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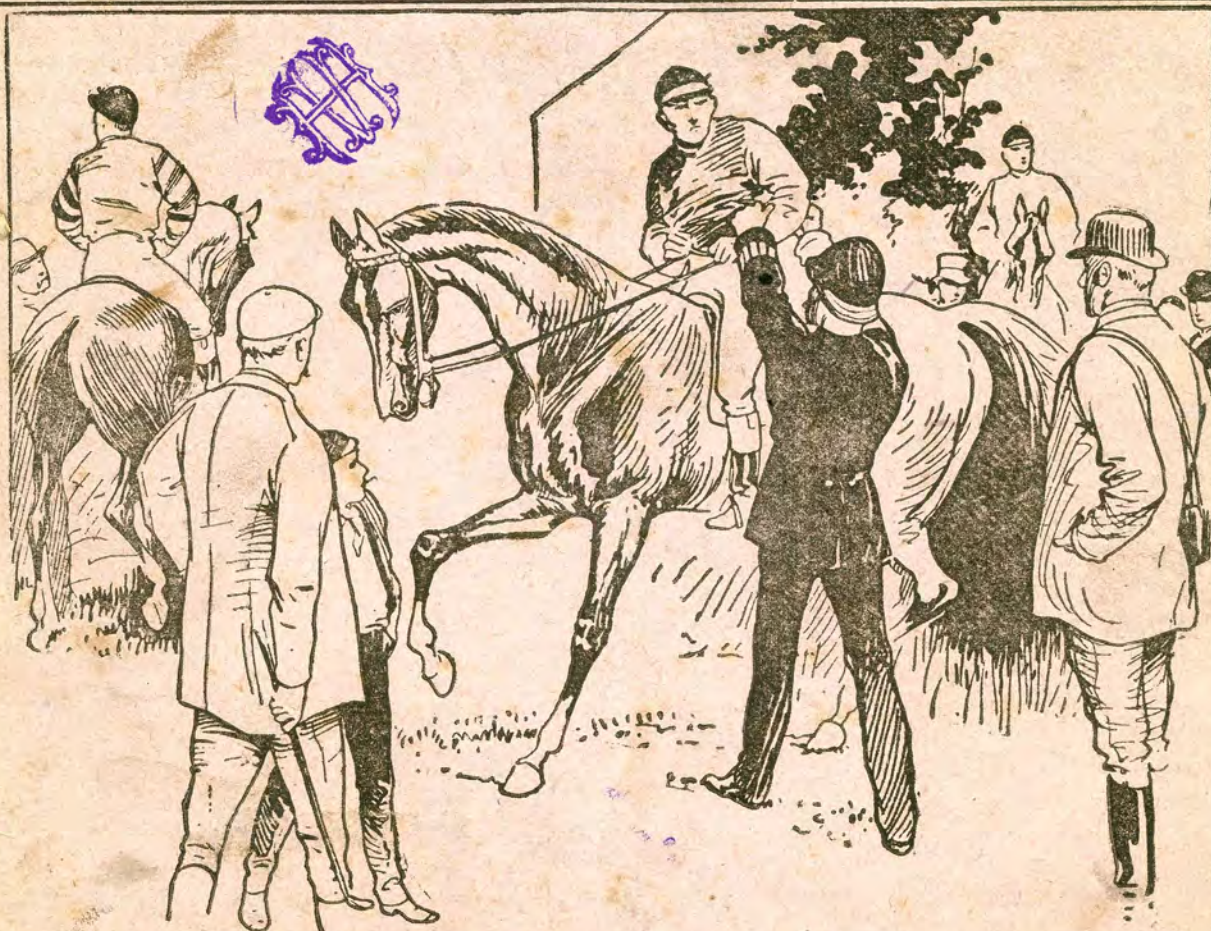
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BRIBED TO LOSE.



No sooner had the jockey regained the horse's back than a policeman made his way through the crowd to Firefly's side, and said: "Sam Holloway, I arrest you for the wilful murder of Isaac Brassington on the morning of September the 3rd of last year."

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Bribed To Lose!

A Thrilling Derby-Day Story.

By JOHN HERBERT.

CHAPTER 1.

THE FAVOURITE FOR THE LINCOLN—A BAD START —A TIGHT FINISH—WHAT'S WON?

The sun shone brilliantly down upon the famous Lincoln "mile," and the thousands of sporting folk who had congregated thereon to witness the first great encounter of the flat racing season.

As usual, the field for this important race was a large one, and no less than thirty-three jockeys were sporting silk for the great event. Many of the horses were, of course, rank outsiders, who did not stand the shadow of a chance, but, on the other hand, some well-trying "flyers" were entered for the race.

The Quaker was favourite, though Droymond and Honeysuckle ran him very close in the betting. It was generally thought that the battle for first position would be fought out between these three, though from the freedom with which one of the largest bookmakers in Tattersall's ring, one Benjamin Strongarm, laid the favourite, people began to grow a little sceptical about the animal. As a consequence, it fell back in the betting to third position. When the bell sounded "go to the post," six to one was freely taken by Strongarm about the Quaker; Droymond had advanced to evens; and three to one against Honeysuckle was taken and offered.

Many people were surprised that such a splendid animal as the Quaker should have fallen back in the betting at the last moment. Yesterday he was hot favourite, but now five or six horses promised to start at closer odds. Ugly rumours soon began to circulate in the ring—the horse was not in condition—it had sprained the sinews of one of its hind legs and was walking lame—Sam Holloway, the crack jockey, had refused to ride it at the last moment—and countless others, all without the slightest foundation.

As Maurice Clifford, the young owner of the Quaker, entered the ring, his eyes met those of Benjamin Strongarm, the bookmaker. A close observer would have noticed that that short look on either side was not merely one of recognition. It told that there was no love lost between them.

Maurice Clifford was soon besieged by friends, all anxious to know what ailed the Quaker.

"There is nothing whatever the matter with the horse," said Clifford; "he is as sound as a bell, and Archer (his trainer) says that he is in the pink of condition. Sam Holloway is on the course, and expresses himself quite confident that the Quaker will be first past the winning-post to-day."

There was a fiendish gleam in the eyes of Benjamin Strongarm as he overheard these remarks.

"Six to one the Quaker! Six to one the Quaker!" he shouted lustily.

Maurice Clifford turned quickly round and faced him.

"I will take you in thousands!" he said. And the bet was registered.

Clifford had already backed his horse for a considerable sum, but this tempting offer was too much for him, and, more than that, he felt he would rather win one thousand from Strongarm than three from anyone else; he thoroughly hated the man, and he knew that he as thoroughly hated himself in return.

In his own mind, though his luck had certainly been out for a considerable time, Clifford had little doubt that the Quaker would win. His trainer had assured him that the horse was in the pink of condition, and with the weight he had to carry could easily beat anything else in the field. And, besides this, was not Sam Holloway, his jockey, reputed to be the best horseman in the country? "Until to-day," he said to himself, "the public have been with us in thinking that the Quaker stood a better chance of winning than anything else. It's all the work of Benjamin Strongarm. It is he who has lengthened the odds. He stands to lose thousands over the race. What can make the man feel so confident that my horse will lose? If the Quaker wins he's a ruined man; and if it loses—well, I suppose I shall be at the end of my tether, and there will be nothing left for me but—"

His reverie was broken by the lusty cheers of the onlookers as the horses went for a preliminary canter. The Quaker looked fit and well, as Clifford had said, and with Sam Holloway in blue and white upon his back, he looked all over a winner. The splendid appearance of the Quaker, and the news that its owner had backed it to win him six thousand only a minute or so before, steadied the slump considerably, and the Quaker went to the post at four to one against.

The thirty-three horses lined up to the starting post, the beautiful rich silk jackets of the jockeys, with the full glare of the sun falling upon them, presenting a magnificent field of colour. The gigantic crowd was silent. It seemed that they almost feared to breathe lest they should frighten the horses. The excitement was intense. Gradually the horses worked up into line, and the white flag dropped. The pent-up feelings of the enormous crowd found vent in a tremendous shout:

"They're off!"

And as this great cry rang through the air the horses dashed forward—at all events, thirty-two of them did. One was badly left at the post—it was the Quaker! Beads of perspiration at once rose upon Maurice Clifford's forehead. Was he to lose the vast sums he had invested on the animal without even a run for his money? He shook with excitement from head to foot.

Like a streak of lightning the Quaker dashed forward. He had only lost a second or so, but that had been sufficient to give such splendid horses as Droymond and Honeysuckle a substantial lead.

Until half the course had been completed the running was made first by one outsider and then another, with the Quaker always in the rear. At the half mile, however, Droymond assumed the lead, and a hearty cheer broke from a thousand throats. Close behind him followed Honeysuckle, and at a quarter mile from home the Quaker drew up nearly level with the leaders, amidst a tremendous outburst of enthusiasm, for the British sportsman is always partial to a horse who has been "under a cloud."

As though nerved to greater efforts by this popular outburst in his favour, the Quaker managed to get his nose in

Quick as thought, he whipped a revolver from his breast pocket, and pointed it excitedly at Clifford.



front, and the gigantic throng of excited sportsmen sent up another vociferous shout.

"The Quaker wins! The Quaker wins!"

Nearer and nearer to the winning-post came the fine thoroughbreds at terrible speed—the Quaker, Droymond, Honeysuckle—only a few feet separating either of them.

"The Quaker wins! The Quaker wins!" still continued to roar from thousands of lusty throats.

As they neared the post it was seen that Droymond and Honeysuckle drew nearer, and the three horses dashed past the post as though locked together.

Nobody knew which horse had won the race. Some declared that Quaker was first, whilst others supported Droymond and Honeysuckle. Never before had there been such a tight finish for the Lincolnshire. The excitement was intense. In the ring only one man bore himself with equanimity. Not a muscle of his face moved, except, perhaps, that the fendish glitter in his eye had become intensified. He was still calmly smoking his cigar. That man was Benjamin Strongarm, the bookmaker! And he stood to lose twenty thousand pounds if the judge should declare the Quaker to be the winner!

Quickly the numbers were run up. "Three—two—four." 1. Droymond; 2. The Quaker; 3. Honeysuckle.

The crowd roared itself hoarse as the owner of Droymond led that animal back to the paddock. Never before in the history of the Lincolnshire had there been such a race!

As Sam Holloway left the weighing-room he met the owner of the Quaker.

"Sorry I couldn't win, sir," he said. "I got every ounce out of him I could."

Maurice Clifford paid up his losings like a true sportsman with a smile on his face, though he well knew that he was now an almost ruined man.

CHAPTER 2.

THE FIREFLY FOR THE DERBY—SAM HOLLOWAY IS SUSPECTED—ONE LAST PLUNGE—HOLLOWAY GIVES UP "CRONK" RACES—BENJAMIN STRONGARM'S REVENGE.

Maurice Clifford was seated in the cosy little library at his country house at Eltham, ruminating upon his experiences at Lincoln. He had done very badly indeed in the races, and this was a terrible start on the flat. He had been hit very hard indeed, and he scarcely knew whether he could recover.

At the early age of twenty-one Clifford inherited his father's vast fortune, and besides being known as one of the richest men in London, he soon acquired a reputation as one of the best sportsmen in the country. His father had been a great lover of horses, and kept some fine stables at Eltham, to which his only son succeeded at his death. Maurice Clifford's whole life had been spent amongst horses, and he had learned to love horseracing at a very early age. What he did not know about horses was not worth knowing. It is said that he could "spot" the winner of a race better than anyone else in the sporting world. But he never backed other people's horses; he confined his operations to his own. He loved horseracing, as his father had done before him, for the sport alone, although he always backed his own horses whenever he thought they had a chance of winning.

Everything had gone well with him for the first two years of his racing life. He had won several big races, and had cleared the expenses of keeping up the stables. But since then everything had been going wrong—a terrible fate seemed to be haunting him. During the last two months of the praiseworthy flat-racing season he had not won a single race, and the same ill-luck had been with him during the whole of the winter over the hurdles. He felt this long series of reverses very keenly, and at last he grew desperate. The spirit of gambling took hold of him, and he had plunged recklessly. And at each plunge he sank deeper and deeper into the mire! He had hitherto regarded his wealth as inexhaustible, but he now found out the mistake. The biggest fortune ever possessed by any man can quickly be lost on the Turf in a spell of bad luck. Security after security had to be sold to pay Clifford's debts of honour. If his luck did not mend he would soon be a ruined man.

Towards the close of the season he gave up hurdle racing, and waited for the flat racing to commence. He thought perhaps he would have better luck at that, and reserved himself for one final plunge. His hopes were founded on the Quaker for the Lincolnshire Handicap, the result of which the reader has learned.

And here was this handsome, finely-built young gentleman, now the heir of one of England's oldest and noblest families, sitting sorrowfully in the library at the old family mansion, contemplating the ruin and disgrace which was soon to swoop down upon him.

And he was engaged to be married to Kate Drew, one of the prettiest women in London, the daughter of an African millionaire, and one of the most prominent racing men in the country. When he thought of this his heart sank within him. He was quite prepared to lose the family estates, his vast fortune, his racehorses, his social position, but the thought that his impending ruin would rob him of his most cherished treasure—his future wife—was too terrible to contemplate. What would she and her father think of him when he had to admit that he was a ruined man?

He could picture to himself the look of contempt upon old Drew's face. He felt quite sure that he would never allow his daughter to marry a penniless aristocrat—he was too mercenary a man for that. And besides, even if he and the lady would consent, such an arrangement would not suit Clifford's independent spirit.

The future was almost too black for him to contemplate. Nine months ago, when he became engaged to Kate Drew, he was a rich man—now he was poor, and could scarcely pay twenty shillings in the pound if it came to settling up. At the time of his engagement the world seemed full of promise, but now, after only the expiration of nine months, he was upon the brink of ruin. But up to the present no one but himself knew of his terrible position. He had taken no one into his confidence. He was still as popular as ever at the National Sporting Club. He was still looked upon as a man of immense wealth, and his word was still good enough for nearly any amount.

It was indeed a peculiar coincidence that with his engagement to Kate Drew, the long string of misfortunes had commenced. But was it only a coincidence? Sometimes he thought there was more in it than a strange coincidence. And yet it seemed hard to doubt the fidelity of any of his employees. Tom Archer, his trainer, had been in the family stables all his life, and had worked his way up from stable-boy to head-trainer, and was quite devoted to his young master. In Will Stubbs the principal stable-boy he had implicit confidence, and felt quite sure that Sam Holloway the crack jockey, to whom he paid a large retainer, did his best to win with his horses, though there had been some ugly rumours about that he was not above "pulling" if a sufficient bribe was put in his way.

"If he rides 'crook' races he does it very cleverly," mused Clifford, "for he only loses by a short neck; but there is no telling what that expert horseman can do. He has pulled many a lost race out of the fire in the last few yards, much to the amazement of everyone, and if he can do that, it is not possible that he could lose in the last few yards equally as well!"

But it was hard for Clifford to doubt him—the fellow always seemed so sorry when he lost with Maurice's mounts. But perhaps the most suspicious circumstance of all was that Holloway was hand and glove with Strongarm the big bookmaker, and Clifford's avowed enemy.

Perhaps after all there was something in the rumours about Holloway! He knew that his rival Strongarm would stoop to anything to ruin him, and was it possible that he had bribed Holloway to pull his horses? He was determined to tackle the jockey on the subject at once.

Strongarm had been his rival for the hand of Kate Drew. A few days after his engagement to that lady he met the big bookmaker at the National Sporting Club, when he openly expressed his intention to be revenged, though he did not even hint the form that it would take. Clifford treated the matter very lightly, for he considered that it was quite impossible for the bookmaker to injure him in any way.

But since that date Strongarm had laid all Maurice Clifford's horses very heavily, and must have scooped in a vast amount of wealth over the transactions, for not one of them had won. Was the bookmaker taking his revenge, and at the same time making a pile of money out of it? It seemed to Clifford that such was the case.

The fire had died out in the snug little library at Eltham, in which we found Maurice Clifford seated, and presently the rising sun began to peep through the venetian blinds, paling the light of the incandescent gas-lamp which had illuminated the room during the night.

Clifford's mind was fully made up. He would make one last final plunge to retrieve his fallen fortune. He would place a tempting bait for Dame Fortune, and this time he would sink or swim. He had no ready cash or means of getting any, but he could secure abundance of credit. He had often heard of fortunes made on credit, and he decided to try it. It would be all right if it came off, but if he failed he would never be able to hold up his head again.

The Firefly, of which he was the owner, was the favourite for the coming Derby. He would go "nap" on it. He would put every penny he could upon the animal—he would stake his very existence upon that single race. If he won, all would be well. His immense fortune would come back to him. He would marry the prettiest and richest woman in London, and no one but himself would know that he had been on the brink of ruin. And if he lost? No, he could not contemplate that! He must win on

Epsom Downs. He dared not lose! Having thus made up his mind, he strolled slowly out of the house towards the stables.

"Good-morning, sir; you're up early this morning," was Tom Archer's greeting as Maurice Clifford entered the stables.

"Yes," replied the latter. "I've come to have a look at Firefly. How's he going?"

"He's getting on splendidly, sir, though we haven't quite cured him of that nasty temper yet. Will (the stable-boy) can do what he likes with him at exercise. He never bolts when Will Stubbs is on his back. I think he's got a Derby in him, sir, and by May 26th, I hope to get him as fit as a fiddle. Will Stubbs is just going to take him out for a trot."

And just then that fine specimen of a three-year-old passed out of the stables to the exercise ground. Clifford thought that he had never seen such a beautifully proportioned animal before. He looked a winner all over, and felt quite confident that he would be steered to victory on Derby day.

"Who's you going to give the mount to, sir?" inquired the trainer, with a faint touch of emotion in his voice.

"Sam Holloway, of course," replied Clifford. "If anyone can win on Firefly, Holloway's the man to do it."

"Yes, that's so," replied Archer hesitatingly. "He's the cleverest jockey on the turf, sir—but d'ye think he rides straight?"

The effect upon Clifford was electrical. Had Archer noticed it, then? He was too astounded to speak for a second or so.

"You could have won the Lincoln with the Quaker, sir, if the race had not been sold," continued Archer. "From what I heard the other night, I'm quite sure that Holloway never tried to win that race. I fancied I saw him pulling myself, but now, after what I heard, I feel quite confident he did."

"I believe you're quite right, Archer," said Clifford. "I suspected him myself. And who do you suppose is bribing him?"

"Strongarm, sir."

"I'll speak to him to day about it, Archer. I'll forgive him if he'll ride straight in the Derby. We'll see him together to-day. Of course, it will be hard to convict him of pulling, because he does it so cleverly; but once we have accused him we must stick to it and make him confess."

Maurice Clifford telegraphed for the crack jockey to call upon him that day.

At seven o'clock the same evening, Sam Holloway was shown into the library at Cannonwood Hall, where he found Maurice Clifford and Tom Archer waiting to receive him.

He was extended the same little courtesies and made quite as much fuss of as he had hitherto been accustomed upon his visits to Cannonwood Hall. He had sampled one of Maurice Clifford's fine Havanna cigars, and had partly consumed a glass of fine old port, with which the cellars at Cannonwood were well stocked.

The conversation, as may have been expected, had been mostly upon racing topics.

"You ought to pull off the Derby with Firefly," said Holloway; "he's a beautiful animal. The race ought to be a walk over for him."

"Yes, he certainly ought to win the race, and I am backing him heavily to do so," replied Clifford coolly and calmly; "that is, if the jockey rides straight!"

Sam Holloway instantly rose to his feet, a savage scowl came over his face, and quick as thought he whipped a revolver from his breast-pocket, and pointed it excitedly at Clifford. "Withdraw those words, or I fire!" he shouted. But Tom Archer gave him little opportunity to execute that wild threat. Instantly he snatched the poker from the fire-place, and struck a tremendous blow at the jockey's extended arm, sending the revolver clattering to the floor.

Holloway stooped to pick it up with his left hand, for all the use had been knocked out of his right with the trainer's terrible blow; but Archer was before him, and secured the weapon.

All this time Maurice Clifford had been sitting calmly in the comfortable dlebag chair. "Sit down, Holloway," he said, without the slightest trace of emotion in his voice, "and we will talk this little matter over." And without another word Holloway resumed his seat.

"You must have known, Holloway," continued Clifford, "that for some time past ugly rumours have been going about that you do not always ride straight. I happen to know that you did not try to win the Lincolnshire with the Quaker. You sold the race!"

"It's a lie!" hissed Holloway; "who told you that? I have never sold a race! Would not my riding licence be suspended if the Jockey Club found out that I rode 'cronk' races, or had any suspicion whatever that I did not ride fair?"

"Certainly they would," replied Clifford; "but you are too clever for them. You ride such close finishes that they do not even suspect you. You are the only jockey in the world who can win or lose by a short neck with any certainty. You lost the Lincoln by a few inches—you know that you could have won it by many lengths if you had liked."

A curse escaped the jockey's lips. "Who told you this?" he asked excitedly.

"We did not want any telling," replied Clifford, "both Archer and I noticed it. You are far too friendly with that scoundrel Strongarm. I know he wants to ruin me, and I know that you have been assisting him to do so for the last nine months. No wonder my horses could never win—no wonder I always lost by a short neck after a tight race. I know it's true, Holloway, and I can prove it, so you may as well own up that Strongarm has been bribing you to 'pull' my horses. The calm way he lays them is sufficient to prove that. Now, own up to it, Holloway, and, so far as I can see, it's the only thing for you to do; and I'll promise not to report the matter to the Jockey Club if you'll ride straight for me on Firefly for the Derby. I have lost heavily by your treachery in the past, but I am content to forgive you if you'll do what I ask. If I report you to the Jockey Club, you know that your riding licence would be suspended, probably for life."

"You're quite right, Mr. Clifford," said Holloway deliberately. "I've been 'got at' by that scoundrel Strongarm. He's got me in his clutches, but come what will I'll ride straight for you on Firefly for the Derby, and in every other race. I'll give up 'cronk' races altogether. I told Strongarm that his game would be discovered, and, Heaven knows, Mr. Clifford, I would have ridden straight for you if I had dared, but that villain Strongarm had me in his clutches, and I was compelled to ride as he told me. I'll have nothing more to do with him, Mr. Clifford, let him threaten me as much as he likes. In future I shall ride straight!"

There was a ring of sincerity about the jockey's words which convinced Maurice Clifford and his trainer that he meant to do what he said. And after that interview they had implicit confidence in him, and felt quite sure that the Firefly would be steered to victory on Derby Day.

CHAPTER 3.

HOLLOWAY VISITS STRONGARM'S TRAINING-QUARTERS—HE REFUSES TO "PULL" FIREFLY. BUT AFTERWARDS CONSENTS—A FIGHT IN THE DRAWING-ROOM—WHO SHALL BE THE RUINED MAN?

Sam Holloway intended to keep his resolution to ride straight, come what would. He had long feared that he should be found out, but he had calculated that when that dreaded event took place, he would be exposed to the Stewards of the Jockey Club, his licence consequently withdrawn, and he would be a ruined man. He knew that Maurice Clifford was a generous-hearted man, though he had never dreamed that he would forgive such terrible injuries as he had been guilty of inflicting upon him. Instead of pulling his horses in the future he would ride them as though his life depended on the issue of the race. And in this frame of mind he called at the country residence and training-quarters of his friend Benjamin Strongarm.

Strongarm was out when Holloway called, but Mike Conway, the big bookmaker's trainer, was at home.

"What oh, Sam!" was his greeting to Holloway as the latter stepped into the stable-yard. "You managed that bit at Lincoln all right. It was a splendid race—so people thought. But don't you think you ran the Quaker dangerously close? You'll overdo it some day, Sam, and be past the winning-post afore yer knows of it."

"The game's all up, Mike," responded the jockey. "Our treachery has been discovered. In future I ride no more 'cronk' races. Every mount I get will be first past the post, if I can possibly do it."

"But you'll ride the Firefly in the Derby?" asked Mike Conway excitedly.

"Certainly I shall!" replied the jockey coolly.

"And ride straight?" ejaculated the trainer, astounded.

"Yes, I shall ride him straight, Conway, and get every ounce out of the animal I can; and you can bet your bottom dollar that he will secure the Blue Riband of the Turf. I'm going to do no more of your dirty work!" said the jockey contemptuously.

"What does Strongarm say about it?" asked the trainer.

"I don't know, and I don't care! I haven't seen him yet."

"Don't you, my beauty," thought Conway. "You won't speak to Benjamin Strongarm like that, or else there'll be an end to yer."

Just then the great bookmaker stepped into the yard. He was only a young fellow of some twenty-six or seven years of age, and had spent his whole life on the Turf. He commenced as a stable-boy, but after a few years he became too rich to follow such a humble trade. He was too much of a coward to be a jockey—he had not the pluck of a gnat, so the other stable-boys told him. But what he lacked in courage he made up in cunning. He had not been in the stables more than a month before he obtained his first commission to "nobble"

one of his employer's horses. The man was a born swindler, and he did all his dirty work in such a cool, calm, collected way that not the slightest suspicion was ever directed towards him. Strongarm's cunning not only saved himself from suspicion, but he always managed to cast the shadow of guilt over someone else. Many a poor stable-lad—and even trainers and jockeys—had been sacked for crimes committed by Strongarm. He received so much money for betraying stable secrets and "nobbling" horses that, in a short time, as already stated, he became too rich to work in the humble capacity of stable-boy.

He left the stable—and right glad were all the other employees, for he was a most unpopular fellow, his very looks proclaiming him a villain—and started as a bookmaker. At this he prospered exceedingly, until at last he became the biggest bookmaker in Tattersall's Ring, and a large owner of racehorses himself.

He had a smooth tongue and a pleasant way with him, despite the treacherous look in his face, and as he stepped out into the yard to greet Sam Holloway he extended his hand to the jockey, and exclaimed, in a clear, melodious voice:

"Well, Holloway, old man, you're quite an unexpected visitor to-day; but still I'm glad to see you—you're always welcome here, you know."

Holloway took no notice of the proffered hand, but looked its owner straight in the face. There was just the faintest quiver in his voice, as he said:

"I've come to tell you, Mr. Strongarm, that in future I intend to ride straight. Mr. Clifford knows that I sold the Lincoln, and many other races, but he promises to say nothing about the matter if I act honourably towards him in future."

Strongarm looked at the jockey in astonishment.

"Come inside and we'll talk the matter over," he said.

At first Sam Holloway refused. He said that it needed no talking over, but in the end he was persuaded.

"Matters are coming to a crisis," said Strongarm, when they had reached the gorgeously furnished drawing-room.

"Clifford was hit very hard over the Lincoln. One more blow like that and he will be a ruined man, and my object will be attained. I never let any man get the better of me, you know that, Holloway; and when he came between me and Kate Drew I swore by Heaven that he should rue it, and that I should marry the girl in the end. Come now, Holloway, you won't desert an old friend? You know I've been a friend to you—"

"I tell you I'm going to ride straight in the future!" said Holloway, with some warmth.

"Promise me that Firefly shall not win the Derby," said Strongarm, "and after that you can ride as straight as you like. That shall be the last time I will ever ask a favour of you. You can have what price you name. Only mention the figure and it shall be paid."

"I will not do it all!" replied Holloway.

"What's that you say?" said Strongarm. "You defy me? I command you to pull the Firefly on the Derby! Let that horse win and you're a dead man!"

Holloway rose to his feet with a look of supreme contempt upon his face, and shouted rather than spoke:

"I refuse you, you cur!"

A smile—a wicked, fiendish smile—crept over Strongarm's face.

"Be careful what you say," he calmly said. "You refuse to sell that race, and the little secret I learned on the morning of the third of September last year will be out. You forget, sir, that you are a murderer, and that I have it in my power to—"

"It's a lie! I am innocent!" shouted Holloway, at the same time making a wild dash at the crafty Strongarm, and landing the bookmaker a terrible punch on the jaw, which sent him reeling backwards. Strongarm regained his feet, and a terrible struggle was soon proceeding, the furniture in the drawing-room being upset, and most of it smashed. There was no one else in the house at the time, so that the combatants were left to fight out the battle to the end.

When both were thoroughly exhausted and covered with bruises from head to foot, Holloway called a truce.

"I was mad to oppose you," he said. "Firefly shall not win the Derby. But remember, Benjamin Strongarm, I shall hold you to your promise—this is the last 'cronk' race I'm going to ride for you or anyone else!"

"Now you talk sensibly," replied Strongarm. "I'm sorry that this little scene should have taken place, but you started it. You always were a hot-tempered sort of fellow. Come, now, what's the figure to be? Shake hands."

"Five thousand pounds," said Holloway, as they shook hands, "and not a penny less!"

"That's a rather big sum," said Strongarm; "but it shall be paid, and in future you can please yourself how you ride,

and my lips will be for ever sealed with regard to that little affair which—"

But Strongarm saw the colour again rising to the jockey's cheeks at the mention of that incident, and he deemed it prudent to stop at once.

Before Holloway left Strongarm's house he had drawn five hundred on account, but he never intended to fulfil his contract. Even as he endorsed the cheque the bookmaker had handed him, he swore to himself that Firefly should win the Derby if it lay in his power to. He knew that Strongarm would lay the horse for any amount, and he also knew that Maurice Clifford would back it for all he was worth. One of them would be ruined after the race was over, and if he could have any voice in the matter, that one should be Benjamin Strongarm, though he well knew that with the latter's downfall his own doom would be close at hand. He would win the Derby and retrieve Maurice Clifford's lost fortune as some compensation for the great wrongs he had done him, and after that, even if Strongarm in his wrath did not denounce him as the perpetrator of that terrible crime which had robbed him of all peace of mind for the past nine months, he would deliver himself up to justice of his own free will. He was quite resigned to his fate.

CHAPTER 4.

THE FIREFLY'S TRIAL—FOUND LAME AT EXERCISE — TREACHERY — WHO NOBBLED THE FAVOURITE?

A few days after the events recorded in the last chapter it was arranged at Commonwood Hall that Firefly should be given a trial with the crack jockey Sam Holloway "up." The trial was eminently satisfactory, and more than ever convinced Maurice Clifford that the horse was capable of winning the Derby. Sam Holloway was quite enthusiastic over the matter. Although he was considered the finest jockey in the country, he had never been able to steer a horse to victory in the Derby, probably because he had never been given a mount that stood even a ghost of a chance in that great race. He had ridden winners in nearly all the other big races, and expressed the hope that this year the Derby would be added to his list of conquests. It would form, he thought, a fitting end to his career as a jockey, and perhaps—though he hardly dared to contemplate it—an end to his earthly existence.

But besides the owner, trainer, and stable-boys, there had been many other witnesses of the great horse's successful trial. It may not be generally known that the doings of a well-known horse entered for a big race, despite every precaution on the part of its owner, is spied out by innumerable "touts," whose sole duty from the break of day to the setting of the sun is to watch what goes on on the trial-ground. Of course these "touts" cannot approach too near, or they would be discovered and immediately routed; but with the aid of telescopes they generally manage to see everything that goes on. Many of them are engaged by sporting papers, and all the information they can get hold of is immediately telegraphed to London. On the morning of the Firefly's trial, besides the ordinary newspaper "touts," a man was hidden in a tree, nearly half a mile from the trial-ground, with a telescope to his eye. That man was Mike Conway, Benjamin Strongarm's trainer!

All he saw—and it was quite as much as Maurice Clifford himself—was quickly communicated to the scheming Benjamin Strongarm.

"I don't think I can rely absolutely on Sam Holloway," said Strongarm, as he heard how easily the Firefly had beaten such splendid horses as the Quaker and Flying Fish in its trial. "I think I must do the job thoroughly, Conway. It won't do to make a half-hearted job of it. What do you think about it, Conway? Two heads are better than one, you know."

"Well, sir, I think," replied the scheming rascal, "that Firefly's a 'dead cert' for the Derby, unless Sam Holloway is reliable, or—"

"Or what?" said Strongarm, rather nervously, though with a knowing wink in his eye.

"Has Clifford got his money on yet?" asked the trainer.

"Yes; he backed him to win fifty thousand yesterday at the National Sporting Club."

"Then unless we 'noble him—'" said Conway deliberately.

"Yes; that's what I was thinking," said Strongarm, before his trainer had completed the sentence. "But how are we to do it?"

"What's the job worth?"

"Well, suppose we say a couple of hundred?"

"It shall be done, sir. You can leave the matter with me."

And a smile of satisfaction crept over Mike Conway's face.

He fancied that he already had the two hundred gold coins in his pocket.

During the next few days Strongarm laid the Derby favourite very heavily. He gave almost any odds about the horse, with the result that the Firefly fell back in the betting to fourth position. Clifford hailed this change in the market price of his horse with delight, for he was able to obtain longer odds for his further investments, and consequently stood to win considerably more money over what he regarded as a dead certainty. Every bit of ready money he could scrape together was sent over to a firm of commission agents in Holland, with instructions to put it on the Firefly. He did as much on credit with all the big bookmakers as he thought they would

spurt. It might fall as it came round the famous Tattenham Corner, as many a favourite had done before it. It might show a bit of its evil temper, take the bit between its teeth, and gallop two or three times round the course before the flag fell. It might throw its jockey. It might go round the wrong side of a post, or accidentally bump against one of the other horses and be disqualified. All these probabilities and more lay between success and failure. What wonder, then, that the race should cause Clifford great anxiety? If he lost he would be a ruined man, and unable to pay five shillings in the pound. All his bright hopes for the future would be dashed to the ground, and he would have to flee the country a penniless beggar and outcast. If he won, he would still be the popular country gentleman, loved and respected by everyone as heretofore, and no one but himself would know that he had been on the brink of ruin. Whether he won or lost, it should be the last but he would ever make.

He had been tossing sleeplessly about in his bed the whole night contemplating the future. At last the dawn came, and, giving up all hope of obtaining sleep, he dressed and went to the stables to watch Firefly at exercise.

He met Archer, his head-trainer, in the yard. "How's the Firefly, keeping well?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Archer, "she's keeping very fit, and doing even better than I expected. I'm not giving him very much work to do at present. I'm just sending him for a mile trot every morning."

The horse appeared to be very nervous that morning. It even seemed afraid of Will Stubbs, the head stable-boy, who as a rule could do anything he liked with the animal. When he approached Firefly, it backed to the far end of its box as though it was afraid that the stable-boy was going to strike it, and it was some time before the animal would let anyone come near it.

"That's strange," said Archer. "I've never known Firefly like this before. He has a bit of a temper, but I don't think somehow as temper can be the cause of it. He must have had a bad fright during the night. I've heard of thoroughbreds getting frights what last 'um several days."

With some difficulty, Firefly was saddled, and Will Stubbs helped "up." For the first few yards she seemed to go all right, but Archer and Clifford, who were watching the exercise, noticed, to their horror and amazement, that Firefly was getting lamer and lamer at every stride. They shouted to Will Stubbs to stop, but before he could do so the horse had begun to limp.

Will Stubbs quickly dismounted and held the horse's head. In an instant Clifford and his trainer was on the spot. The latter hastily lifted the horse's legs one by one, and examined the hoofs, for he thought that perhaps the animal had trod on a sharp stone or nail, which had pierced the hoof. No trace of anything amiss in that quarter could, however, be found. Archer examined the horse all over, but could find nothing to account for the lameness. Clifford watched him with eager eyes, too nervous and excited to assist in the operation himself.

"What's the matter with him, Archer?" asked Clifford, in almost an undertone. He awaited the reply as a murderer in the dock awaits the verdict of the jury—his whole frame shook with terror.

"I don't know, sir. I can't see anything wrong with his legs," replied the trainer very slowly; "it's something out of the ordinary. I believe the horse has been 'got at.'"

"What's that?" exclaimed Clifford excitedly, his face assuming a terror-stricken appearance. "Will he be able to run in the Derby, do you think?"

"Well, it's only three weeks to Derby Day, you know, sir; but we must first find out what's the matter with the animal. It may be nothing serious after all. I'll send for Jenkins, the veterinary surgeon, at once. I thought Firefly looked a bit strange this morning, but I put it down to his temper. Somebody must have got into his box last night."

Clifford was too dazed to reply, his brain seemed to be in a whirl.

A few minutes later, Jim Crabb, a stable-boy, made his appearance upon the scene.

He had only been engaged at the Cannonwood stables a month or so, but he had learned sufficient about racehorses in that short



Strongarm regained his feet, and soon a terrible struggle was proceeding.

take. He had invested altogether something like ten thousand pounds, and stood to win nearly fifty. Although he regarded the affair as a certainty, it caused him no little anxiety, with the result that he passed many sleepless nights. Accidents will happen sometimes, no matter how many precautions are taken.

When he thought of the many little accidents that might happen to the Firefly before Derby Day, and result in the loss of the race, his heart sank within him. Even supposing the horse went to the post fit and well, there were at least a thousand and one things the animal could do but win the race. It might be beaten fairly by one of the other competitors. Its jockey might underestimate the powers of another horse and wait too long before putting on the final

IN NEXT FRIDAY'S "THE PRISONER OF LHASSA."

"UNION JACK."

time to know that there was something seriously the matter with the Firefly. He was immediately despatched by Archer for the vet, and the Firefly was walked quietly back to its box to await his arrival.

This incident, as the reader will have already suspected since our previous remarks about the "touts" who frequent training-quarters, was witnessed by many other people than those connected with the stable. In a short time the news was telegraphed to London, and the first edition of the evening newspapers, which much to the amazement of country people come out soon after breakfast, contained a paragraph stating that the Firefly, who, until a short time ago, was hot favourite for the Derby, had broken down at exercise that morning, and was now walking very lame. This alarming news had the effect of sending the Firefly much lower down in the betting list. He was now regarded as a rank outsider, and a hundred to one was freely offered in all the leading clubs, though rarely taken. It was generally thought that the horse's accident would preclude it from running at all.

In the meantime, Jenkins, the veterinary surgeon, had made a thorough examination of the horse. He found that a very thin, highly-tempered piece of steel had been driven into the horse's leg just above the fetlock. The hole it had made was so small that it could only be seen by using a microscope. At first Jenkins declared that the horse would be as well as ever after a week, but upon further examination he found that some deadly poison had been injected into the wound, which made it rather a more serious matter. If he could extract the poison out he would no doubt be able to get the horse ready for the Derby, but there was no degree of certainty about doing that. The horse would have to stop its training for at least a week, which would in itself be a serious matter with the race only three weeks ahead.

Poor Clifford scarcely knew what he did or said for the next few days. Fortune seemed to have made a "dead set" against him. He was prepared to meet an avowed enemy, for he would then stand some chance of retaliating, but one who stabbed him in the back as it were, and departed without showing his face, or leaving anything behind him by which he could be identified, was too much for him. He knew that he had had an enemy in Strongarm; but now that Holloway had "sworn off" with him, he did not see how he could harm him. It could not possibly have been Strongarm who had tried to "noble" his horse. He felt quite sure that it was the work of someone in his own stable, but he knew not whom to suspect. Whoever had perpetrated that treacherous crime had got into the horse's box at night, but without forcing a bolt or a bar, or without picking a lock.

It could not possibly have been the work of an entire stranger to the stables, for had it been so, force would have had to have been used to open the door. As it was, the door had been opened and closed with a key.

Cudgel his brains as he would, Clifford could not find the slightest grounds for suspecting any of his servants. He had implicit confidence in every one of them. He was too fond of judging other people as though they were of his own straightforward, honest nature.

CHAPTER 5.

A REMARKABLE CURE — STRONGARM GETTING NERVOUS—THE FIREFLY GOES TO EPSOM.

To guard against any further acts of treachery, Will Stubbs was to be in constant attendance upon the Firefly during the day, and sleep in the stable with him at night.

At the end of a week, under the skilful care of Jenkins, the Firefly had so far recovered that it was able to take a little walking exercise. But it was by no means well yet, and it was still doubtful whether it would be able to go to the post on Derby Day. Even if it should recover sufficiently to be able to start in the race, its chances of success had been considerably minimised.

Since the daring attempt to noble the favourite, which had sent a thrill through the whole sporting world, several Scotland Yard detectives had been busily engaged in endeavouring to track down the criminal, but up to the present their efforts had not met with any success. The only possible clue they were able to discover was that Mike Conway, Benjamin Strongarm's trainer, had on the evening before the event paid a visit to Jim Crabb, one of Clifford's stable boys. This circumstance in itself was not sufficient evidence upon which an accusation could be made. A careful watch was, however, kept over Crabb's movements.

Very few people would, of course, back the Firefly after its unfortunate accident, but whoever felt so inclined always found a ready layer in Strongarm. It is perhaps doubtful whether any further money would have been invested on the animal at all had not Strongarm done his best to circulate the report that the Firefly's injuries had been quite overrated. This was an artful move on Strongarm's part, and he laughed up his sleeve to think

what a glorious harvest of gold he would rake out of the mugs who thought a horse would win after the terrible treatment the Firefly had received. He did not even believe the horse would be well enough to start in the race.

Much to the big bookmaker's great surprise, a week before the race, the Firefly was reported to have completely recovered, and was going as strong as ever. It improved considerably in the betting-list as a consequence, but as a rule sportsmen do not care to have any dealings about a horse who has been on the sick-list, and consequently the Firefly did not get back to its old position as favourite, though it was not far behind.

There was, indeed, great joy at Cannonwood Hall when it became known that the Firefly was a "complete cure," and its owner crowded on it as much money as he could possibly obtain. It is true that they only had a week to complete the Firefly's training, but Archer was quite confident that he would be able to send him to the post in the pink of condition.

The news created quite a different feeling when it reached Strongarm and his trainer. At first they doubted its accuracy, but in the end they were compelled to accept it as true. The evidence that the Firefly was fit and well was too overwhelming to leave any room for doubt on the point.

"Jenkins must be a clever man," said Strongarm to his trainer, "if he has got that poison out of the horse's leg in such a short time. How ever he discovered that the leg had been poisoned at all I don't know. You must have been very clumsy over that little job, Conway—he ought never to have discovered the hole if you had done it properly."

Conway's face flushed a trifle. Was he to be found out after all?

"I thought I'd made a good job of it, sir," he said: "but I don't think it's too late to have another try to noble the brute afore the day now, though we must go on a different tack this time, or we shall be discovered, and then the game would be all up."

"I'll leave that to you, Conway," said Strongarm, "and if you succeed I promise you another two hundred. It's life or death to me!"

Conway's eyes sparkled at the offer.

"It shall be done, sir. You can leave it all to me, and if I can draw a 'pony' just to cover preliminary expenses, the job's done sure."

Conway, like all villains, had not the courage of a gnat. In the same way that Strongarm preferred to pay two hundred pounds to Conway to have the Firefly nobbled instead of doing it himself, so Conway preferred to pay someone else a lesser sum to do the dirty work for him, though he kept this from Strongarm. It was not Conway's hand that thrust the poisoned steel needle into the Firefly's leg. He would not have had sufficient courage to break into the stable at dead of night and do it. No, it was a younger hand than Conway's, and one possessed of greater courage. It was this that Conway was afraid Strongarm would find out.

But now he had another commission to noble the Firefly. It was not so much a question of how it was to be done with Conway—he knew of thousands of ways—but who was to do it? Of only one thing was he certain, and that was that he would upon no account do it himself.

Everything went well with the Firefly, and a few days before the race it was safely conveyed to Epsom. Every possible precaution had been taken to guard against any further acts of treachery. Will Stubbs had scarcely let the animal out of his sight for fully three weeks. He had been quite attached to the horse, and, strange as it may seem, the Firefly had become as much attached to Will. Archer always said that the Firefly went better at exercise with Will Stubbs on his back, and predicted that at no distant date the gallant young stable-boy would become a famous jockey. He even went so far as to say that if the boy had had any experience in actual racing he would recommend Mr. Clifford to let him ride the Firefly in the Derby. But it would not be safe to trust him in a race where one little error would mean defeat, and defeat would mean ruin. It needed an old and experienced jockey to steer a horse to victory in the Derby.

But Will Stubbs's chance would come.

CHAPTER 6.

ON THE WAY TO EPSOM—ANOTHER DARING ATTEMPT TO NOBBLE THE FIREFLY—THE JOCKEY IS ARRESTED—WILL STUBBS FILLS AN EMERGENCY—THE GREAT RACE.

The great day had arrived upon which the fate of Maurice Clifford was to be decided. It was a beautiful morning, and the sun shone brightly down upon the miscellaneous crowd of humanity wending its way along the main road from London to Epsom. Some were making the journey on foot, but the great majority travelled in an assortment of vehicles ranging from the aristocratic coach and four to the coster's donkey-

cart. Peers and paupers wended their way along the famous road to Epsom side by side. Both had the same destination, the same love for the great sport, and the same desire to tempt Dame Fortune to be generous towards them. It is the common aims and objects of all patrons of sport that makes the Turf such a wonderful leveller of society.

The Firefly had been doing as well as could have been expected. Maurice Clifford and his trainer both thought that their horse would pull off the event, and at the last moment availed themselves of the splendid odds offered by the bookmakers. Archer pawned nearly everything he possessed, and invested the proceeds on the Firefly at twenty-five to one.

Although he had been connected with the Turf nearly all his life, he rarely did any betting, but in this case he made an exception. Archer himself had fifty pounds on the horse, which, if his hopes were realised, would bring him in over one thousand pounds.

Clifford had invested thirteen thousand pounds, which would bring him in two hundred thousand pounds. Strongarm, however, stood to lose very much more than this over the race. If the Firefly won he would be a ruined man. If it lost, Clifford would be the vanquished. The verdict would be given in an hour or so.

No one who has not actually seen a Derby can realise the intense excitement which precedes the event. In the grandstands and in the various betting-rings hundreds and thousands of sporting folk are excitedly discussing the chances of the various runners, almost drowning the lusty voices of the bookmakers, who stand upon temporary platforms and shout out the odds they will give about the various horses.

In Tattersall's ring the artful Strongarm was in his place betimes, and did his best to start the betting on the big race. He, however, found but little response to his appeals. He could do little business, although he offered a hundred to one against the Firefly, more than double the odds quoted in the morning papers.

For a few moments only Clifford visited the well-known ring. It was not for the purpose of doing any betting, for, truth to tell, he had little more money left to bet with. No; he went there to see if the betting fraternity could give him any hopes of victory. He found none, however. Firefly was regarded in the ring as the rankest of rank outsiders.

"They have been mistaken many and many a time," mused Clifford. But he would have felt much more at ease over the result had they given him a little support.

At last he began to think that the Firefly did not stand the ghost of a chance, though the thought did not make him sorrowful. He had passed through so much trouble and anxiety during the last few days that he had become hardened to it. He felt that he could bear the most terrible news with a calm indifference. He was in that terrible state of mind which frequently leads the gambler to take his own life. He took interest in nothing but his horse and the big race. At one time he would have given anything almost to have had the honour of carrying off "the Blue Riband of the Turf." But now he did not care a straw about the honour connected with the winning of the greatest of the classic races.

He looked at it from a monetary point of view entirely, and hence every shadow of sport was eliminated. Whether he emerged successfully from the ordeal, or became a penniless beggar, he was firmly decided that it should be the last horse-race upon which he would stake such a large amount. Indeed, he was not certain whether he would not give up betting altogether. To pass through such another ordeal, he felt sure, would be the death of him. Even now he looked pale and haggard, as though the weight of some terrible crime was upon his conscience. His friends noticed it, and spoke to him of it, though none of them ever dreamed the real cause. His affianced wife, Kate Drew, noticed it also. Clifford had a good mind to tell her the secret, but he thought better of it, and decided to remain silent upon the point, though he could dearly have liked to have had some friend in whom he could confide. It would have lightened the burden of his trouble immensely. It would not be long before the verdict would be given for or against him.

The two or three minor races set down for decision before the big event of the day had been disposed of, and the course was cleared for the Derby.

The horses had left the stables and were being led round the paddock by the stable-boys. The Firefly looked extremely well, though its fine appearance did not send it up in the betting list, as it was generally thought that its leg would give way before the famous "mile and a half" had been completed. This was what Clifford himself most feared, though he had hoped that the crack jockey Holloway would be able to nurse the animal until Tattenham Corner was passed, and then make a dash for it.

Holloway expressed himself as confident of victory as he took the saddle and bridle from Jim Crabb, and went to the

weighing-room to be "weighed in." This operation over, the Firefly was saddled, and the crack jockey in white and green was given a "leg up." Already Maurice could feel his heart beating faster than usual. He began to doubt whether he would be able to stand the strain to the finish.

Some of the horses started out for a preliminary canter before the Firefly attempted to move. Presently, however, Holloway gave the horse the tip, and away she went. She had not proceeded very far before it was seen that there was something amiss with the animal. It pranced about in an extraordinary way, and made frantic efforts to throw its rider. Holloway dismounted at once, and in a minute Clifford was at his horse's head, patting it gently on the neck.

"He is afraid of the crowd," said Clifford. "He will soon get used to it, though. This is the first big race he has ever been in, and you know that he is a very nervous animal at the best of times."

Poor Clifford's agitation was painful to behold, the perspiration was trickling swiftly down his forehead.

A silent witness of this scene was Mike Conway. A malicious smile of satisfaction was on his face as he turned to Strongarm, and whispered in his ear:

"What d'yer think of it? Are yer satisfied now?" "Hush, you fool!" said Strongarm, "unless you wish to give the game away!"

It was not long, however, before Archer arrived on the scene.

"Off with that saddle!" he shouted, rather than spoke. "What do you mean?" asked Clifford excitedly. "Do you think I'm going to throw away my chances of winning the race like that, just because the horse is a bit nervous. He'll be all right in a minute or two."

But before Clifford had finished, Archer had stripped the horse of its saddle, and was carefully examining the bottom of it.

After a few seconds he was seen to tug at something he had apparently found in the lining.

"There it is!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Just what I thought!" And he held up to the wondering gaze of the bystanders a small piece of steel, which glistened in the sun.

Upon examination it was found to be almost round, with a few little sharply-pointed projections. It had evidently been placed in the saddle with the view to causing the horse pain during the race, so that it would not run its best. It was an old dodge, but luckily it was detected by Archer's sharp eyes. There was no time to be wasted with speculations as to who was the perpetrator of this second daring attempt to nobble the Firefly. Whoever had committed the villainous act must have either been very careless, hard pushed for time, or very inexperienced in such matters. The steel was not placed cleverly enough. To have been effective the horse should not have felt its presence until the preliminary canter and at least half the race had been completed.

The scene was viewed by Strongarm and his trainer from the big ring. In a whisper Strongarm turned to his trainer, and said:

"Where would you have been had I relied on you?" with a knowing wink in his eye. "You'll be surprised when I show you my trump card."

The majority of the onlookers thought with Clifford that Archer had intended to give the race up for a bad job when he took the saddle off the Firefly, and great surprise was expressed on all sides when it was seen that the saddle was being replaced.

But the Firefly was not safe yet. No sooner had the jockey regained the horse's back than a police-officer made his way through the crowd up to the Firefly's side, and, addressing the jockey, said:

"Samuel Holloway, I arrest you," at the same time catching him by the arm. "I arrest you for the wilful murder of Isaac Brassington on the morning of the third of September last year."

Holloway looked at him in amazement, at the same blushing to the roots of his hair.

"I will come with you after the race, constable," he said at length.

"You'll come with me at once," replied that gentleman, with a look of determination on his face.

Clifford had heard the conversation, and for a few minutes his face was a picture of agony. At last he found his tongue, and in a pleading voice addressed the constable.

"Holloway shall come with you the minute the race is over," he said.

"I wasn't talking to you," replied the constable, with an air of dignity; "my orders are to arrest him at sight, and I intend to do my duty at all risks!"

Holloway made a struggle to free himself from the grip of the policeman, but in less time than it takes to tell, the latter had

pulled him from the horse's back and slipped the handcuffs on his wrists.

A large crowd had congregated around the scene of this little drama, and amongst them were Strongarm and his trainer. A gleam of triumph flitted across the bookmaker's face as the policeman led off the jockey in triumph. It was too much for poor Clifford. When he saw that it was no use trying to persuade the policeman to delay the execution of his cherished duty for a few minutes, he was completely overcome and went off in a dead faint.

It seemed as though it had been fated that the Firefly should not run in the Derby. Another jockey must be found somewhere, and that quickly, or the race would start without it. Archer was rushing madly round the paddock in a wild state of excitement calling for a jockey to ride the Firefly, but the prospects of his finding one seemed very remote.

The bell sounded "Go to the post!" but still Archer was wildly careering round the paddock in search of a jockey. He recognised now that the search was hopeless; but just at that moment he felt a touch at his arm. "I'm going to ride Mr. Clifford's horse," said a weak but clear little voice. And as Archer turned round he saw Will Stubbs with the saddle in his arms.

"I've been to the weighing-room," he said. "Come and get the saddle on."

Archer saw that there was no hope for it now. Will Stubbs must do his best, and trust to Providence for the rest. The Firefly was soon resaddled, and the young stable-boy given a leg up. The horse seemed to know who was on its back, and went off merrily to the starting post. On its way it passed the little procession which was bearing its unfortunate owner out of the paddock to the fresh air.

As Will Stubbs came up to the starting-post with the Firefly he was greeted with a rousing cheer from the onlookers, who could not understand why the famous jockey Holloway was not in his place. They had not witnessed the tragic scene which had taken place in the paddock. They, however, concluded that the boy was there to fill an emergency, and gave him a cheer for his pluck.

Lots had been drawn for positions, and the Firefly had been fortunate enough to secure the coveted position nearest the rails. As the horses drew up into line, the brilliant uniforms of the jockeys with the sun shining full upon them, presented a beau-

tiful picture, and made a striking contrast to the work-a-day clothes of a stable-boy in which Will Stubbs was compelled to ride. He, however, was not entirely without colours, for he wore the blue with white cap (Mr. Clifford's racing colours) which Holloway had left behind for his successor, whoever it may be.

After several false starts the horses eventually got into line, the white flag descended, and the thousands of excited spectators sent up one tremendous shout: "They're off!"

The frenzied shout seemed to momentarily revive the unconscious form of Clifford, who lay on the turf some distance from the maddening throng. He rose as with a supreme effort to his feet, and shouted excitedly: "Where is my horse? Where is my horse?"

"He is in the race," answered the two friends, who had foregone the race to attend to him. That seemed to satisfy him, and he sank back to the ground again and lapsed into unconsciousness.

Will Stubbs's appearance created a good deal of comment. Most people did not know the horse he rode, and all were at a loss to understand why he rode in such a commonplace garb. It is the only instance on record in which a horse in the greatest of England's classic races has been ridden by a jockey unattired in silk.

As the horses dashed forward, the enormous throng of spectators cheered their own particular fancy in the race. On they went at a terrible pace, very little separating any of them until the famous Tattenham Corner was reached. Here several of the horses lost their riders, but luckily the Firefly was not amongst the number.

Upon getting into the straight they all put on a final spurt for home. The excitement was intense. The gigantic crowd cheered itself hoarse. Now it was "Condor wins!" then "Barclay wins!" then "Spider wins!" and now and again "The Firefly wins!" It was indeed a tight race, and the jockeys were getting every ounce out of the horses they could. Will Stubbs was riding as cleverly as any of them, and if his horse could only stay a little longer it was more than probable that it would win the race. "Can it stay?" was the question which everyone was asking himself.

Steadily it was gaining on the leading horse. If the course was only another furlong or so longer there would be no doubt as to the issue.

Only a few yards now separated the horses from the winning-post. Will Stubbs saw that he must make a dash for it, and, burying his spurs deeply into his horse's flanks, the Firefly was seen to dash forward.

A tremendous cry, "The Firefly wins!" rent the air. And, amidst a scene of indescribable excitement, it dashed past the post, a short neck ahead of the second horse.

CHAPTER 7.

STRONGARM'S REVENGE—THE FAMOUS TRIAL—THE PENALTIES OF CRIME.

Maurice Clifford had recovered sufficiently to be able to lead his horse back to the paddock, amidst the rousing cheers of the spectators. He was, as the reader knows, a very popular man on the turf, and the victory of the Firefly was all the more popular because of the daring attempts which had been made to "noble" it.

The startling incidents which had taken place immediately before the race had become generally known on the course, and perhaps this accounted in some way for the extraordinary

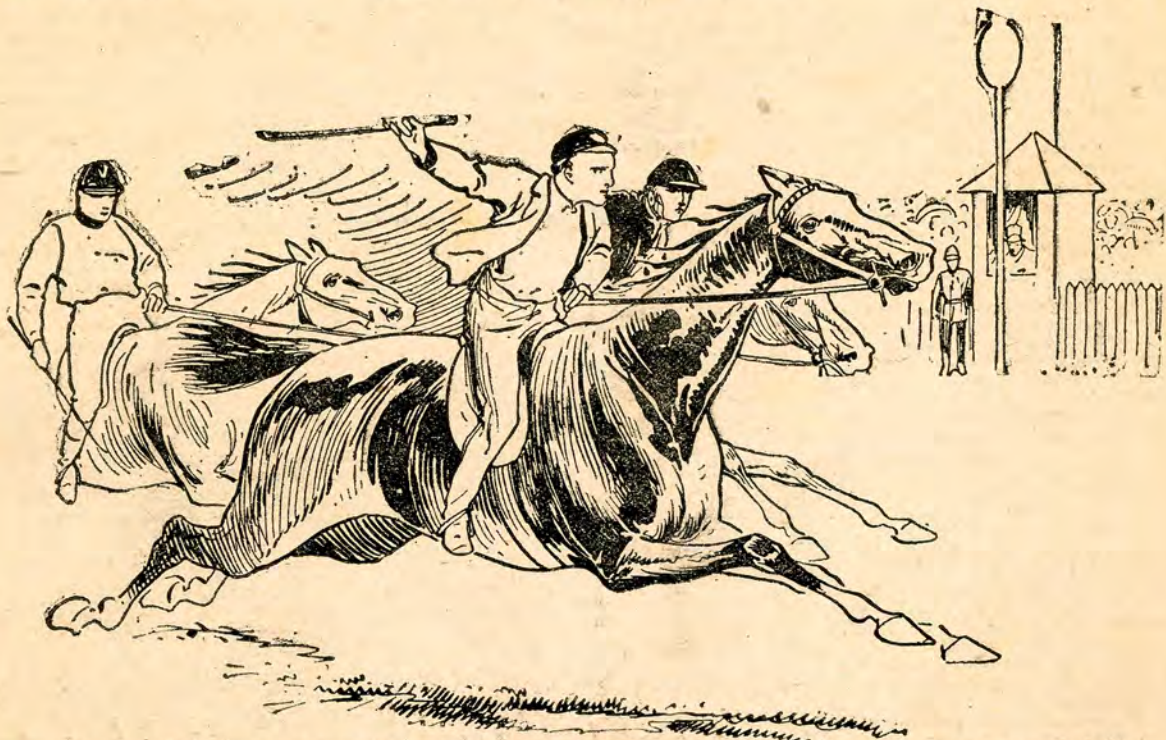
ovation with which the victor was received upon his return to the paddock. Will Stubbs also came in for round after round of applause, and high compliments were paid him by all the other jockeys who rode in the race.

It is beyond dispute that no jockey in the country could have ridden the Firefly better than he did on that memorable day. Maurice Clifford could hardly find sufficient words to thank him, and paid him a higher fee than it had ever before been the good fortune of any jockey to receive.

They were ever after the firmest and best of friends. Will Stubbs kept up the grand reputation he gained that day, and became a famous jockey. Maurice Clifford paid him a big retainer so that he should have the first call upon the jockey's



They carried Clifford from the paddock.



Amid a scene of excitement, Firefly dashed past the post, a short neck ahead of the second horse.

services, and if ever one of his horses lost you may rest assured that it was through no fault on the jockey's part.

People said that the race must have been a good thing for Clifford. There was no doubt that it had been, and no one knew this better than the man himself. It had been a matter of life and death with him. He had won this time, but he was firmly resolved that never again would he place his fate in the hands of such uncertain creatures as racehorses. It was, of course, impossible for a man who had been brought up with horses and the Turf from childhood to give up racing altogether; but he runs his horses now for the sport alone. Of course he bets—it adds a little to the excitement of the race if there is a stake—but he never risks more than he is quite prepared to lose. He had learned a lesson which, alas! some learn too late—that the surest way to earn money is to work for it.

After the race was over, Maurice met Strongarm in the ring, and that gentleman paid the full sum he had lost to him over the race. It was a tremendous sum, amounting to something like twenty thousand pounds. If that had been the only money Strongarm had lost over the race he would have been able to pay it with ease, for he was extremely wealthy; but besides this large sum the big bookmaker had to pay out nearly as much again to other people who had fancied the Firefly's chances. He left Epsom Downs that day a ruined man.

But he was not content that the man who had brought about his downfall should escape revenge. He had done all in his power to defeat his antagonist, but up to the present he had been altogether outclassed. Strongarm was in too much of a rage to sit down and acknowledge a defeat. In his breast was burning a fierce desire to be revenged upon Clifford, and that revenge he was determined to have, even if it cost him his life.

"What is there left me to live for now?" he asked himself as he left the racecourse, as many and many a man had done before him after spending an unlucky day on the famous Epsom Downs. There is, perhaps, no person on earth who feels so utterly miserable and despondent as the man who in a moment sinks from a position of wealth and luxury to beggary. That terrible fate which hung over Maurice Clifford for such a long time had fallen upon the man who had planned it. It was perhaps the thought that the stone which he had hurled at the head of his antagonist had returned like a boomerang and struck the thrower, that caused Strongarm more agony than otherwise would have been the case.

Several nights after that memorable Derby, Clifford was returning to Cannonwood Hall rather late at night. He had been dining at a friend's house, and was walking along the lonely road, musing upon the happy time in store and his marvellous escape from ruin and disgrace. His mind was so occupied that he did not observe a slight rustling in the hedge on his left as he passed

along a very quiet and deserted spot. A moment later, however, he became conscious that a pair of iron hands gripped his throat.

Instinctively he struggled to free himself from the terrible clutch. His assailant, however, was not to be easily disposed of. The grip on the throat tightened at every fresh attempt on Clifford's part to remove it, until at last the unfortunate man felt the nails piercing the skin, and causing him excruciating pain. The pair swayed to and fro in the middle of the road. Every now and then a muffled groan escaped poor Clifford. It was evident that he could not last much longer, each groan was fainter than its predecessor.

It seemed that the life was being gradually squeezed out of him. A few seconds later the would-be assassin found that his unfortunate victim offered no further resistance. The grip on the throat slackened, and Maurice Clifford sank in a heap to the ground.

For a few seconds the villain surveyed his deadly work with no apparent feeling of concern. Then he bent down to the prostrate form and peered into the face. It was still as death. He placed his cheek near his victim's mouth, but all signs of breath had vanished.

Hastily he clutched the wrist of his victim to feel the pulse. With a sudden start he rose to his feet, gave a hasty glance round to see if his terrible crime had been witnessed, and then all at once the full meaning of his terrible deed seemed to dawn upon him, and, with a startled cry, he flung up his hands as though in a fit of despair, and disappeared into the darkness.

Next morning, as a farm labourer was proceeding to his work along that quiet country lane, he espied, to his horror, the form of a young gentleman, in evening-dress, lying full across the roadway in front of him, apparently dead. Nervously he approached the prostrate form. When he saw the terrible imprints of the finger-nails upon the throat of the unfortunate young man, he gave a startled cry of horror. He had read of terrible murders in the evening papers at far-off places, but he could scarcely realise that such a terrible deed could be perpetrated so close to his own door.

He immediately conceived that his duty was to inform the police of the discovery. He tried to run, but his legs would not respond to his will. When, however, he did reach the police-station, he gave such a rambling tale that the officials could make no sense out of it. The man was in a terrible state of fright. At last he was able to make them understand that something extraordinary had taken place, which he wished to point out to them, and so two constables accompanied him to the scene of the tragedy.

The victim was known to the constables, and when a stretcher had been procured they conveyed him to Cannonwood Hall,

where a doctor was soon in attendance. To the great relief of everyone, the doctor was able to say that life was not quite extinct, though it was extremely improbable that the victim would recover.

"But while there is life there is hope," is an old saying which often brings a ray of comfort to the relatives and friends of many a man who is passing through a very dangerous illness. It brought comfort and hope to the friends and relatives of Maurice Clifford, if not to the whole of the sporting world. There was nothing to do but wait and trust in Providence.

No clue as to the perpetrator of the terrible outrage could, of course, be discovered, for the unfortunate victim was in a state of unconsciousness, and therefore unable to give any description of his assailant.

For three long weeks Maurice Clifford lingered between life and death. Once or twice, for a few seconds only, he recovered consciousness, but he never opened his mouth. It was indeed an anxious time for his friends and relatives, especially his affianced wife Kate Drew.

For days at a time she never left his bedside, so intent was she upon watching for the slightest sign of returning strength. At last, however, she was compelled to give up her watching in order that her own health should not be ruined by the terrible strain.

In the fourth week the patient recovered at a surprisingly rapid rate, until at last he was able to recognise people, and was allowed by the doctors to have a brief conversation with Kate Drew.

From this time his progress was assured, though it was a long time before he was able to get about again. He was not able to give the detectives any information as to his assailant, as he declared that he never saw him. This, as the reader knows, was the case, though for a long time the detectives hoped that Clifford's memory would return, and that he would be able to give them the information they needed to bring the scoundrel to justice. But they were hoping against hope—Clifford was never able to give them the information.

Was the same crafty and cunning hand that had so many times tried to nobble the favourite for the Derby, but without success, now attempting to nobble its owner? This was the question which presented itself to the minds of many people, including the detectives and Clifford himself. "Find the villain who tried to nobble the favourite, and you find the man who committed the outrage on its owner!" were the words of the Scotland Yard inspector who had charge of the case.

In the meantime, the trial of the famous jockey Holloway, for the wilful murder of Isaac Brassington, on the third of September the previous year, had been proceeding in due course. People, especially those connected with the Turf, had taken special interest in the case, not only because the accused was the leading jockey in the country, but on account of his sensational arrest just before the start was made for the Derby.

The action of the constable had been questioned in the press, as it was quite clear that he could have made the arrest several hours earlier if he had been so disposed, and that gentleman had been severely reprimanded from headquarters. It appeared at the petty sessions that Holloway had been arrested on the information of a man named Thomas Drake. Sufficient evidence was given to send Holloway to the next assizes, which were now about to commence.

Thomas Drake entered the witness-box, and said that on the morning of the third of September last year, as he was passing through a field at Guildford, he came across two bodies lying at full length upon the ground. One was that of the murdered man Brassington, who had a pistol-shot through his head, and the other he now recognised as the man in the dock, Samuel Holloway. The latter, at the time he discovered the bodies, was holding in his hand a six-chambered revolver. He did not approach close up to the two men, but believing them to be both dead he at once went for the police. When he returned in the company of a constable, one of the men—the prisoner in the dock—had disappeared. The other, upon examination, was found to be quite dead, and was removed to the mortuary to await an inquest. He gave the police as good a description of the missing man as he could, but in cross-examination he was compelled to admit that the description did not tally with the appearance of Holloway. He added that there was not the slightest doubt in his mind that the man he discovered lying beside the corpse on the morning of the murder was the man who now stood in the dock. He had recognised the prisoner on the day before the Derby, and discovered that it was the famous jockey, Samuel Holloway, who was riding the Firefly in the Derby the next day. He immediately conveyed this information to the police, who accordingly made the arrest.

The next witness was Benjamin Strongarm, who seemed to give his evidence very reluctantly. He stated that he knew both the murdered man and the prisoner in the dock very intimately. He seemed much affected at the thought of giving evidence against Holloway. Several times the judge had to order him to answer questions put to him by the counsel for the

Crown, and threaten that in default he would commit him for contempt of Court. At length Strongarm stated, with some reluctance, that he knew the deceased and the prisoner had had some dispute, though he did not know what it was about. He had heard the prisoner threaten to shoot the deceased on several occasions. But for the timely intervention of himself upon several occasions, the pair would have come to blows. This ended Strongarm's evidence.

The theory put forward by the police was that the two men had had a struggle on the evening of the second of September, or the morning of the third. In this struggle Holloway had been stunned, or had sunk to the ground exhausted from his injuries, after firing the fatal shot at Brassington. This seemed feasible enough, and things looked black for Holloway, especially as he, contrary to the advice of his counsel, insisted upon pleading "guilty."

Holloway himself knew little of what happened on the evening before the murder, though he was quite sure Strongarm's evidence, or at all events some part of it, was false. He had never had any dispute with the murdered man, and Strongarm had never intervened to save them from coming to blows. On the other hand, their relations had always been of the most friendly description.

Thomas Drake's evidence may have been correct, all except that he did not know that he was the murderer of Brassington before the day previous to the Derby. Drake had known it all along, and so had Strongarm—and good use the latter had made of the fact, too. This was the information he threatened to divulge to the police whenever he (Holloway) wanted to ride one of Clifford's horses straight. He had no doubt that Strongarm had bribed Drake to split on him, because he had got wind that he was going to ride straight in the Derby.

It did not seem to matter much to Holloway whether they gave correct evidence or not, so long as they gave sufficient to hang him! He was the murderer of Brassington he knew, and was quite resigned to his fate. All he remembered of the affair was that on the third of September, Strongarm came to him in the field, and, shaking him violently, asked him to get up quick. When he did so, he saw Brassington's body by his side, and he held in his own hand his revolver. On Strongarm's advice he got away as fast as he could. Both Strongarm and Drake, who was present, promised silence, and kept it until the day before his arrest. He had no recollection of shooting Brassington. He must have done it whilst he was drunk, he thought; and this was all the defence he wished to put forward. He remembered getting drunk the evening before.

This was the version of the case, Holloway told his counsel. That gentleman made good use of it. Strongarm was recalled, and bit by bit he was forced to admit that he knew that Holloway was the murderer of Brassington from the first, and had used it as a lever to make the prisoner pull the mounts he got from a certain well-known owner. This admission led to several others, all more or less going to prove the innocence of the prisoner, and casting the shadow of guilt over someone else.

In the end, Holloway, much to his surprise, was acquitted. Before Strongarm left the court he was arrested, and in due course his trial for the wilful murder of Brassington came on.

It was shown at the trial that great jealousy had existed between him and the deceased, and that as they were walking home from a public-house in the neighbourhood of Guildford on the early morning of the murder, they had had a quarrel, and that Strongarm had shot the deceased with a revolver, which he took from Holloway, who was too drunk to take any notice of what was going on.

This being the case, the only witness of the affair was Thomas Drake, who now told quite a different tale to that which he gave on the trial of Holloway. To throw suspicion on Holloway, Strongarm had placed the revolver into his hand as he lay insensible on the ground, and thus, when the jockey awoke to consciousness, he readily believed the tale Strongarm told him that he was the murderer.

Benjamin Strongarm was in due course sentenced to death, and paid the full penalty for his crime. So ended the career of one of the biggest scoundrels who ever lived. It is gratifying to know that there are not many Benjamin Strongarms about to-day to disgrace the good reputation of the Turf.

Thomas Drake was, of course, sentenced to penal servitude for life, for perjury at the trial of Holloway, and for being an accessory to the murder by remaining silent.

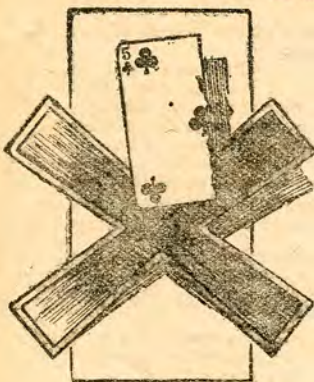
It was proved that Mike Conway had been employed by Strongarm to nobble the Firefly, and that Clifford's stable-boy, Jim Crabb, had aided him in the villainous work. Both were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

Shortly before Strongarm paid the last penalty for his crime on the gallows, he confessed that he was the man who attacked Maurice Clifford and nearly choked the life out of him.

Maurice Clifford is now happily married. He often looks back upon the scenes connected with the famous Derby with mingled feelings of pleasure and regret.

THE END.

YOU CAN BEGIN THIS TO-DAY.



THE SIGN OF THE SCARLET CROSS

By CLAUD HEATHCOTE,

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

READ THIS FIRST.

The story opens on Harry's fifteenth birthday.

Harry and Pierre Evison, whose son Harry thanks 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 for 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 Goubet, 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.

Harry begs a lift to Limehouse, and is told by the carman that the inquest on the mysterious body found in the Thames is to be held that afternoon at the Waterman's Arms.

CHAPTER 12.

THE INQUEST—THE VERDICT.

"The inquest to be held this afternoon!"

Harry kept repeating these words to himself as he turned away from the carman. What was to prevent him from attending the inquest? He might be able to get from it some information which would help him in his search.

No sooner had this idea occurred to Harry than he determined to act upon it. He would find out the Waterman's Arms, and attend, if possible, the inquest.

After threading his way through various tortuous thoroughfares, he at length discovered the Waterman's Arms.

It was a very old tavern, situated in a narrow turning by the waterside. The back of it, which could be reached by a court-way at the side, looked on to the Thames.

Harry passed through this courtway. The river was at low tide, and the barges and boats moored at the side were resting in its slime. It was not altogether a cold day; the sun was still high up in the heavens, but the wind blew keener from the river than elsewhere, and made Harry shiver as he came to the bank.

There was a group of men—of the amphibious sort that usually congregate about a river—smoking, and chewing, and talking together.

Presently they began to move into the house by knots of three and four. Harry guessed they were going to the inquest, and he boldly determined to follow them.

Keeping close up to the crowd, he passed unchallenged into a large, upper room, where he found that the coroner and jury were already assembled.

The coroner's officer having shouted out at the top of the stairs the usual notice convening the inquiry, the first witness was called before the coroner and jury.

He was the waterman who had discovered the body. He had come down to the river a little after five in the morning. He had business on the other side of the river, and had unmoored his boat for the purpose of crossing over. He had taken about half a dozen strokes, when he felt the stern of the boat jolt against something.

He ceased rowing, and turned quickly round. To his horror he saw a man's face staring at him from the water. He clutched him by the clothes, and dragged him quickly into the boat. He was quite dead—had evidently been dead for some hours.

The next witness called was the landlord of the tavern—the man who had succeeded to the business after Benjamin Ford, the good-natured carman, who had given Harry a lift, and told him his remarkable story, was compelled through misfortune to give it up.

Harry leaned forward and listened eagerly to his evidence, wondering if it would coincide in any way with the strange story he had not so long since heard.

"You have seen the body of the deceased, have you not?" asked the coroner.

"Yes, sir."

"And you identify him?"

"Yes, Mr. Coroner; I identify him as the man who came into my bar the night before the body was found, and called for a glass of ale?"

"You served him with the ale?"

"Yes; and he drank it. Then he asked me if I could spare him pen and ink. I handed it to him, and he was about to write out something on a sheet of notepaper on the bar. I told him that he need not write the letter there, but there was a room disengaged to which he was quite welcome. I took him into a spare room, which was empty at the time. As he entered it, I noticed that he was trembling all over, just like a leaf. He had only been there a few minutes when a tall man, dressed in a tight-fitting, military, undress-coat, entered, and asked if a gentleman had come there a few minutes since; and he gave me a description of the man who had just entered the parlour. I nodded, and pointed out to him the room where the man was writing. Upon that he went into the room."

"How long were the two together?"

"About a quarter of an hour."

"Did you hear any noise of quarrelling?"

"None whatever. They seemed to be talking very quietly."

"At the end of the quarter of an hour?"

IN NEXT FRIDAY'S "THE PRISONER OF LHASSA."
"UNION JACK."

"At the end of the quarter of an hour they came out hurriedly together, and I saw nothing more of them. I saw nothing more of the deceased until I saw his dead body; and I have seen nothing more of the other man since."

"You saw something of what the deceased was writing, did you not?"

"Yes, when he went out with the tall man he tore up what he was writing. I put the pieces together. I handed the letter to the coroner's officer."

The coroner's officer handed it to the coroner, who examined it, then handed it in turn to the jury. All it said was:

"P. L. is on the track of you and the boy—"

There the pen had stopped.

"Should you recognise the taller stranger of the two if you saw him again?" asked the coroner.

"I could not swear to him. His coat-collar was turned up, and his hat was slouched over his eyes. I had not a clear view of him like I had of the poor fellow who was drowned."

Harry felt convinced from the man's description that this stranger was Paul Lamaret—he who had killed Pierre.

Another waterman was next called—the only one who had seen the deceased after he had left the Waterman's Arms.

Witness deposed that he had asked them if they wanted a boat. The taller man of the two had turned upon him abruptly, with an oath, telling him that they had no need of a boat. Then he suddenly stopped, as struck with an idea, and said they might want one later on.

"Did they return for the boat?" asked the coroner.

"No, sir; hang 'em!" promptly answered the witness. "I waited about for 'em a long time, but neither of 'em came for that boat."

The doctor, who had made the post-mortem examination of the deceased, was the last witness called.

"You have examined the body of the deceased?" asked the coroner.

"Yes."

"Did you find any external injuries upon it such as would lead to the impression that the deceased had been attacked and thrown into the river?"

"I found no such injuries. There were no bruises about the body whatever. The only thing remarkable about it was the sign of a scarlet cross, which had been tattooed just above the left breast, and small, dark marks alongside of the cross resembling the half of the five of clubs."

"Have you any theory as to that?"

"No; the deceased had probably been a seafaring man at some period or other in his career. Sailors are very fond of tattooing their bodies and arms with all kinds of strange and fantastic designs and figures."

"But you have heard—have you not?—of the strange death of a man in St. Giles's the other day with similar marks upon his breast?"

Harry shivered. The coroner was referring to poor Pierre—the man who had stood to him for so many years in place of a father.

"Yes; I have read the case, and it struck me as very remarkable at the time. He, too, may have been a seafaring man at some period in his career. A tattoo which strikes the fancy of one sailor often strikes the fancy of another, and you will see the same design frequently repeated."

"Wrong, Mr. Doctor!" said Harry to himself. "Pierre may have been a soldier, but I'll swear that he had never been a sailor."

"Then what is your theory as to the manner in which the deceased came by his death?"

"I am confident that he did not receive a foul blow of any sort. There is not the slightest evidence of it on his body. He came to his death, not as the result of a blow, but of drowning. He must either have fallen into the river accidentally, have been pushed into it, or jumped into it of his own accord, and thus ended his existence."

After this evidence, the jury were not long in considering their verdict—the usual one in such cases of "Found drowned."

CHAPTER 13

HARRY'S SACRED TRUST—INSIDE THE CHARNEL-HOUSE—THE QUICK AND THE DEAD—THE BUNCH OF FORGET-ME-NOTS.

As Harry left the tavern he was more and more convinced of one thing—that the stranger who had been with the man found in the river was Paul Lamaret. If the description of the landlord had not convinced him, the letter would.

"P. L.," of course, meant Paul Lamaret. The man found in the river was writing the letter with the express purpose of sending it to Pierre, and warning him of Lamaret's approach.

"Paul Lamaret is on the track of you and the boy," the letter had said.

The pronoun was Pierre; the boy was himself.

Lamaret must have paid a visit to the Waterman's Arms

before he—Harry—met him on his fatal birthday. Had he killed the man found in the river? And was it part and parcel of the same hideous scheme of vengeance by which he had killed Pierre Evison?

Surely it must have been so, for on the breasts of both of them had been found the fatal cross.

The story told him by the waggoner—Benjamin Ford—of the fight with knives that had occurred in the same tavern so many years back, pointed to the fact that the hatred between his family—the Temples—and the Lamarets, was a deep-rooted and fearful one, and the worst part of it was that while his enemies knew exactly where and whom to strike, he—Harry—knew not friend from foe; whence they came from, or where they went.

Why had not Pierre lived long enough to tell him all the story of his strange life? Why had he been left to grope along thus blindly in the dark?

The thought of Pierre recalled to him the sacred trust the dead man had reposed in him—the trust which had been the impelling motive of his flight. Come what might, he would discharge that trust.

The prospect of a visit to a dead-house was not a very exhilarating one; but, strange to say, Harry looked forward to it with a certain degree of melancholy pleasure. The main thing was—whether or not he would be able to get admittance.

He dared not ask permission, for, of course, the authorities were on the alert, and he would be immediately handed over to the police. That would only mean defeating his own purpose.

There was a second way by which he might secure his end, by appealing to the custodian of the dead-house, and asking him to place the ring on Pierre's finger, the braided lock of hair on Pierre's breast.

But no sooner had this method occurred to Harry than it was dismissed. A man of that stamp—the keeper of a dead-house—would probably be quite deaf to any sentimental feeling of that kind, unless it were backed up with a substantial bribe, and that Harry could not give.

And what was more, Harry wished to place that ring on poor Pierre's finger with his own hand, to look once more—for the last time—on his face; then the police might do with him as they pleased.

So he lingered about until night had set in, with those two desires growing stronger and stronger in his heart; then he made his way, under cover of the darkness, to where the deadhouse lay.

It was a squat, red-bricked building, close to an old churchyard.

The latter was crowded to overflowing with the dilapidated tombstones of the dead, as the surrounding neighbourhood was overflowing with the dilapidated tenements of the living.

But though innumerable houses surrounded that grim and dank churchyard, the dark space of ground occupied by the dead-house, situated in its gloomiest part, was shunned by all.

Many were the tragedies associated with it; and, of course, it was believed by the superstitious that the ghosts of the dead, out of an especial affection for the spot, walked there nightly.

Harry was gratified to find the churchyard deserted; he was no less gratified to find that it was in darkness. Both circumstances lent greater security to his purpose.

As, however, he crept to the rear of the church, to the direction in which the deadhouse lay, he noticed that there was a dim light in the church itself.

Drawing nearer, he heard the vibrant note of the organ stealing softly through the church. It was evident that the organist was practising in the solitary fane, and Harry stood for the moment close up to the wall, listening with awe to the solemn music.

It stirred his heart strangely. It echoed through the building with a low, sobbing note, and found a responsive chord in the breast of the lad standing without.

Never till that moment had Harry so fully realised the desolateness and pathos of his life.

He moved away from the protecting cover of the wall, and, threading his way through the grass, reached the deadhouse.

A big padlock was attached to the door. He tried it. As he expected, it was fast locked.

Harry moved to the side. Here there was a small square window. To Harry's joy it had been left purposely open for ventilation.

He sprang lightly upward and caught at the sill. Then he thrust open the window still further, until it was wide enough to admit his body.

He pulled himself through to the other side, and dropped softly to the ground.

His heart went quicker; his breathing became oppressive.

Brave as Harry was, a quail of fear for the first time came over him. He would have been less than human had it not been so, remembering where he stood.

It is easy enough for brave natures to face death; but the bravest shrink from it in its ghastliest form.

But in a moment the lad remembered his purpose, and braced himself up to discharge it.

The place was intensely dark—a darkness so intense that it seemed to Harry he could almost feel it.

He had anticipated there would be no light, and had provided against it. On the road he had purchased a halfpenny candle and a box of matches.

Striking the latter, he soon obtained a light. Though he had been prepared for a good deal, he shrank back when he looked around that ghastly place. In a row on the floor of the dead-house stretched seven winding sheets, underneath which Harry knew full well that the dead were lying.

The feeble light of the flickering candle made those white sheets grimmer, and threw ghastly shadows on the floor and roof.

With trembling hand Harry reverently withdrew the sheet from the first shrouded form just enough to see the face beneath. The faces he saw—hideous, bloated, and emaciated—haunted him for long after. It was not until he had reached the fifth that Harry found the one he was in search of.

There was no fear or repulsion in the lad's breast as he looked at that—as he looked on the face of the man who had been to him as a father.

Indeed, there was nothing in it to evoke such feelings. It bore no sort of contrast to those he had looked upon. The wound that had caused Pierre's death, had drained the body of blood, and left the face clear-cut as a piece of marble.

Upon it rested not the malevolent look of hate, but the placidity of perfect rest. Pierre was as one asleep.

Gently through the window stole the sacred music without, breathing, as it seemed to Harry, a holy benediction upon the sleeper.

Fixing the candle in the wall, he drew out the ring and lock of hair from his pocket.

Unlike the other dead, Harry found that Pierre had been clad in a white shirt of finest linen. Both hands were crossed upon his breast; but the little finger of the left hand was not rigid as the rest. It was bent.

Harry smoothed it out, and placed the thin, golden loop upon it.

He reverently opened the breast of the shirt, and placed upon it the golden lock of braided hair.

Then, as it seemed to Harry, the marble face was transfigured with a radiant smile. The organ without had ceased for the moment playing. A holy calm rested upon the place; but, in that moment of intense silence, Harry heard a sound from without that set his heart leaping madly.

Someone was coming to the deadhouse!

He would be discovered! What mattered? He had discharged his duty to the dead. He had now only to give himself up to justice.

Stay! He must see Shaggy first. And, after all, he preferred giving himself up to justice in his own way, and not to be handed over to the police with the grim statement that he had broken into a deadhouse.

So Harry took a hasty glance around in the hope of discovering a hiding-place.

There was none. The place was destitute of niche or recess of any kind, save that provided by the window through which he had entered.

There was no time to get through that. There was only one possible way of avoiding detection—by hiding beneath one of the shrouds at his feet.

It was a grim alternative; he must either accept it or the certainty of discovery.

The footsteps were getting nearer. Harry resolved to accept the alternative. He blew out the candle, leaving the place in the same darkness as before.

Then he lifted the first shroud, and took his place beside the strangest bedfellow he had ever been with in his life. As he cautiously drew the sheet over him and around him, so that no part of him should be visible, he heard the key turned in the padlock of the door.

Harry's heart beat rapidly. Would he be discovered?

He heard the door turn on its rusty hinges. Someone had entered—nay, two persons, and one of these, to Harry's amazement, was a woman.

He could see nothing just then, but he could hear their voices.

"What a horrid place!" came the voice of the woman—one of the most musical voices Harry had ever heard. Even in the awful predicament in which he was then placed, it thrilled him more than any voice had ever thrilled him before. "Horrid! Do you mean to tell me they have dared to place the body of Pierre Evison here?"

Pierre Evison! It was lucky for Harry they were not looking in his direction at that moment, or the movement he gave under the shroud must have betrayed him.

"Yes, madam. We can't be over pertickler, you see."

"So it seems," said the lady, with a sigh. "Poor—poor fellow! One of the truest hearts that have ever lived to his here!"

"'Tis only for a short time, madam. His friends—if he has any—can bury him in what way they think best after the ingwitch is over. Has he any friends, d'yer think?"

"How should I know?" said the lady quickly. "There may be others—perfect strangers like myself—who may take interest in the poor fellow just through reading about him in the newspapers. I think I may promise that he will not lie in a pauper's grave."

"It's very good of yer, madam—very good of yer; it's all one to the authorities. And now you just want to look upon his face. I tell yer, it ain't a nice sort er thing to look upon the dead in this place, if yer ain't used to it. It took me a good time to get used to it, I can tell yer."

"I have pretty strong nerves. I came here expressly to look upon his face, and I'm not such an arrant coward as to turn back without fulfilling my intention."

"I beg pardon, lady, I'm sure; I only thought it my duty to warn you."

"Quite right; but you need have no fear of me."

"Step this way, please."

Harry could see, even through the sheet under which he lay, the gleam of a lantern flash across his face, and the rustle of a dress sweeping his very feet.

A moment, which seemed like an age to Harry, of deepest silence.

"This is Pierre Evison, madam."

Another moment of profound silence, and then Harry heard what seemed to him like a suppressed sob.

Who could the lady be? All fear of detection vanished. He was burning with curiosity to find out. But how could he do so without being found out himself?

Harry dared all. He must look upon the lady's face—the lady who was so interested in poor Pierre Evison.

So, with the greatest possible caution, he pulled down a corner of the sheet and peeped out.

He saw a rough, uncouth man, holding in one hand a lantern, with the other, he had drawn aside the upper part of the winding sheet which covered the remains of Pierre Evison.

And looking down upon the dead man's face was a woman in a black, hooded cloak that descended from the crown of her head to her feet.

But alas! for Harry's expectations. The wish to look upon the fair unknown's face was defeated, for a thick veil was drawn tightly over it.

Presently he saw her bend lower, and place something upon the dead man's breast; then she again sighed deeply, and turned away.

Harry quickly covered his head again.

"I have finished," said the lady, in low, musical tones, that were now instinct with inexpressible pathos. "Take me away."

"Right, madam; I'm quite ready," said the man, whom Harry judged to be the keeper of the deadhouse.

Again the light of the lantern flashed across the sheet under which the boy lay, again he felt the sweep of a dress at his feet, then he heard the sound of footsteps retreating to the door, the creak of the latter as it opened and shut, the click of the lock as it was shot into its place.

Once more he was alone and in darkness—once more he was with the silent dead.

Harry drew a long breath. His nerves had been strung to high tension during the last few minutes. It had all been so strange and surprising that he had scarcely breathed.

Who could the lady have been? A relative of Pierre's? Harry had never once heard Pierre refer to a relative.

Once, in fact, the lad had put to him the question.

"Haven't you any brother or sister, father?"

"No, lad," Pierre had answered shortly.

"Why, you're as bad off as I am," Harry had said. "I haven't a brother or sister either."

Harry had noticed his father shiver at these words.

"No," he had answered quickly; "and thank Heaven that you haven't!"

"Why?" he had asked in surprise. "I should rather like a sister, especially if she were anything like Angela."

Pierre's sole answer to this was:

"Two months are enough to feed in these hard times without any more." Then he changed the subject.

So that if the lady was a relative of Pierre, it was strange that our hero had never heard of her or seen her before.

But there was no time to waste in conjecture. The night was advancing, and much still remained to be done.

Before he left that charnel-house, however, he determined to see what it was the lady had left upon Pierre's breast.

Harry lit once more his candle, and again reverently lifted the sheet.

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

WRITE AND TELL THE EDITOR WHAT YOU
THINK OF THIS STORY.

IN NEXT FRIDAY'S "THE PRISONER OF LHASA."
"UNION JACK."

WITTY WILL WYNN.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A CLOWN.

(Continued.)

"Do you see that?" Grix said, bending down till his face almost touched Will's; "that's where you are going, my witty lad. You won't do much more clowning in this world, I'm thinking! You thought you'd cut out Joe Grix, didn't you? But, you see, it's the one who laughs last that laughs best! Ho, ho, ho!"

The veins stood out on Will's forehead like whipcord. A handkerchief bound over his nose and mouth half stifled him. In vain he writhed and wriggled. He had been firmly bound. And all the while Joe Grix stared down at him, gloating over his agony. Then, not content with torturing him with words, he struck him a blow across the face with his open hand.

Even Sleuth Slymer, heartless and cruel as he was himself, seemed to think his companion was going too far.

"Stop that!" he cried; "he'll suffer enough in a minute without that!"

Then there was a sudden darkness. The private detective had extinguished the light. Will felt himself raised up from the couch. Grix bore him to the open trap, and then, with a fiendish laugh, shot him down.

There was a hollow splash, then a slamming sound as the trapdoor was flung down into its original position. When, a few seconds later, the light of a match flared out, Sleuth Slymer and Joe Grix were alone in the room. Slymer lit the lamp. His face was livid; his limbs were trembling. The deed had been done. He was a coward, an arrant coward, and conscience had already begun to gnaw at his heart-strings. With a shudder, he glanced at the trap in the floor. Joe Grix, too, was pale to look upon. But the deed was done! For a while, both men, without speaking, stood motionless, avoiding one another's eyes. Then in a voice, hoarse and gurgling, Slymer whispered:

"Quick, give us a drink of your brandy! I—I am feeling queer!"

"Why, man, what's amiss!" muttered Grix, though his own hand was shaking as he passed his flask; "dead men don't tell tales. No one knows that the lad was here. We've nothing to fear. And now it's only a question of getting the reward out of Coppers. Don't shiver like that and look as if you saw a ghost. We've done the trick, and done it well. Think of the reward, man, £500 apiece!"

"Yes, yes!" answered Slymer chokingly, "the reward; it's good, and I wanted money, but—but"—again he glanced shudderingly at the trap—"but you and I, Joe Grix, are murderers! If ever the facts come out, you and I would swing for this night's work!"

"Stop your cursed croaking!" whispered the other fiercely, but glancing uneasily over his shoulder; "do you want to give us the blues? Hand over that flask! Curse it, man, your infernal talk has been and upset my nerves!"

He did not remove the flask from his lips till he had drained down the last drop.

"Now let's get away. What are your plans?"

"I am going to send a telegram first thing to-morrow morning to Coppers, telling him that I have discovered the whereabouts of his ward. I tracked her down to where she's staying before I enticed the lad here. That'll bring Coppers up fast enough. But"—he paused for a moment—"we don't tell him where she is till he has paid up in full, both for finding her, and—for what we've done to-night. Leave me to drive the bargain. You'll have to watch the house where Ada Graham is to see that she doesn't give us the slip again."

Joe Grix nodded his head approvingly.

"That sounds right enough. And let's get to bed. We shall have the morning on us before we know where we are!"

Next morning Ada Graham sat waiting for Will in her little room, the window of which looked out into the street. At eleven o'clock she began to get anxious, and wondered why he did not come. He had promised to be with her not later than ten. Going to the window, she glanced out. On the opposite side, a man of huge proportions was slowly walking up and down, now and again glancing in her direction.

She recognised the man. It was Joe Grix. A strange feeling of uneasiness came over her. She knew that he was a bitter enemy of Will's; then it flashed through her mind that he must be watching either for her or Will. What did it all mean? Why did not Will come? And her uneasiness changed to a vague feeling of terror. At twelve o'clock, she could no longer contain herself. She knew where Will had purposed staying the night before. She must make inquiries.

When she left the house, Joe Grix, who was still pacing up and down, waited for a moment, then followed after her at a respectable distance. She was quite conscious that she was being followed, but her one thought now was of Will.

On inquiring for Will at the hotel, she was told that he had

not been seen since the day before, when he had engaged a bedroom.

Ada's heart sank within her. What was to be done? She was alone, and knew nothing of London. But she did not lose her presence of mind. She would give information to the police. The proprietor of the hotel, having told her the way to Bow Street, the brave girl hurried off.

Joe Grix, who had been waiting outside, followed her. When he saw her enter the police-station, his face changed colour.

"Curse her!" he muttered uneasily; "that's her game, is it? She's going to inform the police. I wish to Heaven Slymer would come along, he'd know better what to do." He paused for a moment, and then a reassuring thought seemed to cross his mind. "Well, let her inform the police. The river does not tell tales, even if it does give up its dead!"

HOW IT FARED WITH WILL—SLYMER MEDITATES MORE VILLAINY.

In that awful moment when, gagged and bound hand and foot, Will had plunged down through the darkness, he had commended his soul to Heaven. Though scarcely a second of time elapsed before he struck the rushing water below and disappeared beneath the surface, in that brief instant he endured a martyrdom of agony. He was unconscious of the utter hopelessness and impossibility of salvation. He felt himself sinking deeper and deeper beneath the water, and at the same time being borne along by a swift current. Distorted pictures shaped themselves before his brain. He only prayed that the end might come quickly. But he rose again to the surface, sucked in a draught of air through the soaking bandage that covered mouth and nose; then sank under again. A fierce, agonising struggle for breath followed; then all pain passed away, and a subtle drowsiness stole over his senses. Strange shapes, well-known faces floated mistily before him. Voices seemed to be singing in his ears. Then a great darkness and oblivion!

The tide had ebbed, and along the edge of the water the slimy mud-flats were showing, strewn with refuse, bottomless tins, and broken bottles. Here and there a few barges and boats stood out high and dry on the foreshore. A couple of barges had tumbled up from the cabin, and were standing on the deck of their craft. Dawn was breaking, and they looked around with sleepy eyes.

"Lor, Bill," said one of them, "I ain't seen the tide so low for a long time!"

"Nor I, neither. Hallo, Jack, what's that lying out yonder on the mud, just below that opening in the wall?"

Both men stared across to where, immediately below a sewerlike opening in the wall, from which a turbid stream was flowing, lay a motionless, dark mass.

"Bill, it looks to me like a body."

They exchanged quick glances. Then, without further words, clambered down the side of the barge, and hurried across the mud, sinking kneedeep at every step, to the object that had attracted their attention.

"It's a lad—gagged and bound! Great heavens, Bill, there's been foul play! I'm afeared we've come too late! Quick! off with them ropes! Poor little chap, we're too late!"

Will, motionless, his features ashen grey, showed no signs of life. But the other man, placing his hand over the region of his heart, gave a hoarse cry of hope.

"Quick, Jack, the heart's beatin'! We may save him yet! Let's get him aboard the barge. For Heaven's sake, look sharp! The laddie's life may depend on it!"

They were great enough men, but their hearts were in the right places. Quickly but tenderly they bore the poor little fellow across the mud. Once on board, they carried him down into the cabin and stripped off his clothes, and began to apply artificial respiration, and one of them forced a brandy-flask between his rigid lips.

The breathing gradually became stronger and more regular, a faint tinge of colour began to show on the livid cheeks.

But over an hour passed, during which time the men scarcely ceased for a moment from their exertions, before Will half opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" they heard him whisper. "The trap—the trap!"

"We shall save him now. Keep on rubbing, Bill, while I give him another dose of brandy!"

Another half an hour passed, however, before Will properly recovered consciousness. Even then he could not but believe that he was dreaming. His last remembrance had been of darkness and icy waters; now, swathed in blankets, he was lying in a little cabin, two bronzed, stalwart men bending over him.

"Where am I?" he asked feebly, for his head was reeling, and he felt as weak as a baby.

"You're all right, my lad, now. But it was a near squeak. You're on board the 'Lively Polly.' Me and Bill found you lying on the mud below an old sewer mouth. If the tide had been up instead of down, you must have been swept out into the river. You've had a marvellous escape! But now tell us about yourself. I am thinking we ought to give notice to the police."

"Yes," whispered Will hoarsely, "they tried to murder me. I know one of them; I have my suspicions as to the other. But they shall not escape this time!"

But Will was calculating without his host. He had scarcely spoken the words when he sank back in a swoon, from which, after a while, he passed into a semi-conscious state of delirium. Nor was it to be wondered at. The wonder was that he lived at all. Many would have succumbed under the terrible ordeal through which he had passed.

It was sad to listen to his babbling. His one thought seemed to be of Ada. Several times he started up, and cried out that he must go to her; that she needed his protection. But strong arms held him down.

"Tell you what, Bill, the tide's turned, and we must be casting loose. You slip ashore. We must get the lad to the hospital, and just drop into the nearest police-station, and tell 'em what's happened."

Shortly after a couple of police came on to the barge. Unfortunately Will was still delirious, and the men could give them but little information. However, Will was conveyed to a hospital, and the police gave instructions that the moment he became conscious they were to be informed of the fact.

"A telegram just come for you," said Joe Swilley, entering the room where the miser Copples, brooding uneasily and biting his long nails, sat alone.

He snatched the envelope from the man's hand, and tore it open with feverish haste.

"Success all down the line. Your ward discovered. Come at once to 38, Jorrook's Hotel, Strand, London."

The miser gave a hoarse cry of triumph so sudden that Swilley started back in amazement.

"Quick, pack my bag! I must go to London at once! Success—success at last!"

He almost shrieked the words, and, like some bird of ill-omen, hopped up and down the room, rubbing his talon-like hands together. The words "Success all down the line" had a deeper meaning underlying them. When Joe Grix and Sleuth Slymer had interviewed the miser before going to London, it had been arranged that if Will Wynn were found and got rid of, the news would be conveyed in these words.

Copples could scarcely contain himself. Now only Ada stood between him and a fortune. The danger that had so long hung over his head like a Damoclean sword, had passed away. Everything had come right at last. Will Wynn was no more; Ada had been discovered!

But even now there was a certain damp upon his unnatural joy, and as he sat in a railway carriage, bound for London, he nervously fingered his cheque-book.

"They'll want paying for what they've done," he groaned. "It will cost me a small fortune. Always paying out—always paying out!"

And though he had danced for joy at the thought of the death of an innocent lad, a tear trickled down his beaklike nose at the prospect of parting with some of his beloved gold.

It was dusk when he entered a private room at Jorrook's Hotel to find Sleuth Slymer—he had discarded his disguise—awaiting him.

"Well?" he whispered, carefully closing the door.

"All's well," answered Slymer; "the boy's out of the way for good! We've got your ward under our eyes, and can lay hands on her at any moment. Joe Grix is keeping watch."

"Where is she?" croaked Copples eagerly.

"Not so fast, Mr. Copples. Before I tell you that, supposing we settle up our accounts. We've done our work, and it's time we saw the colour of your money!"

The old miser shivered as if he had been pricked. He had dreaded that moment.

"Come," said Slymer, "there's £1,000 owing to us for last night's job. And we shall want another £500 for finding the girl. Come, let's have a cheque now, Mr. Copples. You ought to think yourself lucky; we're letting you off cheaply enough."

With a deep moan, Copples took out his cheque-book, and wrote a cheque for the amount.

"No," he croaked, as Slymer eagerly stretched out his hand to take it; "I will only hand it to you when you put me in possession of my ward. Not till then, Sleuth Slymer; not till then. That's my fair."

Something like a snarl escaped the private detective's lips.

"Then I don't take you to where your ward is!"

A strange light glittered from the miser's eyes.

"Oh, ho! Then I shall have to put the case in the hands of the regular police. You have no claim on me, after all. You have no writing of mine. Ho, ho! So you won't take me to my ward? Then I may as well tear up this cheque."

Sleuth Slymer had turned the colour of death. His ill-gotten reward seemed to be slipping from out his grasp. He had a special reason for wishing to get possession of the cheque then and there. Treacherous, even to his companion in villainy, he had intended to get it turned into hard cash and leave England. He had no intention of sharing the money with Joe Grix.

"I want that cheque now. Take care, Mr. Copples, if I chose to speak, I might make it awkward for you!"

"Yes," said Copples; "but it would be still more awkward for you."

"Yes."

Slymer bit his lips. Copples was more cunning than he had thought him.

"No, no! Give me my ward, and I promise you that you shall have the cheque, but not till then!"

The detective was beaten. With an evil look on his features, he led the way from Jorrook's Hotel to the street where Ada was lodging. She had returned to her room, after having laid information with the police about Will's disappearance. She knew that she was being watched; but what could she do? She was alone and helpless. She could only wait in her room, hoping that Will might yet return, dreading that some terrible news might reach her.

She gave a violent start as a loud knocking at the street door rang out. Was it news of Will? She hurried out of the room into the passage, in time to hear a croaking voice inquire if a young lady by the name of Graham was within. And the next moment Copples, followed closely by Sleuth Slymer, entered.

"There you are," croaked Copples malignantly, "the pretty bird that thought her home a cage. But you are coming back with me, and this time we'll take good care to make your cage stronger!" Then, turning to Slymer: "Call a cab!"

Slymer stepped outside to where Joe Grix was waiting. Before going for a cab, he whispered to him:

"Joe, the old miser means to try to get out of paying us. This isn't the place and time to make a fuss. Don't show any signs of annoyance now. We'll go back with him to Oldham. Once we get him alone in the old house, we'll see what can be done."

"What?" muttered Joe Grix, with an oath.

"Hush, keep quiet! Wait till we get him alone in the old house!"

It was a case of diamond cut diamond. The miser Copples, who loved his money as dearly as he loved his life, still clung to the hope of somehow being able to defraud his villainous tools of their crime-earned wages; Sleuth Slymer, on the other hand, had made up his mind at all costs to have his rightful dues, and, if possible, a little bit over. He had also another little scheme in his mind's eye. England had become rather too warm for him. Why should he divide the reward with Joe Grix? If only he could get the money, he meant to leave his confederate in the lurch, and quit the country.

Joe Grix, a dull-brained brute at the best of times, had no such similar ideas. He had been revenged on the boy-crown, and once he had got the money, he was looking forward to having a good time, and a good time with him meant bestial intoxication.

When the cab drove up, Copples, tightly gripping Ada's wrist, escorted her into it.

"We're coming down to Oldham with you," said Sleuth Slymer; "we've still got that matter of business to settle up."

"Very well!" snarled Copples, "only you don't come in my cab. You can go as you please!"

"Mean old rat!" snapped Sleuth Slymer, when the cab had driven off; "but we'll be even with him, Joe, yet. Heaven! If I only knew where he kept his money stowed away, I'd help myself without even asking him!"

Joe Grix's eyes, glazed from much drink, lit up with an avaricious gleam.

"And why not?" he growled hoarsely. "You and me might work the job between us."

Slymer glanced round uneasily.

"Hist! We'll try and get our rightful dues fairly first, but if not—well, he's an old man, and it's a quiet spot, and—"

"I tumble to your meaning!" hoarsely whispered Grix; "and if it comes to that, why, I'm your man!"

The two scoundrels travelled down to Oldham in the same train, but not in the same carriage as Copples and Ada.

Ada, her mind racked with a hundred conflicting and agonising thoughts, noticed that her guardian seemed strangely preoccupied. He took but little notice of her, but grimly muttered to himself, and occasionally a cruel, meaning smile distorted his features. Once she just caught the words:

"They wouldn't be missed—they wouldn't be missed!"

She had no notion to whom they applied, but they made her shudder. She had grown to look upon her guardian as something scarcely human.

It was very late when Oldham was reached. Copples, clutching Ada as though he feared to lose her again, waited for Sleuth Slymer and Grix outside the station.

"It's no use coming to talk business to-night. It's too late. Come to-morrow evening at nine o'clock."

"Late as it is," said Slymer, "we'll come now!"

"No you won't!" snarled Copples. "If you show yourselves at my place to-night, it will be a waste of your time. You won't be admitted."

And, turning abruptly away, he dragged Ada with him.

"Curse him!" hissed Sleuth Slymer, gnashing his teeth and turning livid with impotent rage, "he means to do us out of our rights!"

"It's more than his life's worth!" was Joe Grix's reply. "What, after all the risks we've run? If I have to choke it out of him, I'll have it! We'll visit him to-morrow night, right enough. In the meantime, let's have a liquor up!"

For some little time they walked along together, morosely silent. Then Grix whispered:

"Slymer, there's been no news about anything being found in the Thames, has there?"

"None. But drop that subject. It's not a cheerful one for dark nights!"

COPPLES'S DEATH—GRIX AND SLYMER IN A TRAP.

When Will for the second time recovered consciousness, it was to find himself in a long ward, filled with many beds, nurses in uniform moving quietly to and fro.

Starting up in his bed, he called for his clothes. His first thought was to be up and doing. His brain was quite clear now. But a nurse sprang to his side, and tried to quiet him.

"It's all right, nurse," he said. "I'm quite fit; and I must be off. I've got some villains to hunt down—villains who tried to murder me! Every moment's precious!"

But the nurse told him that even if he were well enough he must not leave the hospital before the police had seen him.

Some half an hour passed, during which time Will, thinking of Ada, could scarcely restrain his impatience, before a tall, clean-shaven man, with keen, grey eyes, and a singularly powerful face, entered the ward and approached Will's bed.

It was Detective Pelter, of Scotland Yard.

"Now, then, youngster," he said, drawing up a chair, "let's hear everything. And be as concise as possible!"

"I think," said Will, "I'd better begin at the very beginning."

"Very well, fire away!"

With a clearness that rejoiced the detective's heart, Will told his story of the mystery of his birth, of his meeting with Ada, of the strange disasters that had pursued him, of Copples's animosity, of his gruesome discovery in the lonely house, and the confession that promised to throw light on his parentage; and he concluded with an account of how he had been decoyed into the house by the river, and had been shot down the trapdoor.

The detective followed every word with the keenest interest.

"H'm!" he said, when Will had finished, "it's more complicated than I expected—wheels within wheels. But if I've any luck, by to-morrow night we'll have three scoundrels under arrest!"

"Three?"

"Yes. This man Copples, the clown Grix, and the man who masqueraded as a clergyman. Now listen to me; you've got to keep quiet till to-morrow. I've a few investigations to make; if they prove satisfactory, we shall go down to Oldham. I'm glad to say nothing has appeared in the newspapers. They've no inkling that you're alive. The man Copples will have probably returned to Oldham. The question is whether the other two have gone with him. It's my business to find that out. I mean not only to bring to justice the men who tried to murder you, but also the man whom I suspect of having put them up to it—Copples! Now, just be patient, my lad, and stay here quietly."

The detective's advice was not easy to follow out. Will scarcely slept a wink that night, so feverish was his excitement. He felt his heart leap into his mouth, when a little before noon on the following day Detective Pelter entered the ward.

"Now, then, my lad, I hope you're feeling up to the mark. We must get down to Oldham at once!"

Ten minutes later, Will was dressed and ready to start. He was still weak and shaky, but the excitement of it all buoyed him up.

"I've been busy since I saw you last," said the detective, as they drove to the station; "I've been able to lay my hands on Mrs. Wynn. From certain papers she's shown me, it's quite plain that you're the son of John Graham, by his first wife, and Ada Graham's your half-sister; that explains Copples's motives in wishing to get rid of you. Secondly, I've been in telegraphic communication with the Oldham police. Copples and his ward have returned. And a man, corresponding to your description

of Grix, has been seen about the town in company with a very shady character, Sleuth Slymer, a private detective. They are both at present being shadowed. We shall be met at Oldham by two or three plain-clothes men, and before midnight I hope to have the three of 'em under arrest. I've got the warrants in my pocket."

All of which intelligence, as may be imagined, only served to increase the intensity of Will's excitement. His eyes sparkled, and his face flushed red, not at the thought of the fortune that would be his, but to think that Copples's reign of tyranny and terror over Ada, if all went well, was near its end. He could not restrain himself.

"Hurrah!" he shouted.

Detective Pelter smiled.

"Steady, my lad; we've still got to let our birds!"

"I tell you we'll get him alone. If he pays up fair and square, well and good. If not, wait till he's not looking, tackle him from behind. You're as strong as an ox, Joe Grix. Take care he don't cry out!"

"He won't do that if once I get my fist over his mouth!"

It was quite dark as Slymer and Grix approached the gate in the wall that surrounded Copples's house. They little dreamed that they were being shadowed. But two silent figures were behind them. When Slymer rang the bell, they paused.

"I'll wait here!" whispered one of the shadowers; "you slip back to Oldham. Pelter's due now."

It was Copples himself that opened the gate. He seemed in a more amiable mood.

"Come in!" he croaked; "I've been expecting you. If I was rude last night, you must forgive me. I've been worried. Come in!"

Copples led the way into the house, then up the stairs into the room containing the mysterious cabinet, the room which Dan Dugger had entered never to leave; the room in which Will had met with such weird experiences. It was well-lighted, and the two men entered without the slightest suspicion. Copples closed the door; but they did not notice that when closed it was totally invisible. Grix was stupidly staring round the room. Sleuth Slymer was greedily eyeing the cabinet, inwardly wondering if it was there that the old miser stored some of the money he was supposed to have amassed.

"I don't usually transact business here," said Copples, rubbing his bony hands together; "but it's nice and quiet, you see! I've no doubt both of you would prefer to take the sum due to you in banknotes!"

He took another step towards the cabinet. Grix's face expanded with an avaricious grin of delight; but a strange expression had come over Slymer's. Yes, the cabinet must contain wealth! No one had seen them enter the house. Perhaps there was a fortune behind the doors of that cabinet! And they were two to one.

Copples's back was turned. Slymer, with a quick movement, touched Grix's arm; their eyes met, and Grix read the meaning of Slymer's glance. For a moment he hesitated. Copples had already reached up a hand to the top left-hand corner of the cabinet.

"Quick!" hissed Slymer. "Now!"

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

Ready Saturday, May 21st,

PRINTED IN COLOURS,

SPECIAL NUMBER

OF THE

WONDER.

Full of Funny Pictures and Grand Stories.

PHIL GARLIC, WITH HIS GOAT
BILLY WHISKERS AND DOG BONES,

APPEARS EVERY WEEK IN

THE WONDER, 1d.

Special Coloured No. ready Saturday, May 21.

CHEQUES FOR CLEVER WORKERS

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

To Purchasers of Forks solving the following:

1. YREVE DUOLC SAH A REVLIS GNINIL.
2. A HCTITS NI EMIT SEVAS ENIN.
3. A GNILLOR ENOTS SREHTAG ON SSOM.

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

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

For **THREE PROVERBS** a still larger Cheque, &c.

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

If it takes £5,000 to pay the Prizes we will pay it cheerfully. All depends on the number of successful contestants, and the number of cheques and the amounts of each which we must send, according to our promise in this advertisement. There is no chance, no lottery. Each successful contestant will receive a sure and certain CASH PRIZE by cheque, as well as the Free Silver Watch offer mentioned above.

This offer is good for 30 days from the date of this paper. The cheques for the Prizes will be forwarded immediately, with the Forks ordered, in due turn as received.

The Result of our last Money Prize Distribution was as follows:

A Cheque for £40 was posted to J. A. Turner, Esq. (son of the Premier of British Columbia), 46, Queen Victoria Street, London, E.C.

A Cheque for £20 was posted to Charles Bailey, Imperial Hotel, Ilfracombe; and eighteen other cheques from £10 to £1 each.—Address

WATCHMAKERS' ALLIANCE, LTD.,
184, OXFORD STREET, LONDON.

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

FREE TO ALL

OUR 60s. SILVER WATCH AND CHAIN, who comply with this advertisement and the offer which we shall send. It would be ridiculous to expect us to continue giving away these Watches and Chains for any length of time, so kindly send at once if you wish to secure one. This is our first advertisement, and by it we are determined to bring our name before the public.

Our 60/- Watch and Chain.

For 1s. 6d. we will send an 18-carat Gold-Cased Brooch or Scarf-Pin, together with our marvellous offer; and on complying with offer we shall forward, free of any charge, our 60s. Watch and Chain. Understand—we charge no money for these Watches and Chains. Number is limited. Money refunded in full if sent in too late. Send 1s. 6d. with stamped addressed envelope.

What a Gentleman Says of our Free Gift Silver Watch and Chain:

"North Jesmond.

"Gentlemen,—I beg to thank you for the handsome present which came to hand on Tuesday morning. I simply answered your advertisement thinking it was a fraud, but to my pleasant surprise I received a silver watch and chain. I wish your company every possible success, and will recommend you to all my friends. You may make what use of this you like, if it will be to your advantage.

I remain, yours truly,

"W. STAVELEY."

What a Lady Says:

"Ingoldby House,

"18, High Street, Redcar.

"Dear Sirs,—I must say I think it is a most beautiful little watch and chain—a most handsome present, for which I return you many thanks. If you should think proper to make use of these few lines, you are at liberty to do so.

"Yours respectfully, E. STOTHARD."

RENNIE & CO.

(Dept. 339), 236, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow.

FREE. FREE.

OUR

£21 BICYCLES. £21

To every person taking advantage of this advertisement and the offer we will send. The Bicycle is packed in a wood crate, and is sent to your address FREE of any monetary charge, with one exception—that you pay carriage to railway company when you receive the Bicycle. We are giving these machines away as a startling advertisement, feeling assured that after you receive the Bicycle you will recommend us to all your friends as being a firm to be relied on for honest, straightforward dealings.

£21 BICYCLES. £21

For 1/6 we will forward our Gent's Epingie-de-Cravate or Ladies' Broché, together with our offer, and on your complying with offer the Bicycle is forwarded Free of Charge, as above stated. To save any disappointment, we will refund money in full to any person sending in after all the Bicycles have been given away.

Send stamped addressed envelope, together with P.O. or stamps for 1/6.

THE ANGLO-AMERICAN AGENCY

(Dept. 339), 195, ST. VINCENT STREET, GLASGOW.

PHENOMENAL SUCCESS.

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

ROYAL AMORETTE

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

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

THE SAXON TRADING COMPANY,

84, Oxford Street, London, W.

21/6/98.