.

As he disappeared from view, the magistrate rose and declared the court over, and Walter followed the other spectators into the street.

The young reporter's mind was in a perfect chaos. That last, desperate shout from the dock had strengthened tenfold the awful doubts that had arisen in his mind.

Could Colter really be innocent of his uncle's murder? Certainly circumstances were all against such a supposition. It was a very strange and ominous coincidence, if so, that the murder should have taken place at the very time when he had returned to the country after the lapse of so many years. Besides, how explain away the suspicious conversation that Walter had overheard between him and the Hindoo? Had not the latter directly even referred to the murder of his master in the course of that conversation?

Walter knew not what to think, and though he tried to reason the matter out thus, the fear grew upon him that perhaps after all there was an error of justice.

Those fiercely-shouted words as the prisoner was being dragged from the dock—"I am guiltless of murder. I resisted capture, and would have fled the country, because I thought I was to be arrested for another and less serious crime"—still rang in his ears, and haunted him the rest of the day.

CHAPTER V.

WALTER HAS ANOTHER CONSULTATION WITH HIS FRIEND HEMSWORTH—THE LATTER'S THEORY—AFTER ANOTHER VISIT TO "THE THORNS," WALTER RETURNS HOME ACROSS THE MOOR—THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT—WALTER BEHOLDS A STRANGE SCENE.

Walter Crostyn asked himself the question again and again that day, as he went about his journalistic duties, Could James Colter really be an accessory to his uncle's murder?

Everything seemed to point to that, and yet the haunting doubt grew upon him until at length it became almost a fixed conviction that the man was wholly innocent.

The Hindoo Sulajee was still at large, and the police were completely baffled in their search for him. Walter felt that if his whereabouts could be discovered, and the poisoned gloves found, there would be some hope of solving the mystery. He therefore came to the conclusion that he should not yet throw off his rôle of amateur detective, but should persist in his efforts until he had run the Hindoo also to earth, and established beyond the faintest shadow of a doubt the guilt of the right party or parties.

Finally, he decided to see Dr. Hemsworth again, and learn the result of the latter having submitted the poison to an expert.

The doctor was at home when he called, and received him cordially.

"Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Crostyn, after the first amenities, 'upon your triumph. My dear sir, Scotland Yard lost something when you took to journalism. You have reason to be one of the proudest men in England at this moment, for the whole country is ringing with commendation of your cleverness and courage. I am happy to think that I was the means of supplying you with the clue to the murderers, small help though it was."

"Doctor," was the young fellow's reply, "I am distracted with doubt, though, as to whether the police really have hold of one of the real criminals. You have read the 'Budget' this morning, I suppose. What do you think of the prisoner's words as he was being removed from the dock?"

"What were they, now? I forget. Ah, I remember! He protested his innocence, did he not? But what of that? All murderers assert their absolute innocence until they are on the very steps of the gallows. Some, indeed, even deny their guilt to the last."

"Yes, yes, doctor, I know that; but I must tell you his declaration of innocence produced the profoundest impression upon me. I have heard the words 'not guilty' before from prisoners arraigned on just such another terrible charge, but I candidly tell you they never produced such an impression upon me as this man's declaration. Oh, doctor, suppose he were really innocent, and yet sent to the scaffold, I should never forgive myself. My mind would be a living torment, for I should consider myself guilty of his blood, just as if I had deliberately murdered him."

"Pooh! pooh! Mr. Crostyn, you are over-excited, your nerves are unstrung by your recent terrible adventure. Let me feel your pulse. There, there, I knew it; your pulse is beating like a steam-hammer. You want a complete rest. The excitement of the past few days has been too much for you. You may have caught a chill from your immersion."

"No, no, I am all right, doctor, I assure you. But I feel I must get at the bottom of this mystery. I cannot rest satisfied until I have ascertained beyond a doubt whether James Colter is guilty or not guilty of his uncle's murder."

"Well, to my mind, there seems not the slightest shadow now for doubt," returned Dr. Hemsworth. "Colter may not have actually poisoned the gloves—that fiendish design seems more like the work of the Hindoo—but that he had some hand in it I am convinced, after reading the evidence."

"If the gloves could only be found," said Walter reflectively. "Bah, they never will be! Do you think for a moment that the murderers would preserve such a tell-tale clue? Of course not! They stole them that they might destroy them, that is quite clear."

"I don't know about that," said Walter hastily. "In my journalistic career I have not infrequently found that, by a strange and apparently incredible folly, murderers often preserve rather than destroy the instruments with which they committed their crimes. Whether they do so from superstitious motives or not I cannot say; but you yourself, doctor, must admit that such is the case?"

"Yes, I do."

There was a silence after this, both men being deeply occupied with their own thoughts.

Walter looked up suddenly.

"Ah, doctor, I had almost forgotten the chief object of my visit. Have you submitted the poison you found in the body to an expert yet?"

"Yes; I sent it to Dr. Temple, the well-known toxicologist. But even he seems baffled, and cannot yet say definitely what drug it is. He is of opinion, though, it comes from India, where the secret of poisons deadlier and more subtle than any we European chemists know of has been handed down among a certain class of natives from the days of the great Moguls, who used them, like the Borgias, to get rid of obnoxious individuals."

"H'm!" said Walter, thoughtfully; "could you tell me, doctor, if the dead man, Clarence Kenyon, was ever in India, or had dealings with anyone in that country?"

"Why, yes," answered Dr. Hemsworth, "he spent the greater part of his early life, I believe, in India. He was in the Civil Service out there, and, as a matter of fact, is said to have made his fortune there. That is how he came to have a Hindoo servant. Goodness knows that fellow Sulajee seemed most devoted to his master, and I would never have thought him capable of such a horrid crime! But, then, there is no trusting such people!"

"Well, doctor, I won't occupy any more of your time; but I must tell you I am determined to go on with my detective work, and, if possible, find the Hindoo."

"Yes, find him; and then you will have the murderer de facto. That is self-evident, or why on earth should he be keeping out of the way, as he is?"

"Well, good-day, doctor!"

"Good-day, and good luck! But, say, don't go courting death in your mission, as you have already done! As you won't take my advice, Mr. Crostyn, and abandon the quest, at any rate, look after yourself, and see you don't tumble into any more docks!"

That same evening Walter thought he would take a stroll round again to The Thorns, the murdered man's residence, and have a chat with the constables in possession. There was no saying what important information he might not again glean—mayhap another clue which might put him upon the track of the Hindoo.

He spent a very pleasant, but otherwise profitless, evening with the officers, who were unable to furnish him with the slightest clue, and it was nearly midnight when he took his leave of them to return home. He had to cross the moor to reach his lodgings in Hawksley, and curiosity led him to take another look at the spot where the murdered man's body had been found.

It was one of the wildest and most unfrequented parts of the moor, as we have already stated, and a man of weaker nerve would scarcely have cared to visit such a place at such a late hour, especially considering a cold-blooded, unnatural murder had been committed there.

But Walter Crostyn was above such weaknesses, and was a cynic on the matter of ghosts or supernatural occurrences.

Treading his way carefully through the bush and scrub which encumbered the ground to avoid a nasty fall, he was suddenly thunderstruck to behold a faint light glimmering ahead, immediately over the spot where the body had been found.

He came to an abrupt halt, and for a moment something very much akin to dread of the supernatural and occult did assail him, for all his boasted cynicism.

The light moved about a bit, then remained stationary a few inches above the ground, as though it had been set down by someone.

Walter quickly threw off the first feeling of dread he had experienced at sight of it, and, the belief rushing upon him that he was on the threshold of an important discovery, he crept forward through the bushes with as little noise as possible.

Presently the occasional clink of a spade or shovel reached him, and, stealing still nearer, he at last was enabled to make out by the dull light of a lantern that had been placed upon the ground the figure of a tall, powerfully built man digging up the earth.

The man had his back turned towards him, and seemed engrossed in his strange occupation; so Walter cautiously drew nearer, until he was within a dozen feet of him.

Then, springing to his feet, Walter rushed forward. The fellow heard him, and wheeled like lightning, and as he turned Walter saw that his face was covered by a mask, which left nothing but the eyes visible.

CHAPTER VI.

WALTER'S STRUGGLE WITH THE MASK—A CLUE AT LAST—MEASURING THE FOOTPRINTS—THE SPADE AND LANTERN IDENTIFIED—ARE THE BOOTMARKS TO PROVE A USELESS CLUE ALSO?

The stranger uttered a startled exclamation at the sight of the figure rushing towards him, and, springing back several paces, swung the spade he had been using above his head, as though with the intention of using it as a weapon of defence.

Walter paused, as well he might, at the sight of the fellow's ferocious aspect. He saw it would have meant certain death to have advanced upon the desperado, who could have brained him at a blow with the spade, and, like a truly brave man, the young reporter cared not to throw away his life recklessly.

"Who are you? What are you doing here at this hour of the night?" he demanded, intending, if possible, to catch the stranger off his guard.

But the other made no answer, and still preserved his murderous attitude, his eyes gleaming horribly through his misshapen mask.

Walter let his eyes travel quickly over the scene illuminated by the light of the lantern, though keeping a sharp watch upon the fellow's movements. He saw that a small hole had been dug on the very spot where the murdered man's body had been found, and lying near it were a pair of ordinary tan kid gloves.

As his gaze rested on these, an ejaculation of surprise involuntarily escaped him, and like a flash the object of this midnight burial burst upon him.

These were the missing poisoned gloves. The man before him was the murderer, and he had been about to bury the evidence of his guilt, influenced doubtless by one of those strange, unaccountable attractions which the scene of a crime is known to possess for the perpetrators, at the spot where his victim's body was found.

The revelation for the moment staggered Walter, and he forgot the peril he stood in from the man before him. The next he was conscious of his fatal error, as he looked up to see the fellow rushing upon him with uplifted spade.

He attempted to spring aside, but his foot slipped on the soft, newly turned-up earth, and he fell upon one knee. The fall was providential, for it saved his life.

The spade swung through the air, but instead of the sharp, cutting edge laying open his skull, the wooden handle caught him on the shoulder, bruising it severely, however, and knocking him backwards.

He threw out his hands to save himself, and clutched the spade-handle. To this he clung, and, with a quick tug, wrenched it from his assailant's grasp.

The fellow thereupon turned at once and fled into the darkness, and, scrambling to his feet, Walter threw away the spade and gave chase.

But the moor was pitch-dark, after the faint illumination of the lantern, and he could not see for a minute or two. On the soft earth, too, the footprints of the fugitive made no sound, and Walter, after running on in the direction taken by the fugitive for some distance without again catching sight of him, was constrained to abandon all hope of capturing him.

He returned to the scene of his strange adventure, and found the gloves and lantern lying beside the hole in the ground, as he had left them. Taking up the gloves rather gingerly, for there was no saying but that some of the awful poison was still upon them, he wrapped them in his handkerchief, then picked up the lantern and spade, and was about to leave the spot, when he saw a maze of footprints trodden in the soft soil that had been turned up.

Instantly he recognised in these a possible clue to the identity of his strange assailant. Why not take the measurement of the bootmarks?

Some, he knew, must be his own; but it would be easy to distinguish these from the others.

Taking a piece of string from his pocket, he first measured one of his boots, and then applied the measure to one of the footprints which he believed to be his own. It was the exact

measurement; and taking one of another pair close by, he found that that impression was fully an inch and a half longer.

Satisfied that this was one of the ruffian's footprints, he thereupon took the exact measurement of it, and noticed also, to his extreme gratification, that there were the impressions of several hobnails in the toe, and a sort of iron tip, or boot-protector, on the inner side of the heel. He found the partner of the bootmark was exactly the same, with the single exception that in this case there was a hobnail less, and no impression of a tip, or boot-protector, on the heel.

Walter was jubilant. He felt he had lighted upon a clue indeed—one even more valuable than the poisoned gloves themselves. Once more taking up the lantern and spade, he quitted the spot and returned to the village. The whole place was wrapped in silence as of the grave, and, wondering vaguely who his assailant on the moor could possibly have been, he let himself into his lodgings with his latchkey.

The mask was a tall and powerfully built man, so he could not possibly be the Hindoo, Sulajee, who was small and thin. Moreover, his hands had been those of a white man.

Had Walter not known James Colter to be lying in one of her Majesty's bridewells, he might have believed the stranger to be he, for there was a certain resemblance in the height and build.

It was clear, then, that in continuing the search for Sulajee he was on the wrong scent. This mysterious individual, if not the actual murderer, must be, at any rate, very closely connected with the latter.

Walter decided that his next move should be to try and trace the fellow. He had several valuable clues, which might lead to the man's identity, in his possession. First of all, there was the lantern, and then the spade. The ownership of both these articles must be discovered, and might lead to the unmasking of the real criminal.

The most important clue of all, of course, would prove the bootmarks, for it would be very easy for a man to steal a lantern or spade.

Walter examined both these last-mentioned articles in his room, but found neither name nor mark upon them that might give him a hint as to their ownership. It was well into the morning before he retired to rest, and the consequence was he slept rather soundly till a late hour next day.

After breakfast he repaired at once to his friend Dr. Hemsworth, and found that gentleman just on the point of setting off on his morning round. The medical man greeted him with a smile and a cheery:

"Well, Mr. Crostyn, how are you? Have you discovered any traces of the Hindoo yet? Not fallen into any more docks, I hope, eh?"

"No, no, doctor!" answered Walter, laughing. "But I have had another rather strange adventure."

"The deuce you have! Come, jump in with me, and you can tell me all about it as we go."

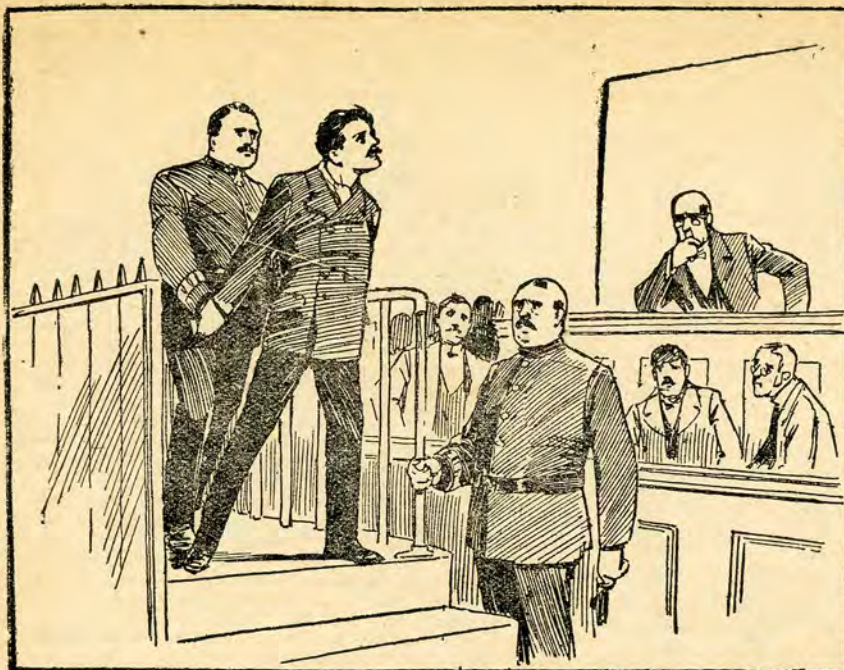
Walter obeyed, and as they rode along side by side he informed the doctor of his encounter with the mysterious stranger on the moor the previous night, and, as may be imagined, Hemsworth was thunderstruck.

"By Jove, Mr. Crostyn!" he ejaculated, "you certainly have got some clues this time! You ought to be able to find the fellow now. You say he was too big for the Hindoo. H'm! I suppose he must be in league with Sulajee and Colter. By Jove! there seems a regular gang, and it strikes me now there was more in the murder of my poor old friend than appears on the surface. It seems as if there was a perfect conspiracy against him. My poor old friend Kenyon—my poor old friend!"

"I am in hopes, doctor, the spade and lantern will lead to the identification of the mask, and then my measurement and description of his bootmarks would bring his guilt directly home to him. Will I tell you what my own firm conviction is now?"

It is that James Colter, at any rate, is not in any way concerned with the murder of his uncle, and that I have all the time been on the wrong track. Thank Heaven, I have found out my mistake ere it was too late! I might have sent an innocent man to the scaffold!"

"I don't know so much about that," observed the doctor. "To me it looks very much like a conspiracy, in which several individuals are concerned. James Colter is the only man who could possibly benefit by his uncle's death, and it is palpable the Hindoo was in secret collusion with him. The fellow you had your strange adventure with last night being also mixed up in the affair certainly makes it very complicated. Well, this is the house of one of my patients, so I will wish you good-day. I trust that you will be able to trace the owner of the spade and lantern, and I don't see why you should not. By the by, what will you do with the gloves? If you like, you can bring them over to my place to-night, and I'll make an analysis of the poison, if any is still left upon them. I should like to, for I am



"I am as guiltless of murder as any man in this court. I swear it!"

naturally curious to discover what the drug employed could possibly have been composed of."

Walter promised to do so, and they parted.

Bending his steps now in the direction of the police-station, Walter was soon busy detailing his latest adventure to the inspector in charge. A couple of constables afterwards accompanied him home, and brought away the spade and lantern, the ownership of which they meant to trace, if possible, without delay.

The scene of Walter's adventure with the mask was also visited, and the constables also took note of the footprints, which were still visible in the soft soil surrounding the hole that had been dug.

Walter returned with the officers to the station, and was considerably surprised to learn that the spade and lantern had already been identified. A farmer had been, with a complaint that his barn had been entered by someone in the night, and a spade and lantern stolen. The inspector had at once shown the man those Walter had captured, and the farmer, without the slightest hesitation, had identified them as his property.

So Walter's hope that these utensils might have led to the discovery of the mysterious mask was dashed to the ground; but still there were the boot-marks. These after all might result in some valuable discovery, for the farmer made no allusion whatever to the loss of any boots.

Still, from the impressions, it was clear these had been made by such boots as farm-labourers wear, and Walter and the police were now inclined not to place very much hope even upon them, for the boots, like the spade and lantern, might also turn out to be stolen property.

CHAPTER VII.

WALTER OBTAINS AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES COLTER IN HIS CELL—THE LATTER'S STORY—HIS STARTLING DISCLOSURE—CAN COLTER'S THEORY BE THE CORRECT ONE?—IF SO, WHO IS THE MYSTERIOUS MASK?—MYSTERY UPON MYSTERY.

Walter Crostyn had now his fortnight's holiday in which to prosecute his search for the murderer of Clarence Kenyon.

Through the kindness of the police authorities, he had obtained an interview with James Colter in his cell, and the latter had earnestly protested his complete innocence of the terrible charge hanging over his head.

"Mr. Crostyn," he said, "believe me, you were on the wrong scent when you were after me for the murder of my uncle. Listen! Bend lower, and if you promise not to reveal my secret, I will give you the reason why I dreaded capture, and why I would have made you a prisoner in my cabin that night."

Walter was a shrewd reader of character, and he felt instinctively now that he had wronged this man in thinking him

capable of even the faintest complicity in such a dastardly crime as the murder of his uncle. Reckless, ne'er-do-weel, James Colter might have been, a man of fierce and sudden passions he might even still be, but a cold-blooded, treacherous murderer—no!

With something like curiosity, therefore, Walter bent his ear to the prisoner's lips, and the latter whispered:

"Remember, I trust to your honour not to reveal what I am going to tell you. The real reason why my uncle turned me out of doors and threatened to disinherit me was because I had been scoundrel enough at the time to rob him of a large sum, and also forge his name to an even greater amount. He threatened if ever I returned to this country to hand me over to the authorities for the theft and forgery, and he was always a man of his word. He gave me twenty-four hours to clear out, or he would set the law upon my track, and, knowing the man I had to deal with, I fled to Australia.

"After his wife's death I thought, perhaps, he had forgiven me, and I determined to return and ask his pardon. I was prevented, however, from returning to England until a week or two ago—until, indeed, a couple of days before the murder took place.

"I came up to Hawksley from Hull to see him, and I am sorry to say my visit had not the result I had hoped. He was as fierce and bitter against me as ever; he struck me—yes, struck me across the face with his walking-stick, and had not the Hindoo Sulajee come between us, I would in my passion have returned the blow, for I was so carried away by anger that I forgot he was an old man. My uncle stormed, and vowed that he would communicate with the authorities at once, and have me arrested as a thief and forger.

"I left 'The Thorns,' and returned to my ship in Hull, fearing hourly that he would put his threat into execution and have me arrested. When I heard of his death and alleged murder, I assure you I was dreadfully shocked. Sulajee, his faithful valet, who had always been a kind friend to me, and screened many of my misdeeds in the past, came to me and urged me to fly, as the police were on my track for the murder. The poor fellow himself seemed to imagine that I really was guilty of the crime, and urged me to leave the country at once.

"I myself, too, feared that if I were arrested on suspicion I should stand a very ugly chance of being convicted, for I realised that appearances were all against me. My presence in the country at the very time of the enactment of the tragedy, my visit and quarrel with my uncle the night before—everything would seem to point to me as the perpetrator; and that was why I would have resorted to the desperate measure of making you a prisoner, so that I might have time to get safely away. I can scarcely expect you to believe my story, but, as Heaven will be my judge, I swear to you it is the truth!"

"But supposing what you tell me is true," said Walter, "why should the Hindoo Sulajee be still keeping out of the way of the police? Do you think it possible he is the murderer? The dastardly nature of the murder is in keeping with the reputation his race bear for treacherous and insidious crime, and the peculiar method of poisoning employed, too, would seem to point to him."

"No, no, I would stake my life on Sulajee's fidelity and honesty. You are mistaken wholly in imagining he could be guilty of such a horrible act. He was one of the mildest, kindest of men.

"He loved his master, my uncle, as a dog might have done, and yet such was his unswerving fidelity to our family that even though he seemed to imagine it was I who murdered the old man, he would have saved me even at the risk of bringing suspicion upon himself. No, I feel confident the reason why he is keeping out of the way is because he believes me to be guilty, and knows that if forced to tell the truth in a court of justice his tale would form the most damning link in the chain of evidence against me. No, no, Sulajee is as innocent of any complicity in the murder as a child unborn, though the poor, foolish fellow seems to believe that I am guilty."

"And if Sulajee, who knew you from a boy, should believe

you capable of so horrid a crime, how can you expect me to believe in your innocence?" demanded Walter.

The other's face flushed hotly, and an angry light flashed from his eyes.

"I expect nothing of the kind!" he answered sharply. "I gave you the facts for what they are worth. You can believe or reject them, as you think fit. But I would ask you where do you think I, a ne'er-do-weel always, who have been roving the sea ever since I left England, would procure a pair of poisoned gloves from?"

"I don't know. Sailing to foreign countries, I should say you may have easily enough picked up a knowledge of the deadly poisons in use amongst the natives. Were you ever in India?"

"Yes; I have been in Bombay and Calcutta. Now if I were guilty, I would have told you a lie, but I don't. I tell you candidly I have been in India, though I know that the expert toxicologist, Dr. Temple, has given it as his opinion that the drug used comes from that country. I will go even further. What would you say, if I told you I could give you the name and fullest information about this particular poison?"

Walter started back in the profoundest amazement, and fairly gasped.

"You can tell me that?"

"Yes; it is a drug that is practically unknown to modern scientists. I doubt if even Dr. Temple ever heard of it."

Walter could only stand in speechless bewilderment as the prisoner made his daring and terribly suspicious disclosure.

"The drug," continued Colter, "is obtained by the Hindoo fakirs from a certain rare but very venomous species of snake met with in the unexplored and totally unknown country of Thibet. My uncle, as you may have heard, lived for some time in India, and there learned the secret of this most virulent poison. It was said that it was the identical drug which the Great Moguls in ancient times used to get rid of their enemies, for such was its terrible power for evil, that if any article of apparel was saturated with it, it was certain death for a man to wear that article. My uncle was something of a scientist himself, and was curious to analyse the poison and give the result to the world in the interests of science.

"But that he did not do so is quite evident. Perhaps he was anxious to make the analysis himself, so that he might claim the full credit of the discovery. Anyhow, it is my own firm conviction that the secret of his own supposed murder is—he accidentally poisoned himself by wearing gloves that in some way had become impregnated with the fearful stuff."

This was a new light upon the mysterious affair, and with full force the possibility that such a theory might be the real solution of the mystery struck Walter at once. Yes, it was quite feasible. Accepting Colter's statement as true, Clarence Kenyon might very easily by accident have unwittingly caused his own death.

But then, like a flash, Walter remembered his strange encounter with the mask on the moor. Who was that mysterious individual, and why had he wished to bury the poisoned gloves? Why also had he gone to the trouble of stealing these, if not for the purpose of getting rid of evidence which incriminated himself?

No, Walter perceived at once that the theory of Clarence Kenyon having caused his own death through accident must fall to the ground. That could not be the solution to the mystery after all.

Some other person must have known of the deadly nature of the poison, and as this thought suggested itself, Walter turned and asked:

"Do you know if the secret of this drug in your uncle's possession was known to anyone else besides you and the Hindoo Sulajee?"

"No, I do not think so," replied Colter, "for he preserved the secret most religiously. You see, he was anxious to make a thorough analysis of it first himself, as he was a bit of a dabbler in chemistry. It was only by the purest chance that I myself discovered it, and he told me the secret then to prevent my meddling with it at any time. He made me swear then not to reveal what he had told me until he had completed his researches, and was able to give them to the world. No one else, I feel sure, with the exception of Sulajee, knew of the drug's terrible power. That is why I suppose Sulajee suspected me of a hand

in the old man's death. I myself, though, am confident, as I said, that Clarence Kenyon was the cause of his own death."

Walter did not explain to the prisoner that he had good cause to believe that such was not the true theory, and, after a little more conversation, which in no wise tended to throw any further light on the mystery, the reporter left the cell.

CHAPTER VIII.

WALTER IS PUZZLED—HE ENTERS HIS ROOMS TO FIND THEM RANSACKED—ATTACKED BY THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER—HE IS STUNNED, AND THE VILLAIN FIRES THE PREMISES—AT DEATH'S DOOR—SULAJEE TO THE RESCUE.

To say that Walter Crostyn was puzzled is but to feebly express the bewilderment he felt as he left the prison, after his interview with James Colter.

The latter's theory was most plausible, and had it not been for that masked stranger Walter would doubtless have seized upon it as the true reading of the mystery surrounding Clarence Kenyon's death. But that man's appearance on the scene upset such a theory, and would seem to point to foul play.

Walter let himself into his lodgings, and was about to ascend to his rooms on the second floor, when his landlady came out of her kitchen, and informed him there was a gentleman upstairs waiting to see him.

"He said his business with you, sir, was most important, and that he would wait until you came in. As he said you knew him, I took him up to your sitting-room."

Walter wondered who his visitor could be, and, running lightly upstairs, opened the door of the sitting-room. To his astonishment, no one was there; the room was empty.

The door communicating with the bedroom beyond, however, was ajar, and as he entered the sitting-room he heard a slight scrambling noise inside this inner apartment.

A vague suspicion at once crossed his mind. What right had his visitor, whoever he was, to enter his bedroom?

Gliding quickly to the door of the inner apartment, he was thunderstruck to behold the whole place thrown into the utmost confusion and disorder. Drawers had been pulled out, and their contents littered the floor; his portmanteau and travelling-bag lay open before him.

He uttered a low cry of mingled surprise and fury, and took a step forward into the room. As he did so, a tall form sprang upon him from behind the chest of drawers, and dealt a terrific blow at his head with some clublike weapon.



A tall form sprang upon him from behind the chest of drawers.

The involuntary start Walter gave as the man leaped out saved him from being struck upon the skull, but the weapon—a clubbed revolver—caught him instead on the left shoulder, almost dislocating it.

Recovering quickly from the blow, the young reporter grappled with his antagonist, and as the latter attempted again to strike him with the pistol-butt, caught the fellow's wrist in mid-air.

Walter saw that his assailant was a perfect stranger to him, tall and well-built, with a heavy black beard covering the lower part of his face, almost to his eyes. An intuitive feeling rose within his breast that this was none other than the mask whom he had encountered on the moor, and he felt that he had now the actual murderer of Clarence Kenyon before him.

Forgetting in his excitement to shout for help, Walter struggled desperately with the man, who uttered not a word himself; but his grip was like iron, his thighs of steel, and Walter realised he had a very powerful man to contend with.

The stranger endeavoured to free the hand which clutched the revolver, and, failing that, seized Walter by the throat with his other hand, and tried to throttle him.

But our hero was by no means a weakling, and the two, locked in each other's embrace, staggered about the room, each putting forth all the wrestling tricks he knew to throw the other.

Walter's foot caught in one of the garments that lay scattered about the floor, and it tripped him up. He reeled, and for a moment relaxed his grip upon the other's wrist, and, with an inarticulate cry, his antagonist freed the hand that held the pistol, and drew it back to strike again at his head.

Walter tried to evade the impending blow, but in vain. The weapon caught him upon the side of the skull, and beat him, sick and half stunned, to his knees. Still, with his senses reeling, the intrepid reporter clutched his opponent round the legs, and tried to throw him down.

Again his dastardly assailant swung the pistol high, again the butt-end descended upon Walter's unprotected head, and, with a groan, the latter let go his grip and rolled over senseless at the other's feet.

The stranger gave a low cry of satisfaction.

"Curse him!" he growled, as he surveyed the prostrate figure; "he might have succeeded in overpowering me, and then the whole game would be up! I must run no more such risks. Where, in the name of all that's evil, can he have hidden those gloves? By Heaven, I must find them at all costs! And yet, no; why should I bother about them? They can reveal nothing. No, I must not linger. Ah! I have it! A grand idea!"

The ruffianly stranger sprang towards the writing-table, upon which stood a large reading-lamp. Quickly unscrewing the burner, he poured the oil in the vessel all over the bedclothes; then, pulling out a box of matches from his pocket, he struck a light, and deliberately set fire to the now highly inflammable material.

It caught like tinder, and a great sheet of flame at once leaped up, threatening to shortly envelop the whole bed.

With a last look of malice and savage exultation at the unconscious form on the floor, the incendiary made for the door, shut it softly behind him, and, with a low, mirthless laugh, crossed the sitting-room and passed out on to the lobby.

"Ho, ho! I have settled you now, Walter Crostyn!" he muttered. "Well, you brought your fate on your own head by interfering in what did not concern you."

Aloud he called:

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Crostyn! Oh, no, thanks! you need not trouble to see me out. I can find the door all right. Good-day!"

Then the wily and murderous scoundrel descended the stairs, opened the front door, and quietly passed out into the street.

There were not many people about, and, walking sharply, he turned a corner and disappeared.

Walter Crostyn lay without motion upon the floor of the bedroom, while the flames spread noiselessly and swiftly, until they enveloped the whole of the bed, and were licking up the walls in great tongues.

The flooring caught, and began to crackle briskly; the pictures on the walls also took fire, and, falling upon some of the clothes and other inflammable articles strewing the carpet, set these in a blaze.

Dense, choking smoke filled the place, and still Walter lay senseless, oblivious of his terrible peril. But a few more minutes, and he must inevitably be suffocated where he lay.

There came shouts of "Fire! fire!" from the street, immediately followed by thundering knocks on the hall door. A dead silence; then more, and even louder, knocks and shouts from the streets. The landlady was heard hurrying to the door to open it, and presently amidst a hubbub of voices were to be distinguished her terrified screams.

Heavy footsteps came bounding up the stairs, and a loud knocking ensued upon Walter's sitting-room door.

It was flung open, and the rescuers, crossing the floor to the bedroom door, beneath which the smoke was pouring forth in dense clouds, threw open that also; but only to recoil, as a choking volume of smoke met them full.

The whole room beyond seemed in a blaze, and the group stood horrified and hesitating, none seeming to know what to do under the circumstances.

Someone cried, "Send to the fire-station!" and two or three rushed off to do so.

Such was the smoke which came pouring out of the bedroom that the men were obliged to beat a retreat to the top of the stairs, and there they stood talking, instead of making some effort to get the flames under control, while they could hear the woodwork within the bedroom crackling furiously.

Suddenly another man came rushing up the stairs—a man with a black skin. It was the Hindoo, Sulajee, wearing false whiskers, and dressed as a European.

Slipping, with the agility of a cat, through the hesitating group around the sitting-room door, he bent his body double, and, pressing a cloth or handkerchief tightly over his mouth and nostrils, plunged boldly into the very thick of the blinding smoke.

A cry of mingled horror and admiration went up from the terrified group.

"He will be burned to death! He cannot breathe inside there!" gasped several.

Then silence fell upon all, until at length another of the spectators, inspired by the heroism and self-devotion of the Hindoo, sprang forward and disappeared also in the smoke. Courage is infectious, and two or three others followed him; and presently out again through the choking vapour came staggering the gallant rescuers, carrying between them the apparently lifeless form of Walter.

A shout of joy went up from the group upon the stairs, and the young reporter was carried down and out into the cool, fresh air, just as there came the rumble of wheels and the clatter of horses' hoofs up the street. It was the fire-engine; and while several of the firemen surrounded Walter, and set to work to resuscitate him, others entered the house to try and extinguish the flames.

"Where is the noble fellow who saved him?" demanded several voices.

And those who had afterwards taken part in the work of rescue turned to try and find the Hindoo. But he had disappeared as quickly and as mysteriously as he had come.

A form pushed through the crowd and approached the group of firemen trying to revive Walter. It was Dr. Hemsworth, and he at once employed his medical skill to bring his friend round.

CHAPTER IX.

WALTER'S ASSAILANT NOT TO BE TRACED—WHAT ARE THE POLICE DOING?—WALTER MAKES A STARTLING DISCOVERY—THE CLUE OF THE BOOTMARKS—THE REAL MURDERER UNMASKED AT LAST—EXPLANATIONS AND CONCLUSION.

Under the skilful treatment of Dr. Hemsworth, Walter presently began to show signs of returning consciousness, and the ambulance having been brought, he was removed to the doctor's own residence, which was close by.

He was laid on a couch in the surgery, and then the ambulance-men withdrew, leaving him with his friend Hemsworth.

Walter soon opened his eyes, and was able to sit up, whereupon the doctor poured him out a glass of brandy, and told him to drink it off. He obeyed, and in a very few minutes felt as right as the mail again.

"My dear friend," said the doctor then, "you had a very narrow escape from death that time! Had you been left in that room a few minutes longer, you would have been a corpse! Tell me how it all happened."

Walter, in rather a faint voice still from weakness, related his thrilling experience, and Dr. Hemsworth fell back in his chair dumbfounded with horror and amazement.

"Good heavens!" gasped the medical man, when he could sufficiently recover his breath, after the sensational recital, "can such villainy be? I see it all now! That scoundrel who attacked you is the murderer of my poor old friend Clarence Kenyon! He was after the poisoned gloves, and when he stunned you he must have set fire to the room, though whether by accident or design I suppose will never be known. My dear fellow, you have had a most miraculous escape, and if I were you, after this last experience, I should give up the idea of hunting down this villain. He is certainly a desperate and unscrupulous ruffian, and will not hesitate to commit even another murder to evade detection!"

"No, doctor," answered Walter; "the villain's attempt on my life has only made me the more determined to run him to earth. I will unmask and find him yet! Remember, an innocent man is at present lying under suspicion of his crime."

"I cannot imagine who the ruffian is," said the doctor reflectingly. "I did not know Clarence Kenyon had an enemy in the world, and yet it is evident this mysterious individual must have had some cause for hatred. From the fellow's acquaintance with this terrible and unknown drug, I should imagine he is no ordinary criminal."

Walter then gave his friend the gist of his conversation with James Colter, and Dr. Hemsworth was considerably astonished.

"Clarence Kenyon must, indeed, have kept this drug a great secret," he said, "for though he and I were on the most intimate terms since his wife's death, he never as much as hinted of it to me. I must say that the theory Colter advanced seems very plausible; but, of course, as you say, it falls to the ground at once in the face of your encounters with this mysterious individual. I suppose you will supply the police with a description of the ruffian's personal appearance? It would be the best thing to do, and then he cannot very well escape."

"Yes, such is my intention," returned Walter. "I will go and lodge the information at once."

But though the police raised the "hue and cry" after the incendiary and supposed murderer immediately, no trace of him whatever could be discovered. The booking-clerk at the railway station was positive no such man had taken a ticket at his office, and though a reward of £500 was offered for any information that might lead to his capture, no one came forward with even the meagrest scrap of news.

Walter's thrilling experience naturally created the greatest sensation, and the cry of the newspapers everywhere was where were the police, and what were our detectives doing that they could not trace a man, whose personal appearance was now so well known.

Walter lost nearly every thing in the fire, for before the firemen had been able to get it under his rooms had been gutted.

The poisoned gloves had been burned with the other articles, for Walter afterwards found charred and shrivelled remnants of them in the place he had hidden them. Upon these remnants, though, were several huge purple stains, which Walter felt sure were produced by the heat acting upon the poison.

He determined to preserve them that these stains might be examined by an expert; but first of all he would submit them to the inspection of his friend, Dr. Hemsworth, and accordingly repaired to the latter's residence a day or so later.

Hemsworth was not in, the "buttons" told him, but he was expected in to dinner every moment. Walter said he would wait for him, and was shown into the handsomely furnished waiting-room.

To while away the time, he went round the room admiring the paintings on the wall, when the half open door of a large cupboard in one corner caught his eye.

Something—a feeling he could never even afterwards analyse—prompted him to take a look inside the cupboard. Several rough, homespun garments hung from hooks, and above these was a shelf upon which were a pair of thick-soled, hob-nailed boots.

At sight of these Walter started. They were just such a pair as would make the impressions he had found in the soft earth around the hole the mysterious mask had dug on the moor.

With a vague, yet terrible suspicion fastening upon him, Walter reached down the boots, and turned up the soles.

He almost dropped them in his horror and amazement, as he saw at a glance that one of the boots had a boot-protector on the inner side of the heel, while the other had not, and, further, that on the latter there was a hobnail less.

Great heavens, what awful discovery was he on the threshold of? These, without the faintest shadow of a doubt were the boots worn by the mask on the moor.

He had the piece of string, with which he had taken the measurement of the bootmarks in his pocket, and in an instant he had found it and applied it to one of the boots.

It was the exact measurement.

Walter reeled, his brain was on fire. What, oh heavens, what did this awful discovery mean? Could it be that his supposed friend, Dr. Hemsworth, the man whom he had taken so much into his confidence—could it be that he was the murderer of Clarence Kenyon?

Like a flash, Walter now recognised the coarse, homespun garments before him as those worn by both the mask on the moor, and the dastardly assailant who had left him to be burned to death in his bedroom.

Greatly excited now, Walter determined to search the pockets of the clothes before him, and plunged his hand into the bulging side-pockets of the coat. He drew forth from one a black, crape mask, and from the other a false wig and beard.

He need search no further; he had discovered damning evidence of his supposed friend's guilt.

As he stood thus, petrified with horror at the very thought

that such terrible duplicity and treachery could be, he heard the outer door open. There was a heavy tread in the hall, then the door of the waiting-room opened, and Dr. Hemsworth stood upon the threshold.

"Mr. Crostyn," he was beginning, when suddenly he caught sight of the mask and false beard in the young reporter's hands, and his face became an ashen grey.

"What—what have you—what do you mean, sir, by going to that cupboard? By the eternal, I—"

He did not finish his sentence, but rushed at Walter, with a fearful, murderous light in his eyes.

"Stand back, Dr. Hemsworth!" cried Walter, facing him fearlessly. "Murderer, you are unmasked at last!"

"I will kill you!" came the words struggling through the doctor's clenched teeth, as he sprang upon our hero like a tiger.

Walter hit out with his fist, but only caught him on the chest, and the next moment the two had closed, and were struggling as fiercely together as they had before in the reporter's bedroom. Walter was borne backwards by the very fury of his assailant's onslaught, and the two fell crashing over a chair.

Walter was undermost, and sustained a cruel knock upon the back of the head from concussion with the floor, and half-stunned, his limbs were for a moment powerless. Hemsworth uttered a glad cry, and, breaking from his antagonist's nerveless grasp, sprang to his feet.

He made a rush to a desk in a corner of the room, tore open one of the drawers, and snatched forth a revolver, just as Walter was struggling to his feet.

"By Heaven, I shall not be taken alive!" cried the now desperate ruffian.

With that he placed the revolver-muzzle to his right temple, and ere the horrified reporter could spring forward to prevent it, pressed the trigger.

There was a sharp report, and Dr. Hemsworth fell to the floor, killed by his own hand.

Great was the horror and amazement created, not merely in Hawksley but throughout all England, when it was given to the world that the murderer of Clarence Kenyon had been the latter's supposed friend, Dr. Hemsworth, a man upon whom not the slightest breath of suspicion had even rested.

Amongst the suicide's papers was found a diary, which was produced at the inquest, and from which the coroner read extracts. These went to prove that Hemsworth had for long nourished vengeful and bitter feelings against the man to whom he professed undying friendship.

It appeared they had both loved the one woman, and Hemsworth had never in his secret heart forgiven Clarence Kenyon for winning her. The latter, ignorant of Hemsworth's enmity, had told him the secret of the mysterious drug he had brought from India, and the treacherous ruffian had seen in this an excellent means of disposing of the object of his hate without any risk to himself.

He had contrived to borrow a bottle of the poison on the pretext of analysing it, and then to accomplish his dastardly purpose during one of his visits to "The Thorns" was the easiest thing in the world. The poison did not perform its deadly work at once, but twenty-four hours' after, and Clarence Kenyon may or may not have experienced pain.

Of course, James Colter was at once liberated, and now the Hindoo, Sulajee, came forward boldly, no longer fearing capture. As Colter had suspected, the Hindoo gave as his reason for keeping out of the way of the police in so suspicious a manner, that he had really believed his master's nephew had committed the crime, and he had no wish, by his evidence, to bring the latter to the gallows.

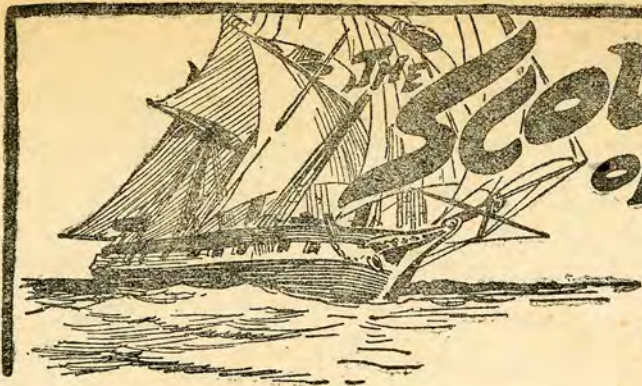
Walter Crostyn was made the lion of the day; the papers rang with his exploit, and the circulation of the "Hawksley Daily Budget," for which he wrote a long and stirring account of his adventures, went up to astounding figures.

The charred gloves, and the bottles of the deadly poison found in Clarence Kenyon's house, were submitted to Dr. Temple; but whatever the result of that expert toxicologist's analysis, he refused in the interests of humanity to make known the results, and so to this day the name of that dreadful poison is known only to one or two eminent scientists in this country.

THE END.

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THE SCOURGE OF THE SEAS.

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 captain and the middy both die; the others are rescued by the "Resolute." Captain Featherstone makes Frank a middy. Bill tells him that our hero's name is Franks.

The "Resolute" meets a French frigate. She refuses to stop when called upon, so Captain Featherstone orders his men to fire at her.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS—THE SECOND LIEUTENANT TO THE FORE—QUACKO AGAIN TO THE RESCUE.

The din of the "Resolute's" broadside had scarcely subsided, when there came an answering thunder from the Frenchman.

No longer able to fly, she was showing her teeth at last, and teeth that bit, too, for, as a storm of round, grape, and canister swept across the "Resolute's" deck, many a brave fellow fell never to rise again.

The boatswain at the helm had fallen, with his head completely severed from his body by a round-shot; but almost before he had touched the deck his place was taken by Bill Woshem, who, like an old warhorse that scents the fray, had thrown off his weakness, and stood with his guiding hand upon the helm, steering the brave vessel on to battle and victory.

The French had no time to repeat their broadside when the "Resolute" ranged up alongside.

Grappling-irons were thrown out, and, boarding-pikes and cutlasses in hand, the British tars stood awaiting the word of command to precipitate themselves into the fight.

Nor was the word long in coming. The two vessels grated together with a jar which shook them both from stem to stern.

"Clear away the nettings! Forward, my lads!"

The captain himself, sword in hand, leaped upon the quarter-deck hammocks of the "Resolute" and cheered his men on.

And the men themselves, with a ringing cheer, thronged like bees into the rigging, chains, and hammocks of their opponent.

And strange to say that among the foremost of them, with bared head, pale, set face, and flashing sword, was none other than the little second lieutenant of the "Resolute."

"Bravo! There is more stuff in the fellow than I thought!" cried Captain Featherstone.

But Lord Eustace's bravery came near to costing him dear, for as he sprang, waving his sword above his head, on to the quarter-deck of the Frenchman, the French captain drew his pistol and pointed it at the daring little man's head.

In another moment there would have been a vacancy both in the Service and in the peerage, had not someone darted forward, and, with a blow from his cutlass, knocked the Frenchman's pistol up, so that the bullet went whizzing high into the rigging.

The next instant Fitzhurse's sword had passed through the body of the French captain, and as he drew his reeking blade out he turned to see who his preserver was, and recognised Frank.

"Thank you, boy! I shall remember!" he said simply.

But now the fight waged fast and furious. Hand to hand the Englishmen and the Frenchmen fought, their blades ringing together, their hot breaths upon each other's face.

Now that it had come to fighting, the French fought bravely and stubbornly, disputing every inch of the blood-reddened deck, fighting with such desperation that even when lying in the death-throes they raised their hands to strike and kill.

Frank, who had worked his way into the front ranks, had received a long, tearing scratch from a sword-point, which extended from his wrist to his elbow. The wound, although not a deep one, bled profusely, and the loss of blood, added to his already weak state, produced a dizziness, which threatened momentarily to overcome him.

In the thick of the fight as he was, he was beset on every side, and he knew that even a moment of faintness would cost him his life.

A burly French marine made a thrust at him with his bayonet. He parried the blow, but in doing so his cutlass-blade broke off sharp with a ringing snap.

The Frenchman, at once perceiving his advantage, rushed at him, giving point in advance.

Frank saw the keen, glittering point, and tried to parry it with the broken stump of his cutlass, but this time without avail. The bayonet pierced through his guard; he felt a sharp sting as it pricked his flesh, and then he was almost stunned by a report which sounded within a few inches of his ears.

At the same moment a hand—a small black hand—grasped the bayonet and wrenched it aside, as the Frenchman, with a hole in his forehead, from which the blood pumped out in great jets, swayed and fell headlong to the deck.

Frank was saved, and, turning to express his gratitude to his preserver, he found the little black face of Quacko grinning up into his.

"Dat's one more time, Massa Frank! Nebber seed such a fellow for gettin' into a mess!"

"I am lucky to have you to get me out of them, Quacko," said Frank, pressing the little negro's hand.

But the cry was still forward; there was much to be done yet before victory was with either side.

Little by little, foot by foot, the French were driven from the quarter-deck; but not without considerable loss to the English, many of whom fell before the hot fire poured on them from the French sharpshooters in the tops, and many who found a worse fate by falling between the two ships, and at the heave of the sea being crushed hideously between their sides.

At last not a living Frenchman was left on the quarter-deck; but even then the carnage did not cease.

The French marines had taken up positions in the boats on the booms, from which point of vantage they kept up an incessant and destructive fire.

But the British sailors, exasperated by the sight of their dead comrades, and led on by Captain Featherstone himself, charged across the deck, cutlass in hand.

GIVE THIS COPY TO A FRIEND WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED WITH IT.

A volley from the boats stopped their progress for a moment, and several fell to the deck.

But Captain Featherstone, raising his sword above his head with his left hand—his right hung limp and useless by his side—cheered on his men.

With an answering shout, the little band swept on. At the gangway a single line of Frenchmen, drawn up with fixed bayonets, were swept aside, and the line broken up, while the Frenchmen retreated in confusion. The boats were reached, and then took place a hand-to-hand tussle, which lasted but a few minutes, for the Frenchmen, realising that all was lost, threw down their arms in token of submission, and a few minutes later the hatches were secured over them, as the tricoloured ensign came fluttering down from the gaff, to give place to the victorious flag of England.

LORD EUSTACE RECEIVES A WOUND AND A SPEEDY CURE—QUACKO CONVEYS INTELLIGENCE.

The brief though sharp engagement with the "Vipère," as the French frigate was called, was productive of several other good results besides the victory.

The little second lieutenant of the "Resolute," who in the main was not such a bad fellow, and who had, as a matter of fact, a deal more heart than brain, felt he owed his life to Frank, as indeed he did; so as soon as the engagement was over, and the victors had retired to their own vessel, he sought Frank out.

Frank was having his arm dressed by the surgeon when the lieutenant entered the cockpit.

"Well, my lord, you want patching up, eh?" said the doctor, looking up.

"No-o. Why do you ask?" stammered his lordship.

"Your face and neck are covered with blood, that's all."

"You—don't say so? I—I didn't know," said the little man, turning very pale.

"Pentle, show his lordship a glass."

Pimples obeyed, and the lieutenant, taking one look at his blood-bespattered countenance, sank down, pale and trembling, on to a chest.

"I—I must be terribly injured!" he murmured—"terribly! I—I feel very weak. W-w-will you examine me, doctor?"

"In one moment," replied the doctor, looking at the lieutenant out of the corner of his eye. "Where do you feel the most pain?"

"I—in the head! Hurry, doctor, for mercy's sake, or I shall die from loss of blood!"

Half a dozen sailors now entered the cockpit, all more or less seriously wounded.

The doctor looked up.

"We shall have our hands full," he said. "Pentle, run and ask the captain to let Boyle be released instantly. I cannot get on so short-handed."

The lieutenant raised no objection; he was too far gone for that.

"Now, sir," said the doctor briskly, stepping towards him.

He ran his hand over the lieutenant's head, face, and neck.

"Oh!" he muttered to himself. Then aloud he said: "You will kindly sit there a moment."

"Won't you attend to me now, doctor?" asked the little man in an imploring tone of voice.

"In a few minutes. I must attend to this case first, then I will come to you!"

The case the doctor referred to was that of a sailor, who, with his left knee shattered by a round-shot, was carried in by a couple of his messmates, and laid upon the table.

The surgeon skillfully cut away the leg of his trousers, and then a fearful spectacle was disclosed.

The leg, blue and shrunken to half its usual size, simply hung from a mass of torn tendons and lacerated muscle.

There was not a great deal of bleeding, for one of the sailors had tied a knotted silk handkerchief tightly round the thigh, and this acted as a tourniquet.

The poor fellow was quite conscious, though his suffering must have been agonising.

"You—you'll have to take it off, sir?" he asked feebly.

"I am afraid so, Benton, my lad; but keep up your courage."

"All right, sir. Fire away!" said the sailor, laying back and closing his eyes.

"Hold his head, Carslake," said the surgeon to the wounded man's comrade who had brought him in.

Benton gave a slight groan as he felt the knife, but after that he clenched his teeth tightly together, and not another sound escaped his lips, though the laboured rising and falling of his chest proved that he was still conscious and suffering.

In a very little while the limb was amputated, and the arteries taken up, but at the rasp of the saw against the bone, a shuddering cry had come from the corner where the lieutenant was sitting.

But no one took any notice of it then.

"I think he will do now," said the doctor. "Carry him away, Carslake—carefully, man!"

The poor fellow, conscious even then, was carried out of the cockpit, and his place on the table was immediately taken by another unfortunate.

"Help—doctor—for mercy's sake help me out of this place!" came a weak, quivering voice from the corner.

"Hallo!" said the surgeon, looking up. "What, lieutenant, what's the matter?"

"I'm sick—sick as a dog. I can't stand it! Help me out, there's a good fellow. Ugh! When I heard the saw on the bone of that poor animal's leg—"

The lieutenant had gone green, and as he looked up and saw yet another poor fellow lying there waiting for the knife, he rose tottering to his feet. "What, another? For Heaven's sake let me out! You can look to me afterwards, doctor."

"I think you will be able to attend to yourself," said the surgeon. "You see, it's not your blood but somebody else's on your face. A little cold water and—"

But the lieutenant, waiting to hear no more, bolted from the cockpit, and, gaining the deck, rushed to the bulwarks, over which he leaned, in contemplation of the dark waters for the next half hour.

When daylight broke, it was found that while the "Resolute" had suffered little or nothing by the encounter, the "Vipère" was in a dangerously leaky condition, several of the shots from the "Resolute" having entered her below the water-line, while her mizzen-mast was cut off short at the deck, and her main and foremasts had received much damage.

Although the pleasure of taking the French ship home as a prize was one of which Captain Featherstone was loath to deprive himself and his men, yet, considering all things, the "Vipère" promised to be almost more trouble than she was worth; so after a lengthy consultation with his lieutenants and his master, Captain Featherstone announced his intention of taking all the prisoners on board the "Resolute," and then sinking the French frigate.

This was accordingly done. The survivors of the French crew were snugly stowed away between the "Resolute's" decks, while their officers, who had delivered up their swords, were allowed the freedom of the vessel on parole.

"You will be pleased to have the society of your countrymen, no doubt, M. Durand," said Captain Featherstone courteously.

The lieutenant of the "Zélé" bowed. "I prefer, monsieur, the society of brave Englishmen, to that of less courageous men of my own nation."

"Oh, but, monsieur, you scarcely do them justice; they fought bravely at the end."

"Parbleu, yes, at the end; but I cannot forget that they ran first!" And, Monsieur Durand, true to his opinions, maintained a distance and reserve towards his companions, which they did not trouble to try and break through.

There were in all one hundred and eighty-five French prisoners on board the "Resolute," which made their confinement in the somewhat cramped confines of their prison very irksome.

There were besides five officers—namely, the first and second lieutenants, the master, a midshipman, and an officer of Marines, the rest having been killed in the engagement, with over a hundred of the crew of the "Vipère."

The "Resolute" had suffered heavily, too, having sacrificed nearly seventy men and two officers, besides several petty officers, of whom the boatswain was one. The "Resolute," which carried only a crew of one hundred and eighty men, now found herself with far less than her proper complement, having only a few more than a hundred.

This fact, and the fact that there were nearly twice as many prisoners as there were of her own crew, caused a certain amount of uneasiness in the breast of the captain, which was shared by Mr. Seymour.

"We shall have to be careful, and sleep with one eye open, Seymour," said the captain, some three days after the sinking of the "Vipère." "We shall have trouble with these French rascals if we give them any opportunities."

"But, sir, you do not mean to say that you doubt the honour of the French officers?"

"Most certainly not. If I did I should clap them into irons in no time. They have given their parole, and, I presume, that, being officers, they are gentlemen. Eh, Monsieur Durand, what is your opinion?"

"I should be indeed grieved to learn that any man wearing the uniform of France is capable of breaking his word. No! Monsieur may in safety rely upon the word of my compatriots."

"Monsieur Durand!" said the captain suddenly. "I have never asked you for your parole d'honneur, for the simple reason that I do not regard you in the light of a prisoner. You are my guest, and as you are a gentleman I know you will respect the laws of hospitality."

"You only do me justice, monsieur."

"I know that. I am assured of that; but our present rather dangerous position compelled me to mention the fact to you, that it is upon your honour as a gentleman that I entirely rely, not upon your honour as an enemy."

"Whatever differences of opinion there may be between France and England, I trust that I shall always have sufficient gratitude left to prevent me from regarding Captain Featherstone as an enemy," said the Frenchman, bowing low.

"You are a good fellow," said the captain, warmly shaking him by the hand; "and, without any disrespect or insult intended, I wish with all my soul that you were an Englishman."

M. Durand laughed. "To be an Englishman would be my greatest ambition were I not a Frenchman!"

The evening following on this conversation, Monsieur Durand was seated alone in the cabin which had been allotted to his use, when there came a slight, timid tap at the door.

Durand looked up. "Who is there? Ah, my little Quacko, it is you! What do you want?"

Quacko stole into the room, and carefully closed the door after him.

"Dere's de—" began Quacko in English; then, recollecting himself, he made a communication in French to M. Durand. The Frenchman sprang to his feet.

"You tell me this! It is not—it cannot be true! No French officer could do this!"

"Den come and see, that's all I've got to say, sah! Follow along behind ob me, quite quiet, and I show you dat it's true. Ebbery bit true!"

THE CAPTAIN'S DINNER PARTY—THE SECOND LIEUTENANT NARRATES A THRILLING ADVENTURE—A STARTLING INTERRUPTION.

Dinner was just over, and the captain's guests were seated at their ease, while the decanters circulated freely.

The captain sat at the head of the table, his right arm still in a sling, but looking otherwise as well and as happy as though he had not a care in the world.

On his right sat Mr. Seymour; on his left the second lieutenant. Next to Mr. Seymour was placed Mr. Clutterbuck the master, then came Mr. Midshipman Cuttlestone. On the opposite side of the table were seated Frank, who, like Cuttlestone, had received an invitation that day to dine at the captain's table, and the doctor's assistant Pentle, otherwise Pimples; while the doctor himself, at the foot of the table, smiled knowingly on all around, and kept the wine cool by constant motion.

"Cuttlestone, my lad, pass the bottle—mind, I say, pass it! You have had enough, you young reprobate! Seymour, you drink nothing. By gad! when I was your age, I got drunk—h'm!—I mean— Captain, may I drink a glass of wine with you?"

"With pleasure, doctor!" replied Featherstone, who was quite willing that the doctor should do all the honours of the table.

"By gad, sir," said the medico, "this is deuced good stuff! Where did you get it, captain? I haven't tasted better Madeira for many a year."

"Woshem!" cried the captain, "where did this wine come from?"

Our old friend Bill, who for the nonce was playing the part of captain's steward, grinned as he replied.

"I rayer fancy, sir, as how the French cap'n laid in this perlicker—"

"Say no more!" cried Featherstone merrily. "It is a legacy from the 'Vipere,' doctor. Frank, my lad, a glass of this Madeira will put a little colour into your pale cheeks. Come, take a glass—a glass of wine with me!"

Frank blushed to the roots of his hair at the honour, which, in spite of his distaste for wine, he could not refuse.

"By the way, boy, I watched you the other night. It was a little foolhardy on your part to push yourself to the front as you did while you were still so weak."

"Young fool, I told him of it!" grumbled the doctor, "and I gave him a slice of my mind."

"Well, I like young fools of that kind," said the captain. "Briton would not rule the waves if some of her sons were not 'young fools,' like our friend here!"

The second lieutenant, who, in accordance with his usual custom, had drunk a little, just a little too much wine, rapped on the table loudly by way of applauding the captain's sentiments.

"Yes, by gad, sir!—yes, gentlemen all, the—the—little—animal saved my life, by gad, that night—my life, 'pon honour, he did, the little animal!"

"Indeed!" said the captain.

"I'll take my oath on it, he saved my life, and I sha'n't forget it. I was engaged—very busily engaged—fighting against hundreds of the enemy, and the captain of the what's-her-name— 'Pon my soul, I forget how it happened; but there

it is, gentlemen, he saved my life, and I'm not ashamed to own it!"

The captain, seeing the condition that his little lordship was in, frowned but said nothing, and the little man rattled on in a maudlin, thick voice, which made Cuttlestone almost choke with laughter.

"Where was I?" went on the second lieutenant, regardless of the stony silence of the rest of the company. "Oh, 'pon my soul, I was almost forgetting. The rascally French captain raised his pistol to blow out my brains!"

"What was he going to blow 'em out of?" remarked the doctor drily.

"Eh, what? My brains, I tell you! He raised his pistol, and there I was—the captain of the thingumbob with his pistol raised, and me standing there. It was like this," continued Fitzhurse, getting more and more confused, "I was standing there—no, here, and the Frenchman, the animal, was standing there, just as you might be, doctor; only he was standing still, not jiggling about like you are, doctor. Then he took his pistol, just as I take up this bottle, and he pointed at me—'pon my soul, the animal pointed it at me, just as I point this bottle at you, doctor!"

Whereupon the lieutenant, picking up the bottle, which happened to be a full one, and uncorked, pointed it in a melodramatic manner at the doctor's head, and the fine old port which it contained came gurgling and bubbling out of the neck, and deluged Mr. Clutterbuck, who was unfortunate enough to be sitting next to the little man.

"Confound it, sir!" roared the master, springing to his feet, and bringing his bald head with a terrific crash against the bottle, which Fitzhurse still held in his hand.

The look of ludicrous dismay on the little lord's face as he stood holding a fragment of the shattered bottle in his outstretched hand was too much for Cuttlestone; and, oblivious of the distinguished company he was in, he exploded into a violent fit of laughter.

The doctor followed suit immediately, and Pimples, who always took his cue from his superior, began to laugh "He, he, he!" in his cracked voice, until he was silenced by a severe cuff on the ear from the exasperated master.

"It's very well for you idiots to laugh!" roared Clutterbuck. "Look at me, drenched to the skin by that confounded pudding-headed jackanapes. Captain, I appeal to you for protection. On my soul, I was never so insulted—no, by thunder, never in all my long and varied career!"

His "long and varied career" was as favourite an expression with the worthy master as the word "animal" was with the aggressor.

And the captain, who had been striving to keep a grave face fairly broke down when the well-known words came from the master's lips.

"Woshem!" cried the captain, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes. "A—a napkin, quick, for Mr. Clutterbuck!"

"A what?—a napkin? Thunder and lightning, I'm drenched to the skin! What's the use of a napkin to me? I was never so wet in all my long and varied career!" yelled the master.

Bill, who was himself shaking with internal laughter, which only his respect for the company kept suppressed, wiped down the master; and presently, after an apology, full and complete from the second lieutenant, something like harmony was again restored.

"That accident to our friend's pate," said the doctor, "reminds me of a case that came under my professional notice when I was assistant-surgeon on board the 'Thunderer.' There had been an engagement with a Spanish corvette, and when it was over one of our men, the bos'un, I think it was, was carried down into the cockpit to be operated on. I never saw a man in such a mess in all my—h'm!—long and varied career. He had one ear shot away, the top of his head had been ploughed off by a round-shot, so that his brains were—"

"Here! Here, doctor! Come, none of your bloodthirsty yarns about protruding brains!" cried the captain.

"No; there's enough of that sort of thing to be met with in everyday life. Stow those yarns away for to-night, doctor!" growled the master.

"Oh, very good," said the doctor, looking a little offended; "it was an awfully interesting story from a professional point of view!"

"Oh, but hang it, you know!" hiccupped the second lieutenant, "we're not—not all sawbones, you—you know!"

"You aren't, most certainly!" snapped the doctor; "and it's a deuced good thing for your patients, by Heaven!"

"Don't tell us stories; sing us a song instead, doctor," suggested the captain, who saw the displeasure on the surgeon's usually cheerful face.

"All right, captain. What shall it be—battle, murder, sudden death, sea, or love?"

"Oh, love; we get enough of the other every day of our lives," said Mr. Seymour.

Whereupon the doctor, striving to assume a sentimental air,

in which he grievously failed, bellowed out in a rich, mellow, robust voice an extremely sentimental ballad, to the melody of which the second lieutenant kept up an accompaniment by banging his heels on the deck.

The song was scarcely ended, and the company were still applauding, when suddenly the door of the room was flung unceremoniously open, and Monsieur Durand, closely followed by Quacko, rushed into the room.

"The—the villains, the traitors!" cried Monsieur Durand, who was white with excitement. "Ma foi, the dishonourable scoundrels! Arm—arm yourselves, mes amies, the—"

"What is it, in mercy's name?" shouted Captain Featherstone.

IN THE HANDS OF THE FOE—THE DEATH OF MR. SEYMOUR—RETRIBUTION—MADDENING INACTIVITY.

The Frenchman gasped. He was so overcome with excitement that he actually could not find words.

"It is de French ossifers, dey's gine and letted de prisoners all loose, and dey's tumblin' up on de deck like winky!" bellowed Quacko.

The captain rapped out an oath entirely foreign to his tongue. "You hear this, gentlemen!" he cried. "The dastardly villains have betrayed us! Quick, to the deck, we must alarm the crew!"

He rushed towards the door, but Durand flung himself in his path. "Stop!" gasped the Frenchman. "They have already the possession of the deck, and if you show your face you are a dead man! No; you shall not go! I, your friend, say it is so!"

Mr. Seymour sprang past the captain, rushed out of the room and up the companion-hatch, with Frank and the master at his heels.

But Seymour had scarcely reached the deck, when two figures sprang out of the darkness on him.

There was a short, sharp scuffle, a yell of pain, and the body of the unfortunate Seymour was hurled backwards down the companion-hatch, sweeping the two who were following him from the steps, and bringing them all with a crash on to the deck below.

"Quick, for the cabin!" shouted the master, catching the lieutenant's inanimate body up in his arms.

They gained the cabin, where the rest still were, and crashed the door to in the faces of half a dozen men who had descended in pursuit.

They laid the body of the lieutenant on the table at which so short a time ago he had been seated.

He was still breathing, though his face and chest were cut and gashed about in a horrible manner.

"It's no use," he said, smiling up at the doctor, who came quickly to his side. "It's no good, doctor. I—I'm done this time. The—villains—took—me— It's—the shoulder, doctor—the shoulder!"

He never spoke again. One of the murderers' knives had pierced him just below the shoulder, completely severing the main artery.

He was dead in five minutes, and they lifted him from the table, and laid him in a corner of the room, covering him with the white tablecloth.

Meanwhile, the liberated prisoners without were making a fearful din, battering away at the door, and calling upon the captain and the rest, with oaths and curses, to come out.

What had happened to the brave fellows of the "Resolute" none of them could guess. They had probably been taken by surprise, and butchered, or, like themselves, were at this moment prisoners, and unable to get to the deck. Anyhow, one fact was very evident, that was that at that moment the French were masters of the vessel.

Fortunately for the refugees in the cabin the door was a stout oaken one, and capable of a great deal of resistance. Fortunately, too, for them, the French were without firearms; while, on the other hand, they had both arms and ammunition in plenty.

Presently there came a cessation of the blows against the door, and an authoritative voice demanding the immediate surrender of the Englishmen.

Captain Featherstone vouchsafed no answer to this demand; but M. Durand, who appeared to be half-beside himself with furious indignation, cried in his own language:

"Miserable that you are, pig and poltroon, you have this day disgraced your country! Yes, Lieutenant Carbois, if I live to tell it, France shall ring with this story of yours, and its shame!"

"Ma foi, those are fine words, you renegade!" sneered the voice from the other side of the door. "Who are you that France shall believe your story, renegade and traitor, you who side with the English against your own countrymen? Bah! Keep your threats, mon brave; you shall swing from the yard-arm of this good ship before many hours are past. Yes, we will hang you high, as a warning to all traitors and renegades!"

None of the Englishmen understood what had passed; but they guessed, from the sudden paling of Durand's face, and the hard glitter that came into his eyes, that he had been insulted to the very soul.

"Harkee!" cried Clutterbuck; "how many men think you could squeeze themselves into the passage at the foot of the companion?"

"Eight, perhaps ten," replied the captain.

"And we, not counting the little black, are eight. Let us each arm ourselves with a musket, and the nigger can fling open the door, so that we can give these rogues outside a peppering!"

"Monsieur forgets that I cannot fire on my own countrymen!"

"No, no! Of course you are a neutral. Well, we shall be seven." The master went to a long rack and selected a musket ready loaded, the rest following his example.

Instructing Quacko in his part of the work, the seven Englishmen took up a position in the centre of the room, exactly facing the door, Frank, Cuttlesome, and Pimples on their knees, and the four men behind them—for the sudden shock had completely sobered the second lieutenant—each with his musket directed at the door.

"Now!" cried the captain.

And Quacko, who had noiselessly undone the bolts of the door, flung it wide open, just as the voice of the French officer was heard for the second time calling upon them to surrender.

The first impulse of the Frenchmen was to rush forward directly they found the door open, but their second was to hang back when they saw the formidable reception awaiting them.

"Fire!"

At the word, the seven muskets rang out almost simultaneously, and the report was immediately followed by a series of wild, discordant yells and groans.

They had barely time to see what the effect of their fire had been when Quacko crashed the door to again, and slid the heavy bolts back in their sockets.

But though unable to see anything, they could hear the dismal moaning of the wounded through the panels of the door.

"I do not pity them!" said Durand, shrugging his shoulders. "Men who have not honour are not fit to live!"

Then followed the scuffling of footsteps as the wounded and dead were being dragged up to the deck; and then these, too, ceased, and perfect silence reigned.

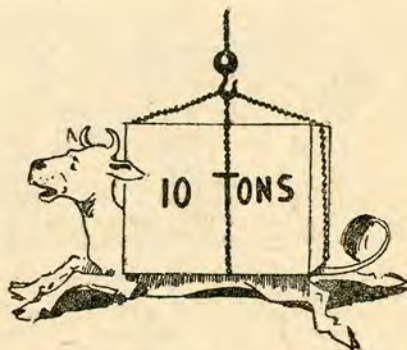
The night was getting far advanced, and Captain Featherstone, beside himself with anxiety as to the fate of his men, strode up and down the cabin restlessly.

At last he could bear the suspense of it no longer.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I can remain here idle no longer, something must be done! Are we to give up possession of the 'Resolute' without striking one blow? And not only of the 'Resolute,' but of our convoy as well, for as soon as day breaks they will take possession of the merchantmen, who can know nothing of what has happened. This inaction is killing me. We must do something to regain what we have lost!"

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

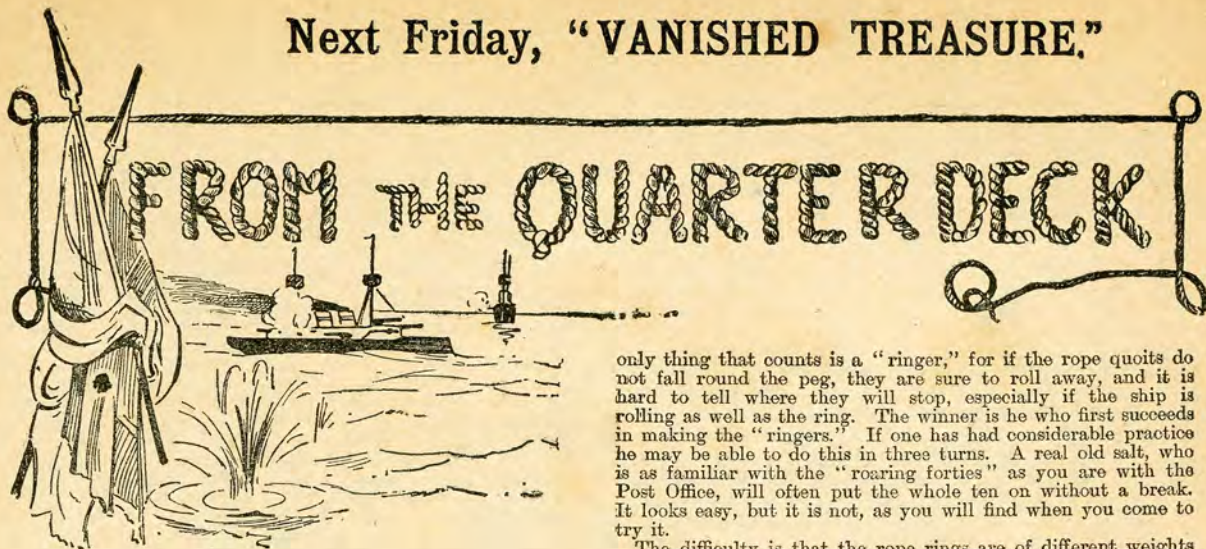
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 "Union Jack" League, and promise to do all in my
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 to exterminate the "penny dreadful."

How do people amuse themselves aboard ship? asks "Lubber." This is a question often asked by the landsman who contemplates, with some dread, the voyage between, let us say, Liverpool and New York. In the winter, to be sure, there is little enough to do, but for the spring, summer, and autumn there are deck games which require bodily exertion, and result in a buoyant circulation of the blood and a far-reaching appetite.

First among these games comes deck quoits, which is nothing more nor less than the old game altered to suit a ship's deck.

Anyone who has ever pitched quoits can see with half an eye that the heavy, iron disc used on shore would splinter and mark a ship's deck.

So sailor men make quoits out of a grommet, which is a piece of rope spliced so as to form a ring.

A boy can also see that the captain of the ship would not be likely to allow anyone to drive spikes into the deck; so a wooden pin, about a foot and a half high, is set up in a bit of wood which acts as a base, and answers the purpose of the customary pin excellently.

The player stands about fifteen feet away from his peg, and, having about ten rope rings in his possession, shies them at the peg. Of course, they cannot have "leaners" aboard ship. The

only thing that counts is a "ringer," for if the rope quoits do not fall round the peg, they are sure to roll away, and it is hard to tell where they will stop, especially if the ship is rolling as well as the ring. The winner is he who first succeeds in making the "ringers." If one has had considerable practice he may be able to do this in three turns. A real old salt, who is as familiar with the "roaring forties" as you are with the Post Office, will often put the whole ten on without a break. It looks easy, but it is not, as you will find when you come to try it.

The difficulty is that the rope rings are of different weights and sizes, and their flight is often erratic.

Sometimes the wind blows them out of their line of flight.

Quoits on deck are not very exciting, but when the vessel is rolling gently, the unexpected freaks of the rope rings often afford a good deal of amusement.

With the vessel on an even keel, and old hands at the game, it soon becomes monotonous.

What you were told is quite true, "Incredulous," the United States navy is chiefly manned by English, German, and Swedish sailors.

Bombay lost by retirement, some time ago, one of its most popular officers, Colonel Sexton, who rose from the ranks in Crimean days to a high position as a combatant officer.

At the "soldiers' battle" of Inkerman, Colour-sergeant Sexton, as senior effective non-commissioned officer, assisted in collecting the reports and calling the roll of the survivors, when but eight men of the 95th Regiment answered to their names.

Subsequently Sexton served with his old corps in India during the Mutiny as lieutenant and adjutant, and not long afterwards joined the Indian Staff Corps. He left India a full colonel, and in receipt of a pension of over £1,100 a year—no bad thing for the recruit who joined the British army with no idea—like Napoleon's soldiers—of carrying a marshal's baton in his knapsack, or even a colonel's allowances.

*Yours sincere friend,
 The Skipper*

All letters for the Editor should be addressed to 123, Temple Chambers, London, E.C.

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