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THE HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS. (AN IRISH STORY.)



The rear of the heavy artillery the troops had brought shook the mysterious house almost to its foundations, and two great gaps were torn in the strong walls by the powerful projectiles.

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The House Without Windows.

An Irish Story.

By JOHN G. ROWE.

CHAPTER 1.

THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE AND ITS TENANT—WHAT PHIL KAVANAGH AND HIS CHUM PAT O'CONNOR SAW NEAR "THE HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS."

It was a strange site to choose, in the first place, for a house—a small islet of solid ground in the middle of a vast bog. And then to build such a house—a huge circular stone affair—without a single window or even a door to break the monotony of its prison-like walls.

The Sligo peasantry were at first amazed, and then highly amused, and many a hearty laugh had they in their little thatched cabins at the poor "innocent," who could fancy such a strange abode.

Their curiosity, too, of course, was aroused during its erection as to the intentions of the owner; but the workmen employed upon it had been sent down from Dublin by a large contractor, and were unable to throw any light whatever upon the meaning of the affair.

All they knew was that they had to build a house or tower of a cylindrical shape, without a single window or door in the outer wall. How on earth its tenant intended to get in and out himself was a mystery even to them. He would require a very long ladder to reach the roof, for the building was to be fully three storeys high.

How the farmers round did laugh to be sure! And how, when the house was finished and the workmen departed, they waited with the hungriest curiosity for the advent of the eccentric individual who meant to occupy such a place!

They expected to find in him some wretched miser, trembling with fear lest any of his worshipped gold should be stolen from him. Instead, they beheld a tall, powerfully-built man in the prime of life, with a dark, sinister, but determined-looking face, lighted by a pair of fierce eyes, from the piercing gaze of which the women and children shrunk away in mortal terror.

Such was the tenant and owner of the "house without windows," and none of the peasantry felt inclined to question him as to the meaning of his building such a house. Indeed, he was himself as great a mystery as his residence, yet he did not seem a man given to faddism.

He came no one knew whence, and never by any chance did he address a soul in Ballymore. A manservant as close and mysterious as himself occasionally came into the village to buy provisions and other necessities, and these in such large quantities that the shopkeepers declared it impossible for two ordinary men to eat so much.

But the two occupants of the "house without windows," as the place was generally called, were no ordinary beings, the superstitious peasantry soon began to assert, and tales were told round the cabin hearths of strange sights and sounds seen and heard near the mysterious house after nightfall.

The means employed by the two men to enter and leave the building was a rope, with a sort of chair attached, which was drawn up by a windlass on the roof. The pair were never absent from the place at the same time. If one was seen in the village, the other was sure to be in the house.

The strange edifice, as we have said, was situated in the middle of a vast bog, and, in fact, was practically unapproachable, on account of the treacherous and miry nature

of the ground, save by a single narrow pathway of firm earth and stonework. Labourers and others, who had occasion to pass along the skirts of the bog at night, now began to affirm that they had heard the most peculiar noises issuing from the mysterious house—noises which resembled the clanking of chains and the shrieks of lost souls. And one even asserted he had seen as many as half a dozen strange men descend from the roof and cut turf from that portion of the bog which went with the site of the house.

These tales were told by some of the most honest and truthful residents in the neighbourhood; yet in the daytime not a sound ever issued from the mysterious house, though even under the strong sunlight its grim, prison-like walls were suggestive of all that was weird and uncanny.

By degrees the vicinity of the "house without windows" began to be shunned by the superstitious peasantry after dusk, and the place got the reputation of being haunted.

Some months had elapsed since its two mysterious tenants had taken up their residence in that part of the country, and every one was still mystified as to what went on inside the place, when one night Philip Kavanagh, one of the most influential farmers of the place—a handsome, stalwart young fellow of twenty-three, in every respect a splendid type of the Irish race—was returning home late with his friend and neigh-



With a wild yell he bore down upon the five ruffians, whirling his shillelagh round his head

bour, Pat O'Connor, from a wedding-party in the adjoining town. Phil, unlike most of his countrymen, was a thorough sceptic in the matter of ghosts and supernatural warnings, and he suggested that they should take the road which skirted the bog as a near cut home.

Pat O'Connor did not altogether relish the idea, and tried to dissuade him from doing so; but his friend only laughed at his superstitious fears, and told him that if he did not care to accompany him, he could go round alone by the longer route. He himself, Phil asserted, cared neither for ghosts nor the "good people" (fairies), and certainly did not intend to go a foot out of his way to avoid meeting any.

"As a matter of fact, Pat," he said, "I am rather curious to see a ghost for myself. I have heard a good deal about them, but it has never been my lot yet to run across one."

"Phil, don't be such an omadawn. Is it to meet your death, you wish to?"

"Oh, come, Pat, you surely don't want me to think that you believe in these old women's tales about banshees and fetches?"

Pat made no answer, so Phil continued:

"Are you coming with me, Pat, or are you afraid?"

Pat O'Connor drew himself up proudly.

"Had any other than Phil Kavanagh asked me was I afraid, I would have answered him with a blow," he said. "I am afraid of nothing human, as you know, Phil, but I care not to face the supernatural."

"Sorry to have hurt your feelings, old chap, but really I thought you were above such a childish weakness as superstition. You never saw a ghost yet, did you? And I can assure you, you never will. I am going to explode this fallacy about the place being haunted. Are you coming?"

Pat O'Connor still hung back, so Phil held out his hand, and said:

"Well, good-night, Pat; if you won't come with me I'm off."

"It shall never be said that Pat O'Connor let a friend face danger alone," observed his friend, after what was evidently a great struggle with himself. "If you go, I'll go with you. But I tell you straight, Phil, I would sooner face a dozen mortals than one immortal."

"That is right. Come on, old fellow. Get over your ridiculous superstition. There is not much likelihood of our encountering anything supernatural, I'll go bail."

So the two linked arms and turned down the cross-road which led past the bog. Phil Kavanagh laughed and chatted away in his usual light-hearted way, so as to dispel any lingering misgivings and superstitious terrors of his companion; but, as they reached the border of the black, dreary-looking bog, even his jovial temperament was not proof against the oppressive solitude and silence of the place.

Pat O'Connor cast a side glance in the direction of the mysterious "house without windows," whose grim, gaol-like walls were clearly revealed in the bright moonlight which flooded the country; and as he did so a wild cry of terror pealed from his lips, and he stood as if rooted to the spot.

Phil Kavanagh turned quickly at his companion's cry, and an eerie feeling for a moment crept over him as he saw distinctly in the moonlight half a dozen dark figures racing towards them along the narrow causeway that threaded its way through the miry ground.

He rubbed his eyes and stared again. Yes, there, sure enough, were six men running at full speed across the bog, one well in advance.

He could see their faces quite distinctly from where he stood, and started back as he saw that, in the first place, they were all strangers to that part of the country—he knew every soul in it—and in the second, that they were all armed, some with swords, some with rifles.

And, gracious heavens! the first man's face was covered with blood, and he was staggering as though he had received a severe wound.

From the anxious glances and the efforts he was making, it was clear he was flying for his life from the others; and presently, as his pursuers were almost upon him, he took the desperate measure of leaping off the solid pathway into the treacherous ooze alongside, and splashed and floundered about in his wild endeavours to escape. He sank deep in the mire and stuck fast, and, as his pursuers came up and strove to haul him out, he uttered yell after yell.

What he shouted Phil could not make out, but from the tone it was evident he was calling for help.

CHAPTER 2.

A TERRIBLE SPECTACLE—PHIL AND PAT PROVE THEMSELVES TRUE IRISHMEN—LEFT INSENSIBLE—WHO WERE THE MIDNIGHT ASSASSINS?—PHIL'S SUSPICION—HE GIVES INFORMATION TO THE POLICE.

Phil Kavanagh stood rooted to the spot, unable to remove

his eyes from the strange spectacle before him, while Pat O'Connor had so far recovered from his superstitious terror as to turn his eyes again in the direction of the "spirits."

They saw the fugitive dragged back on the pathway; and then, to their unutterable horror, they beheld all five set upon him and simply hack him to pieces with their cutlasses and bayonets.

"Heavens!" gasped Phil, reeling back a pace or two, as he realised that a cold-blooded and dastardly murder was being perpetrated before his eyes.

Then, recovering from the momentary shock, and his whole soul revolting at the sight, he shouted to Pat to come on, and, running to the edge of the bog, he never waited to find the path, but bounded on to the nearest tussock.

And he leaped on from tussock to tussock as cleverly and easily as most skilful of marshmen could have done, until he gained the path within a few paces of the murderers.

These, however, had caught the alarm as he came leaping across the bog towards them, and, with passion-distorted faces, though in grim silence, they were waiting to receive him on the points of their weapons.

However, he contrived to evade the thrust the foremost made at him, and, rushing in under the man's guard, he caught the fellow a thundering blow under the chin that lifted him clean off the ground. Ere Phil could turn round, however, a musket-butt descended upon his head, and felled him to earth unconscious.

One of the five, who appeared to be in authority, now said something to the others in a foreign tongue, and they took up the corpse of the poor wretch they had murdered, and, swinging it to and fro between them, prepared to fling it well out into the bog, when their leader suddenly cried out, in broken English:

"Stop! Stop! The British man was not alone. Look yonder! See!"

They all turned and beheld Pat O'Connor running along the path towards them. He had got over his terror of ghostly visitants, and, seeing his friend struck down, his Irish blood was up in a moment. It mattered not to him whether he had five or only one foe to fight so long as they were human.

With a wild yell he bore down upon the five ruffians, whirling his shilleagh round his head, and swept aside the thrusts they made at him as easily as though they had lunged at him with straws.

Crack! crack! and two of the group went down like ninnies under his swinging blows. He was a powerful fellow, was Pat, and the other three ruffians ducked and ran back to escape similar knock-out blows from his stout shilleagh.

One of those the young Irishman had felled was their leader, and this man now roared out something in an unknown tongue, whereupon the three came at Pat, brandishing their weapons in a ferocious manner.

The gallant O'Connor threw himself into a posture of self-defence, and, as they rushed at him, succeeded in catching another man a terrific blow upon the jaw. But the next moment he was beaten to his knees by a blow from a musket-butt, and as he struggled to rise another stroke from the same weapon deprived him of his senses.

Growling and cursing in some foreign language, the leader of the gang now scrambled to his feet, and, with a face distorted with passion, he savagely kicked the two unconscious young Irishmen. When he had thus vented his malice he turned to the others, and, in obedience to an order of his, uttered in the same strange tongue, they again took up the murdered man, and, swinging him between them, flung him out far into the middle of the bog. He fell with a splash, and the quicksand-like ooze speedily sucked him down out of sight.

An animated conversation then ensued among the five, evidently with regard to Phil and Pat, one or two urging that they, too, should be thrown into the bog, and the others that they be left where they were.

This latter counsel prevailed, and, leaving the two Irishmen lying unconscious on the path, the group moved off hastily in the direction of the "house without windows."

Skirting its lofty walls, they came to where a rope with a cradle or seat attached dangled from the roof, and, in answer to a shrill whistle from the leader of the gang, a man made his appearance above.

One of the five got into the cradle, and the man on the roof turning the windlass, he was drawn quickly up. The cradle again descended and another of the gang mounted, and so on until all five had been drawn up on to the roof of the mysterious building.

Phil Kavanagh and Pat O'Connor still lay senseless, while the bright moonlight lit up the black dismal bog around and the grim, dead walls of the "house without windows." Presently Phil stirred, his eyes unclosed, and he sat up and looked dazedly around.

As his eyes lighted upon the inanimate form of his friend, memory reasserted itself, and, scrambling to his feet, he looked around in search of the five ruffians and their victim.

"Good heavens!" he murmured, putting his hand to his forehead and wiping away the cold perspiration, which had burst forth at the recollection of the late terrible scene he had witnessed, "is this a hideous dream, or a stern reality? Have I really witnessed the perpetration of a horrid murder? Yes, I feel—I know that what I remember was no flight of the imagination. But where are the murderers and where their victim? I was knocked senseless, and Pat must have met with the same treatment."

He bent down over his friend; and, by chafing the latter's wrists and rubbing his cheeks, soon had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes.

"Where am I? What has happened?" asked Pat. Then, "Ah, I remember! Where are the murderous villains? Have they gone?"

"Yes, Pat. We must give information to the police at once. Those miscreants must be brought to justice. Did you recognise any of them?"

"No, they were all strangers to me, but do—do you think, Phil, they—they could have been ghosts?"

And Pat cast a shuddering glance around, as though he half feared to see some phantom forms rise up out of the bog on either hand.

"Nonsense, Pat, they were genuine flesh and blood. They have doubtless flung the body of their victim into the bog. We shall have it dragged, and—Pat, do you know a terrible suspicion has come into my mind?"

"What is it, Phil?"

"It is only a suspicion, of course, and I have no real grounds for it; but I believe that in some way the terrible scene we have witnessed is connected with that mysterious murder." And he pointed to "the house without windows."

Pat looked towards the gaol-like walls, and an involuntary shiver shook his stalwart frame.

"Neither you nor I," went on Phil reflectively, "knew any of the men—the murdered one or his assassins—and we know every one for miles round. Besides, they spoke some foreign tongue, and unless I am greatly mistaken the occupants of that house are foreigners. I feel sure those great ugly walls hide some dark and uglier mystery, and it will not be my fault, if I do not induce the police to search the place."

The two men, while thus conversing, had been walking towards the high road, and, as soon as they gained it, they set off with all speed in the direction of the police-station. The sergeant in charge, on hearing their remarkable story, at once called his superior, who listened with rather an incredulous smile to their narration.

"Come, come, Mr. Kavanagh," he said at its close, bursting into a hearty laugh. "I know you and you know me, so you won't be insulted, I hope, if I tell you I certainly must take your story with a grain of salt. Come, come now, admit you had more than one glass at the wedding-party, and that your imagination has been running away with you."

"Inspector McNally!" was our hero's indignant rejoinder, "you and I are old friends, so I won't take offence so easily at what you say; but I thought you knew me better than to think I would indulge to such an extent as that. I give you my adventure of the night for what it is worth. You need not believe me if you do not like, but I can assure you that my friend and I have both seen a cold-blooded murder done to-night close under the walls of the 'house without windows'!"

"There you go. Up like a bottle of porter! Mr. Kavanagh, we know that the house you speak of is tenanted only by a very wealthy but eccentric Polish gentleman, named Ivan Ollinski, and his manservant. That there are no others about the place I can give you my word, so where can your six foreigners come in?"

"Well, Inspector McNally, I have nothing more to say except that I could stake my oath on it, if you drag the bog adjoining Ollinski's house, you are very likely to find the body of the man my friend and I saw murdered."

The police-officer looked in Phil's face, and saw that he spoke with every symptom of sincerity.

"Well," he said at length, in a less confident tone, "as you seem so positive that murder has been done, we will drag the bog in the morning; but I hope you will forgive us for appearing to doubt your word, gentlemen, as really what you have told us does sound rather improbable. There has been a good deal of mystery woven around Ollinski and his eccentric dwelling. I know, but really there is no foundation whatever for it. The man is a bit eccentric, and dabbles in chemistry, that is all."

Phil and Pat thereupon bade the inspector good-night, and, leaving the police-station, turned their steps once more homewards.

CHAPTER 3.

THE BODY OF THE MURDERED MAN FOUND—WHO WAS THE VICTIM—IVAN OLLINSKI'S STARTLING PROPOSAL—PHIL AND PAT ACCOMPANY THE POLICE TO "THE HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS" TO SEARCH IT.

Inspector McNally was as good as his word. With the first peep of dawn he set a number of his men to work to drag the bog, and a large and curious crowd of the peasantry speedily collected to watch the operations and ask the meaning of the unusual performance.

Phil Kavanagh and Pat O'Connor were soon upon the spot, and the inspector, with a smile, asked the former to direct the police where to drag more particularly. Our hero readily complied; but hours passed, and it looked as though the search would be fruitless, when all at once one of the constables halloed that he had grappled something.

In an instant, the excitement and suspense of the crowd was wrought up to the highest pitch, and the other policemen engaged in the search hastened to the assistance of their comrade, and, with a great deal of exertion, the object he had grappled was brought to light.

It was indeed the size and shape of a man, but it was so thickly coated with black ooze and slime that for several minutes it was really a question whether it was a human corpse or not.

Inspector McNally darted towards the group of constables as they pulled the unsightly object on to dry land, and Phil and Pat followed him as precipitately. Yea, it was without the shadow of a doubt the body of a man, and the inspector turned to Phil with the ejaculation:

"By heavens! I believe you were right, Mr. Kavanagh, and that there was murder done."

"What is the moaning of all this, inspector?" asked a voice with a pronounced foreign accent, but in perfectly good English.

Inspector McNally and Phil wheeled round, and, to their surprise, beheld the mysterious tenant of "the house without windows" standing behind them.

For a moment or two the police-officer was at a loss for words, then he stammered:

"We had reason to believe that a cold-blooded murder was perpetrated last night, and that the victim's body was flung into the bog. A body has been found, Mr. Ollinski, and it looks as though there was some truth in the report."

"Humph!" grunted the Pole, turning his piercing eyes upon Phil; "and do you suspect anyone of the crime?"

"You will pardon me if I decline to answer the question at this stage, Mr. Ollinski," replied the inspector quietly.

The Pole grunted something unintelligible, and stepped up to the corpse, the constables surrounding it drawing aside to admit of his doing so. He said nothing, but stood looking down upon it with an imperturbable face, while Phil and Pat, with feelings of loathing and horror, watched his features closely. But no sign whatever could they read therein of the thoughts that might be passing in the mysterious being's mind.

It was impossible to attempt to identify the features or the clothes of the corpse, so coated were they with the foul slush of the bog; so the inspector ordered his men to convey it to the station on the stretcher they had brought, in anticipation of finding it.

Phil and Pat accompanied the mournful cortège, and saw the body washed and its clothes cleaned, when they were at once able to identify it as that of the poor wretch they had seen flying for his life from the five strangers.

The head and body of the corpse were also found to be covered with terrible gashes and bruises, and Inspector McNally felt obliged now to place some reliance upon the apparently improbable story told by our hero. It was clear murder had been done; more than one of the wounds the local doctor, who had been summoned, declared mortal; but there was nothing whatever found upon the body to give the slightest clue as to his identity.

Nothing further could be done to clear up the mystery as to who the poor wretch was, or who were his murderers at the moment, so Phil and Pat left the station and walked down the village street.

"I suppose we will have to wait until the coroner's inquest to learn if any light can be thrown on the mysterious affair?" observed Pat O'Connor. "You see, we have no proof that Ollinski has any connection with the murderers."

"Quite true," assented Phil; "but I mean to use my influence to get a warrant out so that the police may search that mysterious house. I feel convinced its walls hide evil doings, and that its master is at the bottom of this dastardly murder!"

"Humph! it is quite true what you British say, that listeners never hear good of themselves," said a harsh voice immediately behind them. And, turning sharply round, Phil and Pat found themselves face to face with none other than Ollinski himself.

"Gentlemen, I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance,"

the Pole went on, without a muscle of his face betraying either resentment or anger, while our hero and his companion stood dumbfounded and confused; "but I have just overheard you say that you believe I am at the bottom of this murder. In other words, I suppose you mean to assert that I have had a hand in it. Your language is libellous in the extreme, and I might make you pay dearly for it, if only to teach you to put a curb upon your tongues in future. But I will be generous and pass over the libel, excusing it as a youthful indiscretion. I will do more. I will go to the head of the police at once and save you the trouble of procuring a search-warrant, by requesting him to come forthwith and search my residence."

He paused as though expecting one of the young men would say something, but they were too taken aback at his sudden interruption to do more than stare at him in embarrassment and confusion.

"If you so wish it," Ollinski continued, after a minute or two, "you yourselves may accompany the search-party, and satisfy your idle curiosity as to what my house contains. I am going to the police-station now to make the offer. Are you coming back with me?"

Without waiting for an answer, Ollinski turned upon his heel, and Phil and Pat, exchanging glances, but without addressing a word to one another, followed him at a little distance.

They had but a few steps to go to reach the station, and, entering, Ollinski at once asked to see Inspector McNally. When that officer appeared from the inner room, the Pole said, indicating Phil and Pat:

"I overheard these gentlemen express a suspicion that I was in some way concerned with the murder of the man whose body was found to-day in the bog near my house. They also said they would procure a search-warrant, and have my place subjected to a close search, though what they expect to find there I have not the slightest idea. However, I thought I would save them the trouble by coming and asking you to send a search-party at once. I shall be only too pleased to show you all over my house. By that means I hope to satisfy these gentlemen of my innocence, besides perhaps to dispel some of the ridiculous rumours, which I believe have got about respecting my dwelling and myself. Because I have thought fit to build a house unlike the usual run of houses, the gossiping fools of this place must go imagining all sorts of things."

The inspector looked as confused and taken aback as were Phil and Pat, and he stammered:

"Well, Mr. Ollinski, I must say you take my breath away. I do not wish to say anything that may offend you, but these gentlemen saw the murder committed last night, and distinctly saw that the murderers spoke in some foreign tongue. The tragedy took place immediately under the walls of your house, and I leave it to your own good sense to imagine the very natural conclusion people would form."

The Pole's eyebrows contracted, until they formed one unbroken, shaggy line, and his fierce eyes seemed to positively flash fire, as he answered:

"I have proposed that you search my house, and if you find any other occupants than myself and my manservant, I will be more surprised than ever you can be. I thought you knew, inspector, that my household only consisted of my man Paul and myself? Well, you can come at once and conduct the search, and be sure to bring these gentlemen with you. It may satisfy their curiosity to see the inside of my eccentric dwelling."

An angry retort was on Phil's lips at this sarcasm, but he restrained his tongue and remained silent. The inspector speedily called out half a dozen constables, and then expressed himself at the service of the mysterious Pole.

"Very good," said that worthy, "let us proceed at once to my place."

He did not speak again on the way, and Phil and Pat were too busy with their own thoughts to exchange more than a mere word or two. When they had crossed the narrow causeway through the bog, and stood at the foot of the frowning walls of the Pole's strange residence, its owner put a small silver whistle to his lips and blew shrilly, whereupon, after the lapse of a minute or two, a man, in whom the inspector recognised Paul, the servant, appeared upon the roof, and looked down in astonishment at the group of police below.

Ollinski called out something in his own language, and the man on the roof answered in the same, to which his master made a reply, the dialogue between the two being quite unintelligible even to Phil, who knew one or two foreign languages.

Paul, the manservant, flung the cradle attached to the windlass over the wall, and lowered it to the ground at the feet of the constables.

"Now, inspector," said Ollinski, "if you have no objection I will mount first, so as to show you how simple and easy it is to ascend, and you can follow me one by one."

With that he took his seat in the cradle, and pulled the rope to signify that he was ready, whereupon the manservant on

the roof began to turn the handle of the windlass and draw him up fairly rapidly.

CHAPTER 4.

THE INTERIOR OF THE "HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS"—PHIL KAVANAGH NOT SATISFIED WITH THE RESULT OF THE SEARCH—HE OVERHEARS A SUSPICIOUS REMARK—PAT AND HE VISIT THE HOUSE AT NIGHT.

When Ollinski was drawn up level with the parapet round the roof, he stepped out upon it, and called down in English to one of the others to take a seat in the cradle, which was again lowered to earth. Phil Kavanagh volunteered to be the first of the party, and, having seated himself, he, too, was drawn up safe and sound.

As he climbed out on to the flat roof he looked round him with some curiosity, it must be admitted, and saw that, with the exception of a stone parapet some four feet wide running right round the building, the entire roof consisted of strong opaque glass. There was a large chimney stack adjoining the circular parapet, and a glass trapdoor leading down into the house.

While his eye was taking in these particulars, his chum, Pat O'Connor, was being drawn up, and a few minutes later the whole party of searchers were standing beside him upon the narrow stone parapet, gazing around them in open-mouthed wonderment.

"Now, gentlemen," said Ollinski, without appearing to notice their astonishment, "we will descend into the house, and I will reveal to you its startling mysteries."

He whispered something in the unknown tongue to his man Paul, who lifted the trapdoor, and led the way down a flight of stone steps. Phil Kavanagh went next, then Pat O'Connor, and the inspector and his men followed, Ollinski himself bringing up the rear.

They descended into a large and handsomely furnished drawing-room, the floor of which was covered with a carpet, upon which the heavy tread of the constables made no sound. Gorgeous settees were ranged around, and the white and gold walls were hung with rare oil paintings and handsome mirrors.

Phil and his companions started and rubbed their eyes at this evidence of wealth and culture, and gazed in dumb astonishment at one another.

"This is my sitting-room, gentlemen," said Ollinski. "That door leads to the stairs and my bedroom and my servant's. You will please follow me."

He led them out on to a spacious, magnificently carpeted landing, from which wide oak stairs, likewise handsomely carpeted, led to the floor below. He opened the doors on this landing, and showed them his own bedroom and bathroom, and that of his servant.

Next he desired them to follow him to the floor below, and there they saw a large kitchen, a scullery, and a suite of rooms fitted up like chemical laboratories.

"Chemistry, gentlemen," remarked Ollinski, as they glanced inside these, "is my hobby, and I am wholly devoted to the study. Some day I trust to be able to startle the scientific world by some great discovery."

He laughed meaningly, and Phil Kavanagh could have sworn he saw an expressive glance pass between him and his manservant Paul.

"Now, gentlemen," said Ollinski, "you have seen all that is to be seen. There is nothing between this floor and the ground but solid masonry—fully twenty feet of it. I was determined my house should have solid foundations, and if the island on which it is built does eventually sink, Paul and I will not be in very much danger. Now, gentlemen, are you satisfied with the result of your search? Do you, sir?"—turning to Phil—"believe any longer that my house is the resort of murderers?"

Phil did not immediately reply, but, looking Ollinski straight in the eyes, did so after some little time.

"The men my friend and I saw commit that murder were certainly not in the rooms we have been through. You say there are no more rooms?"

The Pole's face went as black as thunder, and, if looks could kill, the malignant look he darted at our hero would have annihilated him on the spot.

"I have said there is fully twenty feet of solid masonry beneath this floor. You can believe me or not as you think fit. If you doubt my word, you are at perfect liberty to pull up the flooring and search deeper."

Phil made no answer, and Inspector McNally broke in with: "We do not doubt your word, Mr. Ollinski. You have been exceedingly straightforward and honest with us, and I must express my complete satisfaction with the way you have shown us round. We will not take up any more of your time, but will wish you good-day."

Ollinski accompanied the search-party to the roof, and Paul, the servant, turned the windlass and lowered the inspector first, and then each of his men to the ground below. Phil remained to the last; and as he got into the cradle, Ollinski, who had been eyeing him keenly, said interrogatively:

"You still believe, then, Mr. Kavanagh, that I had a hand in the murder of the man found in the bog?"

"Mr. Ollinski," answered Phil, "you must pardon me. I prefer to keep my opinions to myself."

The Pole uttered a short, mirthless laugh; then, as his face once more darkened angrily, he grated through his teeth: "Have a care, Irishman, it will not do for you to earn the hatred of a man like me!"

"I am not one to pretend friendship where I do not feel it," was Phil's proud reply. "Good-day, Mr. Ollinski!" And, seating himself in the cradle, he signified that he was ready to be lowered to earth.

As his head disappeared below the coping of the wall he distinctly heard Ollinski say in French to his servant:

"That man may interfere with our plans, Paul, and we may find it necessary to interfere with his liberty."

Phil reached the ground in safety, but he made no mention to the inspector of police of that suspicious remark in French he had overheard. But when he and his friend Pat O'Connor separated from the constabulary, and turned off in the direction of their own farms, he told his companion of it, and added:

"Now, what would you conclude, Pat, from his saying such a thing as that?"

"Why, that you and I are right in our suspicions of the man, and that if he had not a direct hand in that poor wretch's murder, he certainly has something to conceal—something not very much to his credit, I should say."

"I am of the same opinion, and am convinced all the more by our fruitless search that there is some dark work going on inside that strange house. Pat, I firmly believe there is another floor below those he showed us. Do you think I credited for a moment his statement that there was nothing under our feet but twenty feet of solid masonry?"

"Nor did I," answered Pat. Then, after a moment's thoughtful silence: "You think that—"

"That there is another floor, and that could we only explose it we would find the clue to all this mystery. Pat, what do you say? Shall we try to get at the bottom of it all?"

"I am quite agreeable, old chap, but how do you intend to go to work?"

"That we must plan; but it seems clear that, by hook or crook, we must get inside that house again, and that without the knowledge of its owner. Come up to my place and we will talk it over. You are not in a hurry, I suppose?"

Pat said he was not, and accompanied his friend home, and the two sat for over an hour discussing ways and means by which they might commit a little innocent burglary, and get inside the mysterious "house without windows" that same night.

The chief difficulty was how they were to scale the wall.

This they knew was between forty and fifty feet high, and they were ultimately obliged to abandon the idea, and decide to simply hang round the place for an hour or two in the night, and trust to chance to provide them with a means of entry.

Accordingly they met as arranged about midnight at the cross-roads, and proceeded together in the direction of the "house without windows." The place looked more grim and forbidding than ever, looming up one solid mass of masonry out of the ghostly shadows of the night.

Pat O'Connor had greatly overcome his former superstitious terror of the place, since he had held converse with its occupant, and found that he was human after all, but he could with difficulty suppress a shudder at the chill loneliness of the place.

The night was just one for their purpose—inky black, unilluminated by even a single star. They could barely see their hands held up before them, and it was only after considerable

loss of time that they succeeded in finding the path through the bog.

Even then they had to proceed warily along it and feel the ground before them with their sticks ere they ventured to take the next step. One false step would have plunged either of them into the black depths of the morass.

At last they gained the islet, and stood beneath the frowning walls of that most mysterious house. All was still and silent as the grave.

Stay! what meant that strange vibration of the earth beneath their feet? It seemed as if they were in the vicinity of some huge workshop in which large engines were at work.

Phil and Pat stared at one another as they became aware of the sensation, but they could scarcely see each other's faces in the darkness.

While they were standing thus, to their amazement a great



The ruffians climbed upon the iron plate, but even their weight did not cause it to descend.

square of the apparently solid wall before them rolled away, and a blinding flood of light streamed forth.

CHAPTER 5.

WHAT PHIL AND PAT SAW—THE SECRET WORKSHOP—IN THE HANDS OF CONSPIRATORS—OLLINSKI EXPLAINS HIS PLANS TO THE CAPTIVES—OUR HEROES DOOMED TO A TERRIBLE FATE.

Phil and Pat were fortunately not immediately opposite the opening, and when they could recover from their surprise they shrank back deeper into the shadow, each instantly strung up to the highest pitch of curiosity and interest as to what was about to follow.

The rattle and roar of machinery reached their ears, and now

there appeared clearly revealed in the opening the Pole, Ivan Ollinski, and two men they recognised at once as two of the assassins of the previous night.

The three men stood in the light of the open door, and Ollinski seemed from his gestures and authoritative tones to be giving the others certain instructions; but as he spoke in his own tongue the watchers could not understand what he said.

The trio moved away towards the path through the bog, and Phil clutched his companion quickly by the arm, and whispered in his ear:

"Now is our opportunity, Pat. Quick, let us slip inside that door while they have their backs turned!"

The two darted quickly forward, and sprang inside the aperture, but the bright glare threw monstrous shadows of their forms across the bogs as they came within its radius. Ollinski and his companions saw the shadows, and wheeled round in surprise, just in time to catch a glimpse of Pat O'Connor's back ere he vanished inside.

The two young Irishmen glanced round in some curiosity as they entered, and saw, to their utter astonishment, that they were in a huge workshop, like in an iron foundry or engine works. The place was brilliantly illuminated by electricity, and there were furnaces, forges, and steam-hammers on every hand, while the central space of the vault was taken up by what looked like a small metal battleship, fitted with innumerable fanlike screws, raised above the deck, upon which fully thirty men were at work.

Our heroes were not given time to observe more, for Ollinski and his companions reappeared, framed in the open doorway, and, with wild cries and diabolical expressions upon their faces, rushed upon them.

Phil and Pat tried to elude the three, and made for the opening again; but Ollinski flung himself like a tiger upon the former, while the other two closed with the latter.

Throwing his arms around Phil's waist, the Pole clung to him desperately, all the while screaming at the top of his voice in his own language. The young Irishmen saw the workmen running towards them, and he strove to break from the Pole's embrace, but the latter's long, bony fingers gripped him like steel bands, and he was unable to free himself.

He caught a momentary glance of Pat O'Connor rolling upon the floor engaged in a fierce scuffle with the other two ruffians, and then he found himself surrounded by a group of the workmen—fierce-eyed, determined-looking fellows, who pounced upon him at once and speedily overpowered him.

Another group had likewise secured Pat, and then the band commenced jabbering away excitedly in their strange lingo to one another.

Ollinski shouted something that was evidently an order, and several of the men rushed towards the still wide open door, and closed it by pulling a lever.

The role then turned upon Phil, with a face distorted by the fury which consumed him.

"Curse you for a meddling fool!" he cried. "I told you it would not do for you to earn the hatred of a man like me. You have tried to pry into the secrets of this place, so by our laws your life is forfeited, as is also that of your companion. I will put you to death, and throw your bodies into the bog, the same as we did with that would-be traitor, whose body the inspector of constabulary found yesterday."

"You miserable assassin and chief of assassins, you defy you to do your worst!" answered Phil fearlessly. "I do not know what vile work you are engaged in, but that it is against law and order I have not the slightest doubt."

"You are right!" replied Ollinski fiercely; "and since neither you nor your companion will ever again pass alive beyond these walls, I will let you into the secret of our work here. Look at those furnaces and forges. By specially constructed flues, after an invention of my own, I not only prevent the smoke and fumes escaping, and betraying us, but utilise the same over and over again as fuel. But that invention is nothing compared with another."

"You see yonder battleship? Yes; but you cannot have any idea as to its power or our motive in building it. It is an aerial warship, and we, Irishmen, are Nihilists. We have chosen this wild part of the British Isles in order to build this ship and mature our plans, as the least likely spot in which to meet with interruption or discovery. When our great airship is finished—and it will be in a day or so now—we will pull down the floors above, and, manning it, soar aloft into the clouds, and steer straight for St. Petersburg. Then will we rain down bombs, torpedoes, and other destructive missiles upon the palace of the tyrant Czar, and in like manner shall we visit terrible retribution upon the heads of all his nobles and ministers. A free and prosperous Russia shall be the result of our crusade against the brood of despots."

Carried away by fierce enthusiasm, he shouted something twice in his own language, at which the whole band of Nihilists snatched forth knives and pistols from their belts, and brandished them aloft, echoing his cry till the vault fairly rang.

When this wild outburst had subsided somewhat, Ollinski's eye fell again upon the young Irishmen, and he issued an order, whereupon half a dozen of the band seized upon them and dragged them away towards a great stone staircase, which appeared to lead to the floor above. They were forced up the steps to the storey above, and found themselves in a narrow corridor, lined on either side with rooms, which Phil shrewdly concluded were the dormitories of the workmen.

Their captors conducted them to the further end of the gallery, and, throwing open a door, pushed them inside. The door was then banged upon them, and they could hear the shooting of innumerable bolts.

Our friends found themselves in total darkness, a darkness so impenetrable that it was impossible to even distinguish one another's forms as they stood close together.

"Phil, are you there?" asked Pat, in an awed, terrified whisper.

"Yes, Pat, I am here."

"Oh, thanks be to goodness for even that small mercy. I thought they had put me in this terrible hole by myself and taken you off to another."

"Yes, it is some relief to be together," answered Phil. "Solitary confinement in such a rayless dungeon as this would be enough to drive a man mad. Well, I am sorry, old chap, I have got you into such a tight fix as this appears to be."

"You did not get me into it at all, Phil. I walked into it myself, and, be jabers, it won't be my fault if I don't walk out of it!"

Phil laughed, despite their dreadful predicament at his friend's repartee, and Pat said:

"That is right, my hearty, laugh away, and don't be cast down because we are in a bit of a fix. We are not dead men yet, far from it, and we may find some means to circumvent these bloodthirsty Nihilists yet, and make our escape from this dreadful place."

"You see, Pat, my suspicions were well-founded," observed Phil, after a short silence. "I knew that murderous ruffian, Ollinski, was in some way concerned in the assassination of that poor foreigner, and that he had built such a residence as this out of no mere eccentricity."

Pat made no answer to his friend's remark, and they both relapsed into silence, Phil racking his brains to think of some scheme by means of which they might make their escape from their prison. They must first, of course, free their hands of the ropes with which they were bound, and Phil was about to suggest to Pat that they might be able to saw their bonds through by rubbing them against the rough-hewn stones, composing the walls of their prison, when there came the tramp of footsteps in the corridor outside, and they could hear the bolts being slowly withdrawn.

The light of several lanterns flooded the place, as the door swung open, and for several moments the prisoners were blinded by the glare after the inky darkness. When they were able to raise their eyes, they beheld Ollinski and some half-dozen of the Nihilists standing in the doorway.

"The band have decreed your doom by ballot!" said Ollinski. "Fools that you were to dare to pry into the secrets of our great and holy Brotherhood, you must now pay the penalty of your rashness. Look up! From the roof is suspended a great iron plate, fitting close to the four sides of the room. A mouse could only squeeze between it and the wall. The plate is of great weight, and is held up by chains. Released from those chains, the iron plate will fall upon you both and crush you. Such is the doom the Brotherhood accords traitors, and such is that which the band have decreed you shall suffer. In half an hour's time the plate shall fall. We give you till then to prepare yourselves for death."

He waved his hand, and in silence the Nihilists filed out of the cell, and once more the door was shut and barred upon Phil and Pat, who were again left in darkness as of the tomb.

"Heavens, are we to meet such a dreadful doom as that villain said?" gasped Pat O'Connor. "Och wirrasthu, it's my mother's son that's in for it now, and no mistake! Phil, do you think Ollinski really means to put us to death in so awful a manner?"

"My poor friend, I am afraid the murderous ruffian intends to keep his word to the very letter. I have heard some shocking stories of the doings of these Nihilists, and that they will stop short of nothing to attain their bloody ends. Pat, we must meet our doom, so let us meet it as Irishmen and Britons should, bravely and fearlessly."

CHAPTER 6.

WAITING FOR DEATH—REPRIEVED BY AN ACCIDENT—PHIL AND PAT ESCAPE—HOW THEY FREED THEIR HANDS, AND DEFENDED THE DORMITORY AGAINST THE NIHILISTS.

The two doomed men now lapsed into silence.

What terrible suspense they both endured, every moment expecting to hear the rattle of the chains as these were released to

let that terrible iron plate fall with crushing force upon them as they crouched, bound and helpless, upon the stone floor.

Merciful heavens! The hour of their doom had come already.

A sudden bright light flooded the death-chamber, shooting down from the roof in rays all round the great plate of iron. There came the rattle and clatter of chains, and the horrified prisoners saw the great plate begin to slowly move downwards towards them.

Now it dropped with lightning speed, and two wild cries were forced from the bloodless lips of the doomed men. They thought that all was over, when, with a sudden jerk, the iron plate came to a stop within four feet of the floor, and there hung, moving neither up nor down.

Phil and Pat gasped in the extremity of mental anguish, and almost prayed that the plate would fall upon them, and put an end to their agony of mind.

But it remained suspended midway between the roof and the floor, and did not move either up or down. And now there came shouts of rage from above, followed by fierce orders in the voice of Ollinski.

A few more minutes, and then the door of that terrible death-chamber was unbolted and thrown open, and our helpless heroes saw several of the Nihilists enter.

The ruffians climbed on to the plate, and yet it did not descend, and the fact that in some way the machinery had become jammed and refused to work dawned upon Phil.

Finding that their added weight did not have any effect, the Nihilists scrambled off the plate again, and rushed out of the cell once more, while from above came the fierce tones of their chief, as he stormed and raved in impotent rage.

The suspense our heroes endured during this awful interval was enough to drive any weak-minded man out of his mind, for every second they expected that the machinery would be got into working order again, and the iron plate fall and crush them into powder.

All at once Phil's eye rested upon the cell-door, and he gave a great start. It was slightly ajar.

The Nihilists, who had entered to try and force down the plate with their weight, had forgotten to shut and bolt it after them. As a matter of fact, the last man out had really shut the bolts, but without noticing in the dark that he had not shut the door properly. Thus the bolts did not enter the sockets.

A wild, exhilarating hope leaped up in Phil's breast. Their hands were bound, it was true, but not their feet; the door was open, why should they not crawl forth from under that terrible plate into the corridor outside?

Even to meet death there from the knives or pistols of their captors would be preferable to the terrible suspense they were at present suffering.

"Pat, Pat!" whispered Phil hoarsely. "The cell-door is open. Let us crawl out into the passage. It is our only chance." A shudder shook the stalwart frame of his friend, as he gasped: "Anything! Anything, Phil, rather than this terrible suspense."

Scrambling to their knees, they rose to a doubled-up posture, and made for the door, dreading every moment while they remained under that awful iron plate that it would fall. They reached the door; Phil pushed it with his head just wide enough for him to slip through, and Pat followed him.

The corridor outside was deserted, and for a moment they looked at one another in perplexity as to what they should do now. Both were deathly pale and trembling all over, for the experience they had just gone through was enough to shake the nerve of the boldest man that ever breathed.

"Let us make for the stairs leading to the workshop!" panted Phil. "Oh, Heaven, if I could only free my hands of these cursed bonds, I should not let myself be taken again without a desperate struggle for liberty."

They stole along the corridor, which was lighted throughout by electricity, and, to their immense relief, gained the head of the stairs, which they knew led down to the workshop, without mishap.

As they were about to descend they heard voices below, and, glancing over the banisters, to their horror and dismay, they beheld the man Paul and half a dozen other Nihilists ascending. They were caught like rats in a trap. Oh, if only their hands were unbound!

Phil Kavanagh darted a wild, eager look around, and his eye fell upon one of the dormitory doors standing slightly ajar.

"Quick, Pat, quick, we may do them yet!" he whispered. And, running towards the half-open door, he slipped inside.

Pat O'Connor hastily followed him, and, shutting the door to behind them, they placed their backs to it, and waited breathlessly for the ruffians to come up and pass along the corridor.

They had been right in supposing the room to be a dormitory, for there were some five hammocks slung from the roof, and several rifles, pistols, and swords stood in corners and upon a table.

At sight of these weapons, hope once more burned in our hero's breast. If the Nihilists would only pass the room in which they had taken refuge, and a few more minutes be allowed them before their escape from the death-chamber was discovered, they might yet be able to make a bold bid for life and freedom.

Listening anxiously, the young Irishmen heard the Nihilists reach the landing, and now their suspense was something awful. Would the miscreants enter the dormitory or pass along the gallery?

Oh, joy, the footsteps passed the door, and as they died away up the corridor, Phil Kavanagh rushed to the table, on which lay several swords, and with his teeth he drew the hilt of one of these to the edge of the table. Then he turned his back, and was enabled to grip the hilt with his right hand, for his wrists had only been bound, not the hands themselves.

"Pat," he said excitedly, "do as I am doing. Turn your back to the table, and take hold of the scabbard of the sword I am holding."

His friend followed his suggestion, and then, with Pat holding the scabbard tightly behind his back, Phil was able to unsheath the sword.

They were both now all excitement, for Pat had caught the idea of his friend.

"Turn your back now to me, Pat," said Phil. And, slipping his hands along the back of the blade, he gripped it firmly near the point.

Pat turned, and, as they stood back to back to one another, Phil sawed away with the keen sword-point at the ropes, which bound his friend's wrists. In a few minutes the cords were cut through, and Pat's hands were free.

To take the sword from his friend's hands, and with it sever the latter's bonds, did not then take O'Connor long, and the two chums gripped hands in one long, fervent hand-clasp as Phil said:

"Thank Heaven, we have our hands free at last! Now, with these weapons, we can make a bold fight for our lives, and, if need be, die like men!"

Even as he spoke there came a wild yell, muffled by the thick walls, and then ensued an angry murmur, swelling louder and louder until it resolved itself into one thunder-like roar, the meaning of which our heroes needing no telling.

Their escape from the death-chamber had been discovered, and now they heard their foes come tearing down the corridor, yelling like fiends in their rage and alarm. Hastily, Phil and Pat glided to the pile of arms, and secured each a sword and revolver.

They had scarcely thus armed themselves, when the door of the room was flung open, and three men rushed in. These started back in surprise at sight of their late captives standing before them, unbound and armed; and, ere they could either retreat or rush forward, Phil and Pat sprang at them with uplifted blades.

These flashed once simultaneously in the electric light, and two of the three Nihilists rolled upon the stone floor, and as the third man uttered a cry of terror, and turned to escape, Pat O'Connor pounced upon him.

The young Irishman caught him by the throat, and, exerting his great strength, he positively lifted the Russian from the floor, and flung him bodily through the open door full in the faces of a group of his comrades, who were on the point of entering the room.

These went down all of a heap beneath the man's dead weight, and Phil Kavanagh, with ready presence of mind, leaped over the slain Nihilists, and, banging the door in the faces of those without, quickly shot the bolts.

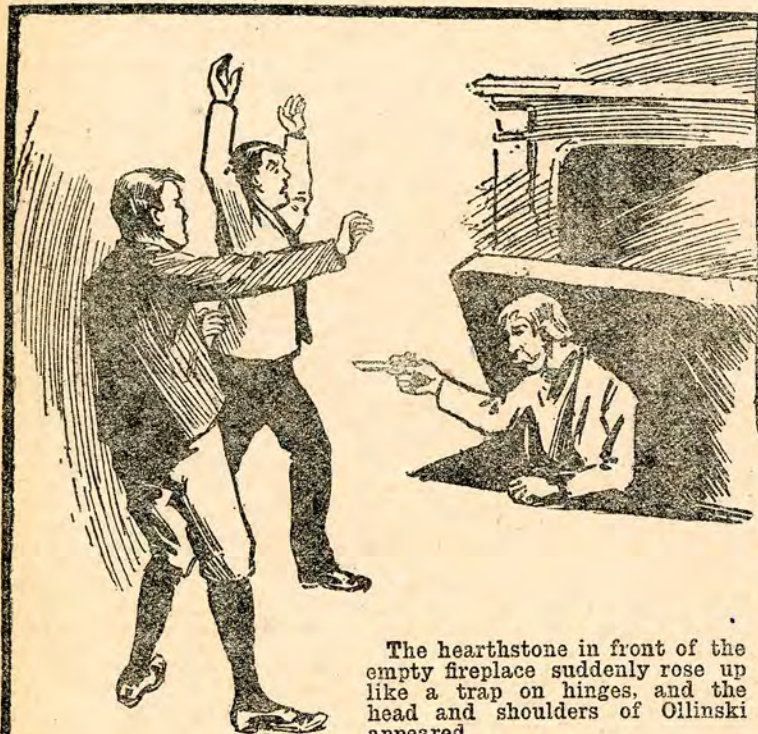
A yell of baffled fury went up from the throats of the discomfited miscreants, and then followed a wild hubbub of voices jabbering in Russian.

Phil and Pat between them dragged the table into the middle of the room, and upon this they placed all the rifles and revolvers, taking their stand then behind it, prepared to resist the anticipated siege.

They heard the Nihilists beating upon the stout oaken door with rifle-butts and sword-hits, and they fired a couple of bullets through the panels. A shriek of agony told that one at any rate of the leaden missiles had found a human billet.

The foe ceased to hammer upon the door after this, and there was a brief cessation of hostilities. Doubtless, the Nihilists were holding a counsel of war, and our heroes waited in some suspense for what was to follow.

Fully a quarter of an hour elapsed; then suddenly there came a thundering blow at the door, which made it tremble and groan. Phil guessed that the ruffians had brought something to serve as a battering-ram, and as another heavy shock upon the door started the hinges, and broke one of the bolts from its fastenings, he and Pat simply riddled the oaken panels with lead, eliciting yells of pain and fury from the mob without.



The hearthstone in front of the empty fireplace suddenly rose up like a trap on hinges, and the head and shoulders of Ollinski appeared.

CHAPTER 7.

A FIERCE SIEGE AND A STUBBORN RESISTANCE—THE SECRET PASSAGE—PURSUED BY THE NIHILISTS—PHIL IS WOUNDED AND RECAPTURED—OLLINSKI RESERVES HIM FOR A MORE DREADFUL DOOM.

Once more the Nihilists abandoned the attempt to burst in the door, which now, however, only held by a single hinge and a crazy bolt or two.

Withdrawing to a safe distance, the besiegers opened fire at cross-range, and as the bullets came tearing through the broken door, and "zipped" across the room, Phil and Pat, to prevent being struck down, lay prone upon the floor, occasionally firing a shot or two to let their adversaries know they were still capable of defending themselves.

All at once the besiegers organised another rush, and this time the battering-ram they carried tore away bolts and hinge as if these were only of paper. The door fell inwards with a crash, and, like a pack of raging wolves, the Nihilists swarmed into the room.

But, standing shoulder to shoulder behind the table, the two Irishmen blazed away as fast as they could pull trigger with a brace of pistols each. Beneath that ceaseless hail of lead, man after man went down, as they attempted to rush forward; and when fully half a dozen of their number lay writhing in the death agony upon the floor, the besiegers broke and scrambled in mad panic out of the room again.

"Quick, Pat," cried Phil, "let us put the door up again, and try and barricade it with this table and the other furniture!" looking hastily round the room.

But as he spoke, the hearthstone in front of the empty fireplace suddenly rose up like a trap on hinges, and the head and shoulders of Ollinski appeared above the aperture thus revealed.

The Pole's face was distorted with the most diabolical fury, and such was his rage that his right hand, which gripped a revolver, trembled as he pointed the weapon at Phil.

The pistol cracked, and the bullet flew within an ace of our hero's breast. With a savage oath, the Nihilist chief again pulled the trigger, but with no better luck.

Ere he could fire again, Pat O'Connor had leapt like a tiger upon him, and a cry of alarm broke from Phil Kavanagh's lips as the two disappeared, locked in fierce embrace, through the aperture.

Phil rushed to the fireplace, and, gazing down the trap, saw that an iron ladder descended to a landing some seven feet below, and upon this Pat and Ollinski were rolling over and over, fighting and struggling madly for the mastery, while bending over the combatants were three Nihilists, one holding a

lantern aloft while the other two were awaiting a favourable opportunity to assist their chief by stabbing his antagonist.

Phil no sooner saw his chum's peril than he took a flying leap down through the trap on to the neck of one of the two Nihilists, just as the mob of besiegers came bursting once more into the room through the open doorway.

The man Phil alighted upon was sent flying headforemost into the stomach of his companion, and the three went rolling over upon the ground. Scrambling quickly to his feet, Phil turned upon the man with the lantern, and ere he could defend himself dropped him with a bullet through the brain.

Then, like a flash, he wheeled upon the other two just as they were struggling to their feet. A couple more well-directed shots laid each of them low, and at the same moment Pat O'Connor, who had got the upper-hand of his foe, scrambled to his feet, and covered Ollinski with his revolver.

Casting a glance upwards now, however, Phil saw a dozen scowling faces glaring down at them through the trap, and, at the same moment a hurricane of lead swept over and around them.

Phil was shot in the shoulder and left forearm, but Pat was uninjured. Badly wounded though he was, Phil called to his chum to run, and the two sped like hares into the darkness beyond.

They were in a narrow gallery, built in the thickness of the outer wall of that strange house, and as they fled along it they found it sloped gently downwards. Whither they were running neither knew, but stumbling staggering over the uneven floor, they kept on, though they could not see a foot before them.

They could hear their enraged foes in hot pursuit, and soon the lights the latter carried began to illuminate the passage behind them. All at once Pat, who was leading, dashed with violence against a stone wall, which apparently closed the gallery and barred the way.

He reeled back, his head throbbing with pain from the nasty knock he had given it against the stones, and a groan of despair broke from his lips.

"Oh, heavens, we are trapped like rats!"

"Not so!" cried Phil. "There must be a secret door here, or Ollinski and the others could not have got in."

With feverish impatience he felt all over the wall in search of a spring, and while so engaged, the pursuers turned the corner of the gallery, and the light of their lanterns flashed upon a brass knob before him.

He clutched it with a cry of joy; and, tugging at it, an oblong portion of the wall turned on a pivot in the centre.

A yell of rage reached them from the throats of the Nihilists as they plunged after one another through the aperture, and found themselves on the islet outside the windowless walls of that terrible house of assassins and conspirators. Each murmured a fervent and heartfelt prayer as they felt the cool night air fanning their hot cheeks.

"Come on, Phil, come on!" cried Pat; "if we can get to the path across the bogs we may yet escape from these human bloodhounds."

But Phil had lost a great deal of blood, and now, that freedom was almost within his grasp, a terrible weakness assailed him. He staggered forward a few paces, and then sank helpless upon his hands and knees.

Unaware of his chum's plight, and believing he was close behind, Pat O'Connor sped on, and gained the causeway across the bog. Then, and then only, did he notice Phil was not with him, and he halted in dismay. He was about to rush back to assist his chum, when he saw the ruffians reach the latter and surround him.

It seemed madness now to think of attempting a rescue, but Pat was a true Irishman, and thought nothing of the risk to himself. He ran back several paces, revolver in hand, but a gang of the miscreants, led on by Ollinski, made towards him, while he saw the others carrying the bound and apparently unconscious form of his friend back towards the house.

Pat let drive a couple of shots at the Nihilist chief, but the bullets pattered harmlessly against his broad chest. The ruffian wore a bullet-proof shirt under his clothes, and as the entire gang now opened fire upon Pat, the latter saw the madness of standing his ground, and, turning, fled with the speed of a hare along the precarious path.

His bloodthirsty foes followed him some distance, but being a swift runner, like most Irishmen born and bred amongst the bogs and mountains, he easily outstripped them, and their aim was faulty in the inky darkness. He eventually got safely away, and, fuming with rage at having let him slip through their fingers, the miscreants returned to the house.

Ollinski was furious and alarmed as well at Pat's escape. He knew that the latter would speedily reveal the secret of "the house without windows," and that the place would be surrounded by police in another hour or two.

Three times in his blind fury did he point a pistol at the head of his senseless prisoner, with the intention of blowing the young fellow's brains out without more ado, and three times did he tell himself that such was too easy and speedy a death for him.

No, to be pistolled out of hand was too easy a death for so determined and dangerous a foe, and Ollinski, after a moment's reflection, turned to the silent and expectant band, and cried:

"Brothers in the most sacred cause of Russian freedom, one of the spies has escaped, and the whole country will be in arms against us in another hour or so. Fortunately, however, our gallant aerial warship, the 'Hope of Russia,' is practically ready to start upon her cruise of vengeance and retribution. We can therefore defy all civilisation, and even laugh to scorn the attempts of Great Britain with her powerful navy to thwart us, once we are in the air. The tyrant rule of the Romanoffs is already approaching its bloody end, the hour has come for us to strike! Brothers, tarry not another moment, but away and tear down the upper floors in order to permit us to mount into the air at a minute's notice. Petroff, Katouski, Melovitch, come ye with me; there yet remains some work for our hands aboard the airship. We will complete it, and thus be in readiness to sail away on our great and glorious mission, when these dull-witted police arrive. Leave that fool where he is—or stay, his hands are unbound, bind them and bring him round. Then bring him along to the workshop. I have a fitting fate in store

for him. We will blow him and as many of the meddling police as are round the building to pieces as we sail grandly off."

The entire band broke into a ringing cheer at this ferocious address, and then the majority departed to destroy the roof and upper storeys, as their chief commanded. The three Nihilists designated quickly secured Phil's hands behind his back, and likewise bound up his wounds; then, when he returned to consciousness, they dragged him to his feet, and conducted him to the workshop where the aerial battleship lay.

Ollinski, the offspring of whose subtle brain the great invention doubtless was, seemed inordinately proud of his work, and turned to Phil, saying:

"Irishman, you have not much longer to live, but ere your eyes are closed for ever, they will look upon the greatest wonder of modern times. Behold yon battleship. In it I and my trusty comrades can soar aloft amongst the clouds and fly through space. The kingdom of the skies is ours, and we hold all Europe in the palms of our hands. Of what avail now will be the proud navies and armies of the world? Our single airship can defy, yea, and annihilate them all if I, her master, so choose. But Russia shall be the first to feel the weight of our wrath. I will avenge the wrongs of the Russian people for centuries past, and the name of Czar shall be spoken no more by the sons of men!"

CHAPTER 8.

INSIDE THE AIRSHIP, "HOPE OF RUSSIA"—THE NIHILISTS PREPARE TO QUIT THE BUILDING—THE POLICE ARRIVE AND SURROUND THE HOUSE—OLLINSKI SUMMONED TO SURRENDER—HE REFUSES.

The Nihilist chief seemed quite carried away by enthusiasm, and Phil Kavanagh could not but feel a certain awe of the man, as he realised that if the latter really had solved the aerial problem, and had built a navigable airship, he must hold all Europe in the palm of his hand, as he proudly boasted.

Oh, if only Pat O'Connor would bring the police in time to prevent this desperate band of conspirators and assassins sailing off in their terrible engine of destruction. But then, like a flash, it dawned upon him how powerless even three score of the Royal Irish Constabulary would be to storm the Nihilists' stronghold. They could not hope to scale its lofty, windowless walls by means of ladders, and the besieged could prevent all approach along the narrow path through the bog by enfilading it from the roof with their rifles.

He shuddered with horror at the thought of the terrible loss of life that must inevitably ensue if the police were mad enough to attempt to storm the place so. No, no, Pat would be able to enlighten them as to the strength of the place, and they would bring a cannon, perhaps call out the soldiers, and bombard the Nihilists.

If they did resort to this means, he himself would have to take his chance of being slain by some of the shots of his friends; but better that a thousand times than that he should perish at the vile hands of these savage and bloodthirsty fanatics.

But Ollinski was addressing him again in English.

"Follow me, Irishman, and I will reveal to you the whole working of the airship. I fear not to, since I know that you will never be able to divulge the secret to a living soul."

In gloomy silence, Phil Kavanagh followed the Nihilist chief up a metal ladder on to the deck of the battleship, and looked around him with an interest and a curiosity he could not help manifesting. To outward appearance she seemed an ordinary man-of-war, with turrets, barbettes, and conning tower complete; but, springing from the bulwarks all round her, were innumerable aluminium rods surmounted by rotary screws.

These Ollinski proudly explained to him were for ascending purposes; and then his captors conducted him down the companion into the pilot-house, where there was a switch with levers to work the vessel. From the Pilot-house Phil was led



The next moment the pair were tearing down through space at a giddy speed.

into the machine-room, where Ollinski pointed out to him the splendid electric engines, dynamos, and other apparatus, which were to work the powerful propelling-screws and the ascensional fans, and then he was shown the magazine of the vessel, filled with bombs, torpedoes, and other diabolical contrivances for destroying life.

Phil shuddered, as he realized to the full now the dreadful havoc the airship could wreak in a large and populous city like St. Petersburg, and how fervently he wished his hands were free that there and then he might make a bold attempt to blow up the magazine and every Nihilist in the house, and thus save humanity from the threatened scourge. He knew well that he himself must inevitably perish too, but, with the sense of heroism, he would have cared naught for that if by so great a personal sacrifice he could prevent the destruction of thousands of innocent people.

He cared not that the race against whom Ollinski and his band intended to war, were not only alien but tyrannical. They were human beings, and he could not view their projected massacre with equanimity or indifference.

But he seemed helpless to avert the dread calamity, and he could only pray that the police would arrive in time to prevent Ollinski starting upon his cruise of destruction.

He was now conducted by his captors through the cabins, which were all furnished and fitted up in the most luxurious style. The quarters of the crew were almost as handsomely arranged as was their chief's own private state-room.

When they had made a complete tour of the vessel, Ollinski put what evidently had been running in his thoughts into words.

"No," he said, "I do not think after all that I will send you to eternity yet awhile. You will accompany me on my cruise, and you will witness my triumph over the might and power of the proud and tyrant Czar. Petroff, Katouski, take him and confine him in the aft cabin. Then join Melovitch and I in the magazine. We have much to do in the next hour. The police of this country will be buzzing round the house like bees shortly. I must post a sentry or two to give us due warning of their approach."

The two Nihilists marched our hero off unresistingly to the aft cabin, and shut him in. He heaved a sigh of relief as the door closed upon him. The hour of his own death was postponed indefinitely, and who was to say what might happen in the meantime?

A ray of hope shot through his breast. He had expected that the first intimation of the approach of the constabulary would be the signal for his own assassination; but now, even if the Nihilists succeeded in getting away safely in their airship, might he not find some means even at the last moment to thwart the fiendish schemes of his captors?

He was confined in a small, electrically-lighted metal cabin, surrounded by berths and slung with hammocks. There was no porthole in the side, and the door fitted into its frame so tightly it was scarcely to be distinguished from the rest of the wall.

He could hear the clang of many hammers and axes, deadened, however, by the walls between, and knew that the band were hard at work, demolishing the floors intervening between the airship and the sky; and he strained his ears eagerly to catch any other sounds that might tell him his friends had come to storm the place.

The time dragged on slowly in his captivity until fully three hours had elapsed, he was sure, since the escape of Pat and his own recapture, and the suspense of waiting and hoping against hope was awful.

At last, to his joy, he heard the clang of the hammers overhead cease abruptly, and a minute or two later he heard someone running along the deck over his head, shouting something in Russian. Ollinski's voice answered the man's, and then Phil heard footsteps hurrying up the companion and along the deck.

We will leave Phil, waiting in terrible suspense for the result of the siege, and see for ourselves what was transpiring on the roof of the building.

Ollinski and his four confederates, when they mounted the stairs, found the whole of the band assembled on the circular parapet, armed to the teeth, and in the grey light of the dawning day, a strong force of police were to be seen drawn up on the edge of the bog, while midway across the narrow causeway giving access to the islet on which "the house without windows" stood, were Inspector McNally, Pat O'Connor, and a couple of sergeants and head-constables.

The inspector wished to parley with the owner of the place, and was not to be awed by the crowd of armed desperadoes who manned the roof.

"I wish to speak with Ollinski!" shouted the brave police-officer.

The Nihilist chief advanced towards the breastwork, and demanded to know what he wanted.

"In the name of the law, Mr. Ollinski," answered the inspector, "I call upon you to surrender quietly. I have reason to believe that your house is the rendezvous of a most desperate gang of Nihilists, who are plotting against the peace and lives of

the Czar of Russia and his subjects. The sight of all those armed men surrounding you would seem to prove that the information I have received is true. I call upon you to instantly lay down your arms, in the name of her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria."

"I refuse to recognise the authority!" replied Ollinski, with a scornful laugh, "and defy you and the whole British empire to interfere with me or my plans. We can defend this place against ten times the force you have yonder. Bah, you will require an army, equipped with artillery, to knock this place about our ears, and even then we can laugh at your puny attempts to check us in our great work. Withdraw, gentlemen, and brave not my wrath. My men's fingers are itching to shoot you down where you stand, but I have no quarrel with you, and seek not your deaths unless"—and his face darkened with fiendish passion—"you dare to attempt to thwart me in my plans."

Inspector McNally conferred a few moments with his subordinates, and then called back:

"Two regiments of soldiers and an artillery corps are already on their way here. If you do not surrender at once, you must take the consequences. You will be shelled out of the place."

"Bah!" retorted Ollinski, with another scornful laugh, "you can bring the whole British Army to besiege us, you can bombard this place into ruins, but the conquest of the skies is ours. We can soar aloft like birds on the wings of the wind, and set all your power at naught."

"We have to deal with a madman!" said the inspector, turning to his associates.

"I do not know," put in Pat O'Connor. "I told you of the airship he has built. As to whether it really will fly or not, I had no means of learning; but in these days of scientific progress there is no saying it will not. Besides, the ruffians have my friend Kavanagh a prisoner, if they have not already murdered him in cold blood, and I would urge you to make the assault at once."

"It seems madness to attempt to storm such a place without artillery," replied the police-officer. "Those marksmen on the roof could pick us off like sheep as we cross this narrow path, and then how can we scale those walls? We have no ladders long enough."

"There are two concealed entrances on the ground floor, inspector, and a bold dash might carry the place."

"No, no, it would never do to take the risk. My men would be decimated before they could get across this path. There is nothing for it but to await the arrival of the soldiers with the heavy guns I asked for. We can then knock the place about their ears without the loss of a single man."

CHAPTER 9.

THE SOLDIERS ARRIVE AND BOMBARD THE NIHILISTS—THE AIRSHIP ASCENDS—WRECK OF THE "HOPE OF RUSSIA"—PHIL ESCAPES BY MEANS OF A PARACHUTE—CONCLUSION.

The inspector's counsel prevailed, for it certainly was the wisest under the circumstances, and though Pat O'Connor would in his anxiety to learn his chum's fate have volunteered to lead the storming-party, he could not help but confess that such an attempt must entail a terrible loss of life.

The Nihilists, within their strong stone house, were practically impregnable, and they could pick off to the very last man any small attacking force even before it could get under the walls.

Inspector McNally and his officers returned to the main body, therefore, and a couple of mounted constables were sent off in the direction the troops were expected, to hurry them up. Then the police sat down, fuming with their own impotence, on the edge of the bog, and watched the fortress-like building, while the moments dragged slowly on.

Ollinski, seeing that his foes were not going to throw away their lives in any foolhardy assault, left a few men to watch their movements from the roof, and then went back with the others to complete the destruction of the interior, and make all other preparations for flight in the airship.

Meanwhile, Phil Kavanagh was racking his brains to think how on earth he might succeed in freeing his hands, as a first step to his heroic determination to, if possible, destroy the airship, even though he sacrificed his own life in the effort.

He tugged and strained at the cords which bound his wrists, putting forth all his strength, and suddenly, to his intense delight, he felt one of the knots give. With difficulty he suppressed the cry of joy that rose involuntarily to his lips, and, by dint of a little more exertion, succeeded in loosening his bonds at length to such an extent that he was able to slip his hands forth.

He sprang to his feet, free once more in body and limb. Now to leave the cabin. While the Nihilists were all engaged in resisting the siege on the roof, he might gain the magazine,

set a fuse, and effect his own escape by means of the sliding door in the wall of the workshop.

But a bitter disappointment awaited him. When he tried the door of the cabin he found it fastened on the outside, and there was not even a porthole in the side of the room through which he could have squeezed himself. He was as much a prisoner as ever, securely caged, for how could he hope to burst his way through the stout metal walls which enclosed him.

There was no visible outlet other than the door to the cabin, but Phil went over nearly every square yard of the metal walls in eager search for a concealed spring. But if there were any sliding panels in the room he could not find them, and had finally to give up his search in despair.

He paced the room slowly to and fro like a caged tiger. Oh, how impotent he was after all! He was no nearer attaining freedom with his hands unbound than he was with them bound.

And when his foes entered, and— Ha! A sudden thought had flashed upon him.

Yes, it was a happy idea; he would slip his hands through the loose loops of the cords which he had just freed his wrists from, and, when his captors re-entered the room, pretend to be still bound and helpless. The chances were that his captors would not dream of examining his bonds, and, once out of that prison-like cabin, he must make a bold attempt to destroy the airship, even at the cost of his own life. He hoped against hope, however, that his captors would visit him in his prison and afford him the opportunity he sought before they started on their vengeful cruise.

He sat down against the wall with his hands behind his back and waited, while the hours dragged by, and he guessed the meaning of the apparent cessation of hostilities between the besiegers and besieged. Anxiously he listened for the welcome roar of cannon above the din and clatter of the Nihilists' tools as they broke away floor after floor above the dockyard in which the "Hope of Russia" lay.

They had now effected vast gaps in all three floors, and nothing remained between the vessel and the sky but the great glass roof. Ollinski had set half the band to work to remove this, and the other half to carry aboard the aerial warship all the supplies of food, ammunition, &c., necessary for their flight and cruise, when the sentries he had posted reported that the troops were in view, and that they had artillery with them.

Ollinski laughed scornfully.

"Let them come!" he cried; "let them bombard the place! Another few more minutes now, and we will be able to rise into the air and destroy them all to a man, if we so choose. Work away, work away, brothers, tear down that roof!"

The Nihilists needed no such order. The tidings that the soldiers had arrived with cannon, and the knowledge that the house would speedily be bombarded with roundshot and shell made them work like blacks, and the glass roof was down by the time the soldiers had limbered up their pieces and the officer in command summoned their chief to surrender.

Ollinski now thundered. "All aboard, men!" Then lingered behind alone upon the parapet around the dismantled roof to hurl a parting defiance at the foe.

Hastily descending the stairway, he had barely climbed, the last man of the whole band, upon the deck of the airship, when the roar of the heavy artillery the troops had brought shook the house almost to its foundations, and two great gaps were torn in the strong walls by the powerful projectiles.

Stones and other debris rattled like hail upon the metal hull of the airship, but Ollinski, the only man upon deck, smiled in disdain, and called down the speaking-tube to Petroff to bring up their prisoner that he might witness the ascent and the triumph of the Nihilist chief over his British foes.

Then he telegraphed to his lieutenant in the pilot-house, Paul, to pull the motor lever. The ascensional fans began to revolve, the aerial warship vibrated from stem to stern, and, as the screws whirled round with ever-increasing speed, she slowly rose from the stocks, and mounted into the air through the great gaps in the floors, higher and higher, until she cleared the roof of the building.

Phil Kavanagh was enduring terrible suspense in his cell-like cabin. He had heard the roar of the cannon and the crash of the falling masonry, and in awful agony of mind wondered was he to be kept confined until the "Hope of Russia" was beyond the reach of shell or cannon-ball. He heard footsteps approaching along the passage; they stopped outside his door, and his mind was made up in a moment.

Now or never was the time to put his desperate scheme into execution, and hastily he drew his hands free of the loose cords, and waited impatiently for the Nihilists to enter. The door swung open, and Petroff and another man appeared.

With a single bound, Phil was upon them; his two fists shot out like sledge-hammers, and catching both ruffians full in the face, sent them flying backwards. Then, like a flash, Phil was through the door and bounding down the passage.

In the excitement of the moment, however, he forgot the run of the vessel, and turned in the direction of the pilot-house in-

stead of the magazine. It was too late to remedy the mistake, for already he heard the two Nihilists he had knocked down shouting loudly and following upon his heels.

He felt the airship vibrate, heard the clatter and rattle of machinery, and knew that it was rising into the air. The alleyway was deserted, for every man of the crew was at his gun, ready to pour down a rain of lead and iron upon the soldiers and police at the signal from their chief.

He gained the pilot-house, and flung open the door. Four men were within, the Nihilist lieutenant Paul standing by the switchboard and jamming over the starting-lever.

The clash and rattle of the machinery drowned the noise of his sudden entry, and as the men stood with their backs turned to him, their eyes riveted on the scene outside the outlooks, he sprang quickly forward, and hurled Paul aside with a violence that sent the miscreant sprawling. Then, seizing the descending-lever, Phil wrenched it back.

A tremor shook the airship, and a wild shriek of amazement and horror rang forth from every part of her, rising even above the rattle of the machinery, as she ceased to rise.

The other three occupants of the pilot-house turned in surprise, and uttered cries of superstitious terror as they beheld the man they believed a prisoner standing by the steering gear.

"Seize him! Down with him!" screamed Paul, scrambling to his feet. "He is steering us to the ground!"

With shrieks of rage and terror, the four ruffians rushed upon the devoted young Irishman, but he met the foremost with a blow in the face that sent him staggering. The other three, however, were upon him like wild beasts, and dragged him by main strength to the floor.

Then, as with howls and yells, the whole of the airship's crew came pouring into the pilot-house, there was a terrific crash; the metal walls were ripped open like paper, and a shell ploughed its way through the seething mass of fanatics, and, bursting, wrecked the steering gear.

Fully a dozen men were struck down by the flying debris, and the aerial monster, heeling over, began to sink slowly to earth. With shrieks of dismay and despair, the whole band of Nihilists scrambled panic-stricken for the hatchway and rushed upon deck, many hurling themselves over into the black bog below in the belief that all was lost.

Phil was left alone in the wrecked pilot-house with the dead and dying. He scrambled to his feet, but could scarcely maintain them with the way in which the mortally wounded airship rolled and tossed as she sank downwards.

Where was the desperate Nihilist chief, Ollinski?

Where? Did he need any answer?

He knew the character of the man only too well to guess that the latter would never wish to survive the defeat of his long-cherished scheme, that far sooner he would prefer to blow the airship and all upon it into eternity.

The thought that the fanatical miscreant might even at that moment be about to fire the magazine nerved Phil to make a last effort for self-preservation. He rushed from the pilot-house and gained the deck, to behold the remnant of the Nihilist crew tearing forth from a locker near the main-cabin a number of bundles of some soft material.

He comprehended at once that these were parachutes, and as one of the miscreants, unfolding one he had secured, ran to the bulwarks to leap over, Phil made a desperate bound, and clutched the man round the body.

The next moment the pair were tearing downwards through space at a giddy speed. Even as they fell, there came a thunderous report, a great eruption of flame and smoke, and the airship was blown into ten thousand fragments.

Ollinski, as Phil had shrewdly surmised, had preferred death to defeat, and with his own hand had fired the magazine.

Down, down, through the air dropped the parachute with the two men clinging for dear life to it, their double weight causing it sank almost like a stone.

It dropped near the outer edge of the bog, and close into the narrow causeway, and Phil and the Nihilist were plunged deep into the soft yielding mire. But this fact saved their lives, and, in less time than it takes us to tell it, they were extricated from the bog, and found themselves surrounded by police and soldiers.

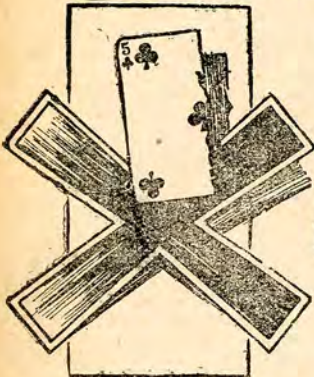
"Phil, Phil, thank Heaven you are alive and well!" cried a voice. And Pat O'Connor burst through the ring, and almost wept for joy upon the neck of his chum.

Law and order had triumphed; the threatened Nihilist scourge had been destroyed, mainly owing to the intrepidity and resource of one man. The Nihilist that had accompanied Phil in his descent by the parachute was the only survivor of the men who had composed the crew of the "Hope of Russia," and he committed suicide in prison while awaiting his trial.

The news of Ollinski's daring scheme and its defeat thrilled all Europe; and Phil Kavanagh and Pat O'Connor received an ovation in Dublin from their enthusiastic fellow-countrymen such as is seldom accorded other than Royalty.

THE END.

YOU CAN BEGIN THIS TO-DAY,



THE SIGN OF THE SCARLET CROSS

By CLAUD HEATHCOTE,

Author of "Four British Boys," "Val the Boy Acrobat," "Roy Royal or St. Miriam's," "The Red Light," "Dick Danvers," &c.

READ THIS FIRST.

The story opens on Harry's fifteenth birthday.

Harry and Pierre Evison, whose son Harry thinks he is, are about to have tea, when Harry's great chum, Shaggy, a newsboy, enters, and tells them that a body has been dragged from the Thames at Limehouse, and that on the breast of the dead man is a strange tattoo—a scarlet cross, and half of the five of clubs.

On hearing this, Pierre Evison turns deadly pale.

Harry asks Shaggy to tea. The newsboy tells his chum that he has a few papers to sell first, and goes out.

He does not return, and Harry sets out in search of him.

In the street he meets Paul Lamaret, who asks if he knows where Pierre Evison lives. Harry directs him to their home, and goes on his way.

Meantime, Pierre takes down a picture from the wall of his room and, undoing the back, pulls a couple of banknotes from it. Then he replaces them.

Mr. Mawker, who has been watching him, unknown to Pierre, then slips away.

A few moments later, Paul Lamaret enters. "Pierre Evison, otherwise Pierre Gourbat, I salute you!" he says. And tells him that he has come to take his life because he has not killed one Horace Temple as he promised to do. The pair fight with rapiers, and Pierre is mortally wounded. The murderer escapes. Harry, meanwhile, goes to where Shaggy lives. He is out. Harry is about to leave, when he sees a rat gnawing a paper. He takes it from the animal, and discovers it to be a letter half eaten away. He puts it into his pocket and goes home. He discovers Pierre dying, and is told by him that he is not his son; that his family name is Temple; and that he must beware of the Lamarets, all of whom are marked on the breast with the scarlet cross and the half of the five of clubs. Then he falls back dead. Harry goes for the police, leaving Mawker with the body. Mawker walks stealthily to the door.

This he closed, and came as swiftly back.

Then he knelt by the side of the dead, his fear of it momentarily gone, and quickly uncovered the wound which Harry had so reverently covered.

In doing so he saw a tattoo on the breast.

"My God!" he cried, staggering to his feet. "The scarlet cross—the five of clubs! I thought so."

Then a look of cunning rapidly took the place of that of horror. His eyes went to the picture of Napoleon at Austerlitz—the picture in which he had seen the dead man hide the banknotes. He stooped once more, and covered the body as Harry had left it.

Then he again went to the door, opened it, and listened. No sound of footsteps. Shutting the door, he got a chair, and, mounting on it, took down the picture.

He opened it at the back as Pierre had done, and took out the notes with greedy, trembling hands.

"Fifty pounds!" he cried, as he looked at them.

At that moment a groan seemed to come from the dead man. Mawker was so startled that the picture and the notes fell from his trembling hands. When he turned, the glassy eyes of Pierre seemed fixed upon him.

He covered his face with his hands to hide that awful stare.

"You're an old fool—an old fool, Mawker!" he said to himself presently. "The dead can't hurt the living. Bah!"

Luckily the picture had fallen on one of its corners, and, beyond a crack to the glass, was not otherwise damaged. He was about to slip the notes into his pocket.

"Stay!" he said, screwing up his cunning eyes. "You're an

old fool, Mawker! Do you want to run yourself in? That's what'll happen, if you're not careful. You shall have those banknotes; but wait a bit—wait a bit. There's a better way than putting your own head into a noose. Put someone else's."

He quickly jotted down the numbers of the notes, then replaced them into their former position behind the picture.

"There may be a will, mentioning those notes, and that'll just upset your appercart, Mr. Mawker. Steady does it!—steady does it!"

He hung the picture on the wall. Scarcely had he done so than there were heavy footsteps on the stairs, and a few seconds later Harry entered, accompanied by a couple of policemen.

Harry had told the constables what had happened by the way, and when they entered the room and had viewed the body, they questioned him further, carefully noting his answers in a pocket-book.

Harry told them exactly what had occurred, so far as he was acquainted with the circumstances, keeping back, however, Pierre's confession that he was not his father.

"He told me," said Harry, "that he was killed in fair fight, and that his adversary's name was Lamaret. I can tell you no more."

"It's altogether the greatest mystery I know of," said one of the constables. "That fellow that was drowned down Limehouse way had a scarlet cross on his breast and the five of clubs, just like this one."

"Yes; it's a rummy go," said the other constable. "Young man, you'll be wanted to give evidence at the inquest."

By this time two more constables had arrived with a stretcher. The body of poor Pierre was then placed upon it and carried to the mortuary.

CHAPTER 7.

SHAGGY MAKES A STARTLING DISCOVERY—RELICS OF THE DEAD—AT THE HOUR OF MIDNIGHT.

A sense of utter desolation came upon Harry when the mournful little procession had gone, and he was alone—alone in the room where he had spent many happy hours with Pierre.

His mournful glance fell upon the tea-table, which had been pushed back for the encounter between Pierre and his adversary. There were the empty cups and the birthday-cake given him by Shaggy still there.

His birthday! What mockery it all seemed! The boy felt a choking sensation in his throat; but there were no tears. His heart seemed ready to burst; yet it was as much with burning hate for the man who had done this deed—this Paul Lamaret—as for regret and affection for the man who had been to him as father.

"Merciful Heaven!" he cried, with parched, burning lips and clenched hands, "grant that I may one day meet this Lamaret face to face, and that I may have the strength of hand to smite him as he has smitten Pierre!"

There was a burning spot behind the boy's eyes, as there was on his lips; still no tears came to his relief. His gaze kept turning from the tea-table to the work-table by the window on which Pierre's tools still lay, and then to that bloody cross on the wall.

It was impossible to realise that that form would no longer be seen by the window, that the deft fingers would no longer be seen cutting away with the graver on the wood blocks.

Buried in these sad thoughts, Harry had not heard a knock upon the door. So the visitor turned the handle, and walked in without ceremony.

"Harry!"

YOUR SISTERS SHOULD READ THE "HEARTSEASE LIBRARY."
1d. EVERY WEDNESDAY.

It was Shaggy—come at last to the birthday tea! Harry looked up. Shaggy's face was almost as pale as Harry's. There was little to choose between them.

"I've only just heard the bad news, Harry," he said. "I should have been here sooner only I've had a bit of a knock-out on my own. Granny's been knocked down and run over, and ain't expected to get over it."

"Granny!"

Then, for the first time, Harry's thoughts went back to Shaggy's miserable home, and the paper in his pocket.

"Yes," said the newsboy brokenly. "When I got home after leaving you I heard that a swell lady, togged up to the nines, had been to see granny. Granny went out with her. Where the two went I don't know; but on coming back home granny somehow fell under a cart, and was run over. She was taken to the 'orspital. I went to see her there, but she didn't know me. P'raps she'll never know me agin, Harry."

Shaggy's voice was quite broken. He could not have spoken more feelingly had his grandmother been a paragon of all the virtues, instead of a maudlin old woman who helped to dissipate his earnings.

"I'm very sorry for you, Shaggy; but do you know who the visitor was?" asked Harry, somewhat curious as to the fashionably-dressed lady who had called upon and gone out with the ragged, dirty old beldame.

"No; I can't think who it was. That's what's been a-puzzlin' me. I found this card on the mantelpiece; but I don't know anybody of that name."

He handed Harry a card as he spoke. On it was the name:

"PAULINE ANCONIA."

There was nothing beyond that—simply the name, no address, and no means therefore of tracing the lady.

Harry considered for a moment whether he should confide in Shaggy all that Pierre had told him. He hesitated for a brief space only before deciding. "Yes; he would confide everything to Shaggy. He could plainly see that there was much to do, and many dangers to face and overcome, before the mystery of the scarlet cross was fathomed. In that task the help of his chum would be incalculable. He therefore told him everything.

In the course of his story, he necessarily referred to his visit to Shaggy's home, and the letter he had rescued from the rats.

"Do you mind my looking at that letter?" said Shaggy, when Harry had finished.

"Certainly. I, of course, intended returning it to you, Shaggy."

Harry drew the mutilated letter from his pocket as he spoke, and handed it to his chum. Shaggy's hair was positively bristling with excitement when he had finished scrutinising the letter.

"Did you notice the name in the letter, Harry?"

"Yes; one of them—Angela. That was the thing that struck me about the letter, because there happens to be an Angela in this house—Angela Mawker. But it's nothing to do with her, is it?"

"Nothing to do with her, perhaps; but—but—what was the name of the man who killed Pierre?"

Shaggy was getting more and more excited, his hair more and more bristly.

"Paul Lamaret."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Positive. It's a name I'm never likely to forget."

"Good. And the other name—the name of your real father?"

"Horace Temple."

"And don't you remember the name at the bottom of this letter?"

He indicated the letter as he spoke.

In the tragic event that had so recently occurred, everything else had been crowded out of Harry's mind.

"Let me look at it again, Shaggy."

Shaggy handed him back the mutilated letter. Harry's breath came and went quickly when he gazed at the signature. There was only a part of it—"CIVAL TEMPLE."

"The same surname as my father's!" he gasped; "but not the same Christian name. The signature is evidently meant for Percival Temple."

"Just what I think, Harry; but what do you make of the other name in the letter?"

Harry's gaze went to the other name, which had been torn in twain—"Angela Lam—"

"Angela Lam— Angela Lam—" he repeated. Then a sudden light leapt to his mystified face. "Angela Lamaret! Merciful heavens! Can that be the name, I wonder?"

"I believe it is," said Shaggy, who had been watching his friend closely as he scrutinised the letter. "It's only a guess; but I think it's somewhere near the mark."

"Supposing it is, what does that prove?" cried Harry, trying to see through the thick mists that seemed to be gathering round his head.

"It goes to prove, Harry, said the shrewd newsboy, "that there's another branch of your family has been tryin' to score off the Lamarets a good many years back, and that the Lamarets

and Temples hate each other like pisin. Oh, yes, they seem to be a beautiful nest o' scorpions!"

"But what is your grandmother to do with it?"

"Ask me another," said Shaggy, trying viciously to smoothe down his bristly looks, which just as resolutely refused to be smoothed down—"ask me another, Harry. That's a lick. But, look here, I'm going to see her at the hospital to-morrow. You might as well come with me, and between us we may be able to get a little information from her."

"Right, Shaggy; I'll be ready for you when you call to-morrow. In the meantime, you may as well take care of that letter. It's more your property than mine."

The newsboy carefully folded up the letter, and put it inside an old pocket-book for safety.

"And now, if you don't mind, Harry, I've got one little question to put to yer. What do yer intend doing when Pierre is under ground, and all this black bi'sness is over?"

"What do I intend doing?" cried Harry passionately. "Can you ask, Shaggy? What would you do if you were in my place? I'll tell you. You'd do exactly as I'm going to do. I'm going to track down the scoundrel who killed poor Pierre, and try, by every means in my power, to find my father."

"Well, I don't think the first part o' the job'll be such hard work, for it strikes me, Harry, that this Lamaret is much more likely to track you down than you track him down. So that what you'll have to do is to keep yer eyes well open and be always on yer guard. The second part o' the programme—finding out yer father—will be the teaser, for you haven't got the least clue—have yer?—to where he hangs out."

"No; but I may find out something about him amongst Pierre's papers."

"Ah, yes, you may find somethin' there, and I'd make the search as soon as possible, if I were you; for yer never knows what'll happen, seems to me. But before I go, Harry, I'd just like to say this—you stood by me once when I was in a tight corner, and I'm a-goin' to stand by you now. Whether it's tracking down that 'ere Lamaret, or finding out yer father, here's one hand as 'll help yer."

Shaggy held out his rough, strong hand, and Harry clasped it tightly in his. Then the newsboy descended the stairs into the streets.

The moment he left, Harry commenced his search amongst Pierre's papers for the purpose of discovering, if possible, some clue to his real parentage.

But though he searched every drawer and corner in the hope of finding some document or letter that might throw light on the mystery, his search was futile. Pierre seemed to have destroyed all his letters as he received them, and there was no sign of any document.

Harry was about to give up his search greatly disappointed, when he happened to place his hand upon a little square box, buried underneath a pile of clothes in a chest of drawers.

They were old-fashioned dresses, falling to pieces with age. Many years must have elapsed since they were last worn by a woman.

Harry drew out the box and opened it. Inside he found a braided lock of hair, a woman's wedding-ring, and an old French Bible.

He looked in the fly-leaf of the latter, expecting to find a name; but though a name had evidently been at one time written there, it had since been carefully erased, leaving nothing but a blank space.

Harry was about to return the Bible to its resting-place amongst the sacred relics that Pierre had so lovingly treasured up, when a slip of paper, folded in three, fluttered from the leaves to the floor.

Harry hastily picked it up, and found his name on the back.

Opening the paper with trembling fingers, he saw that there was writing on it in Pierre's hand. He eagerly read:

"My Dear Harry.—I have sometimes feared that an accident might happen to me in which I might meet my death. My fears may or may not be realised, but in any case my life will come to a close before yours."

"There are two requests I wish to make of you when that time comes. Bury these relics with me. Place the ring on my finger, the lock of hair on my breast. For the love of the good God, do this for me, Harry. I shall then lie at rest in my grave."

"My other request is, that you may sell whatever you please of my belongings when I am gone, except the three pictures of Napoleon. Never part with those—they are valuable. Seek and ye shall find!—God bless you, lad, "PIERRE."

That was all. Harry read this strange letter, written by the dead man's hand, again and again, his eyes growing mistier and mistier as he did so, until at last he could see nothing distinctly.

"Ha, Master Harry, excuse me for intruding, but I knocked three times upon your door, and you did not hear me, so I took the liberty of walking in."

Harry turned quickly, and found Mawker peering over his shoulder.

"What do you want, Mr. Mawker?" said Harry, somewhat startled, and hastily closing the drawer. Then he refolded the letter, and put it in his pocket, Mr. Mawker watching him closely with his cunning eyes as he did so.

"I've only just dropped in to say how sorry I am for you in your misfortune, Harry. It quite knocked me backwards when I first heard of it. As for Angela, she's so cut up that I can't get her to eat a thing—not a blessed thing—though I've bought her a lovely red herring for her supper."

Mr. Mawker sniffled as though he himself were on the point of a sudden breakdown. After adding a number of condolences, and giving Harry the verse of a hymn to remember, Mr. Mawker shook him by the hand, and walked towards the door with bowed head, as one overcome with grief.

When he reached the door he turned again, as if struck with a sudden idea.

"By the by," he said, "I've no doubt you'll want a little spare cash to go on with, Harry? Well, I'd like to help you, boy. I always had a fancy to those pictures—poor Pierre knew it, and promised that he would leave me one of 'em if anything ever happened to him."

He was standing before the battle pictures.

"Oh," said Harry, looking up quickly. "Which one was that?"

"The middle picture—Napoleon after Austerlitz. It's an old print, of no value, especially as it's cracked; but, of course, I wouldn't like to take it for nothing. So I tell you what I'll do—I'll give you a sovereign for it."

"Thank you, Mr. Mawker; it's very kind of you—very kind; but I don't intend parting with those pictures; and I'm rather astonished to hear from you that Pierre Evison promised to leave you one of those pictures, especially as I have just found a letter from him solemnly asking me never to part with them."

Mr. Mawker bit his thumb-nail with the fang of a tooth.

"Have you really?" he said, as he proceeded with this exercise. "Poor Pierre must have forgotten all about his promise to me. So you won't let me have that musty old print?"

"No, Mr. Mawker; I'm sorry to say I can't."

Mr. Mawker took this rebuff very amiably. He hoped that he might be permitted to help Harry in some other way later on. He rubbed his hands, smiled until he again exposed the fangs of his teeth; and then, wishing our hero good-night, withdrew.

It was now getting late, and Harry, thoroughly worn out by the events of the day, began to think of retiring to rest. Ten minutes later, however, Angela came to the door, and handed him in a cup of hot cocoa.

Angela had frequently brought him or Pierre a cup of cocoa or coffee in the evening as some return for the various "pinches" of different articles borrowed by her father.

Angela dared not speak, but there was a look of sympathy as she withdrew from the doorway in her pure, sweet eyes that spoke volumes.

Harry drank the cocoa, and began to feel very drowsy.

"What's the matter with me?" he said. "My head seems as heavy as lead. I thought I shouldn't be able to sleep at all to-night, and now I feel as drowsy as a dormouse."

He tried to shake it off. In vain. His eyelids were getting heavier and heavier.

"Heigho! There's nothing else for it. I must go to bed, and get up fresh on the morrow." Here he yawned heavily. "To-morrow! Yes; there's a lot to do to-morrow."

He walked towards the door of the outer room as he spoke. Pierre—the lad remembered—made it an invariable custom to look the door before retiring to rest.

"Hallo! What's become of the key?" he cried, as he reached the door.

The key was usually on the inner side of the lock; but there was now no sign of it. Harry opened the door and looked on the outer side, thinking that by mistake it had been left there.

No; it was not there. It had either been mislaid or stolen.

Harry searched about for it, getting drowsier and drowsier at every moment.

"No go," he yawned, "so I must get to bed. Anyhow, no one's likely to run away with me."

He staggered towards the inner chamber as he spoke, and commenced to undress himself.

He had only got off his coat and waistcoat when he fell on the bed in a stupor. A few seconds later he was breathing heavily in a dead sleep.

* * * * *

Eleven o'clock struck. In the crowded thoroughfares of the West End people were just coming from the theatres, and the newsboys were busy at that late hour of the night shouting out "Mysterious murder in St. Giles's."

One boy in particular, owing to his extreme sharpness, did a roaring trade. That was Shaggy.

Twelve o'clock struck. The streets were slowly emptying.

One o'clock! The streets were now almost deserted. The black pall of night covered everything.

It was at that hour the door of the room in which Harry slept was slowly opened, and a figure crept stealthily in.

CHAPTER 8.

THE SLEEPING BOY—A MOMENT OF TERROR—A MENACE OR A WARNING?

It was Mr. Mawker.

He cautiously closed the door after him, and then stood perfectly still, listening.

Evidently satisfied, he crept to the inner apartment where Harry slept.

He paused as before, listening. Presently he could hear the deep breathing of the lad.

"The cocoa did its work!" chuckled Mawker. "He might have been suspicious of it if I'd given it him, but coming from the hand of an angel like Angela—"

The remainder of the sentence was expressed by a succession of soft, low chuckles. At the same time he drew from under his coat a dark-lantern, and flashed its light on the bed.

"Dear me!" he continued softly, as he saw the half-dressed form of Harry on the bed. "Sleeps like a little cherub—at he does. But the young rascal's getting into bad habits, going to roost with his feathers on. Dear me! dear me! I don't know what's coming over the rising generation, that I don't. They'll never follow the good example of their elders. Soft!"

Harry at that moment groaned in his sleep, and tossed out his arms. Mawker immediately darkened the lantern, and remained as motionless as a statue for several minutes.

"No fear of him waking, I know that well enough. The dose I dropped into that cocoa when Angela's back was turned was a pretty stiff one; but there's nothing like caution—caution—that's Mawker's motto!"

He took out his lantern again.

"Where's his coat? It was in his coat-pocket he put that little document from his father. I must see what's in it before I go any further. It says something about the money behind the picture, for certain. That's the reason the boy won't part with it. And p'raps there's more money about that Mawker doesn't know of, and it's his duty to know. Caution—caution—that's Mawker's motto! Ha! Here it is!"

He picked up the coat, which was partly under the bed, and proceeded swiftly to examine the pockets, the light from the lantern that he had placed upon a chair rested upon his cunning face as he searched. There was a look of wicked satisfaction in it when he had first found the coat, but gradually the satisfaction gave place to disappointment and vexation.

"It's gone! Curse him! He's shifted it. Where—where? That's the question."

He flashed the lamp round the room. The furniture was very scanty. There was an old washstand with an oval mirror over it, a small dressing-table, a chest of drawers, and a couple of rush-bottomed chairs.

There was no paper of any kind on the dressing-table; nothing beyond Harry's comb and hairbrush. The chest of drawers had nothing on it save a solitary pincushion and a small watch-stand, on which hung Pierre's watch.

But, like the heart of its owner, it had ceased to beat. The hand that usually wound it was cold and still, and so it had run down.

Mawker stood biting his finger-nails with vexation.

He had made sure of finding Pierre's letter to Harry in the youth's pocket. Were he to search through those drawers it would take him a long time, and even then he might not discover it.

It was quite certain that the lad had hidden it somewhere. Again Mawker asked himself "Where?"

Once more he flashed the lantern on the sleeping form on the bed, in the hope that that might furnish some solution of the puzzle that was vexing him.

"Ha! The trouser pockets! You're an old fool, Mawker. Why didn't you think of them before?"

Harry was lying partly on his side. It would be easy enough to search the one pocket; but it would be necessary to shift the lad before searching the other.

Into the first Mawker's hand went softly. It rested there for a moment. A few coppers, a knife, and a small piece of pencil, that was all he found there.

Then, after some difficulty, he was able to search the other pocket—with the same result. No letter or document there.

There was nothing left for it. He must try the drawers. At the moment Mawker was about to put this determination into execution, he noticed that the left hand of Harry was extended above his head, and was clutching the pillow with a tenacious grip.

"Ha!" cried Mawker, struck with a sudden idea.

He placed the lantern again on a chair, and gently tried to release Harry's hand from the pillow. In vain. He was clutching it with the tenacity of a bulldog.

Mawker's cunning eyes had been all the time examining the

head of the bed. Satisfied with his examination, he gently lifted the unconscious form of Harry from the bed, and placed it on the floor.

"Caution—caution! That's Mawker's motto!" he kept repeating to himself.

Pulling down the bolster, he thrust his hand underneath that part of the mattress which was at the head of the bed. All at once he gave one of his significant chuckles. His fingers had evidently found what they were in search of. He drew out a paper. It was the dead man's bequest to Harry.

Mawker knelt by the chair where the lantern was resting, and by its light read the letter.

The one passage in it that particularly interested him was the following:

"You may sell whatever you please of my belongings except the three pictures of Napoleon. Never part with those. They are valuable. Seek and ye shall find."

Mawker read this passage over two or three times. Then he thrust the letter in his pocket.

As he did so he heard a sound that made his heart thump loudly against his ribs.

There was someone moving in the outer room.

Mawker broke out into a profuse perspiration. Who could it be? He recalled the fright given him by the dead man when he got up to the picture a few hours since. Like all cowardly natures, Mawker was very superstitious. Could it be the ghost of Pierre walking about in the next room?

He darkened the lantern, and crouched down by the bed, listening intently, and trembling in every limb.

The footsteps were moving about as stealthily as a tiger's. They drew nearer and nearer to the inner room where Harry lay.

The door was partly closed. The intruder pushed it gently open a little further, leaving a space large enough to admit a body. Then he seemed to pause.

Mawker still lay crouching by the bed in an agony of fear.

Was it really a phantom, or was it someone who had gained a knowledge of Pierre's secret, and had come there with a like purpose to his own?

Whichever way it was, the situation was terrible. Mawker felt certain that he would be discovered.

For one moment the desperate idea flashed into his mind that he would make a wild dash out of the room, but he as instantaneously gave up the idea, because he knew that it would be impossible to escape from it without coming in contact with that figure in the doorway.

Shielded by the darkness, he cast a fearful glance in the direction where the figure was, but he could see nothing.

He was only conscious there was something—an opaque form of some sort in the opening. He could see nothing of any face; but in the place where it was there was a pair of gleaming eyes. The gleam of them froze the blood in the veins of Mawker.

Suddenly the figure dropped to the ground and crawled on all-fours into the room.

The door was now free. Had Mawker been able, he might have stolen from where he was crouching, and slipped through it; but he was not able.

He was powerless to move. He rested there as one magnetised, following with terror-stricken eyes that shadowy form.

It crawled—so slowly that it seemed an eternity to Mawker—round to the other side of the bed, to the side opposite to that where he was hiding.

Then a hand went on the bed, the figure stood upright, the shadowy outline of an arm rose in the air, there was a flash of something bright, the arm descended with a thud.

Then all was still again. Mawker could see nothing; but he was conscious that the shadowy figure had again dropped on its knees, and was crawling out by the way it had entered.

Presently he saw it creep through the door; then he heard the sound of softly retreating footsteps in the next room.

All was once more still—still as death itself; but many minutes passed before Mawker was able to move. He lay crouching in his hiding-place, bathed in an agony of perspiration and limp with fear.

At length the power of movement came slowly back to his limbs.

He stretched out a trembling hand to his lamp, and uncovered the light.

Still on his knees, he turned its light on the bed.

Hardened old sinner though he was, he shrank back in horror.

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

WITTY WILL WYNN.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A CLOWN.

(Continued.)

Almost at the same time, Pat and Will started as they fancied they both recognised those voices.

"You'll find Coppel a mean old beggar!" said the voice; "but we'll screw the price out of him!"

"That's the voice of Thimble-rigging Joe!" thought Pat, "the rascal that was so friendly with my master, the landlord of the Beetle and Whistle!"

Then the other voice said:

"All right! I'll back you up. And we'll have cash down. I'm broke, curse it all!"

"And that voice," thought Will, "there's no mistaking. It's the voice of Joe Grix, the giant clown, and my old enemy!"

And they were right. Joe Grix and Sleuth Slymer were on their way to pay a visit to Coppel.

Slymer had ferreted out the fact that Will had left the Temple of Matchless Mirth for a few days' holiday. With very little trouble—for the scoundrel was cunning—he had traced him to Oldham, whither, accompanied by Joe Grix, he had followed him. The detective had determined to take advantage of the opportunity to visit Coppel, inform him of Will's presence in the neighbourhood, and further raise his demands.

Also it had occurred to him that now that Will was away from his friends, it might be possible for his tool, Joe Grix, to carry out his murderous intentions.

Will waited till the sound of their footsteps had died away before he spoke.

"Pat, there's more villainy in the air. What are those scoundrels doing here? They must be in league with Coppel from what they said. I wonder how it's all going to end?"

"Sure, I don't know! But it's Miss Graham we've got to get out of that house!"

CHAPTER 22.

WILL RESCUES ADA FROM HER GUARDIAN'S CLUTCHES.

Reaching the gate in the wall, Sleuth Slymer rang the jangling bell, and a few seconds later the door was gingerly opened by Coppel himself.

"Who is it?" he croaked, peering out.

"Me, Mr. Coppel!" whined Sleuth Slymer—me!"

"Who's that with you?" snarled Coppel suspiciously.

"A Mr. Grix, a friend, and a very useful friend!"

"Then come in! What's brought you down here?"

"Young Will Wynn is somewhere in Oldham, and I thought you ought to be informed of the fact," was the reply.

"What!" almost shrieked the old miser, "he's in Oldham?"

"Yes, and that's why we're here!"

"Come in, come in, both of you! We'll talk things over!"

Once within the house, Coppel bade them wait for a moment in the gloomy hall, and himself hurried to the room where Ada was.

"Go to bed at once!" he snapped viciously—"go to bed! And I'll see you to your room, miss."

He clutched her with his bony hand, and half-dragged her from the room. Reaching her bedroom, he thrust her in, slammed to the door, and locking it from the outside, slipped the key into his pocket.

Ada's heart sank. How would she be able to meet Will? The hopes that she had been feverishly cherishing died away.

"Well, she's safe for the night!" croaked Coppel, with vicious satisfaction. "Now to interview Sleuth Slymer. But what's that boy-clown doing in Oldham? He, he, he! Perhaps before long he'll have cause to regret that he ever came here!"

Poor Ada, left to herself, paced up and down her little bedroom in deepest distress. She pictured Will entering the house and not finding her, and perhaps being discovered by Coppel.

"Oh, if I could only get out, only get out!"

Once she went to the window, and, having unfastened the shutters, looked out. Her room was on the second floor. It was impossible for a girl to escape from the window. With a little sob of despair she left it, and, sinking down in a chair, covered her face with her hands.

"What will Will think?" she moaned; "and he will wait and wait and wait!"

The hours and half-hours rang out from a distant clock. The appointed time had come, but Ada was still locked in her room.

Rat, tat, tat, tat!

With a little shriek she sprang to her feet. She had forgotten to refasten the shutters.

A face, pressed close against the glass, was staring at her through the window.

It was so ghost-like, the appearance of that face outside a

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window some twenty feet from the ground, that for a moment Ada was paralysed with terror.

Rat, tat, tat, tat!

For the second time the thumping of fingers on the glass sounded out.

Overcoming her terror, Ada again stared at the window, and this time she gave a cry that was full of gladness, for now she recognised the face—it was Will's!

Springing forward, she unfastened the hasp and opened the window. Will was clinging on to the waterpipe that ran close to the window. He had been climbing up to his former means of entrance into the house, when, looking through the window, he had seen Ada. He quickly climbed into the room.

"How glad I am you've come," whispered Ada, wringing his hands in her joy. "My guardian has locked me in. I should never have been able to keep my appointment with you!"

"Thank goodness I happened to look in and saw you! But come, Ada, not a moment's to be lost. We must get away at once!"

"But how? The door is locked. If you tried to burst it open you would be sure to disturb my guardian!"

Will thought for a moment. It was easy enough for him to swarm up or down the pipe outside, but it was another matter for Ada. Nor could he descend, carrying her in his arms. Then he glanced at the bed, and an idea struck him. By tying sheets and blankets together he might be able to make a length long enough to reach to the ground, and strong enough to bear their combined weights.

"All right, Ada," he whispered cheerily: "keep your spirits up. We'll get you out of this place. Help me to strip the bed."

Working quickly and quietly, Will had soon tied together sheets, blankets, and coverlet. Then, pushing the bed near to the window, he placed a heavy chest of drawers upon it so as to add to its weight, and fastened the end of his rope to the rail.

"Pat's waiting for us down below," he whispered; "but I haven't finished yet. I'm going to make that door fast on the inside, so that when old Copples tries to come in he'll have some trouble. We shall want as much time as possible."

Taking a chair, Will wedged the back tightly under the handle of the door, and so that the legs were jammed against a wardrobe that stood next to the wall. In this way the door was firmly secured.

"Now, Ada, you mustn't be nervous. All you've got to do is to cling on to me like grim death, while I lower myself down the rope."

Leaning out of the window, he payed out the rope.

"Pat," he whispered, "are you down below?"

"Begorra, that I am!"

"Then steady the rope."

Ada had flung a cape over her shoulders as Will climbed on to the window-sill.

"Put out the light."

She obeyed, and moved across to the window. Even as she did so the faint sound of footsteps moving up the stairs outside the room reached her ears.

"Quick, Will!" she gasped, turning white with terror; "someone's coming. It must be my guardian! Quick—quick!"

It was true. Copples, who had been plotting villainy with Sleuth Slymer and Joe Grix, and being somewhat uneasy owing to the fact that the boy-clown was somewhere in the neighbourhood, had determined to pay Ada a visit to see that all was right for the night.

She flung her arms round Will's neck. He circled an arm round her waist; then, just as he began to lower himself down, he heard the sound of the key of the door being turned.

Outside the room, Copples had unlocked the door, but could not open it.

"Ada!" he croaked out harshly, "are you asleep? Wake up, and let me in! There's something wrong with the door. It is jammed!"

And he began to bang furiously upon the panels; but the impromptu barricade erected by Will held firm.

Will, Ada clinging on to him, was already half-way down the rope. But it was a perilous descent. The strain on Will's arm was terrible, and the rough wall scraped him. Every moment he feared lest the rope would break and precipitate them into the darkness below. He could feel it stretching under its double burden. Ada had closed her eyes, she was trembling violently; but the brave lad managed to breathe out a word of encouragement. He gave a great sigh of relief when his feet touched the ground.

"Now, Pat," he hurriedly whispered, "take Ada's other arm. We must run for our lives. We shall have Copples after us in a minute. The door can't hold out for long, and all will be discovered."

Copples had already realised that something must be wrong. He ceased to batter the panels. Stepping back, he hurled himself with all his strength against the door. There was a crash, the legs of the chair broke, the door flew open, and the old miser

pitched headforemost into the dark room, and, butting his head against the wardrobe with such force that he saw thousands of stars, sank to the ground half stunned. When he had recovered sufficiently to rise he struck a match.

The empty room, the open window, the rope, explained everything. Foaming at the mouth, and mad with rage, he thrust his head out of the window, calling out "Fire! Thieves! Murder!"

The cries just reached the fugitives, who, however, by this time were well away in the distance.

"We've got a good start!" cried Will. "Stick to it, Ada, we must keep the pace up. Stick to it!"

And he and Pat hurried her forward along the road towards Oldham.

"Stop!"

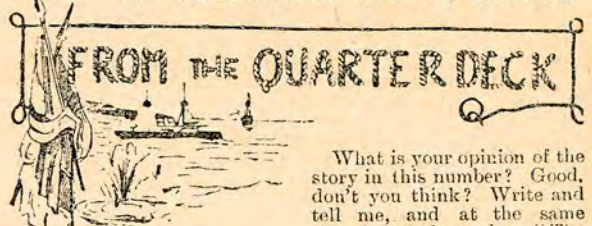
Two figures—those of a man and a woman—had suddenly loomed out of the darkness and barred the way. Ada had recognised the voice as belonging to Joe Swilley, Copples's crafty servant, who, with his wife, was returning from a visit to some friends in Oldham, where he had been making merry till the early hours of the morning.

To be delayed now might mean Ada's recapture. Will was desperate. Leaving hold of Ada's arm, he rushed straight at the man who barred the way.

"Go on, Pat," he cried, "I'll catch you up!"

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

The Editor's Chat with his Readers.



Sign of the Scarlet Cross" suits you.

If any of you want advice on any subject don't hesitate to write to me. I am always willing to give any help I can.

Next Friday the UNION JACK will contain a splendid circus story by Mr. Mortimer Austin, who, you may remember, has written some immensely popular stories for this journal.

My staff are still busy finding the winners in the "Nations" competition.

Some of the competitors' answers are very funny; for instance, one says that No. 25 is a native of Cuba, another that No. 30 is a Boer, and so on. I here give a list of the correct answers, so that you may see where you went wrong.

The winners' names will be printed as soon as possible.

NATIONS COMPETITION.

CORRECT ANSWERS.

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. England. | 19. North America. |
| 2. Germany. | 20. Afghanistan. |
| 3. Wales. | 21. Australia. |
| 4. Scotland. | 22. Ashanti (W. Africa). |
| 5. Switzerland. | 23. Abyssinia. |
| 6. Ireland. | 24. Greenland (Esquimaux). |
| 7. U.S. America. | 25. New Zealand (Maori). |
| 8. Spain. | 26. Greek. |
| 9. Russia. | 27. Zululand. |
| 10. Austria. | 28. Morocco (Moor). |
| 11. Norway. | 29. Fiji. |
| 12. Italy. | 30. India (Hindu). |
| 13. Mexico. | 31. Algeria. |
| 14. Turkey. | 32. Soudan. |
| 15. Canada. | 33. Montenegro. |
| 16. Corea. | 34. Japan. |
| 17. Africa (Boer). | 35. Ceylon. |
| 18. China. | 36. Australia (Aborigine). |

I have in preparation a splendid story of adventure in Lhasa, the sacred city of Thibet, into which no stranger is allowed to go on pain of torture and death. It will be published shortly.

*Yours sincerely,
The Skipper*

A WATCH FOR NOTHING

We are going to give away 1,000 Silver Watches to advertise our Catalogue and our Jewellery. This is no catch, but perfectly genuine. Read our conditions, and then go in and win.

C * * B * * Y'S C * C * *
T * * * L * S V * C * * O *
R * * N * * E * S C * C * *

The words, when filled in, represent the name of three largely advertised articles of food.

DIRECTIONS.

Fill in the missing letters to the above words, and send the answer to us. If correct, we undertake to send you a Solid Silver Watch, a good timekeeper, usually sold by us at £2 2s. Our conditions are that you send us a stamped addressed envelope for us to write and tell you if you are correct; and if you should win the Watch, you purchase one of our Real Silver Chains, as per our offer, which we will send you. Write at once, as by delay you may lose the chance.

To convince you of our offer being genuine, we send herewith copies of a few Testimonials which we are daily receiving.

The originals can be seen at our depot on application.

West End, Henton,

October 18th, 1897.

Gentlemen.—I received the Watch and Chain safely, and am exceedingly pleased with same. I have shown it to my friends, all of whom are astonished to find it such a genuine bargain; and of my friends wishes to know if he could obtain one in the same manner, or has the time expired. With sincere thanks, I remain, yours truly.

M. S. GIBSON.

10, Dean Street, Liverpool.

November 1st, 1897.

Dear Sir,—I received the Watch and Chain on Tuesday last, and I am very pleased with them; the Watch is keeping good time.—Yours truly, Miss B. SWAN.

The Folly, 48, Thornton Street, Hartford,

November 1st, 1897.

Dear Sir,—I received your Watch and Chain quite safe, and was very well pleased with them; and many thanks for your kindness for sending me one of your catalogues; and perhaps I will have the pleasure of giving you another order before long. I remain yours truly, Miss R. GAYNE.

New Emancipator, Durham.

November 2nd, 1897.

Dear Sir,—Just a line to say that I received the Watch and Chain which you sent me, and was highly pleased with them. I have shown the Catalogue to many of my friends.—Yours respectfully, Miss ADAMS.

Miss ADAMS.

£1,000,000

Most boys have heard of millionaires. They have read of the Rothschilds, of Cecil Rhodes, of the Duke of Westminster, of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, of the Astors and Vanderbilts. But they have never heard of a BOY MILLIONAIRE. If they wish to do so, they should buy

THE "BOYS' FRIEND."

next Wednesday, and read

THE BOY MILLIONAIRE

a grand Treasure-Island Story, just starting.

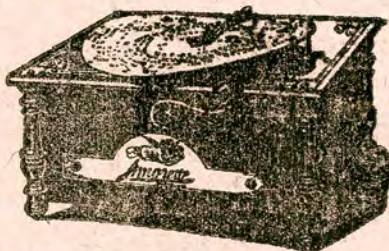
The "BOYS' FRIEND"

1d., Every Wednesday.

P. GRAHAM & CO.,
Wholesale & Retail Jewellers,
277, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

PHENOMENAL SUCCESS.

Thousands Sold
in a
Few Months.



Size,
13in. by 10½in.
by 8in.
Weight 12lb.

To any person who cuts out this advertisement and sends it to us at once, we hereby guarantee to send, carriage paid, for 20s. only, the

ROYAL AMORETTE

equal in every respect to the four-guinea organs advertised elsewhere. The ROYAL AMORETTE is in a handsome black and gold case, has 16 indestructible steel reeds, and will play not dozens, but hundreds of tunes. We sent one to the Editor of "Fashion Novelties" for his inspection, and he replied: "Herewith please find 20s. for the ROYAL AMORETTE you sent on approval. I shall purchase several for Christmas presents, and cannot understand how they can be made at the price. It is the best home musical instrument I have ever seen."

The advantage of the ROYAL AMORETTE is that it can be played by children of any age. It will play hymns, polkas, and all the popular tunes of the day. We will pay carriage throughout any portion of the British Islands, but for foreign countries postage for twelve pounds weight must be sent.

The small picture above gives a very small notion of the instrument, which is large, handsome, and melodious. Do not confuse the Royal Amorette with any other advertised instrument. It is the only one of its kind in the world, and if you are disappointed with it we will cheerfully return the 20s. on receipt of the Royal Amorette, if returned at once.

The Royal Amorette, including 6 (six) metal tunes and packed in a strong wooden box, will be sent only to the readers of the UNION JACK who, in addition to forwarding 20s., cut out this advertisement. Remit by Postal Order to

The Saxon Trading Co., 84, Oxford St., London, W.

Just the thing for the long winter evenings for Dances or Parties. We sell extra Tunes, six for 4s., or 12 for 7s. 6d., Carriage Paid. New list of tunes ready.