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A SPY OF THE CZAR.



He made a daring leap from one train to the other.

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A SPY OF THE CZAR.

By J. G. ROWE.

CHAPTER I.

HERBERT CRADDOCK, THE YOUNG INVENTOR—A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT—THE EAVESDROPPER—MONSIEUR FERAT INDIGNANT—WHO COULD THE LISTENER HAVE BEEN?—FERAT'S STRANGE CONDUCT.

"Congratulate me, Arthur, old fellow. The work of months, nay, years, is completed. There remains nothing now but to submit the plan of my invention to the Government."

"I congratulate you with all my heart, Herbert. So the 'Cradock torpedo' is at last an accomplished fact. Let us hope it will prove an even greater success than the famous 'Whitehead.'"

"Hist! Arthur, don't speak so loud. Remember, I have not yet taken the measures to protect my invention, and walls have ears. There are but too many unprincipled individuals who, if they had an inkling of my invention, would move heaven and earth to get possession of the plans or model, and sell it to some foreign Power."

The speakers were two stylishly dressed young gentlemen, standing in the doorway of a large building, let out as offices to various firms. They were mostly, however, patent agents, who rented rooms in the building; and one of the two young gentlemen we have mentioned was Arthur Welland, senior partner in the firm of Welland and Kershaw, patent agents.

His friend was Herbert Craddock, a rising young engineer and scientist, and the proud inventor, as the reader has gleaned from the foregoing conversation, of a new type of torpedo.

The pair had met in the doorway, and on Arthur Welland's suggestion they now mounted to his office on the second-floor.

As they passed through into the private room, Arthur turned to one of the clerks, a small and thin but exceedingly wiry man of unmistakably foreign origin, and asked:

"Is Mr. Kershaw in the private office, Ferat?"

"Non, monsieur, 'e ees out; but 'e said 'e be in again presently."

"Oh, very good."

And Arthur, conducting his friend into the private room, carefully shut the door behind them, that none of the clerks in the outer office might hear anything of their conversation.

To relate this in full would but weary the reader, as it was merely relative to business; in other words, the routine that would have to be gone through before Herbert Craddock would be entitled to the exclusive right of his invention for a term of years.

Arthur and he were deep in the intricacies of the patent law, when there came a short, peremptory tap upon the door, and before Arthur could call out "Come in!" the door opened, and admitted a tall, handsome, clean-shaven man of middle age, with sharp, penetrating eyes, and the long nose of the thorough business man.

"Ah, Arthur, I did not know you were engaged. Pardon my intrusion." And the new-comer turned to quit the room again, but Welland called out:

"Don't go, Dick; it is my friend Herbert Craddock. You have met him before."

"Of course, of course! I did not recognise you, Mr. Craddock, with your back to the window. Glad to see you! Nice day, is it not?"

Herbert and Dick Kershaw shook hands, and the latter went on gaily:

"Have you come to us to patent another invention, Mr. Craddock? You seem determined to rival Edison for brilliant ideas."

"You have guessed aright, Mr. Kershaw!" laughed Herbert. "I have come about another patent I intend to apply for shortly."

"Ah, and what is it this time, if I may ask?"

"Oh, certainly; but, of course, it is between ourselves. It is a new type of torpedo, and will, I think, if given a fair trial, supersede even the latest and most improved pattern at present in use."

"I hope your expectations will be realised, Mr. Craddock; and, judging from the success of your previous inventions, I have not the slightest doubt they will be. So you have completed it to your satisfaction?"

"Yes, and am thinking of offering it to the British Government. They, of course, must have the first refusal, which I hope will not be a refusal at all."

There was a little further conversation, which would have little interest for the reader of this story, and at length Herbert Craddock rose to take his leave of Arthur Welland and Dick Kershaw.

As he did so, there was a slight scrambling noise outside the door.

In an instant Arthur Welland had leapt past Herbert, gained the door, and wrenched it open.

He was just in time to see the back of a man who was darting through the door of the outer office, which was deserted.

Without halting, he rushed towards that, but accidentally tripped over a stool in the way, and barked his shins badly.

He was ruefully limping towards the door, when it was thrown open, and Monsieur Ferat came hastily in, his coat and tie awry, and a droll look of anger and indignation upon his face.

"What for he run into me like that, and ver' near knock me down ze stairs, ze pig!"

"Ah, M. Ferat, did you see a man run out of this office a minute ago?"

"Tonnerre, oui, Monsieur Welland, he run out like vat you



They discovered that the miscreants in search of the plan had ransacked the room from top to bottom.

calls 'redshanks,' and he bump into me, and ver' near throw me down ze stairs. The coquin, 'e did not stop to apologise!"

Welland reached the door and looked down the stairs; but there was no one in sight. The mysterious intruder, whoever he was, had vanished.

Yet Arthur could scarcely believe the man could have descended something like thirty stairs, even at headlong speed, in so short a space of time as had elapsed between his seeing the figure disappear through the doorway and his reaching the door.

He turned to Monsieur Ferat, who was still muttering "Sapristis!" and "Tonnerres!" under his breath.

"What was the fellow like, Ferat?"

"I—I had no time to see, monsieur. He bump into me, and he rush past me like a flash of ze lightning. Vas he a thief?—a burglar, you tink, Monsieur Welland?"

"I don't know who or what he was; but how came it, Ferat, that there was no one in the office? Where are all the clerks and the boys?"

"They all at their lunch, monsieur. I vas in ze office; but I go to see Walters and Coutts on ze beneath floor about zem papers of Crantin."

"Yes; but you should not have left the office without any one in it. There is no saying what that fellow was up to!"

Arthur turned to his partner and Herbert, who had followed him out of the private office, and remarked:

"Some would-be thief it was, I suppose. I saw him just vanishing through that door as I came out. I fancied at first, Herbert," he whispered, lowering his voice so that Ferat might not overhear him, "that it might be an eavesdropper; but I don't see how it could possibly be."

"Oh, no, who could know about the invention?" asked Herbert, with a smile.

"I would advise you, though, Mr. Craddock, to take care where you drop any hints of your invention. The world is full of rogues, who would only need a hint of what you have achieved, to try and rob you of all the fruits of your labour by stealing the plans and patenting the invention as their own."

"I know it, Mr. Kershaw; but you may rest assured I will not trust too many with my secret."

"You will be wise not to," put in Arthur Welland. "Well, good-day, Bert. Oh, by the by, have you anything on to-night? No; then come with me to the theatre. There is a new piece being produced for the first time to-night at the Gaiety, and, I don't suppose you have heard, it is by an old college-mate of ours. Don't you remember Tom Dalton?"

"Why, of course I remember Tom. And so he has written a play, eh? Oh, certainly, we must go and see it! I will be round at your place to-night, and we will go and give old Tom a call before the curtain. Well, ta-ta till to-night, Arthur! Good-evening, Mr. Kershaw!"

Herbert Craddock descended the stairs, and the two partners re-entered their private room.

The moment Monsieur Ferat was again left alone in the outer office, he acted most strangely. He shook his fist at the closed door of the private office, and a savage scowl overspread his face; then he muttered under his breath, and in very good English this time:

"Curse him! I will be even with him yet!"

CHAPTER II.

AT THE THEATRE—ATTACKED BY FOOTPADS—THEIR MYSTERIOUS CHIEF—HE TAKES SOME PAPERS FROM HERBERT'S POCKETS—HERBERT FOUND BY A CONSTABLE, WHO HELPS HIM HOME—HE FINDS HIS ROOM RANSACKED—THE THIEVES BAFLED—THE MODEL AND PLANS STILL SAFE.

As arranged, Herbert Craddock and Arthur Welland went to the Gaiety in the evening, and for the sake of their friend gave the actors the most unstinted applause, and, upon the fall of the curtain, led the call for the author.

When their old school-mate appeared, people sitting near the pair really thought they must have taken leave of their senses, they cheered and gesticulated so enthusiastically.

Afterwards they went round to the stage-door, and managed to walk Tom off from a crowd of other would-be lionisers, and the three cracked a couple of bottles of champagne to the success of the piece.

It was therefore something in the "wee small hours" when Herbert and Arthur turned their steps homewards. They took a hansom to St. John's Wood, where they both resided within a few minutes' stroll of one another, and, alighting at the corner of the road in which Arthur lived, the two walked as far as the house. They parted at the gate, and then Herbert sought his own home, which was situated only a couple of streets off.

He had turned into his own road, and was passing a deep recess in one of the garden-walls, when suddenly three men leaped out upon him.

"Now, down with him!" came a hoarse whisper from one of them. And immediately all three assailants flung themselves upon him.

Though taken completely by surprise, Herbert struck out quickly with his right fist, and sent the foremost staggering back with a blow in the face. But the other two dealt him each a heavy blow upon the skull with bludgeons they carried, and he dropped to earth like a stone, robbed of all sense or motion.

"Good!" cried a fourth man, stepping forward from the deep shadow of the recess. "Now, stand aside, and let me search him."

He knelt down over the prostrate and senseless man, dived his hand quickly into the latter's breast-pocket, and drew out a bunch of papers and letters neatly tied round with tape.

"These are they to a certainty!" he muttered. "Quick, we must get out of this now!"

He rose to his feet, thrust the stolen documents into his own pocket, and then, like spectres of the night, the four men glided off into the darkness, leaving their victim still stretched out unconscious on the sidewalk.

In a few minutes the darkness had swallowed up their forms, and soon after their footsteps died away in the distance.

Herbert lay for long without moving, but at length consciousness began to reassert itself, and a groan issued from his lips. There came the measured tread of a policeman along the silent street, and, as the assaulted man revived and struggled into a sitting posture, the light of the officer's bull's-eye was flashed upon him.

The policeman uttered a startled exclamation, and in a moment was beside the only yet half-conscious man, and bending over him.

"Humph!" the custodian of the peace muttered. "The fellow is drunk, I s'pose; has fallen down, and, by Jove, he has knocked his head badly, for it is covered with blood! Well, well, these young toffs will have their fling, and will come rolling home at all hours of the night. Here, you! rouse yourself and get upon your feet!"

Herbert only groaned, and the officer, looking more closely still at him, muttered again:

"No, he does not look as if he were drunk, nor does he smell of liquor. Say, mister, open your eyes! What's wrong with you?"

Herbert faintly murmured.

"I have been attacked and assaulted by three men. Did they get away?"

"I suppose so, for I saw nothing of them. Here, take a swig of this and tell me where you live. Is it close by?"

"Yes, yes! No. 25."

The brandy the officer gave him revived Herbert somewhat, and with the man's help he was able to get upon his feet.

"The—the ruffians sprang upon me from that recess, and knocked me down, and then I remembered no more," said Herbert. "Oh, how my head rings! They must have given me a hard blow."

"Have they robbed you of anything—your watch or money?"

Herbert leaned against the wall and felt for his watch. It was in its proper place. Then he put his hand in his trousers pockets.

"No," he said surprisedly; "they have taken neither my watch nor my money."

"That's strange," remarked the constable, "they could not have been ordinary thieves, then; though, perhaps, they heard me coming, and took to their heels the moment they had knocked you down."

Herbert was feeling in his other pockets, and when he came to his breast, he uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Ha! all my papers and letters are gone!"

A sudden thought struck him. The thieves were after the plans of his invention, and he mentally congratulated himself that he had not been so foolish as to carry these about with him. The documents that the villains had taken were absolutely worthless to anyone but himself, and contained nothing whatever about the torpedo.

Still, who could the thieves have been, and how could they have known about his invention? There were only one or two, Arthur Welland and Dick Kershaw, to whom he had told his secret. It was now quite clear, though, that others also knew it.

He turned to the constable, and said:

"Those were no common thieves, officer, as you said. They believed I had certain papers upon me, and committed this assault to get possession of them, but, fortunately, I did not have them on me, and so they were baffled. The papers and letters they have taken were of no great importance."

"That is a good thing, sir. Now, if you feel well enough, I will help you to your home, and I would advise you, sir, to get to bed right away. You will be all right in the morning. You have had a nasty knock, and lost some blood, but I don't think it will be any worse."

Leaning on the constable's shoulder, Herbert gained his

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own door, and, opening it with his latchkey, he invited the officer to accompany him upstairs to his room.

The constable, scenting a "treat," was nothing loth; and, mounting the stairs, Herbert unlocked his door, entered, and struck a match.

Both the officer and himself immediately uttered ejaculations of amazement, and the latter dropped the match.

By the light of the policeman's bull's-eye, though, they beheld the room in the utmost disorder and confusion. Drawers had been pulled out and their contents were strewn all over the floor, the bedclothes had been tossed into a corner, and even the mattresses had been moved.

As the constable shone his lantern round, they could see that there was scarcely an article in the room that had not been overthrown or displaced.

Without a doubt some person or persons had entered it in the owner's absence, and subjected it to a thorough search.

"Strikes me, sir," said the policeman reflectively, "this 'ere is the work of the same rascals, who assaulted you outside. They were after some papers, I expect; did they get them?"

"No," Herbert laughed. "No, they are on the wrong scent. I took precautions to place them in a safe hiding-place, and so they have been completely baffled."

"A good job you took the precaution, sir. Well, I s'pose I will have to report this case to the inspector."

"Will it be necessary? See here, my man, I don't mind you saying how you picked me up in the street and all that, but don't mention about my room being broken into. If you do, believe me, you will do more harm than good. It will be sure to get into the papers then, and curious people will want to know what the papers those thieves were after are all about. I cannot permit their contents to be made public property just yet, do you understand? And, as a matter of fact, if the whole story leaked out, you would benefit the thieves and do me a world of harm. I see you are an honest fellow, and I don't mind telling you those papers are the plans of an invention I intend shortly to patent. These rogues wish to forestall me, if possible. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly, sir; you say those papers are the plans of an invention. Pardon me, sir, are you the great inventor, Herbert Craddock?"

"I am."

"Then say no more, sir. I will be 'mum' about the burglary; but you don't mind my reporting the assault?"

"No, so long as you don't mention I was robbed of anything. You can easily say I was not robbed of either my money or my watch, and that the thieves must have been scared away before they had time to relieve me of my valuables."

"Very well, sir."

Herbert saw the officer out of the door, and slipped a couple of sovereigns into his hand, as they parted.

Then the young inventor returned to the disordered room, and immediately crossed over to the fireplace, pulled away the rug in front of it, and, picking up the tongs, inserted one of the arms in the crack of the hearthstone and slowly levered this up.

A cavity a few inches deep was revealed.

A long, thin metal case took up the greater part of the space, and beside this there was a small box, or casket.

Herbert unlocked the metal case, and, lifting up the lid, disclosed the complete model of the torpedo he had invented.

A single glance was sufficient to show him it was there in all its parts, and, with a satisfied exclamation, he closed the case again, and locked it. Then he bent over the casket, and, opening that also, took from it several bulky packets of plans and diagrams. He but looked to make sure that they, too, had not been tampered with, then he replaced them in their receptacle, and let the hearthstone drop back into its place, effectually hiding the cavity.

"The rogues, whoever they were, have been nicely baffled this time," he said, half-aloud, with a light laugh; "but I must take good care they don't have another chance to ransack my room, or they may light on the hiding-place. I wonder who on earth the fellows could have been? It is quite evident someone besides Arthur, Kershaw, and myself are in possession of my secret. I must go more carefully to work."

CHAPTER III.

HERBERT, ARTHUR, AND DICK CONSULT TOGETHER—FERAT PLAYS THE EAVESDROPPER—IN THE RESTAURANT—HERBERT HAS HIS SUSPICIONS OF FERAT—MR. PHELPS FROM THE ADMIRALTY—THE MODEL STOLEN.

The daily papers naturally made as much as they could out of the assault by three unknown ruffians on the famous young inventor, Herbert Craddock, and several indefatigable reporters even interviewed him in hopes of gleaning more about the

affair; but, though he was courtesy itself to them all, they left him almost as wise as when they went.

The assault was put down as an ordinary attempt at highway robbery, and only to his friends, Arthur Welland and Dick Kershaw, did Herbert disclose the full facts.

They were both very much concerned at the idea of their secret being shared by others, and the three sat for long closeted in the private office of the firm of Welland and Kershaw, discussing ways and means by which the would-be thieves might be foiled.

"We won't ask you, Bert, old chap, where you have hidden the model and plans," said Arthur. "Keep that part of the secret well locked up in your own bosom, and then, if we have any more eavesdroppers like we had the other day, they will be able to glean very little."

"Yes, that will be best," put in Dick Kershaw. "What I would also suggest is that you lose no time in communicating with Government, offering them the sole rights of the invention. Once you get them to take it up, of course, you will be safe from all fear of foul play."

Little did the three men guess, as they thus sat quietly talking, that Monsieur Pierre Ferat, in the outer office, was loitering suspiciously close to the door of the private room, pretending to be occupied in searching for something in the letter-book that stood upon a table close by it.

The other clerks were all busy over their own books, and did not notice his strange conduct, or, if they did, they thought it necessary, no doubt, for him to refer to the letter-book.

When, however, there was the noise of moving chairs inside the inner office, Ferat softly closed the letter-book, and noiselessly glided, rather than walked, back to his desk.

He had scarcely time to reset himself and busy himself again over his books, when the door of the private office opened, and Herbert, Arthur, and Dick came forth.

The trio left the building, and sauntered together down Chancery Lane into the Strand, where they turned into a restaurant and ordered lunch.

"I tell you what I firmly believe, Mr. Craddock, with regard to this attempted theft of the plans," said Dick, apparently continuing the topic of conversation, as they were waiting. "I will tell you what I believe; that in some way a spy of some foreign Power has learned of your invention, and wishes to steal the plans and sell them to his own Government. Were this would-be thief an Englishman, he would know very well that, with the prestige you have already acquired through your inventions, you would easily obtain a verdict against him, even supposing he succeeded in robbing you of the fruit of your labour and patenting the article before you."

"Very true," coincided Arthur; "and I think there is considerable sense in your belief, Dick, that it may be some emissary of a foreign Power who is the would-be thief, because every Power in Europe is now engaged in watching its neighbour like a cat does a mouse. There is not a single invention or improvement—more especially in engines of war—that can be made by one nation, without the others, if they get an inkling at all of it, moving heaven and earth, so to speak, to learn all about it."

"Yes," said Herbert reflectively, "there is something in that; but then, how could any foreign agent have discovered a secret which was known only to we three?"

"But the fact remains that, somehow or another, some other party has discovered it," answered Dick; "and, after all, what is so very strange about one of these foreigners ferreting out our secret. It is their business to be prying into everything; and you, as the famous inventor already of the 'Craddock' rifle and the 'Craddock' cartridge, might expect to be made the object of their especial surveillance."

"By Jove! Mr. Kershaw, I do believe you are right!" cried Herbert, casting a quick glance around the restaurant immediately after he spoke, to notice if anyone at any of the other tables seemed to be paying any heed to their conversation.

But the place contained very few customers, for it was about three o'clock in the afternoon. In fact, there were only four other persons present beside themselves, and the only one of these who sat at all near them was a small, red-bearded man, who, moreover, seemed deeply immersed in his newspaper.

Our friends' lunch was here brought by the waiter, and during the meal the conversation was commonplace and desultory. The red-bearded man after a time rose, paid his bill, and went out; and, finishing their meal, our friends also left the restaurant, and returned to the office.

As they passed through the private room, Herbert's eye happened to catch the Frenchman Ferat's, and, to his surprise somewhat, the man seemed uneasy under his gaze, and dropped his eyes instantly upon the floor.

Immediately what they had been talking about flashed upon his mind, and he looked again at the Frenchman. There was a certain resemblance, a something—he could not have said what had his life depended on it—which reminded him of that red-bearded man in the restaurant.

But Pierre Ferat had hair and a well-waxed moustache of jetty blackness, while the man in the restaurant had fiery red hair and bushy whiskers. Besides—but the very idea that the two could be identical seemed preposterous, so Herbert put it from his mind, and followed his friends.

Herbert wrote that afternoon to the authorities, asking them to take over the new torpedo he had invented; and a few days later he received an official-looking letter, stating that the Admiralty would be only too pleased to give his invention their consideration, and stating that that very day a trustworthy official would wait upon him.

Herbert's appointment with his visitor was in the afternoon, and, punctual to the minute, the official was ushered in.

He was a tall, well-built man, with a well-trimmed beard and moustache; but there was something about him, something indefinable, which our hero did not altogether like.

When he opened his mouth, however, there was a heartiness and agreeableness in his tones that almost immediately dispelled this momentary suspicion, and Herbert soon found himself chatting quite freely and unrestrainedly with the man, who had introduced himself as Mr. Phelps.

The gentleman, after the first greetings had been exchanged, expressed the wish to see the model and plans; and, all suspicion of his visitor being now allayed, Herbert Craddock rose at once and conducted Mr. Phelps upstairs to his bedroom.

"I must tell you, Mr. Phelps," said Herbert, "that already an attempt has been made by some evil-disposed person or persons to steal the plans; but fortunately I had taken the precaution to place them in a secure hiding-place. Look round you now, and tell me whereabouts in this room I am likely to have concealed the model and diagrams?"

Mr. Phelps looked round the apartment, and suggested first one place and then another. Suddenly, though, a gleam of intelligence flashed into his eyes, and, with a strange laugh, he said:

"Ah, I know! You have taken up a plank of the flooring, and hidden the plans between it and the plaster."

"No!" smiled Herbert: "that sort of a hiding-place would be too apt to be thought of by would-be thieves. No; but you are not so far out after all. See, here is their hiding-place."

With that he took up the tongs again, and as before levered up the hearthstone.

"Now, what do you think of that for a hiding-place?" he asked triumphantly.

Mr. Phelps bent forward eagerly, and his eyes lighted up with a strange, exultant look as he beheld the metal case, containing the torpedo model and the box of designs.

"It is certainly a most ingenious one," remarked the visitor, who seemed struggling with some deep, mental excitement.

Herbert bent over the cavity to lift out the model-case, when all at once his companion, who had stealthily opened a small hand-bag he had brought with him, drew therefrom a sand-bag, and brought it down with all his strength upon the head of our unsuspecting hero.

The latter fell in a heap atop of the model-case, and in an instant Mr. Phelps was on his knees beside the partially stunned man, had turned the latter over on his back, and was pressing a small sponge, from which exhaled the odour of chloroform, over the mouth and nostrils.

In a few minutes the drug had done its work. Mr. Phelps rose to his feet, leaving his victim senseless upon the floor.

"It was a risky piece of work!" he muttered; "but, thank goodness, it is safely accomplished. At last, then, I have the plans and model safe and sure. Now I must get away from here with all speed, find a secure hiding-place for these"—laying his hand upon the cases—"and then—bide my time."

He cast a sharp glance at the prostrate form of Herbert, and, after a moment's hesitation, took a small phial from his pocket, and, to make all sure, renewed the chloroform in the sponge, which he again placed over the nostrils of his victim.

Then coolly he went to work, extracting the papers and designs from the small box, and placing them inside his coat; and next he took the model to pieces, and packed the parts inside his hand-bag.

The empty cases he left upon the table, and then, with a careful look round the room to see he was leaving nothing behind, which might serve as a clue to his identity, he softly opened the room-door, and stood at the top of the stairs for a while intently listening for any sound in the house.

Satisfied that the coast was clear, he stole noiselessly down the stairs, gained the front door, opened it, and, slipping out, pulled it to with a slam behind him.

Then, with a light and easy gait, Mr. Phelps walked briskly down the road, turned up a by-street, and hailed a hansom which was crawling past.

As the driver drew up his vehicle at the kerb, the man asked in a whisper of his fare: "Have you succeeded, sir?"

"Yes; drive like fury, and take care we are not followed!"

The caddy whipped up his horse, and the vehicle rattled off at a smart rate.

CHAPTER IV.

HERBERT DISCOVERS HIS LOSS—HE GOES TO THE ADMIRALTY, AND RECEIVES SURPRISING NEWS—THE MYSTERY DEEPENS—HERBERT RECOGNISES FERAT DISGUISED—HE DENOUNCES THE SPY, AND GIVES CHASE.

When Herbert Craddock returned to consciousness, it was to find his housekeeper bending anxiously over him, bathing his forehead and chafing his wrists, while a couple of policemen were standing by.

"What—what has happened?" demanded Herbert, looking around him in utter astonishment.

Then the recollection of his visitor, and the terrible knowledge that the latter must have in some way taken advantage of him and stunned him, flashed upon him, and he leaped excitedly to his feet.

"The plans—the model!" he gasped. And he staggered back with a groan as his eyes rested upon the empty and useless metal case and box.

"They are gone—stolen by that rascal!" he cried. "The labour and thought of months wasted and lost. But I will pursue the scoundrel, if necessary, to the uttermost limits of the world. Mrs. Barrow, my hat! He cannot have got away! I will find him!"

"Restrain yourself, sir!" remonstrated one of the officers, the same man who had found him senseless in the road a few nights back. "Calm yourself—getting excited will do no good. Give us the facts of the case, and you can rest assured we will find the thief, and recover whatever you have had stolen."

This calm and dispassionate kind of talk served to pacify Herbert somewhat, though he was still greatly excited, probably from the effects of the blow he had received upon the head as much as the loss of his cherished model.

He at last calmed down sufficiently to give the constable a full account of what had transpired during the visit of the mysterious Mr. Phelps, besides a personal description of the latter's appearance.

"Strange—very strange," said the officer, who had before befriended Herbert. "This man could never have been sent from the Admiralty. Strikes me, your letter has got into the wrong hands, and some daring rogue conceived the idea of personating a Government agent. If I were you, sir, I should go at once to the Admiralty, and make inquiries whether a man really was sent by them to see you about this 'ere invention of yours.'"

This was good advice, and Herbert, as soon as ever the effects of the ill-usage he had met with had worn off, set off straightway for the office of his friends, Arthur Welland and Richard Kershaw.

They were both in, and both, needless to say, were greatly concerned over his loss. Arthur offered to accompany him to the Admiralty to inquire if they had sent the mysterious Mr. Phelps to interview him, and Herbert, whose brain was still a bit muddled, and who scarcely felt capable of thinking very clearly, gladly accepted the offer.

Perhaps it was not a very great surprise for either of them, when they arrived at the Admiralty and made inquiries, to learn that, not only was there no such individual as Mr. Phelps among the employees or officials, but that they had sent no letter to Mr. Craddock, and, for the matter of that, did not remember having received any communication from him.

Here was mystery, indeed!

Where on earth, then, had Herbert's letter, offering the invention to the Government, gone? Who could have intercepted it, and how could it have been introduced?

Herbert now remembered he had written the letter in the office of his friends, and had placed it in the letter-box, to be posted with the letters of the firm itself. What more easy than for some one to abstract it before the box was cleared for the six o'clock post?

If this were the true solution of the mystery, then the thief, or at any rate an accomplice of the thief's, must have been inside the office at the time, must have known of his writing the letter, and have found an opportunity to abstract it.

As these thoughts flashed through Herbert's brain, the figure of the Frenchman, Pierre Ferat, rose mentally before him, and the words of Dick Kershaw came back with tenfold meaning to his mind:

"I believe that the emissary of some foreign Power is the would-be thief!"

Ferat was a foreigner; but then, there are numerous foreigners employed in various offices throughout London and other large English cities. It was scarcely likely that he would be a secret agent for his Government.

Still, there was every reason to believe that the letter had been abstracted from the box of the firm, no one could very well obtain access to that except someone in the office itself, and to none of the clerks did suspicion seem to point so directly as to Pierre Ferat.

The belief that this man was, if not the actual thief of the model and plans, at least an accomplice, became a conviction with Herbert, and, as they returned to the office, he took Arthur into his confidence.

The latter, too, saw the force of his friend's arguments, and admitted it was far from unlikely that Ferat was concerned in the affair.

"The man has always been a perfect mystery to me," Arthur Welland said. "He acts most strangely at times, and I have often found him prying into matters that did not concern him; but I never yet found him at all dishonest. Still, there is no denying that suspicion certainly points towards him, and we will do well to watch his movements closely. If he is the real thief he will want to leave the country, and the moment he tries to do so will be our time to pounce upon him. But we will hear what Dick Kershaw has to say."

When they arrived at the office, Kershaw was not in, neither was Ferat; and, on inquiring where they were, our friends learned that both had gone to tea.

Arthur knew the particular café his partner patronised, so thither they proceeded; and, sure enough, they found Dick smoking a cigarette and perusing the evening paper after the meal.

He opened his eyes rather wide on hearing the result of their visit to the Admiralty, and Herbert's suspicions of the Frenchman Ferat.

"By Jingo, I do believe you are right, Mr. Craddock!" he said, hitting his thigh enthusiastically. "Sure enough that is the right reading of all the mystery. The fellow is no more than a spy of the French Government, and he thought a situation in a patent office would just be the very thing to enable him to spy into all manner of new discoveries and inventions. The infernal scoundrel, he must not be given an opportunity of getting away. We must lay hands on him at once."

"But we have really nothing as yet against him," said Arthur Welland.

"Never mind that!" cried Dick. "If he really is the thief he cannot have had time yet to conceal the model and plans, and, by searching his rooms, we should be able to recover them."

"But if he is not the thief?" asked the more cautious Arthur.

"Oh, a few pounds would be ample compensation to him!"

Herbert said nothing. He was gazing intently at a little black-bearded man, who was sitting with his back towards them at the next table. Something familiar in the figure had at first attracted him, and, as he looked again, a ray of light burst upon his mind.

The black-bearded man was none other than Monsieur Pierre Ferat disguised.

This conviction no sooner forced itself upon him than, forgetting for the moment where he was, he sprang excitedly to his feet, and cried out in a loud voice:

"Arthur! Kershaw! That man is Ferat disguised!"

His words, distinctly heard over the entire room, produced, needless to say, the profoundest sensation.

Everybody wheeled round in their seats and stared at the speaker—that is, all with one single exception of the black-bearded man. He half rose from his chair, turned a white, scared face upon his denouncer, then, snatching up his hat, cleared the space between him and the door almost at a bound, and disappeared out of the shop like a streak of lightning.

Herbert dashed wildly after him, and Arthur Welland, fully believing his friend had taken leave of his senses, followed almost as quickly to try and overtake him.

Dick Kershaw took things more calmly. Though the cynosure of all eyes, he walked deliberately towards the door, having paid the bill, and gained the street in time to see Herbert and Arthur stepping into a hansom, the former waving his hand wildly after another that was driving off at reckless speed, and clearly telling the cabby to follow it.

"Well, well," said Dick, "he is a hot-headed chap, and no mistake! It is no use my joining in the chase, so I may as well

return to the office. Could it really have been Ferat? I suppose it must have been; no other man would have fled like that. This is growing interesting."

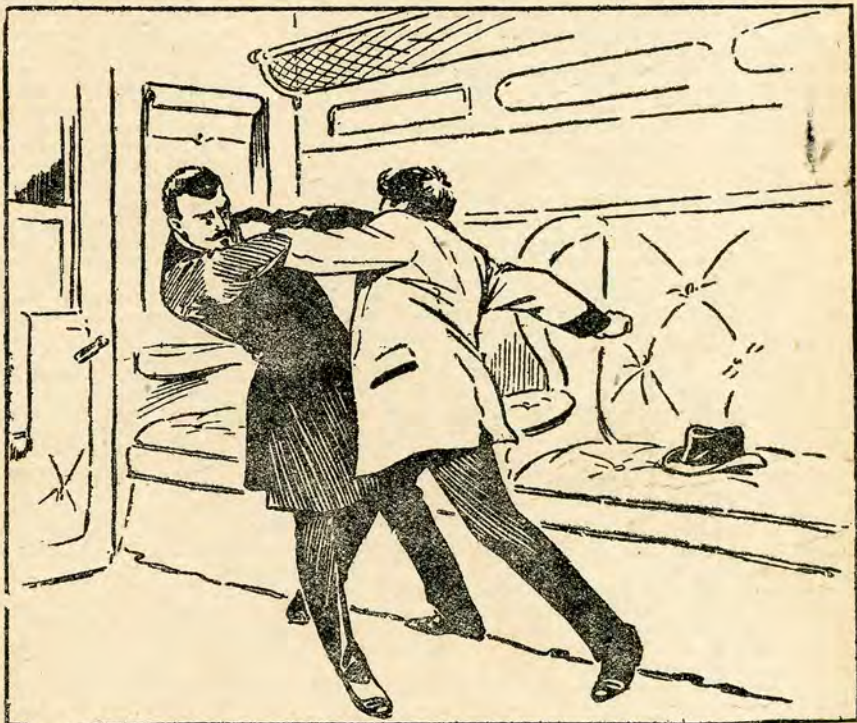
CHAPTER V.

AN EXCITING CHASE IN A HANSON—FERAT BOARDS ONE TRAIN AND LEAPS INTO ANOTHER AS IT IS MOVING—HERBERT'S DARING JUMP—THE STRUGGLE IN THE RAILWAY CARRIAGE—FERAT'S LEAP FOR LIBERTY—HERBERT'S MAD PURSUIT—FERAT'S ESCAPE—THE RECKLESS CABBY—HERBERT AND ARTHUR IN A CAB ACCIDENT.

Herbert and Arthur followed the fugitive hansom in their own along High Holborn, and up Southampton Row.

Ferat must have known he was pursued, for his cab tore along at a terrific rate, and, determined not to lose their quarry, Herbert urged their driver also to go at his fastest. People skurried hastily out of the way, policemen shouted to the two cabbies to pull up, and even ran after them, blowing their whistles, but the hansom only flew the faster.

At length the leading one swung round into Euston Road,



Herbert sprang upon him, and, clutching him by the throat, hurled him back into the corner of the carriage.

dashed under the arch and entered the station, the pursuer close behind.

Ferat leaped forth, slipped a coin into the hand of his cabby, and was gone like a flash.

Herbert bounded out of his own vehicle at imminent risk to life and limb, and, shouting to Arthur to settle with the driver, also darted into the station.

He caught a glimpse of Ferat running towards No. 9 platform, and gave chase. Railway officials and passengers turned to look after the flying pair; but, believing they were running to catch a train, no one attempted to stop them, for Herbert was so intent on his capture that he never thought of calling upon anyone to stop Ferat.

Ferat dashed on to the platform, and, racing along by the side of the train drawn up there, finally leaped into one of the compartments.

Herbert was some distance behind, and could not tell the exact carriage into which his foe had jumped; but, running on, he glanced into all the compartments as he passed them, but without seeing aught of his foe.

He believed he had gone too far down the train, and was thinking of retracing his steps and glancing again into the last few compartments, when an idea struck him, and, immediately

opening the carriage-door beside him, he stepped in, crossed over to the opposite window, and looked out.

A train on the next line was just beginning to move, and as the carriages rolled slowly past Herbert, the latter suddenly caught sight of the very man he was in search of seated in a corner seat of a first-class carriage, and its only occupant.

Their eyes met, and the triumphant look in the other's face almost maddened Herbert. Was he beaten, after all? Was the thief of his beloved model to escape so easily?

Rendered desperate at the bare idea, he threw open the door of the carriage in which he stood, stepped out on to the footboard, and, as the train opposite gathered speed at every second, he hastily calculated the distance between it and himself. Then, utterly reckless of the probability of missing his leap, he launched himself like an arrow from the bow at one of the carriages as it swept past.

He alighted safely upon the footboard of the other train, but, staggering backwards, would have been hurled off it like a ball rebounding from a wall, had he not been so fortunate as to catch hold of the sash of an open window.

Holding on to the sash, he steadied himself, and then began to slowly walk along the footboard in the direction of the carriage in which he had seen Ferat. He could hear some shouting and hallooing, and supposed that the people on the platforms saw him; but he paid no heed to their cries, and the carriages he had to pass were all empty. He had only a few compartments, as it happened, to pass before reaching that in which he had seen his foe, and presently he came to this and glanced in at the window.

Ferat was looking out of the opposite window, quite unsuspecting that his indefatigable foe was so close to him, and, probably enough, congratulating himself on his astuteness in slipping out of the one train into another.

Herbert approached the door and opened it, and at the noise the Frenchman turned and beheld him.

The man leaped to his feet with a furious oath.

"Curse you, you will not take me!" he cried, and he dived his right hand into his breast-pocket; but Herbert, guessing that he was feeling for some weapon, sprang upon him like a panther, and, catching him by the throat, hurled him backwards into the corner from which he had just risen.

Then the two grappled furiously for the mastery, Ferat striving to draw the weapon, and Herbert as strenuously attempting to prevent him; and, as the train rushed on through tunnel after tunnel, the fight was mostly carried on in the dark.

All at once Ferat managed to get his right hand free, and dealt Herbert a savage blow in the face that knocked him backwards. Ere he could recover himself, the Frenchman had sprung to his feet, and with a single bound had gained the still open door through which Herbert had entered, and flung himself bodily through it.

Herbert rushed to the door, glanced for an instant into the darkness, and then, without a moment's hesitation, leaped from the train also.

He struck the ground with fearful force, fell against the wall of the tunnel, and was instantly knocked senseless.

It was some time before he returned to his senses, and then it was to find a train thundering past within only a foot of his body. He had fortunately fallen between the wall and the line, and thus was saved from being cut to pieces as by a miracle.

When the train had passed, he rose to his feet, and, with his head aching frightfully, he determined to retrace his steps to the terminus. Fortune is kind to the reckless equally so as she is to the brave, and, beyond the hard knock upon the head, which had robbed him of his senses, Herbert was little the worse for his mad leap.

Staggering along the tunnels, he at last reached the station, and, climbing on to the platform, was immediately surrounded by several anxious officials, for his head was covered with the blood which had flowed from the deep cut he had sustained.

But to all their anxious inquiries he turned a deaf ear at first, eagerly inquiring if they had seen another man who was at all hurt.

When the officials knew that that other was a criminal he was in pursuit of, and learned of the exciting struggle and leap from the train, they were courtesy itself, and volunteered to search the tunnels with lanterns, lest Ferat might have met with a more serious accident than our hero, and be still lying in one of them.

Herbert accompanied them down the line to where he himself had fallen, but no trace whatever of the fugitive could be found.

They made a thorough search of every one of the tunnels, and continued on as far as Chalk Farm, but without finding a single trace of the Frenchman. So it was concluded that he, too, must have miraculously escaped any serious injury, and have got safely away.

Herbert returned to Euston, and, after a short interview with

the stationmaster, took a cab to the office of his friends Arthur and Dick Kershaw.

He found the pair anxiously awaiting his return; for Arthur Welland, though he had followed his friend into the station as quickly as he could after settling with the cabbie, could see nothing of either him or Ferat, and, after looking along all the platforms and searching the whole station for either of them, had returned to the office, knowing Herbert would be sure to return there.

Both Arthur and Dick Kershaw were very much surprised, as well as concerned, to hear of the adventures Herbert had passed through, and the latter sat for a long time after with brows wrinkled in thought.

At last he spoke.

"All this seems to bear out my surmise that we have the secret agent of some foreign Power to deal with. This Ferat, doubtless, is one such, and I fancy it is conclusively proved by his conduct, and, one might even say, his attempt on your life, Herbert, that he is the thief of the model. What we have now got to do is to set the whole machinery of the law in operation, and try and prevent him getting out of the country with the model or plans."

"Yes, that must be your first move," chimed in Arthur; "and if I were you, Bert, I would post off at once and take the authorities at Scotland Yard into my confidence."

Herbert saw the force of this advice, and forthwith took a hansom, and was driven to the great centre of our secret police.

There he secured the services of a couple of the smartest men in the force, and returned to his friends, satisfied that he was, at any rate, a step nearer the recovery of his precious model, for he well knew it would, indeed, be a difficult matter for Pierre Ferat to leave England now that the Scotland Yard officials were advised he might try to do so.

But days passed, and Herbert received no tidings from the detectives he had employed as to any success on their part, and Arthur Welland and Dick Kershaw in vain urged him to be patient, and all would yet come right. He worked himself up into such a state that his friends grew quite concerned about him; and at length, to humour him a little, Arthur agreed to run down with him to Dover and stay a week or two and employ themselves by keeping a strict watch upon all passengers by the Continental steamers.

Dick Kershaw promised to accompany them to London Bridge Station; but as he was not up to time, and the cab was waiting at the door, Arthur and Herbert got in and drove off.

They were rather late as it was for the train, and so told the cabbie to drive as fast as he could. The man obeyed by whipping up his horse, and they bowled along in fine style.

They were soon in the heart of the City; but even now their driver scarcely slackened his speed, except in the case of a block, and whirled them along past 'busses and other cabs at imminent risk of taking off one of the wheels, or colliding with some other vehicle.

Again and again they nearly ran down some unfortunate pedestrian, and as they got into Cheapside the driver suddenly lashed his horse with brutal force, causing it to bound forward at terrific speed. A policeman blew his whistle, but the driver lashed away at the horse, and, as Arthur pushed open the trap to remonstrate with the man for this reckless driving, pulled the animal sharp round, and positively hurled it right across the heads of the horses of a 'bus coming down on the opposite side of the road.

There was a terrific crash as the three horses met; then a crack like a pistol-shot, and Herbert and Arthur were sent flying headforemost out of the cab amongst the struggling heap of fallen animals.

CHAPTER VI.

A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE—HERBERT AND ARTHUR RETURN TO THE OFFICE—DICK'S TELEGRAM—HAS DICK GOT A CLUE?—THE CHUMS START FOR THE HOOK OF HOLLAND—ABOARD THE STEAMER—A COWARDLY ASSAILANT—HERBERT AND ARTHUR THROWN OVERBOARD.

There came cries and shouts from all sides, and fully a dozen hands were outstretched to pull our heroes from their dangerous position. As luck would have it, both were rescued from amid the very hoofs of the prostrate, kicking horses, with no worse casualty than a few cuts and bruises. As by a miracle both escaped being kicked by the frantic animals.

The cab was utterly wrecked, and the horse was dead, the pole of the 'bus having struck it on the head. The 'bus-horses, too, were both shockingly injured, and one had two of its legs broken. As for the 'bus itself, it had preserved its equilibrium, and had only a couple of windows broken. None of its occupants had been thrown off; but all were considerably shaken and scared.

The police were speedily upon the scene, and Arthur and Her-

Bert, both of whom were dazed by the accident, were sharply interrogated upon the cause of the mishap. They looked round to try and find the cab-driver, but he was not to be seen; and several of the crowd volunteered the statement that they had seen the man deliberately steer the horse across the path of the 'bus, and then, before the collision came, leap off, and dash round the back of another 'bus coming up behind.

"You have had a very narrow escape, young gentlemen," said the police-sergeant, who was promptly on the spot. "Was the cabby drunk?"

"No, I don't think so," replied Herbert, who was hardly yet able to fully comprehend what had happened. "We were driving to catch the continental mail at London Bridge Station, and, as we were rather late, we desired him to drive pretty smartly; but we had hardly got into Cheapside when he began to lash the horse something unmercifully, and the next thing we knew was colliding with the 'bus, and being shot out of the cab head first."

"It seemed to me," put in Arthur, "that the cabman deliberately swerved aside and ran into the 'bus."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, old fellow!" said Herbert.

"But I do! The horse hadn't bolted or anything, and was all right. It would never have swung right round like that if he had not caused it to."

"You are right, sir!" said one of the crowd. "I saw the whole affair. The cabby deliberately pulled the horse round right in front of the 'bus, and on to the wrong side of the road."

"You can swear to that?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes, sir!" answered the man.

"Well, though we have not got the cabby, we can take the number of the cab," said the sergeant; "and you must give me your names and addresses, gentlemen."

Herbert and Arthur readily gave the desired information, and then the former whispered aside:

"I don't think it will be any use our going on to Dover, Arthur. We must lose the train now; and, besides, I really must tell you of a terrible suspicion that has arisen in my mind. I cannot tell you here, but will when we are alone."

Arthur glanced inquiringly at his friend, and saw that he was labouring under some suppressed excitement.

After they had furnished the sergeant with all the information they could, and the temporary block in the traffic of Cheapside had been removed, by the carting away of the dead and lamed horses and the wrecked cab, Arthur and Herbert stepped into a hatter's, and bought fresh silk hats to replace their damaged headgear. They also each had a brush down, and washed the blood from the slight cuts upon their faces.

Then, locking a little more respectable, they took another hansom, evidently not having been taught a lesson by their late experience. This time, however, they were driven less recklessly, and on the way Arthur Welland asked:

"What did you mean, Bert, when you spoke of a terrible suspicion having arisen in your mind? Suspicion of whom?"

"I have thought better of it, old man. The suspicion was unworthy of me, and I feel I would be doing an innocent man a great injustice were I to give voice to what was only a half-formed idea in my mind. But I must tell you that the cabman who came so near ending both our lives bore a great resemblance to the mysterious Mr. Phelps, the pseudo-Government official who stole the model and plans."

"Are you sure, Bert?" asked Arthur quickly.

"Yes; it puzzled me a good deal at first where I had seen anyone resembling him before, and it was not until you said that you believed the fellow deliberately swerved aside and ran into the 'bus, that like a flash it came to me that he was like the mysterious Mr. Phelps, and also like— But no, I will not say whom else it came into my head he resembled. But there, I must be wandering in my mind to believe for a moment that our reckless cabby and the mysterious Mr. Phelps could possibly be one and the same person."

"I don't know so much about that, Bert. Of course, I did not see your Mr. Phelps, so I cannot speak as to any resemblance; but I did think the cabby was very strange in his behaviour. He neither spoke to nor looked at us any more than he could help before we started on our ill-omened journey, and that he was not drunk I could take my oath! The more I reflect upon the affair, the more unaccountable it appears to me, and I really am inclined to think that our accident was no accident at all, but a most deliberate attempt to either kill or maim the pair of us! I suppose the cabby was an accomplice of that confounded Frenchman, Ferat's! By Jingo! I'll wring that fellow's neck if ever I lay hands on him!"

"Yes," answered Herbert slowly, "I suppose the real thief is responsible for all this!"

Having thus delivered himself, he relapsed into silence, and became lost in such a deep reverie that his friend spoke to him several times without his appearing to hear.

"What on earth are you thinking of, Bert?" asked Arthur at

length, surveying his companion's serious face with some curiosity.

The other started, and looked rather shamefaced, as though he had been detected in something criminal.

"Oh, nothing—nothing much!" And he affected to laugh.

But Arthur was watching him closely, and noticed the guilty look in the other's face, and he felt hurt that Herbert, his bosom friend, could hide or wish to hide anything from him.

Fortunately the cab at this moment drew up outside Welland's office, and Arthur said, though somewhat coldly:

"You will come up and see Dick?"

The other thought for a moment, and then answered:

"Yes, I will."

Without another word the pair ascended to the office, and immediately they entered one of the clerks approached Arthur, and handed him a telegram, which had already been opened.

"It was addressed to me, sir, and is from Mr. Kershaw."

Arthur took the telegram in his hands, and read the following: "Am going to Holland on important business. Have wired Welland at address in Dover. Look after office in our absence.—KERSHAW."

Arthur in surprise handed the telegram without a word to Herbert, who read the message through, and then glanced up in blank amazement at his friend.

"I believe, Bert!" cried Arthur suddenly, as a brilliant idea struck him—"I do believe Dick has lighted upon a valuable clue as to the thief Ferat's whereabouts, and has started in pursuit of him. Doubtless the telegram he has sent to the hotel in Dover says so, and advises us to follow."

"By Jove! Arthur, I do believe you are right; and there is no reason why we should not follow him this very night!"

"But surely you will wait until we see what the other telegram contains?"

"It will only be so much wasted time, and I cannot rest or wait another hour with the thought that the thief may have already reached the Continent, and there is nothing to prevent him selling my invention to one of the other Powers. No, let us lose no time, but start at once after Dick. Fortunately, all our things are ready packed, and they may be sent on after us by your clerk."

"Very well; if your mind is set upon going we can take train for Harwich within the hour. Clarkson, we want to see you in the office."

The three men were soon closeted together, and Arthur and Herbert arranged with the former's clerk to forward their luggage after them to the Harwich steamer.

Within two hours from the time of the cab accident, Herbert and Arthur were bowling along in the Continental express, and midnight of that most eventful day saw them both seated in the cosy, electric-lighted state-room of the steamer en route for the Hook of Holland.

"Yes," said Arthur Welland reflectively, "Dick is a shrewd fellow, and he has not started for the Continent so suddenly on a fool's errand, I know. I could stake my life he has got a good clue, and has wired to the hotel we intended to stop at in Dover, telling us to follow him without delay."

"There is no other business that could possibly call him to Holland so abruptly, is there?" inquired Herbert.

"No; I know of none. But come up on deck, we will take a whiff of sea-air before we turn in, if you have no objection?"

"Not the slightest."

The two men mounted the companion, and, standing by the bulwarks, looking across the dark heaving waters at the fading lights of Harwich, they smoked their cigars, and speculated upon how Dick could have come by the information which led him to start off at such a minute's notice for the Continent.

It was a pitch-dark night, for scarcely a star glimmered in the heavens, and neither of them noticed the stealthy, muffled-up figure creeping softly up behind them.

All at once this mysterious individual sprang upon Arthur Welland, who happened to be nearer to him, and dealt him a crushing blow upon the back of the head.

Arthur reeled blindly forward, and fell senseless across the taffrail.

Herbert turned in utter amazement; but ere he could raise a hand to defend himself, so taken aback was he by the sudden and unaccountable assault that the stranger was able to deal him also an ugly blow upon the side of the head.

Half-stunned, he, too, fell back upon the rail, and, like a tiger, his assailant was instantly on him, had caught him by the throat, and forced his head and shoulders over the ship's side.

In vain Herbert struggled to save himself, his adversary's grip was like iron, and even as he uttered one wild shriek for help the villain gave him a strong push and sent him hurtling backwards into the sea.

Quick as lightning the would-be assassin then leaped upon the unconscious Arthur, and flung him, too, bodily over the vessel's side.

CHAPTER VII.

HERBERT AND ARTHUR PICKED UP BY ANOTHER STEAMER—CARRIED TO ANTWERP—THEY GO ON TO THE HOOK, FIND DICK HAS LEFT FOR AMSTERDAM—FOLLOW AND OVERTAKE HIM—THE THREE DECIDE TO TRY AND CAPTURE FERAT AS HE LANDS IN HAMBURG—HERBERT AND ARTHUR LOSE DICK IN THE CROWD AT OSNABRUCK JUNCTION.

The shriek for help Herbert uttered as he felt himself falling, and the double splash, brought seamen and passengers crowding on to the deck, which but a few moments before had been practically deserted.

"What is the matter? What has happened?" one demanded of another.

"It is a man overboard—or, rather, two men!" cried the would-be murderer in tones of the wildest excitement. Quick! quick! Lower a boat, or they will be lost!"

"How did the accident happen?" asked one of the passengers, as the sailors released one or two lifebuoys and strained their eyes into the inky darkness to make out the figures of the unfortunate men in the water.

"I don't really know," answered the double-dyed villain. "I saw two gentlemen talking close to the taffrail; then all at once I heard a shriek and a splash, and one had disappeared.

tinued to swim after the steamer, but the blackness of the night had already swallowed her up, and the heavy swell was carrying him further and further away, neutralising his utmost exertions.

Thus it was that when the steamer did eventually come to a stop and lower a boat its crew could see nothing of the two men, and so concluded they were drowned.

The cold water soon revived Arthur, who feebly asked where he was.

"We are alone on the bosom of the deep, old fellow," answered Herbert. "Pull yourself together, and try and tread water. I am nearly spent with swimming."

For quite an hour the two kept themselves afloat by alternately swimming, floating, and treading water. Then, to their infinite joy, they saw the lights of a steamer looming through the darkness.

By hoarse shouts they succeeded in attracting the attention of those aboard.

A boat was dropped, and a few minutes later our exhausted friends found themselves on the deck of the steamer.

The tale they told caused the profoundest amazement and horror. Captain, crew, and passengers vied with one another to show their sympathy.

The steamer was bound for Antwerp, and Herbert was content to be landed there, as he knew he could easily journey thence to the Hook of Holland or Amsterdam by train.

He could, however, with difficulty restrain his impatience. He felt that Dick Kershaw must have got hold of a clue indeed to start off so suddenly for the Continent, and he panted to join him and get upon the track of the thief.

When they left the steamer at Antwerp, Craddock was all eagerness to set off for the hook, where they knew they would learn whither Dick had gone from the proprietor of the hotel from which the telegram had been addressed.

A few hours later, and they had not only interviewed the proprietor of the Hotel at the Hook at which Dick Kershaw had stopped, but were on their way to Amsterdam, whither the worthy Dutchman reported him to have gone.

Across the flat but picturesque country, with its numerous canals, its neat little houses with tall roofs and many-paned windows, past Schiedam, with its distilleries and pigs, the old-world village of Delft, the gay city of the Hague, then over more green flats, with tulip and hyacinth fields, the horizon bounded by innumerable windmills, past Leyden, famous for its siege by the Spaniards, past Haarlem, and our two friends found themselves dumped down in Amsterdam.

From the station Herbert and Arthur drove at once to the hotel at which Dick was stopping, and as they dismounted at the door they came face to face with him just as he was coming out, carrying a light travelling-bag in his hand.

He fell back in utter astonishment at sight of them.

"Why, good gracious me! where did you spring from?" he asked, with a bewildered look. "I thought you were both in Dover."

"No; we never got there," said Arthur, after the usual salutations had been exchanged. "We were nearly killed by a reckless cabby on the way to London Bridge Station, and, returning to the office, found there a telegram saying you had started on important business for Holland. We at once concluded you had found a clue as to the whereabouts of Ferat, and thought we would follow on. But that is not all. Coming over to the Hook on the boat, we both nearly lost our lives. Some ruffian deliberately attacked us as we stood by the rail, stunned me with a blow from some blunt weapon, and threw Bert here into the sea. Then he flung me in also, and, if Herbert had not fortunately found me, I would have been drowned, for I was quite unconscious."

"Great heavens! you don't say so? But come upstairs—come upstairs to my room and tell me how on earth you were both saved. You were picked up by the steamer again, I suppose?"

"No; they either did not know of the accident, or they could not find us in the dark. We floated about for I don't know how long—it seemed an age—but at last we were seen and picked up by an Antwerp steamer. We went straight on



The driver deliberately hurled the cab across the bus horses' heads.

The other immediately leaped after him, I presume, to his rescue."

The engines were stopped, a boat was got out, and its crew rowed back and all round the spot, searching for the missing men; but the night was inky dark, there was a pretty rough sea on, and they could neither see nor hear anything.

For over an hour the captain lingered near the scene of the casualty; then, feeling sure that the unfortunate men must have perished, he reluctantly gave the order to proceed.

But there was a wise Providence watching over Herbert and Arthur, and neither were yet fated to meet their doom.

When the former struck the water he was quite conscious, and the moment he came to the surface he looked round for the steamer.

Its lights were rapidly disappearing in the darkness, and a feeling of horror and numbing fear crept over him that he was left alone on the black ocean to perish.

In desperation he began to strike out after the vessel, when suddenly his hand came in contact with another floating object. He clutched it eagerly, and found it was a human body.

As he drew it towards him, he found to his joy that it was the senseless body of Arthur. A revulsion of feeling swept over him now, and he thanked Heaven for having found his friend, who, he feared, had been carried away by the high sea that was running, and drowned.

Supporting Arthur's head upon his shoulder, Herbert con-



He jumped through the window, smashing frame and glass, and fell into the street.

from Antwerp to the Hook, got your address here in Amsterdam from the landlord, and so followed you."

"By Jove! you have had some adventures, and it is lucky you came so soon, for I was just on the point of starting for Berlin."

"You have a clue?" eagerly demanded Herbert.

"Yes; I am hard upon Ferat's heels. He is not French at all, so I have every reason to believe, but a secret agent, as I thought, of the German Government."

"And he is on his way to Berlin? Oh, let us follow without delay! It may be even now too late, the evil may be done! Once he succeeds in placing the model or plans in the hands of his Government, we are beaten, and my precious invention is lost to me. Not that I care so very much, after all, for that; but then the secret of this terrible instrument of destruction, which I had hoped to preserve to our own Government at home, will be in the hands of a foreign foe."

"Never say die," said Dick. "Ferat cannot yet have got to Berlin. He is travelling via Hamburg, and it is a far more roundabout way than by the Hook. That is why I chose the latter route in hopes of heading him off."

"But how did you come by your information as to the villain's movements?" asked Arthur.

"I found scribbled on a scrap of paper on his desk in the office the name of the Hamburg steamer and these words, as though they were part of a telegraphic message he had sent off to someone: 'Shall be in Berlin next Friday.' The words were in German. And as you had gone on, as I believed, to Dover, I decided to lose no time, but take the next steamer to the Hook and try and head off the scoundrel."

"And you wired to our address in Dover to follow you, as you said?"

"Yes; but you were so soon after me, you quite took my breath away."

"We have plenty of time, then, to head off the scoundrel, as this is only Wednesday. Our best plan would be to make for Hamburg, and have him arrested as he steps off the steamer. If we go on to Berlin, as you suggest, Dick, the mischief might be

done, and we might have a difficulty in getting the police there to assist us."

"You are right, Bert," claimed in Arthur; "we can have the man arrested on board the steamer, and thus prevent any chance of the German police knowing too much. You see, Dick, three heads are better than one, after all, though to you is certainly due the credit of having discovered the thief's whereabouts."

Dick Kershaw remained silent for a few minutes, as if turning the matter well over in his mind; then, raising his head, he said:

"Yes, I agree with you that our best plan will be to make for Hamburg instead, as it is quite evident that someone in league with him must be aware of at least part of our plans, as the attempt on your life aboard the Harwich steamer testifies, but exactly how much this accomplice may know of them we cannot say. He may have thought that he settled you both for good and aye, when he flung you overboard."

As Dick Kershaw had been on the very point of starting for Berlin, and had all his belongings therefore ready packed, there was nothing to detain our friends longer in Amsterdam, so they drove at once to the railway station and booked to Hamburg via Osnabruck.

Comfortably seated in a smoking compartment, each with a cigar between his lips, the trio whiled away the long and tedious journey by discussing the business in hand.

At Osnabruck Junction they had to change for Hamburg, and they took advantage of the stop to refresh the inner man. In the dense crowds upon the platforms, hurrying hither and thither to catch different trains, Arthur and Herbert lost Dick, and when they took their seats in the through carriage to Hamburg they found one of the corners already occupied by an old gentleman with snow-white hair and whiskers, blue spectacles and a fur cap pulled low over his face.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STRANGE OLD GENTLEMAN—HERBERT AND ARTHUR'S CONCERN ABOUT DICK—HE MISSES THE TRAIN—"HAS HE MET WITH FOUL PLAY?"—HERBERT'S STARTLING DISCOVERY—A PROVIDENTIAL ESCAPE FROM A TERRIBLE FATE—HERBERT AND ARTHUR REACH HAMBURG, AND BOARD THE STEAMER—FERAT NOT TO BE FOUND AMONG THE PASSENGERS—DRIVING THROUGH THE STREETS THEY SEE HIM—THEY TRACK HIM TO HIS HOTEL.

He sprang up as they entered, and the young men saw he was humpbacked.

"Excuse me, but don't you think you have got into the wrong carriage?" he asked, rather angrily in German. "I asked the guard to find me a compartment to myself, and he put me into this!"

"No, we are in the right carriage, sir," answered Arthur. "Those articles belong to us"—pointing to their sticks and travelling-bags on the racks.

"I will have a compartment to myself!" vociferated the old gentleman sharply. And, leaping to his feet, he caught up a bag laid beside him, and bounced out of the carriage.

Herbert and Arthur exchanged smiles, and stepped out also on to the platform to look around for Dick. But he did not appear, and presently the bell clanged for all the passengers to take their seats.

Herbert and Arthur got in, but stood anxiously watching for the missing one from the window.

The train was beginning to move, and still there was no sign of Dick.

He must miss the train, and his friends were half inclined to leap out again and wait for him.

But the fear that he might in that case miss Ferat deterred Herbert Craddock. Throwing himself into one of the corners, he said petulantly:

"Where on earth can Dick have got to? It is too bad of him."

"It is strange that he should miss the train so," replied Arthur. "Can it be possible he has met with any foul play?"

The terrible uncertainty caused our friends grave uneasiness, and they sat in opposite corners, looking at one another with their thoughts mirrored in their eyes.

All at once Herbert sprang up with a surprised look, and glanced under the seat. He uttered a startled exclamation, and,

knocking down, began to grope for something, to the silent wonderment of his friend.

"Whatever are you looking for, Bert?" he asked. "Do you think to find Dick under the seat?"

Herbert made no answer, but suddenly withdrew the hand with which he had been groping, and, to the amazement of Arthur, he held in it a curious sort of box, from which a peculiar "whirring" sound, like that of clockwork, issued.

"Open the window! Quick! Arthur!" cried Herbert in a wonderfully calm voice. "The thing is evidently an infernal machine."

"Great heavens!" gasped Arthur. And, like lightning, he sprang to the nearer window and let it down.

"Stand clear!" cried Herbert. And, as his friend drew back, the young inventor hurled the dreadful weapon of destruction far out through the open window of the carriage.

It struck the ground in a field adjoining the railway track, and immediately there came a blinding flash, a loud report, to be heard even above the roar and rattle of the train, followed by the crash of glass in the next couple of carriages.

Immediately numerous heads were popped out of window, and the train began to slow down. Finally it came to a dead stop, and the guard came hurrying anxiously along, asking the passengers if any of them were injured by the explosion.

Fortunately there were none, and Herbert and Arthur volunteered the statement that they had found the bomb under the seat of their carriage.

Everyone began to congratulate them on the escape they had had, and the occupants of the carriages on either side of theirs were loud in their praise of Herbert's promptitude and daring in throwing out the machine, for, as they said, had it exploded in the carriage the train would have been utterly wrecked, and the loss of life something frightful to contemplate.

All at once Arthur remembered the strange old gentleman, and like a flash it dawned upon him that he was perhaps the perpetrator of the dastardly outrage. Beyond a doubt the man had taken advantage of their absence from the carriage to place the machine under the seat, and set the clockwork so as to cause it to go off shortly after leaving the junction.

He at once gave voice to his terrible suspicion, and a hunt was made for the old gentleman; but, as our friends half expected, he was not to be found on the train.

Under the circumstances, the guard requested all to resume their seats, and the train proceeded on its journey.

At the next stopping-place, however, the guard and our friends told their tale to the police officials, who wired the news to their fellow-officers in Osnabruck.

Herbert and Arthur had not the slightest doubt now but that poor Dick Kershaw had met with foul play of one kind or another from an accomplice of the scoundrel, who had conceived the dastardly idea of blowing them, as well as fully a score of other innocent people, into eternity.

That the ruffians were all associates of Ferat, the real thief, they were also fully convinced, and they were more determined than ever to pursue their original intention, and capture the fugue as he landed from the steamer.

The rest of their railway journey was devoid of any noteworthy incident, and they arrived at Hamburg a few hours before the steamer was due.

First, to relieve their anxiety with regard to Dick Kershaw, they wired instructions to the police at Osnabruck to spare no efforts to clear up the mystery and find him alive or dead. Then they interviewed the British consul, took him into their confidence, and prevailed on him to procure them the services of two reliable Hamburg detectives.

Thus prepared to deal with the thief, our friends, through the consul's influence, obtained seats in the Custom House boat that was going out to meet the incoming steamer.

At length their patient waiting was rewarded, for the smoke of the steamer was descried on the horizon, and soon after she was in full view.

Herbert and Arthur accompanied the Custom House officers and the detectives aboard, and at once acquainted the captain with the object of their visit. He received them most courteously, and rendered them every assistance. He took them down to the state-rooms, and enabled them to scrutinise the features of every one of the passengers; but they were doomed to disappointment, Ferat was not on board. Of that they were certain, for both felt positive their eyes would have pierced any disguise he wore.

Again and again they searched among the crowd on the deck for the man they were in search of; but at length they had to admit that, if Ferat was after all aboard, he must indeed be a master in the art of disguising himself.

Baffled and discomfited, our friends left the steamer and took a cab back to the consul's. They were driving along through the broad and busy streets, when all at once Herbert clutched Arthur by the arm, and pointed excitedly through the open window of the cab.

"Look—look there!" he cried. "It is that infernal scoundrel Ferat, or I am a Dutchman!"

He threw open the door beside him, and, calling to the driver to pull up, leaped off without waiting for the man to do so.

Arthur, too, dismounted, paid the cabman, and hastened in the direction taken by his friend. The latter was almost out of sight, and presently he turned down a side street.

Arthur had to run to catch up with him; he was walking so quickly in the wake of a small man, whose peculiar gait, if nothing else about him, would have betrayed him as Pierre Ferat.

The pseudo-Frenchman was in nowise disguised, and Herbert and Arthur concluded he was not yet aware of their presence in Hamburg.

"We will follow him to his hotel," said Herbert, "and then seek the assistance of the German police, and arrest him in his rooms. The unfortunate thing about it, though, is that then the invention can no longer be kept a secret. A pity it is we couldn't in some way manage to enter his room and steal back the model and plans."

"It is a good suggestion, Bert, though we leave ourselves open to the charge of burglary, even though our object be to recover possession of our own property."

"All is fair in love and war," said Herbert, "and, as a patriotic Briton, I don't care what strong measures I have to take so long as I can preserve the secret of the invention for the service of our own country."

"Then, what do you suggest?" asked Arthur, as they turned down yet another street, and saw their quarry still walking along some yards ahead quite unsuspecting of being followed.

"Let me think. Ah, I have a good idea! When he enters his hotel we will follow him up to his rooms and try and terrify him into confessing the theft and delivering up the model and plans. If it is at all necessary I will not even hesitate to use force, to bind and gag him, in fact, and search his belongings for my own property. Are you willing to assist me, Arthur, in such risky work?"

"Yes; for after all you are only trying to recover your own property from a thief, and my own conscience will absolve me from all guilt or crime, seeing that, however desperate the measure we may have to adopt, it is for our country's sake."

They said no more just then, for the man ahead turned into a handsome avenue, flanked on either side by palatial hotels and houses. The pursuers watched him approach one of the hotels and enter it.

"Now, are you ready for anything, Arthur?" demanded Herbert.

"Yes, lead on!"

CHAPTER IX.

FERAT IN A NEW DISGUISE—RUN TO EARTH—A VILLAIN'S DESPERATE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM—THE CHASE THROUGH THE HOTEL—THE MYSTERIOUS MR. PHELPS—THE MOST STARTLING REVELATION OF ALL—THE FATE OF THE REAL THIEF—THE END.

The young Englishmen advanced to the door of the hotel, and, entering the hall, asked the porter if a French gentleman named Ferat was stopping in the house.

The man took them to the clerk, who consulted his book, and said:

"No; there is no one of that name in the house."

"That was he, that rather short gentleman who passed through a minute or two ago."

"Ah, you mean Signor Feranti, the Italian gentleman! Do you wish to see him?"

"Yes; but you needn't announce us. If you tell us the number of his room we can find it all right."

"No. 12, then, on the second floor."

Herbert thanked the man, and, with mixed feelings, for even at that moment they were not altogether certain as to their course of action, they mounted the stairs.

"No. 12, on the second floor, the man said," observed Herbert, as they gained the landing.

"Yes, there it is." And Arthur pointed to a door just opposite.

"Have you got your revolver ready?"

"Yes."

"Then follow me, but make no noise."

The two men tiptoed up to the door of No. 12, and Herbert laid his hand upon the handle of the door, softly turned it, and flung it suddenly open.

Ferat was standing over a half-packed bag, with a false beard and moustache upon his face, examining the blade of a deadly-looking stiletto, which he was holding in his hands.

He looked up in horror and amazement at their sudden entry, and, as he recognised them, a look of fear and baffled fury swept over his face.

He uttered a savage oath, in some language unknown to

Herbert and Arthur, and faced them like a tiger with the stiletto in his right hand.

"You shall never take me alive!" he hissed. "Stand back; I am a desperate man!"

Herbert presented his revolver at the villain's breast.

"We are not murderers, Monsieur Ferat, and we will do you no injury, if you will consent to quietly surrender the model and plans you stole from me in London. We are determined to recover possession of them, and if you do not hand them over at once, we will not hesitate to use force. Even your own Government would not care to have it known how they got possession of the invention."

While Herbert was speaking a remarkable change came over Ferat's face. Hate and fury gave place to blank astonishment. "What do you mean?" he asked. "You accuse me of having stolen some model and plans. I have done nothing of the sort."

"You lie, you infernal scoundrel!" cried Herbert, lashed into perfect fury by what he believed to be an attempt on the thief's part to dissimulate and brazen it out. "Tell me instantly where you have hidden the model, or, by Heaven, I will not be responsible for my actions!"

He advanced threateningly upon Ferat, whose face again became inflamed with fury.

"Give up the plans you stole!" vociferated Herbert, beside himself now.

With a sudden bound, Ferat was past him, and, as Arthur Welland attempted to bar his escape, the desperate villain struck fiercely at the latter with the stiletto.

The point of the blade pierced Arthur's coat and just scratched the skin, that was all, but it would have been plunged in his side to the hilt had he not hastily stepped back.

Wrenching open the door, Ferat dashed out into the corridor, violently collided with a gentleman who chanced to be passing at the time, but, recovering himself from the shock, he darted up a flight of stairs, leading to the third floor.

Herbert and Arthur came tearing from the bedroom and gave chase, while the stranger, who had been nearly knocked down, stood staring in dumb amazement after the trio.

Up the stairs to the next landing the Englishmen pursued the fugitive, and, as they bounded on to the landing, it was in time to see Ferat burst open a door of another room and dash inside.

Without a moment's hesitation they sprang after him, and as they entered the room both fell back in startled horror at the tableau before them.

Ferat was clutching a tall, bearded man by the throat and brandishing the stiletto aloft, preparatory to sheathing it in the latter's breast.

At a single glance Herbert recognized the Frenchman's intended victim as the mysterious Mr. Phelps, who had robbed him of his precious model.

Ere either of the two Englishmen could prevent the fell deed, Ferat's arm descended, and the stiletto was buried to the hilt in Phelps's breast. With a gasping cry, the unfortunate wretch fell to the floor, and his assassin, waving the bloody weapon high in air, shrieked out the words in German:

"Thus perish the supporters of despotism! Death to the myrmidons of the Czar and all such tyrants!"

With cries of horror and dismay, Herbert and Arthur ran forward to seize the ruffian; but, with a wild, unearthly laugh, he bounded towards the window. Even as Herbert's hand was upon his coat-tails, he flung himself bodily against it, smashing frame, glass and all under his weight, and precipitating himself into the street fully thirty feet below.

Herbert and Arthur looked through the shattered window and beheld the murderous wretch lying in a shapeless mass upon the pavement. It was evident he had paid the full penalty of his crime, and people were running towards him from all sides.

The inventor turned aside at Ferat's victim, and beheld the poor wretch weltering in his blood.

Herbert ran to him and raised his head. His lips moved; he seemed to be making a desperate effort to speak.

He clutched at his beard, and the thing came off in his hand. The face revealed was that of Dick Kershaw!

Arthur and Herbert both uttered ejaculations of amazement, and with a giant effort the wounded man gasped out:

"You recognise me now? Yes! I am Dick Kershaw, alias Vladimir Kutaloff, a secret agent of Russia. It was I who stole the model and plans, intending to sell them to the Government that employs me. Curse the luck, that spy of a Nihilist has stabbed me to death. It was a clever trick on my part to lead you to believe him the thief. It enabled me to bide my own time as to leaving England. Ferat was no more a Frenchman than I an Englishman. He was a Nihilist, who was engaged in hounding me down, though I did not know it until he gave himself away by flying from you that day you detected his disguise in the café. You have both believed all along that it was he who was at the bottom of all the attempts on your life. Instead, I was the would-be assassin on each occasion! It was I—I—"

The man's voice sank to a whisper. The power of speech was

leaving him. Herbert pressed a glass of water to his lips, and with a painful effort Kershaw went on:

"It was I who drove the cab into a 'bus. It was who attacked you on the Harwich steamer, and flung you overboard. I also was the old man who set the infernal machine in the railway carriage. Curse you both! You seemed to have charmed lives, and—and—if it had not been that—that—I could not elude the cursed Nihilist, I—would long—long—ago have been on my way to St. Petersburg. I am—dying—I—know it! How dark it is—growing! Lift me up, I—I— Mercy!"

His head fell back and he breathed his last, just as the door was thrown open and several police-officers and a wondering crowd of the other inmates of the hotel entered.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded one of the officers in German.

"There has been murder done," answered Arthur and Herbert in a breath, as they laid down the head of the corpse. "The man who threw himself from the window murdered that poor wretch before our eyes."

"Well, you will both have to accompany me to the police-station to give your version of the affair."

Herbert and Arthur were perfectly willing to comply with the officers' request, or, rather, command, and their evidence was taken.

An inquest was held in due course upon the murdered man and his victim, and our friends remained in Hamburg for it. They simply told what they knew about the tragedy, and said as little as possible about the stolen model and plans.

Through the influence of the British Consul, however, they obtained permission from the coroner and the police authorities to take possession of the stolen articles, and a few days later they set sail for England.

As they stepped off the boat on to British soil, Herbert Craddock observed:

"Well, after such a sample of treachery as we have met with, I declare we will scarcely know whom to trust in the future. Still, I am happy to think that, to all intents and purposes, my invention is still a secret, and there is now nothing to prevent my submitting it to the authorities."

THE END.

A SAILOR'S CURE FOR SEASICKNESS.

It was in the Bay of Biscay that it happened. We had had a somewhat tedious run down the Channel in the teeth of strong westerly gales, and the fourth day from leaving port found our little steamer not very far south of Ushant. The sea on every side was "mounting to the welkin's cheek" in the most orthodox fashion.

For four days I had been sea-sick. Prostrate, chilled, with misery in occupation of every nook and cranny of my mind and body, I felt, as I have never done before or since, that life was not worth living. If the waves that went surging darkly past the "Miranda's" port-holes, and came slashing ever and anon upon her hurricane-deck, had combined to swallow us up, I could not have found it in me to utter a cry of regret.

George, the first mate, was looking down the skylight at me.

"You're having a bad time of it, sir," said he; "I know something that would cure you—the sailor's remedy."

"What is it?" I asked, roused into animation and well-nigh cheerfulness at these words of hope. The exuberance of an instant was quickly checked, and I sank back damp and inert, when George observed:

"You'd never take it, sir; but it would cure you."

After brief reflection, I muttered: "It isn't arsenic, is it?"

"No, sir," said he, "it isn't arsenic!"

"Then, what in the name of goodness is it? If it's tar, I think I could manage tar—at least, a little of it."

But the mate shook his head, and it was clear tar wasn't in it.

"Come, George," said I, "out with it. What is it? I'm game for anything that will bring me round."

"Well, sir," he began, "it's a bit homely and simple-like, and we call it 'the sailor's remedy.' It's never known to fail. You just drink a tumblerful of salt water, sir."

I was up in an instant. "Bring me a bucketful at once, George! Don't talk about a tumbler."

In a few minutes the mate was descending the companion-stairs, carrying carefully a ship's large bucket full of the fluid I was pining for. On a shelf near was a pint mug, which I buried in the brine, drawing it forth full. I drained it to the bottom. Again I filled the beaker, and quaffed its contents.

Hurriedly I returned to my cabin, and I will harrow no man's feelings by putting into written sentences the immediately succeeding moments of my career. I was under a cloud, but that cloud had a silver lining. Twenty minutes elapsed, and, clad in mackintosh and "sou'-wester," I was standing by the mate's side on deck, enjoying—absolutely enjoying—the careering and cavorting of the "Miranda."

Begin this New Serial now.



By reading this Introduction you can begin this enthralling Serial now.

Witty Will Wynn is a boy clown in Professor Romah's "Temple of Matchless Mirth," situated, when the story opens, at Oldham. After the performance is over for the evening, Will Wynn is left in charge of the show. He is having his supper when he hears shouts, and, going out, discovers that a number of caravans and tents are ablaze. A lion breaks loose. Will lassoes it, and, getting tangled in the rope, is dragged along the ground.

A ruffian-looking man sets him free, and taking him in his arms, quite unseen, carries him to a house in one of the lowest parts of the town. In the meantime, Professor Romah discovers his loss, and seeks his clown in vain. Next day a man comes to Romah, and says that his master, a Mr. Copples, wishes to see him at once about Wynn.

The evening after Wynn was carried off, the man who captured him and an accomplice, take him out of the town to a gloomy-looking building. Here they halt, and order Will to climb a pipe which runs up the side of the house, enter a little window, and open the front door for them.

Will climbs up at once, intending to alarm the inmates. Then the thought strikes him that if he were to do so they might not believe him, and charge him with burglary, so he decides to escape.

His hand comes in contact with the handle of a door. He turns it softly, but the door remains fast. A sounding groan, as from one in dire agony, comes from the chamber. His hand drops from the door, and he stands fixed and shivering.

Then something warm brushed by the bottoms of his trousers. The rattle of its tail along the passage told him it was a rat. He went on gently, and came to another portal, which opened readily.

A soft light glowed in the apartment, and, to the youth's amazement, he saw within its circle of light a golden-haired, blue-eyed girl of about his own age, attired in walking costume.

Which of the two was the more surprised would be difficult to determine.

Ere advancing further, he closed the door carefully behind him. This action brought a half-suppressed cry of alarm from the maiden, who, in Will's eyes, looked like the only real fairy he had ever seen. He knew stage ones well enough.

"Who are you?" she asked; "and what are you doing here?" "I mean no harm, miss, so please do not be frightened. There are bad men outside who want to rob the house. They forced me to enter through the little hole in the wall, and they now expect me to open the front door to let them in. You must wake your parents—"

"Oh, no! no!" she cried in great terror. "I beseech you not to dream of doing that. As a fact, I have no parents," she went on, seeing his wonder. "If you rouse my guardian now I am utterly lost!"

She regarded him pleadingly, and wrung her pretty hands, on the fingers of which flashed a couple of valuable rings.

"I would not do anything to offend you for the world!" declared Wynn earnestly. Her words and manner much perplexed him. The charm of her personality wrought strong on him.

But the feelings excited were ones of the deepest respect. He felt that she was far removed from him—that he belonged to earth, and she to heaven.

"You have a kind face. I trust it is an index to your nature. Never did an unhappy and a solitary girl more need a friend." Lowering her voice to a whisper, she added: "I am making my escape."

"Making your escape?"

"Yes."

"But I don't understand—"

"Of course you don't. You see, I was waiting in here till it should get nearer to daylight, and to—to find a little more courage."

"Yes. But what can you want to escape from?"

"From my guardian, to be sure. He shuts me up in this dreary hole, where I am practically buried alive, and kept as close a prisoner as though I were in an asylum or a gaol. He is harsh and cruel to me. He wishes to see me dead, so that he may take the money that should be mine when I reach twenty-one. Once I am free in the great busy world I will do all I know to keep out of his clutches. Better to sacrifice the wretched money than to be again under his despotic thumb!"

She carried herself with a dignity rare at her age, and spoke with a fine tragedy air.

"How do you intend to live if you do get away from here?" asked the practical Will.

"I don't know. But I would rather sing songs in the streets than stay. How do you live?"

"Oh, I'm Witty Will Wynn, the boy clown. Haven't you heard of me?" He put the question with all ingenuousness.

"On the stage, are you? Oh, how nice! I should like to be an actress very much. Perhaps you can help me?"

"I don't know about that. But if we get out of this house I will try and take you to Madame Romah, and I am sure she will advise you for the best. You'll find us rather common people," he went on dubiously, "but well-meaning for the most part. How do you expect to get out? You must not try the front door, for the men I spoke of are waiting there."

She held up a long, slim key.

"This fits a side door in the wall of the kitchen garden, and I am going that way."

"That's all right. I will go with you. I do not know how you would get on tramping the lonely roads at this hour."

"It unnerved me a bit to think of it. How funny that you should appear, like a prince in a fairy tale, at the right moment. You must have been sent by my good genius."

"Let us be going, if you please, miss."

"Don't call me 'miss,' it is so frightfully formal. My name is Ada Graham."

The garden was reached without event. But they had more trouble in finding the private door than the young lady had looked for. When, however, it was at last discovered, it was easily opened, and they stood out on a narrow roadway.

"Is there a railway station near here?" asked Will.

"I do not know. We drove here from Manchester. This is the first time I have been outside the grounds of my prison since I entered it two years ago."

"I was brought here in a sack. I have not the remotest notion which direction we should take for Oldham."

"How unlucky! But we must not stay here. My guardian will do all in his power to find me."

"And there are two men who will not let me escape them if they can help it," said Will. "To elude them we must take the road to the right. I suppose your guardian is very rich?"

"Oh, yes. He is a notorious miser. Many attempts have been made to break into the house, and that is why all the windows are so well protected. He did not think it possible for anyone to get in as you did. What are you doing?"

They were on the highway now, and Will made a sudden

WRITE AND TELL THE EDITOR HOW YOU LIKE THIS SERIAL.

plunge into the hedge. Compared with the interior of the house they had left, the light was good.

He was back by her side in an instant, carrying a strong stake, which he had drawn from among the bushes.

"This will prove a useful weapon if anyone interferes with us," said he.

"Oh, dear! I hope you will not have to use it. Why should anyone molest us?"

"You never know your luck. Hush!"

Angry voices sounded near to them. Will had no difficulty in recognising the raucous tones of Dan.

"Creep into the shadow, Miss Graham," he whispered, "and they may pass without seeing us."

"There's the lay spoiled agent!" said Dan savagely. "Blister my tongue if ever I knew such hard lines. When we'd got it all so nice and firm-set, too. Wot's become of the kid is what I want to know? It's a sure thing he was not copped in there, or we should have seen lights moving about. Search his young skin, I'd give a dollar to get hold of him!"

"It's my belief," suggested Mike, "that the young cub is lying snug there till the morning, when he will tell the tale, and, if we ain't sloppy, we shall be took. You didn't go the right way to work with him. You was too rough. It was a bit of dipsomany as required my delicate touch. Anyhow, it'll be a month o' Sundays before we can 'claim' old Copple's wedge [silver] or red stuff [gold]."

"Too rough, eh?" snorted Dan. "By the endless flames! if I could catch him now I'd kill him!"

"Why, sugar my coffee if he ain't there!" screamed Mike, as a sudden breaking up of the clouds revealed Will and Ada.

"An' got a donah, too! O my! look at her daisy diamonds."

"Smoother me, if this ain't fine!" roared Dan. "Swag and revenge at one go. She is a dainty bird, and will be well worth the plucking."

He would have seized Ada, but Will rushed between them, and with incredible swiftness, whirled his staff through the air, and brought it down with tremendous force on the ruffian's head.

He staggered under the blow, muttered an imprecation, and dropped in a heap on the roadway.

Mike was so astounded by the prowess of the youngster that for a moment he hesitated.

Being a bit of a coward, he did not care to face that formidable stake. Instead, he took up a large stone and hurled it at the boy's head. Though Will ducked, it caught him fair on the temple, and he, too, lay unconscious.

"Now, my gay canary," said Mike to Ada, and making a grab at her, "I'll trouble you for them 'ere rings."

He seized her wrist, and she was not strong enough to offer serious resistance. He would inevitably have stripped her of her jewels, but at the most critical moment an animal made a plunge—whence none could tell—and fixed its gleaming fangs in Mike's throat.

This apparition alarmed Miss Graham even more than the men had, and she set up loud cries of "Help! help!"

Dan, now recovering, began to bestir himself.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNS ITSELF WITH MR. COPPLES'S DOINGS AT THE FAIR.

When the professor and his evil-looking guide reached the hestery they were bound for, the latter said in a sharp way:

"You will find Mr. Copples in the 'smoke' room."

And he disappeared as quickly as Romah himself could do the vanishing trick.

Being fair-time the place was, of course, crowded; yet, though Mr. Copples was not known by the showman, the latter made no question that the miser would readily pick him out by his showy coat, as indeed proved the case.

"My man, you should keep that garment for winter wear."

Such was Mr. Copples's ungracious salutation.

He had a hawkish look; a perky, bird-like manner; he was like a creature of prey on the rampage.

The professor regarded him from the corner of his eyes, and shrugged his shoulders as though his thought was:

"This man wants more than he will give."

Aloud he said:

"If I chose to wear fur in summer, it is my business and not yours. I understand that you wish to see me about my apprentice, little Wynn? The sooner we get to the matter the better I shall be pleased. I can't afford to waste time here. But while I am here I do not mind a cigar, and something to moisten it with."

"Follow me," said the beaky man, "and I'll see what I can do for you."

He led the way to a private sitting-room.

"There's your cigar and your beer," said he.

"A penny smoke, and a pint of dishwater!" observed the professor with supreme disgust.

"Possibly. I never give away anything. Charity demoralises

both the giver and the receiver. Earn your money first, and then you can spend it in any idiotic way you fancy. If you were guided by me, you would part with nothing and keep all."

There was no particular length about the professor's temper.

"You old image!" cried he testily, "can't you see that you are spending my precious time now—my golden minutes as it were. Come to business. What about Witty Wynn?"

"Ay, what about him?" Mr. Copples grinned in a most provoking way. "Be as acid as you like, my fine fellow. I feel soothed when I see men lose their tempers. Take a perch, and listen to me."

"I'm hanged if I know why I should!" snapped Romah, sitting down all the same, though he did pitch the trumpery cigar into the empty grate, and rolled himself a cigarette to take its place.

"I understand that you obtained your paragon clown from a widow named Wynn?" As the miser talked restlessness grew on him. He hopped about the room like a feathered thing, and as one seeking for something to devour.

"That's right enough. But I did not come to hear stale news."

"Perhaps you will tell me how you found out Mrs. Wynn, and in what way you acquired possession of the youth?"

"I'll see you hanged first! I would not have come had I not thought you had news for me. I did not expect to be cross-examined. I reckon my time to be worth five pounds an hour. If those terms do not suit you, my name is Walker, Esq., bound for Tommyfield!"

"You are talking folly."

"Very likely. All the same, if you don't care to 'brass up,' I will no longer waste the fragrance of my sweet presence on the wicked waste of your wily countenance."

"There's half-a-sovereign for you, my man," said Mr. Copples. And he pitched the coin named on to the table.

The showman picked it up at once, and with great serenity tossed it to where he had thrown the cheap cigar.

"If you want it you can find it," said he. "I must have something a bit better than that. And not so much of 'my man,' and 'my fine fellow,' if you please! My name is Romah. Professor Romah, proprietor of the largest temple of earth-quaking marvels ever seen on this subliminary sphere."

Mr. Copples made a quick dive to secure the bit of gold, and Romah walked towards the door.

"Stop! stop!" cried the former, eager and anxious, fumbling with a wallet he reluctantly drew from his pocket. "You do not surely suppose that I am to pay you five pounds for a few minutes' conversation?"

"No. You take me from my business. As you only seem to want questions answered, after hours would have done. It's a fiver or nothing. Good-afternoon!"

"Here you are!" The old fellow drew a note from the pocket-book.

"A fimsy, eh? No good to me. Nothing but the good red stuff will serve."

For a moment Mr. Copples hesitated, but when the professor once more opened the door, and was on the verge of departing altogether, he exclaimed:

"Here are the sovereigns for you. But remember that when we come to an agreement those five pounds must be considered as part of the payment."

Romah picked up the money with an easy air of indifference.

"Now I am at your service," said he. "Only be quick for your own pockets' sake. The slower you are the more fivers you will have to part with."

"A man after my own heart. Why was I not born a showman? Now tell me who introduced you to the Widow Wynn?"

"A worthy member of our profession named Buggins."

"Humph, humph! Money passed between you and the widow?"

"Naturally."

"I want to buy that boy from you. I will give you £50 for him."

"You won't! I would not part with him for a couple of thousand pounds!"

"Dearie, dearie, dearie!" The old man sank into a chair most disconsolately.

The click of the latch roused him. He rushed down the stairs after the disappearing professor.

"I did not say I would not treat with you!" said he pantingly, leading the other back. "But when you talk about £2,000. You are, of course, jesting!"

"I do not talk about £2,000, and I don't jest. I would not release Witty Wynn from his indentures for one fraction less than £2,500. There's no argle barge about it. It is useless discussing the matter further. Good-day!"

"It is a lot of money!" mumbled Mr. Copples. He plucked his companion eagerly by the sleeve to prevent him from again reaching the stairs, as was his evident intention. "Come," said he, "I'll give you £2,000 at six o'clock to-night, if you hand the boy over to me."

"If you offered me the whole Bank of England I could not do it!"

"Why?"

"Because the boy has disappeared. I'd give a good deal myself to be able to lay my hands on him."

"Disappeared!" The old man's surprise was ghastly to witness. Instinctively he clutched the end of the mantelshelf for support.

"Yes," said Romah; "clean gone, and left no trace behind. It seems to me," he went on in a meditative way, "that if he is worth £2,000 to you, he might fetch a bit more somewhere else, and perhaps the other party has kidnapped him. I thought you had got news of him, or I should not have come here so jolly quick, I give you my word."

The old man gazed blankly at the speaker. The words of the latter keenly disconcerted him.

"Too late!" he murmured—"too late!"

Again the professor hastened off. This time there was no restraining hand or calling voice to detain him.

Taking one consideration with another he was not entirely displeased with his experience. He was a good five pounds the richer, and he had learned that Witty Wynn was worth a good deal more than he had ever supposed.

There are brutal masters in showdom as in other places, but Romah was not one. He took care to get full value out of those he employed, though harshness had never been part of his system for making money. Maybe, he was wise enough to know that in the end it did not pay.

Very soon after he had left Copples, the dark and sinister-looking man, who had brought him from the fair ground, joined the miser, who still wore a dazed look.

"Well," said this individual, "have you and Romah come to terms about the boy?"

"Swilley!" said Mr. Copples impressively, "the boy is not to be had. The boy has gone!"

"Gone! Surely no one else has got scent of who he is?"

"That's more than I can tell, Joe. That itinerant vagabond Romah is a cunning rascal! He sets great store on the lad. He asks no less than £2,500 for him!"

"Does he, though? I thought he would jump at £20. Of course, Wynn would be cheap to you at almost any price."

"Hum, hum! What's the use talking while we can't find him? What do you make of this disappearance, Swilley? What's your theory?"

"I expect the professor has been using the whip a bit too freely, and the boy has run away, as youngsters will."

"There's something in that."

"Or else he has been collared by a rival showman."

"Hum, hum! That's not likely; they don't work that way."

"Don't they," was Mr. Joe Swilley's dogged reply, given with much ill-humour and more scorn. "You keep to your way of thinking, and I'll keep to mine. But don't forget, Mr. Copples, that I have the grip of you. You are under my thumb. I hold you in the hollow of my hand."

"Well, well"—the miser hopped about uneasily—"friends should never talk that way. Besides," he added, with a sly chuckle, "I do not see that you stand anywhere if the boy has disappeared."

"Will Wynn must be found, and your money shall help to his discovery. You cannot rest while you are in doubt as to where he may be. Take a tour round the showground, and interview as many of the folks as you can. You will find out whether Romah is a kind master, and you may light on a clue to the whereabouts of the lad. I will seek my own way."

The man spoke with gruff resolution. Mr. Copples evidently was not prepared to further argue matters with him.

"I will adopt your suggestion," said he curtly, and went away.

Joe Swilley glowered after him, and shook his fist at his retreating back. Thus it seemed that, though the precious pair were on confidential terms, there was no love lost between them.

Mr. Copples pursued his inquiries with remarkable diligence. Probably he had never experienced such a time before. But he was too anxious for anything he saw to bring light to his lack-lustre eyes. And the worst of it was he could gather no news worth going on. Everybody praised Witty Will Wynn, and no one had a bad word for the professor.

His main excitement came from the hands of the Boarded Lady. She, to adopt a colloquialism of the colony, was "on her own," possessed, indeed, two handsome living vans—a fact which, perhaps, had something to do with the admiration professed for her by the Skeleton Masher and the Human Serpent.

She resided with her brother, the once famous Knotted Man, so called because he used to tie himself up that way. He did it so completely once that it took five doctors, and double that number of months in hospital, to undo him. After this joyless experience he became semi-retired, and condescended to cook for his sister, and accept from her more or less fair hands such favours as she in her sweetness was pleased to dispense.

It chanced that "ructions" were on between the amiable couple, when Mr. Copples ventured into the caravan. In their little misunderstanding an almost naked leg of pork played a prominent part. This may have been a small matter from the disputants' point of view. But the knuckly old chanced to catch Mr. Copples a swipe across his left eye, and he simply made a bolt as though the very mischief were after him.

Now Frances Amalia, seeing a man enter her wigwam, and depart so precipitately—she took no heed of such a trifle as the bone—could think of nothing but robbery. So, in a good old travelling voice that might have made Tommy Welch wild with envy, she shouted: "Thieves! murder! Murder! thieves!"

The result was that rough hands were laid on Mr. Copples. And it took a good deal of explaining, and no small distribution of precious coins of this realm, before he was allowed to go off.

He found Joe Swilley waiting for him at the hotel.

"Well," said that worthy, "you seem to have fared worse than myself. I've gathered no news, but you've caught bruises. Wickedness ain't all lavender."

"Hang you! Confound you! Smother you!" roared the old man, dancing wildly in his anger. "If you can't do something better than jeer at me, I'll teach you! Can't you see I'm battered, weary, ill? I shall stay here to-night. We will go home in the morning."

"So be it," returned Joe resentfully. "For the present you are master, and I'm man. Time they say level's all. But it may rise me and leave you a foot or two below, and don't you forget it."

The strange, grumbling pair separated for the night, and fairly early on the following day they returned to Mr. Copples's gloomy mansion, scarcely exchanging a word together on the road.

Scarcely had they entered when Mrs. Joe Swilley gave them the alarming news that Ada Graham was nowhere in the building.

"Not here?" cried Copples, in great consternation. "Then it must have been you—you miserable old woman, who let her out!"

"Ay, that's the way of it! It's all my fault!" returned she, with complete indifference. "Why should I let the little hussy go?"

"But how is it possible she can have escaped without your connivance?"

"Maybe you have forgotten the existence of the side door. See if you still have the key of it, my clever master."

"Confound it all, it has gone! What a wicked little minx it is! She must have rifled my pockets to get at it!"

"Weasels and girls for cunning," remarked Mrs. Swilley.

"And old women!" her husband put in ungraciously.

"This is a fine queer state of affairs!" Mr. Copples went on, angrily pacing the room. Both the boy and the girl have vanished. It's an odd coincidence."

"As far as the wench goes, she cannot be many miles away, and I don't suppose we shall be long in finding her. You are her legal guardian, and can enforce your rights over her. We must scour the country and send word all round till we find her. I reckon she will make for Manchester. Has she money with her?"

"I don't suppose so. But she has some pretty jewellery, which will serve us well. The jade! The ungrateful, vicious jade! Once I get her back here she will know better than to ever play me such a trick again!"

Mr. Copples snarled like an ill-conditioned cur, and looked anything but pretty.

The great bell at the main gate went clang, clang, clang, clang!

"Who's that, I wonder?" Visitors to Mr. Copples's house were few and far between.

"Not much good wondering!" snapped Joe; "I'll go and see."

In a few minutes he returned.

"It's a chap—a dark and dangerous-looking fellow he is, too. He reckons he can take you to the place where he believes Ada Graham to be. More than that, he can put you on to the boy. The two are together."

"Most wonderful!"

"Like the rest of us, he does not work for nothing. You will have to shell out some more of that precious gold of yours."

"Show him in! Show him in!" cried Mr. Copples, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. And then Dan—the ferocious Dan—stood before him.

CHAPTER V.

A ROGUE'S RESOLVE.

Let us see how it came about that Dan resolved to take the bold step of calling openly on the gentleman he had on the previous night made so sure of robbing.

It will be remembered that we left him swiftly recovering

consciousness after the blow he had received from Witty Will, who was also on the road stunned. That tough old dog Sharp had his teeth in Mike's neck, and he seemed to find the flavour so good he was disinclined to leave it.

As for Ada, she did not run screaming away from the scene of conflict as some girls might. She would not desert her young champion, unless compelled by force to do so.

Yet how to help him or what to do for the best was beyond her wit.

Dan, letting much incoherency of malediction escape him, staggered to his feet, and again rushed towards the beautiful girl.

Luckily Will's senses were returning, and he was in time to so put out his leg that the rogue was tripped up, and once more rolled heavily to earth.

Wynn sprang to his feet and administered a rap with his stake on the ruffian's head. It was calculated to hold him quiet for a time. But he kept his senses, and only pretended to be oblivious of his surroundings, so as to get a chance of taking the youth unawares.

The latter was rejoiced to see Sharp again. Not only would the faithful hound prove a valuable protector, but also a champion guide to lead him back to the professor's unrivalled Temple of Endless Surprises.

At a word from Witty, the animal left Mike and rushed to him, fawning and capering round him with every manifestation of delight.

Once free, Mike did not wait for further developments of the situation.

Uttering a scream that would have done credit to a Red Indian, he took to his heels and disappeared from sight with amazing rapidity.

"Thank goodness you are safe!" cried Will to Miss Graham. "We shall be all right now good old Sharp has contrived to track me out. He will lead us back to the showground, and you will be quite safe with Madame Romah."

Dan listened to these words with greedy ears.

"Mr. Copples went away somewhere yesterday," said Ada. "I thought it was best to try and escape while he was out. But I do not know where he is. We might meet him at any turn."

"We must trust to luck and hope for the best," said Will cheerily. "As for that ugly-looking brute, we'll let him lie where he is."

The two made haste away. Then the subject of Will's parting compliment rose and gazed savagely after them.

"Run loose now, you young toad!" cried he, shaking his fist impotently in the air. "I know where to find you when I want you; and want you I shall, or my name ain't Dan Dugger. But, first of all, I have a 'cute and lively notion that I can make a few yellow boys out of old Copples, by telling him where his girl's gone. Gold fast; revenge arter!"

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



AFTER THE BATTLE—THE COST REGAINED—DEATH THE REAPER—WELCOME BACK.

The struggle was over, the din of the guns, the clashing of arms and the hoarse cries of the combatants were silenced, and the English flag waved triumphantly over all.

Yes, after a splendid fight, in which both sides had distinguished themselves for their gallantry, the tide of war had at last turned in favour of the English, and the Frenchmen had thrown down their arms, had accepted the quarter that was offered to them, and Captain Thibault, on his own quarter-deck, delivered up his sword to his victorious foe.

It was a hard blow to the brave Frenchman, yet he bore his ill-fortune with philosophic calmness and imperturbable good-humour.

"Bless my heyes!" said Johnson, of the "Fearless," as he scrambled across the slippery deck of the French prize. "Bill—Bill Woshem, me hearty, how goes it? I'd a-knowned your ugly figure-head outer ten thousand!"

The two old cronies—for they had sailed together for many a long year—shook hands heartily.

"Well, well," said Bill, "queer things do happen, for sure—"

"Your honour's humble, faithful servant!"

The last remark, accompanied by a respectful salute, was addressed to Captain Curzon, of the "Fearless."

The captain started and looked at Bill like one in a dream.

"Woshem!" he gasped at length. "You here—you, whom I feared dead—you here and alive? This is good news indeed. Tell me, old friend, he added quickly, "why—he—the young gentleman who was with you—"

"Master Frank, sir? Ay, he's alive, too, and with me now!"

"Find him. Find him and bring him to me!" cried the captain joyfully.

And Bill, who had not seen Frank's face, hastened on his mission.

Little Cuttlesone knelt beside Frank's insensible body. There were tears in the boy's eyes, for he and Frank had got to be chums together, and now—

"Have ye seen Master Frank, sir? Master Cuttlesone, have ye seen—"

Bill stopped suddenly as his eyes fell upon the inert figure on the bloodstained deck. Then, with a bitter cry, he rushed forward and flung himself down on his knees by Frank's side.

"He lives yet!" he cried, in a husky voice, as he arose and glanced around him for help. Johnstone, Parker—here, my lads, bear a hand."

"What has happened?" Curzon, with a sort of intense anxiety in his voice, strode up to the group.

"Frank Fairleigh—wounded—dead!"

He dropped down on to his knees and lifted Frank's bleeding head tenderly.

"Help me, my lads!" he cried. "Bear this young gentleman on to the "Fearless," place him in my cabin, and desire the doctor to attend him instantly."

He stood looking after the procession with wild eyes and haggard face.

"Fate! Fate!" he murmured. "What is my sin that I should be punished like this?"

"We await your orders, sir. The French captain and his officers are waiting to offer you their parole. The men—"

Curzon turned to the first lieutenant:

"I am ill!" he said. "I—"

He looked ghastly, his face was drawn and haggard. In the last hour he had aged ten years.

"Not struck, sir!" cried the lieutenant, in alarm.

"No—not hurt. I must return to the "Fearless." I leave all in your hands, and rely on your judgment. Do as you think best!"

He repeated the last words again and again as he strode across the deck of the conquered "Rose."

He reached his own cabin on the "Fearless," almost on the heels of the men who were carrying Frank's lifeless body.

Stretched full length on a sofa, his grisly wounds swathed in bandages, lay the pirate captain. He looked up as the men entered, and a savage, exulting expression lighted up his face as his eyes fell upon the burden that they carried.

He struggled to rise, but his wounds had left him feeble and powerless.

"So"—and he turned to Captain Curzon—"you have found him?"

"I have found him," replied the captain, in a low voice. "I have found the lad who saved the life you sought to destroy. Stay"—as the other was about to speak—"I wish to hear nothing from you. I know all—all, inhuman, unnatural brother!"

A look of astonishment passed across the dying ruffian's face. "You know all? From whom have you learned this?"

"From Simeon Clyne."

"Clyne? You lie! Clyne is dead! I saw him fall. He died, cur that he was, of fright!"

"You are right. Clyne is dead, but he did not die when you believe he did. He lived to make his escape on board a French vessel, the frigate 'La Lievre,' which lay off your accursed island that night, when he"—pointing to Frank—"escaped on her consort, the 'Zebe.' Yes, Simeon Clyne lived long enough to tell me the whole vile story of your unnatural crime!"

The doctor had entered, and was carefully examining Frank's wounds. All the rest had left the cabin, except Bill Woshem and little Quacko, who crouched, still trembling with fright, in a corner.

The dying pirate lay back with closed eyes; then suddenly he opened them, and fixed them on the face of Curzon. There was no anger, no passion, malice, or hate in the gaze now.

"Wilfred!" he murmured. "Brother!"

The other recoiled at the word. "Do not pollute that word with your vile lips!"

"My lips will soon be silenced for ever!" said the pirate, in a voice that quivered and broke with agony. "My end is fast approaching. It is the death I chose, the sword rather than the gallows. I have lived my life, and a bad life it has been. I see it all more clearly now than I have ever done before. I see now how vile a part I played to you—my brother. All our lives we have been opposed. Fate made me what I am. Helen, the girl I loved, became your wife. It was that that aroused all my evil nature. I hated you then, Wilfred, because you were more fortunate than I, and when a little son was born to you, I resolved to revenge myself on you through him. I stole him away from you and his mother. You never guessed, then, in your agony and grief that it was I—I, who pretended to be as grief-stricken as you—I, who did the deed. I carried the child to old Fairleigh, a man whom I could trust, because he feared me. Only he and Reuben Clyne knew the secret of the boy's birth. Only he—"

"You waste your breath!" said Curzon sternly, though beads of agony were standing out on his brow. "I know all. Clyne told me the whole truth."

"Yes!" the dying man gasped. "I stole him from you, and then Fate willed it that you should meet. He saved your life—and then I stole him from you again. You cannot, you will not forgive?"

He stretched his bandaged arms out appealingly as he spoke; but Curzon turned away with a shudder.

"It is not easy to forgive," he said. "Your repentance has come too late. You wrecked my life. Your vile deed robbed me of my son, and of my wife. She never recovered from the shock; but I—I lived on, lonely and friendless. I prayed for death. I sought it in battle, but it would not come. Even when you sought to slay me that night in Brightling Harbour, Fate willed it that I should not die. And I live still, to stand at the death-bed of my boy, lost to me for ever! Forgive! you ask me to forgive—No! No! I cannot! Ask Him who is all merciful—Him to whom no sinner pleads in vain; but ask not me!"

Curzon, the pirate and the murderer, turned his face away. No man can ever know what passed in his mind during those last few minutes of his misspent life.

He died silently, with his face towards the wall, unforgiven by man.

But Captain Wilfred Curzon was not called upon to bear this last great ordeal of his blighted life.

Frank did not die; for days he wavered on the threshold of death, the blow which he had sustained having come dangerously near to his brain. For weeks he raved in the delirium of brain fever, and, lad though he was, it took the united strength of several stout fellows to hold him to his bed.

But at last the fever passed away, leaving him weak, and with all his strength spent.

Then it was that Bill and Quacko proved themselves his devoted nurses. They watched by him day and night, and there was one other who watched—watched with longing, wistful eyes and passionate pleading in his heart.

Forgiveness had entered Wilfred Curzon's heart at last. The brother who had wronged him, the brother who lay at rest beneath the sea, was forgiven now. There was no room in Curzon's heart for hate and malice, only for deep gratitude and

joy, as slowly but surely Frank crept back into life, back out of the valley of the shadow of death.

It was a brilliant morning, with every stitch of her snowy canvas set, the brave old "Fearless" was ploughing her way homeward over the crisp, curling waves.

There was an air of subdued excitement visible on the face of each man of the crew.

The men, all in their best, their white ducks, and their well-washed faces shining in the sunlight, were crowded forward, the officers grouped upon the quarter-deck were talking together in whispers. Eight bells had struck some time since, when Bill Woshem, radiant with excitement, suddenly emerged from beneath decks. He was followed by Quacko, who glistened as if he had been polished with the stove-brush.

"Ready, lads; they are coming!" cried Bill.

There was a subdued buzz of excitement. The officers left their conversation, and turned expectant eyes on the companion-hatch, from which a moment later there emerged Captain Wilfred Curzon, and, leaning on his arm, Frank Fairleigh—no longer Frank Fairleigh, but Frank Curzon now.

Their appearance was the signal for a thundering cheer, in which even the officers did not disdain to join.

"Agen, lads, agen!" cried old Bill Woshem, drawing his hand smartly across his eyes. "Give it 'em agen! God bless 'em!"

And again a cheer went ringing across the sea.

It was Frank's welcome back to life; his father's back to peace and happiness.

THE END.



Well, friends, and how do you like the new serial, "Witty Will Wynn"? If it pleases you, write and tell me so; if it does not, let me hear from you also.

I cannot find out what you like unless you tell me, can I?

Mr. O. M. Allen, of Cambridge, is now a lieutenant in the UNION JACK League, he having obtained fifty new members.

Are you a member of the League? If not, join at once. It is easily done. Fill in this coupon:

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and, together with an envelope, stamped, and addressed to yourself, post it to me. I will then enrol you, and send you a badge.

May I ask you to tell your friends about next week's story, "An Avenging Eye"? As I said last week, it is a most thrilling tale, and is partly a story of school life, and partly one of weird and mysterious adventure. My readers cannot but like it.

Several Leaguers have written to ask me why their names and numbers have not yet been printed in the UNION JACK. They must not be in a hurry. Their names will appear in due course; but I cannot give more than a certain number of names each week, on account of the space they would take.

Any stationer will procure a good map of New York City for you, F. Nelson.

*Yours sincere friend,
The Skipper*

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

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