

THE UNION JACK

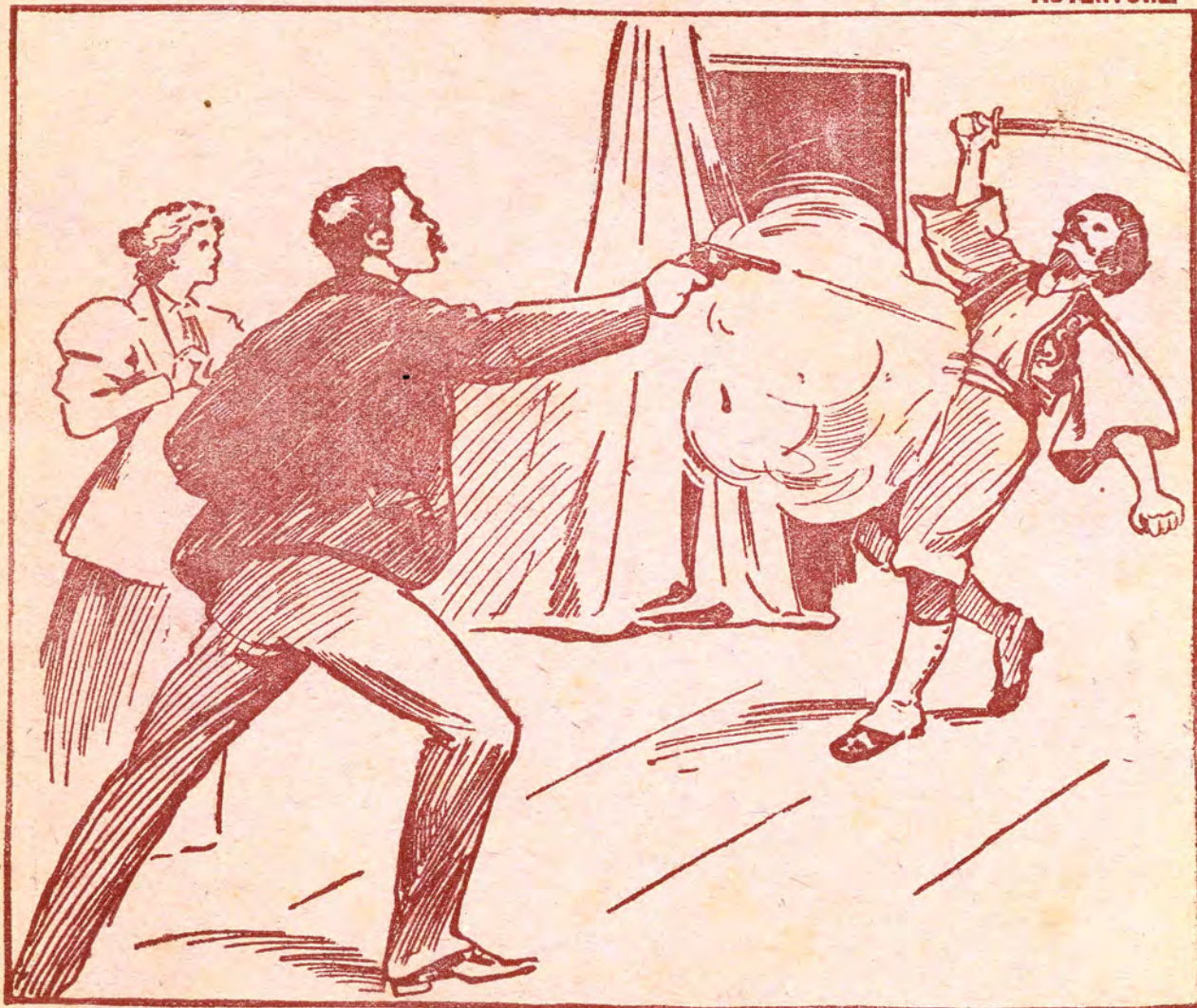


A COMPLETE
BOOK
EVERY WEEK.

LIBRARY
OF
HIGH CLASS
FICTION.

HEIR TO A MILLION.

LONG, COMPLETE
STORY OF
ADVENTURE.



Two revolver shots rang out at the same moment.

PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY.

No. 193.

HEIR TO A MILLION.

COMPLETE STORY OF ADVENTURE.

By HERBERT MAXWELL.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE FUNERAL—THE READING OF THE WILL
—AN UNEXPECTED LEGACY—LENNOX, THE
"DAINTY"—A TELEGRAM.

It was towards four o'clock in the afternoon, when the hum and bustle of business life in the City of London reaches its highest and most extreme point, that a string of mourning carriages drew slowly up in front of Newton Court, Friarsgate, E.C., and set down load after load of smartly dressed City-men, of all heights and ages, who with some difficulty made their way through the throng of eager pressmen and curious onlookers, besieging the premises of Lavenos and Co., Greek merchants and foreign bankers.

The occupants of the carriages pushed through the crowd, and, with the help of the police, were all at length safely inside the large folding doors which gave access to the premises; while excited knots of newspaper reporters vainly besought the stalwart constable, who barred their passage, to let them pass, and admit them to the mysterious proceedings taking place inside.

The baffled throng drew back, and the familiar "Pass along, please!" of half a dozen City policemen quickly cleared Newton Court of the gaping crowd assembled there.

In the meantime, the employees of the great house of Lavenos and Co. were listening in breathless silence to the reading of the quaint will of the late head of the house, just deceased, which was read in slow, drawling tones, and a dry, matter-of-fact manner by a solicitor, the expression on whose face seemed fit to imply that he totally disapproved of the whole proceeding—his own presence there, the gathering before him, and the contents of the lengthy document he was gradually wading through.

He had completed some three-quarters of his task, the remaining and most interesting portion still remained to be read.

The various charitable bequests had been duly proclaimed, the long list of minor legacies, from which no employee's name was absent, had been distinctly enunciated, and the lawyer, turning over a fresh page of his parchment, cleared his throat for the reading of the final passages.

"And now," read the lawyer, with aggravating deliberation, "it only remains for me to dispose of my estates in Servia, the property which I have set aside to reward the man whom, of all those who have worked with me, I consider has best deserved it; and who is, in my opinion, best fitted in point of age, temperament, and physique to deal with the difficult problems of administration the charge of such a property carries with it.

"The estates are situated in the most picturesque district of the Balkans, and comprise mountain, moorland, plain, and valley. Corn flourishes in the lowland, olive and mulberry trees in the sheltered nooks, vines trail their winding tendrils upon the sunny

slopes of the valleys, mines in the mountains yield some gold and abundance of silver.

"The place is an earthly paradise; the people that dwell in it are a fine race, but proud, difficult to manage, and prone to rebel. With a strong and kindly hand over them, a master they can love and respect, they are faithful and true to the death.

"To a strong man, actuated by lofty motives and high principles, such a possession should offer the fairest chances of happiness. To a weak man, or one physically unfit to cope with the duties of the station, it would mean an early grave.

"Bearing all these considerations in mind, and after anxious thought, I bequeath and bestow all my houses, lands, and possessions of every sort in Servia, together with the rights and revenues of every description arising therefrom upon—"

Here the lawyer made an impressive pause, turning over a fresh page of the parchment.

"Upon Thomas Vincent, who has been in my employ for more than five years, and who, I believe, possesses those traits of character which will enable him worthily to fill the trust laid upon him, provided he comply with the conditions herewith annexed: Firstly, that he marry within one year from the time of my death; and, secondly, that he pass at least three months



They set their ghastly load down in front of Helen Stavros.

of every year for the next five years amongst the simple people whose well-being I solemnly commit to his charge."

The secret was out. The pent-up feeling of the listeners found relief in shouts of applause, in loud and long cheers of congratulation, and in hearty handshakings of the lucky heir to property worth at least a million.

He, half-smothered under the vehemence of the good wishes showered upon him, scarcely realised the extent of his good fortune, wondering in a dazed sort of way "why all the fellows had gone mad, and what on earth they all meant by mobbing him."

"Stand back, you chaps, can't you? Don't you see he wants air?" said Lennox, using his broad shoulders and muscular arms freely to secure an open space about his friend, and speedily achieving his object. ("Dainty" Lennox, his friends nicknamed him, because of his extreme scrupulousness about his person and attire, and his strong disinclination to any active exertion whatever, in spite of his huge strength).

Gradually the tumultuous excitement and storm of congratulations subsided, and Vincent became aware of the new life opening before him.

"But why on earth did he choose me?" he asked again and again.

"Because you are a strong man, actuated by lofty motives and high principles," replied Lennox, with a good-natured grin; "it is so stated in the will."

"But I'm not!" protested Vincent.

"But you are. You are blessed with all those traits of character which entail the greatest amount of fatigue upon the possessor. You are just the beggar to govern the gentle but primitive tribes of Servia."

"Now, Len, if it had been you—"

"Bosh, my dear fellow! The trouble of preventing those fellows from smothering you will last me in the way of excitement for months to come. Your future tenants, or subjects, or whatever may be the right term for them, would be the death of me in a week."

"Let me shake your hand, Mr. Vincent," said abruptly an insinuating voice behind them. Both men turned sharply round, and recognised Megaklis, a Greek, Messrs. Lavenos' principal clerk.

"You are very kind."

"Of course you intend to accept the important trust laid upon you?"

"Of course."

"You are not afraid?"

"Not a bit."

"What does the fellow mean?" asked Vincent, when Megaklis had left them.

"Heaven only knows!" drawled Lennox by way of answer; "let us get out of this, and go and dine quietly somewhere."

When they emerged into Friarsgate, troops of boys were yelling the contents of the evening papers:

"Servian regiments march to the front!"

"Mobilisation of warships!"

"Outbreak of hostilities between Servia and Turkey!"

"Enthusiasm of troops in Belgrade!"

Vincent bought a paper, and devoured the news greedily.

"I shall go out there at once!" he said abruptly.

"You had better wait and have some dinner first, hadn't you?" murmured Lennox.

"Don't be a fool, Dainty," was the only reply Vincent vouchsafed to make.

As for Megaklis, he went straight from the office to the post, and despatched a long telegram to a certain Mr. Nikopoulos, Eleusis Street, Belgrade.

CHAPTER II.

NIKOPoulos—HIS STRANGE GARB—THE INTERVIEW—A VISIT TO THE ACROPOLIS, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

When the Austrian-Lloyd steamship "Sorrento" reached the port of Trieste, from Brindisi, early in April, it counted amongst its passengers Vincent and Lennox, the latter, after much urgent pressure, having consented to accompany his friend on his first visit to Belgrade.

"How long are we going to stay here before getting out for your dominions?" inquired Lennox, with a yawn.

"Only long enough to get full particulars of the route from this Greek agent of ours, the man Megaklis recommended me to go to."

"What's the fellow's name?"

"Nikopoulos."

"Well, I propose we call upon Mr. Nikopoulos as soon as we get ashore, and, having heard what he's got to say, move on at once."

"We will. I am at least as anxious as you are."

"Oh, I'm not anxious. But I am sick of this incessant travelling by train and boat alternately, and want to get to our journey's end. I warn you, when I reach this mansion, or

palace, or fortress, or whatever it is of yours, I shall go to bed for a week, and stay there—that is, of course, if I have not died of fatigue before I arrive."

"Oh, you'll last it out, I dare say."

Leaving their servants to look after the mountains of baggage they had brought with them, the two friends drove immediately to an hotel, whence, after changing their dress—a matter Lennox made a special point of—they set out to find the abode of Mr. Nikopoulos.

A tall, thin man, with a long, black moustache, wearing a richly-embroidered smoking-cap, ornamented with a gay tassel, rose from his seat at a writing-table as the two Englishmen entered, and greeted them warmly.

Lennox noticed, with disgust, that his finger-nails were grimy with dirt, and that his whole person conveyed the idea of a man whose views upon the essentials of personal cleanliness were confined to externals only. For the life of him he could not accept Mr. Nikopoulos's proffered hand, and merely bowed in response to the latter's salutation.

Vincent, who looked upon the Greek solely as a man capable of supplying him with valuable information, plunged at once into a series of minute questions about the place, the people, the way to get there, and the probable reception awaiting him, to all of which inquiries he received most unsatisfactory replies. Mr. Nikopoulos even went so far as to urge upon him the advisability of postponing his visit until the ferment upon the frontier had subsided.

"I think," he said, "the people would receive with scant courtesy any stranger coming amongst them now who claimed to be their chief. When the present excitement has abated, they will be in a condition to accept your claims without demur, and tender you their homage as lord of the district."

"But I don't want any homage or nonsense of that sort," objected Vincent. "I merely want to see the house, to take formal possession of the estates, and make the personal acquaintance of the people."

"Quite so," returned the Greek; "but, supposing your presence should cause trouble and strife in the district, would you feel justified in prosecuting your claims?"

"Perhaps not; but I cannot answer that question until I have formed an opinion from personal observation."

"But your lives might be in danger."

"How?"

"The men of the district are very much attached to the family who have ruled over them for years."

"But Mr. Lavenos is dead, and I am his heir."

"True; but he has kinsmen living who have been exercising the duties of active chieftainship, which he, by reason of his residence in England, was unable to perform."

"Then you advise me not to go?"

"I do, if you value your life."

"Thank you very much. I don't deny I attach some small value to my continued existence. It may be prudent to postpone my visit for awhile. Good morning."

With many proffers of service and expressions of regard, Mr. Nikopoulos saw his visitors to the door, and bowed them out. After which, he promptly telegraphed to London as follows:

"Have frightened and choked off English visitors. Movement spreading daily. Antoniades very active. Money urgently needed."

This message was addressed to Megaklis, Newton Court, Friarsgate, E.C.

The same day he despatched a messenger to Antoniades, with information of the Englishmen's arrival, and a promise to keep him informed of their further movements, supposing they decided to go up country, which he considered very improbable.

"When can we get back home?" asked Lennox nonchalantly, as the two friends strolled back to the hotel.

"Home, man? What are you thinking about?"

"I thought I heard you say, or at least suggest, that you placed some slight value upon your life, and that as Servia might be dangerous to your health just now, you were inclined to postpone your visit for a time."

"My dear Len," replied Vincent, "if you were not suffering from extreme fatigue, you would have understood that this Nikopoulos has some quiet little game of his own on, and is evidently interested in keeping us out of this country."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lennox, suddenly developing quite, for him, a large amount of animation, "that never struck me; but I could believe anything of a man who wore habitually dirty finger-nails, with an embroidered silk cap, a red necktie, and pale-pink trousers."

"We must leave to-night."

"But there is no train after—"

"We can't go by train. The station is sure to be watched. We must ride out the very last thing at night and join the train somewhere early to-morrow morning. Leave everything to me," added Vincent laughingly; "go and rest, and don't expect to see me before ten o'clock."

"Very well, as you like; it makes me hot and tired even to

think of what you will have to go through before we meet again. Good-bye."

The two friends separated. Vincent, to make the necessary preparations for their night ride, and Lennox to stroll leisurely towards the Castle, and kill time in the most agreeable manner possible.

Now, it is by no means easy, if you are keenly interested in antiquities, to avoid incurring a very large amount of fatigue in the course of a careful examination of the beautiful ruins of the ancient castle of Belgrade; and the result was that Lennox became done up—or thought he was, which is the same thing—and, hunting about for a convenient spot to lie down in, eventually found one in a small cave, the entrance to which was partially concealed by the debris of broken columns and ruined pilasters and capitals that lay strewn about it.

Here, with a sigh of contentment, he stretched his limbs, and in ten minutes was fast asleep.

When he awoke, which he did, with a start, it was almost dark, and he was vaguely conscious of the dim outlines of two persons conversing in guarded tones only a few feet away from him.

"You are sure you have not made a mistake?"

"Quite sure. The short one has been busy buying horses, and the tall one wandered off up here, and has probably gone on in front, and is now expecting his friend to overtake him."

"Are you certain he did not return to Belgrade?"

"Quite; I have never left the road. But we shall know more directly, as I despatched Falecki in pursuit the moment I discovered he had left the Castle."

"Good; we will wait," replied the other voice, which Lennox, now wide awake, had no difficulty in recognising as that of Nikopoulos.

A pause of some seconds ensued before the latter spoke again.

"These Englishmen are likely to complicate matters. Antoniades is working well for the cause just now, but only because we have undertaken to throw the whole of the Politike-Hetairia's influence into the scale in favour of his succession to the Lavenos estates. Unless we succeed in making his mind easy on that score, there will be no raid into Turkish territory, no war, no defeat of Alexander the Tyrant's forces, and, consequently, no republic in Servia. It all depends upon him. It is cursed hard!"

"It comes to this, then," said the other, "we must get rid of these Englishmen at all costs."

"That is so," returned Nikopoulos musingly; "but I think it will be better managed if left to Antoniades. He can get it done easily up there, and no awkward questions asked afterwards. Still, we might, perhaps; it would be excellent proof to Antoniades that we are in earnest in helping him, provided always he does what we tell him in other matters."

"And what about the lady, Helen Stavros? She is the only other of the kinsfolk that has the smallest claim to the estates."

"Oh, her following is nothing like as strong as Antoniades'. Still I have urged him to marry the girl, and settle it that way."

"But he says she won't look at him."

"Well," chuckled the other, "he is not exactly a lady's man, is he?"

"Not exactly. I have always said he was too ready with the knife."

"Women don't like that."

"Well, they don't like to know about it, at all events."

"Rather than let Antoniades succeed, I believe she would join forces with the Englishmen."

"That is not at all unlikely. And however long we talk we shall always come back to the same point, that the Englishmen are the stumbling-block in our path at the present moment."

There was another pause in the conversation, which was not broken until faint sounds of galloping hoofs were heard in the distance.

Both men rose quickly to their feet, and muttered:

"Falecki!"

They advanced close to the edge of the slope, listening intently.

Suddenly a heavy hand was placed upon the neck of each, with a vice-like grip, paralysing them with terror.

Your sneaking conspirators are always cowards.

The next moment one of them was flying headlong down the slope, eventually reaching the roadway in a sadly damaged and stunned condition. The other, Nikopoulos, Lennox dealt with somewhat differently, and before sending him to join his companion, shook him much as a terrier shakes a rat; and when he did launch him down the incline, his descent was accelerated by all the momentum a powerful kick could lend him.

"I am afraid I have spoilt those pale-pink trousers," and that is the only remark Lennox made. Before leaving the spot, he picked up a white card, which had evidently fallen out of Nikopoulos' pocket.

Some hours later, when he and Vincent were riding past the same spot, he asked the latter:

"Do you know anything about the Politike Hetairia?"

"Yes," said Vincent, "it is some kind of secret association with revolutionary aims."

"Well, I am sorry to tell you that we have incurred the enmity of this particular association. But it may interest you to know that I have Mr. Nikopoulos' card of membership, and that the password for the month is 'Brotherhood.' Kindly remember that. It may be useful to you."

When Vincent had heard the whole story, he remarked slyly: "I thought you looked as if you had undergone some unprecedented exertion."

"Upon my word," replied the other in the same tone, "I don't know how I managed it. I think the desire to wreck those pale-pink trousers must have inspired me with the necessary energy."

And so they rode on.

CHAPTER III.

THE FATE OF THE GUIDE AND HIS RAMSHACKLE BEAST—KALON POLISMA—LENNOX'S AWKWARD DILEMMA—THE LADY OF THE DISTRICT.

The little party, comprising Vincent, Lennox, and their two servants, Giles and Martin, reached a small station some twenty miles from Belgrade, where they were fortunate enough to find a train to take them to Timovo.

This, however, was only accomplished after a liberal expenditure of "backsheesh" (gifts of money), as the train was heavily laden with war material, and packed with troops, being hurried to the front. Six horses—besides those they rode, there were two pack animals—are not beasts that can be stowed away anywhere.

"I should like to know whether Antoniades has been informed of our departure from Belgrade?" murmured Lennox, as the train approached Timovo.

"I imagine he must have been. This Politike Hetairia has agents everywhere. It is quite likely we are under the surveillance of some of their emissaries at this very moment."

Lennox looked round suspiciously upon his travelling companions; but as they all wore trousers of ordinary pattern and hue, he felt reassured.

"You are going to push on at once, I suppose?" he said, when at length they had extricated their belongings from the confused mass of men and material that cumbered the Timovo station.

"Yes, at once. But we shall have to find a guide."

"Do your lordships want a faithful follower?" whined a voice, that belonged to a rough-coated peasant, who advanced to Vincent's horse's head as the latter spoke.

"Exactly; but we don't want a faithful brigand!" remarked Lennox, sotto voce.

"Why do you ask?" inquired Vincent, addressing the man.

"Because I saw your lordships were strangers."

"Well, as it happens, we do want a guide. Do you know the country whereabouts?"

"Every mountain and valley, every path and highway, every stick and stone!" replied the peasant proudly.

"A comprehensive answer," observed Lennox; "a modest man our new guide."

"Do you know a place called 'Kalon Polisma'?"

"Every corner of it."

"How far is it from here?"

"About twenty miles."

"Well, I will give you a hundred drachmæ if you take us there the nearest way. You must find a horse for yourself; and we want to start at once."

"Will my lord give me fifty drachmæ now?"

"Not an obole!"

His request for a pecuniary advance being thus peremptorily refused, the man—whose name it eventually appeared was Hadgi—after much complaining of the hardness of "my lord's" conditions, expressed himself as willing to accept them; and presented himself a quarter of an hour later mounted on a sorry jade, and prepared to guide them to their destination.

"Bristling with weapons, and as villainous a rascal as ever I set eyes on," was Lennox's comment upon their conductor.

"Well, perhaps, he is not an ideal person for the work," admitted Vincent; "but we can't be particular in these times."

"Why don't you ask him whether he belongs to the Politike Hetaira?"

"Because he would only lie if I did."

There was nothing more to be said. Hadgi moved forward on his ramshackle beast. Lennox and Vincent formed up behind him, and Giles and Martin, driving the pack horses before them, brought up the rear. And the cavalcade started on their rough ride.

And rough riding it was for many a mile, only the barest of bridle-paths, and as they approached the lower spurs of the mountains, even this faint semblance of a recognised track died away, and left them nothing by which to judge the correctness

of their direction, except such confidence as they possessed in their guide's honesty and knowledge of the district.

Up and up they went, until at last they reached the summit of the ridge they were climbing, where, at Hadgi's suggestion, all dismounted for refreshment, and to let the animals browse the scanty herbage, and rest.

While the servants were busy getting ready provisions, and Lennox was stretching his limbs luxuriously, and bemoaning the hardness of the ground, Vincent was engaged in interviewing the guide.

"Friend Hadgi," he said, "we have ridden hard for four hours, and we must have covered quite twenty miles, and yet you say that Kalon Polisma is many miles further on. You have lied to us!"

"Your servant has not lied, my lord," was the ready answer. "We have traversed, as you say, at least twenty miles; but the path by which we must ride is circuitous. It is barely twenty miles to walk!"

"But you knew we were going to ride?"

Hadgi made no answer. His attention was keenly fixed upon the opposite ridge on the other side of the ravine, whither, directing his gaze, Vincent saw three horsemen emerge upon the summit.

"Who are those?" he asked, with a sudden impulse of distrust. "The servants of Antoniades, whose servant I also am, going to warn him of your coming," was the surprising answer.

Instinctively Vincent stepped backwards, and it was well he did so. For in an instant a knife gleamed aloft in Hadgi's hand, which, a moment later, would have been buried in the Englishman's heart.

"Run, Tom, run!" shouted the seemingly-dozing Lennox, as he sprang to his feet and raised his rifle. Vincent without more ado took to his heels, and the would-be assassin, seeing himself foiled, made off as hard as he could go down the hill-side.

As he ran, he whistled shrilly, and the sorry jade he had ridden, recognising his master's signal, galloped after him down the slope.

"Bang!" went Lennox's rifle, and Hadgi, throwing up his arms, pitched headlong to the ground, and rolling over and over was brought up by a big boulder, against which he lay motionless.

"Upon my word I could have spared the man for the sake of the beast," said Lennox coolly, as he watched their guide's horse galloping hard down the slope to join its master.

"His horse has joined him," said Vincent a second later.

And the remark was literally true. For in its hasty descent of the precipitous incline it lost its footing, and, turning a complete somersault, lay jerking its limbs spasmodically, its back broken. A friendly bullet put an end to its misery.

"Giles, go and see whether that gentleman has any papers on him to show who put him on to this business."

When Giles returned, he had found nothing in the shape of papers, excepting a dirty white card, which, on examination, proved to be a card of membership of the everlasting Politike Hetairia.

"This unpleasant secret society seems to have agents everywhere. You had better take possession of this card, Vincent. It may prove useful at a pinch. I fancy," he added, with a grimace, "you'll never be dull when you come to settle down here!"

But their attention was speedily drawn to the horsemen on the opposite ridge, who had carefully noted every detail of the late incident, and now began firing upon them at long range.

"This looks like the origin of a very pretty little blood-feud."

"Well, what's the use of being a picturesque mountain chieftain without at least one blood-feud on your hands?"

To which question Vincent did not deign to make an answer.

After an exchange of shots lasting ten minutes, in which no damage was done on either side, Antoniades' men moved off, and the Englishmen had leisure to take stock of their position.

"Our late guide has, I am afraid, purposely led our steps astray. If those were Antoniades' men, they were probably bound for Kalon Polisma. Whence it appears we cannot do better than follow the same route."

No one having a better suggestion to offer, this was accepted, and in the course of two hours, the little party, on whom the effects of the exertion they had undergone were now beginning to tell, found themselves upon the spot where their antagonists had lately stood; and, better still, a little more than a mile away, they saw a building, half-castle, half-mansion, which could not fail to be the place they were in search of, Kalon Polisma.

Evening was now drawing on, and it became imperative to decide upon some plan of campaign before nightfall.

"Oh, I never could make up my mind," observed Lennox languidly; "don't ask me. You are the mountain-chief, I am a sort of faithful henchman, and Giles and Martin are little better than mere thralls. With us to hear is to obey. So speak your commands, my lord, and cut 'em as short as you like."

Having exhorted his friend, as on a previous occasion, "not

to be a fool!" Vincent gave the word to start, and the little party once more set their horses in motion.

"By Jingo, they are preparing for us!"

"There is nothing for it but to go boldly forward."

As the Englishmen ascended the last slope which led to the building, a good deal of commotion was apparent in the courtyard of the castle.

Some score of fierce, be-petticoated mountaineers issued from within, and ranged themselves on either side of the main entrance, within which stood a lady.

"The fair Helen herself, for a thousand pounds!" ejaculated Lennox, with sudden and unusual excitement.

Vincent said nothing. He was struck dumb with admiration for the fair and beautiful woman, who, with dignified pose and erect mien, awaited their coming in the doorway.

The Englishmen rode forward with some trepidation, and, baring their heads, halted their horses a few yards from the entrance. Helen Stavros was the first to speak.

"You are strangers?" she inquired coldly.

"We are Englishmen," replied Vincent.

The expression on her face changed to one of interest and even pity.

"There are those here," she continued, "who charge you with deliberate murder, done this day in my district on one of my cousin's men. Have you anything to say?"

Lennox and Vincent exchanged glances. The latter spoke:

"We deny it!" he said.

"Do you deny you killed a man?"

"No; we did kill a man. But it was not a murder. It was the just punishment of a would-be assassin."

"It is well you do not deny it, for lo! here comes evidence that the charge was not a groundless one."

Looking round, the Englishmen saw, to their intense surprise, four men, carrying shoulder high on a light bier the dead body of the guide Hadgi, which they set down immediately in front of Helen Stavros.

"Was this the man?"

"It was."

"You say it was not an act of murder, but of self-defence. These men, who saw the deed, say it was the former. Only Heaven can tell who is speaking truth and who lies. Then must he of you who did the deed do one of two things. Either he must marry the widow of the dead man, and support and rear tenderly her seven orphaned children, or else he must fight three champions, chosen by the widow, to do battle for her on three successive days, unless he be killed in the first or second encounter."

"Which seems highly probable!" murmured Lennox to himself.

"Let the accused declare himself," continued Helen Stavros.

"Upon my word, this is very embarrassing," said Lennox, speaking aloud for the first time. "Fair lady, I really feel much too tired to fight, and perhaps the poor widow would not approve of me."

"It is an unselfish thought," observed Helen, "although I believe your fears are groundless. Let Hadgi's wife be fetched."

"Now I have done it!" groaned Lennox.

"Be serious, for Heaven's sake; we are in a tighter fix than you imagine!"

Hadgi's widow, with her numerous progeny, was quickly brought, and then followed a scene of pitiable anguish as she bent over the body of her dead husband, which set all the on-lookers weeping.

"Cheer up, woman!" exhorted Helen; "I have not sent for you to make a spectacle of your grief, but to comfort you. Look on this man"—and she pointed out Lennox—"and say whether you will accept him as a new husband, a second father to your helpless children?"

She dried her eyes, and, gazing long on Lennox, cried in a choking voice: "He is a proper man! I will wed with him!"

"But I won't—I can't! I'd rather fight a hundred champions. I decline the lady. I'm not a marrying man. For Heaven's sake say something, Tom, and get me out of this mess!"

Critical as the situation was, Vincent was too much engaged in trying to suppress an overwhelming inclination to roar with laughter, to be able to put in a word for his friend.

"This is an outrage on us all!" exclaimed Helen majestically; "you are either a shirker or a poltroon!"

"I am neither. I will fight with pleasure."

"He has lost the right to choose!" shouted a dozen angry voices.

"Peace, peace!" cried Helen. And Vincent thought her even more beautiful in her spirited attitude than in her dignified repose. "I am the Lady of the District; the guardian and keeper of its laws. This man shall fight to-morrow!"

"But Antoniades, I thought," was Vincent's bold objection, "was Lord of the District?"

"He has unjustly claimed the lordship; but it is mine, and I will keep it!"

There was a firmness in her tone that spoke volumes for the

determination of the speaker. At all events, Vincent was glad to know that Helen was no friend to Antoniades.

Some murmurs of dissent arose from those men who were especially attached to Antoniades at Helen's last remark. But being in a large minority, they deemed it prudent to suppress their sentiments for the present.

"The matter is settled. There is no more to be said," continued Helen in the same imperious tones. "To-morrow, at ten o'clock, the fight shall be, by which time the weary Englishman will be rested. Enter; you are my prisoners until this matter be cleared up. You may be assured of all honourable treatment."

Thus it was Vincent found himself a prisoner in the house in which he had expected to rule as chieftain.

CHAPTER IV.

LENNOX SUSPECTS SOMETHING—A LATE CALL—ANTONIADES DECLARES HIMSELF—THE NIGHT SURPRISE—AN OUTLINE OF A LADDER.

"Upon my word"—it was Lennox's unvarying formula when



She drew a dagger, and pointed it at her breast.

feeling a little injured, or unusually tired—"upon my word, this business of yours is the most exhausting affair I have ever been in; and then, that fight to-morrow, it will just about finish me. Did you gather whether I have to fight the three champions at once, or one down the other come on?"

"I think," replied Vincent gravely, "that you will have to fight them, one after the other. But there is still a way out of it; you've not forgotten the widow and the seven children?"

Lennox made an eloquent gesture expressive of the deepest disgust.

"But why didn't you at once put this imperious young woman in her proper place, and let her know that she has no more right to the position she claims than the man in the moon has? She does not even seem to be aware that you are old Lavenos' heir."

"I don't suppose she has ever heard of me."

"How do you account for that?"

"I imagine that this precious rascal Antoniades has kept her in ignorance for his own purposes."

"Then why don't you tell her?"

"Well—because—well, I may some day"—Vincent spoke with a hesitation that was quite unusual with him; "but really I am not quite sure whether I shall ever—that is, I can conceive circumstances under which I might never put forward a claim to these estates."

Lennox stared at his companion aghast for a second or two, whistled gently but significantly to himself, and abruptly changed the subject.

At this moment a man entered their apartment, with an intimation that the Lady Helen commanded the presence of the Englishman Vincent in the great hall.

"Beg me off that shindy to-morrow, old chap."

Vincent smiled, and followed his conductor into the presence of the lady.

She was clad in a rich velvet gown, and her fingers were toying with some kind of fancy-work. On a low stool beside her, with an open book on her knees, sat a young girl, who had evidently been reading to her mistress.

She reminded Vincent of an old-world châtelaine, left by her absent lord in charge of his castle and retainers, while he himself was away on some distant foray; except, of course, he assured himself, that no mediæval dame could ever have been so fair and beautiful.

"Sir Englishman!" she said abruptly, after motioning him to be seated, "whence did you hear that Antoniades was Lord of this District?"

"I heard it at Belgrade."

She seemed surprised. "Then they talk of him in Belgrade?"

"Antoniades is well-known there."

"As a good patriot?"

"Hardly that; rather as a man who can be made useful, if he gets his price."

"And that price is?"

"Kalon Polisma, and the Lordship of the District."

"Shame upon him, and shame on those who try to bribe him thus, with what is not theirs to give. I stand nearer in degree of kindred to old Lavenos than he does. This place is mine, and I will yield it to none except of my own free will!"

She spoke with passionate vehemence; and Vincent decided once for all that this was the attitude and bearing that best became her.

"But how came you to know these things?" she inquired presently.

"I knew the old lord well, who lived in England; and, business bringing me to Servia, I thought I should like to see a place I'd heard so much of. Hence my inquiries at Belgrade, and journey hither."

Her curiosity about Lavenos, and the kind of life he led in England—she had only seen him once, when she was quite a little girl—was insatiable, and Vincent found a good deal of difficulty in replying to her questions.

"Do you know where Antoniades is now?" she asked.

"Yes, he has crossed the border with his fighting men to raid Turkish Territory. It is an act of war. By this time the armies on both sides the frontier will be moving forward to battle."

"But are you not afraid? Kalon Polisma is in an exposed position. In what do you trust for safety? To Antoniades?"

"No, no; not after what you have told me. I trust—I trust in Heaven and myself. He shall never enter these doors again unless he recognise my rights."

"But he is much more powerful than you. How many followers has he?"

"Perhaps a thousand."

"And you?"

"Barely two hundred faithful men; and I, their leader, am but a woman!" she added bitterly.

"Dear lady, if you will accept such service as I and my friends can offer you, our best efforts are at your disposal."

Before she could make any response, the loud clanging of a

bell resounded through the Castle, and the startled inmates began to hurry to and fro. For the hour was late, and such a summons at night was unusual.

"Your kinsman, Antoniades, desires instant speech with you!" Vincent thought she turned a shade paler as this message was delivered to her.

"Is he alone?" she asked the servant.

"No; he has some fifty men with him, for whom he seeks food and shelter."

"I will await him here. Let his men have food, but do not admit them. Keep a strong guard under arms before the door, and send a summons to the village to all those on whom we can implicitly rely to be here at dawn."

Then, turning to Vincent, she added: "Leave me alone for awhile. I must see this man alone."

When Vincent rejoined his friend in the apartment assigned to them, the latter was very anxious to know what had taken place at the interview just concluded. But, strangely enough, Vincent had very little to tell him beyond the fact that Antoniades had arrived, and that he rather expected there would be trouble, considering it highly probable they would be transformed very shortly from prisoners into defenders of Kalon Polisma—an announcement which gave very little comfort to Lennox, as it merely portended, he complained, a renewed necessity for exertion on his part.

And so he composed himself to sleep, while Vincent paced uneasily up and down the room, listening with all his ears for any signs that might afford him a clue to what was passing between the Lady Helen and her visitor.

At length he heard the great door swing open, and then quickly closed again, with the grating noise of bars and bolts shot home; and, faintly, the tramp of feet outside. And when these sounds had died away, he was once more summoned to attend the Lady Helen.

"Listen," she said, speaking with studied calm, but labouring obviously under great excitement, "this man, my kinsman, has openly declared himself my enemy. He has insulted me by asking me to be his wife, and, when I refused him, declared that he had only made the proposal as the easiest means of obtaining the estates. That now he would have them without the encumbrance of myself; and that if I presumed to oppose him I had better look to my own safety, for he would not spare me. Many more threats to the same effect he used; and the upshot is that he will recall his men from the frontier and attack me here. I ask you then, will you help me? My people are faithful and true; but they will fight all the better for being led by men of gentle birth and breeding."

Vincent's reply may be easily guessed: he would strive in the defence of Kalon Polisma as zealously as if it was his own.

"I have proof that this man Antoniades," he added, "is engaged in a wide conspiracy to overthrow the present Government; that he is a traitor even to the cause he pretends to have at heart, and does but masquerade in the guise of a patriot to promote his own greedy ends."

"He is your enemy as well as mine. He seemed more angry when I refused to give you up to him than when I declined his offer of marriage."

"Perhaps we know too much about him!" laughed Vincent lightly. And then to turn the conversation: "But if I am to assume command, I must visit the different posts to see if everything is secure, and you must introduce me to the garrison."

Before she could reply, a loud hubbub arose in the great hall. Pistol-shots were exchanged, and the sounds of a confused mêlée were apparent.

Vincent rushed to the door of the room, and threw it open.

A small knot of men were running towards it, at the head of whom was someone whom instinct told him was Antoniades.

He rapidly fired two shots from his revolver, then slammed the door to, and looked it just as the attacking-party threw their whole weight against the panels.

"Where does that other door lead to?"

"To the corridor and balcony above the great hall."

"Come!"

She passed through. He locked the door behind them. Then together they mounted the stairs, and gained the balcony, from which they looked down into the great hall.

A hot fusillade was in full progress.

Lennox could be seen leaning negligently against the door-post firing coolly down the passage, a bloodstained handkerchief tied loosely round his left hand.

Vincent ran down to join him; there was a rush of men to the great door, a few seconds' close fighting, then the door was flung open, and the struggling mass surged through it, and vanished into the night.

"A very good notion of a surprise attack indeed," remarked Lennox. "That's where they came in," and he pointed to a small window high up in the darkest corner of the hall, against which, on the outside, the faint outline of a ladder could be seen.

"I suppose there is to be no more sleep to-night, so let's take stock of the damage!" he grumbled.

A brief examination showed that the casualties amounted exactly to a dozen killed.

CHAPTER V.

VINCENT'S REINFORCE—A DASHING ASSAULT—STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF THE ENEMY—HELEN STAVROS' PREDICAMENT—VINCENT'S CLAIM—THE FIRING-PARTY.

Antoniades was not an enemy who let the grass grow under his feet before striking a blow, as was proved by his prompt action of the night before; and it was at once manifest to the two Englishmen that they would have their work cut out for them to defend the place successfully with the forces at their disposal against the superior numbers of Antoniades. For the building itself, although very strong, was extensive and straggling, and open to attack on all sides.

What was more serious was that comparatively few men had responded to the summons of Helen Stavros, and those who had delayed would hardly be able now, even if zealous enough to attempt it, to force their way through the large force that commanded every approach to Kalon Polisma. The defenders, reckoning every available man, mustered exactly three score; the enemy's numbers fell very little short of a thousand.

"It is as clear as day that Antoniades means to rush this thing," remarked Lennox. "As I take it, he wants to get away again quickly. Some desultory fighting—so our fellows who came in last night, report—has taken place all along the frontier, and the Turks are steadily advancing. Antoniades, probably, hasn't much time to spare to us."

"Well, it will be over all the sooner."

"Hum, yes; I suppose that will be an advantage!" murmured Lennox rather doubtfully.

"By the way, Len, I have determined to say nothing to the Lady Helen about my rights to the estates, and so on; and I must beg of you not to say anything either."

"The Lady Helen," replied Lennox, "as far as I am concerned, shall always remain in ignorance of that most interesting fact."

After which remark, the twitching of the muscles of his mouth seemed to show that he had considerable difficulty in suppressing an inclination to laugh.

"Does her ladyship," he inquired, "still insist upon my fighting the widow's three champions?"

"No, of course not!" was the curt reply; "she has more interesting things to think about."

"An observation, which I take to be literally true!" muttered the other, as he walked off to the window to take stock of the situation.

"An attack en masse! Look out!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when a dozen bullets shivered the panes of glass, and flattened themselves against the opposite wall. Instantly a roar of musketry burst forth upon every side of the building at once, while the return fire of the defenders served to enhance the din.

Within half a minute from the start there was not a whole pane of glass in the building, the hissing and spluttering of the bullets as they struck wood and stone were incessant, and under cover of this deadly hail, the assailants were very soon beating and hammering against every weak spot in the building that seemed at all likely to yield them entrance.

There was no doubt about the correctness of Lennox's surmise. Antoniades meant to rush the thing, and get it over.

While the two Englishmen were encouraging their men to keep up a regular and steady fire upon the main body of the enemy in front of the house—although it was instant death to appear for more than a second at any of the windows—an alarm was raised that an entrance had been effected at the rear.

"Take a dozen men, Tom, and go and see what it is. As soon as this position gets untenable, I shall fall back upon the staircase. You do the same."

Vincent hurried with his small reinforcement to the threatened point, but realised all too quickly that further resistance there was hopeless.

A sudden dash, however, created a diversion for the moment, enabling him to pick up the wounded that had fallen in defence of the post, and retire in good order upon the back staircase.

As he executed the manœuvre a loud crash warned him that the great door of the Hall had yielded, while a ringing volley from the inside was sufficient proof that Lennox and his men had given the first comers a warm reception.

When he reached the balcony that ran right round the first floor and overlooked the hall, they were slowly ascending the front stairs, still firing.

"Come up, Len—come up! They're in at the back!" he shouted.

"All right, old chap; lots of time! I hate hurrying!"

And, with calm deliberation, Lennox leisurely mounted, stop-

ping on every step to fire one chamber of his revolver—a piece of daring which, if it had no other effect, served to kindle the ardour of his men and inspire them with renewed courage to continue the combat.

To dispose their men in such a way as to command both staircases did not take the Englishmen very long; but it had hardly been accomplished before the whole of the lower portion of the house was swarming with the enemy and a brisker fusillade than ever was in full swing.

Matters were in this condition when an ominous whisper reached Vincent's ears that ammunition was running short, the reserve supply having been forgotten and left behind in the hall below.

"Then, I take it, that's about the end!"

"Where's Lady Helen?"

"Looking after the wounded in there."

"Ought we to tell her?"

"I think so, for we shall have to try and arrange terms with that beast Antoniadès, and she must be consulted."

"Then you had better go and tell her. I'll stay here."

Vincent went off on his errand, and Lennox remained to direct the firing of the last few cartridges.

But, to his great surprise, he found that the enemy's fire had slackened as suddenly as his own, and while he was wondering what this move might mean, and whether it was not the prelude to an attempt to set the place on fire and burn them out, Vincent came running back to him with the astonishing information that the enemy were streaming away from the house, and making off as hard as they could go in the direction of Larissa. He had seen them from the top windows.

"But why, my dear friend—why?" demanded Lennox incredulously.

"Heaven only knows, unless—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Listen! Surely that sounds like—"

"It's infantry firing!" exclaimed Lennox impatiently.

"Yes; but what infantry?"

Neither made any pretence to answer the question; but both with one accord ran to the top of the house.

"Jove! how those beggars are running!"

"Then it must be the Turks after them!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Lennox.

They returned downstairs and informed the men who had fought so gallantly with them of the good news, and then went off to acquaint the Lady Helen with the same intelligence.

They remained for some time in conversation with her before giving the necessary orders for the bestowal of the dead and wounded that encumbered the hall.

"Hallo! what has become of our fellows?"

"Every man of them has disappeared, sir!"

Giles was the informant; he had seen them go.

"They cleared out, sir, as soon as they heard the Turks were coming"—a piece of supplemental information volunteered by Martin.

"Upon my word!" began Lennox, with eyebrows raised, at a loss to find language strong enough to express his surprise.

"There is nothing to be said," interrupted Vincent; "and, besides, here come the Turks! Lady Helen, is it necessary that you should expose yourself to a meeting with these men?"

She had joined them unobserved.

"Certainly," she replied simply; "I am responsible for the order of the district. They will want to see me."

By this time the courtyard was filled with Turkish soldiers, while two or three officers had stepped across the ruined doorway and entered the hall.

"Gentlemen," said one of the latter in French to the little party awaiting them, "I must ask you to consider yourselves as prisoners. I shall be glad to know which of you is master here?"

"These are two Englishmen, my guests," replied Helen Stavros, stepping forward. "I am the owner of Kalon Polisma, and the estates belonging thereto, and hold the lordship of the whole district."

"Indeed, madam? Then I wish it were anybody else. It makes my task more unpleasant than I expected."

The Turkish officer expressed himself with the most perfect courtesy.

"Our frontier," he continued, "has been violated by a horde of undisciplined bandits, who have burnt, pillaged, and destroyed with reckless and wanton cruelty. These men have forfeited their right to the treatment due to fair and honourable foes; and my orders are, and my intention is, to shoot them wherever I find them!"

Three distinct volleys fired into the courtyard interrupted him at this point, and he was careful to explain to Helen Stavros that the firing need not alarm her. It was merely the shooting of some of those very men, who had been made prisoners in the recent engagement.

"These canaille," he continued, "are mostly members of some pestilential secret society known as the Politike Hetairia, the main object of which is apparently to embroil the two nations in war—an object, unhappily, which has been successfully accomplished. Now, it has been brought to our knowledge that the owner of Kalon Polisma has been, and is, the chief supporter of this society in this district, and I have been specially commissioned to find the said owner, and convey him to our headquarters, where, I doubt not, sharp justice will be meted out to him, unless he can clear himself of the charges brought against him!"

The officer made a brief pause before concluding.

"I have no option therefore, madam, if you persist in claiming the ownership of Kalon Polisma, but to ask you to prepare yourself at once to journey under guard to Turkish headquarters."

To say that Helen Stavros did not shrink from such a journey would be absurd. Her conception of Turkish justice and Turkish honour had been derived from stories of Bashi-Bazouk cruelty and outrage, and the prospect of being handed over to the tender mercies of such men filled her with horror and loathing.

"Do the Turks make war with women?" she asked scornfully.

"No, madam; they do not. But in this instance my orders are explicit. I beg you earnestly therefore to make no resistance, and so compel me to use force. I have no time to bandy words with you, and must start at once!"

"Sir, I know nothing of any secret society whose aims are such as you describe, although I can, perhaps, guess how such a rumour spread. At any rate, I decline to accompany you; and if you attempt to compel me, I have my remedy here!"

As she spoke she drew from a silver sheath, which hung at her side, a small poniard, and resolutely held the point to her breast.

The men, surprised by the swiftness of her action, gazed at her in amazement, while Vincent, in whom astonishment was swallowed up in admiration, now decided that he had never seen her look so beautiful as in this attitude of proud defiance.

But his wits did not desert him.

He stepped forward to the Turkish officer and said:

"This lady, I need not assure you, knows nothing of the mischievous society you have referred to. She is innocent of—"

"Come, come, sir! I want no interference from you to tell me what my duty is! You are only—"

"I am the owner of Kalon Polisma!" interrupted Vincent in his turn; "and these are the papers establishing my title."

As he spoke he handed a packet to the officer.

"Then this lady—"

"Is in error; that is all."

While the officer, now rather bewildered, was looking through the papers, Helen Stavros, momentarily startled by Vincent's claim, was on the point of speaking, when Lennox whispered something in her ear, which had the effect of calming her and changing her defiant look into one of tenderness for Vincent.

"The papers seem to be in order. I see the seal of the Servian Minister affixed to the document confirming your claim."

"Yes, yes; it's all right! I'm ready! When shall we go?"

Vincent wished to get away before the officer blurted out the whole truth in the hearing of Helen Stavros, while the officer himself, much relieved to find that he had to do with a man instead of a woman, was anxious to set out before new complications arose.

He was on the point of restoring the papers, when his eye caught sight of a suspicious-looking card, closely resembling those found on the persons of the prisoners so recently condemned to be shot. He drew it forth, and lo! it was a card of membership of the Politike Hetairia—the card that belonged to the dead Hadgi.

"This alters the whole complexion of the matter!" he said sternly. "Have you anything to say why I should not instantly order you to be shot?"

And then, without waiting for a reply, he beckoned to a sergeant, who entered with a dozen men and formed a circle round the two Englishmen.

"Search them!"

Resistance would have been absurd.

"Yes, I have one of those beastly cards! Here it is! Do what you like with me, but for Heaven's sake make these evil-smelling rascals keep their dirty paws off me!"

This protest came from "Dainty" Lennox.

A minute later the two Englishmen were marched out into the courtyard. Helen Stavros tottered upstairs, and, breaking down at last under the strain of worry, fell into a dead swoon; while the Turkish officers deliberated upon the Englishmen's fate.



The Turkish sergeant drew up the firing-party in front of them.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SIGNAL—HELEN'S HARANGUE—ON THE ROAD TO THE MELOUNA PASS—THE NIGHT ENCAMPMENT, AND WHAT BEFELL THERE—"BROTHERHOOD."

The Turkish sergeant placed his prisoners, bound hand and foot, with their backs to the courtyard wall, drew up his firing-party in front of them, and waited for the signal, which was to be a handkerchief waved from the window of the room in which the officers were consulting.

But these same officers found it difficult to arrive at a decision. Their orders seemed to be conflicting. The owner of Kalon Polisma was to be conveyed to headquarters, and yet all proved members of the hateful Politike Hetairia were to be summarily shot.

How were they to deal with an individual who belonged to both categories?

The position was a difficult one; but after long deliberation it appeared that clemency was the safer course. The reputed owner of Kalon Polisma should be conveyed to headquarters; and similar leniency for the moment extended to Lennox, on the ground of his being an Englishman. The signal handkerchief was therefore not waved from the window.

Ten minutes later the prisoners, with two troopers on either side, two in front, and two behind them, were riding away to the Varna Pass.

Within an hour the officer in command evacuated Kalon Polisma, and marched his men down to the Kola plain, leaving the beautiful home of Helen Stavros, a woeful spectacle of mournful misery and ruin. Its windows were shattered. Its doors were torn from their hinges. Its walls were defaced. Its hall and courtyard were encumbered with corpses. And only a few men, excepting Giles and Martin, remained behind with their mistress in charge of the wounded.

But Helen Stavros was not a woman to sit down idly and bemoan her misfortunes. As soon as she had recovered consciousness, she set energetically about repairing them.

Giles and Martin undertook to remain with her, and began clearing the hall, and burying the dead.

"A fine young woman, a regular princess," Giles confided to Martin.

"If I know Mr. Vincent," replied the other, with a chuckle, "it won't be long before he gives the slip to them Turks, and gets back here, so if I can help the young lady I will. But, law, what a ghastly lot of blood!"

Helen Stavros, in the meantime, had fixed upon a course of action, although her brain was all in a tangle, and it was most difficult to decide who or what these Englishmen really were.

One of them claimed to be the owner of Kalon Polisma. But that, of course, was only a generous ruse to save herself.

Both of them were apparently members of this dreadful society. But that, of course, was a mistake.

Still it set her thinking. This Politike Hetairia seemed a very widely-spread organisation. She doubted not that a good many of her own adherents belonged to it. This would account for their very prompt disappearance on the arrival of the Turks.

And although she knew nothing about this particular society, she thought she knew something about the rules of such societies in general. And one of them she believed to be a solemn vow made by every member to assist every other member, more especially when suffering for the sake of "the cause."

It was this line of argument that took her to the village in search of some of her vanished adherents.

The Turks were rapidly disappearing in the distance, and the inhabitants beginning to venture out of their hiding-places. One of the first she came across was an old retainer named Vasile. When she stopped him, he hung his head, thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"Vasile, is this the way you keep your oath of fidelity to the lady of Kalon Polisma? You are alive, and my house and my guests have been insulted by the Turks. Are you a man?"

The scornful ring in her tone seemed to shrivel him up.

"Where are the other cowards?"

Where are the rest of those who, having eaten my bread, and lived on my bounty, basely desert me in the hour of my need?"

Vasile squirmed under the lash of her bitter words.

He was sincerely devoted to the house of Kalon Polisma and its fortunes. But the Turks? Ah, that altered everything. All the same, his conscience pricked him very uncomfortably.

"Vasile," she continued, "you, and those like you, have behaved like curs. But I will speedily show you you would have been wiser to face a thousand Turks than incur the heavy weight of my displeasure. I can punish, and I will."

Helen knew her audience. The strong words began to tell. The spell was working. Vasile, the simple mountaineer, whose attachment to his chief can only be compared to the veneration of the highlanders of old for the head of the clan, fell upon his knees, and fairly howled for mercy and forgiveness.

Others of the villagers had by this time come upon the scene, and stood sheepishly round, looking, listening, heartily ashamed of themselves, and shivering.

"Listen, all of you," she said, "and take warning. On one condition only will I receive you back into my favour. That is, that you wipe out the dishonour done to my house by restoring to me the two English strangers, whom your cowardice alone permitted to be torn from the shelter of my roof."

She paused for half a second. The hearers fidgeted expectantly and uneasily.

"Nay, more, I know your secrets. I know who belongs to the Politike Hetairia and who does not. Shall I use this knowledge to your undoing, or shall I keep this secret?"

Her audience were now thoroughly roused and excited.

"These Englishmen"—she spoke rapidly—"are also members of your society. They are one with you in brotherhood. They are rich and powerful. They can and will reward those who help them. I charge you, therefore, by the oaths you swore of mutual assistance, go instantly to their rescue. There are twenty horses in my stable. Take as many as you will. Only eight men guard them. They are bound for the Kola Pass. There are ravines, defiles, passes, a score of places where you can overtake and lie in wait for them. Begone, and bring them here before to-morrow night!"

With a queenly wave of her hand, she dismissed her hearers, and retraced her steps towards the mansion.

As for her audience, they appeared like new men. The light of a deadly earnestness burnt in their eyes, as they moved rapidly off to prepare for the quest. Woe betide those eight Turkish troopers, if these hardy mountaineers overtake them in their present humour!

The two Englishmen and their escort rode hard and fast all that day—that is, as hard and as fast as the nature of the ground permitted, which is not saying very much—although the fatigue incurred was considerable. The sergeant had received strict in-

OUR NEW SERIAL, "WITTY

junctions not to sacrifice caution to speed, and rather to choose unfrequented paths than run the risk of falling in with the scattered parties of banditti known to be out in the mountains.

And, to tell the truth, their situation did not weigh very heavily upon the prisoner. They felt, for instance, very different beings from the two rather rueful individuals who had passed such a bad quarter of an hour, with their backs to the courtyard wall, looking down the muzzles of a dozen rifles.

Lennox, at all events, with whom the affectation of susceptibility to fatigue was only a pose, a habit that had insensibly grown upon him, was as blithe and gay as a lark revelling in the bright air, enjoying the excitement of the slips and slides and stumblings of the beast he bestrode, as they negotiated some path rather more breakneck than usual, and keenly alive to the fascinating possibility of being called upon at any moment to take part in, or at least witness, a tussle.

If Vincent was not in such high spirits as his companion, it was because his imagination was constantly haunted by a pale face, surmounted by a wealth of fair hair, last seen looking wistfully in his direction; and because he was troubled by the vicissitudes of fortune that might still be in store for the owner of the face in question.

Still he, too, had his compensating fancies. Had it not fallen to his lot to rescue beauty in distress? Was there not the pleasurable surmise, amounting almost to certainty, that his services had not lacked appreciation?

Added to which, he was by no means insensible to the zest which the spice of danger, the prospect of something happening at any moment, gave to the whole situation.

"If that beast Nikopoulos hadn't dropped his dirty card, I suppose we should still be at Kalon Polisma at this moment?"

Vincent sighed as he gave vent to this remark.

"Cheer up, old chap," replied Lennox, "even the dirty card had its use. It served to put us on our guard."

"I wonder what the Lady Helen is doing?"

"Probably taking a snack of something before dinner. At all events, that is what I should like to be doing. I am feeling precious hungry."

But Vincent wholly declined to entertain so prosaic a suggestion. He preferred to think of her with failing appetite, due to her anxieties for the safety of— Well, he didn't mention who.

The idea of dinner seemed to have occurred to the sergeant much at the same time as it forced itself upon Lennox's notice, for he immediately called a halt, and made the simple preparations necessary for passing the night.

The camp-fire was lighted, the pot was set to boil, and in a brief space the whole party was discussing, with much contentment, the ample rations served out to them.

Then, an hour later, a watch was set, and those whose spell of duty came on later curled themselves up in their rugs, and were soon sound asleep, an example which Lennox was not slow to follow, as his companion seemed to prefer the company of his own thoughts to conversation.

The first streaks of dawn were in the sky—it was the hour when the sentinels were sleepest—that Lennox was rudely awakened from his slumbers by a sharp volley of musketry.

Springing to his feet, he noticed that four of the escort had already been struck down, and amongst them the sergeant. In the ensuing commotion resulting from the surprise and the loss of their leader the men seemed unable to deal with the attack, which was indeed difficult, as their assailants, well screened by rocks and boulders, were practically invisible, and the Englishmen were able, almost unobserved, to steal away.

"How on earth did we get out of that mess?"

"Can't say, unless— Well, it could hardly have been accident."

"Seems to me the beggars must have been studiously careful to fire away from us."

"Can they be friends?"

"Yes. Look! there's a chap making signs to us."

The firing had quite ceased. The Turkish ~~city~~ had been annihilated, the rescuers pouring in volley after volley directly the Englishmen had withdrawn to a safe distance, until the bodies of the eight Turks were simply riddled with bullets.

Quite defenceless, Lennox and Vincent stood, and waited for the victorious band, who approached them with shouts and cries of triumph, and the liveliest testimony of satisfaction at finding them safe and unharmed.

"The Lady Helen has told us that my lords are members of the Politike Hetairia. Will they give the password?"

"Brotherhood!" replied Vincent boldly.

"Brotherhood it is!" added Lennox, with enthusiastic emphasis.

"Hail, brothers! Hurrah for freedom!" shouted the motley crew of mountaineers.

As their horses' heads were once more turned towards Kalon Polisma, and they rode along in company with their ragged preservers, Lennox remarked to Vincent, with much satisfaction: "Those beastly tickets have come in useful after all."

CHAPTER VII.

VINCENT'S IMPATIENCE—THE TRAGEDY AT KALON POLISMA—THE QUEST—SUSPENSE—DESPAIR—NEWS AT LAST.

Who sent you?

How did you come?

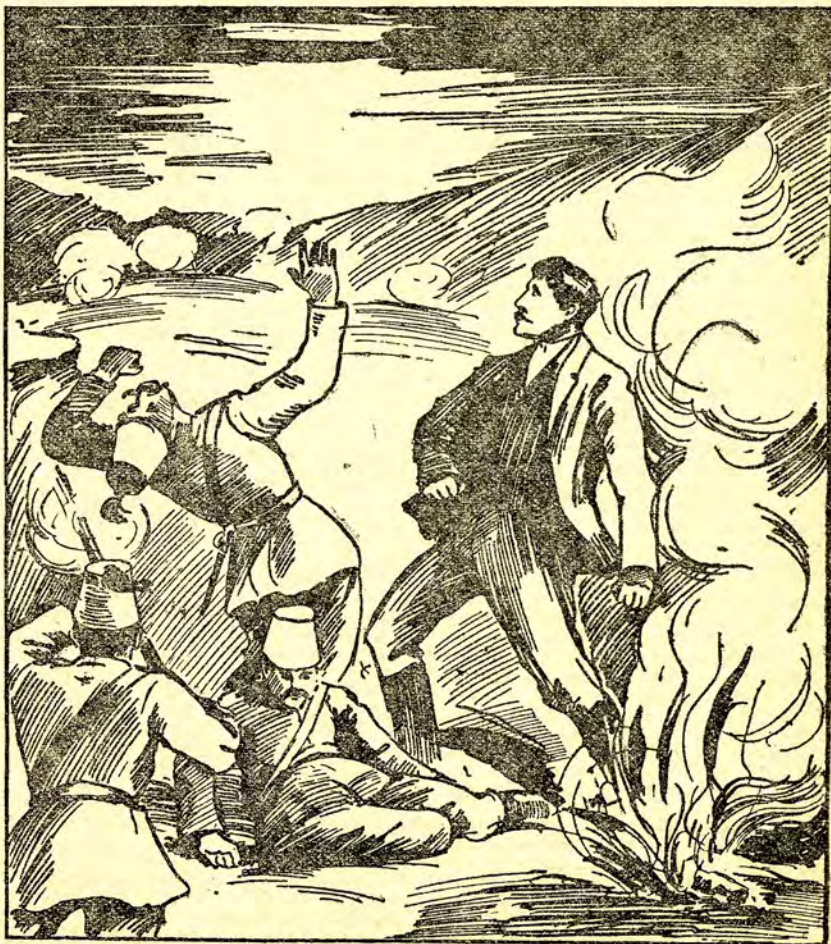
Whose proposal was it?

Where did you get the horses from?

These, and countless other questions, showered upon the chief of the band by Vincent, were always answered by the same three words: "The Lady Helen."

The Lady Helen sent them.

They came by the Lady Helen's orders.



Four of the escort had already been struck down, and amongst them the sergeant.

WILL WYNN," STARTS NEXT WEEK.

It was the Lady Helen's proposal.

The Lady Helen lent the horses.

"Upon my word," remarked Lennox, "this young woman has taken a very great deal of trouble in the matter. She has evidently got the knack of handling these thieves."

"It is wonderful she should have thought of us with so many troubles of her own on hand!" replied Vincent enthusiastically.

Lennox was not at all sure it was so very wonderful, although he did not say so, merely musing in silence upon the point whether these same rescuers would have been so promptly despatched if his own fate alone had been in question.

Ride as hard as they may, the Englishmen did not expect to reach Kalon Polisma before nightfall; but so resistless was Vincent's energy, so uncompromising his determination to get forward, that the afternoon sun was still above the horizon when the party came in sight of the house.

"At last, at last!" he murmured.

And, sticking spurs into his jaded beast, he shot out from the rest, and was down the hill, up the farther slope, and in the courtyard of the Castle, while Lennox and the rest were still upon the other side.

"I foresee there will be no difficulty about fulfilling that last condition of old Lavenos' will, and if I thought any of these pungent but picturesque ragamuffins here understood the nature of a bet, I would lay any number of them odds of five to two that Master Thomas Vincent is married within three months from this date, and undertake to name the lady as well."

So ran the current of Lennox's thoughts; but he did not offer to make the bet, as they had now reached the courtyard, and Vincent, his face as pale as death, came running down the steps to meet them.

"For Heaven's sake, what's the matter, Tom?"

"One moment!" said the latter hoarsely, turning away towards the band of sturdy peasants.

"Men, in our absence evil has befallen the Lady Helen Stavros. She has been kidnapped from her home by her kinsman Antoniadès. I will give a thousand drachmæ to the first man that brings me news of her, and five thousand to anyone who brings her back in safety here. This I swear!"

Consternation was visible on all faces at this strange intelligence. Kidnapped?—and Antoniadès? Was it safe for simple peasantry to meddle with the affairs of so great a person? But, then, the reward—one thousand—five thousand drachmæ—it was immense, colossal.

Did the Englishman really mean what he said?

Yes; Vincent assured them he meant what he said.

This second assurance carried conviction with it. Like a flight of birds the group of horsemen wheeled round and scattered. Some took to the mountains, some to the plain. Each man apparently knew some special haunt of Antoniadès, and hastened thither, eager to secure the reward for himself.

"I think," remarked Lennox, watching them go, "you will not be long before you get the news you want."

"Come in, Len," said the other, trembling with excitement and grief—"come in, and hear the accounts for yourself, and then you can help me to think and to act."

"Giles and Martin, where are they?"

"They are both wounded seriously—Giles dangerously. They seem to have done their best, and are being well looked after by the women. There is no one to blame."

The woman who had first given an outline of the story to Vincent repeated it in detail for the benefit of Lennox.

The few men in the house at the time were either dead or wounded. Even some of the women, who had clung to their mistress, had been ruthlessly stabbed.

With this little preamble, the woman began her story, whence it appeared that Antoniadès and the bulk of his men had successfully evaded the Turkish pursuit.

At night, he returned with a large force to Kalon Polisma, not knowing what had happened there, but certainly expecting to find an alert garrison, and anticipating a stout resistance.

To his great surprise he found neither the one nor the other. He and his men had little more to do than walk in at their ease. Hastily throwing on a few clothes, the Lady Helen collected her women about her, and went to meet the intruder.

There was no beating about the bush.

Would she resign all claims to the lordship of Kalon Polisma?

That is what Antoniadès wanted to know.

Or would she take the consequence?

She declined to resign anything.

After which the affair was over in three minutes.

Antoniadès seized her. Her own men, and the English servants who strove to protect her, were shot down.

She drew her silver-hilted poniard, whether to use it upon herself or him, the woman could not say. But he gripped her hand, and in doing so got a nasty stab in the arm, which seemed to enrage him, for he shook her violently and cruelly.

That was all the woman knew; she was sick with terror at the time; but in the morning her mistress had gone, and so had Antoniadès and his men, and there was nothing for her and the

other women to do but to nurse the wounded men, and weep for the desolation of the house.

So ran the tale, told with an accompaniment of sobs and tears.

"For Heaven's sake, Lennox, now you know the facts, suggest something!"

"My dear Tom, I see nothing for it but to wait for news."

"It's maddening to sit still with the knowledge that she is in that brute's power!"

"Be patient, old friend; think, what can be done other than what you have already done?"

"We might find that Turkish officer and inform him?"

"What? To be immediately despatched ourselves again to headquarters, or, considering what happened to our escort, more probably to be summarily shot? It appears to me that, both for the Lady Helen's sake and our own, it would be wise for us to give the Turks a wide berth just now."

"Well, there are Servian authorities somewhere. Can't we apply to them?"

"The Servians have got their hands too full of their own business to bestow any thought upon ours. There seems to be no doubt that the Turks have won the Kola Pass, and are advancing upon Varna. There is nothing to do, Tom, but possess your soul in patience; although, in the way of advice, I am aware it is the most banal and futile that man can offer to a friend in trouble."

And so the night passed.

Vincent long refused to lie down, pacing up and down the room restlessly, torn with anxiety, agitated by the suspense, and starting up excitedly at every sound, in the hope that it might imply the return of one of the messengers with news of the missing Helen.

But no news came, and at last, worn out in mind and body, completely exhausted, he flung himself down on a couch, and snatched a few hours' uneasy and unrefreshing sleep.

Day came at last, and with it no relief—or rather, if possible, an increase of anxieties.

The messengers straggled in one by one.

One by one they told their tales of failure.

Antoniadès had been sought in every one of his known retreats, and in every instance no sign or trace of him could be found. He might have been suddenly transported to the ends of the earth, for all the evidence of his existence that was forthcoming.

Lennox, to whom his friend's distress was a source of grave concern, did his best to preserve a cheerful mind, and proved himself fertile in suggesting all sorts of ingenious possibilities to account for the absence of news.

"Look here, Tom, there are still half a dozen of these fellows not returned. It is absurd to despair yet."

"But are they likely to succeed where so many have been unsuccessful?"

"Why shouldn't they? When all have returned, and all confessed failure, it will be time enough to give up hope."

"And think of revenge!" added Vincent grimly.

"Think of anything you like short of sheer despair."

"But the brute may have killed her!"

"Not likely; she is too valuable to him."

"How?"

"Don't you see, she can be far more serviceable to him alive than dead. He would be no nearer the estates if she were out of the way than he is now. You are his real hindrance. Provided he could comfortably dispose of you, I can understand him taking strong measures with her, but not before."

The rather doubtful logic of this argument was not as convincing as it was intended to be. Still, it gave Vincent a different aspect of the case to think over; and Lennox would have sacrificed a ton of logic to manufacture an ounce of consolation.

"Well?"

"My lord, I have discovered nothing."

Another messenger had returned from a fruitless errand.

Vincent became sicker and sicker at heart. His restless excitement passed away, and a sort of dreary numbness came over him.

"There are still four others to hear from."

That was the only comforting thing Lennox could think of to say.

Vincent hung his head in absolute dejection.

Two more men appeared with the same dismal report.

Vincent suddenly sprang to his feet.

"I am going to look for her," he said.

"But where?"

"Where? Everywhere. I will seek her until I can seek no longer!"

Lennox thought that grief had temporarily destroyed the balance of his friend's mind. Still, there was nothing so likely as active exercise to restore that. Anything would be better for him than this quiet brooding—brooding over misfortune.

He got up and followed Vincent outside.

Five minutes later the latter was riding furiously down the slope towards the plain, with Lennox in close pursuit.

At the bottom two weary horsemen met them, their horses completely spent with hard travelling.

"News, news!" they cried.

"What is it?"

"We have earned the thousand drachmæ."

"You shall have two thousand if you will speak quickly."

"Antoniades holds the Lady Helen a prisoner in a house in Varna."

"You are sure?"

"We swear it. It is the last house but one on the road to Mustchuck."

"Who are with him?" "About a dozen men."

"Go on to the house, collect a few men that can be trusted, and follow us thither at your utmost speed."

Then the two Englishmen gave the horses their heads, galloping with loosened rein towards the plain, and disappearing in a cloud of dust in the direction of Varna.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BIRD IN THE CAGE—PANIC-STRICKEN FUGITIVES—ANTONIADES' LAST CAROUSE—RETRIBUTION—CONCLUSION.

From the top window of a house in Varna—it was the last house but one on the road to Mustchuck—a woman, of singularly beautiful form and face, but most forlorn and woebegone appearance, gazed longingly into the busy street beneath.

Strong iron bars spanned the window; and these from time to time she shook with impotent passion, her puny strength making no more impression upon them than if they had been cylinders of adamant fixed in blocks of granite.

Anon she would cease her efforts, and sink dejected and exhausted on the floor, abandoning all hope of liberation, a prey to the blackest despair.

Then again she would return to the window and gaze wistfully upon the passers-by. Some heard her cries, and stopped for the briefest space and looked up. But all were too painfully occupied with their own concerns to do more than cast a curious glance, and hurry on.

But still she continued to gaze, and at last the excited and increasing stream of southward travellers exercised a kind of fascination over her, and helped her to forget her own sorry plight.

At first the exodus from the city was orderly. Well-equipped carriages flew by. Heavily but carefully-laden waggons rumbled past. Solitary horsemen cantered along, not slowly, but without frantic haste. The pedestrians that trudged their way to the south looked anxious and eager, but not wholly distressed—certainly not panic-stricken.

Then gradually the mien and bearing of the travellers changed. There were signs of departure, with undue preparation, evident in all of them.

The horses in the carriages wore ill-fitting and motley harness. The household goods that encumbered the carts were piled haphazard, costly articles and cheap thrown confusedly together, pell-mell, without thought for their safety, or care for the damage they were bound to suffer.

Soldiers, too, soon joined the hurrying throng, first by companies, then by battalions, and presently whole regiments.

As the day sank into night, the evidences of hasty flight became more and more pronounced, more and more unmistakable.

The orderly stream of wayfarers had become a rushing, eddying, swirling flood of panic-stricken humanity.

The one idea animating every soul in the congested mass was to get forward and away at any cost.

The weak were jostled and elbowed back by the strong. The feeble and the ailing were thrown down and trampled on. The horsemen were inextricably mingled with the people on foot, and cared for nothing but to push their way to the front. Soldiers, too, no longer marching in regular array, in ordered lines and ranks, pressed on in detached groups and isolated parties of two and three, having dispensed with every article of their kit that could hamper their flight, clinging only to rifle and cartridge-pouch, and, in many instances, alas! minus even these.

Such were the incidents of the Servian flight from Varna, as they presented themselves to the eyes of the unhappy Helen Stavros from the top window of the house on the road to Mustchuck.

Night, gloomy and dismal, at last hid all these scenes from her eyes; but the sounds were still audible—the cries, shrieks, oaths, and execrations; and she remained, horror-stricken, at the window, as rigid and motionless as a statue.

In the meanwhile, in the room below a party of men sat drinking and smoking innumerable cigarettes. To be accurate, there were exactly thirteen of them, and their leader, the man who sat at the head of the board, was none other than Antoniades.

He seemed to be in a particularly happy frame of mind—in deed, he was the gayest where all were gay. His draughts were deepest, his laughter was loudest, and his jokes were coarsest.

Fourteen horses were safely stabled at the back of the house—what cared they for the surging, swaying, struggling crowd in the street outside? When the time came—and the time was not yet—they could save their skins, and overtake the fleetest.

"To-night, boys, there will be pickings, loot—rich loot—in Varna!" And the festive party acclaimed their leader's remark with joyous shouts and copious draughts of wine.

"And the Englishmen have been taken prisoners and conveyed to the Turkish Pasha to answer for their crimes as leaders of that pestilent secret association, the Politike Hetairia. Could anything be finer?"

This particular sally of Antoniades' provoked thunders of applause. The board of revellers was convulsed with riotous and unrestrained merriment.

"And the pretty bird upstairs," he continued, "must be feeling a bit, just a little bit, sorry that she resisted the good pleasure of Antoniades."

"Ho, ho!" they laughed, loud and long. Never had they seen their worthy leader in such a mirthful vein.

Far into the night the jovial crew continued their carouse; and then, the sounds of hurrying, scurrying footsteps having become faint and intermittent, Antoniades sobered himself, and gave the signal for action.

A deserted and defenceless city lay at the mercy of a few marauders.

Never had unscrupulous and greedy ruffians a more favourable opportunity for indulging their predatory instincts, uncurbed and unrestrained.

But before setting out, Antoniades had one little matter to see to. He must assure himself that the pretty captive upstairs was still safe under lock and key.

He reeled up the staircase, undid the fastenings of that upper room, and entered.

Yes; it was all right. There she was lying asleep on the couch. His; at his mercy, wholly in his power, to do what he liked with.

Disturbed by his entrance, she started to her feet, and faced him.

"You have come to kill me!" she said. "Do it; I am ready. Welcome death a hundred times rather than this!"

But his only reply was a drunken laugh, and he lurched forward towards her.

She easily evaded his outstretched arms, and ran past him to the open door.

With a curse, he followed her.

Flattered for a moment by the prospect of escape, she flew downstairs, only to find all further progress barred by a dozen foes, whose looks frightened her even more than Antoniades' had done.

She recoiled with loathing. Antoniades' arms clasped her round the waist, and bore her back to her prison chamber.

With wild whoops and cries of exultation the band rushed into the street, and the work of indiscriminate pillage began.

It was easy work enough. The shops were even unshuttered, their contents exposed temptingly to view. The houses of rich and poor alike stood invitingly open. It was only necessary for them to enter and help themselves. The very streets afforded rich gleanings of spoil, scores of valuable articles having been dropped or thrown away.

But Antoniades and his men were not the only ones engaged in this congenial occupation. There were others who took to it just as readily and naturally. The gates of the gaol had been opened, and a hundred criminals had been deliberately set free to wreck their wills upon a city stripped of its police.

"But what did it matter?" so the authorities seemed to argue; "far better that a free hand should be given to crime than that the goods should fall a prey to the all-conquering Turk."

And so from house to house, and door to door, these villains ran, wrecking, destroying, burning, at times squabbling amongst themselves, and fighting over some specially tempting morsel of booty.

The work proceeded merrily throughout the night.

Towards the morning, two travel-stained horsemen rode into the deserted city.

They did not stop or look about for any place of refreshment for themselves or their tired horses.

They barely noticed the signs of desolation around them, but rode steadily on southwards, taking the road to Mustchuck.

"The last house but one!" muttered the shorter of the two, who was riding a length ahead of his companion.

"Go slow, Tom; we must be nearly there," said the other.

But Vincent only urged his horse the faster.

As they proceeded, the houses became more straggling and farther apart. It was difficult to tell which was the "last but one."

But the eyes of love are sharp; and Lennox, who had fallen far behind, and was carefully scanning house by house as he passed, suddenly saw Vincent straining at his bridle, and pull his horse back on to its haunches.

Fast as he was riding, he had not missed a pale face looking

wistfully into the street from behind the bars of the window of an upper room.

Thirty seconds later he had rushed recklessly into the house without thought of whom he might meet, and only bent upon reaching that upper room.

The first excitement of the meeting had passed. Lennox had retired discreetly to the staircase, leaving the lovers alone.

He was by no means blind to the perils of the situation, and promptly constituted himself guard and sentinel of the approaches to the house.

The precaution was a wise one. He had not been many minutes on the qui-vive before he descried Antoniadès and his men, heavily laden with miscellaneous booty, making for the house.

At that moment Vincent came running down to him. "Helen and I have decided to make a bolt for it at once, Len. It appears there are horses somewhere at the back."

"Then I am afraid you'll be baulked, for here the rascals are!"

They returned to the upper room.

"Away, away, my pretty! Back to Kalon Polisma!" It was Antoniadès who spoke.

"And if I decline?" retorted Helen.

"If you decline!" he echoed, with amazement. "You have no choice. Back with me you go—alive, if you will; dead, if you prefer it!"

And he advanced towards her, grimly bent upon extremities. Vincent could not restrain himself any longer.

"You cur!" he cried, springing out from his place of concealment.

Antoniadès recognised him in an instant, and rushed upon him with the bellowing roar of an enraged bull.

Ping! ping!

Two revolver-shots rang out at the same moment, and the brigand-chief, shot through head and heart at one and the same moment, fell dead in his tracks.

But the noise brought up the rest of the band, and Vincent and Lennox soon had their hands quite full in defending the stairs.

"I have learnt to appreciate stairs, although they are very fatiguing in an ordinary way," remarked the latter; "this is the second time they have enabled us to make a successful stand."

"The rascals have given it up for the moment," was the reply; "I wonder what the next move will be?"

"Fire!" exclaimed Helen. "I can smell the burning!"

She ran to the window.

"Here is Vasile and the others. Quick, quick!" she cried.

They saw her, and understood. Antoniadès' men had also seen the arrivals. They knew they were outnumbered, and their retreat cut off.

"We surrender! Only spare our lives!" "Go; but do not come within five miles of Kalon Polisma—save at your peril."

They scuttled off thankfully enough. Helen and the two Englishmen descended, and mounted their horses. Vasile and the rest closed round them. The little party rode out of the deserted city, half an hour before the advanced guard of the Turks entered.

A few weeks later, when the war was over, Helen and Vincent were married, and when they returned to Kalon Polisma, after a brief honeymoon, the Lady of the District summoned all her dependents, retainers, and adherents together, and solemnly abdicated all her rights and prerogatives in favour of her husband.

At this hour she does not know that she then bestowed upon him what was already his by virtue of old Lavenos' will.

Vincent is very busy extirpating from amongst his people the poisonous principles advocated by the Politike Hetairia, and he has, so far, achieved a remarkable degree of success.

And Lennox, what of him? He has cut a considerable figure in our story, and it seems hard to leave him without being able to prophesy some good-fortune in store for him.

But, unhappily, there is nothing to tell.

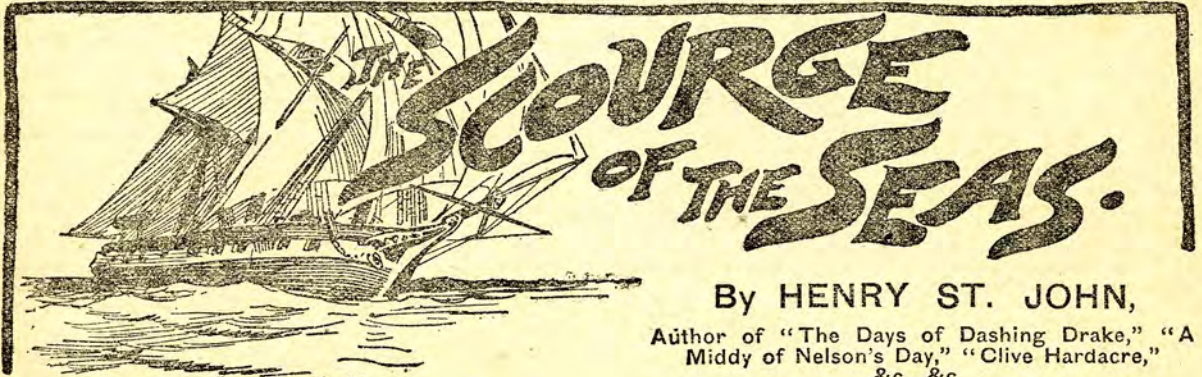
He is not a marrying man, so he says. The prospect of having to keep a large family, he declares to be as appalling as the family itself would be fatiguing. He likes a house to be quiet, and restful, and slumberous, and tranquillising—just the opposite, so he maintains, of what a house full of noisy children always is.

But some of those who know him best declare that he met the only woman he could ever love in the Balkans, and that she is married to a friend of his.

That he realised at once the fitness of things demanded that old Lavenos' heir should wed the lady of Kalon Polisma, and successfully smothered his own feelings.

However this may be, Lennox is a bachelor, and likely to remain one; but he has just accepted a very warm invitation from his feudal friends in Servia to spend a month with them in the autumn, and help to extirpate the heresies of the Politike Hetairia.

THE END.



SAVED FROM THE PIRATES—THE TWO SAILS—THE "VULTURE" TRAPPED—A FLAG OF TRUCE—THE RECOGNITION.

There were two occupants to the berth. One, an old lady, pale and trembling visibly, sat with clasped hands in an attitude of prayer.

The other, a young and very beautiful girl, stood facing the sailors.

"It is true, mother!" she cried joyfully, as she recognised that the men before her were not of the pirate crew. "We have not been deceived; we are safe!"

She sprang across the room and placed a protecting arm around the frail form of the elder woman.

"We are anxious to know all that you can tell us about this outrage, madam," said Frank. "You will forgive me for troubling you with questions at such a moment."

"I will tell you all I know," said the girl. "But first tell

me, sir, what has happened to all the poor fellows who were in this ship?"

"They—they——"

Frank shuddered.

"They are dead! Those vile murderers have killed them! Ah, it is horrible! We heard screams and cries, and we thought—we guessed; and we, sir, were but two poor weak women! What could we do?"

The elder lady, who had spoken, rose, leaning heavily for support on her younger companion.

"My niece and I were passengers in this ship. We were bound to Bombay, where we were to meet my brother, this young lady's father," she continued.

"Your voyage, madam," said Cuttlestone, "has only been delayed, and I hope that shortly you will be able to continue on your way."

"You say that, sir, to cheer us. It is kind of you; but did you not say a little while ago that you were English prisoners

HOUP LA! "WITTY WILL WYNN; or, the Adventures of a Clown," Starts Next Week.

in the hands of the French? This gentleman"—indicating the officer—"is French; so also are these men. Then we, too, must be prisoners."

"The captain of the 'Rose' is a gentleman!" said Frank promptly. "He will treat you with every consideration. Meanwhile, madam, he is waiting on board his own ship, and I should be honoured if you would allow me to conduct you thither."

The old lady bowed graciously and took Frank's arm, and Cuttlesome, not to be outdone in politeness, offered his arm to the younger lady. But the French officer, who was not insensible to the girl's charms, was beforehand with his offer of escort, and Cuttlesome had to retire crestfallen.

They were obliged to pass near to the awful scene of bloodshed, and Frank felt the arm of the old lady tremble in his. He thought for a moment that she was going to faint; but, with a desperate effort, she maintained her composure, and a little while later he had safely conducted her to the deck of the "Rose."

Frank had not been wrong in his estimation of Captain Thibault's character. He received the two ladies with all the courtesy of a well-bred gentleman, and, in spite of his lack of knowledge of English and theirs of French, he made them understand that they were welcome, and that all that could possibly be done for their comfort should be done.

Between Mr. Durand and St. Simon, who acted as interpreters, Captain Thibault was put in possession of all the facts attending the capture of the "Tower of London," as the merchantman was called, or as much of the facts as the ladies themselves were acquainted with.

The elder lady was Lady Ross, and the younger Miss Gerrard. The "Tower of London" had been pursued and captured by an armed vessel, which, from the description afforded by Lady Ross, Frank judged to be a schooner—the schooner the "Vulture."

This had happened late in the afternoon of the previous day. The officers and men of the merchantman had fought desperately; but the pirates were in great force, and, valiant though the resistance was, the pirates in a very short time were in possession of the ship.

What happened after that the ladies could only guess at. They locked themselves in their cabin, where they remained for some time, apparently overlooked.

They heard shouts and screams of agony coming from the deck; then there came a long silence, broken at last in what was to them the most terrible way, by thundering knocks on their door and the hoarse voices of men calling upon them to come out.

Miss Gerrard, half mad with fear, piled all the furniture the cabin contained against the door, and thus successfully kept the villains out.

Then the rising of the storm afforded them blessed relief, for the men were obliged to attend to the safety of the ship.

"We had made up our minds to kill ourselves," said Miss Gerrard calmly; "but we were cowardly enough to put off the fateful moment until the very last, and then came the sound of the firing of guns, then the crash, as your ship struck us, we thinking at the time that we had run upon a rock and were going down, and then we heard the terrible fighting on the deck above us."

"But," asked Frank, "do you know nothing of the other ship—the schooner—which captured you? When do you think she parted company with the 'Tower of London'?"

"It must have been during the storm. I know that she was near us until quite dark, for I could see her lights through our cabin window."

Captain Thibault had already as much to do as he could about the management of his own vessel and the "Resolute," so he quickly came to a decision with regard to the "Tower of London."

The most valuable part of the cargo was transferred from her hold to the "Rose," and then she was fired.

In a very short space of time the great fabric was wrapped in a vast sheet of flame, which ran riot on her decks, and, leaping from mast to mast, reared itself upwards until even her topmasts were blazing simultaneously with her decks and hold.

It was a glorious and a fitting funeral pyre for the poor fellows who had lived and died upon her decks.

Then came a terrific concussion, which rent the burning mass in twain; the blazing wreckage was flung heavenwards, and all that was left of the "Tower of London" was a little charred and still burning wreckage floating on the surface of the sea, and a pillar of smoke that reared itself up to the sky.

Hardly had the smoke dispersed than the man in the foremost crosstrees signalled another sail in sight.

"This will in all probability prove to be that villainous pirate!" said Captain Thibault to M. Durand. "Bid your

young English friend attend me on the quarter-deck. He will in all probability be able to recognise the craft."

Scarcely had Frank reached the quarter-deck, when a second hail from the masthead informed the deck that still another vessel had hove in sight.

"It is the pirate sure enough!" cried Frank excitedly, as he gave the captain back the glass that he had lent him.

"Oui, monsieur; c'est le pirate!" he said, forgetting in his excitement to blush for his bad French.

But the other sail?

As yet only her topmasts were to be seen from the deck.

"The captain here bids me to ask if the pirates they possess of many ships?" said St. Simon.

Frank shook his head.

"They have but one," he replied, "the schooner which we can now see, unless the other one is a prize they have taken—a merchantman, perhaps."

But soon the glass showed that the vessel in the wake of the pirate was no merchantman. She was a full-rigged ship—a frigate.

Then like a flash the true state of affairs occurred to Captain Thibault.

"Tiens!" he cried, "she is being chased, this buccaneer! Englishman or Frenchman, whichever he may be, that is chasing her, we will aid him. We will cut off the pirate's retreat, and when we have finished with him we will settle our own differences after."

The "Vulture," for beyond all doubt it was the Scourge of the Sea itself, soon discovered what a trap it had fallen into.

She made a vain effort to escape the "Rose" by tacking; but Captain Thibault, watchful and wary, skilfully manœuvred his vessel.

The decks of the "Rose" were cleared for action, the guns loaded and manned.

"Run across her bows!" ordered Captain Thibault.

The schooner was so close now that they could see the swarming pirates on her deck.

The order was obeyed, and as the "Rose" forged ahead the whole of her port broadside was discharged into the schooner. Fore and mainmast snapped off like rotten sticks, and fell crashing over her side. The hull of the schooner was riddled through and through, and from her decks there rose the frenzied cries and screams of the wounded wretches, maddened with pain.

"There—there!" cried Frank, grasping Bill Woshem by the arm; "see, there he is!"

A tall figure was clinging to the shrouds of the wrecked mainmast.

Bill Woshem thrust his hands before his face.

"Him as I've sailed under for many a year—him as was a good servant to his King and country! That I should ever live to see him come to this!"

The poor fellow's distress was real and unfeigned. Curzon's recent treatment of himself was forgotten; the glorious past alone remembered.

By this time the other vessel had drawn in. She was a frigate—an Englishman. And as Bill's eyes rested on her he shouted aloud in wonder and surprise.

"The 'Fearless'—the old 'Fearless' herself! And him as was her captain!"

He groaned bitterly, and stood watching the progress of events with tear-dimmed eyes.

Captain Thibault displayed a white flag from the quarter-deck as a signal for a temporary truce, which signal was instantly answered in a similar manner from the deck of the English frigate.

Having nothing to fear from each other for the present, the two frigates turned their attention to the common foe.

The "Vulture," although the time which had elapsed had been so brief, had succeeded in clearing herself of the wreckage of her masts, and had even succeeded in rigging juremasts.

It was Curzon's one and last hope that the enmity existing between France and England would induce the ships of the respective nations to engage with each other, in which case he would quietly make his escape.

But his hope was now dashed to the ground.

With a livid face, he stood up and addressed his men.

"There is no hope," he said; "we must die! We have had our day, and the end has come; but it is at least left with us to choose the manner of our death, and we choose steel rather than the rope!"

He was answered by a wild shout from the fierce and moody gang of ruffians who crowded round him.

Then the shout suddenly changed into a scream as a ball from the bow-gun of the "Fearless" sped across the crowded deck.

"To the guns!" cried Curzon.

Riddled through and through, her masts gone, her decks

crimson with the blood of her crew, the "Vulture" lay exposed to the full force of the two frigates.

They lay on each side of her, the men in their tops picking off and shooting down with cool deliberation the wretches who again and again refused to yield.

Frank and Bill turned away, sick at the fearful scene—sick at the awful sight of the just retribution that had fallen upon those reckless men.

Cuttlestone reeled up to them, his face ghastly.

"I have seen fights," he gasped, "but this is awful! It is just, I know, that they should be punished; but it is like killing rats in a trap. I saw one fellow—I'm as sick as a dog, Frank! I'm going!"

Frank darted forward just in time to catch the boy as he rolled over in a dead faint.

"I wonder if 'he' is dead yet?" said Bill, in an awed voice. "I daresn't look, lest I——"

He finished his sentence by nodding towards the slowly reviving Cuttlestone.

But Curzon was not dead. He had fallen, shot through the breast; but, wounded as he was, he had arisen again, and,

sword in hand, he, with those of his crew who still survived—scarcely a dozen in all—stood at bay, waiting for the end, by the stump of the shattered mainmast.

Firing from the tops had now ceased, and the English sailors leaped down from their vessel on to the slippery deck of the schooner.

"Yield, you madmen!" shouted a little midgy.

A poignard, flung with unerring aim by the hand of one of the pirates, was his answer, and as the boy dropped back with the crimson stain upon his breast, the sailors, uttering a shout of vengeance, flung themselves upon the pirates.

"Back—back! Hold, I tell you!"

A figure leaped from the hammocks of the "Fearless" on to the quarter-deck of the schooner.

It was the English captain; and as his voice rang out his men obediently fell back.

Frank clutched Bill's arm in an ecstasy of wild excitement.

"Look!" he cried, pointing to the figure of the English captain—"look, Bill! Am I mad?"

"The captain—Captain Curzon himself!" cried Bill stupidly.

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

THE MAN-EATER.

Restlessly, backwards and forwards within the narrow limits of its iron-barred cage, paced the man-eater, as evil-looking specimen of a monster tiger as one could wish to see. Evil-looking as the beast was, its well-deserved reputation was even worse than its looks.

For years the man-eater of Bumpoor had terrorised half a province, had counted its victims by the hundred, and been the dream of every sportsman in India. As cunning as fearless, this much-sought beast had never so much as been sighted by the many well-organised expeditions that had scoured the district in search of it.

It had even been known to enter the village at night between the well-posted cordons of vigilant sportsmen surrounding it, seize its prey and make off, leaving only as evidence of its presence, to be discovered in the morning, the remains of another mangled victim.

Dixey, of the ——— Lancers, as all the world knows, was a mighty hunter, and he betook himself to Bumpoor vowing to rid the village of its man-eater, though it cost him his month's leave. Too experienced a hunter to waste a day in beating the jungle for such a wily beast, Dixey made his preparations in a systematic manner. In the outskirts of the village platforms were erected among the branches of the trees. Deep pits were dug, narrow at the top but wide at the bottom, and roofed with a frail framework, concealed by grass and brushwood in artful imitation of Nature.

Night after night, Dixey and his companions watched in vain from the platforms, without a sign of the man-eater, nor did a scrap of information concerning its misdeeds come in from the country.

Never, the natives declared, had the tiger gone so long without a human victim. They began to hope that he had removed to another hunting-ground, and to rejoice at the prospect, for they had long since lost all faith in the skill of any sportsman pitted against that of the village scourge.

More than half the allotted month had passed, and Dixey sat as usual on his platform, his legs over the edge, and his back against a tree, cold, stiff, and uncomfortable. Perhaps the long, fruitless watches had made the watcher careless. His thoughts wandered to other matters that night, a drowsy feeling stole over him, and he nodded.

How long he had slept he knew not, when a noise below the platform awoke him. Wide awake and vigilant in a moment, with the instinct of a hunter he felt for his gun. He was unarmed and alone! The only gun that he carried had slipped from his grasp during his sleep, and it was the noise of it falling on the ground that had roused him. With the intention of recovering it, he was about to descend from the platform by the ladder, when the indistinct outline of a bulky form moving noiselessly in the dark caught his eye. He watched. The form, if such it was, disappeared behind some bushes, and he waited. He had not long to wait, though, alone in the dark and unarmed, it seemed an age to him. Suddenly from the bushes, within a few paces from him, two burning balls of fire appeared and moved towards him; then, as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he saw that they were the eyes of an enormous tiger, and from its size he knew that it was the man-eater.

As he watched the beast moving forward, with cat-like, silent tread, he bitterly cursed his unsportsmanlike carelessness that had lost him his gun and the certain chance of bagging the most notorious tiger in India. But there was a something in the movement of the beast that turned his thoughts into another channel. It was stalking something, and that something was

himself! Incredible as it seemed, nearly twenty feet from the ground as he was, the tiger was about to spring at him; he read it in the cruel eyes that glared up at him.

Dixey was a man of resource, and he did not lose his nerve. There was only one chance for him, and that a slender one. Such as it was, he saw it in a flash, and prepared to act. He would drop to the ground the very moment the tiger sprang—for he knew well that if it sprang it would reach the platform—pick up his gun if he could find it, and try to get in a shot before the beast was on top of him. He stepped back to the farther edge of the platform, and watched the tiger, ready to drop. Measuring the distance with its eye, it took a short run forward, then disappeared, with a growl of terror, head first into the earth! There was a sound of rending woodwork, a cloud of dust, and a heavy thud.

Dixey looked and wondered, rubbed his eyes in astonishment, and thought he was dreaming; then remembered his pits, into one of which the tiger had fallen.

A few days later the man-eater was induced by hunger to enter a baited trap lowered into the pit. So it happened that the scourge of Bumpoor was removed, and found a home in the Cavalry Barracks at Aldershot.

Perhaps it was a feeling of affinity that drew the soldier, loitering by the tiger's cage, there that evening. Certainly there were some points of resemblance between the man and beast. Possessed of a stubborn, quarrelsome disposition, that resisted discipline of any kind as a personal insult, Trooper Ryan's four years' service in the ——— Lancers had been anything but creditable to himself or that distinguished regiment. Constantly in trouble through his insubordination, a marked man among the non-coms. for his insolence, he grew morose and savage. He was that regimental bugbear—the man with a grievance. Small wonder that he had few friends among the ——— Lancers, as jolly a set of dashing soldiers as one could wish for comrades.

The last post had sounded, and the darkness of the summer night deepened. The storm that had threatened through the hot sultry day was breaking; heavy drops of rain fell, and the thunder that had rumbled at fitful intervals in the distant hills grew louder and nearer. Still the soldier lingered by the man-eater, and found a savage pleasure in irritating the half-cowed beast. Placing himself near the bars of the cage, but out of reach of the deadly paw thrust out at him, he struck the unfortunate brute a vicious blow on the nose with the heavy butt of his riding-whip.

This soothing occupation might have continued for some time had not the sound of an approaching footstep reminded the soldier that he had more important business in hand that night.

Some months before Ryan had decided to leave the Army. Not having the necessary funds to purchase his discharge, he had deserted, to the joy of his comrades, who openly expressed a wish that he would not be captured.

It fell to the lot of Corporal Trues, acting on information received, to be despatched in search of the deserter. The young corporal threw himself into the unpleasant duty with that hearty energy that characterised all he did, with the result that the deserter was promptly captured, in spite of a violent resistance, and sentenced to a term of imprisonment—the offence being aggravated by his savage resistance.

Ryan was not the man to accept punishment calmly, and his lot in prison was rendered the harder by his persistent and foolish opposition to all prison rules. Like most evil-doers, he

"'TWIXT CALLOWS AND COLD." In next Friday's "UNION JACK."

blamed everybody but himself for his misfortunes. He had always hated Truves, chiefly because he had never succeeded in disturbing the habitual good-humour with which the corporal went about his duty. The fact that Truves had been the means of bringing him back to punishment and the hated Service added fuel to the fire, and he swore a mighty vengeance.

The man-eater had always possessed a strange attraction for the unsocial trooper, and since his release he had spent many an hour by the cage, gloomily brooding over his wrongs, and plotting vengeance against the corporal. A cruel, cowardly plan of awful vengeance was the outcome of these hours of solitary brooding, and the victim was at this very moment marching to his fate.

On the stable guard that night, the corporal's duty was to visit in succession each of the stables. The last of these would necessitate his passing within a few paces of the tiger's cage. Rapidly the trooper made his final preparations. A cord, with a hook attached to it, was fastened to the sliding-trap in front of the cage, and he mounted the roof. Hidden by the darkness, he crouched waiting for his victim as the beast below him had waited many a night. Nearer and nearer came the corporal, till there was only one more stable to visit. As he passed the door of the cage the trap slid noiselessly up, and the man-eater slunk out, paused for a moment as if about to spring at the unconscious corporal; then, as the light of his lantern flashed across its eyes, uttered a savage growl, which was lost in a deafening peal of thunder, and cleared the barrack wall with a flying leap.

The trooper lay still in blank astonishment at the unexpected development of his plan. Rage at his victim's escape gave place to fear for his own safety. Waiting till the corporal was at a safe distance, he descended, closed the door of the cage, and stole quietly back to his barrack-room.

Next day was a divisional field-day. In the white fog of early dawn, sure sign of a hot day to follow, the Lancers paraded, and were soon on their way to the heather-clad slopes of the Fox hills. Now walking, now trotting, they passed many a long column of infantry moving slowly along the white road, ankle deep in dust; noisy rumbling batteries of field artillery filling the air with thick clouds of dust; smart, spick-and-span batteries of horse artillery, with their light guns swinging jauntily behind the limbers; general officers, mighty medal-bedecked soldiers with their brilliant staffs; engineers with their mysterious waggons, containing everything from a bridge to a telegraph line, a balloon, plant for sinking a well, or blowing up a fort; ambulance waggons, water-carts, and all sorts of other carts; country folk, with all sorts of conveyances full of cooling drinks, sweet cakes, and other luxuries for hungry warriors.

Leaving all these units of an army, and its camp followers behind them, the Lancers were soon in the open, feeling cautiously for the enemy. Divided into small patrols, farm-yards, buildings, and plantations were searched, as well as everything else that could or could not conceal an enemy. Shots were exchanged, bridges were occupied or blown up—this theoretically. They chased and were chased. In short, all that could be done was done, according to the approved method of a field-day, till the action fairly opened with the guns, and the cavalry retired, their work being done for the time.

Guns thundered at guns from the hill tops, till the roar became incessant, and the infantry fire was appalling. Flanks were turned and centres pierced. Impossible cavalry charges were made; positions lost and won. Regiments and squadrons were ordered out of action, and a great cloud of dust and smoke hid the whole scene. Mistakes innumerable were made, as should be, for it is only by observing these mistakes that the officer learns to avoid them, and the victory falls to him who makes the fewest.

At last, when the battle was at its fiercest, the cease-fire sounded.

Umpires, with white bands round their arms, were busy laying down the law as to who had won this position or held that, and who was dead or alive, whilst the soldiers rested where they had stood. The — Lancers lay in a sheltered valley after a glorious dash at the enemy's flank battery. Dismounted, they lay about in the heather enjoying the interval of rest each in own particular way.

The last straggling sound of musketry had died away, and a striking stillness filled the air, as the thick smoke that had been for hours over the landscape cleared away.

Suddenly a roar, more terrible than that of the cannon, was heard, the bushes parted, and the man-eater stood in the midst of them.

For an instant it stood, and its eyes wandered over the four hundred men as if to choose its victim, then rested on Ryan, who lay on his back a few feet away, his eyes turned towards the beast in horror. Like men petrified, his comrades watched as the beast crouched to spring. Without a cartridge, none thought to try the issue of single combat with sword or lance. There was but one man mounted at the moment, and that was Corporal Truves. With him to see was to act. Bringing his lance to the charge, he turned his horse to the scene of action, and dug his spurs into it. The frightened animal reared and swerved,

but would not advance an inch. Nothing daunted, the rider threw himself to the ground, rushed at the man-eater, and thrust his lance into its side. Roaring with rage and pain, the beast clawed the air in its efforts to reach the Lancer, who with both hands thrust his weapon home, till, as the point passed out on the other side, the bamboo bent like a bow and snapped. Losing his balance, Truves rolled under the paw of the man-eater; but the spell was broken, a dozen lances transfixed the beast and did it to death.

That night Ryan went to the hospital a different man, the heroic deed of the corporal appealed to his better nature, and he honestly told him his part in the affair. Truves listened in astonishment to the end of the story, then said: "Well, Ryan, only you and I know this; say nothing more about it and I shall not."

The skin of the man-eater is still treasured by the Lancers. Truves is sergeant-major of the smartest troop in the regiment, and he attributes the proud position of that troop to the good influence brought to bear on the youngsters by a certain old soldier of the name of Ryan.

AN EXTRAORDINARY TREE.

A returned traveller from Madagascar has published a thrilling account of a remarkable tree which is found far in the interior of the island. The tree, according to his account, is a huge sensitive plant, with this addition, that, after recoiling from the touch of human hands, it seizes the aggressor with tentacles like those of the octopus, and squeezes him to death.

The natives of the district in which this tree is found are extremely superstitious, and they believe that this extraordinary tree is inhabited by a god whose wrath must occasionally be appeased by the sacrifice of human lives.

The trunk of this tree resembles a pineapple in shape, is about 8ft. high, black, and as hard as iron. From the top of the cone eight leaves hang to the ground. These are about 12ft. long, 3ft. wide, very thick, and end in sharp points. Stout thorns cover the inner side. The top of the cone is white, round, and, from afar, looks like a small dinner-plate turned down on a larger one.

This larger "plate" contains a clear, viscous liquid, known to possess exceedingly intoxicating properties. Just below it extend six green and hairy shoots, about 8ft. long, and sharp-pointed. Above these, from between the two "plates," six white, plume-like tendrils rise vertically about 6ft. They are in constant motion, shooting and twisting around with bewildering rapidity. The faint hissing noise thereby produced strengthens the illusion that these tendrils are snakes performing a hideous dance.

When the natives have assembled round the tree they seize their victim, and force him to mount to the top of it. There he sits terror-stricken. The savages yell "Drink, drink!" and goad him with their javelins until in desperation the unfortunate man scoops up some of the liquid and drinks it.

Its intoxicating effects are at once apparent. He rises to his feet, and dances wildly about the tree. At this irritation the tendrils shoot up and twine themselves round him with relentless force.

By and by he struggles no longer, and is crushed to death.

HI! HI!! HI!!!

Hurry up! Hurry up!!

WITTY WILL WYNN;

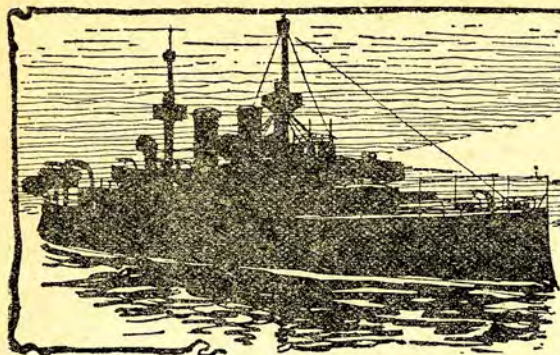
Or, THE STRANGE ADVENTURES
OF A CLOWN.

Our Superb New Serial Story starts
in next Friday's

UNION JACK.

Don't Forget!

OUR NEW SERIAL STARTS NEXT WEEK.



FROM THE QUARTERDECK.

"The Scourge of the Seas," after a successful run, is drawing to an end, and next week our superb new serial starts.

Mr. Harry Blyth, a very well-known author indeed, is writing it, and an admirable story it is in every way.

It is entitled: "Witty Will Wynn; or, The Strange Adventures of a Clown." Mr. Blyth has been engaged for a long time past writing nothing but this serial, and the result is a most novel and thrilling story.

And this is not my opinion alone; several of the staff, at my request, have also read it, and fully agree with me. Don't forget to order a copy of next Friday's issue, and tell your friends that the UNION JACK's new serial is entitled:

"WITTY WILL WYNN."

In a letter to one of the other papers published by this firm Mr. J. Kelly says, speaking of his schoolmaster: "The reason he stopped all the papers was because he found a boy with the UNION JACK."

I regret that Mr. John Kelly did not mention his schoolmaster's address, as I should very much have liked to send him a few copies of my paper, in order that he might see that he is quite mistaken in supposing that the UNION JACK is not a fit paper for boys.

No one can or ought to pass judgment on a paper without reading it, and I am quite sure my young friend's schoolmaster cannot have done so.

A well-known Government science teacher wrote me only a short time back a very interesting letter, in which he said: "I enjoy reading a copy myself. I freely encourage my pupils to read your book."

If Mr. Kelly sees this, I hope he will show it to his master, and ask him to read a copy. He should tell him also that in very many schools the UNION JACK is used for "unseen reading."

Hurry up, and join the League.

It is a very simple operation. Fill in the coupon given below, pop it in an envelope, together with an envelope, stamped and addressed to yourself, and post it to me. I will then forward you a badge, and enrol you as a member.

I, ...

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

In Hayti and Martinique the venom of the terrible serpent indigenous to those islands, the formidable fer de lance, has been often employed by the negroes in disposing of their enemies. A horrible, but well-authenticated, instance of negro ingenuity and malevolence is told in Martinique.

A huge negro, recently imported from the Guinea coast, had been whipped by the order of his master, one of the great planter princes of the island, while it was under French rule. The victim had made no complaint, but meditated revenge. By long search he found the lair of a pair of serpents in the garden adjacent to the house.

Watching his opportunity, he killed one, and dragged its body to the house, through a window that was always open, and into the bedroom of the beautiful daughter of the planter. He dragged it to the bed, lifted the coverings, and coiled it on the sheets. When this was done, he carried the dead snake away, and cast it into an adjacent stream.

As night approached, the serpent's mate followed the trail,

crept through the open window, and to the bed of the planter's daughter. The latter, half awake, made a motion to brush away the intruder. Instantly the fangs of the snake were fastened in her neck, and in a few hours she was a corpse.

Mr. Henry St. John, the writer of our fascinating serial story "The Scourge of the Seas," is the author of one of the most successful boys' books of the present publishing season—"The Cruise of the 'Avenger,'" published by Jarrold and Sons. It is a dashing story of the brave old days of Drake and his comrades of the Spanish Main.

*I am yours friend,
The Skipper*

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

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THE KING OF KLONDIKE

The Remarkable Story by R. S. WARREN BELL, now
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PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

Dick Armstrong (properly Sir Richard Armstrong, Bart., afterwards known on the goldfields as Dick Johnson, "The King of Klondike").

James Hawksley (cousin of Dick, and next heir to the baronetcy).

Silas Symes (a money-lender, to whom James Hawksley is in debt).

Ethel Merivale (Dick's sweetheart).

The Sheebaw Queen (real name, Flossie Flynn; a music-hall performer at "The Sheebaw Saloon," in Dawson City).

HOW THE STORY GOES:

Dick Armstrong's uncle, Sir Hereward, is dying when the story opens, and Dick is summoned home to Deepdene. He makes an appointment to meet his sweetheart, Ethel Merivale, in the churchyard. Arriving there, he finds Farmer Saunders pestering Ethel with his unwelcome attentions. There is a quarrel; Saunders uses insulting language, and Dick, unable to restrain himself, fells the farmer to the ground. Saunders is stunned by the blow, and, while Ethel goes to summon assistance, Dick fetches a doctor. The whole scene has been witnessed by Silas Symes, a money-lender, to whom Dick's cousin, James Hawksley, is deeply in debt. When Dick returns, the doctor declares Saunders to be dead—strangled; and just as news arrives of Sir Hereward's death, and Dick is hailed as "Sir Richard Armstrong, Bart.," the police arrest him for causing Saunders's death. He is tried, found guilty of wilful murder, but reprieved by the Home Secretary, and committed to penal servitude at Dartmoor. A favourable opportunity occurring, he makes a dash for freedom with an imprisoned company-promoter. The latter is shot dead by a warder, but Armstrong escapes, and, after bidding good-bye to his sweetheart, he sails for Klondike with Steve Hargreave, who had formerly been his orderly in the Blue Hussars.



Take up the Story from this
point in this week's

Scene from "The King of Klondike."

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