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See page 16.

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COUNT CONRAD'S GOLD.



His assailant held him down with one hand, whilst with the other he pressed the chloroformed handkerchief quite close to his victim's nose and mouth.

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COUNT CONRAD'S GOLD.

By MAXWELL SCOTT.

CHAPTER 1.

JACK HARDY'S PURCHASE—THE HIDDEN SCROLL—THE LEGEND OF COUNT CONRAD'S VANISHED GOLD—JACK AND DERRICK CONCLUDE AN ALLIANCE.

It was not often that Jack Hardy had a sovereign to spare. His pictures received unstinted praise from his fellow-artists, but, for some reason or other, the great British public didn't buy them, and as Jack was entirely dependent on his brush for his livelihood, there were times when the iron hand of poverty pressed very hardly on him. On the day on which our story opens, however, he had sold a picture for twenty-five pounds, and out of this he calculated that there was exactly one pound which was not already mortgaged, and which he might venture to spend on luxuries.

"Luxuries," with Jack, took the shape of old china, antique furniture, or ancient arms and armour; and on the present occasion he treated himself to a mediæval sword and scabbard, which he picked up in a shop in Soho for eighteen shillings.

To anyone but an artist or a curiosity-hunter, the weapon would have seemed dear at eighteenpence, for it was black with rust, the blade was as jagged as a saw, and the hilt only needed a touch to cause it to part company with the rest of the sword. But Jack was more than delighted with his purchase, and bore it off in triumph to his lodgings in Edgware Road.



Scarcely had Hermann's fist descended ere the scoundrel received a blow on the mouth that sent him reeling to the ground.

Having swallowed a hasty tea, he took up the sword with the intention of cleaning it, but on attempting to draw it from its scabbard the hilt came off in his hand.

"What a beastly nuisance!" he growled. "I shall have to get it mended now, and half the charm of the thing will be gone."

"Hallo! What's this?" he exclaimed, a moment later. "The handle's hollow! And, by Jove! there's a slip of parchment concealed inside it."

He was well acquainted with the fact that in ancient times the hilt of a sword was frequently made to serve as a receptacle for secret despatches and the like, but this was the first time he had actually seen such a thing, and his fingers trembled with excitement as he drew the yellow scroll from its curious hiding-place.

"It looks uncommonly like a letter," he muttered, as he spread it out on the table, and closely studied the faded characters with which it was inscribed. "I don't know much about these things, but I should say it is written in German. I wonder what it's all about. I'll show it to Derrick next time I see him, and ask him to translate it."

At that moment a door opened on the same landing as his sitting-room, and a guttural voice was heard calling to the landlady to "clear the table."

"The very man!" exclaimed Jack. "If anyone can translate this scroll, it's the Professor. I'll take it round to his room, and ask him what he makes of it."

It is here necessary to explain that the "Professor" was a young German student named Heinrich Hermann, who had won considerable distinction at the University of Bonn, and had come to England in order to collect certain information which he needed for a book he was writing on ancient German literature. He lodged in the same house as Jack, and it was the latter who had first dubbed him the "Professor" on account of his studious habits and learned appearance.

He was just settling down to his pipe and books when Jack knocked at his door, but he willingly laid them aside when he heard what was required of him.

"Pray don't apologise," he said, speaking with scarcely a trace of foreign accent. "Your story has interested me already, and I shall only be too delighted to examine the document which has come into your possession under such romantic circumstances."

"Thanks, awfully," said Jack, handing him the scroll. "I don't know whether it's written in a language you understand, but the sword is undoubtedly German, and I thought the writing would probably be the same."

"You are quite right," said Hermann, after a cursory glance at the parchment. "It is written in fourteenth-century German, which, as you know, is very different from modern German; but, all the same, I think I can translate it. It begins:

"To the most noble Count Conrad of Steinberg, from his faithful retainer Hans Memlich.

"My Lord,—Being sorely wounded, and like to die, I hasten to acquaint you with the issue of my enterprise. In obedience to your august commands, I have caused the six large chests of gold to be buried in—"

Having read so far, Hermann came to an abrupt stop, and Jack saw that his eyes suddenly blazed with excitement, whilst the hand that held the scroll shook with agitation.

"Go on! Go on!" cried Jack impatiently.

"I—I—can't make the rest out!" stammered Hermann, with his eyes still glued to the scroll.

"That's a lie!" thought Jack. "If he could translate the first part he could translate the rest. For some reason or other he doesn't want me to know what the letter is about."

Aloud, he said: "Oh, well, it doesn't matter! I have a friend who makes a specialty of ancient documents, and I dare say he'll be able to decipher it for me."

"Mein Gott! you must not show this letter to anyone else!" cried Hermann, forgetting himself in his excitement.

"I beg your pardon!" said Jack coldly. "As the scroll is my own property, I presume I am entitled to do as I like with it."

"Of course, of course!" said the German, suddenly becoming confused. "I knew not what I was saying. Of course you will show it to your friend, if you wish; but will you not first permit me to examine the other scroll? Perhaps, if I were to compare the two, I might be able to decipher this."

"There isn't another," said Jack. "That was the only document inside the old sword-handle."

"That is strange," said Hermann. "This letter distinctly states that a second scroll was enclosed along with this."

"Indeed!" said Jack sarcastically. "It is odd that you know what the letter says—because you can't translate it, you know!"

The German now became more confused than ever, for he plainly saw that he had given himself away. He had first declared that he could not decipher the rest of the letter, and then he had spoken of something which the letter contained, and which he could not possibly have known unless he had translated it.

This shifty behaviour roused Jack's suspicions, and he began to repent of having taken Hermann into his confidence. It was clear that fellow attached considerable importance to the information contained in the parchment-scroll, and it was equally clear that he meant, if possible, to keep the information for his own exclusive use. Needless to say, Jack had no intention of allowing himself to be defrauded in this bare-faced fashion, and, taking advantage of Hermann's confusion, he quietly took the scroll out of his hand, and transferred it to his own pocket.

"Give it back to me!" cried Hermann, in a voice that was hoarse with rage. "What for you snatch it away like that? Restore it at once, I say!" And he clenched his fist, and raised his hand.

Jack drew himself up in haughty surprise.

"I think you're forgetting yourself, Herr Professor," he said. "Anyhow, I shouldn't advise you, for your own sake, to try any nonsense of that kind on me! I mayn't know much about fourteenth-century German, but I rather flatter myself that I know how to use my fists, and if any man hits me he's got to be hit back!"

"I beg your pardon!" said the German humbly. "It was my excitement that carried me away. I merely meant to ask you if you would allow me to study the scroll a little more closely."

"No, thank you!" said Jack curtly. "I have troubled you more than enough already, I fear, and I really couldn't think of trespassing any farther on your valuable time. Good-evening!" And he turned on his heel and left the room.

At the door of his own room he encountered Derrick O'Brien, whose name has already been mentioned above. He was a young Irish journalist, and he and Jack were sworn companions. Both were frank, free-hearted Britons, each thought the other the finest fellow in the world, and either of them would have gone through fire and water to serve his chum.

"Hallo, Derrick, you're just the very man I wanted to see!" said Jack, grasping the Irishman's outstretched hand. "Come in and sit down. I've something strange and startling to tell you."

"Faith, that's my case too!" replied Derrick, as he followed Jack into the cosy sitting-room. "I've got the most absolutely stupefying piece of news for you that ever you heard!" And, to Jack's amazement, he tossed his hat in the air, and proceeded to execute an original war-dance in the middle of the room.

"I was going to offer you some whisky," said Jack, with pretended severity; "but I think I'd better not, for it seems to me that you've had more than's good for you already."

"Sorrah drop have I tasted this day, worse luck!" said Derrick. "Tisn't whisky that's intoxicating me, my jewel, but visions of unlimited wealth! In other words, I've just received a letter from a firm of solicitors in Melbourne, acquainting me with the death of an uncle whom I never saw, and informing me that the defunct has left me a legacy of ten thousand pounds."

"Three cheers for the defunct!" cried Jack, seizing Derrick's hand, and wringing it with unaffected fervour. "I'm awfully glad to hear of your luck, old man, though I shall be sorry to lose you, of course."

"Lose me? What d'ye mean?" demanded Derrick.

"Well, now you're a rich man, you'll move in a different sphere—" began Jack. But Derrick interrupted him with a warning gesture.

"Say no more, or you and I will quarrel!" he said reproachfully. "What's mine is yours, and half the joy of my legacy lies in the fact that you'll now be able to go abroad and paint wherever you like."

Jack's eyes grew moist at this proof of his chum's affection—though he swore to himself that he would never consent to such an arrangement—and for the next half-hour Derrick monopolised

the conversation with glowing pictures of the glorious figure that awaited them. Then he suddenly remembered Jack's greeting, and, breaking off in the middle of a sentence, he exclaimed:

"But you said you'd something startling to tell me. What is it?"

For answer, Jack told him all about the rusty sword, the parchment scroll, and Hermann's strange behaviour.

"Let me see the letter," said Derrick, when he had finished. "Medieval German is a specialty of mine, as you know, and I'll either decipher the thing or eat my hat!"

Jack gave him the scroll, and when Derrick had rapidly perused it, he exclaimed:

"Egad, old man, if this document proves to be genuine, you've made a discovery that puts my legacy completely in the shade! This letter refers to the famous missing treasure of Count Conrad of Steinberg!"

"Never heard of the gentleman," said Jack. "Who was he?"

"He was one of the most notorious of the robber-barons of the Rhine," replied Derrick. "His castle was perched on the summit of a lofty rock, and he never emerged from it except to pillage and plunder. As he played this game for something like fifteen years, you can easily understand that he amassed an enormous amount of booty, all of which was stowed away in an underground vault hewn out of the solid rock on which the castle stood."

"In the year 1349, the Emperor Charles IV. determined to put a stop to Count Conrad's career, and to transfer his ill-gotten gains to the Royal coffers. The count heard that the Emperor was coming to attack him, and, in addition to fortifying his castle, he removed his treasure from the vault and buried it in some spot outside the castle walls. At least, that is what he is supposed to have done, for when the castle was finally taken there wasn't so much as a single gold piece to be found in the place."

"As Conrad had been killed in the final assault, and as all his followers were put to the sword, there was no one left to tell what had become of the treasure, and although the Emperor caused the castle of Steinberg to be razed to the ground no trace of it was ever discovered. I am surprised that you never heard the story before. It is one of the most popular legends of the Fatherland, and Count Conrad's vanished gold forms the theme of innumerable songs and ballads. Rumour has probably exaggerated the amount of the missing booty, but one of the most trustworthy writers of the period puts it at a sum which would be equal to about half a million in English money."

"And do you mean to say that this letter refers to Count Conrad's gold?" asked Jack.

"Well, judge for yourself," replied Derrick. "This is how it runs:

"To the most noble Count Conrad of Steinberg, from his faithful retainer Hans Memlich.

"My lord,—Being badly wounded, and likely to die, I hasten to inform you of the result of my mission. In obedience to your august commands, I have caused the six large boxes of gold to be buried in the manner whereof you spoke. I have likewise marked the place of burial on the map given to me by the seneschal, and I now return the same in company with this letter. The three men who assisted me to bury the treasure have all been slain by my own hand, as your lordship directed, so that none save myself has knowledge of the secret. My son, who brings this to the castle, is ignorant of the whole affair, and knows nothing save that he is charged to deliver this sword to the count with what despatch he may. I would have brought the news myself, as was first arranged, but was mortally wounded by one of those whom I slew, and look not to leave this accursed island alive.—With which, farewell, HANS MEMLICH."

"Now I know what Hermann was driving at when he said that there must be another document in the hollow hilt!" cried Jack. "He was referring to the map!"

"Of course he was!" said Derrick. "Examine the sword again, and see if you haven't overlooked it."

Jack picked up the hilt, and peered into the narrow cavity. The moment he did so he saw that Hermann was right. There was another slip of parchment inside, and on drawing it out it proved to be a carefully executed map of a tiny island on the Rhine, about midway between Bingen and Mayence. The place where the treasure had been buried was clearly marked, and the whole was surmounted by an ornamental scroll, on which were the words: "A plan of the Island of Geldau, made by the Seneschal, Anno Domini, MCCCXLVIII."

The two chums studied this map for several moments in absolute silence, and then they looked up and regarded each other with eyes that danced with suppressed excitement.

"Do you believe it?" asked Jack, in a voice that scarcely rose above a whisper.

"I do!" was Derrick's emphatic reply. "I believe that Count Conrad's gold is lying at this moment in the place where Memlich buried it over five hundred years ago. In all probability Memlich's son was killed before he reached the castle, and the

sword fell into the hands of the enemy, from whom, by a lucky chance, it has descended to you. If the hilt hadn't come off, you would have added the sword to your collection, and the secret would have remained unknown for another generation."

"What a sensation the story will make when it comes to be published," said Jack. "Treasure islands in the South Pacific have come to be regarded as commonplace, but a treasure island on the Rhine, with pleasure-steamers passing and repassing it every day of the year, is a novelty indeed. I wonder who owns the island now?"

"That is exactly what we must proceed to find out," said Derrick. "And when we've discovered who the owner is, we must try to buy the island without arousing his suspicions."

The audacity of this suggestion took Jack's breath away. "But you don't propose that we should try to secure this treasure for ourselves?" he gasped.

"I propose that you should!" said Derrick coolly. "I'll help you, of course, but I won't touch a penny of the money. You must buy the island on the quiet, build a wooden bungalow over the spot marked on the map, and remove the treasure piecemeal, so as not to arouse the curiosity of the German Government, who would claim it as treasure-trove if they got wind of your find."

Jack's eyes sparkled at the thought, but a moment's reflection convinced him that it was impracticable.

"You forget that I am only a struggling painter," he said. "In order to carry out your scheme it would be necessary for me to spend several thousands of pounds, and I haven't as many pence."

"Arrah, whisht with your nonsense!" said Derrick; "isn't there my legacy?"

"Oh, but I couldn't think of taking that!" said Jack, with a vigorous shake of his head.

"And why not?" demanded Derrick. "I'm not after making you a present of it. I'm simply lending it to you in order to enable you to buy the island, and when you've unearthed the treasure you can pay me back."

"But supposing we find that someone has forestalled us, and that the treasure has disappeared?" asked Jack.

"Sure, I'll still have the island!" said Derrick. "I'll sell it again, and anything I lose by the transaction will be more than made up by the fun I'll have had."

Jack pondered for a moment or two, and then he said:

"Look here, Derrick, I'll borrow your money on one condition, and that is, that you take half the treasure if we find it."

"But that's not fair," said Derrick. "I lend you ten thousand for a month or two, and you pay me back a quarter of a million! It's too much."

"Well, I won't have the money—I swear I won't—unless you agree to my terms!" was Jack's reply.

"All right. Have your own way!" said Derrick. And the compact was sealed with a hearty British handshake.

And in this light-hearted way—little dreaming of the perils that awaited them—did the two chums embark on their quest for Count Conrad's gold.

CHAPTER 2.

THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN—THE DREAM THAT WAS NOT WHOLLY A DREAM—HERMANN'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO SECURE THE MAP.

The boldness—one might almost say the cool impudence—of Derrick's plan for securing the buried treasure staggered Jack at first, but he was easily made to see that the boldness of the scheme was its greatest recommendation. When once he had grasped this, he became as enthusiastic as Derrick himself, and the two chums set to work to lick their daring project into shape.

"It will be several weeks before I receive my legacy," said Derrick; "but it would be a pity to wait all that time before we open the ball. Don't you think so?"

"I do," replied Jack. "In fact, the sooner we get to work the better, in my opinion. Hermann, as you know, has read Hans Memlich's letter, and he might try to forestall us."

"That's so," said Derrick. "Still, he hasn't seen the map, and he can't do much without that, for the letter itself doesn't afford the slightest clue to the whereabouts of the treasure. Nevertheless, I'm quite of your opinion that we ought not to lose any time. One never knows what may happen. We shall not need any great amount of money until the time arrives for purchasing the island, but in the meantime we shall want a trifle for preliminary expenses. I should think a hundred pounds would suffice for these. If I can raise fifty by the end of the week, can you raise another fifty?"

"I doubt if I can," answered Jack despondently. "Of course, if I were to dispose of half a dozen of my pictures at ridiculous prices I could manage it, but it would spoil my market for the future."

"Hear the man!" exclaimed Derrick. "What's the good of a market to a demi-semi-millionaire, such as you will be in a

few weeks' time? Sell the pictures for what they will fetch, and let the future go hang!"

"Well, suppose we raise a hundred between us by the end of the week, what then?" asked Jack.

"We depart for a trip up the Rhine," said Derrick. "One of us is a wealthy British tourist and the other is his valet. As the steamer passes the island of Geldau, the man of wealth is struck by its picturesque appearance, and orders his valet to ask to whom it belongs. The valet does so, and informs his master that the captain says the island is the property of Herr So-and-so, of Such-a-place. His master then goes to Herr So-and-so, and says, 'I have taken a fancy to that paltry little island of yours on the Rhine. I should like to build a wooden chalet on it, and live there for a month or two every summer. Rent it, sir? No, sir! A Briton never rents, he always buys. The place would be dear at five hundred pounds, but I'll give you a thousand for it if you'll let me have it.'"

"But what if the owner declines to sell?" objected Jack.

"Then I'll double my offer, and if I know anything about German cupidity he'll jump at it. Having deposited fifty pounds to clinch the bargain, we'll return to England and borrow four or five thousand pounds on the security of my legacy. With this we'll hire a small steam yacht, and buy one of those ready-made bungalows which take to pieces, and which can be set up again in a couple of days or so by merely screwing the sections together."

"I understand," said Jack. "You'll put this wooden bungalow aboard the yacht, along with a supply of furniture, provisions, tools, &c., and sail up the Rhine to Geldau."

"Exactly. By that time, I hope, my legacy will have arrived, and we can complete the purchase of the island. When that is settled, and the deeds have been handed over, we'll take formal possession of our dominions and proceed to erect our bungalow. By erecting it on the spot marked on the map, we can dig for the treasure from the inside of the house, so that we shall run no risk of being observed, and the yacht will enable us to bring it over to England at different times without exciting suspicion. When the last coin has been removed, the wealthy Briton will announce that he is tired of his pet island, and will either sell it back to the original owner or offer it for sale by public auction. If we were French, or Italian, or Russian, we couldn't carry out this plan without arousing suspicion; but as it is firmly believed on the Continent that every Briton is slightly mad, our singular behaviour will merely be set down as another example of British eccentricity. That's one of the advantages of being a Briton."

"You're a perfect genius!" cried Jack enthusiastically. "As I listen to you talking I feel that the thing is as simple as A B C, yet as soon as I begin to think it over in cold blood I can see no end of difficulties and dangers."

"What of that!" said Derrick contemptuously. "Difficulties only exist to be overcome, and as for dangers—well, the only danger I can see is the danger of losing the map. If that were to be lost or destroyed before we reach the island our labour would be in vain. Where do you propose to keep it until we are ready to make use of it?"

"I thought of keeping it in one of the drawers of my dressing-table," said Jack. "They are the only lock-up drawers in the place."

"And where should we be if a fire broke out in the middle of the night?" asked Derrick. "And what price the map if a burglar took it into his head to visit your rooms and rifle your drawers?"

"Both of which are very unlikely things to happen," said Jack, with a smile.

"Faith, I don't know about that!" retorted Derrick. "Anyway, we can't afford to run any risks, and if you'll be guided by me you'll take those two slips of parchment to the Chancery Lane Safe Deposit first thing to-morrow morning, and leave them there until we're ready to put up our bungalow."

"Perhaps that would be best!" assented Jack. "In the meantime, where would you advise me to keep them to-night?"

"Well, I'm going to the office now," said Derrick, taking up his hat. "I've written a leading-article for to-morrow's paper, and I'm going to call with it on my way home. If you like to entrust the scrolls to me, I'll seal them in an envelope, and put them in the office-safe until to-morrow morning."

Jack readily agreed to this, and a few minutes later Derrick took his departure. It was eleven o'clock when he went, but for quite another hour Jack sat in front of his fire, pondering over the strange events of the last few hours, and blessing the lucky impulse which had led him to purchase Hans Memlich's sword.

On the stroke of midnight he turned out the gas and went to bed, but the subject pursued him even in his sleep. At one time he dreamed that he had dug up the buried chests, only to find that they were filled with rusty swords. At another, the island was floating down the Rhine, and he was trying to swim after it, but his legs and arms refused to move.

Following these came another dream, more real than all the

others. He had found the treasure; but on stooping down to pick up some of the glittering coins, the ghost of old Hans Memlich suddenly rose up before him, and clutched his throat with an icy, strangling grip. He exerted all his strength to free himself from the phantom's embrace, but the grip on his throat grew tighter and tighter, until at last, by reason of his desperate struggles, he awoke.

But how was this? He certainly wasn't dreaming now, yet the feeling of suffocation still remained. The bedroom was in total darkness, and the blackness of death encompassed him on every side, whilst the air was filled with a peculiar, stifling odour, the like of which he had never smelled before.

He tried to call out, but the deadly vapour crept into his windpipe, and stifled the cry ere it reached his lips. He raised his hand to his burning throat, and in doing so he encountered another hand—not a ghostly hand, but a tangible human hand, whose fingers were holding a saturated cloth an inch or two from his mouth.

Half-stupefied though he was, he was still sufficiently conscious to realise what was taking place. Someone had entered his bedroom and was trying to chloroform him in his sleep.

As soon as he realised this, he raised himself up in bed and endeavoured to drive his assailant away. But the chloroform had already accomplished its deadly work, and, after delivering a couple of feeble blows, he sank back on his pillow with an inarticulate gasp. The moment he fell back his assailant held him down with one hand, whilst with the other he pressed the dripping handkerchief quite close to his victim's nose and mouth.

For a little while longer the bedclothes continued to heave as Jack struggled in the toils of the merciless anæsthetic. Then the writhing form grew strangely still, the laboured breathing dwindled into a long-drawn sigh, and silence once more reigned supreme.

CHAPTER 3.

HERMANN'S SECOND ATTEMPT TO SECURE THE MAP—FOILED AGAIN—A HASTY DEPARTURE—JACK AND DERRICK WIN THE FIRST TRICK.

It may have been that Jack's assailant meant to kill him, but did not administer sufficient chloroform for his purpose; or it may have been that he only wished to render him insensible whilst he searched his rooms. At any rate, whatever his intention may have been, he did not administer a fatal dose, and about five o'clock in the morning Jack began to recover consciousness.

His first impression was that he had had an uncommonly bad attack of nightmare, but, on creeping out of bed (for the anæsthetic had left him as weak as a rat), he perceived that every cupboard, every drawer, and every box in the room had been opened, and its contents turned out on the floor. Even the vases on the mantelpieces had been emptied of their contents, the carpet had been pulled up all round the edges of the room, and the pockets of his clothes had been thoroughly overhauled. His sitting-room (which communicated with his bedroom by means of folding doors) was in the same state of upset; and, in short, every nook and corner of the two apartments had been submitted to a minute and painstaking search.

The bedroom window, which had been fastened when he had gone to bed, was now wide open. It overlooked a little yard at the back of the house, and the roof of the wash-kitchen was just below it, so that it would not have been a difficult matter for a burglar to have climbed on to this roof and to have entered the room by means of the window. On examining the sill, however, Jack instantly noticed that there was not a single fingerprint or footmark on it, for it was covered with an even layer of dust and grime, which had clearly not been disturbed for many weeks. In other words, it was absolutely certain that no one had entered or left the room by way of the window, and it was equally clear that the burglar (whoever he might be) had opened the window in order to make it appear that that was the way by which he had gained admittance.

This discovery convinced Jack that the author of the outrage was someone who lived in the house. The further discovery, which he made later, that nothing whatever had been stolen, proved that the outrage was not the work of an ordinary burglar; and, to make a long story short, he finally arrived at the conclusion that it was his fellow-lodger, Heinrich Hermann, who had stupefied him with chloroform, and had then ransacked his rooms in search of Hans Memlich's map of the Island of Geldau.

Now the reader may possibly wonder why Jack didn't straightway inform the police and have Hermann arrested. A moment's consideration, however, will show that such a course would have been absolutely fatal to his plans. If he had given Hermann in charge he would have had to make mention of Count Conrad's gold, the whole story would have been published in the papers, and the owner of the island—to say

nothing of the German Government—would have been put on the alert. This, of course, would have destroyed all chance of Jack and Derrick securing the treasure; for unless they could keep the matter absolutely secret, their project was doomed to failure. If the owner of the island knew that the treasure was buried somewhere on his property he would refuse to sell it to them; whilst if the German authorities got wind of the fact that the long-lost treasure had been discovered, they would claim it on behalf of the Government.

Jack was shrewd enough to understand all this. He knew that whatever Hermann did they could not afford to take open action against him, and consequently he decided to say nothing about the outrage to anyone but Derrick. He also determined, as far as possible, to prevent anyone finding out for himself what had taken place. Fortunately his landlady had not yet risen, and he promptly set to work to put everything back in its place, and to tidy up the rooms in such a way that she would never suspect that they had been upset.

When he had completed this task he went back to bed, and a few minutes later he heard his landlady kindling the fire in the sitting-room. Half an hour later she brought him his shaving-water, and at nine o'clock he sat down to his breakfast as calm and serene, to all appearance, as if he hadn't a care on his mind.

Having finished his breakfast, he proceeded to overhaul his pictures, with the object of deciding which of them he would sell in order to raise the fifty pounds of which Derrick had spoken. Whilst he was so engaged, he was interrupted by a knock at the door, and in answer to his "Come in!" Heinrich Hermann entered the room, in company with a swarthy-complexioned young fellow of the same nationality as himself.

"Good-morning, Mr. Hardy," said Hermann pleasantly. "You're at work in good time this morning, I perceive."

"On the contrary, I'm rather later than usual," said Jack. And then he added significantly: "I'd a bad night last night, you see, and it caused me to oversleep myself this morning."

"Indeed! I'm sorry to hear that," said Hermann, meeting Jack's stare with an unflinching face. "But I'm forgetting my manners. May I introduce my friend Karl Richter? Karl, this is Mr. Hardy, of whom you have so often heard me speak."

"Proud to make your acquaintance, Mr. Hardy," said Richter, holding out his hand.

Jack bowed, but pretended not to see the German's hand. He was puzzling his brain to discover what Hermann hoped to gain by this fresh move, and he preferred not to commit himself in any way until his crafty foe had shown his cards.

"Karl is an enthusiastic antiquarian," continued Hermann. "He came round to breakfast with me this morning, and on my telling him about that interesting document which you showed me last night, he at once expressed an ardent desire to see it for himself. Have you any objection? Of course, I am not asking you to let us take the scroll away. My friend merely wishes to look at it, and you need not let the thing leave your own hands unless you wish."

Jack could scarcely repress a smile, for he saw through Hermann's device at once.

"He thinks I've concealed the scroll in some place which he overlooked last night," he muttered to himself; "and he asks me to show it to Richter so that he may watch where I fetch it from, and so find out where it is hidden."

"I'm sorry I can't oblige you," he said aloud; "but the fact is, the scroll is no longer in my possession. My rooms were broken into last night by an unknown burglar, though I don't want you to mention the matter to anyone else, as it isn't worth making a fuss about."

"But the burglar didn't take the scroll," exclaimed Hermann in an unguarded moment.

"Now, how on earth did you know that?" asked Jack, with an air of pretended surprise. "Upon my word, you must be a clairvoyant! Last night you couldn't translate the letter I showed you, yet you knew what it was about; and this morning you know that the burglar didn't steal the scroll, although, of course, you didn't know that there had been any burglar in my rooms until I told you. Such power of divination is truly marvellous."

A vicious gleam sprang into Hermann's eyes, and he glared at Jack with a look of malignant fury. Black murder was in his heart at that moment, but the sight of the Englishman's brawny muscles, no less than his fearless demeanour, cowed his craven spirit; and, turning to Richter, he said:

"Come away, Karl. It is evident that Mr. Hardy doesn't wish to show you the scroll, but instead of saying so in a straightforward way, he pretends it has been stolen by a burglar, who doubtless only exists in his own imagination. Let us return to my rooms before I yield to the temptation of teaching this boorish Englishman a lesson in politeness."

"Pray don't hurry away on that account!" said Jack, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. "If your fingers are itch-

ing to teach me a lesson, I shall only be too delighted to offer myself as a pupil."

Hermann vouchsafed no reply to this challenge, but took his companion's arm and left the room, followed by a peal of mocking laughter from Jack.

"I guess he didn't get much change out of me that time!" chuckled the latter. "That's two attempts he's made to get hold of the map, and both have ended in ignominious failure. I wonder what his next move will be?"

Here he paused, as if struck by a new idea.

"I'll do it!" he muttered at last. "All's fair in love and war."

With these words he slipped off his boots and stole softly down the passage leading to the German's room. The door was closed, but the voices of the inmates were distinctly audible, and this is what he heard:

"He suspects that it was you who ransacked his rooms last night," said the voice of Richter.

"What of that?" retorted Hermann. "He daren't make a fuss about it, for he knows that if he did he would lose all chance of getting the treasure. That's where we have the advantage. Whatever we do, he daren't invoke the aid of the law against us."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Richter. "I admit that he won't take open action against us so long as the map remains in his possession; but if we steal it, he will no longer have any motive for holding his tongue, and he'll publish the whole story in order to spite us and prevent us making any use of the map."

"I think not," said Hermann quietly. "I don't intend that he shall live five minutes after we have got the map; in fact, if I had found it last night I should have given him an overdose of chloroform and killed him outright. The map would be of no earthly use to us if we allowed him to live, for he must have formed a pretty good idea by this time where the treasure is hidden, and as soon as he found he could not secure it for himself he would forward his information to the Government, who would take good care that no one but themselves was allowed to hunt for it. No, Richter, my boy, we must first get hold of the map, and then we must slit Mr. Hardy's throat before he has time to make his knowledge public."

"It's easy to say, 'We must first get hold of the map!'" growled Richter; "but how are you going to do it? You couldn't find it last night, and in spite of all your artfulness this morning you couldn't trick him into showing you where it is hidden."

"I don't believe it's hidden anywhere," said Hermann. "I believe that he was speaking the truth when he said that it was no longer in his possession."

"Then where is it?" asked Richter wonderingly.

"His friend must have taken it away with him last night," replied Hermann. "I was a fool not to think of that before! Instead of wasting my time in searching Hardy's rooms I ought to have searched O'Brien's. But it's never too late to learn. I happen to know where O'Brien lodges, and I also know that he's engaged at the office every morning until twelve o'clock. If we go to his lodgings now and represent to his landlady that he has sent us for some papers he has left behind, we can easily persuade her to admit us to his rooms, and once inside we can overhaul them as thoroughly as I overhauled his chum's last night. What do you think of my plan?"

"I think it is a very good one," said Richter. "If the map isn't there we shan't be any worse off than we are at present; whilst if it is there, we can bring it away and start for the Continent at once."

"Come along, then," said Hermann, taking up his hat. "It's eleven o'clock now, so we haven't too much time."

Jack stayed to hear no more, but noiselessly glided back to his own room, where, to his great surprise, he found that Derrick was awaiting him.

"Hallo! What brings you here at this early hour?" he exclaimed. "I thought you were engaged at the office until noon."



With a hearty British cheer the defenders dashed out of their hiding-place and charged upon their foes.

"I've done with the office for the present," said Derrick, with a cheery laugh. "I told the chief this morning that I had come into a fortune, and asked him if he would release me from my engagement without the formality of a month's notice. He not only granted my request, but—"

"Excuse me one moment," interrupted Jack, who had just heard Hermann and Richter leave the house. "What have you done with those parchment scrolls? You haven't left them at your diggings, I hope?"

"Of course I haven't," replied Derrick. "I left them in the office-safe last night, and I've just taken them to the Safe Deposit in Chancery Lane, where I think they had best remain until we have bought the island."

"That's all right," said Jack, in tones of great relief. And he then told Derrick all that had happened, including the conversation he had just overheard.

"Those fellows mean mischief," said Derrick, when he had finished. "They have evidently made up their minds to cheat us of the treasure if they possibly can, and I'm afraid we shall have trouble with them before we're through with the job. When they find they can't get hold of the map, they will probably dog our footsteps night and day in order to see where we go."

"That's just what I expect," said Jack. "It will be hard enough to bamboozle the owner of the island, and to avoid arousing the suspicions of the authorities; but if we have these two scoundrels spying on all our movements as well, the difficulties of our task will be increased a hundredfold!"

"I'll tell you what we'll do!" cried Derrick, with a sudden inspiration. "We'll give them the slip. We'll start off for the Continent now!"

"But how can we?" asked Jack. "We haven't raised that hundred pounds yet!"

"Oh, yes, we have," replied Derrick. "The chief not only let me leave without notice, but he lent me a couple of hundred pounds until my legacy arrives. It was to tell you this that I came here this morning. I've cashed the cheque, and the money is now in my pocket, so what do you say if we drive straight off to Charing Cross, and start for the Continent by the next train? We can buy all we need in Brussels, and by starting now, before those villains return, we shall throw them completely off the scent."

This brilliant proposal met with Jack's approbation, and he immediately set to work to pack his portmanteau. A quarter of an hour sufficed for this, and then the two chums walked to the nearest cab-rank, engaged a hansom, and drove to Charing Cross.

It thus came about that when Hermann and Richter returned from their unsuccessful raid on the Irishman's rooms they found, to their consternation and chagrin, that Jack and Derrick had

gone away a couple of hours before, and that they had neither told the landlady where they were going nor when they would be back.

Without a doubt the first trick in the game had been won by Derrick and Jack.

CHAPTER 4.

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE IN COLOGNE—TRAPPED!—JACK DEFIES HIS CAPTORS—A DASH FOR FREEDOM—THE GERMANS OUTWITTED.

The scene now changes to Cologne.

"... that town of monks and bones,

And pavements fanged with murderous stones."

After leaving England, the two chums had provided themselves with a suitable outfit at Brussels, and had then moved on to Cologne, where they had taken up their quarters at the Dom-Hotel, which is probably the finest and most expensive hotel in the city. If the choice had been left to Jack, he would have selected one of the cheaper hotels, but Derrick had insisted that they should do the thing in tip-top style.

"Sure, you wouldn't have me spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar, would you?" he had said. "You seem to forget that I'm going to pose as a man of unlimited wealth, who can afford to chuck away a thousand or two on a miserable swamp of an island that happens to have taken my fancy. Where would I be if I went and swaggered of my wealth to the owner of the island, and then, when he asked me where I was staying, I gave him the name of a fourth-rate hotel? He would set me down as an impostor at once!"

To the Dom-Hotel, accordingly, they had gone—Derrick in the character of a British millionaire, and Jack as his valet. On the day following their arrival they had gone for a two days' trip up the Rhine, embarking at Cologne in the morning, arriving at Mayence in the evening, and returning next day.

Though it was the first time either of them had seen the historic river, and though the Rhine is usually considered to be most interesting between Cologne and Bingen, they had neither of them been able to get up any enthusiasm until the steamboat had passed the latter place, and had entered on that broad stretch of river which lies below Mayence. The reason is not far to seek. At this point the Rhine expands to its greatest breadth, and is studded with innumerable islands. Some of these were little more than clumps of reeds, but one or two were fairly large, and amongst the latter was Geldau, which both Jack and Derrick identified the moment they set eyes on it.

It was a long, low, narrow island, situated almost in mid-stream. Its length was not far short of half a mile, but its breadth was nowhere more than a couple of hundred yards. It was almost entirely covered with trees and shrubs, but in the centre there was an open clearing, on which could be discerned a heap of crumbling masonry, which probably represented the ruins of an old building.

Derrick's plan for finding out to whom the island belonged was carried out to the letter; and as a result of Jack's inquiries they had learned that it was the property of a certain Herr von Arenberg, who lived at Wiesbaden, and who was reputed to be over head and ears in debt. Upon returning to Cologne, Derrick had written to this gentleman, stating that he had taken a violent fancy to Geldau, and asking if it was for sale. He had received a reply from Von Arenberg, expressing his willingness to sell the island at a reasonable price, and inviting Derrick to Wiesbaden to talk the matter over.

This letter was received on the morning of the day on which we take up the thread of our narrative. Its receipt was a source of unbounded joy to the two chums, and Derrick promptly decided to go to Wiesbaden by the first available train, leaving Jack to await his return at the Dom-Hotel.

"Take care of yourself whilst I'm away," he said, as he bade his "valet" adieu at the railway-station. "It is true that we have seen nothing of Hermann and Richter since we left England, but it doesn't follow that they haven't tracked us here. When they found that we had given them the slip they would naturally turn their footsteps towards the Rhine, and, for anything we know, they may be watching us now."

"Well, it's a certainty that they didn't accompany us up the river the other day," said Jack. "I made it my business to see every passenger who came aboard, and I'm prepared to swear that neither Hermann nor Richter was amongst the number. It is impossible, therefore, that they can have heard me asking who was the owner of the island, and, consequently, they can't have a glimmer of an idea up to now that Geldau is the place where the treasure is buried."

"I don't say they have!" retorted Derrick. "But the very fact that they haven't been able to get any clue to the whereabouts of the gold will make them all the keener to obtain the information before it is too late. Hope deferred maketh a man desperate, and that's why I implore you to take care of yourself. I don't want to come back from Wiesbaden and find that you've been kidnapped during my absence."

"But why should they kidnap me?" asked Jack, with a careless laugh. "The parchment scrolls are safe in the strong-room at Chancery Lane, and—"

"But they don't know that!" interrupted Derrick. "They may think that you carry the scrolls about with you. But there goes the whistle. Good-bye, old chap. I shall be back to-morrow afternoon, and by that time, I hope, the island will be ours."

Jack watched the train steam out of the station, and then returned to the hotel. It is doubtful if he ever gave another thought to Derrick's warning, for he was perfectly convinced in his own mind that they had shaken their rivals off; and as soon as he had dined he set out to explore the sights of the city.

The Cathedral and Picture Gallery occupied him all the afternoon, and in the evening he decided to pay a visit to the Zoological Gardens, where an open-air concert was advertised for eight o'clock. A tram conveyed him from his hotel to the gardens and the concert, which lasted until nearly midnight, and passed off without any untoward incident. When all was over, however, and he was about to embark on one of the home-bound trams, he found, to his dismay, that some light-fingered German had picked his pockets, and left him without the price of a tram-fare.

Under these circumstances he had no choice but to walk back to his hotel—a distance of close upon a couple of miles. As he was a total stranger to the city, and as the night was uncommonly dark, it is not surprising that he lost his way, and after trudging along for upwards of an hour he found himself, not in the aristocratic neighbourhood of the Dom-Hotel, but in one of the lowest and vilest quarters of the city.

To make matters worse, he had the misfortune to collide against a drunken and disreputable-looking woman—or, rather, she collided against him—at the corner of a dark, deserted street, and almost before he knew what was happening, she had clawed him by the hair and was loudly calling for the police.

Her cries were promptly answered by a helmeted official, muffled in a cumbersome waterproof-cape, who huskily demanded to know the cause of the uproar.

"This English thief has attacked me and robbed me of my purse!" yelled the woman, who was apparently besides herself with drunken fury.

"What a monstrous untruth!" said Jack indignantly. "I was walking peaceably down the street, when she lurched against me and all but knocked me down. Do I look the sort of person to rob a drunken woman?"

"It's a lie!" screamed the woman. "He's robbed me, and now he tries to take my character away by saying I am drunk! Oh, you villain! I'll have the law on you for this!" And she made an ineffectual attempt to leave the marks of her nails on Jack's face.

"Do you deny the charge?" asked the officer, turning to Jack. "Of course I do!" was Jack's indignant reply.

"You hear what the gentleman says?" he continued, addressing the woman. "Do you still press the charge?"

"Certainly!" she replied. And if you don't take him up I'll report you to your betters!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to accompany me to the station, sir," said the officer, turning to Jack again.

"What for?" cried Jack. "If you doubt my innocence, search my pockets, and you'll find that I haven't a single coin in my possession."

"We don't search people in the streets!" said the officer gruffly. "You must come to the station. If you are innocent you will be allowed to go, and this woman will find herself in gaol for making a false and odious charge. I am sorry to insist, but I am only doing my duty."

"All right. Lead the way, and get it over as soon as possible!" said Jack, with a philosophical shrug of his shoulders.

"You must come, too!" said the officer, seizing the woman roughly by the arm. "If it turns out that you have accused this gentleman falsely you will spend the night in the cells!"

The woman made no reply, but the officer's words seemed to sober her a little, and she walked by his side in sullen, sulky silence. As for Jack, he was too indignant to indulge in conversation, and it was not until they had threaded a perfect maze of squalid streets, and were tramping along a narrow, ill-favoured alley that he designed to break the silence.

"The station seems a long way off," he remarked.

"It's only a few yards away now!" growled the officer in a deep bass voice.

"What! A police-station in this miserable slum!" exclaimed Jack, in contemptuous tones.

"Yes; here it is!" replied the officer. And, seizing Jack by the nape of the neck, he gave him a push that sent him crashing against the door of one of the houses.

The door flew open as if by magic, and the next instant Jack found himself lying on his face on the floor of a dimly-lighted room that was situated somewhat below the level of the street. Before he could scramble to his feet, the officer flung himself upon him, and clapped a revolver to his head, whilst at the same

time the woman sprang into the room, closed the door, and looked it on the inside.

"One cry and you're a dead man!" hissed the officer, in a hoarse, excited voice. "So long as you keep quiet no harm shall befall you, but if you resist you must take the consequences."

It went against Jack's grain to submit without a struggle; but what could he do? He was lying face downwards on the floor, with the German's knee in the small of his back, and the muzzle of the revolver just behind his ear. The woman, who was evidently an accomplice of the man's, had also drawn a revolver, and as Jack glanced up out of the corner of his eye he saw that she was standing over him, ready to fire whenever her confederate gave the word. Under these circumstances he had no alternative but to surrender at discretion, and in less time almost than it takes to tell, his wrists were secured behind his back, and lashed together with a couple of pocket-handkerchiefs.

Having rolled him over on his back, the man rose to his feet and turned up the solitary lamp by which the room was illumined. Until then Jack had never distinctly seen the faces of his captors, and he had been at a loss to understand why they had been at such pains to lure him to this miserable hovel. He could only suppose that robbery was their object. But as soon as the light fell on their features the whole truth was revealed.

For the man was Heinrich Hermann, disguised in the uniform of a German officer of police, and the "woman" was Karl Richter, clad in skirts and petticoats.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Hardy?" said Hermann, with a mocking smile. "You flattered yourself, no doubt, that you had seen the last of us, but we're not so easily shaken off as you imagine. We've had a long hunt for you, but we spotted you amongst the pictures this afternoon, and we've never lost sight of you since. It was I who picked your pockets at the Zoo this evening, in order to compel you to walk home, and then we dogged your footsteps until you reached a convenient place for carrying out our plan. This is where Karl and I are living for the present, and you are as far from help in this house as if you were in the middle of the Sahara."

"May I ask what your object was in luring me here?" asked Jack, more for the purpose of gaining time than because he wanted the information.

"Need you ask?" replied Hermann. "We want Hans Memlich's map, of course."

"Then you've captured the wrong man!" said Jack, with a scornful laugh. "The map is not in my possession."

"Ah! Mr. O'Brien has it, then?" suggested Hermann.

"Wrong again," said Jack. "Neither Derrick nor I have the map."

"You are quibbling!" said Hermann sternly. "You may not actually have the map in your pocket, but you know where it is."

"Why, certainly!" said Jack.

"I thought so. Well, if you will tell us where it is and afford us the means of obtaining it, I'll pledge my word to set you at liberty as soon as Karl and I have secured the treasure."

"Thank you," said Jack, with pretended humility. "You know in what region the treasure is buried, of course?"

"No," said Hermann, shaking his head. "If we had been able to get on your track a little earlier, we had intended shadowing you until you led us to the spot. But we never saw either of you until we found you in the Picture Gallery this afternoon, and consequently we know nothing. Where is it buried?"

"In the place marked on Hans Memlich's map," said Jack innocently.

"I know that!" cried Hermann angrily. "But what is the name of the place? Come, answer me quick, or I shall be tempted to put a bullet through your head!"

"I can't see how that would help you!" said Jack calmly. "It would be like killing the goose that laid the golden eggs."

"Do you know where Count Conrad's gold is buried?" roared Hermann, who was rapidly losing his temper.

"Of course I do," answered Jack. "I also know—or, at least, I expect—that by this time the place has been purchased by my esteemed friend Mr. Derrick O'Brien."

A simultaneous oath burst from the lips of the two Germans. "If what you say is true," cried Hermann, "there is all the more reason why you should tell us at once where the map is, so that we can proceed to this place and dig up the treasure before your friend sets to work. Come, now, where is the map?"

"In a place where it is safe from thieving fingers!" said Jack.

"Beware, lest you try my patience too far!" said Hermann, in menacing tones. "If you do not answer my question I shall be compelled to take means to make you!"

"Take whatever means you choose!" was Jack's defiant

reply. "You have mistaken your man if you think you can terrify me with threats! If I were to give you the information you seek the treasure would be yours; if I refuse, and you kill me, it will be Derrick's. Needless to say, I prefer that he should have it, even at the cost of my life! That is my answer—now do your worst!"

This reply exasperated Hermann to such a degree that he lost all control of himself; and, stooping down, he dealt Jack a cowardly blow between the eyes.

The effect was magical! Whilst they had been talking, Jack had quietly freed his hands from their bonds, and scarcely had Hermann's fist descended ere the scoundrel received a blow on the mouth that sent him reeling to the ground. The next instant Jack sprang to his feet and flung himself on Richter, who was standing by the fireplace, taking off his skirts with one hand, and holding his revolver in the other.

In the twinkling of an eye Jack snatched the revolver out of his hand and tumbled him backwards, skirts and all, into the empty fireplace.

"Lie there, you treacherous hound!" he cried. "If you attempt to move I'll riddle you like a sieve! Ah, would you?"

This last exclamation was addressed to Hermann, who had picked himself up and was rushing on Jack like an infuriated bull. If the latter had been so minded he could have shot the scoundrel down with the greatest ease, but he wished, if possible, to avoid creating too big a disturbance, for fear of inconvenient inquiries by the neighbours or the police. Instead of firing, therefore, he nimbly stepped aside, and as Hermann rushed past he caught him a stinging blow behind the ear that sent him once more to grass.

"Want any more?" cried Jack, picking up Hermann's weapon, which had fallen from his hand when he fell. "I've six shots apiece for each of you here!" And he covered his outwitted foes with their own revolvers.

Neither of the Germans stirred, and, after commanding them to turn their faces to the wall—a command which they sullenly obeyed—he swiftly shot back the bolt and darted into the street.

By sheer British pluck—the pluck that never knows when it is beaten—he had triumphed all along the line, and the Germans' third attempt to secure the coveted map had ended as disastrously as those which had preceded it.

CHAPTER 5.

ON THE ISLAND AT LAST—A SURPRISE ATTACK—DERRICK WOUNDED—IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

Derrick came back from Wiesbaden the following afternoon flushed with triumph, and firmly convinced that the treasure was as good as won. He had interviewed Von Arenberg. He had agreed to purchase the island for £3,000 (which was at the rate of £100 an acre). He had planked down fifty pounds as a deposit, and had promised to pay the rest of the money in ten days' time—that is to say, as soon as the deeds of transfer were ready.

He was somewhat dismayed when Jack told him that Hermann and Richter were on their track again and had made another desperate attempt to obtain possession of Hans Memlich's map; but his spirits soon recovered their usual buoyancy, and he ventured to prophesy that Jack had taught the two Germans such a lesson that they would not dare to interfere with them again. In this, however, he was greatly deceived, as he was shortly to discover to his cost.

As the two chums had no longer any reason for remaining in Cologne, they returned to England in order to make their final preparations for taking possession of the island. By the time they reached London, Derrick's solicitors had received formal notice of his legacy, and the ten thousand pounds—minus the cost of their recent jaunt on the Continent—was placed to Derrick's account in the bank.

Being thus provided with the "sinews of war," they set about securing a suitable vessel, and finally hired a small steam yacht, named the "Rippling Wave," for a period of six months. She was only a tiny craft, manned by a crew of four, including the skipper, but she was amply large enough for their purpose without being too large to navigate the shallows of the Rhine.

Having brought their vessel round into the Thames, where she was coaled and provisioned, they proceeded to load her with such things as they considered necessary for the execution of their design. These included a wooden bungalow, built in sections; a quantity of furniture, bedding, carpets, &c., and a large supply of tools and implements, some of which were intended to be used in the erection of the bungalow, whilst the remainder (though this was a secret known only to Jack and Derrick) were for digging up and removing Count Conrad's gold.



Jack rolled the German over on his back, and planted his knee on his chest.

During the whole of the time occupied by these preparations nothing was seen or heard of the two Germans, and when all was ready for the start, Derrick went to Chancery Lane and brought away Hans Memlich's map. In order to safeguard it against injury or loss, they had decided to enclose it in a flat, asbestos wallet, which had been specially manufactured for them, and which was intended to be sewn into the lining of Jack's waistcoat. This latter operation was performed in the privacy of Jack's room in Edgware Road, and then the two chums drove down to the dock where the "Rippling Wave" was berthed. Steam was already up, and as soon as they came aboard the moorings were cast off and the long-expected voyage began.

Upon reaching the mouth of the Rhine, Derrick left the yacht and proceeded by train to Wiesbaden, where he paid the balance of the purchase-money and received the legal deeds constituting him sole owner of the Island of Geldau. He then rejoined the yacht (which had meanwhile been steaming up the river) at Cologne; and about eight o'clock one sultry September evening they dropped their anchor in the tiniest of tiny bays on the south side of the island.

"Behold your kingdom!" cried Derrick, as he and Jack stood on the quarter-deck of the "Rippling Wave," and gazed with glistening eyes on the island of their dreams.

"Your kingdom, you mean," corrected Jack.

"No, yours," said Derrick. "I am only the chancellor of the exchequer, whose business it is to provide his Royal master with funds. Would your Imperial Highness like a salute to be fired in honour of your arrival?"

"I think not!" said Jack, with a laugh. "We don't want to inform the whole neighbourhood that we've bought the island."

"Faith, they know it already!" retorted Derrick. "Did I never show you that paragraph in the 'Cologne Gazette'?"

"No. What was that?" asked Jack.

"It appeared the day before yesterday," said Derrick. "It was a paragraph to the effect that the Island of Geldau had been purchased by 'Sir O'Brien, a wealthy English nobleman,' who proposed to take up his residence there."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Jack gravely. "If Hermann and Richter see that announcement (as they're pretty sure to do) they will immediately tumble to the fact that Geldau is the island on which the treasure is buried."

"Let them tumble!" said Derrick contemptuously. "If either of them attempts to set foot on my property—I mean your property—we'll duck him in the river and prosecute him for trespass afterwards. But what do you say if we row ashore and have a peep at our new possession?"

"The very thing I was going to suggest," said Jack. "We sha'n't have time to do much to-night, but we might, perhaps, be able to make a rough survey of the island by means of the map, and fix on the spot where the gold is buried, so that the crew could set to work first thing to-morrow morning to erect the bungalow."

"Have you got the map on you?" asked Derrick.

"Yes, it's here," replied Jack, tapping the spot where it was hidden. "I'll not take it out till we're actually on the island."

"Right you are," said Derrick. And he shouted to the crew to lower the dinghy.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the skipper, coming up and addressing Derrick. "Was you thinking of going ashore this evening?"

"I were," said Derrick quizzingly.

"Well, I wouldn't if I was you," continued the skipper. "It'll be dark in half an hour, and, unless I'm vastly out of my reckoning, were in for dirty weather."

"What do you mean by dirty weather?" asked Derrick. "A thunderstorm?"

"Ay, and a jolly big one, too!" replied the skipper.

"But why should that prevent us going ashore?" asked Derrick.

"We're not a couple of children, to be frightened by a flash of lightning or a peal of thunder."

"And, besides, we should be back in an hour's time at the

outside," added Jack. "You don't think the storm will have burst before then, do you?"

"Well, no, I don't think it's quite so near as that," said the skipper.

"Then I vote we go," said Jack.

"Same here!" said Derrick. And without any further ado they clambered down into the dinghy and rowed ashore.

What words can describe their emotions when they first set foot on the Rhine-girt isle, which represented the goal of their hopes and fears. The romantic nature of their quest had hitherto kept them in a constant whirl of thrilling excitement, and they had never paused to ask themselves if it were possible that they were pursuing a will-o'-the-wisp. But now that the hour for action had come—now that the time had arrived when the truth would be revealed—the laugh died away on their lips, and their faces grew strangely grave.

What if old Hans Memlich had lied? What if the treasure had never been buried on this island after all? What if it had been removed by some former owner of the place, who had kept his discovery secret from the world? These were the disquieting questions that assailed them as they stood in the deepening twilight, listening to the hum of the swiftly-rushing river, and gazing at the twinkling lights on the distant mainland.

"Well, let's get to work," said Jack at last. "It will be too dark to see the map if we stand mooning here much longer. Will you lend me your knife to cut these stitches? I've left mine aboard the yacht."

"Wouldn't it be more prudent if we were to go a bit farther inland before we rip out the map?" suggested Derrick. "Some of the crew may be watching us from the deck of the yacht. There's an old building somewhere on the island—I fancy I can see it through yon clump of trees—how would it be to examine

the map in there? We should be sheltered from the wind, and we should be safe from prying eyes."

"Just as you like," replied Jack. And they forthwith made their way through the trees and bushes until they arrived at the building in question.

It proved to be little more than a heap of ruins, but there was one room which was fairly intact, and thither they directed their steps. Derrick entered first, a few yards in advance of Jack, but no sooner had he passed through the crumbling doorway than someone sprang out of the darkness, and aimed a blow at his head with a heavy wooden club. He endeavoured to parry the blow with his arm, but the effort met with scanty success, and the next instant he was lying on the ground with a broken arm and an ugly gash on the top of his head.

In the meantime, Jack was faring but little better. At the same moment that Derrick was attacked, a second figure darted out of the building and leaped at Jack's throat. The onslaught was so unexpected that he was taken completely by surprise, and, before he had time to defend himself, his assailant—who was no other than Heinrich Hermann—had tripped him up, and was doing his best to strangle him.

As soon as he regained his presence of mind he clenched his fists and dashed them into Hermann's face. The effect of this was to cause the German to relax his grip for a moment, and, quick as thought, Jack seized the scoundrel's wrists, and tore the claw-like hands from his throat. Then, with a cry of encouragement to Derrick, he suddenly let go his assailant's wrists, and flung his arms round his waist.

Hermann struggled with savage desperation to free himself from this rib-cracking embrace, but in spite of all his efforts he could not shake his resolute opponent off, and at last, with a superhuman effort, Jack rolled the German over on his back, and planted his knee on his chest.

Scarcely had he accomplished this ere he was startled by a guttural oath behind him, and, glancing over his shoulder, he was dismayed to see that Richter—for he it was—had succeeded in overpowering and binding Derrick, and was now coming to his ally's assistance, brandishing his murderous-looking club, and uttering the most sanguinary threats of vengeance.

Leaping to his feet, Jack whipped out his revolver, and levelled it at Richter with a cry of "Back, or I fire!" At the sight of the gleaming weapon, Richter came to a sudden halt, but at the same moment Hermann thrust out his arms along the ground, seized Jack by the ankles, and jerked him off his feet.

As Jack's finger was already trembling on the trigger of his revolver, this sudden jerk caused the weapon to go off. But the bullet flew harmlessly over the tops of the trees, and the next instant Richter darted forward and dealt him a stunning blow with his club that robbed him of all consciousness.

He was only insensible for a minute or two, but by the time his scattered wits returned his cowardly assailants had bound him hand and foot, and had carried him into the old ruin, where Derrick already lay in an equally evil plight.

So far, the Germans' fourth attempt to outwit their English rivals had been crowned with complete success.

CHAPTER 6.

RESCUED BY THE CREW OF THE YACHT—ESCAPE OF HERMANN AND RICHTER—A STARTLING DISCOVERY—"THE VILLAINS HAVE STOLEN THE YACHT!"

Mention has already been made of a paragraph in the "Cologne Gazette," announcing that "Sir O'Brien" had purchased the island of Geldau. It has also been recorded how Jack expressed his fear that Hermann and Richter would see this announcement, and would thus be made acquainted with the fact that Geldau was the island on which Count Conrad's gold was buried. Derrick had treated the suggestion with light-hearted contempt; but he was now compelled to admit that his chum's forebodings had been amply justified.

After their unsuccessful attempt to kidnap Jack in Cologne the two Germans had "lain low," waiting for a favourable opportunity to renew their attempts to ascertain the whereabouts of the treasure. As soon as they had read the paragraph in the "Cologne Gazette," they had tumbled to the fact (as Jack had prophesied they would) that Geldau was the place referred to in Hans Memlich's letter; and although they had little expectation of being able to find the treasure without the aid of the map, they had nevertheless determined to pay a surreptitious visit to the island before Jack and Derrick arrived on the scene.

In pursuance of this design they had left Cologne, and had engaged a couple of rooms in the little town of Erbach, which lies on the right bank of the Rhine almost immediately opposite the island. They had arrived at Erbach the night before the "Rippling Wave" made her appearance, and as soon as it was light the following morning, they had hired a small boat for



Each of the Englishmen singled out a man, and flung himself upon him like a human avalanche.

IN NEXT FRIDAY'S "UNION JACK." "BRIBED TO LOSE."

the avowed purpose of going on a fishing expedition up the river.

In this boat they had rowed round to the opposite side of the island, where their movements were hidden from those on shore, and had then effected a landing, and spent the rest of the day in hunting for the treasure.

It is hardly necessary to say that their efforts met with no success; and they had just decided to return to Erbach when the "Rippling Wave" steamed up the river, and anchored in the little creek already described.

As their boat was hidden amongst the reeds which fringed the shore of this very creek, it was manifestly impossible for them to launch her without attracting attention, and they accordingly decided to remain on the island until nightfall, and then to slip away under cover of the darkness.

The landing of Jack and Derrick somewhat upset these calculations, and when the two chums walked towards the ruined building, where the Germans were hiding, the latter had no choice but to show fight. If they had been free to follow their own inclinations they would have preferred to have postponed their attack until they had found out where the treasure was buried, but when Jack and Derrick came marching towards their hiding-place, it was no longer possible to avert a crisis. They had to choose between trying to overpower and capture their rivals, or submitting to discovery and capture themselves. As the reader now knows they adopted the former course, with the result that fortune smiled upon their efforts, though it was plain to see that their victory brought them little joy.

"I wish this had never happened!" said Richter, addressing Hermann under his breath, and glancing ruefully at their captives. "I wish we'd got safely away before they came."

"So do I," said Hermann. "But it's better that we should have captured them than that they should have captured us."

"That's so," replied his companion. "But what on earth are we going to do with them now that we have captured them? Kill them?"

"It all depends," said Hermann, drawing his accomplice aside, and speaking in a low whisper. "It would be folly to kill them before we've discovered the whereabouts of the treasure, for, by so doing, we should prevent them digging for it afterwards and showing us where it is hidden. Until we know where the gold is buried, it is more to our interest that we should let them live than that we should kill them. As soon as we've discovered the secret, however, the sooner they're out of the way the better."

"Then what do you propose?" asked Richter.

"I propose that we should first submit them to a thorough search," answered Hermann. "If they haven't got the map with them, we'll leave them here, just as they are, and return to Erbach. Some of their comrades will find them sooner or later, and they won't dare to prosecute us for fear of drawing the attention of the authorities to their schemes for removing the treasure. To-morrow, or the day after, they'll start to hunt for the gold, and as soon as they've found it we'll make another attempt to step in and cheat them of their booty."

"And what will you do if they have the map with them?" asked Richter.

"Slit their throats on the spot!" answered Hermann coolly. "It's a thousand to one that they haven't told a living soul why they've bought this island, so that we shall only need to keep quiet for a month or two, and then we can return here on the sly and remove the treasure at our leisure."

He had scarcely finished speaking ere a blinding flash of lightning cleft the darkness, and the next instant the silence was rent by a deafening peal of thunder, which caused them to rush into the open air under the impression that the ruins were tumbling down about their ears. It was only the herald of the approaching storm; but it seemed to Richter that the outraged powers of Heaven were expressing their wrath at the crime which he and Hermann were contemplating, and his face grew ashen grey with superstitious fear.

"Let us clear out of this!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper. "Depend upon it, no good will come of meddling with those fellows to-night!"

"Don't be a fool!" said Hermann contemptuously. "If your courage isn't proof against a thunderstorm you'd best go home, and leave me to finish the affair by myself, for I swear I won't leave this island until I've secured the map, or satisfied myself that they haven't got it on them!"

With these words, he once more entered the old ruin, which was now enveloped in darkness. After a few seconds' hesitation, Richter summoned up sufficient pluck to follow him; but just as he was about to pass through the doorway

the sky was torn asunder by another dazzling flash, and, with a cry of terror, he staggered back and took to his heels.

A contemptuous oath was Hermann's only comment on his ally's cowardice as he calmly set to work to rifle Derrick's pockets. Having satisfied himself that the coveted map was not in the Irishman's possession, he turned his attention to Jack. Here, again, he failed to find what he sought; but just as he was on the point of abandoning the search as hopeless, his fingers encountered the thickness caused by the presence of the wallet beneath the lining of Jack's waistcoat.

He realised the importance of his discovery in an instant, and a blaze of triumph leaped into his deep-set eyes.

"Karl! Karl! I've found the map!" he yelled at the top of his voice. But the words had scarcely left his lips ere Richter dashed into the room, crying:

"Quick! We must fly! The crew of the yacht have come ashore, and are scouring the island with lanterns. They're less than fifty yards away, and are coming in this direction."

As soon as Jack heard this joyful news he opened his lips to let the search-party know where they were imprisoned. Hermann divined his intention, and dealt him a brutal blow across the mouth, but he was just too late to stifle the shout, and the next moment the sound of hurrying feet was heard approaching the ruins.

"I'll have the map, at any rate!" muttered Hermann, whipping out his pocket-knife. But before he had time to open the blade the skipper of the yacht rushed into the room, followed by the three men, who composed the rest of the crew.

"Seize those men!" cried Jack exultingly. But ere the skipper could obey the baffled Germans sprang through a gap in the crumbling wall and vanished into the darkness.

"Shall we pursue them, sir?" asked the skipper excitedly.

"By and by," said Jack. "But first release me from these bonds and let us see how it fares with Mr. O'Brien."

The skipper hastened to comply, and whilst he was cutting the ropes, he explained to Jack that they had heard the report of his revolver (when Hermann had jerked him off his feet), and had decided to come ashore in order to see whether he had intended the shot as a signal for help.

"I've also taken the liberty of getting up steam again," he added, as he assisted Jack to his feet. "This storm grows worse every minute, and as the anchorage hereabouts is none too good, I thought we'd better run down the river as far as Bingen and berth there until it blows over."

"I'll discuss that with you afterwards," said Jack. "My chief anxiety at present is for Mr. O'Brien." And he glanced at his chum, who had meanwhile been freed from his bonds by the rest of the rescuers.

He was relieved to find that Derrick had quite recovered consciousness; but the pain of his broken arm was evidently causing him intolerable agony, whilst the large amount of blood he had lost had rendered him so weak that he could scarcely stand.

As soon as Jack discovered this, he abandoned all thought of hunting for the fugitives, and announced his intention of proceeding to Bingen with all speed, in order to procure medical attention for his wounded chum.

"But think what a chance you're missing!" protested Derrick. "In all probability Hermann and Richter came to this place in a rowing-boat, and consequently they can't possibly leave whilst this storm lasts. Don't bother about me just now. I shall be all right here for an hour or two. Catch those beggars first and then attend to me. If you go back to Bingen now you'll give them the opportunity of escaping from the island as soon as the storm abates."

"I would rather they escaped and took all there is on the island than that you should have an hour's unnecessary pain," was Jack's affectionate reply. "It's no use arguing, old fellow; we're going to take you to Bingen, and get your wounds attended to before we do anything else."

It was useless for Derrick to protest, and a stretcher was hastily improvised on which he was carried down to the little creek where the skipper had beached the ship's boat, and where Jack and Derrick had also left the dinghy in which they had come ashore.

To their consternation and dismay they found that both the boats had disappeared.

"This is the Germans' doing!" cried Jack. "They have turned the dinghy adrift, and have made their escape in the bigger boat. How on earth are we going to get aboard the vessel now?" And his eyes travelled ruefully across the stretch of rushing water which separated them from the yacht.

"And they've set the yacht adrift, too!" he exclaimed an instant later. "See! She's moving away from her anchorage!"

"But she's moving up the river—against the current!" cried the skipper. "That doesn't look as if she was adrift. There's someone aboard, and they've started the engines!"

"By Jove, you're right!" exclaimed Jack, with a groan of despair. "The villains have stolen the yacht!"

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CHAPTER 7.

AN INFAMOUS PLOT—THE SKIPPER SCENTS DANGER—A WARM RECEPTION FOR THE INVADERS.

No thought of stealing the yacht was present in Hermann's mind when he and Richter fled from the ruins. Their intention, at that time, was simply to rush down to the creek, collar the biggest boat, and row across to the mainland. They expected that the sailors would follow them too quickly to allow of them doing anything more; but when they found that there was no sign of immediate pursuit they resolved to spend a few moments in setting the other two boats adrift in order to cover their retreat.

Having accomplished this, they launched the boat in which the crew had come ashore and started to row away. As they neared the "Rippling Wave," which was riding at anchor, they perceived that her decks were completely deserted, and Hermann at once exclaimed:

"Let's board the yacht. Those fellows on the island can't possibly leave until the storm abates, so that we need not fear being caught."

"But what's the good of wasting so much valuable time?" growled Richter. "You know that Hardy has the map, so it's no use looking for it on the yacht."

"That's so," replied Hermann; "but there might be a copy of it in one of the cabins, or some papers which would afford us a clue to the whereabouts of the treasure."

"All right," said Richter, shrugging his shoulders. "Have your way." And they accordingly brought the boat alongside, made her fast, and scrambled aboard.

Up to this point neither of them had ever thought of such a thing as stealing the yacht; but as soon as Hermann found that steam was up, his cunning brain at once conceived a new and daring scheme.

"Can you manage the engines if I take the wheel?" he demanded, addressing his accomplice, in a voice that was hoarse with suppressed excitement.

"I think so," said Richter wonderingly. "But what mad scheme are you after now?"

"A scheme for securing Hans Memlich's map and getting rid of all those foreigners in less than three hours' time!" cried Hermann exultingly.

"Indeed! And how are we going to manage that?" said Richter sarcastically.

"By taking this yacht to Biebrich," answered Hermann. "As you know, I was born at Biebrich, and I flatter myself that I know all the ruffians in the town. In half an hour's time I can hire a dozen men—I know just where to find them—who are ripe for any crime under the sun for fifty marks apiece."

"Having smuggled these men aboard the yacht, we'll return to Geldau, and slay every man on the island. The thunder and lightning will prevent the reports and flashes of our firearms being seen and heard on the mainland, and as soon as our men have done their work we'll run them back to Biebrich before it is light. We needn't tell them anything about the treasure, for fifty marks will buy them body and soul, and so long as they get their money they'll ask no questions. We can then dig up the treasure, remove it to the yacht, hire a German crew, and sail away to some foreign port before the Englishmen's friends at home begin to make inquiries about them."

Richter's face was a study as he listened to this atrocious proposal. Greed and fear struggled for the mastery, and several seconds elapsed before he found his tongue.

"It's a great idea," he said at last, in a husky voice. "But the risk will be tremendous."

"And so will the reward, if we succeed!" retorted Hermann. "Think what it means! The whole of Count Conrad's gold for just us two! Isn't that worth risking something for? But we are wasting valuable time. If this thing is to be done it must be done before daybreak, or the opportunity will be lost. Are you game to make the attempt?"

"I am!" said Richter recklessly. "And without any further ado they set to work to get the yacht under way."

In the meantime, Jack and his four companions had borne the wounded Derrick back to the ruined building already described. Its roofless walls afforded but little protection from the drenching rain and the blustering wind, and the prospect of spending the night there was anything but a cheerful one. It was the only shelter on the island, however, and any grumbling which they might otherwise have indulged in was silenced by the sight of Derrick's sufferings. The brave fellow made no complaint, but it was plain to see that his broken arm and his wounded head were causing him the acutest agony, and it almost drove Jack crazy to think that he could do little or nothing to relieve him.

"I'll tell you what I'll do!" he exclaimed at last, in reckless tones. "I'll swim across to Erbach and procure assistance."

"You'll do no such thing whilst I have strength to prevent you!" cried the skipper, seizing him by the arm, as he was about to rush out of the building. "There isn't a swimmer living who could breast that current to-night! You'd be swept away like a wisp of straw, and your dead body would probably be fished out of the river somewhere down by Rotterdam. Besides, supposing you performed a miracle and reached the mainland in safety, where would you find a boatman who would venture out on the Rhine in a storm like this?"

"Then can I do nothing?" cried Jack despairingly.

"Yes; you can stay here and help us to fight those rascally Germans when they come back," said the skipper calmly. "That'll be better than committing suicide."

"But you don't for a moment imagine they'll come back to-night?" asked Jack, in surprise.

"I do!" said the grizzled old salt, rising to his feet, and knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "I've been thinking it over whilst we've been squatting here, and I've come to the conclusion that they wouldn't have stolen the yacht if they'd only wanted to save their own skins. I'm getting a bit rusty with age, and my thinking machinery isn't what it used to be; but it seems to me, as plain as the nose on your face, that those beggars collared the yacht, meaning to return with reinforcements."

"By Jove, I never thought of that!" cried Jack. "You've hit the right nail on the head without a doubt. Come along, lads! We mustn't let those scoundrels catch us napping! Let us go down to the creek so as to be ready for them when they come."

"There's no need for all hands to turn out at present!" growled the skipper, as he calmly proceeded to refill his beloved clay. "One man on the look-out is enough, and he'll have ample time to warn the rest when the enemy comes in sight."

"All right; I'll go and keep watch," said Jack.

"No you don't!" said the honest skipper. "Fair do's, Mr. Hardy, if you please. We'll draw lots. I've five pennies here, all of different dates. We'll shake them up in my hat, and the man that draws the penny dated 1870 shall go and mount guard at the creek, whilst the rest remain here and keep as dry as the rain will allow."

This original method of drawing lots was put into execution, with the result that one of the sailors, named Barker, drew the coin agreed upon, and proceeded to his post. For a couple of hours after his departure nothing occurred to disturb the tranquillity—if tranquillity it could be called with the thunder bellowing overhead, and the tempest-driven rain sweeping across the island in gusty squalls. Then, when they had almost persuaded themselves that their fears were groundless, the man came rushing back with the startling news that the yacht had arrived, and that a boatload of men were already on their way to the island.

"They've put out all the yacht's lights!" he panted; "and they'd lowered a boat before I twigged that they were here! Hurry up, or we shall have them ashore before we get back."

"Good-bye, old chap," said Jack, grasping Derrick's hand. "It goes against the grain to leave you here, but needs must. If those fellows get a footing on the island it's all up!"

"I quite understand that," replied Derrick. "I only wish I were able to help you to drive them back into the river, but, seeing that I can't go myself, will you take my revolver?"

"I have one, thanks," said Jack. "Give it to the skipper."

"I've got my own shooting-iron, thank ye kindly," replied the skipper, producing a useful-looking Derringer. "Maybe one of the other chaps would like it, though," he added. And, turning to the three sailors, he said: "Any of you lubbers know how to use a pistol?"

"I used to be considered a pretty fair shot," said Barker modestly.

"Pretty fair won't do for to-night!" growled the skipper, handing him Derrick's revolver. "It must be a bull's-eye every time. Here's the club with which that German skunk broke Mr. O'Brien's arm; that'll do for you, Smithson. As for you, Pratt, you'd best take one of those big branches which we used as a stretcher."

"And now, Mr. Hardy," he concluded, "we're ready to start. You're commander-in-chief of this 'ere expedition, and we look to you for our orders."

"Right you are. Silence in the ranks! Quick march!" cried Jack. And, placing

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himself at the head of his followers, he led the little band of defenders out into the darkness.

Flash after flash of lightning rent the sky as they marched through the little wood which lay between the ruins and the shores of the creek; but they managed to reach the latter place during an interval of darkness, and promptly concealed themselves behind a clump of bushes. Jack himself was unable to see a vestige of the boat, but the skipper's practised eye discovered its shadowy outline against the white foam of the river, and he urged his companion to let him try the effect of a shot.

"They'll be ashore in half a jiffy," he whispered. "The boat is crowded with men, and I couldn't miss hitting somebody."

"No, no!" said Jack. "We can't afford to take any risks. When the next flash comes we'll fire, and then we'll make a rush."

He had scarcely finished speaking ere a vivid flash illumined the scene, and revealed the forms of the invaders with startling distinctness. They had run their boat ashore, and half of them, including Hermann and Richter, had jumped out whilst the rest were handing them their weapons out of the boat.

There was no need for Jack to give the word of command. The lightning flash was a sufficient signal, and the three revolvers rang out with a simultaneous report.

There was only a fraction of a second in which to observe what happened, but three of the Germans were seen to leap into the air, and then, with a hearty British cheer, the defenders dashed out of their hiding-place and charged upon their foes.

CHAPTER 8.

A GALLANT DEFENCE—THE DEATH OF RICHTER—A SENSATIONAL CLIMAX—CONCLUSION.

Never were the tables more completely turned than they were on this rascally gang of hired cut-throats. They had counted on taking the Englishmen by surprise; but, thanks to the skipper's foresight, the surprise was all on the other side; and instead of the Germans catching their victims napping, as they had hoped to do, they found them very much awake, and ready to defend themselves with that reckless contempt for odds that is one of the strongest traits of the true-born Briton.

There had been fourteen Germans at the commencement—including Hermann and Richter—but three of these, as the reader knows, had been wounded by the first volley. Of these three, two fell backwards into the river and were instantly swept away, whilst the third pitched forwards on the beach with a bullet in his shoulder, and, in the lines of the well-known poem, "the subsequent proceedings interested him no more." There were thus eleven Germans to contend with when Jack and his four companions rushed out of their hiding-place.

Acting on Jack's instructions, the skipper and Barker used only the butt-ends of their revolvers, whilst Smithson and Pratt relied on their wooden clubs. "Drive them into the river!" was the order of the day, and in pursuance of this plan each of the Englishmen singled out a man, and flung himself upon him like a human avalanche.

Even if the Germans had been expecting an attack, it is doubtful whether they could have withstood this reckless onslaught, for there are no men in the world who can charge like Britons when their blood is up. The Russians discovered this at Balaklava, and the Germans discovered it now, to their cost, for they were toppled over like ninepins, and in less time almost than it takes to tell three of them were floundering in the river, and two were stretched out on the ground in a state of complete insensibility.

This reduced the odds against the five Englishmen to six. Both Hermann and Richter were included in these six, and the latter immediately grappled with Jack, whilst the former tackled the skipper. This left four Germans to cope with the three remaining Englishmen, and one of the ruffians whipped out a revolver, and fired point-blank at Barker, who, it will be remembered, was armed with Derrick's revolver. The gallant fellow fell forwards with a stifled groan, and his revolver dropped from his hand; but, quick as thought, Pratt snatched it up, levelled it at the man who had done the deed, and shot him in the arm.

In the meantime, Smithson had stunned his assailant, so that invaders and defenders were now on equal terms—four against four. Up to this point, the wounding of Barker had been the only casualty on the English side; but the tide was now to turn, for Hermann, having pinned the skipper to the ground, pulled out a murderous-looking knife, and plunged it into the old man's breast. The wound—like Barker's—was not a mortal one, but it was sufficiently serious to render the skipper hors de combat, and neither he nor Barker were capable of taking any further part in the fight.

Having thus disposed of the skipper, Hermann whipped out his revolver, and rushed to the spot where Jack and Richter were

staggering to and fro in a deadly hand-to-hand encounter. Several moments elapsed before he dared to fire, for fear of wounding his accomplice; but at last he saw his opportunity and pulled the trigger. At the same instant, however, Richter made a sudden effort to fling his assailant off, and in consequence of this unexpected movement, the bullet which Hermann intended for Jack's brain crashed into Richter's skull. There was an awful shriek, a spurt of blood, and the dead man and the living reeled to the ground, locked in each other's arms.

At the sight of what he had done, Hermann seemed to be paralysed with horror. If he had been so minded he might have shot Jack down as the latter was struggling to extricate himself from the dead man's embrace; but the discovery that he had shot his comrade appeared to have deprived the German of all power of movement, and he stood rooted to the spot, with his eyes fixed on Richter's lifeless form in a vacant, glassy stare.

In the meantime, Pratt and Smithson had made short work of the other two Germans—Pratt, by shooting his man in the leg, and Smithson by felling his opponent with his club, and tying his hands behind his back. They then turned their attention to Hermann, but as soon as he saw them coming, he roused himself from his stupor and levelled his revolver.

"Stand back!" he yelled, with the reckless laugh of a madman. "I've five shots left, and as sure as there's a Heaven above me I'll riddle the first man who attempts to lay a hand on me!"

He had forgotten, however, that Pratt was also armed, and he had scarcely finished speaking ere the latter raised his weapon and fired. The bullet struck the German on the wrist, shattering the bone, and causing him to drop his revolver with an agonised shriek. He had still his knife, however—the knife with which he had wounded the skipper—and as Smithson and Pratt flung themselves upon him, he buried its bloodstained blade in Smithson's shoulder.

Notwithstanding his wound, the Englishman stuck gamely to his man, but with a last despairing effort the German shook his would-be captors off; and then, seeing that Jack had scrambled to his feet, and was preparing to attack him, he uttered a shout of "Vengeance!" and took to his heels.

This strange behaviour puzzled Jack for a moment, for he could not understand why Hermann should vow vengeance and then run away. An instant later, however, the appalling truth dawned upon him.

"He's gone to wreak his vengeance on Derrick!" he cried. And the next moment he was tearing through the wood at the top of his speed.

"Follow him," said Smithson to Pratt. "I'll stop behind and look after Barker and the skipper. I don't think we're any of us very much hurt; but you're the only one who's fit to fight, and he may need your help. Hurry up, man, or you'll be too late!"

Pratt needed no second bidding, but instantly dashed away in the direction in which Hermann and Jack had disappeared. As he neared the old ruin, he heard the sound of excited voices inside, and on bursting through the doorway, he saw that Hermann was crouching down by the side of Derrick, who had fainted away, and was holding the point of his knife to the Irishman's breast. His eyes were blazing with maniacal fury, and were fixed in a mocking glance on Jack, who was standing just inside the roofless room, with helplessness and despair on every feature of his haggard and bloodless face.

"Hallo! Here comes another!" cried Hermann, when Pratt made his appearance. "I'll say the same to you as I've just said to your leader. If you approach one half-inch nearer, or attempt to raise your hand, I'll plunge this knife into this fellow's breast!"

"What are your terms?" demanded Jack, in a husky voice, for at that moment he would gladly have given the whole of Count Conrad's gold to save the life of his chum.

"Terms!" yelled Hermann, with a maniacal laugh. "Who speaks to me of terms? The time for making terms is past! You have shattered my plans and slain my only friend, and all I live for now is revenge!"

He repeated the word "Revenge!" half a dozen times, and at each repetition he flourished his knife in the air, and uttered an unearthly scream that made his hearers' flesh creep. At the same time, he never for a moment took his eyes off the two Englishmen, and it was only too certain that the slightest movement on their part would seal their comrade's fate.

"He's bent on killing Mr. O'Brien sooner or later, whether we attack him or not!" whispered Pratt. "Then, why should we stand by and see him do it without making an effort to stop him? Let us try a sudden rush."

"It seems like signing Derrick's death-warrant to do so," said Jack despairingly. "However, if he means to kill him in any case, we have everything to gain and nothing to lose by attacking him now. Are you ready?"

Pratt nodded, and they both made a simultaneous dash on the madman. The instant they moved, Hermann raised his knife with a blood-curdling yell, and a great wave of despair swept

over Jack's heart as he saw that the gleaming blade would be buried in Derriek's heart long before they could seize the hand that held it.

But it was not to be. As the madman raised his knife, a blinding flash of lightning cleft the air just over their heads, and dazzled them with its awful nearness. For a fraction of a second the electric current—attracted by the steel in the German's knife—sparkled and crackled round the blade, and then, like an arrow of flame, it shot down his arm and into his body.

One harsh, dry sob, one convulsive shudder, and Heinrich Hermann's lifeless form fell prostrate at their feet.

The rest of the story is as prosaic as a tract. There was an official inquiry, of course, into the disturbance on the island; but as Hermann and Richter were dead—as they had said nothing to their accomplices about the treasure, and as Jack and Derriek wisely held their tongues—the whole affair was set down as an unprovoked attack on a couple of peaceable English gentlemen by a gang of lawless desperadoes.

When the excitement died away, and the two chums were permitted to retire into that obscurity from which they had so unwillingly emerged, they set to work to carry out their original plans.

The bungalow having been erected on the spot marked on the map, the gold was removed in small parcels, and at different times, and conveyed to England. Twelve months were occupied in this task, and then, the last gold piece having been removed, the island was sold, and the chums returned to their native land.

The skipper and the crew of the "Rippling Wave" were pensioned off for life, but to this day they know nothing of the secret of Count Conrad's gold, whilst the source of Jack's and Derriek's enormous wealth is still a mystery to all who know them.

"Won by the sword!" is Jack's laughing reply when questioned on the subject. And Derriek's answer is "Sure, 'twas all through a legacy I received from an uncle in Australia!"

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 of 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 Gourbet, 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.

Mawker makes up his mind to steal the money hidden behind the picture, but not wishing to be suspected, and knowing that Harry has a letter from the dead man, which no doubt refers to the notes, he decides to be careful. He sends Angela to Harry with a cup of coffee, which he has previously drugged. Harry drinks it, and goes to bed. Later Mawker quietly enters his bedroom, and proceeds to look for Pierre Evison's letter, eventually placing the drugged lad on the floor while he searches under his pillow. He finds it, and slips it into his pocket.

As he is about to leave, he hears someone coming. He hides. A man enters, and plunges a dagger into the bed.

Mawker accuses Harry of stealing some banknotes of his. Things look very black against Harry, and he is arrested.

He strikes the policeman, and runs away.

CHAPTER II.

"STOP THIEF!"—OUTSIDE NEWGATE—THE CARMAN'S STORY—PHIL THE CRIPPLE.

Harry rushed on, unheeding whither he went. Every moment he expected to hear a mob rushing at his heels, shouting frantically after him "Stop thief! Stop thief!"

With that fear big in his breast, he threaded his way with marvellous dexterity through the crowd, until he found himself in the direction of Newgate Street, with the Old Bailey frowning over him.

Not till then had Harry realised the direction in which he was travelling. He looked up at the grim building with a shudder. He was almost opposite to the massive doorway with the manacles over it through which the condemned prisoner used to pass at one time to the gallows.

Harry had a vague idea of prison. He imagined that every criminal in London was taken to that building. There probably he would be taken, if captured. He had rushed to the very place he should have avoided. These were the grim thoughts surging in his mind.

Once more he took to his heels and sped on. He did not pause again until he was nearing London Bridge. He rested in one of the stone embrasures of the bridge thinking.

His brain was still in a whirlwind with the suddenness of the charge brought against him and the rapidity of his flight.

But after a short rest he began to look the situation calmly in the face.

Had he acted wisely in running away from the policeman? It was not very clear that he had. Would it not be imagined that he had run away because he was guilty of the crime that Mawker had fixed upon him? Of course it would. He had strengthened the case against himself a hundredfold. He had undoubtedly played into the hands of Mawker, into whose treachery and deeply-planned scheme, Harry now began to get some little insight.

Nevertheless, unwise though his action had been, Harry knew that he would have acted in precisely the same way were he placed in the same circumstances over again. For at the bottom

DO YOU LIKE THIS?

of his burning sense of injustice, he had a deep and serious motive.

It had been called into bolder relief by the scorn of the policeman, when he had thrown over those two sacred mementoes—the braided hair and the ring—which had been so precious to Pierre. Even then the blood in Harry's veins was tingling, and he was longing to give the man the blow that he afterwards gave him.

But the motive—what was that? It was to visit the mortuary in which Pierre was lying, and place on his breast those two sacred relics.

"Bury these relics with me," Pierre had asked. "Place the ring on my finger, the lock of hair on my breast. For the love of the good God do this! I shall then lie at rest."

He seemed to hear the voice of Pierre pleading with him as the sacrilegious fingers of the policeman roughly turned about those relics. And when the charge of theft was hurled against him, a barrier seemed to be rising in his pathway for the express purpose of preventing him from carrying out the sacred duty imposed on him by Pierre.

Once in prison he would be unable to discharge that duty. Probably the relics would be taken from him, and either destroyed or placed in the prison archives. Anyhow, he would be unable to carry out Pierre's wish.

These were the thoughts that rushed tumultuously through Harry's mind, and induced him to make that bold blow and leap for liberty at the moment of his capture.

Once his purpose achieved, he would not mind what became of him. He would then be perfectly willing to meet his accusers. He had so far succeeded in eluding his pursuers, but it seemed to him as he sat in the embrasure of the bridge, that everybody who passed by him looked at him suspiciously.

He must be moving on, but where—where? That was the question. He could not set about his purpose till night came. Where was he to go—what to do with himself during the next eight or nine hours?

He had the hearty appetite of youth, and began to feel desperately hungry. He had only a few coppers in his pocket. He went to a cook-shop, and for threepence bought three slices of baked plum-pudding.

As he was devouring these, a van drew up outside the shop, and a burly, jovial-looking driver descended. After putting the nosebags on the horses, he entered the shop, and sat down in one of the compartments to his dinner.

But it was the name on the cover of the van that attracted Harry—"Limehouse."

The van came from Limehouse! That was the place, Harry recalled, where the body had been found with the scarlet cross. It was the reading of the paragraph about the man's death that had so strangely moved Pierre on the afternoon of his duel with Paul Lamaret.

Harry kept his eye upon the word as one mesmerized. He began to wonder whether it would be possible to get any further information about the man's death beyond the meagre intelligence contained in the newspaper report.

He had plenty of time on his hands. Why could he not visit Limehouse? The more he thought of it, the more the idea grew upon him. Yes; he would go there.

He finished his dinner, and waited outside until the carman had finished his.

Presently the man came out, and commenced taking the nosebags from his horses.

"Are you going to Limehouse, sir?" asked Harry. "Yes, my lad," said the carman, looking up at Harry in some surprise. "What for?"

"Well, as I'm going there, I wanted to ask you if you could give me a lift."

The carman looked at him searchingly for a moment. "Jump up!" he said, evidently satisfied with the scrutiny.

Soon they were jolting along in the direction of Limehouse.

"Know anybody at Limehouse, my lad?" asked the carman presently.

Harry was at first nonplussed how to answer. He could not very well tell the man the nature of his visit.

"No, sir. I only wanted to see what the place was like."

The carman again looked at him sharply for an instant; then his broad, round face grew broader and rounder still, his shoulders shook, and he broke into a hearty laugh.

"Well, youngster, you're about the first one I've ever known pay a visit to that quarter of the town for choice. People mostly go there because they can't help themselves. I don't live there because I like it, I can tell you."

"Oh, you live there, then?"

"Live there and work there—have done so for the last fifteen year. It's right enough for me—my tough hide can stand anything. It ain't so good for poor Phil."

"Poor Phil?" queried Harry.

"Yes; my boy. He's a cripple." A deep shadow fell over the jovial face of the carman. In an instant his sunny nature was changed.

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir. Your only son?"

"No; not me only boy. There are three or four more of 'em; but we somehow cling to him the most because he's a cripple. He might have been as strong as you are, hadn't his mother dropped him from her arms when he was a baby, through two scoundrels fighting with knives in our house."

"Fighting with knives?" queried Harry.

"Yes; with knives. You look a bit scared—you don't think it's possible in a civilised land. But it's a fact, and I was reading of a similar thing in this morning's paper, only that was with swords and not with knives. And I believe it's part of the same gang as fought in my house, for the man as was killed had a scarlet cross on his breasts. So had the man as fell in my house."

"What!" cried Harry, pricking up his ears. "A scarlet cross—how strange!"

"And there are stranger things behind it all, I guess."

"But what were they doing in your house?" asked the astonished boy.

"Well, at that time, you see, I had a little waterside beer-house. It was one drizzling winter-night, getting on towards dusk. I was out on business with the brewer, when a stranger entered, and told the missis he expected a friend. Could she oblige him with a private-room. We had a room which was a cut above the taproom, and the missis told him he was welcome to that if it would suit. He said it would, ordered a bottle of wine, and told her to never mind the change."

"The missis naturally thought she had a good customer; but that was the worst customer we ever had. He ruined the business. Well, he hadn't been there very long when a second stranger came in. The missis directed him to the room where his supposed friend was awaiting him. They hadn't been together very long, when the missis heard a clashing sound coming from the room in which the two strangers was."

"She had just lifted Phil from the cradle at the time, and went towards the room with him in her arms. As she did so, there was a cry of pain from the room, the door was flung open, and one of the men rushed out. On looking into the room the missis saw, to her horror, that the other man lay groaning on the ground. The sudden fright was so great that she dropped the child from her arms; and that fall crippled him for life."

"But the fallen man?" cried Harry eagerly.

"Well, luckily I came in at that moment, and found him in the potman's arms. The wound, after all, was a very slight one. It had been aimed straight for the heart; but the knife, or rather dagger, had struck on a button and glanced aside. But on opening the man's shirt, and looking at the wound, I saw, to my amazement, a scarlet cross tattooed on the skin."

"What became of the injured man?"

"Well, when he found that it was only a scratch, he was anxious to hush the affair up. He put five golden sovereigns into my hand, explaining that my wine had been too strong for his friend and had made him quarrelsome."

"I was ready enough to take the money and keep the affair quiet, because the police had been down on me six months before for a dispute that occurred at the bar, and I was afraid this second row would tell against my licence."

"But I've cursed both the men ever since. Ill-luck dogged me after that. Poor Phil became a cripple, and business got so bad that I had to leave the house and become a carman to one of my customers. Hallo! There's Phil waiting for me as usual."

He pointed with his whip to a cripple on crutches, who was standing at the corner of a street waiting the approach of the van.

Harry, glancing into the burly carman's face, saw that his eyes were moist. He pulled up the waggon where the lad was standing, got down from his seat, and lifted the cripple tenderly in his strong arm into the waggon.

Harry looked at the cripple, not only with interest but with pity. The curse that had blighted the poor cripple's life was commencing its work on his.

When would the mystery unravel itself? And where would it all end?

No contrast could have been greater than that between the strong, burly carman and his son. The cripple's face was thin and very pale; but his eyes shone with uncommon brightness now that he was seated by his father's side.

The father commenced eagerly inquiring about all the lad had been doing during the morning, taking interest in every little detail told him by Phil.

Harry was burning to ask him one or two questions; but it seemed like profanation to interrupt the happy conversation between the two.

At length the waggon again stopped.

"Here you are, my lad. I go no further," said the waggoner.

"Thank you very much," said Harry, as he prepared to descend. "By the by, would you mind telling me if you ever heard anything more about those two strangers who fought in your house?"

"No; but I firmly believe that the man who escaped was the man who was found in the Thames the other day not far from here. That was Heaven's judgment on him. And another remarkable coincidence is that the inquest is going to be held on him this very afternoon at the house where he fought so many years ago—my old tavern, the Waterman's Arms!"

The inquest to be held that afternoon! Harry looked up at the burly driver speechless with astonishment.

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

WITTY WILL WYNN.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A CLOWN.

(Continued.)

"My sister. Our landlady turned us out of our lodgings—not because we couldn't pay the rent, but because she said she found out we were low, clowning people; and we couldn't find other rooms, and we should have been wandering about all night if you hadn't come along."

They climbed into the van. So tired was Ada that she soon fell asleep on some soft bales; but Will chattered away merrily with the carrier, who was a good-natured man, and was proud beyond measure at having a chance of making the boy-clown's acquaintance. Reaching Manchester, Will and Ada, after heartily thanking him, parted from the carrier, and then, having made a hearty breakfast, took train for London.

"I think we're all right now, Ada," said Will, as the train steamed into Euston; "and as soon as I've got you rooms, I'm going to find out a good solicitor. There are lots of things to be done yet. I wonder what's become of Pat. I feel ashamed at having left him to take care of himself; but he's well able to do that, and I had to think of you first!"

But Will was destined to meet with one disappointment. Reaching the small house in Fulham where Mrs. Wynn had lived, he was told that she had left some time ago, and had been entirely lost sight of. There had been many questions that he had wanted to ask her, for he was bent upon solving the mystery of his birth.

"Well, Ada," he said, "we must make the best of a bad job. We'll see if we can get some quiet rooms somewhere for you, and then I vote we enjoy ourselves. Let's go to a theatre or something. We want cheering up after our past experiences."

But we must return for a while to Oldham.

The carrier, who had taken Will and Ada to Manchester, had returned, and, happening to drop into a public-house where Sleuth Slymer and Joe Grix had adjourned for refreshment, began to tell the landlord of his encounter with the famous boy-clown.

Slymer pricked up his ears. He drew aside the carrier and questioned him. Then, bidding Grix follow him, hurried out.

"We're on the track now," he whispered; "they've gone up to London. It's a big place; but I know my way about. And if we could come across them—well, Coggles should have his ward back, and as for the boy-clown—"

He put his lips to Joe Grix's ears, and whispered something. The ex-clown gave a horrible grimace.

"But is it safe?" he asked, glancing quickly round as if he feared someone was standing at his elbow.

"Safe!" echoed Sleuth Slymer; "of course it is! There's a little house by the riverside—a quiet place—the old woman who keeps it is half-blind and very deaf. There's a room at the back. I sometimes stay there. There's a trapdoor in the floor, and the river at full tide rushes underneath. That's all! But come, we must see Coggles, and then get off to London at once."

Half an hour's private interview with Coggles, and then Slymer, accompanied by Grix, paid a visit to his rooms.

"I'm going to make a complete alteration in my appearance," said the private detective. "Thimble-rigging Joe's played out."

Entering into the room that was filled with clothes and wigs, he proceeded to make the necessary change. Grix watched him with gazing wonderment. First of all, Thimble-rigging Joe became Sleuth Slymer again, and then, a quarter of an hour later, Sleuth Slymer had become a white-haired old parson, his ferret eyes concealed by a pair of smoked spectacles.

"Wonderful!" gasped Joe Grix—"wonderful! Blessed if anyone would spot you!"

Slymer chuckled.

"No, I think not. I'm the Rev. Stephen Stubbles now. Come up from the country to see the sights of London town. Oh, I'm so innocent, and I don't know my way about London—oh, no!"

"But what about me?" asked Grix; "if that clowning little beast catches sight of me, he'll recognise me!"

"But he mustn't. As soon as we get to London you must go to the house by the river—and wait! Leave it to me to find Will Wynn, and decoy him there!"

Will had secured a room for Ada in a quiet street just off the

Strand. He himself intended to sleep at a private hotel a few doors off.

"And now, Ada, let's go to the Lyceum and see Sir Henry Irving."

How they enjoyed that evening at the theatre! Ada had never been in a theatre before, and when it was all over, she gave a deep sigh of regret.

"It's been just lovely, Will," she said, as they passed out.

"Well," said Will, "we'll go again somewhere else to-morrow night. My leave is not yet up."

They did not notice a white-haired old parson, wearing dusky spectacles, and carrying a guide-book and a badly-rolled umbrella, who was following them at a respectable distance.

Reaching the house where Ada was staying, Will said good-night.

"You've nothing to fear now, Ada. I don't think either of us are likely to be traced. I shall come round for you early to-morrow morning. Good-night!"

"I beg your pardon, but—but I'm afraid I've lost my way. I'm a stranger to London, and an old man. Could you tell me how to find my way to Lafton Street; I only know it's not very far from Blackfriars Bridge."

A white-haired, clerically dressed old gentleman had stopped Will as he was moving away.

"I don't know Lafton Street," said Will; "but Blackfriars Bridge isn't so far off. I can tell you how to find it!"

"Dear, dear," said the old man; "London is so bewildering."

"Well," said Will, feeling sorry for the poor old gentleman, "I'm in no hurry. I'll show you the way as far as the bridge."

"Oh, thank you—oh, thank you! That is indeed an act of charity!"

And the ferret eyes behind the smoked glasses lit up with a malignant gleam of triumph.

Will was feeling a trifle tired, but he felt sorry for the grey-haired old man, who seemed such an utter stranger to London. When they reached Blackfriars Bridge, where he had intended to leave him, the old man still appeared so hopelessly lost that he changed his mind.

"It's somewhere on the other side," he said vaguely; "but I'm so unused to London. Dear me, dear me!"

"All right," answered Will, "let's get across; we're sure to meet a policeman before long, and he'll set us right."

"I'm sure," went on the old man, "I'm deeply indebted to you. It is most charitable and kind of you to accompany me."

Sleuth Slymer was singularly clever at altering his voice—he imitated the quavering accents of old age in a wonderful fashion.

Once across the bridge, the old man suddenly seemed to recognise his surroundings.

"Oh, yes, now I know my way. But you will come with me to my rooms, won't you? They are very humble, but I have taken you out of your way, and I can't let you go back without some refreshment—teetotal, of course. But you might find a bottle of gingerbeer refreshing!"

Will suppressed a smile. But he would not have smiled had he only known that he was being lured into a death-trap.

"Thank you. I'll come in for a few moments."

They had turned down a narrow, ill-lighted street, the houses on one side were practically standing on the edge of the river. Will could not help remarking to himself that the old clergyman had not chosen a very savoury neighbourhood to live in.

The old man at his side seemed to have read his thoughts.

"It is a dreary neighbourhood," he said, "but I have a mission. I wish to see how the poor of London live. Ah, it is a strange world, full of contrasts. It is wrong to shut our eyes to the poverty and misery around us. We should all of us—each in our own humble way—endeavour to alleviate distress!"

Truly noble sentiments, but scarcely appropriate, coming as they did from the lips of such an unutterable scoundrel as the disguised Sleuth Slymer.

They had reached a tumbledown, dark little house that stood by itself on the riverside. No lights shone out from the windows.

The old man drew out a key, and prepared to open the door.

"You will come in, won't you? If not, I shall fancy that you are too proud to enter my poor little place!"

Will had hesitated, but now, rather than hurt his feelings, he followed him into the badly-lighted passage. The old man closed the door and bolted it.

"My little room is at the back."

And taking down a dirty, smelling lamp from a bracket, he led the way into a room at the far end of the passage.

Will followed him in. As he did so, his eyes fell on the huge figure of a man who was lying asleep on a couch, and snoring heavily. He could not see his face as his back was turned to him; but there was something strangely familiar to him about the huge form.

Click!

The old man had quickly locked the door, and stood with his back against it. There was something ominous about the sound

**DON'T FORGET OUR GREAT DERBY DAY STORY
NEXT FRIDAY.**

and action. Will turned sharply round. As he did so, the man on the couch awoke, sat up, and rubbed his eyes.

It was Joe Grix. The moment his eyes fell on Will, a fierce oath escaped his lips. He sprang to his feet, and before Will could face round again—he had turned his back to the couch when the door had been locked—rushed down upon him, and fastened his arms round him in a bearish grip. Like lightning it flashed through Will's brain in whose clutches he was. He had felt those cruel arms round him before. In vain he struggled to free himself.

"Help! help! help!" he shrieked; "you cowardly brute—let go!—you've taken me from behind; but I know you, Joe Grix!"

"Hold your noise!" Speaking in a voice very different to what he had been lately using, the disguised Sleuth Slymer had whipped out a handkerchief, and approached Will from the front. One of Will's arms was free, and he let drive. Slymer reeled back, dazed and half stunned. But, a moment later, recovering himself, he returned to the attack; at the same time Joe Grix tightened his grip, slowly squeezing the breath out of Will's body.

"You little brute!" he hissed, "do you think I've forgotten you. No! I've always sworn to be revenged, and I am going to be now! You don't leave this place alive!"

Despite a panting for breath, Will still struggled gamely. He knew that he was fighting for his life. Strange thoughts—agonising thoughts—crowded through his brain. If the villains into whose clutches he had fallen worked their will, what would become of Ada? Even in that awful moment the brave little fellow's thoughts reverted to her. She would be alone, with no one to protect her.

Again he shouted in the hope of attracting assistance. But the house stood alone. The cry died away unheard.

"Quick!" roared Joe Grix; "gag him!—stop his noise! Curse you; do you want to bring the police down on us!"

Sleuth Slymer darted in again. Grix, still gripping Will round the body with one arm, with the other struck him a blow that robbed him of his senses.

A hoarse cry of triumph burst from Slymer as the great brute flung the senseless lad, limp and unresisting, on the couch.

"Curse you, Slymer, you're no good! You leave all the work to me. Why didn't you gag him?"

"It's all very well. But he was working his arms and legs like a windmill. Look at my nose, where he hit me. I couldn't get near him!"

"Don't palaver! Make fast his hands and feet. Stuff up his mouth. He's only stunned. The water might revive him. Then pull up the trap."

Sleuth Slymer did as he was told. A moment later Will opened his eyes. For a moment he glared wildly round him. Then everything that had happened returned to him.

Grix, like the fiendish brute he was, could not resist the temptation of torturing him. He pointed to where Sleuth Slymer had raised up a trapdoor in the floor. Through the opening came the faint sound of rushing water.

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

The Editor's Chat with his Readers.



Below I give the names of the winners in the "Nations" Competition.

As the first prize is carried off by a lady, I have given the special prize of 10s. to a gentleman.

The names of those who have won consolation prizes I am compelled to omit as they would take up too much room.

If, however, you have won a prize you will have received it by this time.

A FIVE POUND NOTE

has been sent to Miss Elsie Drysdale, 12, St. John's Road, St. Leonard's-on-Sea.

The Special Prize of 10s. has been awarded to Mr. J. C. Dear, 3, Ethel Street, Larcom Street, Walworth, S.E.

WATCHES HAVE BEEN WON BY:

Mr. C. W. Spencer, 64, St. Dunstan's Road, Hammersmith, W.; Mr. F. W. Keenan, "Devon House," 5, Howard Road, Southville, Bristol; Miss G. Ridley, Bratoff Rectory, Burgh, R.S.O.; Mr. T. Johnson, Pelton Fell, Chester-le-Street, Durham; Mr. G. Drew, 32, Friar Street, Southwark, S.E.; and Mr. W. Oliver, 6, Station Buildings, Gloucester Road, S.W.

EACH OF THE FOLLOWING HAS BEEN SENT A POKET-KNIFE:

Mr. R. J. Hendley, Woolwich Common; Mr. G. W. Skillings, Edinburgh; Mr. Alfred Baker, Rotherhithe, S.E.; Mr. J. S. Ings, S. Wimbledon; Mr. E. Ryan, Dublin; Mr. H. Bradford, Brighton; Mr. T. Harrison, Hulme; Mr. H. Bean, Leeds; Mr. B. Knight, Fiscoard; Mr. J. Seymour, Bootle; Mr. W. Lucas, Nottingham; Mr. A. Smith, Dundee, N.B.; Mr. T. Hendley, Woolwich; Mr. A. T. Curl, Great Berkhamstead; Mr. H. Jones, Havod; Mr. H. H. L. Jones, Camberley; Mr. J. W. Lowe, Nottingham; Mr. M. Hunter, Chester; Mr. J. Webster, Smethwick; Mr. W. G. Bellamy, Regent's Park, N.W.; Mr. H. Bullivant, Lewisham, S.E.; Mr. C. Wells, Lincoln; Mr. G. Riley, Holborn, W.C.; Mr. A. Cramphorn, Leytonstone; Mr. C. Howard, Leytonstone; Mr. F. D. Nicholson, Islington, N.; Mr. J. Taylor, Newcastle-on-Tyne; Mr. H. Parsons, Pudworth; Mr. W. Deakin, Heath Town; Miss R. Const, Clerkenwell Road, E.C.; Mr. W. Murray, Nottingham; Mr. C. Merryweather, Birmingham; Mr. E. E. Dunn, Dublin; Mr. G. Scanes, London, N.; Mr. E. G. Laker, Dorset; Miss A. M. Jenkins, Morriston; Mr. W. G. Slipp, Bath; Mr. W. Smith, Falkirk; Mr. W. Ellis, Richmond, S.W.; Mr. C. Const, Clerkenwell Road, E.C.; Mr. W. R. Arnold, Morriston; Mr. J. E. Const, Clerkenwell Road, E.C.; Miss Mulliner, Leytonstone; Mr. W. Cramphorn, Leytonstone; Mr. A. T. Stubbles, Reading; Mr. J. Davies, Oswestry; Miss E. M. Cramphorn, Leytonstone; Miss E. Grace, Victoria Station, S.W.; Mr. E. Cramphorn, Wanstead; and Mr. H. Barker, Openshaw.

A STAMP ALBUM HAS BEEN WON BY:

Mr. H. Morgan, Liverpool; Mr. W. Day, Oxford; Mr. W. Blake, Palmer's Green; Mr. C. Johnston, Edinburgh, N.B.; Mr. R. B. Bitty, Hammersmith, W.; Mr. J. Watts, Princes Risborough; Mr. H. Robertson, Ashby-de-la-Zouch; Mr. G. Kimberley, Kingston-on-Thames; Mr. M. Brown, Pimlico, S.W.; Mr. E. Jenkins, Morriston; Mr. B. Incoe, Wolverhampton; Mr. G. F. Vaughan, Preston; Mr. W. H. Higgins, Lydney; Miss E. R. Price, Cardiff; Mr. W. Roworth, London, N.W.; Mrs. B. Rhodes, London, S.E.; Miss D. R. Thomas, Rhyl; Mr. J. Williams, Towyn; Mr. R. Thompson, Woolwich; Mr. R. W. Pethen, Baker Street, W.; Miss Dooley, Dublin; Mr. W. Tynan, Southend; Mr. D. M. Guthrie, Dublin; Mr. W. Hudson, Oxford; Corporal O. Vials, York; Mr. J. Jones, Shrewsbury; Mr. J. H. Connors jun., Kentish Town, N.W.; Mr. L. V. Saward, Holloway, N.; Mr. H. Phillips, Liverpool; Mr. F. L. Willoughby, Islington, N.; Mr. J. Cropper, South Wimbledon; Mr. J. McCauliff, Chatham; Mr. J. W. Simpson, Sunderland; Mr. D. Byers, Crewe; Mr. J. Shuttleworth, Gorton; Mr. S. M. Gale, Alverstoke; G. Pound, Honiton; Mr. A. L. Davies, Llandrindod Wells; Mr. J. Wren, London, N.; Mrs. H. M. Wright, Hammersmith, W.; Mr. W. H. Mupon, Altrincham; Mr. F. W. Grew, King's Lynn; Mr. R. Browning, South Shields; Mr. H. E. Hatcher, Birkenhead; Mr. W. E. Hughes, Falmouth; Mr. C. J. Port, Leyton; Mr. H. Whittle, Darwen; Mr. H. Bell, Fulham, S.W.; Mr. T. Wyke, Everton; and Mr. W. Tomlins, Gloucester.

A PENCIL-CASE HAS BEEN FORWARDED TO:

Mr. T. Price, Cardiff; Mr. A. Hutton, Bradford; Mr. H. Dawson, Halifax; Mr. F. W. Jenney, London, N.W.; Mr. A. Wilson, Manningham; Mr. W. F. Harris, Southampton; Mr. S. J. Hobbs, Bridgewater; Mr. T. Ring, Greenock, N.B.; Mr. J. Johnstone, St. Leonard's; Mr. A. R. Thomas, Rhyl; Mr. E. Osborne, Birmingham; Mr. T. A. Orange, Lincoln; Mr. R. Scanes, Stalybridge; Mr. J. Hosker, West Birkenhead; Mr. A. Hindson, Southport; Mr. B. Turvey, Staple Hill; Mr. G. Wren, Dalston, N.E.; Mr. P. Simon, Chelsea, S.W.; Mr. G. Austin, Enfield; Mr. J. Williams, Stoke Newington, N.; Mr. H. Swayne, Londonderry; Mr. V. Abraham, Putney, S.W.; Mr. E. Berry, Nottingham; Mr. W. Roberts, Batley; Mr. J. Rosier, Bradford-on-Avon; Mr. J. Whittington, St. Helen's; Mr. W. S. Marchison, Hampstead, N.W.; Mr. P. H. Thompson, Cardiff; Mr. W. H. Parkes, London, N.E.; Mr. A. Foote, U.J.L., Caterham; Mr. G. Monk, Brighton; Mr. A. H. Veal, Woking; Mr. W. Lever, Pendleton; Mr. A. H. Lewellyn, Ross; Mr. T. Griffiths, Manchester; Mr. C. A. Ive, Greenwich, S.E.; Mr. L. Neligan, South Liverpool; Mr. W. Richardson, Ulverston; Mr. L. G. Wright, North Shields; Mr. S. Melville, Liverpool; Mr. W. Garlick, Sheffield; Mr. W. Lucas, Nottingham; Mr. G. Smith, Cheltenham; Mr. J. Newsome, Brindle Heath; Miss E. Burk, Wolverhampton; Mr. J. Brown, Perth; Mr. A. J. Romeril, Jersey; Mr. S. Potts, Kentish Town, N.W.; Mr. W. E. Booth, Purfleet; and Mr. J. Clark, Bermondsey, S.E.

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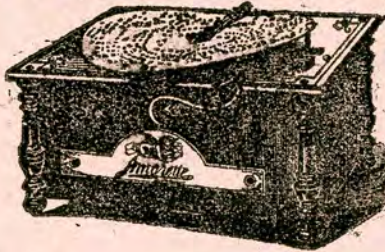
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