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A MARKED MAN; Or, The Mysteries of a Great City.



Flinging away the useless weapon, he seized a chair and lifted it above his head.

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A MARKED MAN

Or, The Mysteries of a Great City.

By H. S. WARWICK,

Author of "The Golden Secret," "An Avenging Eye," &c.

CHAPTER I.

JIM OF THE BARGE—HIS TORMENTORS GET MORE THAN THEY BARGAINED FOR—JIM SETS OUT FOR LONDON—HE MAKES A FRIEND—JIM SEES A FACE HE FEARS.

"Wot 'ave you got in that parcel?"

As Ishmael Lamb thundered out this inquiry in his far from pleasant tones, his red, ferret-like eyes were bent suspiciously on a paper packet, which, though not large, caused the pocket of the boy he addressed to bulge.

The boy started and changed colour at this roughly spoken question. He was a lad of about fifteen, with a dull, dispirited look in his face that told its own story of his wretched boyhood. He stammered out something unintelligible.

"Come here!" said the man savagely, enjoying the look of fear he saw in the boy's eyes. "Come here, you young imp, or I'll—"

Before he had finished his sentence, Ishmael Lamb seized hold of the lad's collar and thrust a rough hand into his pocket. Pulling out the badly-tied parcel, he opened it. Therein he found, among other small articles, a gold watch and chain.

"Blowed if I didn't think so!" cried Ishmael. "All right, my lad; I'll learn you to be a thief!"

"I'm not a thief!" cried the boy passionately; "it's you, not me, that name fits!"

The man looked at him evilly.

"Oh, that's yer tune, is it? I see, I 'aven't tamed that contradictory spirit of yours yet!" he said slowly and maliciously. "But I'll break it, my lad!"

As he spoke the man began to unfasten the leather belt round his waist. Ishmael Lamb was a bully, every inch of him, and it made him smile to think how he would make this wretched boy cry for mercy.

This was not the first time by many that he had used this heavy belt to the lad. Jim Ware could scarcely remember the time when his cruel taskmaster had not thrashed him, often for the most trifling causes, and sometimes out of sheer love of bullying. Little need to wonder that this lad of fifteen had had most of the spirit beaten out of him in the course of his hard, loveless boyhood.

But this time, as Ishmael raised his arm, the lad did not shrink. He cried:

"You bully! I've stood your beatings long enough! If you lay hand on me agin, I'll go to the police and tell 'em all wot I knows about you!"

For a moment the man stood amazed at this unexpected outburst.

"Why! wot do yer mean?" he stammered.

"Oh, I ain't so blind as you think! This watch and chain you stole. You thought I was asleep, but I was a-watching you. You sneaked 'em off that gent as you found drunk near the riverside two nights ago. I've learnt where he lives—at a big house not far off—and I was going to take what you stole back to 'im. I ain't no thief like you!" the boy cried indignantly.

This altercation took place on board a barge that was moored near to the bank of the canal, the intervening yard or so of water being spanned by a loose plank that formed a means of communication between the barge and dry land.

Jim Ware was an orphan. He could not remember his mother. His father, a drunken, good-for-nothing, had died when Jim was only eight, leaving the boy to the tender mercies of his friend Ishmael Lamb, who was employed on a barge. Thus most of Jim's life had been passed travelling to and fro on the narrow waters.

The boy had a wretched time of it. Both Ishmael and his mate Gepp found a delight in making the lad's life a burden by their systematic ill-treatment of him.

They took care that poor Jim should slave from day's end to day's end at an age when most boys were enjoying plenty of healthy amusement.

But he had revolted at last. His bold words momentarily staggered Ishmael Lamb—perhaps alarmed him.

"You young liar!" he cried roughly. "If you dare open you mouth to the police, I'll do for you!"

"You've done your best before now to half-kill me!" cried the boy bitterly; "but I ain't going to stand no more! I've made up my mind about that! There's plenty I can tell the police—all about that young woman whom your fine friend, whose dirty work you do, that Italian Bonari, wanted out of the way!"

"Silence! Do you hear?"

"I've been silent long enough! I'll tell how she was decoyed on to this very barge and dropped into the canal to drown one foggy night three years ago! I was only a kid at the time, but I ain't forgot it—don't you think I have!"

And the boy's eyes dilated in horror as the memory of that dark night's work came back vividly in his mind. He had been only twelve when that evil deed of which he spoke had been committed—



A young fellow of five-and-twenty had come round the bend in time to see the attack made upon Jim. Leaping from his machine, he betrayed his presence in this practical way.

too young to dare do aught but keep silence, though for long after, both by day and in his dreams, the victim's last despairing cry had rung in his ears.

Ishmael had stood with blenching face, tongue-tied as the boy's wild words left his lips. Recovering himself, he cried: "You know too much, you young limb! And"—he lowered his voice, hissing the words with malignant intensity—"when people know too much, it's safest to silence them!"

There was grim murder in Ishmael's face then, as he made a dart towards the boy.

But Jim was too quick for him. Slipping under the man's arm, he took to his heels, and darted across the plank that communicated with the land. And as he did so, to his horror the boy saw Saul Gepp, Ishmael's mate, coming towards the barge across the field.

He felt sure that his life was no longer safe at the hands of these men; he knew too much. He must escape. But how?

His natural ready resource came to his rescue. As Ishmael stepped on the plank, the boy pushed it with his foot with all his might.

Down it crashed, and in a moment Ishmael was struggling in the deep, muddy water of the canal.

He sank below the surface; then, as his head reappeared, he clutched hold of a chain by the side of the barge, uttering a volley of maledictions on our hero.

But Jim's whole attention was now directed on Saul Gepp, who had seen his mate's mishap, and was rapidly approaching, unfastening his leather belt as he ran.

The pathway lay by the side of the hedge of the next field, and close to where Jim was standing was the gate that led into it.

Just within on a board was the significant notice: "Beware of the Bull;" and the bull in question, a very savage one, was glaring at our hero through the bars.

Jim could perceive but one way of escape from Gepp—a desperate expedient to which he resorted. Quickly he unbarred the gate and opened it. The animal rushed out. But before it could reach Jim, the lad, who had kept well behind the gate, darted through into the field, and fastened the gate behind him.

Just then the infuriated bull caught sight of Jim's pursuer, Saul Gepp. It lowered its head ominously. The man trembling with terror, turned and fled; he could hear the animal's hoofs thundering after him. He uttered a wild yell; he felt he was doomed. Then his foot caught in a rabbit-hole; he stumbled and fell. The beast was on him before he could regain his feet.

In another second Saul Gepp was elevated on the bull's horns. He described a rapid, if not singularly graceful, somersault in the air, and descended in a sitting posture with much force on the top of a thick prickly hedge, yelling: "Murder! Help! Murder!"

Unlike Gepp, the bull appeared desirous of continuing the game. It waited by the hedge until its victim should descend to terra firma.

The wretched Gepp was in a dilemma. On the one side of the hedge was the bull, on the other side lay a great stagnant pond, with more mud in it than water. His present elevated condition was one of agony; it was like sitting on a cartload of tinctures.

Unable to bear the torture of those sharp thorns, the wretched Gepp had to face the alternative of leaping into the pond. He jumped.

Splash! He sank up to the waist in the midst of the green slime, disturbing a colony of tadpoles, and bespattering himself with the oozy mud. Nor was this the worst, for in trying to extricate himself from his undesirable position, his foot slipped from under him, and he fell full length into the evil-smelling slime. He emerged, covered with it from top to toe, boiling over with rage, and heaping maledictions on Jim's head—not that his remarks were more forcible or sincere than those of Ishmael, who by this time had succeeded in climbing on to the barge.

"The ingratitudo of the young fiend!" he muttered. "When I clap hey on you agin, skinning alive will be paradise compared to wot you'll get!"

And there was no doubt that Ishmael fully meant to keep his word.

Only, as it happened, Jim and he were not destined to meet for some little time to come—for the boy had no intention of returning, and the good start he had gained was decidedly in his favour.

Looking back as he ran, Jim had seen Gepp's mishap. For the present, at any rate, he need not fear pursuit. But he did not slacken speed; he was anxious to make the most of his start.

The pathway he was taking led him to the main road to London. On a milestone he read:

"London—eighteen miles."

Yes; he would go to London, and there, in the great City, start a new life, free and safe from the power of his persecutors.

Jim felt in his pockets. He had a shilling; not much, certainly, to start life upon. But Jim did not think of that. His one dominant thought was to get away from the old life on the barge.

A good-natured-looking lad, a few years his senior, was driving a trap laden with vegetables. On an impulse Jim hailed him. The driver pulled up.

"Well?"

"I want you to give me a lift if you're going far. I'll give you sixpence."

"Let's see the colour of your money," said the other cautiously.

Jim produced his shilling.

"All right. Jump up."

Then they rattled merrily down the road, and Jim breathed more freely. Every milestone they passed gave him fresh hope of safety. At last the driver announced that he was going no further. Jim had counted six milestones, so he felt he was in luck to have got so far on his journey. He tendered payment. His acquaintance took the coin, looked at it, then returned it to Jim, saying:

"I won't take it, matey. Maybe you have more need of it than me. I guess you're running away from school, ain't you? I did the same myself once. Good-bye, and good luck to you!"

Jim thanked him gratefully, and resumed his journey on foot. By this time it was late in the afternoon. He tramped on steadily, with a glorious feeling of freedom and irresponsibility that he had never experienced before.

Six miles more he had walked when fatigue began to tell upon him. London was very near now. Straggling rows of newly-built houses began to occur frequently as he approached the north-east corner of the metropolis.

He had bought a piece of bread in one of the villages through which he had passed. Sitting down, Jim began to munch it. He finished his meal, and was thinking about resuming his journey, when a man appeared round a bend of the quiet road.

To Jim's surprise this individual, who carried on his back a sheaf of canes and walking-sticks for sale, came up with a grin on his face. Sitting down beside the boy, he opened conversation. Jim, however, did not care for the man's appearance, and rose to his feet.

The travelling hawkers rose, too.

"Got any money?" he suddenly demanded fiercely, having first looked round to see that no one was in sight.

"What's that to you?" asked Jim, somewhat alarmed.

"None o' yer back-arnsers!" retorted the hawker. As he spoke he grabbed hold of the boy, and his hand dived into the pocket where Jim's little store was.

This the man calmly pocketed, despite Jim's protests and attempts to free himself.

"It's my hopinion you stole this money!" said the tramp severely. "If I did my dooty I should hand you hover to the perlice!"

"Let me go, will you!" cried Jim. And, with a sudden jerk, he wrenched himself free from the man's grasp; then he suddenly dived between his aggressor's legs, bringing that worthy to the ground.

Off Jim darted.

But with surprising quickness the hawker regained his feet, and with an ugly imprecation pursued the boy.

Jim's long tramp had tired him. His feet seemed leaden, and in a minute or two his pursuer was on him. The man seized Jim's collar, and, pulling one of the canes out of his bundle, he gave the boy a stinging cut.

"That's for your monkey tricks!" he cried. "Before I've done with you I'll—"

The threat remained unfinished; for at that moment a strong arm intercepted the second blow, and some muscular fingers were inserted between the neck of the hawker and his collar. The man was shaken as a terrier shakes a rat.

A young fellow of five-and-twenty had come round the bend of the road on his bicycle, in time to see the attack made on Jim. Leaping from his machine he betrayed his presence in this practical way.

"You hulking brute!" cried the new-comer, all his indignation roused by the man's brutal assault. "Put up your fists, for I'm going to give you the soundest thrashing you've had in your life!"

And George Lennard looked contemptuously at Jim's aggressor, whose face had begun to visibly pale, as he started to whine out some excuse.

It did not avail him, however, for Jim, in a few words that carried conviction to the new-comer, told the real facts of the case.

"Such bullies as you need a lesson, and I'm not going to spare you!" cried Jim's champion.

The hawker dropped on his knees and prayed for mercy. His

appeals fell on deaf ears. George Lennard, taking one of the man's own canes, delivered a well-earned thrashing that made the hawk writhe and yell.

"Now, hand out the money you stole from this lad!"

This the man did with an ill-grace. Then George Lennard said to Jim:

"Come along with me. I'll walk my machine and keep you company for a bit. He's an ugly-looking customer, but he won't touch you again while I'm with you, I guess!" with a laugh.

The young fellow cut short Jim's expressions of gratitude, and asked him his name.

"And where are you going, Jim?" was his next question, put with a pleasant smile that still further won the boy's heart. The stranger's kindness encouraged Jim to tell his friend that he had run away from home.

"Run away? Isn't that rather foolish, my boy?" said George Lennard kindly. "What do you think you can do in London without money or friends?"

"Dunno!" said Jim hopelessly. "Only I ain't going back. I'd rather die!"

"Tell me about your home and friends?" said George Lennard, struck by the intensity of determination in the boy's words.

"Friends? I never had no friends!" said the lad bitterly. "And I'll tell you the sort of home I've got."

Jim told his questioner of his life on the barge, of his persecutions at the hands of Lamb and Gepp.

"They're afraid I know too much, and they'd not stick at murdering me," he said, "as they murdered someone once afore!"

"Murder!" cried George.

"Yus! I seed it! I was only a kid at the time. I s'pose they thought I didn't understand. It was a well-dressed gent—kid gloves on his white hands, and all that—who wanted a woman putting out o' the way. They did the job for him. They've worked for him ever since."

George Lennard looked earnestly at the boy for a minute as they walked on through the gathering dusk.

"You don't believe me, guv'nor!" the boy said reproachfully. "Do you s'pose I'd tell you lies arter wot you've done for me?"

"No, Jim, I believe you!" cried George, convinced by the boy's manner. "You were right to run away from such a life as that. Look here, my boy, your story has interested me. You've had a hard time of it. I have known myself what it is to have to fight one's own way, and I'll be a friend to you. You shan't starve in the big city, Jim! There's my hand on it."

A generous impulse—a quixotic one, perhaps, since George knew nothing about this little waif beyond his own story. But George Lennard's impulses were generally of the generous kind, and Jim, though he wanted to tell his new-found friend something of the gratitude that overflowed in his heart for this kindness—which touched him the more since no one hitherto had troubled to be kind to him—could not find the words he wanted to utter, because there was a queer lump in his throat. But he gripped the friendly hand, and George understood.

"I am going in here," George Lennard said suddenly, after they had gone some distance, stopping in front of a great iron gate that opened upon a long drive, with trees on either side, leading to a lonely, square-built house. It stood in the midst of a wilderness of a garden, almost on the fringe of the Essex marshes.

On the stone pillars by the gate in discoloured lettering were the words Audley Towers.

The darkness was closing in, and the house looked dreary and desolate, with no light visible in any of the windows.

"We are close by Hackney now," said George. "That cross-road will take us into it. I expect you're about tired out, aren't you?"

Jim admitted that he was.

"Well, I shan't keep you waiting long, I expect. Then we'll talk about where you are to sleep to-night, and I'll put you on to a 'bus. You shall stay here and mind my bicycle, whilst I go to the house—"

Jim felt a sudden pride that his new friend trusted him. But he said:

"You ain't afraid, then, that I shall do a guy with your machine, sir?"

George smiled.

"Haven't I said that you and I are going to be friends?" he replied. "And doesn't that mean that I trust you?"

Then, his tone growing more serious, he said:

"Jim, until two years ago that house was my home. Now—well, you would find a warmer welcome there than I!"

"That don't seem right, sir. Only this is such a blessed rummy world!" said Jim, the philosopher.

"Well, you see, I offended my uncle who lives there. We quarrelled, and he turned me out of his house two years ago. To-night is the first time I've entered his gate since then.

He doesn't know I'm coming to see him—only I've made up my mind I'll call and ask him to let bygones be bygones. If he won't be reconciled, well, I shall feel I've done my best."

"Oh, but he will, sir, never you fear!" cried the boy.

"I don't know about that, Jim. Anyway, I'm going to try the effect of this little surprise on him."

George Lennard strode through the rusty, creaking gate, and towards the gloomy old house.

Jim propped the bicycle against the wall that ran round the grounds, and stood waiting several minutes. Then he walked inside the gate, and peered down the long dark drive.

Suddenly he heard footsteps approaching, and he slipped out on to the road, almost running into the arms of a man entering the gate.

As he saw the man's face, Jim's heart began to beat wildly, and he would have shrunk back into the shadow with a queer feeling of terror. But the man saw him, and, grasping his collar, cried harshly:

"What were you doing in there? Spying, eh? It's not good for those who spy hereabouts! Be off with you, you young vagabond, and remember: it's dangerous for those who spy about this house!"

Jim did not answer. He was glad to walk away unmolested—thankful that he had been unrecognised. For he had good cause to know and fear the man who took him for a spy!

CHAPTER II.

THE ITALIAN DOCTOR—STRANGE FOREBODINGS—GEORGE LENNARD'S SWEETHEART—A SECOND VISIT TO AUDLEY TOWERS—WHAT JIM WARE SAW IN THE MOONLIGHT.

Five minutes later George Lennard walked up the drive towards the road. To judge by the expression on his face, one could see that his mission had been unsuccessful.

"I was a fool to go!" he muttered to himself. "I might have known my uncle would refuse to see me. The sneer on my cousin Ralph's face made me feel I would like to strike him, as he gave me my uncle's message at the door, and said: 'I see your address is on your card. We shall know where to find you if my uncle changes his mind!' Bah! I wish I hadn't let them know even where I live. Well, well, Nicholas Crann, I won't expose myself to further insults by attempting again to see you."

George stopped, and turned to give a last look at the dark old house where he was now regarded as an intruder.

At that moment a strange wailing cry seemed to float towards him on the night air from those gloomy walls.

He started and listened.

But the cry was not repeated. He persuaded himself that he had been mistaken.

"What strange tricks one's fancy plays one," he said to himself, as he walked towards the gate.

There he found Jim waiting for him.

"It's no good, Jim. I tried to break the silence of two years, but my uncle refused to even see me. Why, Jim, how scared you look! What's the matter?"

"I seed him just now!" the boy cried excitedly.

"Whom do you mean?" asked George mystified.

"Him that I told you of!—that fine-dressed gent, with the white hands, who planned the murder on the barge that foggy night!—that human tiger, what Lamb and Gepp are hand-and-glove with!" cried the boy. "Didn't you see him?"

"I saw someone certainly. As I was standing at the door a man came down the drive, and, speaking to my cousin, entered the house. I scarcely noticed his face. But are you sure you are right?"

"Dead sure! I knew him the moment I set eyes on him, but he didn't know me. He's called Bonari."

"Bonari! The Italian doctor, who is my cousin's friend—ho a murderer?" cried George. "I have heard that Dr. Bonari is the boon friend of my cousin Ralph Crann—"

"He said if I was spying—that's the word he used—I'd best look out," said Jim.

"Spying? The word suggests the existence of a mystery. There's an old adage about birds of a feather—what if these two men are purposely keeping my uncle's mind embittered against me for their own ends? There's something about this I don't like," said George musingly. "But there, you are tired, Jim. The sooner you get to bed the better; we've talked enough about my troubles for to-day. Now my old nurse is married, and lives in Shoreditch. She lets rooms. I'll send you to her house with a note, and she'll find you a bed. To-morrow you shall meet me, and we'll talk over matters—my affairs and yours, too, for I'm going to help you to earn your living."

George put the boy into the train at Hackney, with directions for finding the house; then he rode on to his lodgings.

George Lennard called for Jim the next day about noon, and after they had had dinner together, he said:

"Jim, I've made arrangements for the present that you shall lodge here with Mrs. Tetlow, whilst we look about and find some employment for you. Now, I'm going to Rotherhithe to see someone—a young lady; you shall go as far with me."

But Jim hesitated.

"It don't seem proper as I should walk alongside of you, sir. You're a gent, and I'm only——"

"Nonsense!" his friend laughed. "Your clothes may be shabby, but I know your heart is as good as gold. Besides, we are going to smarten you up a bit."

And with a clean new collar, a pair of tidy boots, and a coat that one of Mrs. Tetlow's own boys had outgrown, and with a little money in his pocket, Jim felt that he had become quite a "toff," as he expressed it.

"You are an out-and-out good 'un, sir!" the boy cried gratefully. "I wish I could do something for you in return."

Ah, Jim, the time is coming fast enough when you'll be able to make good your words; when you'll find yourself facing deadly peril to help the man who has befriended you, in a contest the issues of which mean life or death!

George Lennard was feeling somewhat in a bitter frame of mind that day. He had received a curt note from Audley Towers, emphasising the message he had received there on the previous night: his uncle would have nothing more to do with him. But he betrayed no trace of his bitter mood. He talked kindly to the little waif in whom he had interested himself.

He told Jim of the letter he had received.

"Wot if Bonari and your cousin have got your uncle under their thumb?" said Jim suddenly.

"The thought has occurred to me, too," George said. "If so I must endeavour to open my uncle's eyes to the real character of this man—at present, of course, I could prove nothing. I should like to find out what footing Bonari occupies in the house."

"Maybe I'll go up and look round," quoth Jim.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Maybe I'll go up to Audley Towers to-night and have a gossip with the servants. One can learn a lot from servants, I've heard."

George laughed, thinking the boy was joking.

But Jim had never been more serious in his life.

They made their way over London Bridge, and to the darker streets of Rotherhithe. They reached a lonely road, the houses on one side of which were backed by the river. Truly an uninviting neighbourhood!

"I am going to a house in this street, Jim," said George Lennard, "so we'll have to part here. You'll go home on a 'bus. Mind you don't get lost. I can't see you to-morrow until night, as I'm going out of London. But if you walk along the Embankment near Cleopatra's Needle about seven, I shall see you. Ah!"

He had seen a pretty girl, somewhat shabbily dressed, emerge from a private door next to a public-house. She came in their direction.

"Good-evening, Miss Lee," said the young fellow, with a curious blush, as he raised his hat. "No; you needn't be in such a hurry to run away, Jim."

"How do you do, Mr. Lennard?" And the girl held out her small gloved hand.

"This is a little friend of mine," said George. And the young lady smiled and held out her hand to Jim, which he shyly took.

"Proud to know you, miss," he said, adding, on a boyish impulse: "Mr. Lennard here, ain't he jest a real gent, and no error! I can't tell you all he's done for me; things as no one else in all England would have done for a cove wot's a stranger to him——"

But here George laughingly stopped his flow of eloquence, by saying:

"Stow that, Jim! I've done precious little for you yet!"

"That's jest like him, miss!" cried Jim. "He won't let me tell you how good he's been! But I'd be willing to give up my life for him, I would!"

Then he said rather shyly that he would have to be going, because, as he told himself, "I shouldn't want no other blokes about when I met my donah."

So, raising his cap politely, Jim wished them good-night, and off he went.

He walked back the way he had come, noting the name of the street, which now had an especial interest for him. Then he took a 'bus and went back to Mrs. Tetlow's to tea.

A couple of hours later, Jim was walking up the drive that led to Audley Towers.

A little paper parcel was in his hand; this was to complete his present disguise of an errand-boy, who had come to Audley Towers in mistake for another house. Such was the plan whereby Jim hoped to get into conversation with one of the servants. And for his friend's sake the boy had determined, if

possible, to glean some information about Dr. Bonari's footing in this house.

Unfortunately for Jim's purpose, the servant who opened the door, proved quite disinclined to enter into gossip. She curtly informed him that he was at the wrong house, and then, before he could reply, slammed the door in his face.

Jim felt disheartened at the failure of his elaborate stratagem. His journey had been wasted. He slowly retraced his steps.

But, as he was walking up the lonely avenue, something occurred that made the boy's blood run cold and rooted him in startled horror to the spot.

A wild cry had issued from the dark house! A cry as of desperate, human agony!

What could it mean?

The boy stood for a moment in the shadow of the trees motionless, unnerved by the sound he had heard.

At that moment he became aware that someone had entered the gate and was approaching him.

An once the boy associated the figure that he could dimly see in the faint moonlight with Bonari, and like a flash he remembered the Italian's words on the preceding night:

"It's dangerous for those who seek to spy about this house!"

Words surely that indicated that the old house contained some secret.

And that ghastly scream of a moment or two ago corroborated the suspicion that, hidden behind those ivy-grown walls was some dread secret indeed.

It would not do to let this unscrupulous man who had threatened him last night find him here now.

He would be deemed a spy.

These thoughts flashed through the boy's brain in a moment. He must hide.

He backed stealthily among the thick growth of dwarf shrubs, and dropped noiselessly on his hands and knees.

As the man came nearer, Jim could see in the dim light that it was not Bonari, but someone he feared still more—Saul Gepp!

The boy's breath came quick and fast; but luckily he had not been seen.

Then the most startling thing of all happened.

The door was flung open, and a tall, white-haired figure rushed out of the house, lifting up its arms in wild denunciation, and crying:

"A curse on this house of guilt! A curse on this house of guilt!"

As Gepp saw this sudden apparition, he ran towards the man and seized him.

From the doorway at the same moment rushed a second person, whom Jim recognised as Dr. Bonari.

"Hold him fast, Gepp!" he cried. "How the fool got away I don't know!"

The struggle was brief.

The white-haired man was soon pinioned.

A wild scream broke from him, and he was dragged into the house, still crying:

"Woe on this evil house!"

The door was shut, but still Jim, in his hiding-place, could hear the awful screams from within.

Then a sudden silence fell.

What terrible mystery did it betoken?

Trembling in every limb, the boy rose to his feet, and fled out into the silent roadway, with the cries still ringing in his ears.

CHAPTER III.

THE THREE MEN ON THE EMBANKMENT—"SHADOWED"—JIM'S SUSPICIONS ARE AROUSED—TRACKED TO THE OLD WHARF.

Jim did not get much rest that night. What he had seen in the grounds of Audley Towers excited his brain so much that it was long before he fell asleep. He was anxious to tell George of the mysterious occurrence he had witnessed.

George had told the boy that he could not see him until seven in the evening, and Jim could hardly control his impatience until night came. Then he made his way to the Thames Embankment, still revolving in his mind the events of the previous night.

That awful scream, that that white-haired figure flying through the door, as if trying to escape from a prison, with the cry: "A curse on this house of guilt!" and the man's recapitulation—over and over again did the boy live through this scene.

It had been like some ghastly nightmare, only it was true! What terrible mystery lay within those grim walls?

Jim took up his position near Cleopatra's Needle, and waited for his friend. Soon he saw George approaching. With him was Madge Lee. They were engrossed in conversation, and

each looked very happy. Jim felt half sorry to be the bearer of such serious news.

The boy saw George looking about, as though expecting to see him. He was on the point of revealing his presence, when something met his eyes that startled him into a sudden exclamation of surprise. Then, without a moment's delay, Jim stole quietly out of sight behind the obelisk.

For not a dozen yards away from where he had been standing were his enemies, Ishmael Lamb and Gepp, and with them the Italian, Dr. Bonari!

A momentary impulse came to Jim to call the police and denounce the men for the murder he had witnessed on the barge.

Yet what could he prove? Nothing. The crime had been committed long ago and forgotten. There would be only his bare word; the police would laugh at his tale, and he might again fall into the merciless clutches of these men.

Had they seen him? Jim was reassured on that point. They had no suspicion of his presence, for they were too busy watching George Lennard, whom they were evidently shadowing.

Jim's impulse to take to his heels lest they should see him was a momentary one to which he did not yield. For another thought flashed into the lad's brain—they could mean no good to his friend!

There was no doubt in Jim's mind that they were shadowing the unsuspecting man who had befriended him. What was their purpose? It could only be that they meant George Lennard some deadly harm.

Only the day before Jim had said he would lay down his life for his friend, if need be. Was he, then, to fly like a coward at the first breath of peril?

Here was a mystery unfolding before his eyes. Jim told himself that, for George Lennard's sake, he would not shrink from attempting to solve it, even though it meant falling again into the hands of his enemies.

Pulling his cap well over his eyes, and half hiding his face by a ragged woollen muffler, the boy crept in the wake of the three men.

He could only catch a stray word here and there, for he dared not go too near to them, lest the men should suspect that they were being followed.

But he heard the words:

"George Lennard—no one will suspect—verdict of accidental death!" spoken by the suave foreigner.

As far as London Bridge Jim followed the men, unnoticed by them.

At this point the boy expected the trio would cross the bridge, to follow George Lennard and his companion.

But to his surprise the men kept on the northern side of the river.

At first Jim thought of running up to George and warning him. But if he did that he might lose sight of the three scoundrels. It would be better, he thought, to track the men, and learn, if possible, more of their intentions.

So he followed them down Lower Thames Street, keeping some distance behind. More than once one or another of the men looked round. But they did not recognise the little urchin who was slinking along on the other side of the road. Evidently they had no suspicion that they were being watched.

They came to a street in Wapping.

From a considerable distance, Jim saw them unlook the gate leading into a yard that surrounded a dark, deserted-looking building, backed by a wharf. They entered.

With fast-beating heart, Jim crept up to the wall of the yard and listened. Then, summoning up his courage, he pushed open the gate and entered the yard.

Quietly he stole round by the side of the warehouse to the wharf at the back.

In the window looking out on the wharf and across the murky river a light appeared.

Then he heard their voices.

The boy crouched down to listen.

CHAPTER IV.

A MURDEROUS PLOT—A RACE AGAINST TIME—TO THE RESCUE!—THE ESCAPE BY THE RIVER.

Jim could hear the words they uttered quite distinctly, for, believing they were alone, the men did not trouble to lower their voices, which were borne to the boy's ears through a broken pane in the window.

From the conversation of the men inside the room, Jim learnt the nature of the house at Rotherhithe to which George frequently went—the house where Madge Lee lived.

It was a gambling-den, principally frequented by sailors, though ostensibly it was a duly-licensed public-house, kept by an unscrupulous woman who called herself Madame Vigne. This woman was Madge Lee's aunt.

Dr. Bonari, in his smooth, oily tones, was explaining his scheme to his two confederates.

"You will see I have lost no time," he said. "After hunting for Lennard's whereabouts, I only discovered it two nights ago



"A curse on this house of guilt!
A curse on this house of
guilt!" he cried. "Woe to
this evil house!"

by a lucky chance. Yesterday I found out that he frequents this house in Rotherhithe. Inquiries led me to discover, happily for our plans, an old acquaintance in Madame Vigne. She has cause to fear me. I forced her into consenting to help me."

"You're a deep 'un, doctor!" said Lamb.

Bonari laughed. He resumed:

"George Lennard has an infatuation for Madge Lee; it is solely to see her that he goes to the house. In her lies our chief danger. Despite her surroundings, this girl is what you English call perfectly 'straight.' If she suspected our plans she would warn Lennard."

"But how is she to know about 'em, doctor?" chuckled Gepp. "Madame Vigne will lose a good customer to-night, eh?"

The doctor laughed too.

"Yes, my friends. You may be sure Lennard has to spend money each time he goes to see the girl, or madame's welcome would soon wear out. He doesn't gamble—bah! he is a strait-laced young man!—but madame also sells bad spirits and wines. It is a public-house. So this infatuated young man pays for diluted spirits for the pleasure of sitting in a private room where he can talk to Madge Lee. Well, to-night, madame will

invent a pretext to get the girl away, and drug Lennard's glass. That is your opportunity—"

"We understand, doctor."

"As soon as he becomes senseless, you will secure him, and get him into your boat by the steps at the back of madame's house that leads down to the river. Then, whilst he is insensible—oh, my friends, it will be easy to drop him into the pool—"

"Yes?"

"Keep him under water till life is extinct. Then you will 'find' him—ha! ha!—and take the body to the river-police. Say that you saw the man jump in, and you went to his rescue, but were too late. There will be no marks of violence on the body; the verdict will be either suicide or death by misadventure."

"That's all very well, guv'nor; but I don't like the taking of the body to the perlice, and that's a fact. The perlice and me don't seem to hit it, somehow. Ain't it enough to make sure of drowning 'im?" grumbled Ishmael.

"No, no!" was the doctor's impatient reply. "Can't you understand? I want it to be known officially that George Lennard is dead. If you were to leave him in the water, he might be washed out to sea with the tide, and then I never could prove to the satisfaction of the law that he was dead."

"Very well, guv'nor, you generally gets yer own way," assented Lamb.

"The boat is waiting at the back by the wharf-steps," said Bonari. "You'll row across to Rotherhithe—I won't go with you for obvious reasons."

He looked at his watch.

"Ah, it is later than I thought! You must start at once!" cried the doctor, who spoke English fluently, and only revealed his foreign extraction by his accent. "Come!"

A horror had seized Jim. He understood that a plot worthy of a fiend was being hatched for the murder of his friend—a plot so skillfully planned that when the deed was done no suspicion of foul play would be aroused.

Was it possible that in this great city such a cold-blooded crime might be perpetrated with impunity, under the very noses of the police?

Could he thwart their plans?

Jim meant to leave undone nothing that boyish pluck and endeavour could accomplish.

But first of all he must take precautions not to be seen by the men. He had no time to slip past the house, and out of the gate, for he would inevitably meet them as they came round to the landing-stage where the boat was moored.

If he had had time he would have jumped into the boat himself, and rowed off, but he could not unfasten the moorings.

Quickly he crept round behind a stack of timber, and hid there, praying that his presence might not be discovered.

As Ishmael and Gepp got into the boat, Dr. Bonari pointed across the river, and explained to the men how they should recognise the house for which they were bound.

Then, loosening the moorings, the two men rowed away.

Jim heard Bonari leave the wharf with a low laugh of triumph, and pass into the street, locking the door of the yard after him.

As soon as he thought it was safe, Jim made his way round the side of the warehouse. Climbing the wall, he dropped into the dark street.

Then Jim ran.

Every moment was precious. In any case there was little hope that he could reach Rotherhithe before the men in the boat. But he might be in time to save his friend's life. This thought lent him wings. Not even in his flight from the barge had the boy flown so fast as he did to-night, when George Lennard's life was at stake.

At the time of this story the Tower Bridge was not yet built. People desiring to cross the Thames at that point had to use the ferry-boats that plied to and fro. Jim did so now. He jumped into a ferry-boat, and was rowed across.

How Jim blessed the happy chance that had induced George Lennard to take him as far as the house in Rotherhithe which he frequented. Otherwise, he might never have succeeded in finding Madame Vigne's house.

As it was, Jim had no difficulty in making his way direct to the dark street in which he had first met Madge Lee.

Dr. Bonari had told his confederates that Madame Vigne would arrange to get her niece out of the house on some pretext, in order that she might not become aware of the drugging of her lover.

Evidently she was just returning from madame's errand, quite unsuspecting of the dark plot against her lover's life, for, by the greatest of good luck, Jim espied her. In a moment he was at her side, breathlessly telling her his story.

A look of startled horror deepened on her face; at first he thought the girl was about to faint.

But instantly she recovered herself.

"I used to know Dr. Bonari; I always hated and mis-

trusted him!" she cried. "Please Heaven, we may yet be in time to save George. At any rate"—with a passionate look in her eyes—"his fate shall not go unavenged!"

They had by this time reached the house.

"Shall I look about for a policeman?" Jim cried.

"No; don't leave the doorstep. I may want your help at once. If a policeman should pass tell him. But don't go away. I am going in to learn if we are yet in time. If not, we will go at once to the police-station together!"

Swiftly she entered the house.

No policeman appeared in sight as the boy waited—the minutes seeming like centuries in his suspense.

In reality the girl reappeared at the door within three minutes.

"I've found him!" she said in a hurried whisper. "They have drugged and bound him. The men are upstairs drinking."

"And Mr. Lennard?"

"We will save him! Come in! Hush! not a sound!"

Jim followed her into the house down a passage. But their footsteps caused attention, for a voice came from above:

"Is that you, Madge?" And a door-handle rattled.

Madge did not answer; but she whispered to Jim:

"We must not lose a moment. They are desperate men. I locked the door of the room where they and my aunt are sitting, and they have discovered it!"

From upstairs as Madge spoke came the sound of a door being violently shaken, and voices were heard clamouring loudly for the door to be unfastened.

Madge quickly led her boy-companion into an apartment where George was lying, bound and unconscious.

Without waiting to unloose his bonds, the girl threw open an outer door close by, and through it could be seen a small landing-stage and steps leading down from the old house to the river.

At the foot of the steps was moored the boat belonging to the men upstairs.

"We must carry him down there quickly!" the girl whispered.

It was no easy task for the lad and this frail woman to lift the dead weight; but desperation nerved them.

Meanwhile, the sounds above increased in volume—they could hear the locked door being vigorously hammered and shaken by the prisoners.

Somehow Madge and Jim got the senseless man out through the door, down the steps, and into the boat. The girl jumped in. Quickly Jim unloosed the rope, and, seizing an oar, began to push off.

"Thank Heaven, we have saved him!" cried the girl hysterically.

Just then the evil face of Ishmael Lamb appeared at the window above. In a moment he saw what was happening, and his eyes blazed with fury. With an oath, he renewed his onslaught on the door, and in another moment succeeded in kicking it open.

So the fugitives were only just in time. Scarcely had Jim pushed off than the two men, furious to think that their prey was escaping them, rushed downstairs and out to the head of the river steps.

They were too late!

Jim's life on the barge had taught him how to handle an oar, and he and the girl pulled as for dear life. They were half a dozen yards from land, as the two baffled scoundrels rushed out, in time to recognise Jim Ware.

"Hang me, if it isn't that infernal imp that tipped me head over heels into the canal, and me wot had been like a father to 'im!" cried Ishmael, in conflicting rage and bewilderment.

It was an unfortunate reminiscence. Scarcely had the words left Ishmael's lips before his feet flew from under him on the green, slippery planks, and for the second time he took an involuntary header in the muddy waters.

He reappeared above the surface in time to hear Jim's derisive laughter from the fast-vanishing boat.

CHAPTER V.

AT GEORGE'S LODGINGS—THE THREAT IN THE LETTER—SOME POINTS IN A STRANGE CASE—GEORGE'S MARRIAGE.

As soon as they were in safety, Jim ceased rowing, and cut the cords that bound the insensible man. The cool night air and the bandage of cold water, that the girl made of her handkerchief, and applied to his brow, soon brought George back to consciousness.

He opened his eyes and looked round in wonderment, at first not realising where he was. But he soon recovered his scattered senses, for the drug administered had evidently acted less powerfully than was intended.

"You are safe, dear, thanks to this brave boy," the girl whispered to him. Then, turning to Jim: "Is there any fear

of pursuit?" she asked, straining her eyes. "If the soundrels obtained another boat might they not give chase?"

"Not much fear of that, miss, I think," answered Jim. "Underhand work is their game. They would be too much afraid of meeting the river police."

They landed, however, at the first convenient landing-stage, and, finding a cab, drove off to George's lodgings. Jim elected to ride outside with the driver. Inside, as the cab rattled along through the lighted streets, George, who was by this time feeling more like himself, had a serious talk with Madge Lee.

"Madge," he said, "to-night's work has robbed you of a home, for, of course, to go back to your aunt is impossible."

"I could never go back!" she cried, with a shudder. "I always loathed the place, the drunken gamblers who went there; but I never believed my aunt capable of such a crime."

"No doubt to-night's exposure has caused her to already fly from the place. She will hardly dare to stay. But we won't speak of her. Madge, you and I have been friends for a long time. I suppose you know that the only reason I had for going to that house, from which you and plucky little Jim rescued me, was to see you?"

"Yes; I knew that."

"In that den of evil I learnt to love you, Madge—you, whom its atmosphere of vice could not contaminate," he said earnestly. His arm had stolen round her waist. "I want you to be my wife."

And shyly she lifted her face to him, and told him he had made her very happy.

At last they reached George's lodgings.

Jim gazed around the comfortable room with feelings akin to awe. The pictures on the walls, the couch and the chairs, with their well-padded springs—all this seemed wonderful to him after the hard, comfortless experiences of his boyhood.

With a deep sigh of content he sank into the depths of a luxurious armchair, and murmured:

"Oh, my stars! ain't this just 'eav'ngly!"

Calling his landlady upstairs, George said:

"Mrs. Preedy, this young lady is going to be my wife. We shall be married in two days by special licence. In the meantime she will occupy my rooms. I shall sleep at an hotel. Will you bring up supper for three, please?"

And wasn't Jim delighted when he heard the former announcement.

"I feel as happy as if I was going to get spliced myself!" he cried; and proceeded to dance a breakdown out of sheer good spirits.

"Now we must have a serious talk," George said. "Jim, old boy, I want to hear how you came to know of the plot against me. It is owing to you and Miss Lee that I am alive at this moment, and I'll never forget that! Jim, old boy, you are 'one of the best,' and no mistake! You've been as staunch as steel."

"Why, sir, seeing wot a real brick you've been to me, do you think I could have done less?" Jim replied, taking the hand that George extended to him, and wringing it heartily.

Then the boy told his friend how he had seen the three men shadowing him on the Embankment, and how he in turn had shadowed them.

"Bonari!" cried George. "His work, was it? We knew him, of course, for an unscrupulous soundrel, yet what benefit could he derive from my death?"

"Don't forget he's a friend of your cousin," said Jim. "Yes; but that doesn't elucidate matters. He has no cause to fear me as a rival in my uncle's affection."

"I don't understand you, George," said Madge.

"My cousin, Ralph Crann, and I are nephews of rich old Nicholas Crann—we are his only living relatives. My uncle disinherited me two years ago. It was my own fault, though I think he has been more harsh than I deserved. It was for an act which I may say is the one thing in my past life on which I can look back with shame," George answered. "I'll tell you about it."

"A man I knew was in difficulties; my uncle's signature on the back of a promissory note would save him from ruin. I was an expert penman, and my cousin suggested I should forge my uncle's name."

"He will never know," my cousin said, "for long before the bill falls due you can find the money in event of your friend failing to meet it. You are defrauding no one by doing this, and you'll save your friend."

"His plausible arguments overcame my scruples. I forged the signature, only to find that my cousin had been planning my ruin! The treacherous hound got hold of that bill when discounted, and took it to my uncle!"

"The cur!" Madge cried passionately.

"My uncle was furious. He would not listen to my defence. He told me he could send me to prison if he liked. However, he said he would not do that—for the sake of the family name

he would destroy the bill. Only I was never to speak again."

"And you never have done?" asked Madge, who knew of George's history.

"No; we parted. I turned artist, and have been fairly successful," her lover answered. "I have often felt I would like to prove to my uncle that I had merely been guilty of folly and not of a desire to defraud. At last I made up my mind to call at his house and ask to see him. I was on my way to Audley Towers, when Jim and I became acquainted."

"Your uncle refused to see you?" she asked.

"Yes. On the card I gave to the servant was my address and on the morning after I received a letter from my uncle."

Going to a bureau, George took out a letter and read aloud. The writer declared emphatically that he no longer regarded George as his nephew, adding:

"I did not destroy the evidence of your forgery of my signature. If you attempt to see me or come to my house, or my nephew Ralph—in whose hands the document is—will, of my instruction, hand it over to the police, and a warrant will be taken out for your arrest!"

"How heartless your uncle is!" the girl said indignantly.

"That letter puzzled me," George remarked. "But for the signature at the end I could hardly have believed he would have sent such a letter. Now since my uncle refuses to forgive me, what motive can Ralph Crann have in seeking my death, as you suggest, Jim? It would have been different if my uncle intended to leave me any of his fortune."

Jim answered the question by another:

"I say, if you hadn't left your address, would your cousin have known where you lived?"

"No; I think that they had lost sight of me at Audley Towers."

"Evidently Bonari found out your address from your cousin," said Jim. "That looks like collusion, don't it?"

"Yes. No doubt, on Bonari's arrest, we shall learn if my cousin was implicated or not," George said.

"Guess, if I was you, I should leave this case out of the hands of the police for a spell," quoth Jim.

"Not have Bonari arrested for his attempt to murder me?"

"That's about the size of it. Look here, you've got to prove that Bonari had anything to do with it. All you could do would be to prove the case again Lamb and Gepp, and you'll lie low for a bit!"

"But, Jim, we know that they were merely the tools of Bonari!" cried George.

"Yus! But could we prove it? There's only my word against that of a rich doctor! Wot would a jury say? 'Insufficient evidence—leaves the court without a stain on his character and all that! No, Mr. Lennard, my evidence wouldn't convict him,' said Jim earnestly. "You've got some desperate villains to fight, and you must fight 'em with their own weapons. They have got a hold on you and they know it! You would do yourself more harm than 'em by going to the police. Wait the moment you commenced proceedings again Bonari, your cousin would checkmate you by having you arrested for forgery!"

"By Jove, Jim, I believe you're right!" George cried.

"What would you do?"

The boy reflected a moment, then he cried:

"Why, I'd lie low and keep my eyes open. First find out why Bonari should want you dead; find out whether he's acting for himself or for your cousin! Find out whether your cousin really has that forged bill, or if it's only a bit of bluff."

George stared at him.

"Bluff?" he exclaimed.

"Yus!" retorted the boy. "Didn't your uncle tell you years ago he meant to destroy that bill? Does it stand reason, then, that not only should he preserve it, but should also let it go out of his hands, not knowing who might get hold of it? If you ask me, I expect it is destroyed—only till we know that for certain, our safest plan is to act as though the document is in your cousin's hands to use again you."

"But," cried George, "in his letter my uncle distinctly said the bill was not destroyed. He is a harsh man, but I know him for a truthful one."

"You are sure your uncle did write that letter?" again objected Jim.

"Why, what do you mean? There is my uncle's signature to the letter!"

"You said you could hardly believe your uncle would write such a letter," persisted the boy. "Wot if your cousin forged it, and threatened you about that forgery—to prevent your going to Audley Towers?"

This startling suggestion made George open his eyes.

"But why should he fear my doing that, since my uncle won't see me?"

"I'll tell you why. 'Cos there's some other queer game afoot!" cried the boy. "When I waited for you on the Em-

WOULD YOU LIKE £5?

IF SO, ENTER FOR OUR NEW
COMPETITION NEXT WEEK.



Looking towards the window, he saw the boy glaring at him from behind a gleaming revolver.

bankment to-night I had some queer news for you. I went last night to your uncle's house to look round—"

"And you made a discovery?" George asked eagerly.

"Yus!" Jim told his friend of the strange scene he had witnessed. "Now wot do you make of that? Who could the white-haired bloke be?"

George was excited.

"Not my uncle, for he is short, whilst you say this man was tall. But whoever he was, there must be some terrible work going on there. On the night that I visited Audley Towers I fancied I heard a scream. Our business it shall be to sift the mystery. If we can, we will do so without calling in the police—unless we find out that it is a bogus threat about the forged bill being still in existence. I'll start by going to see Mr. Everett."

"Who's he?"

"My uncle's lawyer. He is a thoroughly honourable man; I used to be rather a favourite of his. He'll help me if he can. But there, we'll not discuss this again to-night, for here comes supper."

The adventures through which they had passed did not prevent them doing justice to the meal.

The following day George called at Mr. Everett's office. He was disappointed to find that the lawyer was out of town the day. He would be back to-morrow, one of the clerks told him.

"I'm going to be married to-morrow," George laughed; "but I am anxious to see Mr. Everett. I will call then."

George Lennard had procured a special licence, and on the next morning he and Madge were quietly married at an old city church.

Was it Jim Ware's fancy that, as they came out of the church, he saw quickly moving away from the doorway the figure of Dr. Bonari?

CHAPTER VI.

A VISIT TO THE LAWYER—THE MYSTERY DEEPENS
—THE LAWYER SUSPECTS A TERRIBLE SECRET
—MADGE DISAPPEARS.

It was an odd wedding-day. Instead of starting on a honeymoon, as most happy couples do, there was business to keep George Lennard in London, since he had an appointment with the lawyer.

"How are you, Mr. Lennard?" said the man of law, a pleasant-looking elderly gentleman, as George entered. "Pleased to see you. I have wondered a good deal lately what had become of you."

"Your curiosity does not seem to have been shared by my

uncle, Mr. Everett," said George, as he sat down. "He was glad when I left his roof, and, if I am not mistaken, was sorry when I turned up two or three days ago."

"I hardly understand."

"Several days ago I called at Audley Towers, and asked to see my uncle. I was anxious to be reconciled."

"And his answer was?" asked the lawyer, looking curiously at the visitor.

"He refused to see me. The next day I got a letter from him. He threatened me with arrest if I went near his house again."

"I suppose you haven't that letter about you?"

"Yes."

"May I see it?"

"I brought it to show you. It puzzled me. You see, after two years that forgery still hangs over my head as a threat."

The lawyer read the letter through. A puzzled look was on his face. Then he said:

"Your uncle never wrote this letter, Mr. Lennard."

"Ah! I wondered if that suspicion would strike you as it has done me!" cried George excitedly.

"Believe me, it is a forgery."

Nearly two years ago, in my presence, Mr. Nicholas Crann destroyed the bill that was the

cause of your quarrel. As he did so, I assured him you were more sinned against than sinning. He made no reply; but at last he came to share my view. A month ago I had ample proof that he had forgiven you."

"You are sure of this?" cried George eagerly.

"Quite. I am glad you have called, Mr. Lennard. For the past week I have thought of advertising for your present address. I am not easy in my mind concerning your uncle, Nicholas Crann!"

"Explain yourself."

"The letter you have just shown me, purporting to come from your uncle, has deepened my anxiety tenfold," the lawyer said. "I am now so convinced that something is seriously wrong at Audley Towers that I feel justified in breaking my client's confidence in a matter that concerns you. Less than a month ago your uncle came to my office and made a new will. It is in that safe yonder. He made you his sole heir!"

George started in amazement. If it were true, as he suspected, that his cousin was connected with the attempt on his life, here indeed was the motive of the crime.

"It was expressly stated in the will," went on the lawyer, "that should your death precede that of the testator, in event of your being married, on your uncle's death his fortune should go to your wife. Your cousin Ralph is not mentioned in the will. You see, then, how much at variance this act on your uncle's part is with this letter purporting to come from him. I remember distinctly the words Mr. Crann used as he left my office."

"I have discovered my nephew Ralph to be a hypocrite," he said, "who has robbed me right and left. This very day I turn him out of my house for ever. I mean to advertise for the address of my nephew George, for I long to make up the foolish quarrel before I die."

"You have not seen my uncle since then?" asked George.

"No. I wrote, saying I wished to see him on business. The reply I received was a curt note from Ralph Crann, telling me his uncle was far from well, and could see no one. A week later I paid a visit to Audley Towers. I was told that I could not see my client—he was too ill. I asked to see Ralph Crann, who coolly informed me I could not have an interview. So I had to accept this decision."

"But my uncle has always been eccentric."

"Yes, but reflect," said the lawyer. "Your uncle left my office three weeks ago, expressing his intention of at once turning Ralph out of the house. Yet Ralph Crann still occupies the same position in the house. Then, again, the letter you have shown me—on the face of it a forgery. Did your uncle ever see the letter you wrote? I doubt it. George Lennard, that threat in the letter about the forged bill looks to me like an attempt to prevent you going to the house, and

whoever forged that letter fears that you may discover whatever secret those walls hide!"

Jim's words over again! George cried:

"You think there is some secret? I know there is! Listen!" George told the lawyer both of the scene witnessed by Jim, and the attempt made on his life.

The startled look on Mr. Everett's face showed how deeply the news impressed him.

"Incredible!" he cried. "Who could the prisoner have been? Certainly not your uncle from the description. But where is your uncle? Is it likely he would allow such proceedings in his house? Is he a prisoner, too? And the attempt on your life—that points to a terrible conclusion—"

"You mean—"

"You are the old man's heir—but if you were dead, and Nicholas Crann failed to make another will, Ralph, being next-of-kin, would inherit everything; or, rather, would have done two days ago. Your marriage, of course, puts another heir between him and the fortune."

"To-night I shall go to Audley Towers with the police!" George cried.

"I will go with you!" said the lawyer.

"Good. The sooner we start the better. But first of all I must return to my wife and explain my absence. I will call here for you in half an hour."

"I shall be ready."

George darted out into the darkening street, with a thousand strange fears assailing him. Calling a hansom, he drove quickly to his lodgings.

He had promised to return to the lawyer's office in half an hour. But an hour passed, and to Mr. Everett's surprise he did not come. Two hours, three hours crept by, still there was no sign of him. In terrible suspense, the lawyer asked himself—had some evil befallen George Lennard?

Meanwhile, George rushed upstairs into his rooms. He was surprised to find them empty. He went downstairs to make inquiries of Mrs. Preedy.

That worthy woman was evidently astonished to see him. She ejaculated:

"Lor, Mr. Lennard! Then you ain't met with no accident?"

"Accident? Of course not! Where is my wife?"

"Why, she went away in a cab, sir, that came from the horspital!"



The swaying of the two wrestling men caused his aim to miscarry, and by accident he plunged the knife into Ralph Crann's side.

"Hospital? What do you mean?"

A great dread was fastening icy fingers round his heart.

"A cab came, sir, and a messenger, saying you'd met with a haccident, and your wife was to go in the cab at once to the horspital."

A wild cry of despair broke from George Lennard, that frightened the landlady no less than his hoarse words:

"A trick! They have decoyed her away! My wife has fallen into the power of those scoundrels!"

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE TRACK OF THE SCOUNDRELS—GEORGE FINDS HIS WIFE—TREACHERY—TRAPPED!

Without waiting to enlighten the terrified woman, George rushed into the street.

Only one thought possessed him. His wife was in the hands of those merciless scoundrels who had plotted his ruin!

What other explanation could there be? The story of his accident was just the one to excite Madge's fears. She would not stop to reflect. She would jump in the cab in her anxiety to be with her husband, who might be dying. An old trick, but as effective one to play on a loving wife.

What was he to do?

George decided he would go to the police, and tell them all. Probably his cousin was implicated in this affair—at any rate, he could and must be forced to give a clue to the whereabouts of that oily, scheming villain, Dr. Bonari.

"If any harm befalls Madge!" George muttered to himself fiercely, "I will never rest till I have made the scoundrels suffer!"

He had not gone many yards from the house when a woman advanced to him, and laid a hand on his arm.

Startled out of his preoccupation, George looked at her, saying:

"Well, what do you want?"

"You are Mr. George Lennard?" the woman asked in low, hurried tones.

"That is my name. Tell me your business quickly? I have no time to spare," he answered.

"You will listen more readily when you know the nature of my business," she said. "Your wife has been decoyed away by villains!"

"How came you to know that?" he demanded hoarsely.

A wild hope surged up within him.

"You know where she is?" he cried eagerly.

"I know. That is why I stopped you. I was hurrying to your house, when I saw you come out. It is providential both for you and me that we did not miss. Come down this side street. We can talk more freely there."

He looked at the woman half suspiciously. What if this was but some new move in the plot?

She seemed to read his mistrust in his face.

"Oh, you can trust me," she said. "Your wife has been decoyed away at the direction of an Italian doctor by name Bonari—"

"I knew it!"

"For what purpose I do not know; but he employed my husband to carry out the plot. Thinking she was being driven to an hospital to see you, she was taken to a lonely house by my husband. He, my husband, is in the power of Dr. Bonari, and dared not refuse to carry out the orders given him. But at all risks I determined to effect the poor lady's escape, and so have come to you to take you to the place where she is a prisoner."

"I will go with you—with the police!" George said.

"No, not that!" she cried. "Though I would aid you, it shall not be at the expense of my husband. If the police accompany us, my poor husband will be arrested. This is his first crime, and he was driven to it by his terror of Dr. Bonari. Unless you consent to go with me alone, I shall not help you!" she said in a decided tone. "Nothing shall make me betray my husband."

"What guarantee have I that this is not all some further deep-laid plot against me?" he cried irresolutely.

She smiled.

"I expected to find you suspicious, and I came prepared to conquer your fears. Look! I give

you this. Use it if danger threatens you. Does that proof of my good faith convince you—my husband's revolver?"

The woman had handed him a small revolver.

He examined it before he answered.

There was a cartridge in each of its six chambers.

"Yes, I will trust you," said George.

"Call a cab; we have far to go."

They got into a hansom. George's companion gave an address to the cabman—merely the name of a street, not the number of any particular house. It was that of a street in Wapping close by the riverside.

George sat silent. He had plenty to occupy his thoughts.

His first anxiety was to rescue his wife. Once she was safe, all his energies should be directed to bringing Dr. Bonari to justice.

And whatever secret lay hidden within the walls of his uncle's residence, Audley Towers, as the lawyer feared might be the case, that should be laid bare.

He had nothing to fear from his cousin; the bill with the forged signature was destroyed—that old folly that might have consigned him to a prison. He could work with a free hand.

The cab rattled on through grimy thoroughfares, past dingy-looking warehouses, dark and silent most of them, for the day's work was over.

Solitary gaslamps threw a faint flickering light

They were nearing their destination, much to George's relief, for a terrible impatience consumed him.

At the corner of a dark, ill-lighted street the cab drew up, and they dismounted. George paid the cabman, and they walked forward.

"We are close at hand now," the woman said.

George's hand was grasping the cocked revolver that lay in one of his pockets. There was a stern, set look on his face.

The woman paused before a doorway in a blank wall.

"Be as silent as you can," she whispered. "Follow me."

She pushed open the gate. George found himself inside a desolate-looking yard, enclosing a warehouse that was backed by the moaning old river.

"Within a minute I promise you you shall see your wife," she whispered.

He nodded; but on the alert for treachery, he took out the revolver and held it in his hand.

She opened a door of the house silently. He followed her into a passage.

The woman closed the door, and as she did so the catch gave a click.

George looked suspiciously at her. Was it a signal? But he could glean nothing from her face.

At the end of the passage he saw a door ajar, from which streamed a streak of light.

"Your wife is there," the woman said.

Grasping his revolver, George rushed forward and hurled back the door.

Yes; the woman had spoken the truth! There, in one corner of the room, bound and gagged, was Madge!

He called out her name, and he saw a wild look of joy come into her face. She tried to answer, but with the gag in her mouth, she could only moan.

There were two men in the room, sitting at a table, on which was some food and drink.

They started up at his appearance.

Sternly George levelled his weapon at the men whom he had already recognised as the two scoundrels who had hounded and bound him at Madame Vigne's house.

"Seiz hand or foot and I fire!" he cried.

At that moment a noose of stout cord was flung over his shoulders from behind, with the evident intention of pinning his arms to his side.

But he wrenched himself free, and turned to find it was the woman who had been his guide. Then he knew he had been betrayed.

Planting his back against the wall, he cried:

"You traitress! The first of you—man or woman—that tries to bar my way, I'll shoot dead!"

"Fire away, and good luck to you!" the woman cried, with a mocking laugh. "You fool, you don't suppose I gave you a loaded revolver? All those cartridges are dummy ones, filled with sawdust!"

A horror seized George Lennard. He pulled the trigger.

No report followed.

Flinging away the useless weapon he seized a chair and lifted it above his head.

He would make a desperate fight for Madge's life and his own.

But Ishmael Lamb, with a coarse laugh, cried:

"We wanted yer here, guv'nor, and we've got yer. Bet your life you won't get away this time as you did last! Enough of this farce! This barker is loaded!"

And he levelled a revolver at George Lennard's head.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ARTIST IN CRIME—JIM HEARS OF MADGE'S DISAPPEARANCE—JIM ON THE WARPATH—THE DEATH-TRAP BY THE THAMES—JIM AGAIN GETS THE BETTER OF ISHMAEL LAMB.

At that moment a well-dressed man, smoking a cigarette, entered the doorway.

"You managed very well, Myra," he said approvingly to the girl. "You needn't stay here any longer. You played your part to perfection, like an artist."

As he spoke, Dr. Bonari sat down, and, taking the revolver from Ishmael's hand, told the two men to bind George.

"Let me tell you, my friend, that resistance won't avail you. I shall shoot you dead if you as much as struggle!" he said.

George recognised the folly of trying to resist. The two men bound him.

His mental agony was terrible—not so much on his own account, but for his wife's. As she lay bound and unable to speak, he saw the horror in her eyes, and the sight added to the intensity of the terrible situation.

He felt that they were both beyond help or hope.

But his voice did not falter or show a sign of fear, as he said:

"You are Dr. Bonari, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"What is the meaning of this outrage? Why do you so persistently seek to injure me or mine?"

"Oh, believe me, I bear you no ill-will personally!" said the doctor, with much politeness. "Be sure I act with adequate motives."

"At any rate, let my wife go free!" George cried. "Do what you will to me, but don't be such a consummate coward as to make war on a woman!"

"Let her go—to inform against us? And after our trouble to bring her here?" smiled the doctor. "Oh, no, my friend! You have made her your wife, and in so doing have sealed her fate!"

Then George understood. His death alone would not serve the evil ends of these men, for by the terms of his uncle's will his wife stood between Ralph Crann and the fortune. Until she, too, was dead, Ralph, the next-of-kin, could not inherit. Oh, how horrible it all was!

Suddenly changing his suave tones and walking up to his prisoner, Dr. Bonari looked full at George Lennard. His eyes gleamed with a hard, impenetrable glitter.

"You escaped my toils once through the bungling of those fools there! But this time I have you fast—fast as a fly in a spider's web, and with as little hope of escaping alive! You are in someone's way, my friend!"

"You mean my unscrupulous cousin, Ralph Crann," George said.

"Oh, I mention no names!" said the doctor airily. "I merely state that fact as the reason why you are to be removed—artistically. I flatter myself on being an artist—an artist in crime if you will. See how well my plans are laid! You and your wife are here, and no one, except my agents, knows that you have been brought to this lonely wharf!"

The doctor smiled, and rubbed his fat, white hands together complacently.

But at his words a thought came into George's mind.

"What if Jim Ware should suspect the place of their imprisonment?"

For no doubt this was the wharf to which the boy had followed Bonari and his two confederates on the night of the first attempt on George's life.

Sooner or later the disappearance of George and his wife would arouse suspicion—in Jim's mind, at any rate. And this wharf would no doubt suggest itself to the boy as a place to which to direct the attention of the police.

But George had little hope that help would come before it was too late to be of use.

"If I have to die, I'll not die like a coward!" he said proudly. "As for you and your miserable tools"—addressing himself to Bonari—"be sure retribution will strike you sooner or later—a shameful death that will fitly terminate a life of crime! A death that you will whiten and shudder to think of, like the cowards you are, as you walk to the gallows that claims you! My wife, courage!" he cried to Madge, casting her a tender look.

Bonari had started uneasily at George's denunciatory words. Almost involuntarily, as it were, he put his hand up to his throat, as though the noose of Justice already was encircling it.

"Curse you! You are too free with your tongue!" cried Ishmael Lamb roughly.

He struck George brutally across the mouth, adding:

"Well, you won't wag it much longer, my fine gentleman! I only wish we had your friend Jim Ware as well. I owe that

"Bring him a score I mean to repay to the full some day, when he falls into my hands! I'd like to have him here at my mercy alongside you!" he muttered, with a dark look on his evil face.

Perhaps Jim Ware was nearer at that moment than Ishmael Lamb dreamed.

Five minutes after George had rushed out of the house, distracted by the news of his wife's disappearance, Jim called. He found the landlady in a state of nervous agitation.

"Oh, something terrible has happened!" Mrs. Preedy wailed. "I don't rightly know what, but something terrible!"

At last Jim elicited from her what she knew. "Can you explain what it all means?" she cried.

Jim's face was ashen by now. "It means," he cried hoarsely, "that that Italian fiend has kidnapped the young lady! If Mr. Lennard should come in, tell him I've gone to find her."

Little did the boy dream that his friend, too, had fallen into the grip of those relentless enemies.

At once Jim's thoughts flew to the wharf in Wapping, where, unknown to Bonari, he had overheard the crafty Italian's former plot against George.

The scoundrels did not dream that their rendezvous was known. To the wharf, then, he would go as the first step in his search for the missing girl.

At first Jim thought of acquainting the police, but he reflected that such a course might occasion delay and hamper his movements. The police might laugh at his belief that the girl had been kidnapped.

No, he would go alone, and make sure of the correctness of his suspicions before he called the police to his aid.

Arming himself with a sheath-knife that belonged to George, he made his way to Gower Street Station.

Very fortunately the New Cross train was nearly due. Jim got the ticket, and within five minutes was on his way to Wapping. Thanks to the speedier method of locomotion, Jim got out at Wapping Station only ten minutes after George Lennard and his treacherous guide had descended from the cab.

The boy hastened from the station, and soon stood in front of the rotting gate that led into the yard of the warehouse. He found it locked, but in half a minute he had surmounted it. Then the brave lad quietly crept round by the side of the great silent building to the wharf at the back.

Above the dreary moaning of the wind he could hear voices; then he saw, as on the former occasion, a light in a window at the back of the warehouse.

At his feet the river was hurrying along, black and sullen, with little white crests of foam churned up by the wind.

The boy cautiously peeped into the window where the light was.

Imagine his horror at seeing not only the bound figure of the missing girl, but also George Lennard a prisoner!

Jim's first impulse was to rush for the police. He cursed himself for having come here without acquainting them of his intention.

It was too late to go for the police now, for some words he heard kept him riveted to the spot.

"Go and see if the cab has come yet, Lamb." It was the doctor who was speaking.

Ishmael went out, unlocked, and opened the yard-door. Bonari was holding a chloroform-pad over George's nostrils.

Gepp said: "I don't see as how there's any occasion for this young spark to be taken over to Hackney. Why can't we dispose of the pair of 'em here in the water-cellar?"

"Ah, friend Gepp, you talk idly," was the doctor's bland reply. "Husband and wife have both to be got out of the way; but the important point is that we do so without arousing any suspicion."

"Well," grumbled Gepp, "why should it cause suspicion if we drowned 'em both?"

"Fool! We have to make sure that the bodies will be found, that the fact of the death of each can be legally established!" said the doctor contemptuously. "If both bodies were 'found' by you and Lamb in the Thames, suspicion of foul play would be aroused at once. No; I have a better method. I propose to take the man to Audley Towers. He will be found dead on Hackney Marshes under circumstances pointing to death from natural causes. A few days later the body of his widow will be 'found' by Lamb and yourself floating in the river!" said the doctor.

Jim shuddered as he listened to the deliberate words. "In one case, you see, Gepp, it will be 'natural death' in the other, 'suicide,' induced by the widow's grief. My methods are artistic, Gepp. All crime should be artistic, else it is a failure. Ah, I hear the rattle of cab-wheels!"

A cab—driven no doubt by an agent of the crafty doctor's—was heard in the quiet street.

Ishmael came back into the room and reported that the in-

sensible man could be got into the cab unseen, as the street was deserted.

"The tide is on the turn about this hour," said Dr. Bonari. "You will take the woman into the cellar, Ishmael. You won't be afraid of ghosts, all alone here, eh?" he laughed pleasantly. "Come, Gepp, take this fellow's legs."

Between them, Gepp and Dr. Bonari lifted the senseless body of George Lennard, and took it to the cab. Then Jim heard the yard-gate close behind them, and the cab rattle off.

During those few minutes of horror the lad had stood as though rooted to the spot, knowing that he could not get away from his hiding-place unseen to call the police to this den of iniquity.

"There's only one of them to face now," thought the boy. "Evidently Gepp and Bonari are going to Audley Towers. Though I could not save George Lennard, I'll rescue the poor young lady or die myself in the attempt!"

But he knew that he must be prudent in his movements. Rashness might be fatal, for he was but a boy, pitted against a strong, desperate man.

He stood motionless, listening and watching, waiting his opportunity.

Ishmael Lamb was standing looking at the lovely girl, whom he was about to consign to a terrible death with no scruple of remorse.

He had been drinking, and he laughed brutally. "Do you know wot is in store for you, my fine lady?" he cried, with a grin on his repulsive face.

Jim could not tell whether she heard or not. Perhaps she had fainted.

"There's a cellar below here," went on Ishmael mockingly, "a death-trap, my lady. It is empty at low tide, but as the river rises the water creeps in, higher and higher—in by inch up the wall—drowning anyone who is caged there! The tide is rising now, my lady, and before it turns again, the life'll have been choked out of you, till you're as cold as the flagstones in the cellar to which I'm going to take you! It comes in slowly does the water—slowly, but surely as fate! Ha! ha!"

The man tossed off another glass of brandy-and-water. Jim was horror-struck.

What horrible mysteries lay hidden in the heart of this great city! What terrible facilities for the execution of their secret crimes of which the social outlaws availed themselves.

How many other victims had been done to death in that horrible underground water-cellar, drowned with the rising of the tide?

Suddenly Ishmael said to himself: "Ah, better lock the yard-gate! Not that I fear trespassers. Still, it'll be safest. Then I'll return to you, my lady, and carry you down to the cellar and the incoming tide!"

He went out of the room. Now was Jim's opportunity! He tried to force open the window, the catch of which he could see was undone.

To his dismay it stuck. At last, however, he got it open. He climbed into the room.

He saw a revolver lying on the floor. He seized it. At that moment Ishmael Lamb reappeared. With a cry of startled rage, he saw the boy.

"You here!" he cried. "You young limb, you've come to your death this time!"

Pale but determined, Jim levelled the revolver at his old enemy.

But Ishmael, who had seen him pick up the weapon, laughed hoarsely, as he said: "That toy won't hurt!"

Jim pulled the trigger. No report followed. It was the weapon loaded with blank cartridges that George Lennard had flung away.

Laughing at the thought of the revenge he would take on this boy, Ishmael leapt towards him. Jim was very near death at that moment, as he darted round the table from his pursuer.

On one corner of the table were the remains of the supper on which Ishmael and Gepp had been regaling themselves. There was a jar of pickles, and as he saw it an idea flashed into Jim's head. Seizing it as he ran, he turned and dashed the contents in the face of his pursuer. The vinegar, of which the jar was half full, caught Ishmael's eyes, and temporarily blinded him.

He yelled with pain, rendered for the moment helpless, as he groped in his pocket for a large clasp-knife.

Before he could use it, Jim seized the heavy pair of tongs, and struck Ishmael Lamb a heavy blow.

The man fell like a log. Hurriedly Jim set to work to bind the stunned man hand and foot with the cord he found in the room.

When Ishmael was securely bound, Jim turned his attention to the woman.

The cords had cut cruelly into her white flesh. Gently he removed them, and unfastened the gag.

She was unconscious.

Taking the brandy from the table he forced a little down her throat.

The spirit acted as an immediate stimulant; the girl moaned, and opened her eyes.

"Don't be afraid!" cried the lad. "It's me—Jim! You have nothing more to fear!"

"But my husband?" she cried. "Where is he? Is he safe?"

"Don't be afraid about him, ma'am!" answered Jim, putting a confidence into his words that he was far from feeling. "We'll rescue him, too, never fear!"

By this time Ishmael had recovered consciousness. He began to whine for mercy.

"You'll get what mercy you deserve, you villain! You bet you've got to stay here till the arrival of the police," answered Jim. "When next you see me you'll be in the dock of the Old Bailey, and I shall be giving evidence agin you. It's the gallows, or Portland for you, Ishmael, don't you forget it!"

Turning to the girl, he asked anxiously:

"Do you feel strong enough to walk a little way, ma'am? Here, take a sup more brandy."

Jim picked up the key of the yard-gate which Ishmael had dropped.

Together they made their way out of that house of evil deeds into the fresh night-air.

"I can walk now," the girl said. She added piteously: "Oh, Jim—Jim dear, you have saved me—save my husband, too!"

"I'm going to do my best," he said. "Now we must go straight to the nearest police-station."

They reached the police-station, and Jim breathlessly told his tale.

"They have taken Mr. Lennard to Audley Towers in Hackney!" Jim cried. "If we go at once we may be in time." No time was lost.

Within three minutes a couple of police were on their way to the wharf to arrest Ishmael Lamb; and, leaving Madge at the station, Jim and an inspector drove off in a cab with all haste to the Hackney police-station.

The net was closing round a gang of rogues at last.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT JIM SAW THROUGH THE WINDOW—ON THE LEADS—JIM HOLDS THE VILLAINS AT BAY—A TIMELY RESCUE—THE TERRIBLE SECRET OF THE OLD HOUSE.

For the third time Jim Ware found himself entering the gateway that opened from the lonely by-road upon the drive of Audley Towers.

With him were three plain-clothes men.

The moon was quite obscured, and under the cover of darkness the party silently stole over the grounds, until they stood under the shadow of the dark old mansion.

"Inspector!" whispered Jim eagerly, "do you see, there's a light up there in that tower? If I was to climb up—I could do it easy—I can peep in and report to you. You see, I've heard Mr. Lennard say this old house is chock-full of secret hiding-places. Were you to knock at the door it might alarm our birds, and Bonari and Mr. Lennard (who is probably drugged, if still alive) would be in safe hiding before we could reach the room."

The inspector, who admired Jim for his plucky achievements at the wharf, and seeing that there was sense in the boy's proposal, assented.

Jim, lithe as a cat, easily climbed up the tough, knotted ivy branches.

He reached the ledge of the old mullioned window and peeped in.

Then, to the surprise of the police, instead of descending, the boy began to climb still higher. He was now on the leads of the roof. Impatiently they waited. At the inspector's command one of the plain-clothes men began to climb up—more slowly and cautiously than Jim, on account of his weight—to ascertain the boy's delay.

The man peeped into the window. A terrible sight met his eyes.

In a bare room was a white, emaciated man, almost like a skeleton, with drawn features that spoke of awful privations.

Then he saw that through an open skylight Jim was holding a whispered conversation with this pitiable object of humanity.

At that moment Jim, who had seen the officer's ascent, leaned over and whispered:

"Quick! Enter at once! This man confined here in this room a prisoner is Nicholas Crann's butler, whom the villains have tried to drive mad. He is half-starved—almost dead!"

It was the man whose attempt to escape Jim had witnessed from his hiding-place among the shrubs a few nights before.

"As I expected, Bonari is in the house now. The butler has heard his voice. Quick! Lose no time!" cried the boy.

The man began to climb down, but slowly, for he found the descent both difficult and dangerous. Jim did not descend. Instead, guided by some words of the imprisoned man, he quickly made his way still further over the leads, and began to climb down at the other side of the house, till he stood in an angle of the wall on the end of a broad ledge by the window of a lighted room. Any sound he might have made was lost in the whistling of the wind.

Through the window he saw the man he was in search of, George Lennard, still alive!

But evidently he had only just come in time, for in front of the bound man stood Dr. Bonari smiling, with a glass in his hands.

Another man, a stranger, was in the room.

"This is poison, my friend," the doctor was saying deliberately, gloating over his prisoner's sufferings. "Poison that does its work and leaves no trace! Its action will simply make the heart beat slower and slower till its action ceases. Now you shall drink it!"

The boy listened with horror. Then he remembered he had dropped into his pocket the revolver he had picked up in the old riverside house. True, it was loaded, but with blank cartridge, but it might serve to frighten the scoundrels until the entrance of the police.

The cup was nearing George's lips, and his teeth were being forced apart.

Then crash!

Jim had thrust his foot through the window. The doctor started, dropped the glass of poison, as, looking towards the window, he saw to his abject amazement the boy's face glaring at him from behind a gleaming revolver. He could hardly credit his senses.

Both he and his companion—who was none other than Ralph Crann—started back, as Jim cried:

"Stand, or I fire!"

It was a lattice window, and whilst he pointed his revolver at the two men, he managed during their momentary confusion to unfasten the catch of one of the sides of the window, which swung back on its hinges, Jim all the while never taking his eyes off the two men.

Quick as lightning the boy sprang into the room.

He knew that whilst the two scoundrels stood together he had a mastery over them. He could not hold if they separated. So he cried:

"Hands up! The first that moves a step I'll shoot!"

So determined were his words that the two men, both cowering to the core, and utterly cowed at the sight of the revolver, held up their hands, whilst their faces grew livid, as they stood, not daring to move, in a corner of the room.

At that moment downstairs was heard a knock on the door. Jim knew it was the police.

George, who was as surprised as the two scoundrels at his plucky friend's strange entrance, cried hoarsely:

"Jim, you brick!"

And Jim answered, never taking his eyes off the two men, who stood like rats at bay, neither daring to move:

"Oh, it's all in a day's work! Buck up, guv'nor! That's the police below! Your wife's safe, and Ishmael Lamb's in quod!"

Hearing the news about his wife, George cried in overwhelming thankfulness:

"Thank Heaven! Thank Heaven!"

Another loud rapping was heard on the door below. Jim felt they were not safe yet. The two men were eyeing him, waiting for the least relaxation of his vigilance to make a desperate effort for freedom; and the tension on his own nerves was becoming almost unbearable.

There was a knife on the table. Without taking his eyes off the two men, he cautiously reached for it. George's hands were free, though his arms were pinioned. He put the knife into George's hand, who began to saw away at his cords. Cutting through the rope, he wrenched his arms free. Quickly he severed the cords binding his feet. George Lennard was free.

Below, before the last bond was cut, a crash was heard. The police had broken in the door and had entered the house.

Footsteps were heard racing up the stairs, and, with alarm on his face, Gepp burst into the room.

The sight that met his eyes there startled him still more. But not losing his presence of mind, Gepp, before George could reach him, knocked the revolver out of Jim's hand.

The two men rushed out of their corner, and George threw himself on Ralph Crann.

The doctor seized the revolver.

"You shan't live to tell tales!" he cried, and levelled it at George's head.

But, whilst struggling in Gepp's grasp, Jim cried out:

"Fire away! You loaded it yourself—with blank cartridges!"

With an oath, the doctor pulled the trigger and found that such was the case. He had been "hoist with his own petard!" "Help! help!" yelled Jim, to guide the police to the room. Gepp was holding him tightly. One arm was round him, with the other hand he was trying to throttle the struggling boy. Jim saw murder in the man's face.

Meanwhile a desperate struggle was going on between George and Crann.

The former had dropped his knife. Bonari seized it, intending to stab George; but the swaying of the two wrestling men caused his aim to miscarry, and by accident he plunged the knife into Ralph Crann's side, just as the police dashed into the room.

The inspector seized Gepp in a grip of iron. A minute later and Jim would have been throttled. The others rushed to seize Bonari.

But before they could reach him, he darted to the window and leapt through. He was picked up dead!

And where was Nicholas Crann all this while? Why had not the master of the house been alarmed by the entry of the police?

The butler, released from his prison, with tottering steps led them to a locked door.

"He's in there! My poor master's in there! Dead! Murdered!" he cried. "Oh, this house of guilt!"

In horror they entered, after bursting the door. Their eyes encountered a horrible sight!

Under an air-tight glass case was the body of Nicholas Crann, who—to judge by the condition of the skin—might only have been dead a few hours.

"My poor master has been dead almost a month!" the white-haired butler cried.

The bystanders looked at him incredulously.

"Oh, it's true! Don't think I'm mad, though the horrors I've seen and my sufferings almost drove me mad! They murdered my poor master nearly a month ago!"

His story was almost incredible.

It appeared that on the day that Nicholas Crann had made his new will, on returning to Audley Towers he told his nephew he must leave the house never to return.

Bonari and Ralph Crann, seeing that their game was up, overpowered the old man. They forced down his throat poison distilled by Bonari—similar, no doubt, to that by which they

had meant to kill George—which left no trace, merely causing the heart's action to cease.

The butler denounced the murderers in his horror. He was made a prisoner in the room in the tower, where sooner or later he would have met his master's fate.

The only other servant was a woman in the doctor's pay—the woman who had decoyed George Lennard to the wharf.

It was necessary for the success of these scoundrels' schemes that it should appear as though old Nicholas Crann had not died until after the death of George Lennard and his wife, who were appointed heirs in the will.

For, in event of both dying during the testator's life, Ralph would become heir by virtue of being next-of-kin. On the other hand, were it known that the testator had died first, even had the scoundrels succeeded in compassing the death of George and his wife, the fact that Ralph was next-of-kin would not have availed him if George should happen to have made a will.

So, fully alive to the importance of this legal point, Ralph determined to keep up the fiction that his uncle still lived, until he had found George Lennard and compassed his death.

Bonari had adopted a method he had learnt in Italy of preventing the decay of the body by preserving it in frozen air. Their intention was to wait until several days after George's death could be legally certified, and then announce that Mr. Crann had died of heart disease. Dr. Bonari would have given a certificate to that effect, and the dead man would have been buried who had been dead several weeks!

Such were the high stakes for which Bonari and Ralph Crann had played—and lost.

The minor scoundrels who aided the doctor received stiff sentences that they richly merited.

And so George Lennard found himself a rich man. You may be sure neither he nor his gentle wife ever forgot what they owed to Jim Ware—not only their fortune, but their lives.

"You shall go to a good school, Jim, to fit you for some worthy position in life," said George. "What would you like best to be?"

"A detective!" said Jim promptly.

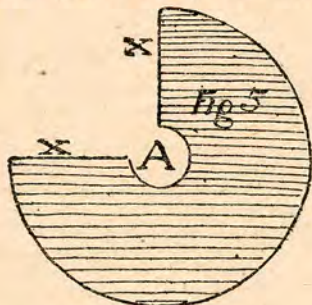
"Well, so you shall be, if you like!" laughed his friend. "Certainly you ought to succeed in that profession, after the part you played in solving for us some dark mysteries of a great city."

THE END.

How to Make Money in Spare Time.—No. 4.

This week I give a useful article which would sell readily enough to householders. It is a funnel of the common type, used generally for filling lamps, &c.

Reference to the diagrams A and B will explain the shape that the two pieces are to take. A, the cone-shaped top, takes, in the flat, the form of three-



quarters of a circle, the outer ring measuring 14in., the inner 4in., and from line to line 4in. When X X are brought together and soldered the cone is formed. The stem is simply a piece of tin 4½in. long by 4½in. wide at the top and 2½in. at the bottom. This is rolled so as to form a tapering tube, the wider end of which just overlaps the

narrowest end of the cone, where it is soldered.

Old biscuit-tins, coffee-tins, &c., can be used up to make this and similar articles; and if you find that you have no piece of tin large enough from which to cut the circle to form the cone, you can cut it in sections and join by letting the edges of the different sections slightly overlap and then soldering together.

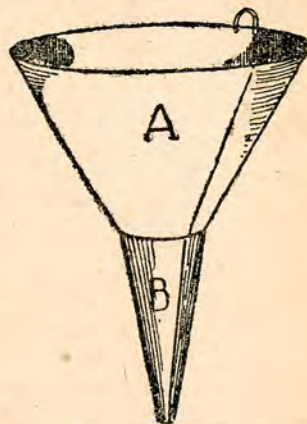
Another article for household use, and one that is so easily made that it requires no illustration, is a grater. It consists simply of a piece of thin tin measuring 8in. wide by 6in. to 8in. long. Turn a narrow strip over at the top and at the bottom to give a smoother edge. Then lay the tin on a flat wooden surface, and with a bradawl and hammer, or a nail and a hammer, puncture a number of holes—not haphazard, but evenly on pencilled lines that have previously been drawn.

It will be found that on the downward side there are a number of sharp projections where each hole is. These form the grater.

Now bend the tin to the shape of a half circle, the grater forming, of course, the outside of the circle. Then take a couple of inch-wide strips and solder them across the back, one at the top and one at the bottom, to keep the tin in shape.

There are many other trifles which could be made to return their maker a

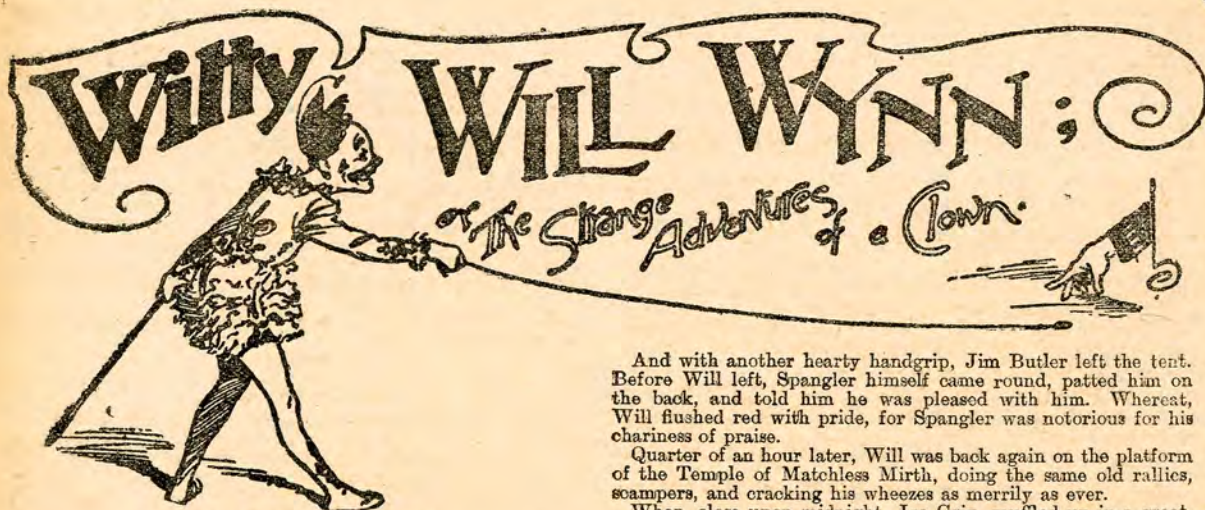
good profit—tin for bird-cages, baking-dishes, drinking-troughs for animals, wall-pockets and match-holders for hanging to the wall, card-trays, pen-trays, and



others too numerous to mention. Those not for kitchen use could be decorated with enamel, in red, black, or green, but nothing intended for kitchen use should be painted.

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

DO YOU LIKE THIS SERIES OF ARTICLES?



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.
SLEUTH SLYMER	...	A villainous detective. Employed by Copples to get rid of Will.
ADA GRAHAM	...	Mr. Copples's ward, known in the show as "Lanetta, the Gipsy Queen."

Will Wynn is performing in Lord Spangler's Circus. Joe Grix, a giant clown, hates him for his success.

Spangler bets Will he cannot leap over fourteen horses.

Will did not draw in any deep breaths, or smite his chest this time. He gathered himself together, and pressed his elbows into his sides. He started to run, reached the end of the board, jumped—

Lord Theodore Spangler dropped his whip and his lower jaw. An audible gasp of surprise went up from the audience. There was a momentary silence, followed by a thunderous tumult of applause. Men jumped up from their seats and waved their hats.

Witty Will Wynn had somersaulted twice in the air, and had cleared the fourteen horses!

"And what about those two five-pound notes?" he asked, trotting up to the astonished Spangler, and staring comically up at him, his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Then, before the audience had time to realise what had happened, he somersaulted out of the ring. But he was not allowed to depart thus. Three times he had to reappear, and three times was he lustily cheered.

And the ringing cheers, floating into the tent where Joe Grix sulked, with a pint of porter before him and a blackened clay between his teeth, were so much gall and wormwood to him.

Very different was the conduct of Jim Butler. While Will was hurriedly changing his clothes, Butler came into the tent.

"Bravo, youngster," he said, "you took the shine out of me and no mistake! I couldn't have believed it possible for you to do that!"

"Well," said Will, "I thought I'd like to have a try, and I was excited. You see, I've never appeared in a circus before, and—well, no one was more surprised than myself when I found I had landed safely on the mattress."

There was not the slightest suspicion of conceit in the lad's manner. It was evident that he had no idea that he had done anything very remarkable. Jim Butler nodded his head.

"It was well done, anyhow"—he paused for a moment. "Now, look here, laddie, I'm an older hand at the game than you are, and I'm going to give you a bit of advice. Just take care of yourself when Joe Grix is about. You've trodden on his corns to-night. I've known Joe for a long time, and he's got a nasty temper. Understand, laddie? Just take care!"

Will held out his hand, and Jim Butler shook it heartily.

"It's very good of you to give me warning. I'll keep my eyes open. I knew he was upset to-night; but I thought he would have forgotten all about it by now!"

"Joe Grix doesn't forget so easily, my lad. Well, good-night, sonny, I must get into my jockey's togs or I shall be late!"

And with another hearty handgrip, Jim Butler left the tent. Before Will left, Spangler himself came round, patted him on the back, and told him he was pleased with him. Whereat, Will flushed red with pride, for Spangler was notorious for his chariness of praise.

Quarter of an hour later, Will was back again on the platform of the Temple of Matchless Mirth, doing the same old rallies, scampers, and cracking his wheezes as merrily as ever.

When, close upon midnight, Joe Grix, muffled up in a great-coat, and growling and cursing, left the circus tent, a cringing, red-headed figure slipped out of the shadow, and advanced towards him.

"Mr. Grix, the famous clown, I believe?" said the man in oily tones.

"Yes, I'm Grix. What's that got to do with you?"

"Oh, I beg pardon; but I was in the tent to-night and saw your performance, and though I'm only a poor chap, I shall feel proud if you'd take a drink along with me!"

Grix was fond of his glass, especially when someone else paid for it. His puffy countenance assumed a mollified look.

"Well," he said, condescendingly, "I don't mind if I do. But I like to know the name of the man I'm going to drink with."

"Oh, I'm a very humble person, who earns a precarious living with three thimbles and a pea, or with three cards; but I've seen better days, Mr. Grix, and I admire genius when I meet it."

Sleuth Slymer—our readers will have recognised him—had fairly gauged Grix's character. He was amenable both to drink and flattery.

"My name," he went on, "is Joseph Spavin, though some call me Thimble-rigging Joe. I know a quiet little place where they're not over-particular about closing-time. Will you honour me with your company?"

"I don't mind if I do!"

It was a low drinking-den, some distance from the market-place, to which Slymer took the huge Grix. The landlord, a man with a horrible squint, nodded familiarly to Slymer, and whispered that the little back room was empty.

"I didn't think much of that boy-clown," said Slymer, when they were alone and drinks had been served. "He overdid it, and wasn't funny. Give me your performance for choice, Mr. Grix."

"Little brute, I'd like to break every bone in his body! The ring ain't the place for boys; it's meant for men of experience. And if he tries any of his impertinence to-morrow night, I'll give him such a hiding as he's never had before in all his blessed life!"

The more drink Grix took, the more inflamed he became against Will, and Sleuth Slymer plied him freely, mentally resolving that Copples should ultimately pay for the whisky consumed under the heading of extra expenses.

"Of course," said Slymer, "the boy's funny to some people. They cheered him heartily, and I heard some of them say—it wasn't my opinion, Mr. Grix—they thought him almost as funny as you. But there, the public are very fickle, and will throw over an old favourite for a new one without any mercy."

When at last Grix staggered out of the drinking den, he was mad with drink and jealousy. His bloated face was purple. Slymer's sly insinuations had taken root. What! was that whipper-snapper going to supplant him in the public favour?

"Not if I know it!" he hiccupped, as he reeled towards his lodgings. "If only the little beast were to break his neck—no, an arm or leg would do! That 'ud keep him out of the ring. Accidents do happen sometimes in the ring. And if I was to roll on him or tumble on him, I reckon he wouldn't be up to performing for many days to come!"

Sleuth Slymer had stayed behind, and sat alone, wrapped in meditation.

"Now," he muttered, as he nervously fingered his mouth, "I can earn that £1,000 easy enough. I've only got to ply that mountain of flesh with drink and work upon his jealousy,

and he'd do anything. But there's no particular hurry. I'm just wondering what Copples would do if he were to hear that Witty Will had been carried off and wasn't to be found. It mightn't suit his book a little bit. Perhaps he'd give me the job of finding him, then I should make a bit out of that. It strikes me that Witty Will is a goose that's going to lay me a lot of golden eggs. And it's a pity to kill a goose that does that—at least, till you're certain that it's given up laying."

Going to the door, he opened it, and gave a low whistle. A moment later the squinting landlord appeared.

"So your friend's gone, half-eas over," said the landlord.

"What's your little game, Sleuth?"

"H'sh! stop that, Dicky! I'm not known by that name down these parts! Thimble-rigging Joe, if you please!"

The two men were evidently old acquaintances, for the landlord, with a villainous leer, rubbed his nose with his forefinger.

"Well, whatever it is, there's money in it. I knew you, for all your carrotty wig and false eyebrows.

"You always were sharp, Dicky. It's a pity you gave up the detective business for a public-house, you would have made a great name for yourself. Now, look here, Dicky, I'm going to ask you a question. What sort of cellars have you got?"

The landlord gave a villainous leer at Slymer.

"You tell me why you ask the question, and I'll tell you something about my cellars."

"Oh, you're very sharp, Dicky! Well, it's just this. It's nothing violent, you know. But supposing there was a certain somebody I wanted to keep out of the way for a bit—a boy, we'll say—would you accommodate me with nice, secluded premises? There would probably be a reward offered, and, of course, you would stand in with me."

The landlord grinned, and nodded his head comprehensively.

"Come and have a look at my cellars."

The town of Nottingham stands almost entirely on a foundation of rock that is honeycombed with natural passages and caves. At Sherwood Rise, just outside the town, Robin Hood's cave is still to be seen. And the rock on which Nottingham Castle stands is undermined with secret tunnels, some of which have played important parts in historic times.

The landlord lit a candle and beckoned Slymer to follow him. They passed through several rooms to a dirty, stone-flagged kitchen at the back of the house. In one corner was a wooden trap. Raising it up, the landlord, followed by Slymer, descended some wooden steps into a large stone cellar below, filled with beer-barrels.

"This is no good," said Slymer, peering round; "it's too close to the house, and that"—he pointed to a grating in the ceiling—"leads out into the street."

"Wait a bit, this isn't all; don't you be in such a hurry!"

The landlord, holding the candle above his head, led the way to the far end of the cellar, and pointed significantly to another wooden trap in the rock floor.

"There are cellars and passages below this. They say one of the passages leads right along to the castle itself."

Sleuth Slymer's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. When the trap had been raised, and they had descended a narrow, steep flight of stone steps, they found themselves in a low, rock-hewn tunnel. Fifty yards along they came across a stout, iron-clamped door in one side of the wall. The landlord drew out a key and unlocked it.

"This used to be the old cellar, but it was too far down, and hasn't been used for years."

It was a dark, musty-smelling natural cave; the only light came from the flickering dip the landlord held aloft. It was, indeed, a veritable subterranean tomb.

"If you shut anyone up in this," said the man with the horrible scowl, "he might scream and scream till doomsday, and no one would hear him."

"It's the very place for my business!" said Sleuth Slymer, in a low, meaning voice.

"Yes; but you've got to get him here first."

"You can trust me to do that. I wasn't born the day before yesterday. Oh, yes"—the private detective rubbed his hands together—"this will be a cosy little berth! There's not too much light, and the air isn't extra fresh; but we can't expect everything in this world, can we, Dicky?"

"No; but when's this business going to come off?"

"The party I wish to get hold of will be in Nottingham as long as the Goose Fair lasts. So I've got the best part of a week before me. Supposing I made an arrangement to meet the party here, and asked him to take a glass, and there was something in that glass that would send him to sleep, eh? When he woke up, he'd find himself down here, and wouldn't know how he came here, or where he was."

"That sounds all right."

"It's going to be all right. And, what's more, you won't

be the loser, Dicky. There's a certain rich, old miserly party that I'm going to bleed pretty freely."

How little Will dreamed as he sat that night at supper in Professor Romah's lodging, Ada Graham beside him, of the dastardly plot that was being hatched in an underground cellar to rob him of his freedom.

Professor Romah was in the best of humours; madame was beaming. For the news of the Witty One's success had been told them by the great Spangler himself. Another source of congratulation was the success that had attended "Lanetta, the Gipsy Queen." All day and all night the side-show had been crowded by people eager to have their fortunes told; and though Ada had been terribly nervous, she had done splendidly.

What a happy party they were, and how they laughed when Will gave them a comic description of his encounter with Joe Grix, the giant clown!

They little knew of the dark shadows that were looming in the distance.

CHAPTER XIV.

SLEUTH SLYMER HAS HIS FORTUNE TOLD.

"I say, Ada," said Will on the following morning, as he peeped into the Gipsy Queen's tent, "the professor tells me we shall stay in Nottingham over Sunday. I've been thinking it would be jolly to go over Nottingham Castle. There are a lot of secret passages and interesting things to see. We might make a day of it. Would you like to?"

"Yes; I should love to."

"All right, that's a bargain."

And Will darted off again, for the great organ was beginning to roll out its brazen notes, and people were crowding round the steps of the show. He did not notice the carrotty-haired man who was standing outside Lanetta's tent, pretending to read the flaming placards.

"Now then, sir, why stay outside, when, for the trifling sum of sixpence, Lanetta, the peerless Gipsy Queen, the revealer of the future, the discloser of the past, awaits you within? Step inside, sir; step inside. If you are not satisfied, your money will be returned."

Tommy Perch, the orator, had been especially told off by Professor Romah to stand outside Lanetta's tent, and he had turned a flow of eloquence upon the disguised Sleuth Slymer.

"Now, sir," cried Tommy, "remember the old adage, 'He who hesitates is lost.' You won't begrudge the sixpence. Come along, sir. Napoleon himself, the conqueror of empires, was not ashamed to have his fortune told, why should you? Step inside, sir."

Sleuth Slymer, inwardly determining to put down that sixpence to Copples as an extra expense, stepped inside. It was not because he had the slightest wish to have his fortune told, but Lanetta, the Gipsy Queen, was one of Romah's party, and he might gain some useful information about Will.

Ada, sitting in her fantastic dress at a small table, did not like the appearance of the red-haired stranger, who stepped inside and sat down with what was meant to be a fascinating smile. She noticed, too, that he was staring at her from under his bushy eyebrows.

"You must give me a nice fortune, my dear," he said. "I'm only a poor man, and I want to learn if wealth is coming to me. Dear, dear! but do you know I fancy I've seen your face somewhere before? Now, where could it have been?"

Ada was growing nervous under the scrutiny of the ferret-like eyes. She looked at the man again. She was positive she had not seen him before. Then the thought flashed through her brain that possibly he was someone employed by her guardian to search for her, and she shivered. The thought of going back to that weird house where she had lived in daily terror still haunted her.

"I have been to many places," answered Ada, rather nervously. "Will you have your fortune told by your hand or by the cards?"

"By the cards, please. Were you ever at Oldham?"

Ada started, then she recovered herself.

"Oh, yes! I was there with Professor Romah at the fair."

Then she quickly spread out the cards, for she was anxious to change the subject.

"Well, my dear, is there a lot of money coming to me?"

Now, as a matter of fact, Ada did not believe in her own fortune-telling. She had originally taken up the subject as an amusement to pass away dull time. But as she looked at the cards, she shuddered.

"I—I don't think I'd better tell you! It's horrible!"

"Is there no money coming to me?" said Sleuth Slymer, pretending to be disappointed.

"Oh, yes," said Ada, with a strained voice, "there's money—a lot of money coming to you; but—but—"

"Well, my dear—well, I'm getting impatient!"

"But there's blood upon it!"

Sleuth Slymer gave a little start.

"Is there anything else?"

"Yes; you are hunting for someone, and there is another person who is controlling you—an old man."

Sleuth Slymer started more violently. He had not the slightest belief in the cards; but the Gipsy Queen was unpleasantly near the truth.

"Thank you, my dear," he said, putting down his sixpence; "that'll do for to-day."

"That's funny!" he muttered uneasily as he moved away.

"She was speaking the truth. Does she know something, or was it only chance? And yet I know I've seen her before, or someone very like her, in Oldham."

Then he stopped and scratched his head.

"Yes—no—it can't be! She was fair, and this one's dark; and yet the features are the same. Besides, Copples wouldn't let her get out of his clutches; she's worth too much to him. And yet she might have run away, and there are such things as hair-dye and face-stain. My goodness! if it should turn out to be Copples's ward, and I could only get hold of her, I'd make as much money out of her as I'm going to make out of that young clown!"

"I only wish," continued Sleuth Slymer, "I could be in two places at the same time—here and Oldham. Well, Goose Fair and Will Wynn won't be running away, so I think I'll pop over and see Copples, and get back again by to-night. There are several things I want to find out; besides, expenses have been very heavy, and I should like a little on account."

And so, Sleuth Slymer, intent on bleeding and pumping Copples, made his way from the market-place, already humming and bubbling with humanity, towards the railway station.

Never, perhaps, had Professor Bzomah done better business than he did on that day. Hundreds flocked into the temple.

Ada Graham, in her little tent, had scarcely a moment to herself. And she was so sweet and tactful that more than one youth who went into the tent to have his fortune told came out with fluttering heart—to dream that night of love.

All through the day the Witty one had clowning it right

merrily on the platform. During the few moments he was at rest, his mind was busy planning out new business and jokes for his turn at the circus. He was one of those go-ahead little fellows, who did not believe in standing still. It was during one of these rests that Sharp trotted up to him, and greeted him by placing one paw on his knee, and thrusting his cold nose into his hand.

"I wonder," thought Will, "if they would let me take Sharp into the ring. I'm sure I could train him to do lots of funny things."

And Will determined to ask Lord Spangler's permission that very evening.

Joe Grix was in a worse humour than usual. He had arisen in the morning with a violent headache, the result of the deep libations of the night before. To cure his headache he had started to drink again, with the result that by the evening he was more or less in an intoxicated state. Some men, under the influence of drink, become boisterous and jovial. Grix became morose and savage.

Witty Will had arrived at the circus, and was changing in the dressing-tent, when Jim Butler stepped inside.

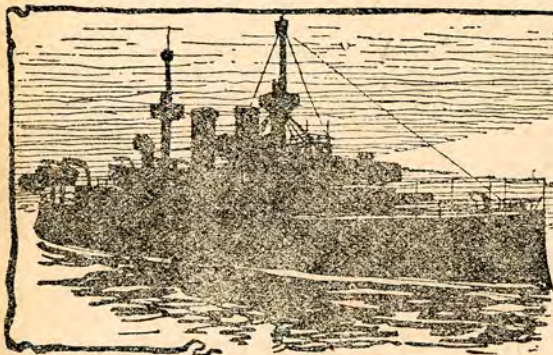
"Good-evening, laddie," he said, with a friendly nod. "I wanted to catch you before you went on to give you a word of advice. Grix is in drink, and is in as nasty a mood as I've ever seen him. He's been cursing and grumbling about the place all day, and I can see the gov'nor's mighty wild with him. Look here, laddie, do your business the same as last night; but don't let him get too close to you. I know the man, and if he got hold of you in his present mood, he might give you a nasty squeeze; he's got a grip like a bear!"

"Thank you for warning me," said Will; "but I'm not afraid of him."

"I don't suppose you are," said Jim Butler, secretly admiring the lad's pluck; "but you're only a youngster, and Grix stands six-foot-three, and measures forty-seven inches round the chest."

A few minutes later Will, in all the glory of his war-paint, and with a merry "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" somersaulted into the ring.

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



FROM THE QUARTERDECK.

The Editor's Chat with his Readers.

As I have already told you, a splendid new competition starts in next week's UNION JACK. Now, please, don't forget it, and in the second week of the competition find you cannot buy the number of the week before for love or money.

The competition is so good, and the prizes are so many, that I am fully expecting a record entrance for it. The first prize is £5. What a nice lot of things you could buy with five golden sovereigns, and why should you not win it instead of Jones, or Smith, or Robinson? £5 is not bad pay for amusing yourself, is it? Besides, if you are not the best man, there are many other prizes, and you will get one of those if you try hard enough. You can get anyone to help you; or two readers can work together and divide the prize. We make no restrictions whatever.

You may rely, too, on the UNION JACK's prizes being good, and exactly what are offered.

Remember, the first set of pictures appear next Friday in this paper. All you will have to do will be to name the countries that the people shown in the pictures belong to.

Before I turn to other matters I would like to remind readers that this week No. 1 of our new journal, the "Girls' Best Friend" appears. You may have seen No. 1 by this time, as the "Girls' Best Friend" comes out in advance of the UNION JACK. Those who have not seen it may take my word for it that the journal will come as a big surprise to them. I can honestly say that it is in every respect original. But I would advise all my readers to buy No. 1, and see for themselves. Ask for the new halfpenny journal, the "Girls' Best Friend."

"P. B." sends me the following letter:

"Birkenhead, Cheshire.

"Dear Editor,—I have been a reader of your remarkable paper since the first copy came out. If I might make a suggestion, I should be glad if you would make the Spanish bull-fight a subject for one of your stories in the UNION JACK. I am sure a tale of that kind would please a great many.—I remain, yours very truly,

P. B."

I may tell "P. B." that I have a story of the class he asks for on hand, and it will be published shortly. I am very glad he wrote to me, though, as I want to please you all. If any of you like any particular kind of story, or dislike anything in the UNION JACK, write and tell me so at once.

Just a word of warning.

From time to time you will find in this paper loose leaflets advertising other halfpenny papers. The papers advertised in this way I may tell you have absolutely no connection with this. Newsagents are prevailed upon by the managers of the papers advertised to insert them in our papers in the hopes of stealing some of our readers. It is a mean trick, and I only wish I could prevent it.

Do you like "Witty Will Wynn"? Why don't some of you write and tell me? Don't be afraid to grumble if you have anything to grumble at. I like to hear from you, and only by your letters of praise or criticism can we hope to satisfy the majority, for it is quite impossible to please all.

CHEQUES FOR CLEVER WORKERS

Thousands of Pounds to be paid away to the Public by Cheques on our Bankers.

To Purchasers of Forks solving the following:

1. SLLA LLEW TAHT SDNE LLEW.
2. A DRIB NI EHT DNAH SI HTROW OWT NI EHT HSUB.
3. STI NA LLI DNIW TAHT SWOLB YDOBON YNA DOOG.

A Cheque will be sent to every purchaser of our wonderful Nickel Silver Forks who solves **ONE PROVERB**, besides an offer whereby a £2 Silver Watch can be obtained **FOR NOTHING**.

A larger Cheque to every purchaser who solves **TWO PROVERBS**, besides an offer, &c.
For **THREE PROVERBS** a still larger Cheque, &c.

DIRECTIONS.—Re-arrange to represent well-known Proverbs as many of the above lines as you can, and enclose with it 4/6 for one half-dozen Forks, or 8/6 for a dozen. The Forks are full-size Table Forks, and we guarantee them fully equal in wear and appearance to solid Sterling Silver Hall-marked, as they are actually manufactured from Solid English-Nickel Silver. Also enclose a stamped, directed envelope for us to post you your cheque if correct.

If it takes £5,000 to pay the Prizes we will pay it cheerfully. On the other hand, it may not take £1,000 to pay the Prizes. All depends on the number of successful contestants, and the number of cheques and the amounts of each which we must send, according to our promise in this advertisement. There is no chance, no lottery. Each successful contestant will receive a sure and certain Cash Prize by cheque, as well as the Free Silver Watch offer mentioned above.

We have a Capital and Reserve Fund amounting to £97,500, and the whole of our forces are directed to the production of these high-class Forks to meet the demand we anticipate for our marvellous Silver. This offer is good for 30 days from the date of this paper. The cheques for the Prizes will be forwarded immediately, with the Forks ordered, in due turn as received.

The Result of our last Prize Distribution was as follows:

A Cheque for £10 was posted to J. A. Turner, Esq. (son of the Premier of British Columbia), 40, Queen Victoria Street, London, E.C.
A Cheque for £20 was posted to Charles Bailey, Imperial Hotel, Ilfracombe.
A Cheque for £10 to Officers' Mess, 3rd Field Battery, Royal Artillery, per Messrs. H. S. King & Co., Pall Mall, London; and seventeen other cheques from £5 to £1 each.—Address:

WATCHMAKERS' ALLIANCE, LTD.,

184, OXFORD STREET, LONDON.

Incorporated according to Act of Parliament. Capital £90,000; Reserve Fund, £7,500.

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This Watch
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"R. C. H. Woods."

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