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SLAVES OF THE MINE.



Jedd San opened a sort of cupboard-door in the chest of the image.

PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY.

No. 200.

SLAVES OF THE MINE.

A Story of Burmah.

By C. ENGLAND COWAN.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS FAKIR.

An early September day was quickly closing. A hot, dank mist rose from the rotting vegetation, increasing in volume, but cooling as the darkness set in.

Two men, evidently Europeans from their appearance and dress, emerged from the shades of a giant palm-tree, and stood steadily gazing in the direction of Ranapura. Although that tiny Burmese town was distant little over a mile, the uncertain flickering light magnified the space, and the minarets of the two Buddhist temples could only be discerned indistinctly.

"Shall we start?" asked one man of the other in a whisper.

"No. We must run as little risk as possible, and had better wait the few more minutes that will bring us total darkness—that will cover our movements."

"Yes," interrupted his companion; "and prevent us finding our way."

"Bah! Do you think I don't know the way? Why, I could find it blindfold."

The argument was conclusive evidently, for no farther conversation ensued. The two men cautiously retired to their original hiding-place, nor did they make a reappearance for quite an hour. Then, with catlike caution and silence, they crept along a narrow path that intersected a bamboo forest, finally emerging into a semi-barren open space. To cross this opening seemed to cause some hesitation, but it had to be done; so, making the best of a bad job, they quickened their pace until safely within the confines of a cactus hedge. With bated breath they stood and listened. Every sound appeared to their wrought-up minds some ingenious signal of human effort. The jungle-fowl's harsh croak seemed to have a false sound about it, and the occasional scream from the peacocks that strewed the woods caused the men more than once to look at each other as if in mute acknowledgment of failure. All these noises, however, were natural, and in time the fears of the two men gave place to a courage that was more in harmony with their looks and physique, and the mysterious journey was continued. With stealthy steps they slowly wound their way amidst a labyrinth of tall cactus, the lanes or passages being formed to act as we understand a maze.

Surely man never verified what seemed an idle boast better than this man leading. As if guided by superhuman means, he led the way without a moment's hesitation, much to the admiration of his silent follower, who, however, if the truth must be told, had several qualms as to returning.

At length they arrived near the end of the maze, a signal of the hand denoting the necessity for more caution being made by the pioneer. The two peered through the thin hedge of artificial creepers, and beheld the marble steps leading to the principal temple, and beyond the temple itself, looking grim and mudlike in the imperfect light that an antiquated lamp gave forth. Long and searching were the glances cast towards those steps. To the minds of the two Englishmen it was absurd to think that a temple, containing precious stones of fabulous value, should not be guarded, or at least have sentries posted; but they failed to catch a glimpse even of anything of the sort. The absence of a sentry or guard at the entrance roused their suspicions. Both men were well versed in Oriental peculiarities, not the least of which is a universal subtle wiliness that no European can ever hope to baffle. Standing there merely thinking, however, they knew thoroughly well would not benefit them much, and if they intended getting inside the temple those steps had to be mounted. So they held a short, whispered

council of war, the outcome of which was that the man who had acted as guide, quickly but silently emerged from the skirt of the maze, and boldly mounted the steps towards the temple. His companion, with every faculty he possessed at its highest tension, stood, watching and listening, each hand nervously grasping a revolver—a weapon he knew how to use, not only with precision but marvellous promptitude. Not a sound—not the faintest rustle of falling leaves—disturbed the air. A weird silence, only broken by the distant howl and roar of wild animals in the forest they had left.

The minutes dragged—time seemed stopped by the man keeping the terrible vigil. Not a breath of wind, yet to his imaginative brain the lofty palm-trees appeared to move and bend themselves into all manner of fantastical shapes. Sometimes these fancied pictures took the form of men—of Buddhist priests in their white robes of office. Then flickering shadows seemed to pass and repass before his distorted vision, until when a man of reality glided silently past the hideous monster that acted as gate-post in front of him, he doubted his senses, and



They saw him remove a large piece of bark, that worked on a hinge just like an ordinary door.

thought the man a mere creation of his brain. And the creature vanished as swiftly and silently as it had approached.

Suddenly he became aware of an artificial light gradually approaching. All the brain-picturing ceased, and the man stood alert and ready for any emergency, his gaze riveted in the direction of the coming light. Slowly, and as if with uncertain movements, the light approached, until coming from behind a similar cactus hedge to that at his back, the watching Englishman beheld a dark-skinned man of great age creeping along on all fours. The man's costume was simple. It consisted merely of a loin-cloth and small turban. It was not the man, however, but his peculiar movements that excited attention. Crawling along on hands and knees, holding the guttering light first to one side then the other. The old man was evidently making earnest search for something. With many mutterings of thankfulness, he picked up a small key, which he clutched with a seemingly grim determination not to lose again. Just as he vanished behind the cactus hedge, the second Englishman appeared on the top step, and, beckoning to his comrade, whom he knew would be watching, the two followed the bearer of the light as quickly and secretly as a shadow.

Little dreaming that his every motion was watched by two keen-sighted, hated Christians, the old fakir leisurely made his way along a path which, from its condition, was evidently little used. The old man still carried the spluttering torch, perhaps through absent-mindedness, for it was not a necessity. In turning a corner too abruptly, a dusky leg came in sudden contact with a cactus needle, which had precisely the same effect on this Oriental as on an ordinary Englishman, for he commenced rubbing the injured locality, and to do this the more thoroughly put out the torch and used both hands. This was unlucky all round. It stung the old man, and made it more difficult for the two men following to watch the movements of the advance guard.

Having irritated the puncture until it really hurt, the old man muttered something no doubt in praise of the cactus family, and continued his journey. Eventually he stopped before the most gigantic tree the Englishmen had ever seen. In the dim light, of course, its size seemed magnified; but it was evident the tree was of immense girth. Creeping up close to the old man, they saw him remove a large piece of bark, that worked on a hinge just like an ordinary door, fumble about a few minutes, and then vanish within the tree. Full of wonderment, and fond of adventure that was tinged with danger, the two men looked at each other, nodded, and then entered the tree after the fakir.

CHAPTER II.

THE LITTLE WHITE QUEEN.

Precautionary measures had to be redoubled upon entering the cavity in the tree. Absolute darkness, of course, prevented their having the slightest inkling of the nature of their discovery. They stood and listened, and heard the fakir's retreating steps as he evidently descended. They waited for some time, long after the sounds had died away, before commencing their perilous descent; but once started found matters much easier than they had anticipated. Down, down, a seemingly unending flight of rude steps, with naught beyond the sense of touch to guide them. Finally they reached what appeared to be a sandy flooring, and rightly conjectured it to be terra-firma. With pulses beating strongly, the two men crept side by side, groping along vainly trying to find a wall or something to guide them. Suddenly they turned an angle and beheld the fakir, with his torch lighted and fastened to a neighbouring tree, doing something to a fragile bark canoe, which after sundry pushes and knocks, he arranged to his satisfaction, for, removing the torch from its temporary support, he placed it in a niche in the canoe, then picked up the little boat and walked off with it with the greatest of ease.

When the fakir had vanished, and the sounds of his retreating steps were no longer heard, the Englishman, who had a few moments before been acting as sentry outside the Buddhist temple, whispered to his companion:

"It strikes me very forcibly, Jack, old fellow, that we are a pair of over-curious idiots. To think that you, Captain John Armstrong, and I, Lieutenant Bertram Hall, of her Majesty's Dragoon Guards, should be wasting so much time of our six months' leave in creeping through holes after a wretched nigger, with nothing to gain but a possible jab in the ribs from a Burmese dagger. What do you propose to do now?"

Ignoring the initial part of Hall's remarks, Armstrong replied: "Hide somewhere; watch to see if that old sinner returns, then wait for daylight to reconnoitre."

"For what, though?"

"You'll see in time. In the meanwhile, let us get round here, and keep on the qui vive, and remain quiet."

They found a comfortable place to wait at. A bank of exquisite moss, as soft as down, and that emitted a fragrance of

great delicacy upon the slightest pressure. It was dreary work, though, watching and waiting for something to happen. Not that the night was so still, for it was far from that. Parrots and monkeys vied with each other in proclaiming their feelings. Wild, discordant shrieks occasionally pierced the air, which made the blood run cold, and these treble sounds were often accompanied by hoarse, deep-toned howls—howls of anger and of pain. By and by they heard the splash of oars, and from the direction of the sound gathered it was the old fakir returning. The old man dispensed with a torch this time, and soon placed the canoe in its original position, and vanished up the mysterious passage.

The night was calm, the atmosphere heavy, and the monkeys and parrots having proclaimed a truce, there were few sounds audible save the hum and drone of insects—sounds that possessed that monotonous intonation so easily workable into a lullaby. Gradually the two men felt the demands sleep was making for her share of the twenty-four hours, and although it had been arranged to watch in turns, it was not long ere both men were fast asleep, and running the imminent risk of discovery from the nasal duet they played.

The first ray of light that announced the beginning of another day roused the two men, who sat up, yawned, and rubbed their eyes in the orthodox fashion of the waking Englishman.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Hall, as, forgetful of the risk of being seen, he stood up to gain a better view of the gorgeous scene—a veritable tropical flower-garden. His companion, however, although equally surprised, had more caution in his nature, and soon made Hall relinquish his standing position. Both Hall and Armstrong felt the necessity for replenishing the inner man, and as both men were supplied with chocolate, their morning meal required little preparation. Before the meal was finished, a dense mist gradually enveloped the whole scene until nothing was discernible beyond a few yards. They were just about to take advantage of this natural screen to do a little reconnoitring, when they were startled by hearing the sweet strains of "Home, sweet home," wafted over the water the fakir had evidently crossed the previous night. It was somewhat awe-inspiring, hearing those familiar words in such a distant land, especially as they were evidently uttered by someone young. Both men looked vastly astounded.

"What on earth does it all mean, Jack?"

"Blessed if I know," replied Armstrong. "But it oughtn't to take long to find out. Come on, let us get into yonder canoe, and make for the direction of the sounds."

The frail little bark was unaccustomed to such giant forms as the two Dragoons, and showed unmistakable signs of preferring the bottom to conveying so much extra weight. Once Armstrong got the paddle at work however, the tiny craft went better; but it required all Hall's ingenuity to keep her afloat, for each stroke of the paddle caused a miniature sea to be shipped. A few minutes sufficed to cross the lagoon, but in getting out, Hall managed to put his foot clean through the thin bark, making the canoe absolutely worthless. As the mist was rising both men instinctively looked to see the distance, for as their retreat was cut off there was nothing for it but to swim. One glance upon the waters of the lagoon, however, dispelled all hopes of that means of regaining the mainland should they be on an island, for several huge alligators were swimming about, and had evidently followed in the wake of the canoe in anticipation of a relishable breakfast of white men.

"Looks well, eh, Bert?"

"Boat's turned," was Hall's brief rejoinder.

Undecided what to do or which way to turn, the two men stood irresolute for some minutes, when suddenly, to Armstrong's utter amazement, Hall burst out in a fit of uproarious laughter.

Quickly glancing in the direction from whence Hall derived his merriment, he beheld a young girl about fifteen or sixteen, surrounded by a goodly number of open-mouthed mulattos, upon whose black visage the most utter astonishment was depicted. The girl had undoubtedly been white at one time, but an Indian sun had coloured her to tan. She was really pretty, and looked most picturesque in the fantastic costume she wore. Of the whole company she alone seemed unimpressed by the sudden appearance of two enormous white men in yellow clothes and brown boots. The whole thing seemed so absurd, even Armstrong laughed, which, of course, set Hall's risible faculties going again. This seemed to have the desired effect of quelling the fears of the niggers, for one and all expanded their mouths, to the advertisement of beautiful rows of teeth. It was then Armstrong and Hall's turn to be surprised, for the girl walked up to them and smilingly asked:

"Which of you is the prince?"

Again all laughed. But Armstrong took the girl more seriously, and replied:

"I don't think either of us can lay claim to such a title.

But why do you ask?"

"Oh, I am so disappointed! Jedd San promised only last

night that he would try and bring my prince over this morning. But have you had breakfast?"

"No, my dear, we have not!" promptly replied Hall, whose stomach revolted at a breakfast of nothing but dry chocolate.

"Then come to my garden and I will provide some for you, and then you can tell me who you are, and where you've come from."

Both Hall and Armstrong were too bewildered to make any reply, but simply walked in silence after their little hostess. She led the way to an enclosed garden, the negroes taking care that the gate was opened for her. Indeed, they paid her such homage and attention that not a little puzzled the two visitors. If Hall showed wonderment at the scene depicted by the morning's first glimpse of light, no words could describe his feelings as he beheld the garden with its wondrous flowers and plants.

Fountains played here and there upon magnificent ferns where cool, green leaves tempered the air, and relieved the eyes from the glare of the surrounding vivid colouring. At one end of this Eden, which was walled in by an impenetrable mass of giant cactus, was a partly natural, and partly artificial arbour, the latter part of the wall consisting in a vari-coloured lattice-work of slender bamboos and canes, that to our modern minds would act as a dado. Above this, and covering not only the walls but the roof, were hung finely worked tapestries, each depicting some scene of Oriental splendour. The floor was really of some fine grass matting, but was so littered with the luxurious cushions of the East, that only an odd patch of flooring here and there was visible. Into this open-air palace this self-possessed little lady led the two dragoons, who looked and felt as awkward as if suddenly ushered into a Belgravian drawing-room.

At her bidding the two men sat; but, being unaccustomed to that means of resting, did not add to the beauty nor the picturesqueness of the scene. Then came breakfast. Bread-stuffs and luscious fruits, thin slices of buffalo tongues with little balls of rice, yams, and a sort of salad consisting of fruits and vegetables, the meal winding up with coffee served in golden vessels, and, of course, the fragrant cigarette.

Armstrong reclined on his cushion, blowing long, slender streams of blue smoke into the air. He was contemplating. Hall imagined himself an Aladdin, but, not given to mind-picturing, upset the fine train of his companion's thoughts by suddenly exclaiming:

"I say, would you like a bit of chocolate?" at the same offering to his hostess the remains of his early breakfast.

With childish eagerness she accepted the proffered sweetmeat, nor did she fail to evince extreme satisfaction in its consumption, so much so that Armstrong gave her his remains also.

"And now," asked Armstrong, "won't you tell us how you came to live here in this charming place, and—"

"Oh, I don't mind telling you what there is, but I don't remember anything before we came here. I say we, because both father and mother were here then. Poor father, they took off and made work in the ruby mines, and I've not seen him since. Jedd San says he died a long time ago. Mother and I were placed on this island, and when she died six years ago, they sent all these black slaves to wait upon me. It is lovely living here, and next moon I am going to marry one of the king's sons, and it was that which made me ask if either of you were the prince. Oh, it seems so queer to see white faces! There's nothing but black and yellow here. But you haven't told me how you managed to get here. Jedd San is always telling me that only he and the priests, besides the king, knows how to reach here. You see, there is the only entrance to the mines from here, and the water teems with ugly monsters to prevent anyone coming or going."

"Whereabouts is the mine?" asked Hall, his mind running riot at the thought of endless rubies.

"Oh, it is on another and smaller island over there. There are three islands together. Jedd San says Buddha made this big hole one day when he was angry with the king, and it frightened him so much he turned good. Buddha then made the islands pretty with flowers and trees, and showed the king where all the rubies were."

"Rats!" rudely remarked Mr. Hall.

"What are rats?" came the innocent question.

Armstrong reprimanded Hall by a look, and, turning to the girl, inquired:

"Will you tell me your name?"

"Dear me, I thought you knew! Daisy Dalton, but really my name is Margaret."

to being the private secretary and confidential servant rolled into one, though it must be admitted that San's secretarial work mainly consisted in taking verbal messages and looking after the ruby mine.

Strange as it may seem, Jedd San was Mohammedan, but kept his religious scruples well under control and disguise, and to Bhenja Khan, the priest, was a true disciple of Buddha.

Among Jedd San's numerous duties, he had to make a daily visit to the islands and report to the high priest the state of affairs therein, and especially to show what work had been done at the mine. San's feelings had become blunted. Many years' experience in almost daily sights of torturing had made him callous, but to Jedd San's credit, be it said, he had a small but soft spot in his heart for the white slave (as she was known to the priest).

Jedd San was astonished the morning of Armstrong and Hall's introduction to the island, to hear that the high priest intended visiting the ruby mines, a thing he had not done for quite two years. Immediately upon receiving the news, Jedd San hurried down the tree staircase, intending to pad the canoe with side-pieces of cork bark, in order to make the little vessel more buoyant. Imagine his complete astonishment to find the canoe gone. He searched here, there, and everywhere for it. Tried his usual landing-place, but, of course, failed to find a trace of it. Jedd San stood gazing upon the placid waters of the lagoon, a queer, sinking sensation prevailing within him, for he knew the temper and cruelty of the high priest. Suddenly San's blood received a shock that chilled every drop. He heard Hall's outburst of laughter.

"The voice of the Feringhee!" groaned San. The slaves have escaped from the mine, and have taken possession of the Garden Island!"

With nervous haste Jedd San remounted the steps, and not waiting to close the back door after him, hurried to Bhenja Khan's house.

The skinny visage of the high priest, puckered and parchment-like as it was, seemed to rise and fall with the passion that swelled within. His thin lips were pressed together, and looked a mere slit across the dark skin. But his eyes, they seemed positively aflame. Poor Jedd San saluted and trembled, and trembled and saluted again while waiting the orders of this holy man, who was pacing up and down, jerking odd sentences of Arabic out every now and then.

"Take men down and construct a raft, and see that it is done ere the sun tinges the cypress in our holy garden."

Jedd San saluted again, and vanished from the presence of the high priest with far more alacrity than he had shown in approaching.

At the appointed time the high priest, at the head of about two hundred cut-throats, approached the spot where lay the raft in all readiness. Except as to hair and complexion, the high priest, who had donned his state robes of office, resembled a thin specimen of the City of London alderman, minus, of course, that ridiculous emblem of City bumbledom—the furlined coat.

Bhenja Khan strode with a majestic step on to the raft, and muttering something which possibly did duty for a blessing, commanded the before-mentioned two hundred cut-throats to embark. The effect was unique and quite unexpected—the raft sunk. Experimenting with numbers proved that only half could be taken at a time. So the high priest, with Jedd San and a hundred chosen desperadoes, embarked, and were slowly rowed across the lagoon to the accompaniment of hideous shrieks from wind instruments, and the discordant roll of twenty different toned tom-toms.

Naturally this varied assortment of music soon reached the ears of Armstrong and Hall, and, indeed, all those on the island. To the Englishmen there was but one meaning to it, and that was an ominous one. The black slaves trembled with fright, for such sounds, they knew by bitter experience, were generally the initial proceedings of scenes of barbaric cruelty and torture. Little Miss Daisy Dalton, however, clapped her hands with unalloyed joy, because, as she said, she was sure it was Jedd San bringing her prince. To her, poor child, this coming prince was like a promised toy.

The negroes held a hurried consultation. They positively worshipped their little white queen, and instinctively felt that, should the coming horde discover two white men in the garden, they would be tortured for certain, and harm possibly be done her; and she seemed so pleased and happy talking to the white men. Their decision was quickly made. Two entered the arbour, and in a language neither Armstrong nor Hall understood, implored the little queen to let them hide the two white men until all was safe. She, in turn, made their wishes, known to the two dragoons, who, not only for their own safety's sake, but for their newly-discovered fellow-countrywoman's, acted upon the negroes' good advice, and were soon hidden in a hollowed-out space in the cactus hedge.

CHAPTER III.

BHENJA KHAN SHOT.

Jedd San was the chief servant of the high priest of Ranapura. To give a better idea of his position, it was equivalent

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The high priest might have made a name for himself as an Inquisitor, but he was no general, and had there been an armed mob on the island, it could have killed the two hundred men as they landed with consummate ease. The nature of the ground was against them, and the island was little better than a miniature forest. There being no opposition, however, which Bhennja Khan attributed to the fear of his august presence; the company, headed by Jedd San as guide, marched in straggling order to the garden before mentioned. Here they were met by the salaaming niggers, who lined the avenue leading to the gate, resembling, except for their colour and costume, the line of flunkies one sees at home occasionally.

"Where are the rebels?" demanded the high priest, speaking, of course, in his native language.

The poor, terrified niggers didn't know what to say or what to do. Of course, they were under the impression that the high priest referred to the white men they had just hidden. The sons of Africa did what was perhaps the best thing under the circumstances. They simply kept a discreet silence and salaamed. This naturally aggravated the irritable Bhennja Khan, and he bade Jedd San obtain the necessary information. Poor San's efforts were equally futile, and the high priest, losing patience, ordered a search to be made. About half an hour was expended in looking for the rebels, but, of course, the search was in vain.

The high priest then asked his white slave if the slaves from the mine had escaped—if she had seen them; and, receiving a reply in the negative, all Bhennja Khan's wrath turned against poor Jedd San, the innocent cause of all this commotion. San pleaded that he had not deceived the holy and mighty Bhennja, but the pleadings were useless. Jedd San, by command of the high priest, was stripped to the waist and pinioned to the stump of a tree, and his hands and feet securely tied. Then Bhennja Khan, with hands uplifted, gave vent to some more mutterings, which, however, were interrupted by a strong tug at his robes. The high priest turned in terrible wrath at such sacrilege, and beheld his white slave on her knees supplicating for the life of Jedd San. Knocking her over with a cruel blow, he bade some slaves convey her to her harbour and keep her there.

Bhennja Khan then produced a small lens, such as seen in pocket telescopes, and with it, and the aid of the sun, intended to burn out the eyes of poor, helpless Jedd San. In order that his sanctified arm might not tire in the irksome position of keeping the focus even, a slave's back was requisitioned, which acted as a support or rest. The high priest then threw back his cloak, baring his arm, and adjusting the lens to the correct focus, which he obtained by trying it on the slave's back.

He raised it to aim the deadly thin streak of white heat at Jedd San's eye, when a report from the cactus hedge made every man jump—jump so, that few knew for several seconds that their high priest Bhennja Khan was dead—shot through the eye!

CHAPTER IV.

DOWN INTO THE TREASURE-CAVE.

The commotion that ensued gave wondrous testimony to Oriental superstition. That the fatal bullet had come through any human instrumentality was never imagined, except by the negroes.

The two hundred armed men, who had come with such swagger and bounce, became a panic-stricken mob, with but one object in view, and that to escape from the bewitched island as quickly as possible. A tumultuous rush was made for the raft, when a struggle took place that cost many a man his life.

The fiendish horde of fanatics, having re-embarked on board the raft, the two dragoons emerged from their shelter and promptly released Jedd San from his painful position. The combination of fright, pain, and surprise held poor San spellbound, and his only means of testifying gratitude was in the commonplace salaam, which he made, however, with particular unction. The negroes gathered round Armstrong and Hall, and showed plainly that they were quite prepared to supplant their native gods, and worship the two Englishmen. While Armstrong held a palaver with Jedd San and the niggers, Hall went to the harbour to see and console the child queen of the island. The blow of Bhennja Khan had done no more than cause a temporary sting, and the gratifying news that Jedd San was alive and well, quickly restored Daisy to her usual good spirits. She at once suggested, and, of course, her wish was law, that they should celebrate the event by all sitting down at once to a sort of *à fresco* banquet. Armstrong demurred; he saw danger looming ahead—knew quite well that the priests would avenge Bhennja Khan's death somehow, consequently put this picnicking idea down as a waste of valuable time. Hall, of course,

backed Miss Daisy up; indeed, it gradually approached a contest between these two as to who could propose the most extravagant scheme for the general amusement of the mixed assembly.

In the midst of their merriment, there rose in the distance a succession of yells that made the blood run cold. They were the yells of frantic savagery worked up to a frenzy.

Jedd San explained it in solemn brevity.

"They're looting the mine."

The shrieks and yells became appalling. It seemed as if the fiends incarnate had risen in one mighty effort to raise the dead. The participators in the attack on the mine were little, if any, better.

Guided by Jedd San, the two dragoons made their way to that part of the island from whence could be seen the smaller one containing the mine. It was less than fifty yards away from where they stood.

"What do you think they will do next?" asked Armstrong of the fakir.

"Come here, sahib, and search for the hidden treasure."

"Then we had better get out of this at once," promptly remarked Hall.

"We would have to fell trees and make a raft. It would take much time. Long before we could be ready—ay, before we could get one tree down—they would be here. Look!"

As Jedd San spoke hundreds of men seemed to emerge out of the bowels of the earth and rush madly about. They were the slaves and their liberators. The raft being the only means of conveyance, a terrible fight ensued for its possession. Jedd San explained that the men knew nothing about the treasure, but in all probability, finding nothing at the mine, in comparison to what they had expected, had wrung the secret out of the governor of the mine by torture.

"They're coming!" suddenly called Hall.

And, sure enough, the raft had been got away, and those on board were making frantic efforts to get beyond range of the missiles hurled at them.

"Come along, Bert! Now then, Jedd, there's no time to lose; we must prepare to meet this crowd somehow, for no matter where we hide they will find us, and we must protect that child."

"The sahibs saved poor Jedd San from torture and death, he will save them and the white girl."

"And the niggers?" added Hall.

"No, I cannot take them. What are they, only black slaves, all grins and fears."

"Where do you propose to hide us?" demanded Armstrong.

"In the secret cave where the treasure is hidden."

"And you won't take the negroes with you?"

"Ugh! No; they are unclean beasts."

A yell of triumph from the approaching raft made the three men quicken their pace considerably. They soon arrived at the harbour where Daisy was waiting, evidently alarmed this time. Quickly she understood all, and followed Jedd San and the Englishmen without asking a single question.

Jedd San had only gone a few yards down one of the innumerable cactus avenues when he stopped and almost demanded that the two Englishmen should be blindfolded. Armstrong forcibly convinced Jedd San that he had very different metal to deal with than he thought, and San, grumbling and muttering, continued his way, the others closely following. Jedd San led them down several of the narrow lanes before they got a glimpse of the lagoon, but to the astonishment of all three, the fakir stopped at the edge of the water and announced that they were at the treasure-cave. Hall's fingers played nervously with the butt of his revolver, for it seemed to him that Jedd San was playing false. Not so, however, for the old man briefly explained that the waters emptied themselves down a big hole, which he indicated and proved by throwing in several twigs, which were sucked in immediately. He further explained that some dozen yards beneath the surface there were several large caves, apparently at right angles to the great volume that seemed to pour down. These caves, according to Jedd San, were never touched by the water, as the downward velocity was too great.*

Jedd San gave directions how the descent was to be made—feet first, and with arms extended. He was to go first and assist the others as they bumped upon the cradle or grid opposite the particular cave. As the sounds of the approaching horde were now close, too, and louder, there was little time to waste; so Jedd San, after a final caution, jumped in and

* The deep open space occupied by the lagoon and its islands was the result of several terrific shocks of earthquake, and the surrounding country being literally honeycombed with subterranean passages, several of the tributaries of the Irrawaddy flowed through them. Two of these entered and made the lagoon, emptying again about three miles distant near Bhar-el, or as it is sometimes spelt, Bharjel.

vanished in a manner simply marvellous. Following instructions, Daisy Dalton followed, nor did she show that amount of fear one would naturally have expected. Then it came to the Englishmen's turn.

"I will go down first," said Armstrong, "and if all is right I will fire at the roof. If it is only twelve yards, you ought to hear it if you lie down."

There was every sign of a wrangle between the two as to who should go first. Neither would give way, so they finally allowed chance to decide for them, and it fell to Armstrong to go.

"As soon as you hear the shot, Best, get the niggers here somehow; we can't leave them, you know."

"No need to call 'em, Jack. Look! there they are!"

Sure enough, not twenty yards away, stood the group of trembling negroes, some eight or nine of them. When Hall made a sign for them to approach, they required no second bidding. Hall pointed to Armstrong, and the negroes watched and marvelled at his sudden disappearance.

Try as Hall would, however, after he had heard Armstrong's signal, he could not persuade a single nigger to venture. They salaamed and grinned and shook their heads, until Hall began to lose patience with them. The noise from the other side of

room for such outside things, he was intently watching Jedd San, whose movements had aroused deep suspicion. Although Hall followed close on San's heels, he was suddenly surprised to see him and Daisy vanish. He called out to her, but not a sound came in reply, and they now left in absolute darkness.

The negroes became panic-stricken with fear, and yelled and groaned in alternate breaths. Hall and his comrade stood side by side, fully persuaded that the negroes, goaded by fear and exasperation, would attempt their lives, under the impression that the Englishmen had purposely led them into this death-trap. No doubt something of the kind would have happened, but, fortunately for the two dragoons, San's torch suddenly came into view further down the tunnel. With one spasmodic roar the terrified blacks welcomed the light, then rushed for it with fiendish delight, each man to meet his doom, for a silent but swift flowing stream divided them from Jedd San and his torch.

"Their impetuosity has cost them dear, Jack," whispered Hall. "I wonder what that brown beast will now devise for our destruction?"

"I don't know, Best, but we must try and be civil to him; it is our only chance of escape."

In a few minutes Jedd San and Daisy returned. San explained that he could only rescue three or four people, and that it was the Feringhee's fault in bringing down the blacks contrary to his advice. He next said he wished to prove his sincerity, and would show them the treasure, of which they could help themselves, as he meant to flood all the underground passages before leaving.

Again Hall and Armstrong followed their dusky guide, but this time he allowed them to see how easily he had evaded Hall's watchfulness before. A narrow crevice in the wall was protected, as it were, by an extra piece of the porous stone jutting out, and by quickly dodging behind this, of course those following were left in the dark, and unable to judge the locality.

Prepared to be ushered into a gorgeous underground palace, the two Englishmen were disappointed in being shown into a damp, clammy cavern, the walls of which were covered with a kind of stalactite, formed by the perpetual dripping of water. The ground was slimy and slippery, and was covered with ghastly-looking creatures that resembled legless toads with tails. Jedd San quickly led them from this unwholesome spot up a flight of rude steps into a chamber of much smaller

dimensions, but which had the advantage of being dry. In one corner there stood a wooden image of giant size that must have caused much labour to place in position, for it had to be brought there just as the others had—through the mighty volume of falling water.

It was a weird scene. The dusky fakir holding up the torch—the fantastic shadows reflected all round, and the slight figure of Daisy in the background by the two Englishmen. All were eager and excited as Jedd San opened a sort of cupboard door in the chest of the image—excitement that changed to awe as they beheld countless stones of rarest beauty. Of course, most of them were rubies; but amidst the sparkling mass of the precious red stones were a number of enormous sapphires, whose beautiful blue stood out in contrast. Strange it may seem to you, but it was stranger to Armstrong and Hall that nearly all the stones were cut and polished, and as Jedd San's torch moved, caused a scintillation among the myriad prisms that was positively dazzling. Jedd San then showed them nuggets of gold the size of coconuts, and pieces of moss and grass that were real silver, but these paled after the rubies and sapphires. The fakir signalled to the amazed spectators of such fabulous wealth to help themselves, which, it need not be said, was promptly done.

Daisy Dalton forgot about her prince as she toyed with handfuls of the sparkling gems. She was ignorant of their value, but charmed with their beauty, their lustre and colour. Hall and Armstrong each filled their pockets, the former regretting



The high priest fell to the ground, shot through the eye.

the island plainly indicated that the marauders had landed. Hall pointed in the direction of the sounds, and by dumb show demonstrated the throat-cutting performance the negroes might expect if found. That had the desired effect. Reluctantly, but pushed by his fellows, the oldest negro got to the brink of the water and fell in, only to vanish as quickly as the others had done. Then the others, one after another, slid into the sluice, and just as the pioneers of the looting party arrived at the harbour, Hall jumped in. He said afterwards he felt as if some giant power grasped him, and pulled him down with frightful speed; and just when he thought all was over, his feet touched something hard, and ere he knew what it was, a hand grasped him by the belt and pulled him violently out of the water.

Jedd San stood with ignited torch raised high above him, but the scowl on his brown face augured ill for someone.

"The Feringhee have not kept faith with me, they have brought these ugly black slaves, and now we must all perish."

Armstrong and Hall just gathered sufficient to understand that some threat was made, so tried to appease the old fakir's wrath; but all attempts were futile. The fakir moved towards Daisy, and began speaking to her in a low voice; then, lifting his voice, commanded all to follow him. Through a narrow passage that water had worn smooth, they trooped after their Indian guide. Armstrong drew Hall's attention to the fact that the tunnel in which they were groping about was of lava, or something like pumice-stone; but Hall's mind had no

audibly that they hadn't a sack, when a sudden cry of alarm from Jedd San interrupted him. All four listened with bated breath. At first nothing could be heard but the trickle of the water in the lower cavern, but gradually another noise became more audible—the sound of heavy tools being driven against the soft and yielding lava somewhere overhead.

"It is the escaped slaves digging!" announced Jedd San. "They have heard the shout the blacks made, and are aware of the cave now; we must go at once!"

So once more the quartette moved off, but this time in a totally different direction.

CHAPTER V.

JEDD SAN'S STRANGE CONDUCT.

Shortly after Bhennja Khan's departure to quell the rebel rising at the mines, another priest, Saikaban, who was next in order of the priesthood at Kanapura, and resembled in office what a dean does to a bishop at home here, conceived the idea of a visit to the chief temple. Such an ordinary affair as that of course was daily, often hourly; but as with the Hebrews of old only the high priests were permitted to go beyond a certain barrier of the temple.

Now, Saikaban was a man of an inquisitive turn of mind, and not overburdened with scruples, religious or otherwise, so he thought the absence of Bhennja Khan an opportunity not to be missed, and determined to make a survey of the inner temple. He with true Oriental caution left no stone unturned to gain admission without many seeing him. It was hopeless to think he could enter the temple without someone noticing; but his idea was, the fewer the better.

Having entered the temple through the same entrance that Armstrong used, Saikaban moved about in his ordinary manner until satisfied that no one was following. Then he cautiously made his way towards the inner, or forbidden part of the temple. First of all casting a look behind to make finally sure Saikaban divided the folding curtain, and entered the sacred ground—an act he knew that if discovered meant his death by torture.

Like many other cases that might be cited as parallel, Saikaban soon found that he had risked much to find little, and his first thought was the absurdity of making such a fuss, and having such terrible punishment for the breaking of a rule so stupid.

Not seeing or finding anything to excite his curiosity, the inquisitive priest was just about to retrace his steps, when his attention was attracted to a strip of tapestry that occasionally moved as if wafted by a slight wind. To go and satisfy himself on the point was a matter of a few seconds only; but Saikaban's astonishment was supreme. The hanging tapestry hid a small window, from which an excellent view—almost a bird's-eye view of the islands could be had.

From that narrow window Saikaban saw all. He saw the high priest fall—though he couldn't imagine what had caused it until he saw the two white men appear on the scene, and finally he watched Jedd San and his followers dive for the treasure-cave.

His future action was soon decided. Collecting twenty men upon whom he could rely, Saikaban led them to that part of the country where the underground tributary emptied itself into the main river. There Saikaban and his trusty warriors crouched behind the undergrowth waiting the arrival of Jedd San and his company.

In less than an hour's time their patience was rewarded by seeing a canoe shoot out of the tunnel into the open day. The sudden glare after the darkness naturally blinded the Europeans, but Jedd San's trained orbs quickly saw the trap that was laid for them, and saw the hopelessness of the situation. In front of the canoe, stretched across the stream just where it joined the main river, was a thick rope of grasses spiked by innumerable cactus and other thorns, and on either bank could be seen the dark forms of men waiting their inevitable capture. To attempt to cut the rope barrier was useless, as it would take time even with sharp instruments, and during the effort the least tug from the land would upset the frail craft and precipitate its occupants into the seething waters. The few minutes that meant grace before touching the rope were ample for the quick-thinking men to see that no alternative was left them but to run the canoe ashore and be taken prisoners, although both Hall and Armstrong had misgivings as to their ultimate fate, and felt not a little remorse in their being the means of bringing such danger upon the innocent child sitting so close to them. It was too late, however, to rake up thoughts of that kind. Hall was for fight, but Armstrong prevailed upon him not to fire, just simply to wait events, and see what happened.

To the disgust and rage of the Englishmen, as soon as the canoe touched the bank, Jedd San sprang ashore, and, salaaming Saikaban, said:

"Behold your faithful servant Jedd San has delivered the hateful Feringhee into the hands of the holy and mighty Saikaban."

More than one set of fingers grasped the handle-butt of a revolver, to once and for all settle accounts with the perfidious Jedd San.

"The Feringhee stole the canoe and sailed to the island in search of the holy treasure," continued Jedd San. "They killed Bhennja Khan the high priest, and then tortured the faithful San to make him divulge the hidden cave of the treasures. Your faithful servant is revenged in delivering them into your hands. The black slaves are all drowned, and none but the holy and mighty Saikaban and his old servant know the way to the cave—except these dogs of Christians!"

Armstrong and Hall were immediately bound hand and foot, placed upon a rude litter, and marched off, whither they knew not. As they were tied face down on the litter, they could see next to nothing, but heard Jedd San speaking with Daisy, but in so low a tone that neither could detect what was said. After about an hour's march a halt was called, and Armstrong and Hall lifted from the litter and fastened to a tree. Night was fast approaching, and Saikaban and others, who now appeared on the scene, held a hurried consultation, and soon the fate of the Englishmen was settled. They were to be sacrificed to Buddha in order to atone for the death of Bhennja Khan. The tom-toms sounded their weird note, accompanied by the droning of the troop of people who preceded the prisoners to the temple. The van of the procession had just reached the marble steps referred to in the first chapter when some startling news evidently reached Saikaban. The brown visage of the priest turned brick-dust colour, and orders were issued at a great rate, each succeeding one being in exact opposition to all the others, with the very natural result that the greatest confusion existed. The litter with the prisoners on was dropped as abruptly as if a piece of burning coal, while the late guards scurried off as if suddenly possessed of some evil spirit.

"I wonder what's in the wind now, Bert?" asked Armstrong.

"Hanged if I know," came the reply; "but I wish we'd had a fight for it, old chap. Just listen how scared the lot seem. If they are not going to roast us I wish they would roast something for us, I'm beastly hungry, Jack, aren't you?"

"How you do mix up your sentences, Bert! Hush!"

Another but softer voice also said hush, and deft fingers were soon busy undoing the cords that bound the two men—the fingers and the voice belonged to Daisy.

Hall's first movement upon his release was of course to get up, his second to kiss Daisy, who laughed, and thought it all great fun.

Just as the trio were deliberating as to their procedure, a dark form was seen wriggling towards them. Hall whipped out a revolver, murmured a silent prayer that his weapons had not been taken from him, and drew a bead on the object approaching.

It was Jedd San.

Jedd San soon saw that the Englishmen were freed from their bonds, and arose and walked to them salaaming.

"Well, what do you want here?" demanded Hall, who was the nearer of the two men.

"To assist the sahibs in making their escape!" came Jedd's reply.

"A nice sort of creature you are, too. Do you think we mean to trust you again, you liver-coloured scum!—not much. So just make yourself scarce, or some cold lead will be introduced into your black body!"

"Ah! The sahibs don't know Jedd San. They think he is a traitor, and means to deliver them to the priest. Jedd San told the little white queen how she was to undo the cords, and—"

"Yes, that is quite true. And Jedd also told me that if he hadn't pretended and acted as he did, we should all have been killed."

That statement somewhat assured the sceptical Hall, who, however, felt compelled to suspect the fakir a little, just as a cat doubts the bona-fides of a dead mouse.

"Look here, Bert, we must trust Jedd San, and I think, considering that you saved his life, he will not be so degenerate as to play false."

"The slaves are about to attack the town," interrupted San, "and if they are successful, and they seem possessed of the strength of fiends, they will certainly loot the whole town, temples, and all. I will show you a secret passage from the temple, and until an attempt is made there you had better hide inside. I will bring you news as the fight goes on."

"And for goodness' sake, San, bring us something to eat and drink!" Hall implored.

Jedd San left them, but soon returned with the desired food and drink; and as the fight was evidently raging hotly, if noise was anything to go by, he made them enter the temple, and showed them the secret passage.

CHAPTER VI. A TERRIBLE FIGHT.

Garden island was turned into an open air madhouse. Men, who had been incarcerated in the hot mines for years, had suddenly been released—saw the sun and all the grandeur of Nature running riot in the tropical country. The blaze of colour from thousands of flowers, the huge trees, and tall, delicate palms—all were new—and all were unnoticed. The fever of loot and revenge burned within them, from the strongest to the weakest.

The boarding of the raft had been a striking exemplification of the survival of the fittest; and of the hundred men who managed to obtain and retain a foothold, not one of the original band of Bhennja Khan's troops was amongst them. The fever of excitement had given these men, who had been buried alive, so to speak, the strength of ten men, and those who imagined their physical powers to be above their fellows were swept to one side like a gust of wind scattering chaff.

Nearly every nationality was represented, but how they came to be there was, and always will be, a mystery. One exception there was, and that was a noticeable one. Not a single Chinese managed to get to the garden island. The cunning of the Celestial was for once of no avail against the brute strength that prevailed. It must not, however, be imagined that the general physique of those who did reach the island was anything out of the common. There were some, of course, whose limbs were just a huge mass of quivering muscles, but by far the greater number were emaciated wrecks, whose abnormal strength was merely the transient fever of insanity that would soon pass, leaving behind it a terrible reaction.

No disturbance occurred on the raft while crossing the narrow strip of the lagoon. As soon, however, as the rude pile of trees touched the banks of garden island, a mad rush was made, the men scattering in all directions, each bent upon finding the place where the treasures they themselves had found were hidden.

Daisy's arbour was the scene of a terrible conflict, and was in full swing, when a few who were wandering aimlessly about heard the negroes yell beneath them. No words could depict the scene that followed. Men worked like fiends; some had rude implements, but the majority burrowed with their hands and nails, until the latter were torn off, and even that had no effect in quelling their ardour. They worked and fought with each other like a pack of famished wolves over a carcase, until, without a word of warning, the ground beneath them gave way, precipitating men and earth into the tunnel. Only those who had been placed hors de combat were left alone. One and all rushed to the spot where the huge hole was, and, without giving a thought of consequences, leapt after their fellows.

Now when Jedd San's quick ear caught the sound of hard instruments being forced on the roof, he, vulgarly speaking, took in the situation, and quickly led Armstrong and Hall (Daisy he took by the hand) to where a canoe was kept. Before he got in, however, he ran back some twenty or thirty yards round a bend in the tunnel, and lighted the torch, carefully propping it up. It was a decoy to bring the escaped slaves to their doom, for between them and the lighted torch was the swift but silent stream that had engulfed the hapless negroes.

When the contingent of the fanatical slaves, who fell with the earth, managed to regain a standing position, and scramble from the debris of the fallen lava, or, really, earth and lava, they beheld the light in front of them. One demoniacal yell of delight was uttered, and a rush made for what they imagined was a lamp in the treasure cave. Not a single individual escaped the trap, but over fifty, thanks to Saikaban's rope across the stream, managed to get ashore, close to the spot where Jedd San had run in the canoe.

If the men were consumed with fever before, it reached a frenzy when they landed, and severe vengeance for the trap they had so narrowly escaped. Led by a man of gigantic stature, and each armed with a club, obtained where they stood, the band made their way in the direction of the sound of tom-toms—Ranapura.

Excitement, and the thirst for revenge, enabled this motley crowd to scale the heights to the village in an incredibly short time; but by the time they arrived at the outskirts of Ranapura, their courage and strength were both quickly evaporating, and they were no longer callous to the hurts and cuts their naked feet received at every stride.

Under the direction of Saikaban a party of his hirelings, armed with obsolete rifles, began firing upon the approaching foe; and, although the marksmanship would not have been considered form for Bisley, still a great many of the escaped slaves fell either killed outright or severely wounded. With only rude clubs for either offensive or defensive purposes, it soon became apparent to the most sanguine that their chances of success were very remote. Just when all hope seemed past,

the giant, who was the self-elected leader, called upon his followers to scatter themselves and approach under the covering of the undergrowth—a tactical movement that upset the calculations and aim of the riflemen.

From bush to bush these men kept on their slow but certain march, until at a given signal they rushed pell-mell upon their enemies. For more than half an hour a hand-to-hand contest waged with the utmost ferocity. Quarter was neither asked for, nor given. As a defender of the place fell, his conqueror possessed himself of his weapon, and no matter what the description might be, one and all were used as clubs. What the end might have been is doubtful, but the capture of the giant leader virtually ended the fight—his comrades losing spirit at once, and only continuing the fight a few minutes ere taking to flight, only to be pursued and slaughtered.

As soon as this happened, Jedd San ran off to the temple to acquaint those anxiously waiting there with the result of the fight.

Saikaban had now the opportunity that he had yearned for for years—the uncontrolled power over the "big man of the mines," as the rebel leader was called. Three or four years prior to the time of this story, Saikaban, while inspecting the mine for Bhennja Khan one day, was particularly struck with the muscular development of the giant, and, to satisfy himself that it was muscle and not wood, Saikaban had the poor wretch tied, and then experimented upon him with slightly poisoned cactus needles. The cruelty of that day was never forgotten, and upon Saikaban's next visit, accompanied by the high priest, the muscular slave managed very cleverly so to arrange his salaam to Bhennja Khan, that his head came into violent contact with the top-piece of Saikaban, causing that sepi visage to contort itself into many shapes with pain. Jedd San soon learned what the punishment of the rebel leader was to be, and at once made for the temple to warn Armstrong and Hall, and to get them to hie them away through the secret passage, as the man to be tortured in the temple was the little white queen's father.

Armstrong and his comrade listened with great eagerness to Jedd San's whispered news, and after a really long cough, San suddenly left them, returning, however, very shortly with a small bag full of something which he handed over to Hall, Armstrong having taken Daisy to the hiding-place, and at that moment having a difficulty in persuading that determined little lady of the necessity for her staying secluded. When he returned to the temple, he found Hall as busy as he could possibly be, and, much to his disappointment, Hall declined any assistance.

Outside, but beyond the reach of hearing from the temple, an unusual excitement prevailed. Men might occasionally be seen flitting from a dirty mud hovel to the bazaar, returning with some gaudy fabric, the product of the looms of Lancashire.

Here and there stood eager groups of expectant men and women discussing the all-absorbing subject of the coming ceremony—the torture of the rebel and the two dragoons, and the appeal to be made by Saikaban to Buddha that he be proclaimed the high priest in place of Bhennja Khan.

Jedd San, as servant of the priest, had lighted all the lamps in the temple; but as soon as the last one had the torch applied to it, San, contrary to his Oriental training, turned his face towards where Hall and Armstrong were hiding, and positively grinned.

That grin once and for all satisfied the two Englishmen that Jedd San was their friend, and could be implicitly trusted.

Only another quarter of an hour elapsed, and the hiding and excited men in the temple heard the din of musical instruments and tom-toms—the approach of the dread procession headed by Saikaban.

CHAPTER VII.

SNATCHED FROM THE SACRIFICIAL ALTAR.

Saikaban entered the temple with evident pride and satisfaction. A perpetual grin of malicious joy suffused his ugly face, making, with his grotesque costume, a hideous spectacle, fitting to the vile torture he intended for his victims, but for one in particular.

As in Westminster Abbey or St. Paul's, when a state function is being performed, the offices of Ranapura were allocated to their various positions according to their rank, forming in this instance a rude semi-circle around Saikaban, who stood a dozen yards or so from the curtain of the inner temple, which was the only part of the temple left in darkness.

Upon what must be called an altar, directly in front of Saikaban, Robert Dalton, the chief rebel, was bound. The priest looked down upon his defenceless captive with that anticipation depicted you sometimes see expressed on the features of a gourmand, who gloats over the delicate morsel he is about to carve.

The carving implements of Saikaban were small evidently, for they were contained in a little box only a few inches across; but from the oft glance of satisfaction the box received, it must have held something of uncommon value. The contents were two spiders. These insects, about the size of our garden spider, are fearful creatures. Their legs are covered with soft hair or down, each hair being in turn covered with cross hairs, as branches form a tree. The titillation these spiders cause when crawling over the skin of a human being will often produce insanity before the person so tickled is aware of their presence, for the sensation is only realised some seconds, perhaps minutes, after being actually crawled over. Naturalists say the minute hairs or tentacles on the feet act as an irritant poison to the skin, with an itching unbearable, followed by terrible pain.

This was to be Dalton's punishment.

Saikaban, waving the box about above his head, muttered something wholly unintelligible; and then, with great pretence of ceremony, began unscrewing the lid; but before that slight effort had succeeded, the two lamps nearest the curtain suddenly went out.

Saikaban stopped the finger and thumb operation with the box, and demanded Jedd San to relight the lamps.

The wily Mohammedan at once left the temple for his torch—at least that is what Saikaban and the others thought he had gone for; but San, immediately upon reaching the steps, turned in the direction of the tree with the back door.

Jedd San kept the company waiting some time, and Saikaban, becoming impatient, decided to continue the ceremony without the two lamps' assistance.

The olfactory nerves of Orientals generally are not (fortunately for them) ultra-sensitive, but the diabolical odour that gradually enveloped that temple just when the priest decided to go on with the ceremony was too much even for them. Sundry coughs and sneezes, with intermittent noises of marked peculiarity, interrupted Saikaban, nor did he enjoy immunity from the effects of the nauseous smell. He opened his mouth, no doubt to give some order for the abatement of the nuisance, but so much foul gas and smoke entered the cavity that the order never came, but in its place a gasp and splutter, the latter dying on the priest's lips as they closed with a snap, partly, no doubt, to prevent the further inroads of the smoke and smell, but principally through absolute fright.

The curtain dividing off the sacred portion of the temple had been divided, and there, before the eyes of all, save, perhaps, those of Dalton, was seen a fiendish little snake of fire, twirling and writhing in a cloud of dense smoke. All saw it was fire, and all saw it was in the shape of a snake, and all believed it was animate. But the fear of Saikaban soon reached the point of frenzy when, from behind this curling, twisting snake, he plainly saw Bhennja Khan alive, and moving about near another fiery snake.

The eyes of the awed Burmese were riveted on the scene behind the curtain, else they might have seen the terror depicted on Saikaban's face. His colour changed to a dirty green tinge, possibly receiving a little assistance from the weird light of the temple, but his trembling body magnified the effect.

Hall had calculated upon a general flight so soon as the superstitious men beheld the snakes and Jedd San disguised as the late high priest; but his experiment had acted too well, and instead of a stampede, one and all stood spellbound. This in no wise suited Lieutenant Bertram Hall, so as an extra inducement for Saikaban and his followers to make their exit, the dragoon entertained them to a yell of profound volume, at the same time extinguishing the two gunpowder snakes. The combined effect was startling in its thoroughness. In less than a minute the temple was empty, excepting the two Englishmen and Jedd San, and the prisoner on the rude altar.

A few words, and fewer strokes of a knife, convinced Dalton that he was free—stiff and sore certainly, but free once more. He would have said much in thanks and praise; but Jedd San interfered with the trite suggestion that they had better make good their escape at once. An immediate move was therefore made in the direction of the hiding-place where Dalton's daughter had been left. Fortunately no one mentioned the

fact to him, else in his condition the shock of not finding her might have unhinged his mind, for certain it was not a sign of Daisy could be found. They searched with unremitting care every likely and unlikely place, but failed to find the least trace of her. She had vanished as completely and mysteriously as if spirited away.

Rage was on every face but Jedd San's. The old fakir looked supernaturally solemn, and persistently wagged his head from side to side, but no feeling was visible. He seemed stunned and unable to think. He adored his little white queen, and was convinced that some harm had befallen her, for only Saikaban could possibly know that passage, and Jedd doubted whether the priest was really aware of it, hence her disappearance was a complete mystery.

Disobedience always brings retribution in its wake. Miss Daisy Dalton objected strongly to being left in an underground passage while her friends were, as she thought, having great fun scaring the niggers. So she just waited sufficiently long to allay suspicion, and then cautiously felt her way back to the temple, where, more by luck than management, she contrived to open the door, and secreted herself in a corner of the inner temple, from whence she had a clear, uninterrupted view of the proceedings. She forgot, however, that to open the door from the limited passage was one thing, but finding that same door from the temple side was quite another, and while her friends were anxiously puzzling their brains about her, she was wandering round and round the temple.

Robert Dalton, who it must be remembered had no notion as to the identity of the lost maiden, argued that the lives of four men should not be sacrificed for one girl—especially as he had heard that great care and attention had been shown her. To such a proposition Jedd San waxed wroth, and glared with no feigned malignity upon the Goth; but Armstrong and Hall felt pity towards the man. They could understand his anxiety to get away, to be free after so many years' captivity, and they therefore made allowances; but withal the deepest pity was for the man's hereafter when he learned that the missing girl was none other than his daughter. Armstrong put an end to all ideas of flight by stating in a calm, matter-of-fact-way that he and Hall had determined upon her rescue, and nothing had happened to change their intentions. As soon as Dalton heard that he showed—and to the great satisfaction of all three listeners—that the sense and power of chivalry had not been flogged out of him, for he turned to Armstrong, and, speaking under strong emotion, said:



Hall watched each little streak of flame as it shot along, and wondered how long it would be ere the whole was alight.

"Gentlemen, don't think me a brute—nay, worse, something without feeling altogether. That I am impatient to get away from this fiendish spot you may very well imagine; but as you have decided upon this girl's rescue, and as she appears to be nothing to you beyond claiming the same country for birth, I'm with you. You saved my life, saved me from torture, and I'm one with you in any game that is going. Just you tell me or show me what the scheme is, and allot me the riskiest bit in it, and see if—"

His sentence was never finished, for a wild scream from the temple interrupted him.

"She's there!" exclaimed Hall. But as he spoke all four moved with quiet but rapid strides towards the secret door. Jedd San opened it, and stayed whilst the others silently entered. All seemed still and quiet within, and they began to doubt whether the scream had really come from the temple, when Dalton suddenly sprang towards the curtain, uttering a hoarse roar that might have emanated from some wild beast. The movement gave direction for the others to look, and they saw Saikaban carrying off Daisy, bound and gagged. Dalton must have recognised his daughter, for no man could raise such an amount of frenzy for a stranger. With two leaps or bounds he reached the priest, who immediately dropped his helpless burden, and stood ready with an ugly-looking tulwar. A smart, upward movement of the bright weapon smote Dalton a terrible wound; but it had no more effect than a pin scratch, for he grasped the priest by the waist, and swung him round and round his head, smashing him into an unrecognisable heap upon the narrow steps that acted as a dividing line between the public part of the temple and the inner or sacred portion.

"I say, Jack, if we don't clear out from this locality soon, there will be a very high premium on priests," remarked Hall, who of course saw something comic even in a tragedy like this.

Armstrong deigned no reply. He didn't appear to know that Hall had even spoken, so absorbed was he in the sudden, the impulsive action of Dalton.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOST IN A BURMESE TEMPLE.

While Jedd San released Daisy from the bonds and gag, the two soldiers examined Dalton, who showed no signs of life, having literally collapsed after killing Saikaban. The wound the priest had inflicted was a terrible one, and it required no medical knowledge to see that the end was only a matter of a few minutes.

It seemed hard and inhuman to leave their fellow-countryman to die in a Burmese temple, but what could they do? No effort of theirs could restore him to life, and as to burying him that was pure sentiment. It was therefore decided to make all haste away. So the three men, with Daisy under the immediate care of Jedd San, once more traversed the damp passage which led from the secret door in the temple.

All this time the natives were collected in little groups discussing the awful vision they had seen, and wondering whether the Bhennja Khan they had so plainly beheld was Bhennja of the flesh, or of the spirit. Of course, with an ultra-superstitious people, the latter theory had the greater number of supporters, hence the all-important question remained what reason could be ascribed for Bhennja's visit? Some argued that it augured well for Saikaban, others, on the contrary, contended that it was a distinct caution to Saikaban to beware. They were unaware of the priest's surreptitious visit to the inner temple.

In the midst of the discussion there came Daisy's scream, followed soon after by the shout of rage from her father. Had it been daytime, of course an immediate inspection would have been made to see into the cause of the two cries; but it was night, and your Oriental has a peculiar fear of darkness at any time; but when spooks are about—well, they discreetly keep indoors, or if travel they must, do their best to collect as big a crowd as possible. The suspense waiting for further cries that never came, and the absence of Saikaban, for they knew he had gone towards the temple, got simply unbearable, so between forty and fifty men decided upon a tour of inspection.

The discovery of the dead body of Dalton, and the mutilated Saikaban sent a thrill of awe through the dusky warriors. How



He grasped the priest by the waist, and swung him round and round his head.

Dalton had got loose never occurred to them, nor did they trouble to think about it. All they were interested in was to find out whether the rebel had killed the priest, or if Saikaban's death was due to the weird appearance of Bhennja Khan. As our detectives would say, there was little to work upon to form a motive or to give a clue, hence a burning desire came over each man to enter the sacred portion—not out of mere idle curiosity, but from a genuine desire to fathom the mystery, or rather, the sequence of mysteries.

The punishment for transgressing in that direction they knew was death by torture; but they argued that under such extraordinary circumstances some excuse might be made—yet no one would volunteer to risk it.

The end of all the arguments and palaver was that all should cross the threshold, and thus be equally guilty. With the aid of lamps and torches, an inspection of the inner temple was therefore made. A sudden cry from one of the searchers attracted all in his direction. He pointed out what were evidently finger-marks, and had been covered, or at least smeared, with blood. From their position it was evident to a close observer that the remainder of the hand must have been inside the wall, hence there were positive signs of the existence of a door, which they were not long in discovering. Then, and only then, it flashed across the minds of some of these men that the two Englishmen and the white girl were missing, and then someone also drew attention to the fact that nothing had been seen of Jedd San since his departure from the temple in quest of a torch. It gradually dawned upon these men, then, that they had been made the victims of trickery, and during the scare that succeeded the prisoners had escaped, and Saikaban, suspecting the game, had returned to the temple just in time to see the prisoners making off, had killed Dalton, but the others had overpowered him, and left him as he still lay, an inanimate mass of flesh.

Hall's gunpowder snakes were forgotten, and in place of the frenzy of fear that had unmanned them so short a time pre-

viously, these men entered the passage, calm and determined. They had no light, and none had ever been in or knew this passage before; hence their movements were made with great caution, and their advance was slow.

Step by step they crept on, not a sound issuing from them until quite two hundred yards had been traversed. Then the contingent who were acting as pioneers or advance guards stopped, for they plainly heard the sound of voices ahead. This information was quietly given to the main body, and with still greater stealth these forty odd revenge-thirsting fanatics gradually approached to within a dozen yards of their unsuspecting enemies.

Jedd San and Daisy were in the van, Armstrong and Hall being a couple of yards behind, keeping close in order to watch the direction taken, as San's torch declined to burn properly. San at last stopped, causing a slight collision as the two heavy Dragoons bumped against him, and indicated by raising Hall's left arm that a sudden turn to the left was the course. Why none of them spoke just then was due to Jedd informing them that they were passing under the priest's house, and silence was advisable, merely as a precautionary measure.

San led Daisy up several wide steps—steps that Hall and Armstrong both stumbled over, not anticipating a rise. Just as Hall was about to anathematise San for not warning them of the steps, a wild rush was made by the men behind them, who, unsuspecting the abrupt upward turn taken, swept past with a wild cry—a cry that increased, and became one of baffled rage as their efforts to capture the escaped prisoners so utterly failed—their disappearance being beyond the ken of the savages. Torches were soon produced, however, and they quickly found the steps, and scrambled up them with marvellous rapidity.

About forty of these steps up, the two Englishmen stood waiting, a revolver in each hand. So eager were the nurses that they retarded each other's progress, for as the height increased the steps became narrower, and these bloodthirsty wretches got wedged. Into this wedge of humanity the leaden contents of two revolvers poured, the light from the first shot, slight as it was, sufficing for both men to take in the situation and make the most of it.

A temporary panic ensued. Such deadly shooting was a revelation to the Burmese. Those behind, however, clamoured so, and made such frantic efforts to pass those who hesitated, another rush was made, men climbing over dead and wounded comrades just as they would have trampled upon molehills. They made the mistake this time of having a light behind them, which gave the defenders a better chance, and while Hall picked off the leaders, Armstrong loaded the emptied revolvers. This was a good arrangement, for though Armstrong could shoot fairly well, he was nothing to Hall, whose revolver-firing was the admiration of every Tommy Atkins in their regiment.

Against such terrific odds what wonder that the badly armed Burmese had soon had enough? Those who were able quickly got beyond the range of Hall's death-dealing weapon, whilst those only slightly wounded—and it must be admitted they were few—feigned death, so terrified were they at each flash from above.

Finding that pursuit was at least for the present at an end, the two men quickly began mounting the steps in order to catch up with Jedd San and Daisy. They naturally came to the conclusion that the fakir would push on at all hazards to get his little white queen to some place of safety, and as long as they only had these steps to mount the course was obvious. Difficulties soon presented themselves, however, for they came into what seemed a large cavern, and which direction to take then was a question that baffled them.

In absolute darkness, neither possessing a single match, there was but one course open to them. Armstrong walked a few yards and fired, while Hall laid down and tried to gather some idea of the cavern from the quick flash of the explosion, but it was useless. Armstrong then suggested a systematic search by keeping to the wall and feeling their way; but, try as they would, no boundary or wall could they find. It seemed as if they were seeking an end to space, so futile were their attempts. Disheartened and disgusted, they sat down to quietly discuss the situation.

"I wonder," remarked Armstrong, "if it would be possible to get a light by taking a cartridge to pieces?"

"In what way, Jack? Do you mean to try and fire it by the percussion powder?"

"No; I thought we might possibly ignite the powder by friction, and by placing the powder on a bit of paper I have we might succeed."

"I don't think it would act. You see, even if we managed to light the powder, the chances are that the paper would only smoulder. But, taking everything as a success, have we enough paper to make many spills with?"

A quick search followed, when it was evident that Hall's calculation was correct. They possessed about twelve square inches of paper between them.

Hall then proposed firing, and trusting to hearing the bullet strike the opposite wall, but then they remembered the number of echoes the other shot had raised, and that scheme was rejected.

"It strikes me very forcibly, Bert," Armstrong began, after a silence of several minutes, "that when we went groping about for the wall, we travelled in circles, and, maybe, are only a few yards from our original position."

For answer, Armstrong felt a strong hand grip him by the arm—an undoubted signal for silence, and to be on the qui vive.

They strained every nerve, and breathed inaudibly, so suspicious were they. By and by they could hear the sound, faint in the extreme, but there, for all that, as if some soft article were being slowly dragged along the ground. Both men silently rose, and, although unable to see one another, and no signal passed between them, the same manœuvre was tried by each. The right hand gripped a revolver, while the left was moved about as an octopus uses its feelers.

Standing back to back, they waited the closer approach of this hidden enemy. Whether it was the continued pursuit, or some strange, wild beast, of course they could only conjecture, but the former idea prevailed in the minds of both men.

Waiting there in absolute darkness, uncertain of the foe that was creeping so silently towards them, and retreat of any kind cut off, no wonder their hearts beat rapidly, and their breathing was short and quick.

The suspense was ended in a way never for a moment calculated upon. Somehow the wretches in pursuit had located the spot where the two men stood, for they suddenly felt a strong rope twine round and round their legs, the impetus being given from one end of the rope having a weight attached, similar in all respects to the lariat used by the cowboys of Mexico and Texas. Standing as they were back to back, the lariat bound them together, and ere a hand could be lowered to remove or attempt to unfasten the twining rope, they were twitched from their feet, and lay struggling on the ground. Immediately the cavern was lighted by innumerable torches, and a dozen Burmese made a savage rush at the fallen Englishmen. They reckoned, however, on success too prematurely. Crippled as far as legs were concerned, they certainly were, but their hands were free, and once more the army revolvers were used with deadly effect. So accurate was the shooting that the natives made a discreet exodus towards the opening of the cavern, but in their hurried flight a lighted torch was left burning on the ground. To unravel the lariat took time, although the utmost speed and exertions were used, the thought of the torch dying out giving a wonderful incentive. Just as the last circuit of the hide rope was disentangled from their legs, the torch gave a flicker and the flame died away, leaving a smoking, smouldering length of dried grasses. Hall, regardless of the chances that he exposed himself, dashed across the intervening few yards, and soon had the dying torch in his hands, and was coaxing it with sundry waves in the air, and by gently transforming his lips and breathing apparatus into a bellows. Armstrong stood by his side ready to fire should an inquisitive head protrude again into the cavern, but all was quiet, and Hall soon had the torch going again, the first sign of flame being welcomed by a feeble cheer.

Even with the torch it was a matter of great difficulty to keep in any direction, as the cavern was literally honeycombed with smaller ones leading from it. Through each one of these the two men went, working quickly but systematically. In the "five hundredth," Hall said—in the ninth, as a matter of fact—there was a small hole just wide enough to permit a man to crawl in. That no stone should be left unturned, so to speak, Armstrong stooped down, and wriggled some way up this miniature tunnel. To Hall's astonishment, Armstrong called out to him to follow, as there was daylight ahead; and, sure enough, in less than ten minutes, the two dragoons were once more breathing fresh air in the open. There was a lid or rude covering at the exit mouth, which Jedd had evidently kept open purposely, but which was now carefully replaced in such a manner that further pursuit from the underground passages was beyond possibility. The next thing was to look about them and see whereabouts they were. It was loose ground, with plenty of undergrowth, but where, they couldn't tell. For one thing, it was only just daylight, and a heavy mist obscured everything at a distance.

"The best thing we can do now, Jack, is to rest a bit, and when we are able to reconnoitre, look after some grub; I'm simply famished. How do you feel in the Army Service Corps Department?"

"I am quite of your opinion; and, by the way, we must be sparing of ammunition; I've only ten shots left."

"And I six," replied Hall, with more solemnity than usually came from that irrepressible young man.

A convenient shelter offering, some comfort was found, and the two slept.

CHAPTER IX.

AFLOAT ON A RAFT.

They had three hours' good sleep before being rudely awakened by the downpour of rain that was soaking them. The two sat up and gazed upon the misty atmosphere that enshrouded them. Everything was enveloped in heavy, curling waves of low-lying clouds.

"If we only knew where we were, or where to go, this rain would be our salvation. But which way do you think we ought to try?"

"I'm blessed if I know!" replied Hall; and from the tone it was evident he didn't very much care. "What I am particularly anxious about is where our dinner of yesterday and breakfast of to-day is to come from, for I tell you, Jack, I feel just on the turning-point of becoming a cannibal."

Armstrong laughed, for just above Hall's head, and nearly touching him, was a great bunch of ripe bananas. Hall, following his comrade's set stare, beheld the luscious fruit, and was soon—and, indeed, so was Armstrong—busy peeling and eating what they unanimously decided was the best thing they had ever introduced to their teeth.

Having demolished a goodly number of bananas, they sat down to talk over the situation. As this rain was likely to continue for several weeks, their chances of coming upon Jedd Sen and Daisy were extremely remote; and that point being settled, the only matter of importance left was to decide upon the course to be taken.

After a lengthy discussion, Armstrong wound up the debate.

"I don't think it is worth the risk, Bert, to try and get back to camp; and if we were successful, the chances are those beggars we left in charge have made their way to Ava. So I fancy our best thing to do is to try and find the river, and construct some sort of raft and float down. The rainy season has now commenced in real earnest, and the current will necessarily become stronger every hour."

"Right you are, Jack; but I suggest we stow some fruit aboard in case of accident, and, of course, they're better than nothing, but I can't say bananas are very filling to a hungry man."

A few minutes later they set off in search of the river, each man carrying a big bunch of bananas.

The bad luck that had attended these two now seemed inclined to reverse the order of things and let them enjoy a taste of the other side. They soon found the river, and to their joy found several trees that had been felled by the natives for boat-building. Three of these cork trees they bound together with a creeper something like our bindweed, only much thicker and stronger, and after three hours' hard work they managed to push this roughly improvised raft into the river. Two tree-boughs suitable for oars were found, and with their bananas the two men got aboard and pushed off into the centre of the stream. From the banks the river did not appear to be moving at any great rate, but this they soon found was incorrect, as their craft shot along so rapidly it took them all their time to keep their course, the raft having a marked preference to sailing sideways and for making for the banks.

They took it in turns at the steering arrangement, and Hall, during one of his spells, nearly caused a complete shipwreck by shooting the raft straight into an abutting piece of ground that, fortunately for them, was soft.

Armstrong, who was lying down, and was possibly snoring, despite the fact that he was lying in water (between two of the trees), and that the rain was still pouring down, was nearly shot overboard by the sudden impact.

"What on earth are you doing, Bert?" he asked roughly, as he took in the situation.

For reply, Hall pointed ashore, and grinned with evident satisfaction at his astuteness.

"Bread-fruit and coconuts, my dear chap," he informed the astonished Jack. "And such a free restaurant may not be marked on our chart again. Saying which he leaped ashore, and began collecting supplies for their commissariat.

Once more they started, but Armstrong sat up watching. He had been thoroughly awakened, and was not satisfied but what Hall might perform a similar feat again, should anything tempting catch his quick eye.

For several hours they sped along with nothing to supply the commonest interest, except that both were on the alert listening for cataracts. It was impossible to see beyond fifty yards, and as they were travelling quite twelve miles an hour, they knew that with their clumsy steering-gear it would require all their best efforts to avoid anything like a rapid.

A sudden bend in the river, however, provided much food for contemplation, as it presented to their view some hundreds of men busy dragging up boats, preparing, no doubt, for the coming flood.

The current of the river, as luck would have it, carried the

raft on the side nearest to the men, and their look of astonishment, when they in turn beheld the small log craft and its two occupants, was too much for Hall, of course, and he laughed outright.

"By George, Jack, wouldn't it be fine if we could appropriate one of those large boats?" he asked of Armstrong.

"Better get past that crowd as soon as we can, Bert; this ship is all right so far, and we might go farther and fare worse."

"Oh, yes; but just look at that one nearest the water."

"Yes, I am. They are going to launch it and try to intercept us."

That was evidently the intention of those on the banks; but the little log raft was travelling much faster than they calculated, and before the boat and its complement of ten men were under way, the raft was past them.

Now started a race, for the boat had commenced the pursuit, and although a stern chase is supposed to be a long one under ordinary circumstances, it is not so when the chased craft is merely drifting and the pursuer propelled by eight long oars.

So confident were their pursuers of capturing the raft and its occupants, that they took absolutely no precautions, and just rowed on. They got within twenty yards of the raft, when Hall, who had given over the "wheel" to Armstrong, took deliberate aim at the boat. A yell of rage and defiance was the result, and impelled with fierce energy the boat got alongside, and several yellow hands grasped the log. Before a man could gain sufficient grasp of the raft to enable him to spring aboard, Hall sent his steering oar clean through the bottom of the bark canoe, which split up and filled with water at once. Fortunately those men were at home in the water, and were able to swim ashore, and, to the joy of Hall and Armstrong, the raft was once more free, and speeding along as merrily as ever.

One mistake they made, however. They whistled before they were out of the wood, as the saying has it, for another and larger canoe had by this time been launched, and was coming at a great pace; but neither Jack nor Bert noticed it.

CHAPTER X.

SENTENCED TO BE BURNT—CONCLUSION.

What with mist and lowering clouds, and the rapid approach of darkness, it was impossible to see far either ahead or astern, and the log raft was swept along by the ever-increasing current, its occupants totally ignorant that further pursuit was being made. There was no twilight, hence they decided to run ashore and shelter somewhere for the night, a thick cluster of dwarf palms offering the best protection from the heavy rain. Under this meagre shelter they sat and listened to the continuous patter of the rain-drops and the wash of the river as it swept past them.

Neither spoke. There seemed a mutual depression on each man, and finally both dropped off to sleep, thoroughly worn out.

Their awakening was rude in the extreme. Rough, powerful hands gripped them as in a vice. Bound hand and foot they were conveyed to the river, and placed in the sternsheets of the canoe, and silently the crew got in, and began rowing against the stream. All night the canoe was swiftly borne along, the silence of the rowers and the others on board making the scene weird and unnatural.

So completely had the Englishmen been taken by surprise no resistance whatever had been made; but now they were beginning to understand the situation a bit better, and a whispered conversation was held.

The first streaks of dawn appeared ere the canoe in which our heroes were prisoners was run ashore. A howling mob greeted them, and as the two captives were led to a dirty hut, the crowd feasted their eyes on the unusual sight. The mud hut was damp and filthy; but as some of their bonds were loosened it was an agreeable change from the cramped position they had suffered in the canoe. For more than an hour they were left alone.

"I wonder what is to be the end of this business, old chap?" Hall asked his comrade.

"I don't know. Torture of some kind, no doubt, and then an agreeable addition to their larder."

"The fiends have taken away our arms, or we might have a chance; still, buck up, we'll die game, or my—"

"Hush, there is someone coming!"

An elderly man, evidently a chief, approached the hut, accompanied by several men who carried food and drink. Both were acceptable, especially the latter. After they had eaten what they wanted, the old chief tried to convey something to them; but neither could imagine the drift of the old man's signs, and he finally left them, muttering something as he retired.

Both Armstrong and Hall felt refreshed, and no doubt that accounted for their taking a better view of things; but both would have felt more satisfied had they really known what their fate was to be. In this suspense they were kept nearly a week,

well fed, and attended to in every way; still they were never permitted to go beyond the entrance of the hut.

On the morning of the sixth day they were led out of the hut to a distance of about three hundred yards—to an open space fronting a semi-circle of rude huts, but better looking ones than that in which Armstrong and his companion had been incarcerated. If they had been kept in ignorance of their fate some time, they were now rudely acquainted of it.

In the middle of the semi-circle were two large stakes driven firmly into the ground, and standing by each were several natives with crudely arranged ropes of grass. Hall was stopped at the first post, and Armstrong taken to the other, which was distant about twenty paces. A very few minutes sufficed to bind the two men securely, and then a terrible long wait came. Each minute the rays of the sun shone brighter, and the heat became unbearable. Hall was merely a limp mass bound to the stake, but the sound of approaching tomtoms and a general din of human and other noises roused him.

A great procession slowly came into view. It was a gruesome sight. The first thirty men wore diabolical head-dresses of imaginary animals. Then came a troop of men and women, painted and daubed all over with all the colours of the spectrum, and finally the old man who had visited the prisoners. A wild, discordant chant was howled, and then the men with the fancy headgear spread faggots and wood around the two stakes. When this was satisfactorily done, a lighted torch was given to the old man, and he approached, waving the flaming torch amidst a great beating of tomtoms.

Above all the din, Hall heard Armstrong call out "Good-bye!" but his parched lips were incapable of moving, though he struggled terribly to reply.

The first few straggling faggots were ablaze—Hall watched each little streak of flame as it shot along, and wondered how long it would take ere the whole mass was in flames—when a great commotion took place—some strangers had entered the camp.

Armstrong heard a man speak in English, then fainted, Hall was unconscious long before.

The sun was high in the heavens, and but for the freshening breeze the heat would have been unbearable. It was bad enough as it was. Under a roughly constructed canvas awning Armstrong and Hall were laid upon rude cushioned beds, still unconscious. By and by Hall opened his eyes, and closed them again as quickly, so dazzling was the light. Again he made the attempt, and this time with better success. He looked around him, and to his bewildered senses seemed to have been transported to fairyland, for he saw that he was aboard a yacht. He tried to arouse Armstrong, but that gentleman withstood all the shaking and pushing, and lay inanimate. While Hall was trying to bring his comrade round, a tall, sallow-complexioned man, dressed in white duck clothing, with a red sash worn Spanish fashion round his waist, came and stood by the tent and watched Hall.

"Glad to see you are better, sir"—he spoke to Hall.

"Yes, I'm better; but my friend isn't. By the way, who are you, and where are we?"

"Ah, that will take a little time to explain, friend; but you had better come with me, and I will provide you with more appropriate clothing, and I dare say you are hungry. Ah, your friend is rousing up."

Although much mystified at first as to his whereabouts, Armstrong gradually began to recollect things, and of a sudden remembered hearing someone speak in English. Then began a general thanksgiving to the captain, who listened, and smiled, and exasperated, but made no remark.

"Guess you don't kinder catch on to this bizness. I rescued you from death at the stake!"

"You did, indeed!" they said.

"Wall, I hed to pay for your release, and I, seeing two Britishers as looked like military chaps, thinks to myself they'll stump handsome on this deal."

"Which we will."

"Jest so. But I'll hev' to get into cooler water first."

"What do you mean?" asked Hall.

"Wall, I'm in a good humour to-day, so I'll jest tell yew. I was way down near Bassain, when a nigger comes aboard and tells me as two white men had robbed the temple of Ranapura of all its valibles, 'end that you were gwine to be roasted. I turned up jest in time, and bought you off."

"Well."

"Wall, I've got a mixed cargo aboard, most of which I've got on terms of my own; but it wouldn't do for me to be caught by a United States cruiser—see?"

"Why? Are you a modern pirate?"

"No; I guess I am a very free trader, with other folks' goods."

"That means you have got our gems with you?" Hall added. The Yankee skipper looked daggers.

"I don't mean to tell you anything more, but even if I had those stones, what then?"

"They belong to us!"

"I suppose I would be held guilty of receiving stolen property," mused the captain, as if he had failed to hear the last remark; "but that isn't the point. I am making for Malacca. If you want to get back to your dirty England, you will have to pay for it!"

"And you can hand over the 'change' from those gems of ours."

"I don't recognise you there. I bought those stones and you from some natives, and unless you dry up about it you will get warmed up a bit when we reach our destination."

"Well, there is no use arguing, Bert!" exclaimed Armstrong.

"Now you're speaking sense," approvingly remarked the skipper.

"There's just the chance of our spotting a cruiser, Jack, or more likely still of their spotting us."

"Good heavens, my lad, do you think I care for the old iron tubs about here? Why, I can go two knots to their one in this pretty breeze, and I have little cannon that would send any of your cruisers to the bottom. If it wasn't for the valuable cargo I have aboard I should just like to meet one of your old woman's tubs. I'd rip holes in that dirty rag of a flag of hers! No use, boys. Keep cool. I've a fine six-shooter here made in New York State, where they know how to make sich things."

The man grinned and leered at the Englishmen, who resented the boastful and insulting language.

"Wall, what is it, Jake?" to a negro who had popped his woolly head inside the cabin.

"Thar am small gunboat on de wevver, making most offul smoke, massa."

"I'll come and look at her, Jake." To the Englishmen—

"Come on deck, gentlemen, and see the scant courtesy we free Yankees offer your Union Jack!"

With different feelings the three went up the companion-ladder.

It required artificial assistance to enable the little black speck to be made out, and even then it was doubtful what the craft really was. But of course the crew of the yacht had smarter eyes for such things, despite the brag of their skipper.

"Ah," mused the yacht's captain, "I reckon I'm in too great a hurry to wait for her! Sorry to disappoint you, gents, but this breeze is worth some hundreds of dollars to this child, so we'll have to leave yonder panting biler to make buttermilk of the sea."

Half an hour passed, and the panting biler was nearer, so much so that her hull could be clearly seen by the naked eye.

"Yonder tub seems to have got its second wind," quietly remarked Hall to the skipper.

"Yes, she'll bust yet, if they shove her like that."

It was evident that the captain didn't at all like the way that panting biler was diminishing the distance between them, although he did his best to appear callous.

Another half hour went by, and the little black tub was only a few miles astern.

"Hadt'n you better haul down your colours, captain?" Armstrong asked.

"Guess you'd better put your tongue in irons, mister, unless you want to go overboard. Hallo!"

A white puff of smoke, and the scream of a small shot flying overhead, caused the sudden exclamation.

"Now then, Jeff, just show these worn-out lubbers what our little 'President' can do."

The small, obsolete cannon was run out, Jeff taking careful aim (at a very small mark, too), and then, with a cheer from the yacht's crew, the ball travelled off, to reach about half way. The moment the shot from the yacht was fired, the "panting biler" seemed to positively fly through the water. Nothing but a huge hill of seething foam could be seen from the yacht, and in less than ten minutes the little craft swept up to the yacht as if the latter were anchored, or had been sailing to meet her.

All the tall talk evaporated from the skipper. As a matter of fact, he had never seen a first-class torpedo-boat destroyer, and his astonishment and admiration quite bewildered him. An officer and three men boarded the yacht before the skipper's thinking apparatus recovered, and so great was the shock to his pride, he gave up his papers and the guns, and told the officer they had two hundred slaves stowed away, as meekly as a lamb, whereas he could have swept the men off the deck and won easily, for the torpedo-catcher's crew were outnumbered ten to one.

Not much time or many words were wasted, and in less than a quarter of an hour the yacht was tearing along in the wake of the "panting biler" at a pace absolutely unknown hitherto.

Armstrong and Hall were on the torpedo-catcher, busily engaged in recounting their exploits, and in turn listening to the officers' yarns, particularly as to the unpleasantness of a torpedo-catcher in bad weather; but as they were bound for the China station, they had hopes of something better.

The night soon came, but as it was one of magnificent calm

and beauty, two of the officers and their newly-made friends sat on deck smoking and still telling yarns. Suddenly there was a sharp check given to the catcher, and followed by a lunge sideways. Lieutenant Wareing, who was in command, took in the situation at a glance, and ordered the tow-rope to be instantly cut. It was promptly done, and just in time. The captain of the yacht had scuttled her, no doubt making off in his punt in good time. An hour was spent searching about; but, failing to see anything, the course was altered, and first-class torpedo-catcher "Vivid" had her clean-out bow pointed towards the China Sea.

Lieutenant Wareing and his brother officer wanted their comrades to accompany them all the way, but this they refused, preferring to take advantage of a passing homeward-bound liner.

The officers were each presented with a valuable sapphire, and a stone of lesser worth given to the men and stokers, and with a thorough British cheer the two dragons left the "painting biler" and boarded the stately liner.

Calcutta was reached in incredibly short time. Such stories had to be told and retold, that, as Captain Smithson remarked one day at dinner, "He wouldn't be astonished if half the passengers left at Calcutta intent upon a raid for the remainder of the gems, if they did leave any."

The passengers were all curious to know why Armstrong entered the temple that evening, which was really and truly the cause of all their subsequent adventures; but for a long time he declined to say, nor could Hall be persuaded to divulge the secret.

"Well, if you must know, we were resting in camp one day, sport had been good the day before, and we listened to one of our servants recounting about the wonderful rubies in the temple of Ranapura. He said the eyes of one image were the largest rubies in the world. It sort of stuck, did that yarn, until Hall and I determined to investigate."

"Then you did get them?" exclaimed an excited young lady. "No, that was just it, there wasn't an idol in the temple; and seeing that old man crawling along suspiciously, we followed, thinking he was up to no good, and very likely meant doing a bit of pilfering on his own."

Diamond Harbour saved these heroes from absolutely becoming dumb, as Hall, in his usual way, put it. They were soon at Calcutta, nor did they stay longer there than necessary, but made arrangements for getting to Rangoon, where they hoped to hear something of Jedd San and his charge. Just as they were passing Government House, an aged man, dressed in Hindoo costume, stood in their way and salaamed.

It was Jedd San.

As soon as he was recognised both asked the old fakir where Daisy was, and upon his replying that she was safe in the native part of the town, the passers-by thought the two tall men had gone off it a bit.

What a meeting that was! How Daisy clapped her hands with joy when she saw her real princes, and what a lot had to be told!

Daisy was left in charge of Colonel Maitland's wife (a cousin of Armstrong's) for some time, until all arrangements could be made, but when the time came for Hall and Armstrong to return, they found Daisy quite a different young woman, and one with a will of her own.

She would not leave Mrs. Maitland on any account.

"Very well, Daisy, we must go without you; but mind you remember now, some day I shall come and claim my little white queen," laughed Hall.

"And be my prince?"

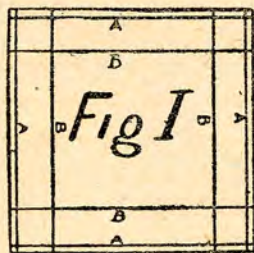
"Yes, and more, be your king."

It was said in jest, but who knows it may come to pass. There's many a true word said in jest.

THE END.

How to Make Money in Spare Time.—No. 3.

Working in tin is by no means the difficult occupation that most boys believe it to be. Like everything else,



it is simplicity itself when you know how. And to show you how is now my object.

One or two inexpensive tools are necessary. First, a soldering outfit; secondly, a pair of round-nosed pincers; and thirdly, a pair of tinman's shears, for which, however, a strong old pair of scissors may be substituted.

The other implements that are necessary are a few blocks, which we can make for ourselves, a straight-edge ruler, which we probably already possess, and a hammer and pair of ordinary pliers.

Thus equipped we can proceed to take our first lesson, which will be of the simplest description—the construction of a box.

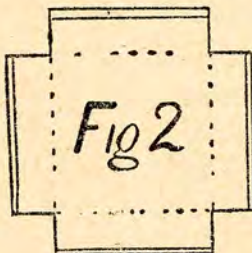
When possible, it is advisable to make both the sides and bottom from one piece.

Illustration No. 1 shows the ground plan of a box—or, rather, of a tin tray, for it has no lid—measuring, we will say, one foot square, with sides three inches high. For the purpose we will take a piece of sheet-tin, and cut it into a square measuring one foot seven inches each way.

Now measure off half an inch all around the box, and draw the straight lines A A A A, drawing the lines with the point of a bradawl, upon which rather heavy pressure is brought to bear, and, guiding the bradawl with the straight-edged rule. Now, at a distance of 3 in. from the lines just drawn, draw the four lines B B B B.

Remove with the aid of the shears the four square pieces at the corners, so that the work now assumes the form shown in Fig. 2.

A wooden block will now be required, It should be of boxwood, or other hard,

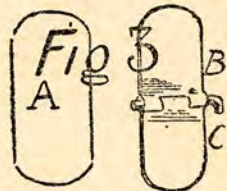


well-seasoned wood, with a clean-cut, sharp edge. Lay the tin upon this, so that one of the lines A exactly coincides with the edge of the block; then, with a light hammer, tap upon the projecting half-inch of tin, distributing the taps evenly along the whole line, until the tin is gradually beaten down to the shape of the block, or, in other words, the projecting half-inch is at right angles with the rest of the sheet.

Turn the sheet over, and place along the bend a length of iron wire; then lap the edge right over until the wire is enclosed. This is to form a smooth, even edge to top of the box sides. The wire may be left in or pulled out and made to

perform the same duty for the other three edges, which are similarly treated.

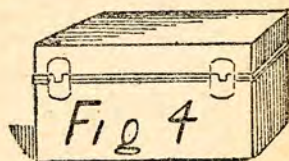
The tin must now be bent along the



lines B B B B, using the straight edge of the block and the hammer as already described for the purpose. When the sides are bent to right angles, the edges are soldered up, and the box is complete. Care must be taken that the overlapped edges at the top come inside and not outside the box.

The lid is constructed in an exactly similar manner, and forms, indeed, a reproduction of the first, except that the sides are much shallower, 1 in. instead of 3 in. being ample depth.

The hinges, which are cut out with the shears, are shown in Fig. 3—A being the hinge-plate in the flat, and B and C the



top and bottom, shaped up and joined by a stout wire.

Fig. 4 shows a back view of the box complete.

(To be continued next Friday.)



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.

Ada Graham runs away from her guardian. 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.

Copples seeks out Sleuth Slymer, a villainous detective, whom he employs to work up the case against Will.

Will is acquitted. Ada Graham joins Romah's show.

There was a supper-party that night in the professor's lodgings in honour of Will's return. It was, indeed, a festive night. The Human Serpent and the Skeleton Masher—for the while forgetting their rivalry—the Bearded Lady and the herculean Bint were present. It was at the commencement of the meal that the last post arrived, and the professor opened a letter that was brought in to him. Across the envelope, printed in large red letters, were the words, "Spangler's World-Famed Hippodrome."

"Business, dearest?" asked Madame Romah, as she saw her husband purse up his lips as he read the contents.

"Yes," he answered. And re-read the letter, that ran as follows:

"My Dear Romah,—I hear you are bringing your show to Nottingham for the Goose Fair, where I am at present running my circus. The fame of your boy-clown is spreading. If terms were agreed upon, could you see your way to loan him to appear nightly in my ring for some twenty minutes. I do not think it would interfere with your business. He would be able to work both shows. I am prepared to pay handsomely for the accommodation, and, of course, 'By kind permission of the world-renowned Professor Romah, whose Marvellous Temple of Matchless Mirth is nightly attracting thousands,' would appear in large type in our bills. The reason I am anxious to get the lad is because Joe Grix, the giant clown, the greatest clown on earth, would afford a striking contrast to Witty Will Wynn, the boy-clown. The two would prove a great draw. Let me have an immediate answer.—Yours sincerely,

"LORD THEODORE SPANGLER."

Spangler, let it be said, was not a peer of the realm. Lord was a Christian name. But it looked well on the bills, and impressed the multitude. Amongst his own folk he was more commonly spoken of as Diamond Spangler.

"Yes," said Professor Romah to himself, "that seems all right, if we can come to terms. Then, aloud to the assembled company: "On this occasion, it is pleasure first, and business afterwards." And he stuffed the letter in his pocket, and his guests proceeded to eat and drink and make merry.

Whether it was the bowl of punch that brought the supper-

party to an end, or the excitement, or the tobacco smoke, that induced the Human Serpent on leaving the lodgings to burst out into song, cannot be said. As for the Skeleton Masher, he would have never arrived home at all but for the support of the herculean Bint and Frances Amelia, who propped him up on either side.

"I am overcome!" he gurgled, as they proceeded through the streets—"I am overcome! Good old Winny Wittle Will!"

We must, however, return for a while to Copples. Everything had gone counter to his plans. His ward had escaped him. Will Wynn had been acquitted. Gnawing his lips with baffled fury, he had gone straight from the court to Sleuth Slymer's disreputable residence.

"Yes," he muttered, "the police will search for Dan Dugger, but they will not find him!"—he gave a distorted grin that showed his fang-like teeth. "If only I could get that boy to my house, he should go the same way as Dan. If he only knew who he was, if only he knew the secret of his birth, it would mean ruin to me! But he must never know! I'll give Slymer another chance. He has got brains, and so long as he doesn't endanger his own neck he'll not stick at trifles!"

Sleuth Slymer had not recovered from the treatment he had received the day before. He was suffering from physical pain as well as prostration, for Sharp had ultimately managed to get hold of him, and had made a decided impression. Nor had he recovered his temper. A jeering crowd had pursued him to his very door.

When he opened the door to Mr. Copples, he was looking more vicious and ferret-like than ever.

"H'm!" snarled Copples, when they had entered the dingy office, "so this is the way you do business! One hundred pounds for expenses, and the boy is acquitted. I might just as well have thrown the money in the gutter. If I want business done in future I must go somewhere else, that's evident!"

"I did my best, Mr. Copples!" he said cringing—"I did my best; but I was brutally treated! It was no fault of mine! Look here, Mr. Copples!"—his ferret eyes gleamed cunningly—"wouldn't it be better if we came to an understanding?"

"What do you mean? Why don't you sit down, man, instead of tramping up and down the room? You worry me!"

"Sitting down," said the private detective sadly, "is an impossibility after the bite that cur gave me! Come, Mr. Copples, you know well enough what I mean! You want Will Wynn out of the way. Supposing there was a certain party who would do it for you—what would it be worth?"

Copples began to twist and turn uneasily in his chair. Another raid on his moneybags seemed imminent.

"H'm! that depends. One thousand pounds, if it is done successfully. But not a penny till then!—not a penny!"

"Oh, but!" whined Sleuth Slymer, "think of the preliminary expenses. These things cost money, you know. The party in question would have to follow the boy about; perhaps weeks would pass before a favourable opportunity would occur. There would be travelling expenses, and disguises, and all sorts of things!"

"Oh, oh!" groaned Copples, "you private detectives are extortionate robbers. Well, well, suppose we say three pounds a week for expenses."

"Make it five pounds, and I am your man!"

"No. Four pounds, and not a penny more!"

"Make it four-and-a-half, Mr. Copples!"

"No. Four!"

"Very well!" whined the detective, "it's not worth my while; but to oblige such an esteemed client I'll do it for that!"

The bargain concluded—an infamous bargain for an innocent lad's life—Copples questioned the detective as to his method of procedure.

"I shall disguise myself. I'm pretty smart at disguise, Mr. Copples, and I shall follow the show from place to place, and when a safe opportunity occurs I shall take it! You understand?"

There are some features in the "GIRLS' BEST FRIEND" which will specially interest readers of the "UNION JACK."

"Perfectly!" croaked the miser—"perfectly!"

"I—I shall want a fortnight's expenses in advance, of course," murmured Sleuth Slymer; "that is business!"

"You shall have it to-morrow!" growled Copples. "Eight golden sovereigns! Ah, I shall die a pauper!"

"Die a pauper," said Sleuth Slymer, after the miser had departed; "the old rat's worth thousands! What's the game with this boy? That's what I've got to find out. He's worth £1,000 dead. Would he be worth more alive? That's the question. If he is, why then he lives! If not, why then—I may as well earn that thou."

Then Sleuth Slymer, leaving the office, went upstairs to a room on the second floor. It might have been a secondhand clothes shop. Dozens of different suits hung on pegs round the walls. In one corner stood a dressing-table, with wig-boxes and paints upon it.

"The Temple of Matchless Mirth," he muttered, picking up a caroty wig from the table, "goes from here to Nottingham for the Goose Fair. It wouldn't do for me to run a chance of recognition. I always was clever at thimble-rigging, the three-card trick, and other little fakes. That's the game I'll pay at the Goose Fair. And I reckon it will be a clever fellow who recognises Thimble-rigging Joe as Sleuth Slymer, the detective!"

CHAPTER XIII.

WILL WYNN MAKES AN ENEMY OF JOE GRIX, THE GIANT CLOWN—"THIMBLE-RIGGING JOE" APPEARS ON THE SCENE.

The Nottingham market-place—the largest uncovered marketplace in England—was one variegated mass of booths, shows, tents, roundabouts, aerial flights, shooting-galleries, and stalls. From early morning till early morning again nothing but shouts, laughter, poppings and crackings, the beating of drums, the blatant music of organs, the hoarse whistling of merry-go-rounds, the roaring of lions, the trumpeting of elephants. All the lads and lassies of the great lace-town seemed to be gathered there.

Among the hundred and one shows there, the most conspicuous were Wombwell's Menagerie, Holloway's Show, Spangler's Hippodrome, and last, but not least, Romah's Temple of Matchless Mirth and Moving Mystery.

Professor Romah had come to an agreement with Lord Theodore Spangler, and it had been arranged that Witty Will Wynn should do a twenty-minutes' "turn" in Spangler's circus every evening.

When Will was told this he could scarcely restrain his delight. He was an ambitious little fellow; but so far his talent had been confined to the Temple of Matchless Mirth. He had secretly longed for more scope. To appear in a real circus ring, to crack wheezes with an immaculate gentleman in evening-dress and wearing diamonds, to say smart things about the beautiful ladies who rode bareback and jumped through hoops—this indeed was a step forward.

Will was a genuine little artist in his way, and, like all true artists, he was very nervous. Would he succeed? He was to appear in the ring almost immediately after Joe Grix, the giant clown, a man of great bulk and reputation. Would he be able to hold his own against him? He had flushed red with pride and excitement when he had come across the following flaming poster:

DO YOU WANT TO SEE SOME CLOWNING?

Then come to Spangler's Hippodrome!

THE GIANT JOE GRIX, the Mountainous Mirth-Provoker!

THE LITTLE WILL WYNN, the Lilliputian Rib-Tickler!

Witty Will Wynn, the only genuine Boy-Clown, will appear nightly at 8.30, by special arrangement with the Renowned Professor Romah, whose Temple of Matchless Mirth is nightly attracting thousands!

Come and see the Long and the Short of It!—THE GIANT JOE, THE LITTLE WILL WYNN!

But there was one gentleman who was by no means pleased with the arrangement, and that was Joe Grix himself. He had been used to having it all his own way, and he was wroth at the idea of having to share honour with "a brat of a boy." He had remonstrated with Spangler; but the latter had informed him that if he did not like the arrangement he might look out for an engagement elsewhere.

Joe Grix was over six feet in height, and was correspondingly fat. His puffy face, with its turned-up nose and small eyes, was comical to look at, and he had only to show himself in the ring to get a laugh. In fact, some people said that he relied on his appearance more than his wit.

"Aren't I good enough by myself?" growled Grix as he sat in his dressing-tent addressing Jim Butler, the famous "English jockey"; "and yet Spangler engages this brat. It makes me sick. Who is he? What's he done? The ring ain't meant for kids. Well, I reckon I'll make him look ten times smaller

than he really is before I've finished. I'll wipe the floor with him. I've not been at this game for fifteen years without learning something. I'll show 'em who's the funniest!"

And Grix, going up to the looking-glass, took up a stick of red paint, reddened his nose, painted a crescent on each of his cheeks, and a star on his forehead.

Grix was a comedian who looked upon a red nose as essential to humour.

It had been a hard day for Will. From eleven o'clock in the morning till eight in the evening, with barely a moment to snatch some food, he had been clowning, tumbling, rattling off wheezes on the platform of the Temple of Matchless Mirth.

At eight o'clock he left the platform, and, slipping into a side-tent, washed his face, and changed his clothes, then hurried out, and forced his way through the crowd towards Spangler's Circus, where an entire change of costume awaited him.

His heart was throbbing with wild excitement. The moment he had dreamed of was close at hand. He was about to appear in a circus-ring for the first time!

He did not notice the slouching figure that crept after him—a man, with caroty hair, who, all day, had been hanging round the Temple.

"So he's going to perform at the circus," muttered the disguised Sleuth Slymer, as he saw Will enter at the back of the huge tent. "Well, I'll pay my tanner and see how he gets on!"

"Now, then, my lad," said Spangler, when Will entered, "hurry into your clothes. Grix is on at present, and I want you to follow him. Meet him as he comes off, crack a wheeze with him, if you like, and then start on your own business."

The circus was crammed to overflowing. Roar after roar had greeted Grix's jokes and rallies, and the giant clown was flattering himself that he had taken the wind out of the brat's sails.

Spangler had arranged that the two clowns should meet, thinking that the contrast would afford amusement. And Grix had determined, if possible, to "score off" the Witty One, and make him look small before the vast audience.

The band had struck up a lively tune.

"Holloa, holloa, holloa!"

There was a rush, a scamper, and the Witty One, as neat as if he had come out of a band-box, sprang into the ring, and, turning a double somersault, landed on his feet under the very nose of the giant clown. Thrusting his hands into his pockets, he stared comically up at the mountainous mass, and said:

"Hallo, Big 'un!"

The audience screamed with laughter. There was something irresistibly humorous about Will's expression and attitude.

"Hallo, Little 'un!" replied the Giant Grix. "Does your mother know you're out?"

There was another loud laugh at this.

"Yes, she gave me a penny to buy a plum-pudding with. Are you for sale?"

There was a yet louder laugh, and Grix turned pale with rage beneath his war-paint.

Undoubtedly Will's reply was a trifle impertinent; but he was in a nervous, highly strung frame of mind, and the sneer that had accompanied Grix's question, "Does your mother know you're out?" had pricked his rather sensitive nature.

Now, when Joe Grix lost his temper, he invariably ceased to be funny. His huge body quivering with rage, he stood for a moment inarticulate, and glared savagely at Will.

"Take care, little 'un!" he spluttered at last, "that the plum-pudding don't roll on you and flatten you into a pancake!"

And the giant made a sudden rush at him. Will darted away round the ring. The audience, thinking it all part and parcel of the performance, laughed more lustily than ever at the sight of the little clown running away, and the giant clown lumbering after him.

Suddenly Will was seen to trip up in the sawdust, and Grix, who was close upon him, and unable to stop himself, in his turn tripped over Will and fell flat on his face. Will's tumble had been a feint.

The audience were now swaying to and fro in their seats with laughter. And when Will, quick as lightning, leapt to his feet, and somersaulted once forwards and once backwards over the still prostrate giant, their delight knew no bounds.

But there was one person in the audience who had an idea that it was not all fun—Sleuth Slymer, who, in his disguise, was sitting in the sixpenny seats, and who had seen signs of rage on Joe Grix's painted face. He made a mental note. It might be worth while to cultivate the clown's friendship.

"Magnificent, Joe!" said Lord Theodore Spangler, who, gorgeous in evening-dress and diamonds, had been looking on from the entrance; "that little bit of business has fairly knocked 'em. Without a rehearsal, too! We must have it in every night, Joe. It's capital. That young Wynn's a gem. By Jove, he's worth the money I'm paying for him!"

Grix fairly grinned with rage. Here was Spangler congratulating him on what had been a complete humiliation, and actually suggesting that it should be repeated nightly.

"Yes," went on Spangler, "you and the Little 'un work splendidly together. That fall of yours, Joe, was the most natural thing I've seen for a long time!"

Without a word, and chewing the cud of bitterness, Grix slunk away to his dressing-tent.

"The brat!" he muttered; "I'll be even with him. Little beast, drawing as much money, perhaps, as me who've been in the business fifteen years, and know the ropes backwards. I'll pay him out before I've finished. I'll clown him. Just let him try the same game on to-morrow night, and I'll show him a trick he don't know!"

Left to himself in the ring, and during a short interval that preceded the entrance of the graceful equestrienne, Lucia Valdini, Will kept the audience in a continuous roar of laughter.

The equestrienne act of Mademoiselle Valdini was to be followed by the vaulting over a number of horses from a spring-board by certain members of the circus, headed by Jim Butler, who, later in the evening, was to give his famous impersonation of the English jockey.

A spring-board was fixed up at one end of the ring, and a thick, soft mattress placed on the ground some distance from it. Three strapping fellows, in flesh-coloured tights, headed by Jim Butler, climbed on to the small platform at the far end of the spring-board. Then, with a "Hi, hi! houp-la!" ran along the board one after another, turned somersaults into space, and landed feet foremost on the mattress. Then two horses, side by side, were placed between the mattress and the spring-board, and over went the athletes again.

Gradually the number of horses between mattress and spring-board were increased. At ten, two of the performers had dropped out; at twelve, the third; and at last Jim Butler was left alone. Every time Witty Will had run along the spring-board last of all. Every time he had stopped short. Once he

had almost frightened the spectators by slipping off, rolling on to the back of the nearest horse, and then flopping on to the ground.

Lord Theodore Spangler was beaming with satisfaction. The lad, with his funny, merry little ways, had fairly "got hold" of the audience. In fact, they were taking more interest in his antics than in the others' legitimate performance.

Fourteen horses now stood between the end of the spring-board and the mattress.

There was a moment's pause. Spangler, in a prince-like, yet suave manner, announced that the celebrated, world-renowned artiste and Englishman, Jim Butler—loud cheers, and someone shouted out: "Good old England, no furriners!"—would now perform the rather astounding and unparalleled feat of turning a double-somersault over fourteen horses.

Jim Butler was a lithe, splendidly-proportioned man, all muscle and sinew. He stood for a moment on the platform, and poised himself on his toes; then raced along the board, jumped, and landed on the very edge. The board gave him the necessary spring, he shot forward into the air, twice gyration round, came down, feet foremost on the mattress, shot up again, and alighted in the ring. Then he made his bow.

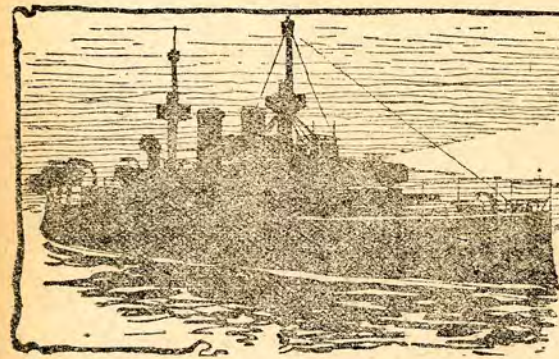
A thunder of applause greeted him. It had been well and gracefully done.

The audience now settled back in their seats prepared to laugh, for Witty Will had climbed up on to the platform.

"Mr. Master Lord Spangler!" he cried, "if I do that will you give me a five-pound note?"

"Two!" said the ring-master and proprietor magnificently, with a wave of his be-diamonded hand, as if five-pound notes and dirt were synonymous. He never dreamed for one moment that Will would attempt the feat.

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



FROM THE QUARTERDECK.

The Editor's Chat with his Readers.

No 200! Just fancy! that means that we are two hundred weeks old to-day. And thanks to the enthusiasm of its faithful readers, the UNION JACK, like the dear old flag from which it takes its name, is still going strong.

From a young lady reader of the UNION JACK I have received this letter:

"We like your paper very much. The tales are very good, but the competitions don't give the working classes much chance. There are a lot of us who want to know if you will start a stamp competition to see who can collect the most stamps. This is a competition that everyone can join in. Hoping that you will be able to see your way to start one."

I shall be curious to see whether any other readers of the UNION JACK are of the same way of thinking. In the meantime, as I told you in last week's "Quarter-Deck," there is a grand prize competition in active preparation, and this is one that will suit all classes, all ages, and both sexes. I have no doubt many readers will feel curious as to the nature of this wonderful competition which is going to please everybody, and so I will just give a rough idea of what it will be like.

A number of pictures will be given, representing men of different nationalities, such as Scotch, Irish, German, Zulu, and so on. All the competitor will have to do will be to write under each picture the name of the country represented. This will be an easy matter for readers of the UNION JACK, who have seen so many nationalities depicted and described in the stirring stories we have published.

A FIVE-POUND NOTE

will be the first prize, but there will be a large number of consolation prizes, including watches, pencils, stamp-albums, &c. We shall also give a special money prize for the neatest list sent in by a young lady reader.

The competition will begin in the number after next (that is,

No. 202, published March 4th), and will run for five or six weeks.

This week's novel, "Slaves of the Mine," is by an author new to the readers of the UNION JACK, but well-known to the readers of other successful journals. Mr. C. England Cowan has travelled extensively, and this Burmese story of his is based upon a legend he met with while sojourning in Burmah. My readers must tell me what they think of this latest addition to the staff of the UNION JACK.

Those who liked "An Avenging Eye," the story published in No. 196 of the UNION JACK, will be glad to hear that I have secured another very clever story by the same author, Mr. H. S. Warwick. This is entitled

"A MARKED MAN; OR, THE MYSTERIES OF A GREAT CITY,"

and will appear in next Friday's UNION JACK. It is a story packed full of interest from beginning to end, and will, I am sure, tend to enhance this coming writer's reputation for good, stirring fiction.

I had almost forgotten to tell you that on next Wednesday appears the first number of the "Girl's Best Friend." I have seen an advance copy of No. 1, and I can assure all my friends and readers of the UNION JACK that this new girls' journal is coming to stay. It is quite the daintiest and most up-to-date journal for girls I have ever seen. I don't think it would be fair of me to mention any of the numerous features, as of course the Editor wants his journal to come as a surprise. But I am sure from what I have seen that the journal will have a welcome in hundreds and thousands of homes. So I hope readers of the UNION JACK will rally together in recommending their sisters to buy No 1 of the "Girls' Best Friend."