

THE

UNION JACK



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THE DEATH BALLOT;

Or, TWO BRITONS
IN RUSSIA.

A COMPLETE NOVEL

BY

S. CLARKE HOOK



"HOW TO
MAKE
MONEY
IN SPARE
TIME."

SEE PAGE 15.

Jack took a step forward, and dealt the Colonel a blow between the eyes with his fist that sent him reeling back.

PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY.

No. 198.



DEATH ROLL

THE DEATH BALLOT

Or, Two Britons in Russia.

By
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CHAPTER I.

JACK EGERTON—THE DUEL—JACK ACCUSED OF MURDER.

Riding southwards from the city of Moscow, on a dark summer night, was a young Briton, who from time to time cast anxious glances towards the hills, which rose on his left, for there had been rumours that a band of miscreants, flying from Russian justice, were lurking amongst those wooded heights, and that these gentlemen did not hesitate to take toll of solitary travellers, and Jack Egerton carried a large sum of money, which the firm he represented had entrusted to his charge for certain business operations.

Suddenly he reined in his horse, and, placing his hand upon a revolver, remained listening intently, for above the moan of the night wind rose the beat of horses' hoofs. The sound drew nearer, and soon he caught the words in Russian:

"Has he passed yet?"

"No, captain," came the reply. "We have watched closely for upwards of two hours, and not a soul has come this way. I fear your information was incorrect."

"No! Natalie had it from that old villain's lips. He shall die this very night, I swear it, and mine shall be the hand to deal the blow. He thinks to crush us. Already two of our comrades have been lashed to death by his orders. That was when he had his men with him. This night he will be alone, and he shall feel my vengeance!"

Jack's horse was beneath the deep shadows of a thick clump of trees, and the horsemen, of whom there were half a dozen, were passing at some little distance from him. He had heard quite sufficient of their conversation to be convinced that they were not very desirable parties to encounter in such a lonely spot, so he determined to remain concealed until they had passed, and then warn the other traveller, should he meet him, of his peril.

The band rode slowly on, and Jack was congratulating himself upon his escape, when his horse neighed loudly.

In an instant the riders drew their horses round.

"Who is there?" demanded a fierce voice.

"A British subject travelling on business," replied Jack.

"Your name?"

"Jack Egerton, representing Grane and Rowlaski."

"Ah! It is fortunate. We shall have to ask you to accompany us for a short distance."

"I would warn you that I am armed," replied Jack coolly.

"Dismount instantly, or I fire!" cried the leader of the band.

Jack gathered up his reins. He heard the click of a rifle-lock. The next moment there was a red flash of light, and a bullet whizzed past his head.

Shot after shot
they fired into
the midst of the
howling pack.



Levelling his revolver, he returned the shot; then, leaning forward in the saddle, galloped swiftly across the wild country, while the gang of ruffians came thundering after him.

Jack was well mounted, but so were his pursuers; and while the country was familiar to them, he had not now the slightest idea as to which direction he was taking.

Shot after shot was fired, but, thanks to the darkness, he escaped the deadly bullets. Presently, in front of him, he saw a broad opening in the rugged ground. How broad and deep the leap was he had not the slightest idea. He could only trust to his horse, and, setting his teeth, he rode straight towards the chasm. The horse rose in the air, a rifle-shot rang out, the horse plunged forwards, and Jack was thrown violently to the ground. Then he remembered no more.

"I think he is settled!" cried one of the riders.

"I hope not," replied the captain. "We have need of his aid. I fired at his horse. Probably he is only stunned. He is a brave man, at any rate, to take such a leap as that in the darkness. Ride round quickly. Take possession of his papers and money. He will have much on him. Then carry him to yonder roadway, if he is living. And, listen to me, place this document in his pocket. Be sure you disarm him. Quick! I hear some rider approaching. It should be that Chief of the Police, and I will avenge my comrades' deaths, and rid ourselves of a dangerous foe."

These orders were hurriedly obeyed. Jack, who was only stunned, was carried to the spot the captain had designated; but ere they reached it, the remainder of the gang were already there, and the rider was approaching at a rapid pace.

The leader of the gang stepped into the middle of the narrow roadway, and, cocking his rifle, levelled it at the approaching horse. The rider saw his danger when it was too late to turn, so, spurring his horse into a furious pace, he charged at the

armed ruffian. The horse was almost upon him ere he fired, then he sprang aside, as horse and rider were flung violently to the ground.

"Now is your time for vengeance!" cried one of the band.

"No! Take away his revolver. Leave him his sword. I have mine. I have sworn to meet this demon hand to hand, and I will keep my oath. This night I will avenge our comrades' deaths!"

"Hear me, you villains!" cried the fallen rider, springing to his feet, and drawing his sword. "I am the Chief of the Police!"

"And I am Nomad Lowritz, head of the secret society, which you have tried in vain to crush!" retorted the captain. "You call us robbers, but we aim at higher things than that. My comrades' blood is on your head. The hour for vengeance has arrived. We meet on equal terms!"

The weapons crossed, and furious strokes were dealt. Both were accomplished swordsmen, and they parried the blows in the dim light with marvellous skill. Presently one of the gang lighted a torch. Then, by the flickering glow, the terrible combat was fought with renewed fury. Suddenly the Chief of the Police leapt forwards, his sword flashed in the weird, uncertain light, the stroke was turned aside, and Lowritz's weapon pierced his adversary's heart. With a cry that echoed round the hills, the doomed man fell forwards on his face, and he never moved again.

"His men are coming!" cried one of the gang. "Hark! they are upon us."

"To horse!" shouted Lowritz. "They are more than we dare face!"

"The Englishman?"

"Leave him where he is," replied the captain, flinging his bloodstained sword by Jack's side. And, leaping into his saddle, Lowritz led his band away at a gallop.

Jack had just regained consciousness. He heard the approaching horsemen, and, believing them to be his foes, he seized the weapon, and, springing to his feet, stood ready to defend his life. At that moment the police rode up.

Before he quite knew what had happened, several of the horsemen sprang from their saddles, and roughly seized him. The weapon was wrenched from his grasp, and his hands manacled behind his back.

"We are too late!" cried one of the police. "But we will have vengeance for this crime. Place that ruffian on one of your horses, and bring our poor chief along. It is very sad. Had he taken my advice, and accompanied us, this would never have occurred."

"Let me explain," said Jack, in the best Russian he could command. "I am a British—"

"Silence, prisoner!" commanded the officer.

"I only demand justice!" said Jack.

"You shall have it, fellow, I swear!" replied the officer. "Forward!"

And through the dark night the little troop rode, with Jack Egerton their prisoner.

It was growing light by the time the horsemen reached the town, and the few pedestrians that were about took little heed of the prisoner. They were well accustomed to such scenes.

Halting in front of a large stone building, the police dismounted, and the prisoner was dragged through a long corridor, and forced down a flight of steps into a dreary dungeon. He heard the iron door clang, the heavy bolts drawn, then he realised that he was a prisoner in a Russian prison, where the air was fetid, and the darkness deeper than the blackest night. And here, alone in the deathlike silence, he passed weary hours.

At last the prison door was opened, and a Cossack officer, in a colonel's uniform, accompanied by some officials, and the police who had arrested Jack, entered. The officer took a lantern from one of the men, and eyed the prisoner keenly.

"Your name is John Egerton," he said in French. "You represent the English firm, Grane and Rowlaski? You are here for the ostensible purpose of making some purchases?"

"Exactly!" exclaimed Jack, much relieved.

"Search the prisoner, men!" commanded the officer.

The document which Lowritz had placed in Jack's pocket was withdrawn. His papers and money were missing.

The officer glanced at the document, then, with a smile, he handed it to one of the officials. Having read it through, they conferred together, and in undertones closely questioned the police who had arrested Jack. At last the officer turned to his prisoner.

"You have been caught in the act of committing an atrocious murder!" he cried. "The document found in your possession proves that it was premeditated, and your own words have helped to convict you. For that crime we, your judges, sentence you to receive one thousand lashes with the knout, and to be exiled for life in Siberia!"

"Do you dare to consign a perfectly innocent man to such a fearful death?" gasped Jack. "Hear me! Let me explain!"

"No explanation is needed!" replied the officer coldly. "Your sentence is passed."

Then, before Jack could reply, the party marched from the dungeon, and he was left once more in solitude and utter darkness. Bitter were his thoughts, for Jack well knew that life in Siberia meant a lingering death—a slow death, amid the most horrible surroundings.

CHAPTER II.

IN A RUSSIAN GAOL—THE NUN'S MYSTERIOUS POWER—JACK ESCAPES FROM HIS CELL—A FIERCE FIGHT, FOLLOWED BY HELP FROM AN UNEXPECTED QUARTER—FRED PEARCE, DETECTIVE.

The weary hours dragged slowly by, when once more the key grated in the lock, and a thrill of horror ran through Jack Egerton as the gaoler entered, followed by a nun. She was quite young, and very beautiful, and the gaoler seemed to be strangely affected by the low, earnest tones in which she addressed him. Even while he was closing the door, his eyes were fixed upon her beautiful grey ones, and presently she accompanied her words with strange gestures, passing her delicate hands before the warder's face, and keeping her brilliant eyes fixed upon his, until he appeared to lose all power of will. Presently the nun ceased speaking, and, taking a handkerchief from her pocket, waved it closer and closer to the dazed man's face, until she actually touched it, then held it firmly over his mouth and nostrils. Even now he made no effort to escape from the sway of her will. In a few moments he sank senseless to the ground.

Swiftly the woman now took the keys from the warder's belt, and as rapidly unfastened Jack's manacles.

"Put on his tunic, and take his sword," she said in English. "Quick! Ask no questions. He will not wake. I have chloroformed him."

Jack needed no second bidding. Unbuttoning the warder's coat, he quickly exchanged it for his own. Fastening on the sword, he stood ready to accompany his mysterious visitor.

"Take the lantern," she said. "You are supposed to be seeing me from the prison. I shall address you earnestly in Russian. Take heed to shine the light in the face of anyone whom we may meet, keeping your own features in the shade as much as possible."

They passed a number of warders, who only grinned and muttered amongst themselves. Presently they reached the room of the officer who had sentenced Jack to the knout and Siberia. Hearing footsteps, the officer came to his door.

"Ah, sister!" he exclaimed, looking earnestly into her beautiful eyes. "I trust you have given the prisoner spiritual comfort. It is a hard sentence, but not harder than his fearful crime has merited. He is in league with one of the most dangerous secret societies in Russia. A most desperate fellow, I assure you. The firm with which he is connected are in the plot, and he, being a British subject, we are bound to use great caution in punishing him. Caution! ha! ha! He will never be heard of again!"

He will not be the first who has met such a fate," the beautiful woman replied quietly.

"Nor the last. We will stamp these villains from the face of the earth. But pray step into my room. I should like to converse with you concerning the welfare of some of the prisoners."

"Pardon, Colonel Kapritzi!" she answered. "My time is very precious at this moment. On another occasion I shall have pleasure in conversing with you."

"In that case," exclaimed Kapritzi, motioning the supposed warder away, "I myself will see one so young and fair from the building. It is an honour and a pleasure, I assure you. You can go, fellow! Allow me to offer my arm, madam. The passage is rather dark."

"I thank you," she answered, taking the proffered arm. "You must look to the prisoner, warder. I can do no more for him. I trust he will ponder over my words, and make the best possible use he can of the advice I have given him. Farewell! I am ready, Colonel Kapritzi."

Jack dared not follow. He knew that discovery would mean death to his beautiful rescuer, as well as to himself, and as he stood hesitating some warders approached along the corridor. Before they caught sight of him he stepped into Colonel Kapritzi's room, and closed the door; then he waited in fear as the footsteps approached. The men stopped outside the door, and he heard their voices.

"He has gone out," said one. "I saw him passing with that beautiful nun. She'll desert the monastery, if I mistake not. It is not safe to thwart the colonel when he falls in love. Come, we will make our report later on."

To his intense relief Jack heard the men pass on. He was about to open the door, when he heard other footsteps and the rattle of a sword. It was Kapritzi returning. The next mo-

ment the door was opened, and the two men stood face to face.

Jack took one step forward and dealt the colonel a blow between the eyes with his fist that sent him reeling backwards.

Kapritzi's sword flashed from the scabbard; but with the warder's weapon Jack turned the stroke aside, then he sprang along the corridor. He saw armed men in front of him, but now he felt no fear—only a fierce determination to escape from that horrible place or die.

Into the midst of his foes he dashed, and his sword swept from side to side.

The men fell back before the rush. They were three to one, but that one was a Briton fighting for life and freedom.

He was through them now, but others were approaching, and shots rang out. He felt a sharp pain in his shoulder as one of the bullets grazed the skin. A door was open at the side of the corridor.

Through this door Jack dashed, springing towards the window, through which only a faint light entered, for it was night.

In a second he had flung the casement open, and climbed through, but in that second his foes had followed him into the room, and he heard Kapritzi's command:

"Present! Fire!"

A dozen or more rifles were levelled at the fugitive. There was a red flash of light, and a volley of bullets tore through the opening; but ere the fatal word had been uttered by the officer, Jack leapt to the ground outside, then ran swiftly across the yard at the back of the prison.

As he reached the high surrounding wall, he heard the shouts of his pursuers.

Escape seemed hopeless. Still, on he sped, and as he ran round the wall he suddenly stumbled into a clump of laurels.

For a few moments he remained motionless, listening to the fierce shouts of his enemies, who seemed to have taken the opposite direction.

Presently some men bearing torches approached.

By the red glow Jack saw a tree close by him, and, springing into the branches, he drew himself up, but as he did so an angry cry from the searchers told him that he was discovered.

Lying flat on one of the branches that overhung the prison wall, he quickly worked his way along.

Again the order to fire was given, and bullets tore their way through the leaves of the tree.

The branch on which Jack lay was bending dangerously, but he was now over the wall, and, swinging himself as far out as possible, he leapt over it, to fall heavily to the ground on the outer side.

Before he could rise three armed men pounced on him.

"Silence!" cried a voice, which he thought he recognised. "Follow us, and we will save your life! Resist, and your blood be upon your own head! Swear to follow?"

"I promise!" panted Jack. "I have no choice."

"Quick! Not a moment is to be lost, if you would save yourself from a terrible death!"

In silence the party proceeded down some narrow streets, and presently they reached some stone steps which led down to a broad river. Here a boat awaited them, and, hurriedly entering, they rowed swiftly down the stream.

They had proceeded some considerable distance, when the order was given to cross, and the boat was brought up at another flight of steps which led into a large riverside building. Into this Jack followed his strange conductors, and when he saw them bolt and bar the heavy door he felt that he was but entering another prison. Without a word of explanation he was led into an enormous vault, which was filled with some of the fiercest-looking ruffians he had ever seen.

Jack turned to the man who had addressed him before.

"Who are you?" he inquired.

"I am Nomad Lowritz, leader of this band."

"You intend to take my life?" demanded Jack, placing his hand upon the sword, which he still retained.

"That depends upon yourself," replied Lowritz. "We do not take the lives of those who cannot harm us. You cannot, for were you to turn traitor your own life would pay the penalty. Now, listen! Without my aid you could never have escaped."

"Without your aid," retorted Jack bitterly, "I should never have got into this terrible position!"

"That may be," replied Lowritz. "But having got into it there is but one escape."

"Name your terms," said Jack. "I am in your power."

"You shall hear our terms presently," replied Lowritz; then, raising his voice, he addressed his accomplices:

"Comrades, another of our men has suffered death, and Kapritzi is his murderer. As you are aware, we have sworn to have life for life. In this casket are a number of tickets representing the number of our men. On one of those tickets is written that murderer's name. He who draws it strikes the blow.

One of our members is absent. I will draw for him. Is it agreed?"

"It is!" cried every voice.

Lowritz shook the casket up, then placed it on the table, and, opening it, drew the first ticket. It was a blank. Now, one by one, the Anarchists filed past, each one taking a ticket; and Jack saw that some of the ruffians turned ghastly as their turn came, while terror was in their eyes as, with trembling hands, they unfolded their tickets, for they well knew that to deal the blow would be certain death to the assassin. Lowritz seemed to be the only one unmoved by the ordeal, but even his fierce face paled as the tickets grew lower, and still the one bearing Kapritzi's name was not withdrawn. By this Jack imagined that the last ticket was to be left for Lowritz. Now the last man approached, and his hand trembled so that he could scarcely grasp the tickets. For nearly a minute, amid a breathless silence, he hesitated as to which of the two tickets he should take. At last he took one, and his face was white as death, as, with trembling fingers, he essayed to open it.

Laughing scornfully, Lowritz drew the other ticket, unfolded it, and revealed Kapritzi's name.

"So let it be!" he cried, in a voice that was perfectly calm.

"Within a week from this night that murderer shall meet his doom!"

One by one, and in perfect silence, the gang stole from the great vault, then Lowritz motioned to Jack to follow him into a room at the very top of the building.

"I must leave you here to pass the night alone," Lowritz said. "Remember, my men will be watching outside, and, should you attempt to escape, though I do not think you will be mad enough to do so, your death will be on your own head."

"What do you want with me?" demanded Jack.

"That you become a member of our band. That you take the oath of allegiance."

"Then I tell you, once for all," replied Jack firmly, "rather than take such a vile oath I would face any death!"

"We have means of enforcing our commands!" said Lowritz, with an evil smile. "I rather think you will change your determination. See! I trust to your honour. Have I your word that you will make no attempt to escape?"

"You have not," replied Jack. "I will use every endeavour to get out of your clutches."

"Then I must take measures to prevent it," said Lowritz, leaving the apartment, and bolting the door on the outside.

Jack stepped to the door, but a glance at it was sufficient to convince him that to burst it open would be an impossibility; besides, the noise would certainly attract the attention of his gaolers. Next he stepped to the window. Heavy iron bars guarded it, but the woodwork had rotted away in places, and, after a desperate struggle, he succeeded in wrenching out one of the iron bars; then, using this as a lever, he dragged out two more. As he looked out, he saw that the height from the ground was tremendous; but presently, as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he saw the black, glittering waters of the broad river, but he also saw that the stone steps, which led into the building, were immediately beneath the window. For some moments he hesitated, then his resolution was formed. He would take a flying leap, and trust to his chances of escape.

Noiselessly climbing through the open window he stood upright on the narrow sill. Now he raised his arms above his head; then, leaping out as far as he could, he darted headfirst down the terrible height. Swifter and swifter through the air his body cut; then, with a mighty plunge, he dashed into the waters of the river, to sink far beneath the surface. In a few seconds he rose uninjured, then struck out boldly for the opposite side.

His plunge had evidently been heard, for the door of the building was flung open; but although some of the ruffians appeared at it, no shots were fired. Doubtless they were fearful of attracting the attention of the police.

It was a good distance across, but Jack was a powerful swimmer, and he gained the opposite bank without much difficulty. He was scrambling up, when he was roughly seized by a tall, powerfully-built young man.

"I am a detective!" he cried, in French. "I arrest you as a suspected character!"

"Fred Pearce!" gasped Jack. "Is it you, or am I dreaming?"

"Why, Jack, my old comrade," exclaimed the young man, "of all the men on earth I should have least expected to meet, you are he! I am engaged in tracking down a gang of Anarchists, amongst whom are some Englishmen. I traced them to this delightful country, and was watching their lair, when I saw you dive into the water, and I took you for one of them. I see you are strangely clad. Follow me to my rooms, and tell me what has happened. We must trust that no one will see us in the darkness."

In a few words Jack explained the difficulty he had got into,

and the young detective listened attentively, especially when he mentioned about his firm being under suspicion.

"It's that old Pole," he said. "I don't believe Grane has anything to do with it. Now, look here, Jack. I think I can get you out of the difficulty. My clothes will about fit you, so we will work together. We are detectives. See?"

"But what about the passports?"

"I can arrange that all right. I don't need one myself, as I am well known to the police. To-morrow night I am attending a mask ball, at which I fancy some startling developments will occur. You must come with me. Kapritzi will be there, but I can disguise you so that he will never recognise you. Is it agreed?"

"Certainly!" answered Jack. "I am only too thankful to have got out of my difficulty, so far. As to the rest, we must trust to luck."

CHAPTER III.

AT THE MASKED BALL—A CRIME PREVENTED—THE EXECUTION—A MYSTERIOUS FIGURE.

The guests at the great hall had arrived, and amongst them were Fred Pearce, the detective, and his friend Jack Egerton. Both wore long cloaks, while their features were concealed by masks, as were those of the other guests. Colonel Kapritzi was in earnest conversation with a young girl whose figure was veiled by a silk domino of pale blue, and as Jack and Fred passed close to the pair they heard Kapritzi's words:

"If you will not remove your mask to let me gaze on a face that I know is beautiful, at least you will tell me the name of my charming companion."

"Natalie!"

"Ah! It is a pretty name, and worthy of one so fair."

"That is only your imagination, Colonel Kapritzi!" Natalie replied, with a merry laugh. "I may be old and ugly."

"Never. That voice could but belong to one who is beautiful."

"He is taking a good deal on trust," whispered Fred. "But I fancy he is in rather dangerous company."

"You are right," replied Jack. "Natalie is the name that Lowritz mentioned as having given him information concerning the movements of the man he slew."

"Hush!" whispered Fred. "Watch yonder man in black. If I am not mistaken that is Lowritz himself."

The man in question moved slowly among the merry guests, casting furtive glances around. It was evident that he was in search of someone. Presently his eyes rested on Kapritzi, then his tall form was drawn up, and his eyes seemed to blaze from behind his mask. Stealthily he drew nearer, and Fred watched his every movement. Kapritzi heard a stealthy step behind him, and quickly turned. At that moment the man raised his hand above his head, and a bomb was clenched in his right hand. Fred leapt upon him, and gripped the miscreant's wrist; but with a mighty effort the ruffian wrenched his arm free, and hurled the deadly missile full at Kapritzi's breast. The colonel sprang aside, and the bomb must have struck Natalie, had not Jack dragged her aside. As it was, the fearful missile struck the casement-window, and burst with a terrific explosion. Kapritzi and half a dozen more leapt upon the assassin, and bore him to the ground; then, tearing his mask off, revealed the features of Lowritz.

A tall form, dressed as a Cossack officer, strode up with drawn sword, and gazed at Lowritz's fierce face.

"Ah! That demon is caught at last! He dies this night, Kapritzi, by the Czar's command! He is your prisoner!"

Kapritzi rose to his feet, and saluted; meanwhile, some of the police, of whom there were many there, had manacled Lowritz's arms, and like some wild beast he was dragged from the apartment, followed closely by Kapritzi.

They had scarcely disappeared when a fearful cry rang out.

The bursting bomb had fired the curtains, and the flames darted amongst the drapery with fearful rapidity. A wild rush was made for the exits, of which there were two, and there was a fearful struggle along the corridors. Some of the braver amongst the men tried in vain to calm the terrified women; but some thought only of their own safety, and they added to the panic by their cowardice.

"Keep calm," said Jack, placing his hand upon Natalie's trembling arm. "All would be saved if they would only go out quietly. Come this way."

"I do not fear in the presence of one so brave," replied Natalie. "You have saved my life."

Jack and Fred hurried their charge to one of the windows, and, throwing it open, looked out. The height was not very great from the ground, and, lifting Natalie through, they lowered her by the hands as far as possible, then released her hold, and she fell into some laurels which were beneath the window.

"Are you injured?" inquired Jack anxiously.

"No," she answered, rising to her feet. "Pray follow."

"First we will see if we can be of any assistance to the others. Remain where you are. We will follow in a few minutes."

Hurrying back, they lent what aid they could; but the terrified people had all made their escape, and were still struggling in the corridor.

"There is plenty of time!" shouted Fred in French. "Go quietly, and you will all escape. See! I will shut the door, so that the flames cannot reach you for some time. Come along, Jack. We must think of our own safety."

The fire was raging fiercely in the room now, and, half suffocated by the fearful heat, it was as much as they could do to gain the open window. Then, climbing through, they sprang to the ground, and found Natalie anxiously awaiting them.

"How can I ever thank you?" she exclaimed, turning to Jack. "That dreadful bomb would have struck me but for your quickness and bravery to a perfect stranger, whose name you do not even know."

"You are wrong there, Natalie," said Jack. "I have heard your name twice."

"Indeed, Mr. John Egerton," she said in English. "You surprise me!"

"Not so much as you surprise me by knowing my name, and in spite of my disguise."

"I know your voice," replied Natalie. "Would you wish to see the face of one whose life you have saved?"

"It was a favour I was about to ask," replied Jack.

Then Natalie took off her mask, and as Jack saw her beautiful face by the light of the lamp beneath which they stood, he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"It is a face that I should ever remember, even were it not for its beauty," said Jack, in a low voice of admiration.

"Natalie, you have saved me from an infamous death!"

For in Natalie's fair features and beautiful eyes Jack recognised the nun who had risked her life to set him at liberty.

"Now will you complete your kindness by conducting me to a carriage," she said, smiling at his look of admiration. "The fire was not so serious after all. They seem to have subdued the flames already."

"I trust we may meet again," said Jack.

"We shall," said Natalie. "And now, gentlemen, I bid you farewell, and trust you will be cautious. You are beset with many perils in this country."

"We are," exclaimed Fred, as the carriage drove swiftly away. "And one of the perils, at least, to my comrade, is the beautiful Natalie. Come, Jack! It won't do to fall in love with a young lady Nihilist, however beautiful she may be."

"I am naturally grateful to her!" replied Jack, somewhat coldly.

"Of course!" laughed Fred. "Only let it stop at gratitude, and don't make an ass of yourself. I must learn the fate of Lowritz, though I do not doubt what it will be, now that he is in Kapritzi's clutches."

They hurried down back streets towards the prison, and as they passed one of the sentries challenged them.

"I am Pearce, the detective," said Fred, taking off his mask. "This is my comrade."

"The brave Englishmen who saved our colonel's life," replied the sentry. "Pass through, gentlemen. I have orders to admit you."

"We will keep on our masks," said Fred. "It is not well for detectives to be seen too frequently."

"That is so," replied the sentry; "although only the police and soldiers will be in the courtyard. Enter, gentlemen. I will inform the colonel of your arrival, as he wishes to speak with you."

This was not exactly what they could have wished; but it was impossible to draw back now, so, accepting the unwelcome invitation, they both entered the great courtyard, and the gates were closed behind them.

Here a terrible scene met their view. Standing in a circle were a number of Cossacks, holding lighted torches. In the centre stood Lowritz, by his side the executioner, leaning carelessly on a huge axe. The headsman's block was between him and his wretched victim.

Presently the soldiers stood aside, and Kapritzi strode into the fatal circle. There was no pity on his stern face as he gazed at the culprit.

"Nomad Lowritz," he cried, "your death has been decreed by the Czar's command! That you are well deserving of death you know better than words can tell you. But such a merciful death shall not be meted out to your vile gang, though their deaths are equally sure. Have you anything to say before the end?"

"Only that I defy you!" cried Lowritz fiercely. "I meant to take your vile life, though I knew my own would be forfeited. But though I have failed others will not, and your days are as surely numbered as are my minutes. Others will avenge my death, and a fearful vengeance it will be. But you will not

meet your death as fearlessly as I. Strike, man, and let your blow be sure!"

Then glancing round at the fierce faces, Lowritz, without a sign of fear, placed his head upon the block.

The executioner stepped forward, and, taking up his position, waited for the fatal command.

"Strike!" cried Kapritzi.

The executioner swung his great axe round, then Lowritz's lifeless body fell to the ground.

"Come, Jack," said Fred. "The ruffian deserved his death, though I wish we had not witnessed it."

Jack turned in silence from the sickening scene.

"Have you seen the colonel, gentlemen?" inquired the sentry.

"Yes," replied Fred. "We shall be speaking to him further, later on."

Then to their relief they stepped from the prison gates, and quickly made their way to Fred's apartments. The young detective now set to work to disguise his comrade by darkening his hair and eyebrows.

"There!" he exclaimed, surveying him with much satisfaction. "I don't think Kapritzi will recognise you again. He only saw you for a few moments, and that by night. At any rate, we must chance it, for the fellow is certain to come here. He knows my address, and also that I am after some of the members of the gang he is so anxious to run down."

The following day the two friends remained in, and towards night Colonel Kapritzi called.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," he said, fixing his eyes on Jack. "I have to sincerely thank you for the prompt action you took last night. One at least of our foes will never trouble us again."

"That is true, Colonel Kapritzi," replied Fred. "But while the remainder of the gang are at large, your life is far from secure."

"It is about that I have called," replied Kapritzi. "You must know that one of the ruffians was captured, but he escaped in a most mysterious manner. The warder who was in charge of him is a well-trusted man; but the strange part of the thing is he can give very little account of the affair. He remembers showing a nun into the cell; but he says that she suddenly vanished, although the door of the cell was closed. Then he could recollect no more until he was found lying unconscious in the cell. Now, the strange part of the thing is that I saw that very warder in company with the nun; and I actually spoke to the nun myself, and conducted her away from the prison."

"Where did you leave her?" inquired Fred, who could have thrown a good deal of light on the mystery.

"Outside the prison walls," replied Kapritzi, stepping towards wards the detective, and lowering his voice. "She was talking earnestly to me, though for my life I cannot recollect her words. Between you and me, I did not intend to let her go just then; but she seemed to have a wonderful power over me. It was a sort of fascination. I would have done anything that she asked. I think she ordered me to go, and I went. Mr. Pearce, do you believe in the supernatural?"

"Strange things do occur," replied Fred, glancing at his comrade. "There may be powers that we know nothing of."

"I do not believe that woman was human," said Kapritzi superstitiously. "Had she been, where has she gone? And how could she effect the prisoner's escape?"

"Would you know her again?" inquired Fred.

"Yes. Her face was very beautiful. I shall not forget it."

"Well," exclaimed Fred, "the thing is a complete mystery. But have you learnt anything of the remainder of the gang?"

"Yes," replied Kapritzi. "One of their number was tracked to a certain spot outside the city. He was seen to conceal something in an old monastery, which is now a complete ruin. My men were on the point of arresting him, but when they came to search the place he, too, had disappeared; they imagine

down some subterranean passage. Now the question is, what had better be done under the circumstances?"

"Did your men find what had been hidden?" inquired Fred. "No; although the closest search was made. My impression is that it was some message to the remainder of the gang."

"In that case they will come for it," said Fred. "I would suggest that we three go to that ruined monastery and keep watch to-night."

"I will bring some Cossacks," said Kapritzi. "We know not how many foes we may have to contend with."

"Were you to take soldiers the gang would be certain to get word of it," replied Fred. "No; we should go alone. If you do not care to accompany us, we will go by ourselves. Are you not of my opinion, Stanton?" he added, giving Jack a false name, because Kapritzi would have known his real one.

"Certainly!" replied Jack. "No time should be lost."

"I will accompany you, by all means," said Kapritzi. "I am ready to proceed at once. The distance is not very great, and it will be better to walk than take horses. When you are ready, gentlemen."

In a few minutes the three were walking at a rapid pace to-



"Only that I defy you!" cried Lowritz fiercely.

wards the ruin, which they reached after about an hour's walk.

It was a lonely spot, surrounded by a dense clump of trees, which stretched away into a forest towards the north, and the three men concealed themselves amongst the bushes. There was a moon, but heavy clouds floated across the heavens, and its light only shone through fitfully. As they remained listening, from time to time they could hear the distant howl of a wolf as it roamed the depths of the forest. Save for this, all was silent, and no sign of life was in that crumbling ruin. An hour or more passed by, when presently a sound like a heavy blow proceeded from the ruin; then all was still once more.

Motioning to his companions to follow him, Fred led the way towards the spot, and Kapritzi glanced round fearfully more than once, while he kept his hand upon his sword. They reached the crumbling walls, and gazed through an opening which had once been a window, but for some moments the darkness within was too great for them to see anything. Presently they heard low voices, but they were too low for them to catch the words. The moon struggled through the clouds. The voices ceased, then two shadowy forms appeared. They

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were crossing the monastery, and as Kapritzi caught sight of them his face turned ghastly, while his eyes dilated with terror.

"The nun!" he gasped. "Great Heaven! do you see who is with her? 'Tis Nomad Lowritz!"

Both Jack and Fred were gazing at the strange forms with quite as much awe and wonder as Kapritzi. The forms were coming directly towards the watchers, and as the moonlight flooded upon the mysterious figures, Lowritz's features were revealed quite distinctly, and in that beautiful nun Jack recognised Natalie's fair face.

Kapritzi uttered a cry of terror. He would have fled, but his trembling limbs refused their office, and he stood with glazed eyes fixed upon those unearthly forms.

"Who are you?" he gasped at last.

The man turned his fierce face towards the terrified colonel.

"You should know," replied a deep voice. "I am your victim. Before a week has passed you will have joined me. Your time has nearly come. Death is hovering over you."

At that moment a heavy mass of clouds floated before the moon, and when its light shone forth again the forms had disappeared.

"Come away!" cried Kapritzi. "Let us leave this place!"

"Why, colonel?" exclaimed Fred. "We are three men. We have only one to face."

"That was no man!" gasped Kapritzi, with superstitious awe.

"It was Nomad Lowritz returned to earth to haunt me! I saw his face! His eyes were fixed upon me with the gaze he fixed upon me ere the axe fell! I believe he spoke the truth, and that my time has come!"

"Nevertheless, I shall search the ruins," said Fred. "I will fathom this mystery, however great the risk may be."

And, before Kapritzi could reply, Jack and Fred climbed the crumbling wall; but as they passed into the ruins Kapritzi fled from the place at his utmost speed.

Although the two comrades spent upwards of an hour at the ruins, searching every corner, they saw nothing more of those mysterious forms. Jack was very silent, for Natalie's beautiful face had made a deeper impression on him than he would have cared to own even to his comrade; and it seemed to him impossible that the beautiful girl could be implicated with that gang of miscreants. Yet in his own mind he felt that such must be the case.

"Well, Jack," exclaimed Fred at last, "it is pretty certain that we shall discover nothing more."

"How do you account for what we have already seen?"

"I can account for Natalie's presence easily enough," replied Fred. "That she is associated with the gang there can be no doubt."

"I will never believe it!" replied Jack.

"Pshaw, man! You must believe it. Surely, Jack, you are not so foolish as to become infatuated by the first pretty face you meet? I warned you that she was dangerous."

"She saved me from a fearful death."

"Oh, feel as grateful as you like!" replied Fred. "But, for goodness' sake don't fall in love with that beautiful tigress. Why, you have only seen her three times!"

"I have no intention of falling in love," said Jack. "At the same time I would risk my life to shield her from harm."

"Her fate is as certain as is that of her companions," replied Fred. "You saw her companion?"

"It was Nomad Lowritz," answered Jack. "I saw his features as I saw them last night."

"That is what utterly baffles me," said Fred thoughtfully. "I never forget a face; and his is such a marked one. The likeness was remarkable. I never saw two faces so alike. And yet you and I, as men of commonsense, know perfectly well that it could not have been him. That superstitious colonel believes it right enough, though. Between you and I, I believe him to be an arrant coward. He must be, else he would never have given you such a frightful sentence. The rascal has bolted, and left us to bear the brunt of his spectres. He must be gifted with a vivid imagination to believe that a man whose head he has seen cut off can amuse himself by coming back to life, and prowling about haunted ruins. I don't believe it, at any rate, neither do you."

"Of course not," said Jack. "But how can you account for it?"

"It is a mystery that you and I must solve," answered Fred, leading the way back. "And we shall need all our wits to do it."

"Fred," exclaimed Jack, stopping and facing his comrade, "promise me that you will do nothing to bring harm to that poor girl!"

"She saved my comrade's life," replied Fred, grasping Jack's hand. "I promise you more, old friend. I will do everything in my power to shield her from harm. But pray remember my warning!"

But even now Jack began to fear that his friend's warning had come too late. For Natalie's beautiful face was still

before his eyes, and even now he would not believe that she was wicked. Only he tried to convince himself that his feeling towards her was merely one of deepest gratitude. Fred, however, trusted that they would meet no more, for his comrade's sake.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTERRUPTED MEETING—COLONEL KAPRITZI MESMERISED—NOMAD LOWRITZ AGAIN APPEARS.

For several weeks Fred kept watch at the house from which his friend had escaped, but he saw none of the gang enter it. During this time Jack, relying on his disguise, went boldly about the city. The fact is he was hoping against hope to meet Natalie once more.

One evening, as Colonel Kapritzi was seated in his room, a man entered, and carefully closed the door.

"Colonel Kapritzi," he said, "you directed me to search for a certain Englishman, John Egerton by name."

"Well," exclaimed Kapritzi, springing to his feet, "have you discovered that ruffian? If so, he shall meet his death."

"I have discovered him," replied the spy. "He was in conversation with a young and very beautiful woman; and, if I may judge by her tender glances and his words, there is something deeper than friendship between them."

"Describe her!" cried Kapritzi.

"Fair, with brilliant grey eyes, and hair of deepest gold. Her form is slight, though of perfect proportions. He addressed her by her Christian name, which is Natalie; and at his earnest request they are to meet this evening in the park by the water. Stay, Colonel Kapritzi! Let me tell you the rest. I followed Egerton to that detective's apartments. The two are friends."

"Fool!" cried Kapritzi fiercely. "You have been tracking the wrong man!"

"Pardon, colonel. I never forget a face, and I should know John Egerton even though he were more cleverly disguised than he is now. Besides, the girl addressed him by name. If I mistake not, she is as deeply in love with him as he is with her. Not that they spoke of love. I only judge by their looks."

"Order half a dozen men to be in readiness to accompany me to the park," commanded Kapritzi, buckling on his sword, and arming himself with a revolver. "They shall find their meeting not quite so pleasant as they anticipate."

All unconscious of the impending danger, Jack, without a word to his comrade, made his way to the park at the appointed hour, and he had not been there many minutes before Natalie, looking more beautiful than ever, came towards him.

"Natalie," he said, taking her hand, "I want to employ you to fly from these perils. I cannot think that it is of your own free will that you are associated with such dangerous characters."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Egerton," she answered; "the only risk I ran was in rescuing you, at my father's request."

"But you know, or rather knew, Nomad Lowritz?"

"By name only," replied Natalie. "I have never spoken to him nor seen him. My father has mentioned his name as being connected with a band of Socialists."

"Did you not see that ruffian who threw the bomb?"

"Only when his face was masked," replied Natalie. "I was too frightened to think about him afterwards."

"That man was Nomad Lowritz," said Jack. "I heard him say to his followers that it was from you that he had learnt the destination of a man whom they murdered, and for which crime I was arrested. Now, Natalie, will you tell me who was that man you met at the ruins?"

"My father."

"Your father!" gasped Jack. "Surely you cannot mean it? What is his name?"

"Rowlaski. My name is Natalie Rowlaski."

"Why, that is the name of a partner in the firm with which I am connected!" exclaimed Jack, more mystified than ever.

"It is very likely," replied Natalie. "My father has a cousin in business in England. He got into some trouble over political affairs here many years ago, as also did my father, though what it was I never heard. It is easy to get suspected in this country. Hark! I think I hear someone moving in those bushes. Oh, Mr. Egerton, fly! It is Colonel Kapritzi!"

"And leave you in that villain's power!" exclaimed Jack. "Surely you cannot think that I would act thus?"

"John Egerton," cried Kapritzi, "I arrest you in the name of the Czar! And you, my pretty Natalie, will have to accompany me. So I have discovered at last who is the fair nun who set the prisoner at liberty. It will rest with you whether this young man's life and your father's life are spared. Now I can understand why you would not unmask that beautiful face at the ball."

"Stand back," said Jack, stepping in front of Kapritzi.

"You are my prisoner," said Kapritzi.

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"I do not think you will make me such," replied Jack.

"Listen, young man," answered Kapritzi. "Within call are half a dozen Cossacks. At my word their rifles would be levelled at your heart. You are in my power."

"But, Colonel Kapritzi," said Natalie, fixing her eyes upon him, "you would not give that word?"

"That rests with you, Natalie. Both his life and your father's: for, although you may not know it, he is a dangerous conspirator. For your sake I would spare both their lives. But you must agree to my conditions."

"What are your conditions?" inquired Natalie, approaching Kapritzi, and still keeping her eyes fixed on him.

"Natalie," he replied, "your beauty has gained my heart. In your presence I forget everything except that I love you. You have some wonderful power over me. What it is I know not; but—but—"

"Colonel Kapritzi," answered Natalie. "If I have such power over you, you will surely do as I will now. Follow this way. Let your soldiers remain where they are."

"I would follow you anywhere," replied Kapritzi. "Your face has haunted me from the first moment that I saw it. To gain your love I would lose my soul!"

"Do not speak," said Natalie. "Merely follow me in silence. You say you would follow wherever I lead. Now do so, and I will give you my answer. You spoke truly when you said I had a strange power over you. I have, and you must obey me!"

Without uttering another word, Kapritzi walked by Natalie's side, and Jack followed closely. When they reached the boundary of the park, Natalie stopped, and, keeping her eyes fixed upon Kapritzi, she passed her hands before his face.

"Stay here," she said; "it is my will, and you shall obey it!"

Then, motioning to Jack, she walked quickly away, while Kapritzi stood gazing at her, much as he had done that night when she had appeared to him disguised as a nun.

"Natalie!" exclaimed Jack in utter amazement, "what is this strange power you have over all men?"

"Not over all men," replied Natalie, glancing up at him. "I have no such power over you. For your will is stronger than mine. I could not make you obey me!"

"I think you could, Natalie," replied Jack. "But by what strange power did you control him?"

"It is simply by hypnotism—mesmerism, as some call it. Do you not believe in it?"

"I certainly believe what I have seen," replied Jack.

"We must say farewell now, Mr. Egerton. My carriage is waiting there. It must be farewell for ever!"

"Do not say so, Natalie!" pleaded Jack. "You will meet me again? Pray grant my request!"

And, after a little hesitation, Natalie agreed. Then he assisted her into the carriage, and she was driven swiftly away.

"Well, you precious duffer!" exclaimed Fred, after he had heard Jack's story, "you have got yourself into a nice difficulty now. I shall have to get you out of this somehow, though how, I'll be shot if I know. However, I have got work to do to-night. I intend to enter that building, as I believe that gang still meet there."

"Very well," exclaimed Jack, "then I shall come with you!"

"There is peril in the attempt," said Fred.

"Not more for me than you," replied Jack. "I am ready to start whenever you are."

It was nearly midnight when the two friends reached the empty building, and they gained admission by one of the lower windows. The silence in the place was intense, and, after listening for a few moments, Fred ventured to turn on a dark lantern, with which he had provided himself, then they proceeded towards the cellar. But ere they reached it they heard the tramp of feet down the stairs. The two friends had just sufficient time to conceal themselves in an empty room, and turn off the lantern, when several men descended the stairs, and they spoke in such low voices that it was impossible to distinguish their words. Presently the gang separated, leaving the house by the back door, while one of their number remained alone in the building. For a few moments he stopped outside the room in which Jack and Fred were concealed, then he cautiously descended the steps into the cellar.

"I think we have caught our foe at last," whispered Fred. "Hark! Someone is bursting open the front door. By George! it is Kapritzi and his Cossacks!"

But very little noise was made in opening the door, and Kapritzi, motioning to his men to remain silent, softly entered the building. He was accompanied by quite twenty soldiers, and some of these he stationed at the front entrance, while others guarded the back. Now he brought forth a lantern, and, ordering his men to search the upper rooms, he took the lantern from one of them, and descended into the cellar. Holding the light above his head, he peered round the gloomy place, while he held his drawn sword in front of him.

Believing the place to be empty, he stepped in. At that moment the heavy iron door was slammed to, the great lock

was turned, and, to his horror, he found himself face to face with Nomad Lowritz.

Colonel Kapritzi staggered back against the side of the vault, and his eyes were fixed in awe upon that strange form, while the look that he encountered froze his blood. It seemed as though he had lost all power of speech and action.

"I told you that you would not face death as bravely as I!" exclaimed Lowritz, drawing a revolver, and leveling it at the trembling man's breast.

Uttering a cry of terror, Kapritzi dashed the lantern to the ground, then sprang aside to avoid the shot; and now he drew his own revolver, and waited for a sound to guide him in which direction to fire; but the silence was deathlike in the black vault.

Hoping that the soldiers would come to his assistance, he waited in the absolute darkness. He did not dare to call for help, as it would show his enemy where to fire. At last the intense silence was dispelled by a pistol-shot, and the bullet was flattened against the wall, fearfully close to Kapritzi's side. He returned the shot at random, though no sound told him whether it was true to its aim. Another shot was fired, and Kapritzi uttered a cry of pain as the bullet slightly wounded his side. He heard the shouts of his men, and the sound of heavy blows, which caused the iron door to tremble. He saw a red flash of light, and a bullet whizzed past his face. The blows were redoubled, and he was hoping that the door would be burst open, when, without a moment's warning, a fearful grip was placed upon his throat, and his right wrist was seized with a strength that caused him to drop his revolver. In vain he struggled. He was powerless in that fearful grip. He heard the mocking laugh of his mysterious foe, as the blows at the door were redoubled. He would have shrieked for mercy; but with that awful grip upon his throat he could not utter a sound, and his senses were fast leaving him. At last his struggles ceased, and then he remembered no more.

A few moments later the door was burst in with a heavy crash. Soldiers, bearing lights, rushed into the place, to find their colonel lying senseless on the stone floor, while no one else was in the vault.

"Where is that fiend?" gasped Kapritzi, as soon as he recovered consciousness.

"Colonel, no one is here," replied the man who had acted as spy. "We found you alone."

"Nomad Lowritz appeared to me!" said Kapritzi, shuddering.

"My colonel," answered the spy, "that must have been your imagination. I saw Nomad Lowritz beheaded, and I have never yet known the dead come to life. No doubt you imagined it, and fired at some object, which, in this darkness, you mistook for an enemy. It was enough to terrify even one so brave as our colonel, and I do not wonder at you losing consciousness. It must have been very alarming to fancy you saw Lowritz's spectre in the dark. But it was very brave of you to have shut the door so that he should not escape. It is wonderful what the imagination will lead one to believe sometimes. I know my old mother once thought she was—"

"Fool!" roared Kapritzi, mad with rage and mortification.

"If you dare to talk that insane nonsense to me, I'll stab you to the heart. Do you think this was imagination?" he added, pointing to his wounded side.

"That certainly looks real," replied the man calmly; "but still, you see, no one could have been here; otherwise, where has he gone?"

"How should I know, you dolt!" roared Kapritzi. "I only know some fiend in Lowritz's form fired repeatedly at me, then seized me by the throat with a terrible grip. I tell you it was Lowritz!"

"Merely his imagination," murmured the spy. "The poor coward is losing the little reason he ever had."

"What is that you are muttering, villain?" demanded Kapritzi, turning fiercely towards him.

"I was merely thinking how brave you were to close the door," replied the man.

"Blockhead! It was that fiend who closed it!"

"It might have been the wind. Ah! Keep him back. The poor colonel is bereft of his senses. I assure you no one is in the vault. But we will search, if you so desire. Lend me a lantern. There may be some secret door. I never thought of that before. Ah! It is as I suspected all along. See! Surely this is a door, though it is so cleverly made that it might well have escaped our notice. I believe you are correct, after all, colonel, and that someone, indeed, has attacked you."

"You exasperating blockhead!" roared Kapritzi, striking him in the face with his clenched fist. "Let that teach you sense. Burst that door open, men. I will fathom this mystery, if it costs me my life!"

"He will not risk that," murmured the spy, assisting the others to burst open the door. This they succeeded in doing after considerable difficulty, and a secret passage was revealed. Kapritzi ordered his men to descend it, and he took good care not to be the first. It led them to the riverside, and the exit

was so narrow that they had to crawl through it on their hands and knees. It was on a level with the water, and doubtless in times of floods would have been covered by it; but now the water was very low, and it only reached the bottom of the tunnel.

"Dear me," exclaimed the spy, "I always thought that was merely a huge drain; indeed, I have seen water flowing from it!"

"You are fool enough to think anything!" snarled Kapritzi. "Anything but what is correct."

"We cannot all have the wisdom of our colonel!" retorted the spy. "Neither can we all have his bravery. You see, sir, it was not a spectre that you saw after all. I told you it could not be. It was merely one of the gang whom you mistook for Lowritz. But Lowritz is dead, and, as I have already told you, the dead cannot come back to—"

"Silence, you utter fool! If you speak like that again, such words will be your last. Follow me, men, from the accursed place! That fiend, whoever he is, has escaped me once again! But I will have vengeance yet, I swear!"

Fred and Jack waited until the soldiers had left the building, then they followed along the tunnel.

"Those ruffians have proved too clever for me, so far!" exclaimed Fred. "But I will track them yet. Now, Jack, I would rather you did not accompany me any farther. I am going to Natalie's home, for I believe she holds the clue that will place the gang of ruffians in my power."

"You remember your promise to me, Fred?" replied Jack. "Yes. I will bring no harm to her, though I cannot promise the same for her father."

"I shall come with you, Fred," said Jack. "Though, how do you know where she lives?"

"I tracked her home one day," replied the detective. "I wish to goodness that she was not mixed up with this affair! But, come what may, I must do my duty in capturing the gang. Her home is some distance from here, but no time must be lost in reaching it."

The two friends proceeded along the deserted streets at a rapid pace, and at last they stopped at a large house surrounded by grounds. The front gate was unfastened, and entering, Fred made his way to the back of the house. Here, in one of the lower rooms, a light was burning, and, making sure that his revolver was safe, the young detective knocked at the back door.

CHAPTER V.

OUR HEROES PAY A VISIT TO LOWRITZ—DEATH OF LOWRITZ.

A few minutes elapsed, then they heard footsteps approaching, while a woman's voice demanded who was there.

"I wish to have a few moments' conversation with the master of the house," replied Fred. "I come on important business."

Some whispering voices were now heard, and some little time elapsed before the woman again spoke.

"Are you alone?" she demanded.

"No; I am accompanied by my friend John Egerton."

The door was now opened, and the two friends were shown into a handsomely furnished room, in which an old man and Natalie were seated, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour.

"Excuse me rising," said the old man, in a weak, tremulous voice. "If I understand aright, you are the young man who so bravely saved the life of my daughter Natalie; and I am very grateful. This lady is Natalie's aunt, and my sister. Now, tell me, gentlemen, to what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?"

"I am an English detective," replied Fred. "I think your daughter may be able to give me some information respecting some of the members of a certain band of Socialists. It was at your instigation, I believe, that she saved my comrade from a fearful death?"

"It was," replied the old man.

"Then, perhaps, it might save the young lady all trouble if you would grant me a few moments' private conversation, Mr. Rowlaski."

"With pleasure," he replied. "I will bid you good-night, my dear Natalie. It is over late for you to be up."

Natalie hesitated, and she glanced appealingly at Jack, but his smile reassured her, and she followed her aunt from the room, while the old man remained with his eyes fixed upon Fred, and waited for him to speak.

"Perhaps it would be as well," said the detective, "if, first of all, you took off your false beard and wig."

"With pleasure," replied the man, doing as requested, then springing to his feet.

Fred uttered an exclamation of amazement, for Nomad Lowritz stood before him.

"Nomad Lowritz!" he gasped.

"The same," he replied quietly. "Leader of a band of Socialists, and the avenger of my comrades' deaths. Young men, you are brave, for you are in the lions' den."

"Yet we are two men to one," replied Fred quietly. "Even when the foe is Nomad Lowritz, I do not fear such odds."

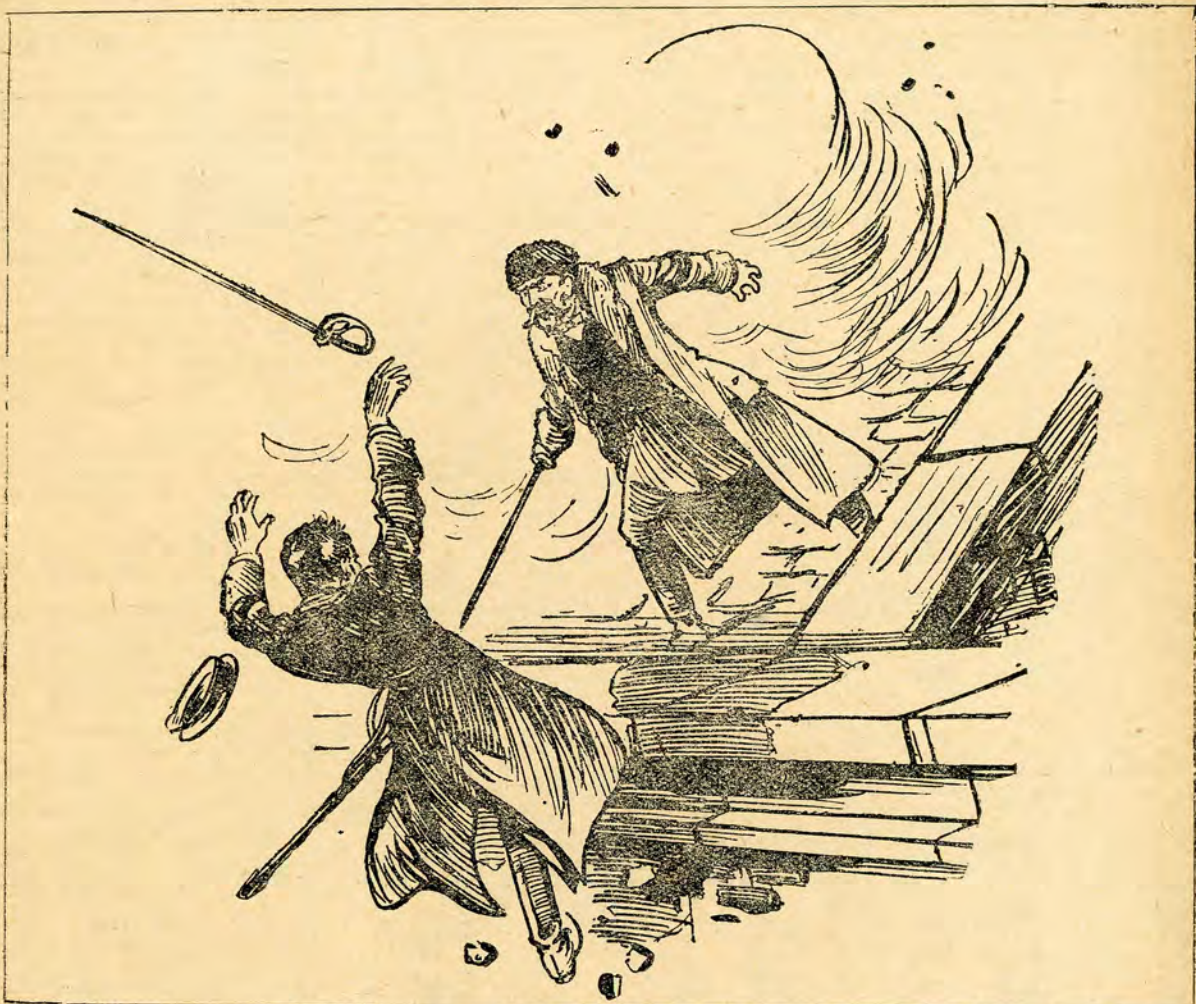
"You mistake," replied Lowritz. "Were I to raise my voice I could bring three trusty servants, all well armed, to my aid. But enough of this. I fear you no more than you fear me. Now you wonder at seeing me here, after having seen me beheaded, as you believed. You, young man, saw me draw that ticket, I drew it on behalf of another. Would that it had been on my own account, even if death had followed. For it consigned to death one who was very dear to me. My twin brother, whose resemblance to me was so exact, that even in broad daylight Natalie has mistaken him for me. To you I may seem vile; perhaps I am. Soon it will be proved. But in the vilest there is some good. For that reason I speak to you this night. Were Natalie my own child, I could not love her more."

"Then is she not?" cried Jack. "Thank Heaven she is not!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Lowritz. "I thought I had guessed your secret, and hers. You love her. Have I guessed aright?"



A bomb was clutched in his right hand. Fred seized his wrist.



Kapritzi sprang back to avoid a sudden thrust; then, uttering a cry of terror, he fell backward over the height.

"I love her," replied Jack quietly. "I think I loved her from the very first day I met her—the day she saved my life."

"Then if I tell you all," said Lowritz—"if I convince you that she is as good as she is beautiful, will you strive to gain her love and make her your wife? Will you see her from this accursed country? Swear to me that you will do this."

"I promise you faithfully," replied Jack.

"That is sufficient," said Lowritz, eyeing him keenly. "Through you I may undo some of the wrong I have done her, and those who are very dear to her; for my days are numbered now, and such men as I do not war with defenceless girls. Natalie is heiress to a large fortune. She was kidnapped when a little child by Rowlaski, so that he should one day inherit that fortune. That man is an utter villain, but he has been a useful tool, and our society do not stop at black deeds to attain our ends. Natalie was kidnapped, I say. She was left to my charge and to my sister's charge by that villain Rowlaski, and it is only lately that I have discovered whose child she is. I have taught her to believe that she is my daughter—ay, and I have taught her to love me almost as a father. She does not even know my name, much less that I am associated with that society. I have only told her that I am under suspicion as a political offender. On more than one occasion I have availed myself of that strange power she has of hypnotism—a power I did not believe in until I once saw her exercise it over another, though she cannot over all. I myself am proof against it. It is the stronger will over the weaker, and there are few who have a stronger will than I. There is one thing more you wish to learn, young man."

"Whose daughter is she?" demanded Jack.

"Mr. Grane's," replied Lowritz. "Rowlaski knew that the old man had only one relative on earth to leave his wealth to, and that one was his only daughter. He rightly guessed that

should she disappear or die, as the old man believes, that he would leave his wealth to his junior partner; and, knowing Rowlaski so well as I do, I only wonder the old man has not died ere this; but Rowlaski is a coward, and he would rather wait for years than risk his neck. It was he who gave me information of your intended visit, and by his means I robbed you of your money and your papers. See! They are here, and here is the money intact. They are yours. Take them, and now farewell for ever."

As Lowritz spoke he touched a bell, and three men in servants' livery entered the room. At a sign from their leader each man drew a revolver, and levelled the weapons at the comrades' breasts.

"You may think it your duty to arrest me," said Lowritz calmly. "I do this to show you that on this occasion, at least, you cannot fulfil such duty. I extract no promises from you. You can use the information I have freely given you against me, as you think fit. Put the Cossacks and the police on my track. But when they meet Nomid Lowritz, let them beware, for I am not the man to die without a struggle."

Fred hesitated for a moment, then, motioning to his comrade to follow, they left the house.

"Do you believe what that man has told us?" inquired Jack.

"He appeared to be speaking the truth," replied Fred. "Of course, there is the possibility that Natalie may still be his daughter, and that he has only concocted this story, hoping that you will marry her, and so give her protection when he has met his fate."

"You think, then, he spoke the truth when he said his days are numbered?"

"His hours are numbered," replied Fred, "let alone his days. He must know it. Kapritzi has discovered the ruffians' lair, and

he will surely hunt them down. I should not wonder if he came here this very night."

"I trust not. What would be Natalie's fate were she to fall into that ruffian's power?"

"We must hope for the best, Jack," replied Fred. "Whatever happens, you may rely on me to protect that helpless girl. Come! It is time for us to get home. The day is breaking."

But ere the morning came, Natalie and her supposed aunt left Lowritz's home in a carriage, and drove swiftly from the city.

They had not long left when the remainder of the gang of Socialists came in one by one, then Lowritz spoke concerning their future movements and their vows of vengeance. They remained in the house all day, and as darkness settled in, the band were startled by a heavy banging at the door.

"We are too late!" cried one. "Those Cossacks are upon us. The house is surrounded, and we are lost!"

"And do you fear death?" demanded Lowritz, who, in spite of the peril, was perfectly calm. "If they have come to deal us death, we will show them how brave men can die. If our plot has failed, our foes shall yet feel the weight of our arms. Your weapons, comrades. We will give those Cossacks a warm reception."

He had scarcely spoken when the door gave way before the heavy blows. Now Colonel Kapritzi's voice could be heard giving his men their orders. Lowritz, at the head of his men, ascended the stairs, and, halting at the top, stood ready to meet their foes.

"Surrender!" cried Kapritzi. "Throw down your arms, or your deaths be on your own heads!"

"Advance one step further," retorted Lowritz, "and I give the command to fire!"

"Ready!" cried Kapritzi. "Present! Fire!"

Flashes of red shot through the dark building. The roar of the rifles burst forth, and the bullets shrieked past. Then that deadly fire was returned, and volleys were poured in by either side. It was a fearful strife, rendered more terrible by the almost total darkness. The Cossacks rushed up the stairs, to be hurled back by the hail of bullets that met them. Shrieks and terrible curses filled the air, to be drowned as the murderous volleys once more burst forth. And above the uproar Lowritz's fierce voice arose, as he urged on his men to greater fury. But the steady discipline of the Cossacks soon began to tell. The gang of miscreants were gradually driven back, though they contested every inch of ground. On the great landing above a stubborn stand was made. Rifles and revolvers were empty, nor had the combatants time to reload. But they had their swords, and they fought with these with truly awful fury. With fierce rushes the soldiers tried to drive their enemies back; but for some time the Socialists held their own; and when at last they rushed higher up the building, so severely had the soldiers suffered, that Kapritzi commanded a halt, to give them time to reload. Then once more they ascended the stairs, but now no foe opposed them.

Kapritzi had brought no lights, so that the search had to be continued in the darkness. From room to room the soldiers went, and at last they reached one on the top floor, whose heavy door was firmly barricaded, and in this room Lowritz and the remnant of his gang waited for their foes.

The panels of the door were soon burst in, and shots were poured through the opening; then the door was burst open, and the soldiers dashed once more at their foes, and mercy was neither asked nor given.

At that moment a light flashed on the scene—a fierce, flickering light. By it Lowritz saw Kapritzi standing at the door. With a frenzied rush the leader sprang at his hated foe, and his flashing sword swept the two soldiers who were in front of him aside. Kapritzi fired two shots, then he turned and fled from the foe he dared not face, nor in the wild confusion did the soldiers notice their colonel's action. He reached the stairs, then uttered a cry of horror as he saw that the flames were rushing up them. The building was on fire. He might even yet have descended the stairs, but in his abject terror he turned in the opposite direction, and with murderous hatred Lowritz followed. Kapritzi rushed up some steps which led into a turret on the flat roof of the building; then, as he looked from the roof down the great height, he knew that all retreat was out off. He could just see the tall form of Lowritz coming towards him, and, levelling his revolver, he fired shot after shot, but, owing to his terror and the darkness, only one of the shots took effect.

"Now we will fight with swords!" cried Lowritz.

"I surrender!" replied Kapritzi.

"There is no surrender for you or me!" retorted Lowritz. "I will show you such mercy as you showed my brother! Draw, you pitiful hound! Think you I would have asked for mercy at your hands?"

Kapritzi drew his sword, and the weapons crossed; but, though he fought with all the skill he could command, Low-

ritz gradually drove him backwards, until he was alarmingly near the low parapet which ran round the roof. Then he perceived his peril, and made a sudden rush, piercing his adversary's breast.

But although terribly wounded, Lowritz was not conquered; and so fierce was his attack that again he drove his enemy backwards. Kapritzi sprang back to avoid a sudden thrust; then, uttering a cry of terror, flung his arms wildly in the air. He made a desperate struggle to save himself, but, losing his balance, he fell backwards down the height.

Lowritz, with a sigh of mingled agony and triumph, sank to the roof, never to rise again.

Kapritzi uttered cries of terror as his body cut through the air. Something struck him a heavy blow. He had fallen into a fire-tree, and he clutched frantically at the branches as he was dashed through them; then he remembered no more, and by the time he regained consciousness his soldiers were standing round him.

"Where ever did you come from, colonel?" inquired the man who had acted as a spy. "It was very brave of you to leap from such a height; but it was very dangerous. I trust you are not hurt."

"Fool!" gasped Kapritzi, who was really more terrified than injured. "Do you think I could fall from such a height without being hurt?"

"It is improbable, colonel. The house caught on fire. I think some of those ruffians must have fired it. We thought you had escaped, so we came through the flames."

"The prisoners, where are they?"

"There are only three, colonel. We have them here. The others have met their deaths. It will save the executioner much trouble. I fear the leader, he who fought like any fiend, has escaped us!"

"He has not. I slew him with my own hand," said Kapritzi, romancing a little. "It was he whom I followed on to the roof, then we fought, and he fell before my sword."

"See! colonel, here he comes!" cried the spy.

"Close round me, men!" shouted Kapritzi. "Shoot the fiend down!"

"Stop, I was wrong," said the spy, nudging one of the men. "I quite thought I saw a form appear. I should not wonder if he has escaped even after all your valour, colonel, for I feel sure now that the man is not mortal. We await your orders, colonel."

And Kapritzi gave them in no very good humour, for he was terribly bruised; nor did he feel at all satisfied at the part he had taken in the fray, because he always tried to convince himself that he was a brave man, and he knew that night he had met one braver.

Leaving the building to burn itself out, the party of soldiers, carrying their wounded comrades, made their way back to the prison, and Kapritzi spent a couple of hours in drawing up his report of the capture of the band, which was really a very cleverly worded document.

Shortly after the soldiers left the burning building, Jack and Fred were upon the scene; but they only arrived in time to see the walls fall in with a great crash; then, what had been Natalie's home, was a pile of smouldering ruins.

"Never fear, Jack!" cried the young detective, when he saw the look of horror upon his comrade's face. "She will have escaped. Probably those miscreants fired the place purposely. Let us get back to my rooms; then I will make some inquiries. It is not safe for you to be seen. You have a terrible foe in Kapritzi, and there is no villainy he would stop at 'by the Czar's command!' as he calls it."

That very night, Fred, disguised so that few would have recognised him, went out to learn something concerning the fate of the beautiful girl who had won his comrade's heart; and, in an agony of dread, Jack awaited his coming. It was daylight when he returned.

"What have you discovered, Fred?" cried Jack. "Tell me in a word."

"That two ladies left that building yesterday morning, and from the description I do not doubt that they were Natalie and Lowritz's sister."

"I will find her yet!" cried Jack. "I will never leave this country until I do!"

"And I will help you," said Fred. "But, first of all, it will be well to communicate with Mr. Grane. Tell him that you believe you have heard some news of his missing child; that she is still living, and you hope to bring her back to him; also hint that his partner Rowlaski is not to be trusted, and, above all, enjoin on him the most absolute silence; then leave the rest to me, and I believe I shall soon discover Natalie's whereabouts."

And this advice Jack followed to the letter; but although weeks passed by, and the terrible winter came, Fred, in spite of his every effort, failed to learn the slightest tidings of Natalie.

CHAPTER VI.

CHASED—A FIGHT WITH WOLVES—CONCLUSION.

One night, as Fred was returning from his fruitless search, as he neared his apartments he was accosted by a strange man.

"I am entrusted to deliver this letter to either you or your English friend. It is from my dead master, Nomad Lowritz, and would have been delivered ere this, but we have been closely watched. In it you will find the address of his daughter. Beware, for you are watched by Kapritzi, and he is only biding his time to arrest both you and your friend. I have this information from one who is in his pay."

Fred handsomely rewarded the messenger, then hurried into the house. The messenger turned down some narrow streets; but as he did so two men stepped from an alley opposite the house where the young detective lodged, and closely followed the messenger. The ground was deep in snow, and they were only a few paces from him before he heard their footsteps. He had scarcely time to turn, when they sprang upon him, and wrested the revolver which he drew from his grasp.

"You are our prisoner!" cried one. "Resistance is in vain. Come quietly, and perhaps your life will be spared. See! we have help coming."

The man saw that resistance was in vain, and the soldiers conducted him into Kapritzi's presence.

"We bring you that traitor, Lowritz's servant, colonel," one of them said. "From what we have heard of his conversation he knows the address you wish to find."

"Is that so?" cried Kapritzi eagerly. "Tell me, fellow, where is this Natalie?"

"She died, colonel. She met her death in the fire!"

"Villain, you lie!" cried Kapritzi fiercely. "Take him below, and bind him. Perhaps the knout will make him speak!"

The wretched man was dragged away, and when Kapritzi entered the dungeon, he found him bound, while the executioner, with his terrible lash, stood beside him. At a sign from Kapritzi the fearful knout descended, and the wretched captive shrieked out the information demanded of him; but still the dreadful punishment continued, nor did Kapritzi give the order to desist until his victim was in a fainting condition.

"Let him be kept alive," he said. "If he has given a wrong address, his punishment will be repeated. Now, let a dozen men be prepared to accompany me, and let my horse be saddled. We will reach the farm to-night."

But ere this, Jack and Fred were already on their way, mounted on the best horses that money could command, and they reached the farm where Natalie had taken refuge while Kapritzi and his soldiers were still many miles distant.

Jack and his friend were shown into the little sitting-room, and presently Natalie entered; then Fred left them, and went to seek her companion, to make arrangements as to the future, for he knew perfectly well that Jack would take no heed of any counsel he might give. When he re-entered, Jack confirmed this opinion by informing him that Natalie had promised to be his wife, should they ever escape from that country.

"In that case a start had better be made at once," said Fred. "I learn the servant has not returned, which looks as though he had been captured, in which case Kapritzi would not be long in forcing him to reveal this address. They have a sleigh here that will carry the four of us to the next village, then we must make plans as to our future movements. Do not lose a moment in preparing for the journey; and remember the cold will be terrible."

In a very few minutes the sleigh was at the door, and the little party entered, Jack taking the reins. He was about to urge the horses forward, when the clank of swords reached him.

"Quick!" cried Fred, who had also heard the ominous sound. "The soldiers are upon us. Their horses will be jaded; ours are fresh. We must trust to their speed."

Then away they dashed at a speed that caused the sleigh to swerve from side to side.

Jack drew the heavy furs over Natalie, and bowed his head as the driving snow beat into his face. The soldiers had either seen or heard the fugitives, for Kapritzi's stern command to halt rang out; its only effect was to cause Jack to urge his horses into greater speed. Then bullets came whizzing past. Still on the fugitives sped, and as they glided swiftly past the pine forest, the fierce howls of the famished wolves rose above the shouts of the pursuers. The snow was now falling in blinding sheets, and the horses swerved as the icy blast beat into their faces, in spite of Jack's efforts to keep them to the beaten track, which was now almost covered by snow. The bullets flew wider and wider of the mark, and presently the shouts of the pursuers grew fainter.

"Steady your horses, Jack!" cried Fred; "I think our foes are taking the wrong direction."

"They will follow by our trail," replied Jack.

"I think not," said the detective. "The wind is drifting the snow across it. I believe we have escaped them. But you

are right. We must not check our speed. We have yet another foe. Those wolves are following us, and they are as terrible as the soldiers. Get your revolvers in readiness. I fear we shall need them before long."

As he spoke, through the driving snow he saw the grizzly forms of the famished wolves bounding after the sleigh, and at their fierce howls the horses quickened their great speed. They needed no whip now; their terror urged them on in that fearful race for life. Natalie drew closer to Jack, as though he could protect her from that terrible foe.

They had proceeded about half a mile, when Fred saw one of the wolves but a few yards from the back of the sleigh. Levelling his revolver, he took careful aim, and fired. With a yelp of pain the fierce brute fell struggling in the snow; but the remainder of the pack still came on.

Shot after shot was fired into their midst, and when one of the brutes was killed, the remainder of the pack stopped to devour it; while each moment the howls grew fiercer, as other wolves leapt from the forest to join the fearful chase.

Jack now guided his terrified horses further from the forest, and, reloading every chamber of his revolvers, Fred poured a regular volley into the midst of the pack, and the savage brutes stopped to make their terrible meal, nor did they again renew the chase.

Notwithstanding this, Jack still kept his horses up to their great pace, and presently they came in sight of a peasant's hut, which lay some miles from the outskirts of the village.

Here, with the aid of gold, the fugitives obtained shelter for the night, and before they continued their journey the following day, the woodman, who lived there with his wife, brought in word that the lifeless body of Colonel Kapritzi had been discovered on the outskirts of the forest by his soldiers, who had lost sight of him in the darkness, and only discovered his frozen body in the morning, after having searched for him all night.

For reasons of his own, Kapritzi had revealed nothing concerning Natalie in his official reports, and, thanks to this, and to the passports with which Natalie and her supposed aunt were furnished, which were in Lowritz's assumed name, the party encountered little difficulty in crossing the frontier; and perhaps the gold, of which Jack had his principal's instructions to make what use he chose, rendered their escape the easier. At any rate, the little party reached England in safety, and all doubts concerning Natalie's parentage were set at rest when Mr. Grane met her, so striking was her resemblance to her dead mother.

Then came Rowalski's punishment for the wrong he had done to one who had always proved his friend; that punishment is likely to keep him from further harm for life.

Jack is Mr. Grane's partner now, and the beautiful Natalie is Jack's partner; while his comrade Fred received a reward for his services such as would, if he so wished, render him independent of work for the rest of his life.

And thus, in their newly-found happiness, we take our leave of Jack and Natalie, his beautiful bride.

THE END.

PRINCE OF THE PRAIRIE

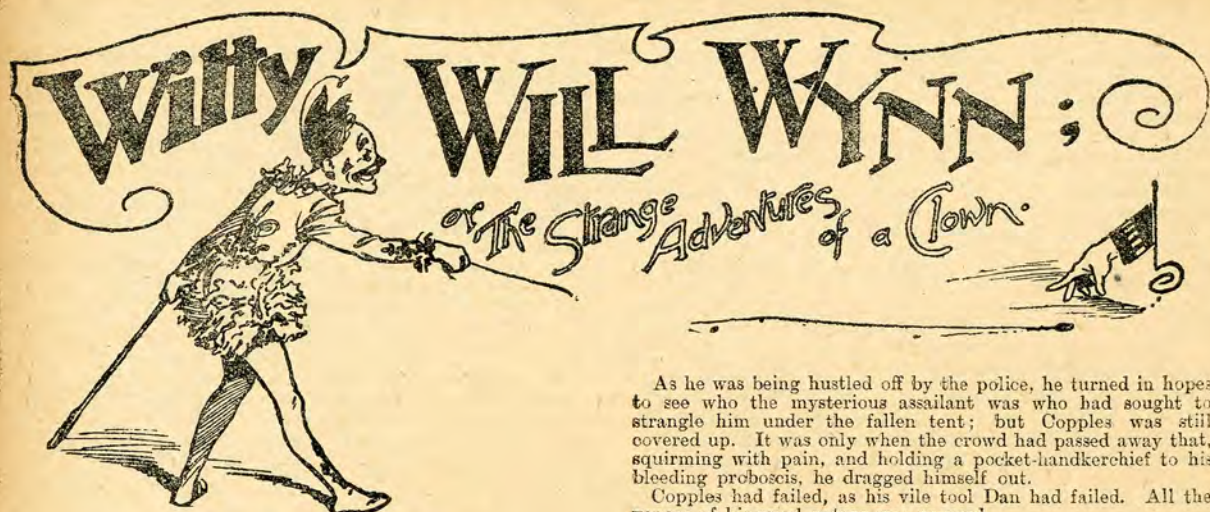
BY

LIEUTENANT LEFEVRE,

Author of "Azul the Aztec," &c.,

Is Published in Next Friday's

UNION JACK.



PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

WITTY WILL WYNN	...	Boy clown at Professor Romah's Temple of Matchless Mirth.
PROFESSOR ROMAH	...	Will Wynn's employer.
MR. COPPLES	...	Ada Graham's guardian.
JOE SWILLEY	...	His servant.
DAN	...	Two burglars.
MIKE	...	
ADA GRAHAM	...	Mr. Copples's ward.
Scene	...	Oldham.

Ada Graham runs away from her guardian, and goes to Romah's show. Mr. Copples offers Dan £20 to murder Witty Will. Dan accepts. The night following he sets out to do his deadly work. He is about to stab Witty Will outside the caravan, when a man stops him. Dan turns upon him and stabs him. Then he runs away, leaving the knife he used, which turns out to have originally belonged to Will, beside the body. Will is arrested as the murderer. An attempt at rescue is made, and in the confusion Will gets entangled under the canvas of a tent. A hand grips him.

CHAPTER X.

SLEUTH SLYMER, DETECTIVE—DAN TRAPPED.

Will was in the merciless clutch of Copples! The rush that had borne Will to the ground, and had torn him from his captors, had also overturned Copples, and the tent had collapsed over both of them. Rolled on, and half-stifled as he was by the struggling men on the top, Copples's fiendish brain had conceived the idea of strangling Will under cover of the confusion. The indescribable din would drown his cries, and his death would in all probability be attributed to suffocation.

But Mr. Copples was reckoning without his host. Will might be a little fellow, but he was all wire, muscle, and energy. Continual clowning, rallies, and somersaults had made him as tough as a bagful of nails. But he was hampered by his inability to move, and the horrible pressure at his throat was beginning to squeeze the breath out of him. He was lying on his stomach; but by a wriggle, worthy of the Human Serpent himself, he contrived to turn over on to one side. Then, with a last frantic effort—he was choking now, and well-nigh unconscious—he sharply jerked up his knees.

And Will's knees struck Mr. Copples in precisely the same spot where, only that afternoon, he had planted his feet—namely, in the pit of the stomach.

Copples relaxed his grip, and, with a hollow groan of pain, doubled up. Will, guided by the sound—someone above rolling off the canvas, and so giving him more freedom—let drive with his fist into the darkness, and found Mr. Copples's beaklike nose. There was a lot of vigour in Will's blow; consequently, blood flowed freely.

Meantime, the police had prevailed, and had driven back the crowd. The canvas was stripped back, a couple of constables rushed forward and grabbed Will, as, still dazed and breathless, he rose to his feet. Not that he had any wish to get away. It was the ill-advised zeal of his friends that had been the cause of all the trouble. Horrified as he was at the charge against him, and the mysterious fact that the murdered man had been stricken down with his knife, Will never doubted but that he could prove his innocence.

As he was being hustled off by the police, he turned in hopes to see who the mysterious assailant was who had sought to strangle him under the fallen tent; but Copples was still covered up. It was only when the crowd had passed away that, squirming with pain, and holding a pocket-handkerchief to his bleeding proboscis, he dragged himself out.

Copples had failed, as his vile tool Dan had failed. All the venom of his cruel nature was aroused.

"Curse him!" he croaked, as he stole away into the darkness. "Ugh! how my nose bleeds! Ugh! I feel as if I had got the cholera! But I'll be even with him yet. He shall not stand in my path for long. That clumsy idiot, Dan struck down the wrong person"—his eyes lit up with a malicious light—"but the boy will be charged with the crime!"

A sudden idea seemed to strike him. Late as it was, Copples did not return home, but, looking like some bird of ill-omen, made his way through the silent streets towards a disreputable quarter of the town.

"Sleuth Slymer will work up the case against him. Only he will want money. Ugh, everybody wants money!"

And he gave a deer groan at the prospect of parting with more of his beloved gold. Reaching a narrow street, the miser paused before a dingy house. On the door was a brass plate, unpolished and dull, bearing the name, "Mr. Sleuth Slymer."

It was long past midnight, and scarcely a polite hour to make a call; but Copples, still nursing his nose—it was swelling—did not hesitate to ring the bell.

A window on the second storey was flung up, and a night-capped head was thrust out.

"Go away, before I empty my water-jug over you, whoever you are. Ringing bells at this time of night. Clear out, d'ye hear!"

"Hist!" croaked Copples; "don't be a fool, man! It is I, Copples!"

"I beg pardon, Mr. Copples!"—the voice had assumed a cringing tone. "I'll come down and let you in."

If Copples looked like some bird of ill-omen, the man who admitted him might have been a ferret. His eyes were small and red; his nose, sharp-pointed as a weazle's. Sleuth Slymer, the private detective, had an evil reputation in the town; but though he was supposed to have been mixed up in many shady transactions, he had always kept clear of the clutches of the law. In his way he was clever, and had won several rewards.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Copples!" he whined, as he led the way into a shabby office on the ground floor, and lit the gas. "I did not expect such an esteemed client as yourself at this hour. Ah, sir, you have been injured. Your nose is damaged, and bleeds profusely. May I put the door-key down your back. It is a certain cure for a bleeding nose!"

"Certainly not!" snapped Copples; "never mind my nose, I've come to talk business."

Sleuth Slymer noiselessly rubbed his hands together. Business meant money, and he loved money almost as much as Copples did himself.

"Murder has been done to-night!" croaked Copples, eyeing the detective out of the corner of his eyes. "A showman has been stabbed to the heart in the fair, and a hardened young villain, William Wynn, a boy-clown, has been arrested!"

"Pardon me, Mr. Copples, but what has Will Wynn—a clever, funny little rascal—or the murder to do with you?"

Slymer's ferret-eyes were agleam with curiosity. The miser's thin lips tightened.

"Personally, nothing. I am only anxious that justice should be done. I want the crime to be brought home to the young villain. It would be a terrible thing if he were acquitted for want of proper evidence. Do you understand me, Sleuth Slymer?"

"Perfectly, perfectly!" said the ferret, with a cunning, leery look; "you want me, purely in the interests of justice, to hunt up evidence that will put the hangman's rope round Will Wynn's neck!"

Slymer paused for a moment, and scratched his stubby chin.

"Well, I might be able to do it—for a price."

Copples buttoned up his coat as if afraid his pockets were about to be raided.

"My terms," continued Slymer in oily tones, "would be low. £100 for working expenses, and £1,000 when the thing is accomplished!"

The miser gave two little jumps as if twice and separately he had been pricked with a knife.

"Do you think I am made of gold?" he croaked piteously.

"Pretty nearly so, Mr. Copples. And there's a chance of more gold flowing into your coffers soon—that is, if things go right. Eh, Mr. Copples?"

Some horrible insinuation evidently lay beneath the detective's words, for the miser turned a livid, greenish colour.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"Oh, nothing, sir; but my terms are very low for the work I'm to do. I don't think you ought to complain."

"Very well"—with a deep sigh and an agonised expression the miser drew out a leather case, and took from it five crisp twenty-pound notes—"take them; but if this sort of thing goes on much longer I shall die a pauper!"

"Thank you, sir. I shall start on the case as soon as possible. Will Wynn is down to Professor Romah's Temple of Matchless Mirth. I will pay it a visit. Perhaps"—the private detective winked a ferret-eye meaningly—"there may be some one there prepared to swear that this Will Wynn always was a vicious youth, and he had been heard to speak of doing for someone sooner or later. You may trust me, Mr. Copples, to see that the ends of justice are not defeated. Ahem! of course there may be a few additional expenses."

"Not a farthing more will I pay!" cried Copples shrilly, and dancing up and down as though he trod on hot bricks. "I'm beggared—beggared as it is!"

Sleuth Slymer evidently thought it wiser not to press the point, and a few moments later Copples departed homeward.

"H'm!" muttered the detective, when he had gone, "wonder what's in the wind? What's Will Wynn to do with Copples? It's funny, and it might pay me to find out. Will Wynn dead is worth something to the old miser; Will Wynn alive might be worth something to me. I'll just nose about a bit."

Copples was in a vile temper when Joe Swilley admitted him. It was not improved when Swilley, catching sight of his swollen nose, grinned immoderately.

"Well," he said, "have you found your ward?"

"No; and don't stand sniggering there. But I shall find her to-morrow. She's hiding somewhere in the fair. But I'll get her back!"

It might have been expected that Copples would have employed Slymer to discover Ada Graham's whereabouts; but, in the first place, it would have cost him more money, and, secondly, the miser believed himself competent to find her. Being her guardian, he was legally entitled to demand her being delivered up to him.

"I say, master," said Swilley, with biting sarcasm, "who's been trying to improve your features?"

"Don't be impertinent!" shrieked Copples; "don't—"

He did not finish the sentence. A low rat-tat-tat sounded out. Someone was knocking at the door. Swilley opened it. Outside, white and haggard, with the look of a hunted animal on his brutal features, stood Dan Dugger, the murderer. He pushed past Swilley into the gloomy hall. Copples started at the sight of him.

"Guv'nor, they're arter me! I wants brass to git away! I messed up the job; but it was you as put me up to it. I wants brass to git out of the country!"

Copples's eyes flashed for a moment with a wild gleam of rage. Then he seemed to control himself.

"I don't know what you are talking about. What job? I don't understand you!"

"You understands me well enough. It'll pay you to help me out of the way. If I'm lagged, I shall speak out! But I don't want to be lagged, and I sha'n't be, if you brasses up. I'll make off for Klondike, or some sich place."

The only light in the hall was the candle that Joe Swilley was holding. Copples seemed to have shrivelled up under the man's words. Dan did not notice the strange twitching of his thin lips, and when the miser, almost humbly, croaked out that he should have money, a greedy smile passed over Dan's coarse features.

"You shall have brass, Dan; not much, I am a poor man, but enough to take you to Klondike; but when you are rich, Dan, you mustn't forget the poor old man who helped you!"

"Yer 'and, guv'nor. I sha'n't forgit yer. But look sharp. We may have the slops down on us any moment. There ain't no time to be wasted!"

As a matter of fact, Dan was not so terrified as he made out. But he wished to accelerate the miser, and get as much out of

him as possible. But he did not quite understand the man he was dealing with.

"Swilley," said Copples, "you need not stay up. Give me your candle. I will settle up with Dan, and see him safely off the premises."

"Ere, what are yer larking at?" growled Dan, for Swilley was smiling rather strangely, "my misfortunes? It ain't no matter for jestin', that it ain't!"

"No. Only smiling at the idea of your going to Klondike."

"And why not? There's a openin' there for a man as is honest and hard-working."

"Oh, yes, you'll find an opening, perhaps sooner even than you expect. Good-night, Dan. A pleasant journey to you!"

"Are yer tryin' to git at me, or wot, with your sniggering and insinuations? You're a darned sight too witty for me! I'm a pore, hard-workin' man, I am, as lives by the sweat of my brow!"

Swilley laughed, then left the hall.

"How much, Dan," croaked Copples, "will satisfy you? I'm a poor man; but if £200 is any use, you shall have it—you shall have it!"

Dan was fairly staggered at the miser's liberality. He knew how unwilling he was as a rule to part with money, and he had reckoned on £50 as the most he was likely to squeeze out of him.

"Well, guv'nor!" he stammered, "I might gist manage to scrape along on it. Well, yes, guv'nor, £200, and I'm lettin' yer down light. But, there, I always was too soft-hearted!"

"I haven't got it here, Dan. You must come with me to my private room. The money's locked up. We will go upstairs to my private room."

It was a case of "Will you walk into my parlour," said the spider to the fly." And Dan was the fly, and Copples the spider.

Dan, though possessed of a natural low cunning, was not quick-witted. As he followed the miser up the creaking stairs, he chuckled to himself, thinking that he had fairly bested his man. Reaching the landing, the miser led the way down a long, thickly-carpetted corridor. It was only when he paused before a massive carved door, with polished brass handle, that Dan realised that he was outside the mysterious chamber where he had passed that gruesome night of terror.

Dan, thinking of the strange, weird thing that had sprung out at him, shivered. For a moment he felt inclined to turn back, and refuse to enter that "harnted" room; but his greed for money prevailed over his fears.

As Copples turned the handle, a horrible, saturnine grin seemed to distort his features.

"Come in, Dan; this is my private room. Not many people are privileged to enter it."

"I say, guv'nor"—Dan was hesitating—"there ain't no hanky-panky about all this? I'm a-goin' to have my £200?"

"Of course, Dan. Come in."

Copples entered first, and pressed a knob in the wall. A bright light shone out from the ceiling, illuminating the handsome furniture, the costly china, and the quaint cabinet, with its handleless doors. The light gave Dan further courage. He stepped inside. A moment later, there was a sharp click. The door had closed to. Glancing quickly round, Dan could see no sign of the entrance—only dark panelling stretching from floor to ceiling.

"I keep my little store here," said Copples, indicating the graven cabinet; "you shall have the money now!"

Then a truly strange thing happened.

Copples made a quick movement. The doors of the cabinet flew open. The astonished Dan saw him pass bodily into the cabinet. Then the doors closed upon him, and Dan was standing alone in the mysterious chamber.

"Ere, guv'nor, no hanky-panky! Look 'ere—"

He did not finish his speech. There was a sharp click, and the light went out.

Seized with a sudden terror, Dan groped his way to the cabinet, and battered away madly on the doors; but he made no impression on the stout timber. The blood froze within him, and dewy damps stood out on his forehead, as a faint, screaming laugh seemed to come from within the cabinet. It died away, and the ghastly silence was only broken by Dan's deep breathing. He had ceased to thunder on the doors. An awful paralysis of terror had come over him. Then he became conscious of a stifling sensation, and a faint, pungent smell assailed his nostrils. He could not see an inch before him, but something told him that suffocating fumes were pouring into the room from somewhere. He gave a groan, and sunk down in abject terror, on to the thick carpet. There was no mistaking the smell now—it was the smell of burning charcoal. The mysterious room was a lethal chamber!

Dan Dugger did not leave the house that night.

When, next morning, Mr. Copples came down to breakfast he attacked his food with more than usual zest.

"Well, master," said Swilley, "are you quit of him?"

"Dan won't trouble us again!" croaked Copples. "And now, Swilley, we've got work before us. We must find Ada Graham before to-day is over. We must search the fair until we do find her!"

"Well, we must look sharp about it. Yesterday was the last day of the fair, and many of the shows will have shifted before this."

CHAPTER XI.

HOW SLEUTH SLYMER VISITED THE TEMPLE OF MATCHLESS MIRTH, AND OF THE RECEPTION THAT WAS ACCORDED HIM.

The news of Will Wynn's arrest had caused the profoundest sensation. The nature of the evidence against him was known; but none of the show-people who knew the bright, cheery lad believed him guilty. He must be the victim of coincidence.

The fair was at an end. Many of the tents had been struck; caravans were moving off, but the Temple of Matchless Mirth still stood on its old site. But a great gloom hung over it. The great organ was silent. There were no cheery shouts, no rallies, no somersaults. The crowd that gathered round it was not composed of merrymakers, but silent men and women, gazing at the spot where the crime had been committed.

"I don't believe the lad guilty!" Professor Romah had cried when the startling intelligence reached him. "I'll stand by him, and I won't spare the money either!"

The morning following his arrest, Will had been brought up before the magistrates. The court had been crowded. Professor Romah and madame were there. The Human Skeleton, the Bearded Lady, the Masher Skeleton braved publicity. Sleuth Slymer hovered in the background. Will had been remanded. He bore himself bravely throughout. When he was led away, he waved his hands to his friends, and cried:

"All right, I'm innocent! I shall come out of this all right, never fear. Poor Ned, he was my friend!"

Then Will started, for he had caught sight of a face that seemed strangely familiar to him. Wedged in among the crowd was a beautiful girl, wearing the fantastic dress of a gipsy. Was he dreaming? Though her skin was stained dark, and her hair was black as the raven's wings, the features seemed to be those of Ada Graham, the missing heiress. Her eyes, bent upon him, were filled with a look of deepest anxiety. Yes, it must be her, for, as he was led out of court, she made a quick, almost imperceptible sign with her hand. And Will's heart throbbed with wild delight. Ada had contrived to keep clear of Copples's clutches. He hoped that she would still evade him. The disguise was excellent, and, but for the sign she had given him, he himself would not have been certain that it was her.

That afternoon, gloom still enshrouded the Temple of Matchless Mirth. Professor Romah, in his fur-coat, sadly smoked a cigar on the steps. Even his diamond ring seemed to have lost its glitter. Madame Romah, in the little box-office, looked like a queen of tragedy, as she sat there thinking of the witty one locked up in a police-cell. Even Sharp had refused to eat, and was slinking round with dejected tail—a picture of canine woe. The Skeleton Masher paced his erow side-show with a gloomy rattle of bones. The Human Serpent had never a wriggle left in him. And Frances Amelia, the bearded lady, sat in her caravan, moistening her beard with falling tears.

"Oh, ho!" she sobbed, "our little 'ero as never 'armed a fly, and was gallingitry to the fair sex, immured in a dungin deep. Oh, ho!"

Such was the state of affairs when Mr. Sleuth Slymer, bent on ferretting out information, approached the show, and, with an unctuous bow, climbed the steps. Professor Romah eyed him; he was not impressed with his appearance. Sharp gave a growl, and showed his teeth.

"The great Professor Romah, I believe," said Slymer oilyly, "the famous caterer of mirth, the William Whiteley of showdom, may I have a word with you?"

"Twenty, if you wish it!"

Unobserved, Madame Romah, hearing voices, had thrust her head through the trap of the box-office, and was scrutinising Mr. Slymer. A majestic look of withering contempt crossed her features. With a snort, she withdrew her head, and listened.

"I am a reporter," went on Slymer, "and am anxious, my dear sir, to obtain fuller information about William Wynn, who is charged with murder. Of course, in writing my account, I shall not fail to give a glowing account—to the best of my humble ability—of the wonders of this matchless temple!"

Professor Romah, scenting an advertisement, relaxed somewhat. He did not see how Will's case could be injured if he gave a few details about him. It might be improved in the eyes of the general public.

"William Wynn, the unsurpassable, unrivalled boy-clown, is the son of a Mrs. Wynn. Even in his infancy he evinced remarkable talent, turning a double-somersault out of his cradle to the astonishment of the family circle."

Slymer had drawn out a greasy notebook, when madame's head again popped out through the trap.

"Adolphus," she said, "a word with you!"

"Excuse me," said the professor, "my wife calls me. I will continue in a minute."

"Don't trust that man," whispered madame, when her husband entered the office. "I know him. He's not a reporter, but a private detective, and he doesn't mean any good to Will. He's probably working up the case against him!"

The professor had great belief in his wife's powers of discernment. There was no time to question how she came to know the detective; but he quickly whispered:

"All right. A spy, working against our Witty One, is he? Then I reckon before I've finished with him he'll be sorry he ever ventured near the Temple of Matchless Mirth!"

"I'm sorry," said the professor, returning to Slymer, "but important business calls me away. But if you will step inside the temple, you will find in the side-shows, the Human Serpent and the Skeleton Masher, both of whom will give you any information you require."

The unsuspecting Slymer rubbed his hands together, and passed into the show. Sharp, still sniffing around, followed, and wistfully eyed a certain portion of his seedy garments, as though a longing was upon him to fasten his teeth therein.

Then Professor Romah hurried down the steps, and made his way to a show, a little way off, owned by one Tom Bint, the English Hercules, a mighty man of muscle, one of whose feats was to swing round with his teeth a barrel with three men seated on it.

"Tom," said the professor, "there's a sneaking detective in my show, who is trying to ferret up information against the Witty One. What would you do with him?"

Will Wynn was a great favourite with Tom, who silently rolled up his sleeves, and revealed two enormous and muscular arms.

"Professor, any water or pump handy to your place? We'll give the sneaking beggar a bit of a wash!"

"There's a tub of soapy water inside the show. One of my men has been giving the benches a wash-down."

"That'll do!"

And the English Hercules, followed by the professor, strode across to the temple, where, within, Sleuth Slymer was asking the Human Serpent a number of cunning questions; but the Human Serpent, to use his own words, "had tumbled to the wheeze, and wasn't having any!"

Sleuth Slymer was not feeling altogether comfortable, owing to the vicinity of Sharp, who was circling round in a slow, meaning way, and ominously snuffing the air.

Near the stage stood a large washtub full of dirty soapy water. Slymer had not even noticed it as yet; but he was destined to know more about it before the day was over.

"Close the doors after us, madame," said the professor, with a wink, as he and the strong man passed in.

Scarcely had Madame Romah, smiling to herself, done so, when, looking up, she saw a dark-skinned gipsy-girl rapidly advancing towards the show. She lightly sprang up the steps. Madame stared at her in surprise.

"Hush!" whispered the gipsy-girl, "I'm Ada Graham. I have got this disguise—I'll tell you how later. I will not go back to my cruel guardian. But he is hunting everywhere for me."

Even as she spoke, the bird-like figure of Copples loomed distantly into sight.

At the same time, from within the show, came a shrill yell that would have done credit to a Red Indian, followed by a loud splash.

"You would come sneaking round here, trying to ferret out things against our Great Little Will, would you? Then in you go again!"

The wild yell and the splash that greeted Copples as he ascended the steps of the temple were caused by Bint, the English Hercules, suddenly gripping Sleuth Slymer by the scruff of his neck and a certain portion of his nether garments, and completely submerging him in the tub of soapy water.

"Ugh! puff! cough! murder!" spluttered the private detective. Then there was another splash as he again squelched under the soapy water.

"Bravo, Bint!" cried Professor Romah, as he stood by, a broad grin on his face.

The Human Serpent wriggled, the Skeleton Masher rattled with delight. Sharp was emitting a number of short, jerky little yaps of excitement.

"It's a case of the good old annual—the bath that only comes but once a year. Lave him again, my noble Hercules, spare not the water lest you spoil the detective. Once again, my noble Hercules, for luck!"

Encouraged by the Skeleton Masher's inspiring appeal, Bint promptly ducked Slymer for the third time. He was a baby in the strong man's grip, and all his struggles, kickings, and bitings were in vain.

The box-office in which Madame Romah sat was a small and badly-lighted little place; besides the portly and majestic madame, there was only just room for Ada Graham.

The strange noises did not deter Copples from his purpose, and, having mounted the steps, he turned his beaklike face through the pay-hole.

"The fair is over, there's no performance to-day, my good man," said Madame Romah majestically.

"Tut, tut!" jerked Copples irritably, annoyed by her patronising manner; "I don't want to see your paltry show. Are you Mrs. Romah?"

His eyes had wandered to the fantastically-dressed gipsy figure that stood, demly distinct, in the background.

"Madame Romah, if you please!"

"Well, well, madame, if you like! I understand that my ward Ada Graham has taken refuge with you. Now, plainly understand that, unless she is immediately delivered up to me, her legal guardian, I shall bring an action against you for abduction!"

Ada, standing in the background, was trembling with suspense. Madame Romah was visibly perturbed by the threat. Visions of law courts and heavy damages were floating before her eyes.

"Well," she stammered, "a Miss Ada Graham did spend a

night with us, but the next day she disappeared. She was afraid of her wicked old guardian, she said.

Madame Romah had been unable to resist the temptation of having a dig at Mr. Copples. The miser grinned painfully.

"Never mind what she said. Do you mean to tell me you don't know what became of her? Good gracious! what's that? Is another murder being committed in your booth?"

Another bloodcurdling yell had rung out from the anterior; but Madame, who had a shrewd idea of what was going on inside, calmly replied:

"They're rehearsing a little drama that's going to be produced in the next town. No, I can't say I do know what's become of her."

"Perhaps," said Copples, eyeing the gipsy figure, "that young person behind you could help me."

Ada was quivering now from head to foot. Discovery seemed imminent. Already, in her imagination, she saw herself being taken back to that horrible house where she had lived in a state of daily terror. But Madame Romah was equal to the occasion. She was of an inventive turn of mind, and the girl's disguise had given her a suggestion. It was evident that, so far, Copples had not recognised his ward.

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

How to Make Money in Spare Time.

To the boy who is sufficiently industrious, and who is possessed of a certain amount of ingenuity and cleverness, the task of making a little money, either for pocket-money or to help at home, is by no means a very difficult one.

Such pursuits as gardening—that is to say, attending to the gardens of other people—are closed to the boy whose whole day is occupied at business. What he wants is something to occupy his spare time, and with that idea in my mind, I have the following suggestions to offer:

There are numerous little articles which require no skill, only care and

groove on the other. The matchboard, originally 7in. wide, is now reduced to about 5½in. About 6ft. of this will be required for the article in question, the measurements of which are as follows: 10in. long for the two sides, and 5in. for the ends, the depth of both sides and ends to be the width of the wood—i.e., 5½in. The elongated, upright division is the same width as the sides, and 12in. high; the bottom piece is 10in. long by 5½in. wide, the extra three-quarters of an inch in the width being allowed to make up for the width of the two pieces of wood used for the side-pieces.

Use a carpenter's or a T-square when marking off the lengths of wood, so that the parts shall be true and square. The round hole in the top of the centre division can be negotiated with a fret-saw, a tool which most boys possess, or if they do not, should.

The knife-box (Fig. 2) is an article on exactly the same lines as the last-named, the sole difference being in the measurements, and in the shape and size of the centre division, which runs the length and not the width of the box.

The same material can be used, and about the same quantity will be required.

Divide the 5½in. wood down the centre, so as to produce two planks of 2½in. wide; from this cut out the sides, which are 14in. long, and the ends, which are 8in. long. The centre division, from its highest point to its base, is 8in. high, and as this cannot be produced from one piece of wood, a strip of the 2½in. and of the 5½in., each 14in. long, are joined together, as shown in the illustration marked A, the join being represented by the dividing-line B. A slight touch of glue is enough to cement the joint, which is further strengthened when the division is nailed into position between the two ends. The curved top and open handle space can easily be cut with a fret-saw. It will be noticed that the measurement given for the division is three-quarters of an inch less in length than that for the sides. The reason for this is, that the sides are nailed on to the ends, therefore the ends are nearer together by double the thickness of the wood used (which we suppose is three-eighths of an inch thick).

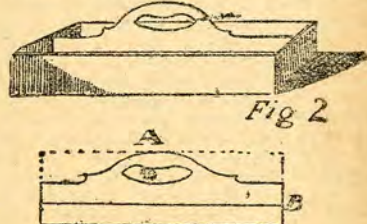
A good scouring with sandpaper is all

that is required to finish off the articles, though a coating of varnish, varnish stain, or paint may be applied if preferred.

Sink tides, housemaid's-boxes, and spice and salt boxes, are all articles which can easily be manufactured, with no great knowledge of carpentry, the best way to proceed being to take a shop-bought article for a model, and to copy it as carefully as you can.

Now, a few words with regard to cost and profit. The wood for the boot-brush-box will cost about twopence, unless an old box-lid or side is used for the bottom, when of course the cost is lessened. The knife-box costs no more.

Referring to an ironmonger's price



neatness, in the making. They may be divided into two classes: fancy and useful. The former, though perhaps the pleasantest form of work, is not, however, so remunerative as the latter.

Figs. 1 and 2 are useful kitchen articles, which can be easily turned out by the unskilful carpenter. The only tools that are required are those which are to be found in most homes—a hammer, a saw, and a plane. The material is cheap, being only matchboarding, which is purchasable at any timber-yard at the rate of three feet for one penny; but if empty packing-cases, soap-boxes, &c., are to be had, so much the better, as a saving in material is at once effected.

The bootbrush-box (Fig. 1) consists of five different pieces, which can be screwed or nailed together.

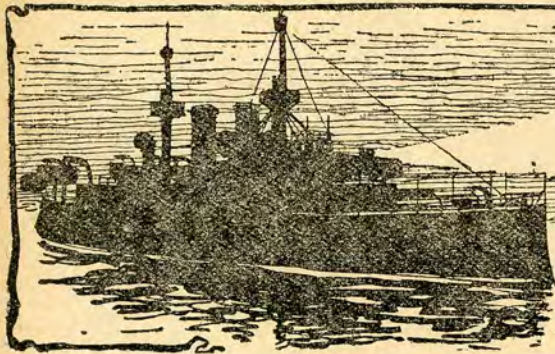
First take the matchboarding and remove, with a plane or saw, a thin strip from each side, to take away the bead and tongue on the one side, and the

list, I see that the price asked for the former article is 1s., and for the latter 1s. 2d., so that even if the home-made articles are sold at half-price, there is still a good margin for profit, as if several of one article are made at a time they can be turned out very quickly—at the rate of three to four in an hour.

If well made, no doubt the home-worker will be able to make some arrangement with a shopkeeper to take the work off his hands; but the best way to sell such universally useful articles as those described, is to make a house-to-house pilgrimage with them, when better prices can be demanded. If the maker himself is too proud, or has not the time to do this, he could probably arrange with some other boy whose day is free to do this part of the business for him for a commission of, say, 1d. per article sold.

In future articles I will give some suggestions for other home-work of a profitable character.

(To be continued next Friday.)



FROM THE QUARTERDECK.

A stained and faded UNION JACK reached me the other day, together with the following very interesting letter, which I am sure you will all enjoy reading:

"25, Queen's Road, Peckham, S.E.

"Dear Skipper,—I am sending you a copy of the UNION JACK, which I got possession of under peculiar circumstances. I am a steward on the R.M.S. 'Ormuz,' and we called at Ismailia to land passengers for Jerusalem. While we were there an Arab came to me, and asked me to buy a book. I asked him to show it to me, and, guess my great surprise, for it was the UNION JACK entitled 'A Son of the Sea.' I asked him where he got it from, and he said he brought it from Jerusalem, and he wanted 1s. for it, and he would not part with it until I gave him the money. So I thought I would send it to you with my letter as a curio, and let our readers see how your paper travels. I always take a lot of back numbers to my friends every time I go abroad, and they have a very big opinion of it. I have been a reader of the UNION JACK ever since it has been published, and, no matter what part of the world I am my sister never misses a copy, and sends them to me, which, after I have read, I give them to the sailors. I must now close my letter, asking you to enrol me as a member of the UNION JACK League, remaining yours truly,

"R. BEESON."

I thank my reader very much. The UNION JACK he was good enough to send me now reposes in the editorial treasure-chamber.

I am pleased to be able to announce that, in response to the almost universal request of my readers, Lieutenant Lefevre has written next week's UNION JACK story. It is entitled:

"PRINCE OF THE PRAIRIE."

and is, I think, quite the best that clever author has written.

It is indeed wonderful what a crack-shot can do. "Ray." A well-known French sharp-shooter has often made ten bull's-eyes in eleven shots at a man-target at a distance of twenty-five yards, the usual one in a French duel, and firing in the regular duelling way, at the word of command.

This, one must remember, is a very different thing from ordinary firing, where one is allowed to take aim. The marksman stands with his right side towards the target, or towards his antagonist, as the case may be, with his hand holding the pistol at his side.

The command given is: "Fire! one, two, three." The shot must be fired between one and three, and as the words are spoken quite rapidly, sometimes as fast as the second giving the word of command can talk, it is quite impossible to do more than glance along the barrel before pulling the trigger.

Another remarkable feat credited to him is this. A silver coin, the size of a sixpence, was secured to a target by driving four nails just outside its edge. In four successive shots at fifteen yards he sent the nails home.

He has broken twenty saucers in succession, thrown from a trap at twenty yards, and he can cut a thread at fifteen yards distance. He can throw a five-franc piece into the air, and rarely miss hitting it.

I would call your attention to the article on page 15, "How to Make Money in Spare Time." This series of articles is written by a gentleman who thoroughly understands his subject, not, as is often the case, by one who does not know a chisel from a screwdriver. The articles are thoroughly practical, and should enable any of you to add quite a nice little sum to your pocket-money every week.

There are more than 300,000 Germans in England alone, a few in Ireland, and a small number in Scotland. London has 70,000 Germans.

But in regarding these figures you must not forget that there

are in Germany veritable hordes of English, and while the German in England is generally an employee, the Englishman in Germany is usually an employer, with a branch house at home. Unlike some of our immigrants, the Germans make good and often extremely loyal citizens.

If I were you, A. F. Ferguson, I should advertise in the "Situations Wanted" column of one of the daily newspapers. You are sure to hear of what you want there.

*I am sure friend,
The Skipper*

"UNION JACK" LEAGUE.

1101, R. Knight, Hfracombe; 1102, A. C. Marshall, London, S.E.; 1103, A. Brenner, Dundee; 1104, J. Curwen, Liverpool; 1105, G. A. Bates, Henley; 1106, R. Dickie, Galashiels, Scotland; 1107, J. Cleland, Downpatrick, Ireland; 1108, A. G. Jones, Elsbay, Cheshire; 1109, H. Kendal, Wadebridge; 1110, J. Holland, Oldbury; 1111, T. Bird, Newcastle-on-Tyne; 1112, J. McBride, Downpatrick, co. Down; 1113, W. Chapman, London, N.W.; 1114, A. Pusey, London, S.W.; 1115, S. Jones, Elsbay, Cheshire; 1116, W. Watt, Coatbridge; 1117, P. Neville, Leeds; 1118, H. C. Rowe, Grimsby, Lincolnshire; 1119, W. Stewart, Bradford; 1120, W. A. Lane, Slough; 1121, G. M. Hedges, London, W.; 1122, F. Haslam, Blackpool; 1123, L. Lockyer, London, N.; 1124, W. Stainsby, Darlington; 1125, W. Parker, Chester; 1126, J. Mortimer, Greenwich; 1127, J. Moore, York; 1128, J. Falconer, Newcastle-on-Tyne; 1129, R. Dughes, Dudley; 1130, A. H. Yates, London, W.; 1131, L. Vinchill, Tunbridge Wells; 1132, F. Gee, Newton-le-Willows, Lancs; 1133, J. Walker, Coatbridge; 1134, E. A. Mountford, London, N.; 1135, W. Gostage, Liverpool; 1136, J. Young, Somerset; 1137, C. L. Cabannes, Boston; 1138, G. Gale, London, W.; 1139, F. Irons, London, N.; 1140, R. Bowers, London, W.C.; 1141, D. E. White, Haywards Heath, Sussex; 1142, F. S. Jenkinson, Stafford; 1143, F. Keibell, London, N.E.; 1144, V. Jemmett, London, N.; 1145, E. Roffey, London, S.W.; 1146, C. J. Phillips, Clifton; 1147, F. McCulloch, Portsmouth, Cornwall; 1148, R. Wilson, Leeds; 1149, W. Roberts, London, W.; 1150, P. Sudcliffe, Yorks; 1151, W. H. West, London, N.E.; 1152, P. Barden, London, W.; 1153, C. A. Barker, Birmingham; 1154, C. F. Derriek, Hull; 1155, G. H. Drummond, Llandrindod; 1156, W. S. Jones, Pontypool; 1157, J. E. Skingle, London, N.W.; 1158, W. Brazier, London, N.W.; 1159, W. A. Burcher, New Brighton; 1160, A. E. Harley, Portsmouth; 1161, B. G. Brown, Bristol; 1162, J. Kingcome, Stonehouse; 1163, G. Moore, Kingstown, Ireland; 1164, R. Learmouth, Polmont; 1165, H. Hepwood, Aylesbury; 1166, F. Richards, Nottingham; 1167, W. McKing, Dunfermline; 1168, H. Pusey, Oxon; 1169, W. H. Beckett, Birmingham; 1170, R. Gibson, Gateshead; 1171, J. Thurley, London, N.W.; 1172, D. Gorne, Edinburgh; 1173, W. Ward, York; 1174, J. A. Kenyon, Litherland; 1175, W. Seal, H.M.S. "Agincourt"; 1176, Miss Morrison, Killarney, Ireland; 1177, A. Walker, Erdington; 1178, W. Neill, Downfield, near Dundee; 1179, H. Bailey, Cambridge; 1180, R. Burchett, Bohemia; 1181, R. Allen, Patricroft; 1182, R. Addison, Ribblesdale; 1183, W. Campbell, Glasgow; 1184, J. Simpson, Buffet; 1185, W. F. Islip, Birmingham; 1186, F. Atkinson, Highcliffe; 1187, G. Rudd, Hadleigh; 1188, C. Furniss, London, S.W.; 1189, C. E. Heyes, Liverpool; 1190, G. H. Gilbertson, Preston; 1191, H. Muir, London, W.; 1192, A. G. Andrews, Edmonton; 1193, J. Bellfield, Chadderton; 1194, J. E. Kenyon, Sheffield; 1195, H. Hill, Grangetown; 1196, J. Harley, London, S.W.; 1197, F. Buckler, Devonport; 1198, E. Proctor, Atherstone; 1199, W. McNaught, Kirkcudbright; 1200, E. Smith, London, W.

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GOLD!

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