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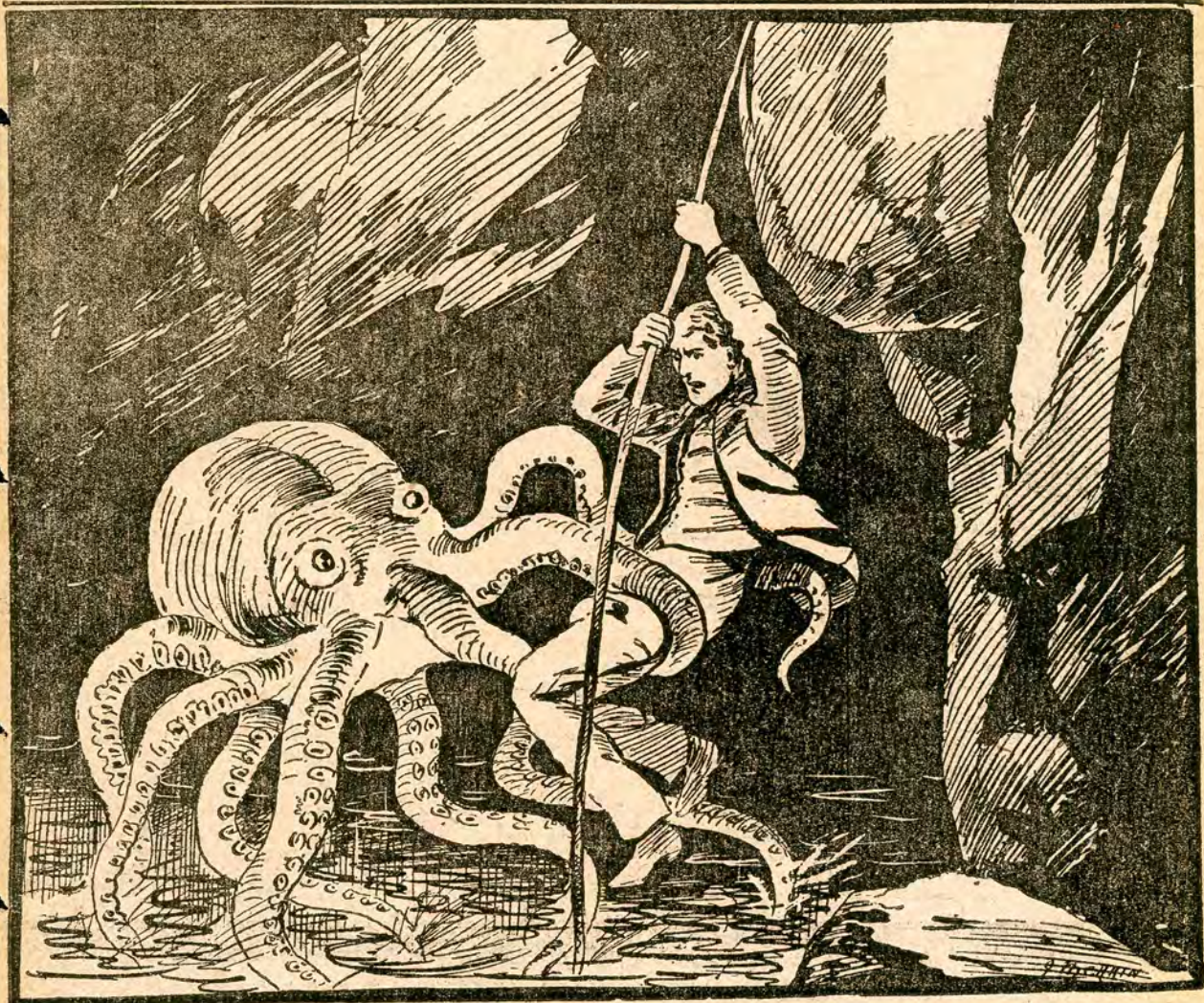
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The Heart of the World

The Story of an Expedition to the Centre of the Earth.



As Gerard hung suspended over the water, a long arm suddenly flashed above the surface of the underground river, and twined itself round his legs, drawing him downwards into the darkness with irresistible force.

No. 239.

THE HEART OF THE WORLD

The Story of an Expedition to the Centre of the Earth.

By CHAS. HAMILTON.

CHAPTER 1.

TELLS HOW A WONDERFUL JOURNEY WAS COMMENCED.

High above the rocky wastes of Northern California towers the snow-clad peak of Mount Shasta, solitary and majestic, like a giant guard set by nature to keep watch and ward over the treasures of the great Gold Land. At a height of fourteen thousand feet the summit pierces the clouds. A thousand feet below the extreme point is the bottom of the ancient crater, one side of which has crumbled away, leaving the interior of the mighty mountain open to the explorer. In the mass of solidified lava and scoria which blocks up the once-active crater are seen innumerable gaps and fissures, extending downward to an unknown depth. One of these fissures, almost in the centre of the closed-up crater, resembles the shaft of a mine, and is known in the vicinity as the "Black Gap."

One bright, sunny June morning five men stood by the verge of the Black Gap. The sun had climbed the heavens unobscured by a single cloud, and the bright rays fell in a flood of light upon Mount Shasta—on the dark forests which clothe the lower slopes of the mountain, on the belt of "red snow" which girdles it at a height of ten thousand feet, and on the spotless mantle of eternal white which covers the summit. But in the old crater where the five men stood there were coolness and shade. The lava rocks were cold and lifeless;

only the voices of the visitors broke the stillness of the crater, once the scene of terrible eruptions.

"This yer is Black Gap, genelman," said a long-bearded fellow, in the rough attire of a Californian miner. "An' now I've p'inted it out, I'll vamoose, if it's all the same to you. Don't like this old corner of Shasta; too much like a darned graveyard ter soot my fancy! So ef you'll fork over, Mister Chelton—"

The person addressed, a grave, thoughtful-looking man of thirty-eight, drew a double-eagle from his pocket and passed it to the miner, who, ducking his head to the company in general, commenced to descend the rocky mountainside.

"Now," said Dr. Chelton, looking at his companion—"now our expedition is about to commence."

The other three looked at him in some surprise.

"About to commence?" said a tall, athletic-looking youth of eighteen. "I fancied that it was about to end, cousin Lascelles."

"Well, you were mistaken, Gerard," continued Chelton calmly. "It is, as I just remarked, about to commence. Our destination is still 3,600 geographical miles distant."

"You are joking?"

"I did not bring you from London to the summit of Mount Shasta for the purpose of making a joke," the doctor replied.

"Where, then, are we going?"

"We are going to the Heart of the World—the centre of the earth."

Gerard started in amazement. The other two, a broad-shouldered negro and a stalwart white man, whose bearing showed the old soldier, stared at the doctor open-mouthed.

"Why didn't you tell us this before, doctor?" Gerard asked slowly.

"To tell the truth, I thought your hearts would fail you. Now we have come so far, I suppose none of you wish to turn back?"

"Of all the impracticable projects I ever heard of—"

"Impracticable! That remains to be proved."

"We shall prove it," answered Gerard, "if we try."

"We will try, at all events," said Dr. Chelton.

"But, cousin—"

"I do not wish to take any unwilling companions with me," the doctor continued.

"I trust that, having arrived at our starting-point, you'll decide to come. But I leave you to your own free will. What do you say, Ebony?"

"I go wherever you go, massa," replied the big negro, who was the doctor's servant, and devotedly attached to his master.

"And you, corporal?"

The old soldier removed his pipe from his mouth.

"Dooty is dooty," he observed. "I've received marching orders, and I ain't going to retreat unless I'm told to."

"Well, Gerard," said Lascelles Chelton, with a smile, "and what say you?"

"Of course I will not desert you, Lascelles. If you go, I go. We ought to have made our wills, though, before we left England."

"Come," laughed the doctor, "don't be glum; you'll be back in a few months, little the worse for wear, and Amy will be proud of you for what you have done."

"Is this yer the way, doctor?" asked Corporal Bolt, looking with some misgiving at the yawning abyss of the Black Gap.

"That's the way, corporal."



The savage whirled aloft his club, and rushed at the adventurers.

"Looks like broken bones, don't it?"
 "I don't intend to jump it, that's certain."
 "Slide down a rope, I s'pose?"
 "That's the idea."
 "Can you guess the depth of this abyss?" asked Gerard.
 "I know it for certain. It has been descended before."
 "The deuce it has?"

"Yes, Gerard, as I shall explain to you presently. Our task now is to descend. Our baggage must be lowered first. The depth is three hundred feet. Make that rope fast to yonder rock, corporal."

"When we're at the bottom, how shall we recover the rope?" Gerard asked.

"We shall not recover it," the doctor answered simply. "Among our baggage are ropes I brought from England, which we shall use during our subterranean journey. The rope the corporal is tying I purchased at Yreka, intending to leave it here."

The baggage of the party was considerable, but not too much for four stout fellows to carry fairly easily. Its amount had puzzled Gerard Thorne before he found out that the doctor's journey was not to end at the summit of Mount Shasta.

It took but a few minutes to lower it all to the bottom of the gap. Then the explorers followed, sliding one after another down the rope. It gave Gerard a queer feeling to be slipping down swiftly into the dense darkness. At last they all stood upon the lava-encrusted floor of the Black Gap, in gloom so intense that they could not see each other's faces.

CHAPTER 2.

UNDER THE EARTH.

Having now fairly started our adventurers upon their expedition to the centre of the earth, it would perhaps be as well to give some description of the four men who so boldly embarked upon the greatest journey of modern times. Dr. Chelton was a great traveller, and had already distinguished himself by a voyage to the Antarctic regions, and an attempted ascent of Mount Everest, the highest peak of the Himalayas. While on his return through India after the latter exploit, he had been attacked by Thugs, and these ruffians were already tightening the fatal noose about his neck when he was rescued by Corporal Bolt, then serving in India.

The shock of this narrow escape threw Chelton into a violent brain-fever. His health was restored; but his passion for undertaking strange expeditions had intensified into a mania almost. This was the result of brain shock. He was, however, quite sane and perfectly sensible in all his actions; only upon the subject of exploration in untrodden regions he would lose all his judgment, and would plunge into the wildest adventure without a thought for the consequences.

Gerard Thorne, his cousin, was his only relative. Left an orphan in early youth, Gerard had been brought up by his cousin, who, twenty years older than himself, acted as a father to him. The young man was deeply attached to the kind-hearted doctor, and whenever possible he accompanied Chelton on his dangerous journeys. He was still more deeply attached to the doctor's ward, Amy Ellesmere, the daughter of an old friend of Chelton's, who at his death had confided the girl to the care of the eccentric doctor. Gerard and Amy were, in fact, engaged, and Gerard had somewhat reluctantly left his sweetheart to accompany Chelton to California.

The negro, Ebony Jem, Chelton had picked up during a trip to Mashonaland. The corporal, after serving his time in the Army, had found a comfortable home with the man whose life he had saved, and he became the companion of the doctor's wanderings rather as a friend than a servant.

To return to our explorers.

"Anybody got any matches?" the corporal asked, groping about in the gloom. "This is wuss'n Egypt, or the Black Hole of Calcutty!"

"Did you bring candles, doctor?" asked Gerard Thorne.
 "Candles! ha, ha! We should need a hundredweight of them to light our way to the centre of the globe!" laughed Chelton.

"What light have we, then?"

"Electric lanterns, invented by a German savant, improved by one of my colleagues of the Royal Society, and finally perfected by myself. Candles! just see this; it is as good as a searchlight, every bit."

A brilliant white light suddenly flashed forth and dispelled the darkness. Dr. Chelton wore his lantern upon his breast, supported by straps over the shoulders. Taking three more of the lanterns from his pack, he gave one each to his companions, who put them on in the same manner. When they were all giving out light, the cavity in the heart of Mount Shasta was almost as bright as if the sun of noonday were shining into it.

"That's better," Corporal Bolt observed. "We can, at least, see our way about now."

"Yes, and these lanterns need no replenishing, my friend. Now, let us shoulder our packs, and march away."

"Whither?" asked Gerard, looking about him.

"There is a path leading southward, with a downward slope."

"How can you know that?"

"Didn't I tell you someone has been here before?"

"Who was it?" asked Thorne, with some curiosity.

"An American traveller."

"You know him?"

"Well; or, rather, I did."

"He is dead, then?" asked Gerard.

"Seven months ago."

"And did this traveller penetrate to the centre of the globe?"

"No, but he has pointed out the route to me. But let us go forward. I'll tell you about him when we halt for the night."

"Very well. Where is the passage you spoke of?"

"I'll pretty soon find it, my boy."

And he did. At the bottom of the Black Gap the chasm was closed in by walls of thick lava, which gleamed and glittered in the rays of the electric light—all except at one spot. There a narrow opening, about as large as the door of a small house, gave admittance to what appeared to be a tunnel penetrating into the bowels of the earth.

"What do you call that?" the doctor exclaimed triumphantly. "And, look; there is the sign left by George Garrison!"

He pointed to a cross, roughly cut with an axe in the solid lava.

"Someone has been yar, that's suttin!" Corporal Bolt remarked.

"We shall find other crosses as we advance," continued Lascelles Chelton. "You have, no doubt, heard how the American pioneers 'blaze' their way through a forest, by cutting notches in the trees, as a guide to those that follow. Garrison has adopted the same plan, cutting crosses instead of notches in the rock."

"Garrison! Is that the name of the man who has preceded you?" Thorne asked.

"Yes; a well-known American savant."

The explorers shouldered their loads, and, with the daring doctor leading the way, entered the narrow tunnel. Doubtful as they were of the result of their journey, they little guessed what terrible adventures were to be theirs ere they again saw the light of day.

CHAPTER 3.

THE PRECIPICE—THE UNDERGROUND RIVER—A SUDDEN ATTACK.

"Forward!" the doctor said laconically, as he strode boldly into the unknown passage, the lava incrustations of which gave flashes like diamonds as the electric light gleamed upon them. And forward they went, in silence, for the path was too difficult to permit conversation. The ground sloped somewhat abruptly; they were compelled to steady themselves with long sticks, resembling alpenstocks, with which the doctor's forethought had provided them. The slope, however, was not yet perilous. The doctor, a veteran mountain-climber, was quite at his ease. Corporal Bolt came next to him, and he brought into use the surefooted activity he had learned when fighting the hill-tribes in Northern India. Ebony Jem was an agile fellow, notwithstanding his colossal proportions; and Gerard, youngest of the party, united a vigorous strength to a supple activity.

It will be seen that our adventurers were physically fitted for the task before them. Gerard was the only one who did not believe in the utility and certain success of the expedition.

The corporal and the negro were too used to the doctor's wild trips to be much astonished at this, the wildest of all, and they were accustomed to obey Chelton without demur. They knew nothing of the difficulties of the journey.

Gerard Thorne, though he was not in the least scientific, was aware of the theories advanced by savants concerning the interior of the earth, and was fully convinced that the contemplated discovery of the world's centre was totally impracticable.

It was useless, however, to reason with the doctor, who was only made the more obstinate by opposition. Gerard anticipated that, before they had been many days, or, perhaps, hours, beneath the surface of the globe, some insuperable obstacle would present itself, and force even Chelton to turn back. To discover the centre of the earth! What folly! As well propose a journey to the moon!

For three hours the adventurers walked on, the descent continuing easy enough. Then the doctor called a halt.

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"What now?" asked Gerald.

"Dinner."

"What time is it?"

"One o'clock. We need a rest and some refreshment. Ebony, get out the provisions, while I ascertain our position."

Gerald looked at him curiously as he consulted his manometer, which indicated the depth to which they had descended.

"Well, Lascelles," Gerard remarked, "we are not at the centre yet, hey?"

"No," replied Chelton, laughing. "We have not reached even the level of the sea."

"Are we not yet at the base of Mount Shasta?"

"Almost. Shasta is 14,400 feet high. The bottom of the crater, from which our descent began, 13,400 feet above the level of the sea. We are now 400 feet above sea-level. Consequently we have covered 13,000 feet vertically."

"About two miles and a half."

"Isn't that good for a start?" demanded the doctor.

"Oh, excellent!"

"I fear, Gerard, that you don't believe in this journey."

"I fear so, too," the young man answered, laughing.

"Well, we shall see."

Dinner consisted of dried meat, tinned vegetables, and sea biscuit, washed down by pure water, of which they carried several gourds, filled from the golden Shasta River. The doctor expected to find subterranean springs, at which to refill the gourds.

After dinner they sat upon lumps of lava to rest for a few minutes, and then resumed their journey. The descent became more abrupt. The passage widened into a cavern, measuring several hundred yards from side to side. Their footsteps woke strange echoes in the vast hollow.

"Isn't it like a tomb?" the doctor said, who, usually high-spirited and light-hearted, jocular in the presence of the most terrible dangers, was somewhat depressed by the silence and desolation of the gloomy vault.

"Perhaps it is destined to be ours," answered Gerard.

"Come, Jerry, it's gloomy enough without a Job's comforter to make it worse. Think of the glory of discovering the world's centre!"

"What about the fire that burns there?"

"Central heat, Gerard, is only a theory which remains to be proved. Let us not manufacture difficulties. But, in any case, I'll never turn back."

"Not if we come upon a conflagration—melting rocks and burning stone?"

"Not even then. I have sworn to discover the earth's centre, and I will accomplish it, or die in the attempt."

Gerald looked at him quickly. Chelton had become excited as he spoke, and his eyes were flashing strangely.

"Come, cousin," said Gerard quietly. "No man can surmount impossibilities."

"Impossibilities do not exist for determined men."

Gerald shrugged his shoulders, and said no more. A few minutes later they halted, upon the verge of a precipice. This cliff, ending their path, overlooked a dark and apparently fathomless gulf.

"Here's the first difficulty," quoth Corporal Bolt.

"We can nebbber cross it," Ebony Jem remarked, looking questioningly at the doctor.

"Is it right-about-face, doctor?" asked Bolt.

"Do you want to sound a retreat already, corporal? Come, follow me."

The doctor marched off along the verge of the abyss, seeking a narrow spot where it could be crossed. But the search was useless.

"What's to be done?" asked Thorne, when the savant stopped.

"That's simple enough. Our path lies downward; we must descend to the bottom of this abyss," answered the indomitable doctor.

The adventurers looked doubtfully at the abyss, but no one raised any objection.

"One must be lowered first," continued Chelton. "We must ascertain the depth before we commit ourselves to the descent."

"I will go," said Gerard. "I am the lightest of the party."

"Very well."

A stout rope, three hundred feet long, was made fast to his body, under the armpits, and the other three grasped it. Below, as Gerard was lowered over the edge, was darkest blackness; but as he went down, his electric lantern lighted up his way.

He looked about him with interest. The side of the precipice, down which he was sliding, was almost as perpendicular as the wall of a house. It was crusted with lava, showing that this gulf had been one of the ancient channels

of the erupted matter, in the days when Mount Shasta was an active volcano.

One hundred feet. No sign yet of the bottom; but Gerard thought he heard below the faint splash of water. Fifty feet more.

The electric rays of his lantern fell upon a sheet of dark water, glittering upon the surface as upon a mirror. He hastily jerked the rope, as a signal for those above to cease paying out. The rope tautened, but not till his feet were almost touching the water.

While Corporal Bolt and Ebony Jem held the rope, passing one end around a point of rock for additional security, the doctor knelt upon the edge of the precipice, fearlessly peering into the vast hollow. Far below he saw the gleam of Gerard's lantern.

"Gerard," he called out, "have you found the bottom?"

"I have reached water, doctor," replied Gerard, his voice sounding strangely eerie as it came from the depths of the chasm.

"Is there no footing anywhere?" the doctor asked, anxiously.

"I think I can see the bank dimly, about a dozen yards away."

"We shall have to swim for it, then."

Then, all of a sudden, a frightful yell resounded at the bottom of the abyss. As Gerard hung suspended over the water, a long arm had suddenly flashed above the surface of the underground river, and twined itself round his legs, drawing him downwards into the darkness with irresistible force.

CHAPTER 4.

IN THE GRIP OF AN OCTOPUS—A TERRIBLE FIGHT AND A NARROW ESCAPE.

Horried by the appalling cry he had heard, the doctor leaped over the edge of the cliff, so as almost to lose his balance, eagerly seeking to see what had happened to Gerard. The rope was jerking violently, showing that something was tugging at it from below. With a sharp twang, it suddenly snapped, and Gerard's mysterious assailant dragged him beneath the surface of the black waters.

What a terrible sensation of dread numbed the heart of the young man, and chilled the very blood in his veins! Immersed in the darkest water, in the depths of the earth, in the grasp of some horrible monster! What situation could be more terrible?

Courage he possessed—the determined and resourceful courage of a dauntless British heart. And as the waters closed above his head, he recovered from the fearful horror which was deadening his senses, and made a desperate struggle for life.

He had caught a glimpse of his assailant. It was an octopus of the largest species, with seven twining tentacles, and a hideous bird-like beak. The underground river was at sea-level; doubtless some subterranean channel gave admittance to the inhabitants of the great ocean.

The force with which the octopus pulled Gerard had caused the rope to snap. This was fortunate, for had it held firmly, he must have been torn into two. A spattering gasp, as he disappeared beneath the black waters; then he held his breath, while his right hand grasped the axe he wore in his belt.

With all the strength of his powerful arm he struck at the octopus. The blade of the axe was buried deep in its body. A hissing sound came from its mouth, and its little venomous eyes glittered like emeralds. The tentacle relaxed its grip, and Gerard shot up to the surface, where he inhaled a deep breath of air.

But the animal was not defeated yet. It came for Gerard with a rush, its long, snaky tentacles thrashing the water like flails, and its beak snapping like that of a famished eagle. Gerard was a splendid swimmer, fortunately. Treading water, he placed his back against the cliff, and there awaited the onrush of his enemy. The long tentacles coiled round him. He struck savagely, inflicting frightful wounds upon the monster, but apparently with little effect.

A gleam overhead told him that his friends were coming to the rescue. The doctor, after affixing his lantern to the top of his hat, slid down the rope, and, reaching the end where it had snapped, dropped the remaining distance without hesitation, and plumped into the water beside his cousin.

Corporal Bolt and the negro hurriedly procured a longer rope from their packs, and fastened one end to a rock, intending to slide down and join the others.

The arrival of the doctor with the electric light saved the life of Gerard. Four of the fiendish tentacles were coiled round him, and the sharp mandibles of the octopus were darting at his face. The doctor dealt the brute a forcible blow full upon the jaw with his axe, shattering the mandibles. In its agony the octopus rolled about, beating the water madly,

dragging Gerard helplessly hither and thither, while his blows grew few and feeble.

The doctor threw himself upon the animal, guiding his blows easily in the brilliant light of the electric lantern, and severed, one by one, the tentacles which gripped Gerard. The octopus, mutilated, disabled, dying, sank with agonised convulsions to the bottom. Then Gerard, overpowered with exhaustion, fell back helplessly into the water.

"Help me! I sink!" he cried.

The strong arm of his cousin, thrown round his waist, supported him.

"Courage, Gerard!" said the doctor. "The creature is dead—you are saved!"

At this moment Corporal Bolt appeared at the end of the new rope.

"Lend me a hand, Bolt," the doctor called out.

"Yes, sir; I'm yer man!"

Between them they tied the end of the rope about Gerard, who was easily hauled up by Ebony Jem. The negro then lowered the rope again, and pulled up the other two in turn.

"This yer is a nice go," the corporal remarked. "Is Gerard hurt, doctor?"

"I think not, Bolt," said Lascelles Chelton, kneeling beside the half-senseless youth, with deep anxiety in his face.

"No, I am not hurt!" Gerard gasped.

"It was a near shave, though. You saved my life. Lascelles."

"Well, that's fortunate, especially as it was I who brought you into danger," Dr. Chelton replied. "Are you sure the beast didn't bite you anywhere?"

"Oh, yes; but his mandibles were horribly close to my face when you came," Gerard said, with a shudder.

"What kind of hanimile was it, massa?" asked Ebony Jem.

"An octopus," replied Gerard.

"How could it hab come dar?"

"From the sea, doubtless. I tasted the water; it was salt. No doubt that river communicates with the Pacific."

"The question is," the doctor observed thoughtfully, "how are we to proceed?"

"That's simple. Before the beast clutched me I saw the dim outline of the farther bank of the river. On the other side there is no cliff like this. The ground is on a level with the water. We must swim the river."

"S'pose thar's some more o' them hanimiles?" suggested Corporal Bolt.

"Well, what if there are?" interjected the doctor. "When you were in the Army, corporal, did you turn tail whenever you saw an enemy?"

"Not much," answered Bolt, drawing himself up with all the dignity of a British soldier.

"Well, imagine that this river is the Khyber Pass, and that the octopus are the Afridis!" said Chelton, with a smile. "They dispute our path!—good, we will fight our way through them."

"Dooty is dooty!" sentimentously said the corporal. "I follers you, sir."

After a short rest, Gerard was ready to go on. The explorers strapped their packs to their shoulders, and slid down to the water, their lanterns fixed over their heads. Hastily they swam the river. Brave they certainly were, but they did not wish to encounter any more octopus. Quickly they reached the bank, and pulled themselves out of the water, which was still disturbed by the contortions of the monster that lay dying at the bottom. The rope they were compelled to leave behind, but the doctor, anticipating situations like this, had provided himself with plenty of stout cord, and the loss was, therefore, small. Besides, as Corporal Bolt remarked, the rope, remaining there, would facilitate their return after the discovery of the Heart of the World. Gerard was of opinion that they never would return. What the doctor thought upon the subject he kept to himself. As for Ebony Jem, he never thought at all.

The travellers halted upon the shore of the unknown river to dry their drenched clothes and to rest. The delay caused by the river had occupied the afternoon; it was now past six o'clock.

"We will halt here for the night," said Dr. Chelton. "It is earlier than I intended to stop, but the experiences of the afternoon have been fatiguing. Besides, we must dry our

clothing before we can proceed. Set the stove, Jem, and let us have some hot coffee; that will put new life into us."

"You promised to tell us all about your predecessor in this cavern," Gerard remarked. "While we have our supper, let us hear about George Garrison."

"Listen, then," replied the doctor.

CHAPTER 5.

THE DOCTOR EXPLAINS.

"George Garrison visited me last summer, Gerard, while you were in Paris. I was well pleased to receive such an illustrious savant, famous alike for his enterprise in planning expeditions to unknown places, and for his audacity in carrying them out. We became great friends, so much so that, when he lay dying a few months later, he sent for me to hear his great secret. Conceive my astonishment when from his lips I learned of the possibility of a journey hitherto undreamt of. He related to me how, when exploring Mount Shasta and the adjacent region, he had fallen in with an Indian of the almost extinct Shasta tribe, who told him of a legend among the Shastas that a gap in the heart of the great mountain opened a passage to the centre of the earth. Garrison was incredulous.



Six desperate warriors remained, too brave or too enraged to retreat. Two of them were clinging to Ebony Jem.

lous, but being of an enterprising nature, he descended the Black Gap and explored the subterranean passages. Mark, Gerard, for a distance of five hundred miles vertically he penetrated into the globe, with his Indian companion."

"How long was he underground?"

"A year, nearly."

"He was dying when he told you this?"

"Yes. Don't you believe him?"

"No. He must have been delirious."

He was perfectly calm and sensible."

"Well, continue," said Gerard, not in the least convinced.

"He found the passages opening out before him in endless succession, and, fearing that his provisions would not last out his return if he went further, and the Indian being importunate to regain the surface of the earth, he turned back. In my opinion he was wrong; he should have pushed on regardless of everything, and discovered the centre of the earth. I should have done so."

"And died there of hunger."

"A martyr to science! What better fate could man desire?" answered the enthusiastic doctor. Gerard shrugged his shoulders.

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"I would rather be a live tabby cat than a dead savant," he said.

"That's a matter of taste. Well, Garrison, although he did not complete his journey, always felt certain that had he done so he would have reached the heart of the world. After his experiences he placed firm reliance upon the Indian legend. I rely upon it also. The American explorer always meant to make the journey afresh, well supplied with necessities, at the head of a party of geologists. Death overtook him before he had time to carry this project into effect. His friendship for me caused him to bequeath the expedition to me."

"Nice friendship that!" Gerard muttered.

"What became of the Injun, sir?" asked Corporal Bolt.

"He tumbled into a crevasse during the return, and was killed."

"So George Garrison came back alone?"

"Quite alone. What do you think of the story, Gerard?"

"One of two things. Either the solitude of the subterranean caverns rendered George Garrison light-headed, and he imagined that he had penetrated five hundred miles into the earth, or he was wandering in his mind when he told you the story."

"So you don't believe that there's a passage to the earth's centre?"

"That is possible, as far as I know. But we shall never traverse it."

"Why not?"

"Because it will be impossible for us to do so."

"Where does the impossibility come in?"

"Everywhere. First of all, there's the fire at the centre."

"Which I don't believe in, for one."

"Granted that it does not exist. There are other obstacles. The human body is formed, is it not, to support the pressure of the atmosphere on the earth's surface? Well, every mile we go down, the pressure of the air increases. It will end by assuming the density of water."

Corporal Bolt, hearing this, looked grave. Ebony Jem, who was picking a chicken he had brought from the upper regions, was too busily engaged to be impressed by dangers near or remote. It was Jem's great quality that he never thought, felt, or understood anything. He took his master's word for everything, and found this course much easier than puzzling his head about matters he could never comprehend.

"Perhaps you are right, Gerard," the doctor said tranquilly.

"Well, if the air is too dense to be breathed—"

"As we descend our lungs will gradually become accustomed to the density."

"There's something in that, but—"

"When we have to cut our way through the atmosphere with our axes, we'll turn back," the doctor said, laughingly.

"Well, at any rate," remarked the young man philosophically, "we may as well go as far as possible. There is a certain charm in exploring unknown regions. When we come to a wall of rock, or an underground sea—"

"That will not baffle me."

"Have you a boat in your pack, then?"

"No, but a good substitute, my boy."

"What can that be?"

"Large bladders, made under my own supervision, which we shall fix under our arms when blown out and filled with air, and which will enable us to float whither we please without causing us the slightest fatigue."

"Werry good idea," said Corporal Bolt.

"But when you provided yourself with these valuable articles, Lascelles, you did not reckon upon meeting with fish which will nip off our legs while we are floating along so comfortably."

"Once past the sea-level, there will be no inhabitants to the subterranean waters."

"Why not? Fish are known to exist under the earth; why not sea-animals?"

"That is such a remote contingency that it need not alarm us."

"Besides," Gerard said jocularly, "it's an honour to lose a leg or an arm in the cause of science."

"There's one thing we might wisely do," Corporal Bolt remarked, between the puffs of his pipe.

"What's that?"

"Take a snooze."

This was, in fact, a good idea. The explorers followed the corporal's excellent advice, and very soon were sleeping soundly, comfortably wrapped in their blankets.

CHAPTER 6.

THE SUBTERRANEAN SEA—THE ISLAND—THE FOOTPRINT ON THE SHORE.

For the next three days the progress of the explorers was uninterrupted and uneventful. They found the path smooth

enough for easy travel. The tunnel seemed to extend without end. Sometimes it let them southward, sometimes to the north, but always downward. At times the descent was almost precipitous, at other times hardly perceptible. But on the whole they progressed well. At the end of the fourth day the doctor calculated that they had covered two hundred miles diagonally, and fifty vertically; that is, that they were fifty miles below the earth's surface.

"Little enough," he said, when Gerard expressed his astonishment. "The way is so easy. It's like walking down the side of a mountain."

"I do not notice that the heat is much greater than at the bottom of the crater of Mount Shasta," Gerard observed.

"Well, that only proves that I am in the right."

"Are you sure that your reckoning is correct?"

"Do you doubt my instruments, then?"

"It seems impossible that we have accomplished fifty vertical miles."

"Look at the manometer yourself."

"True, it seems correct enough. But, though the atmosphere is certainly denser, I feel little difficulty in breathing."

"Didn't I tell you that it would all be simple enough?"

The doctor was right when he reckoned upon finding springs of fresh water below the earth. Once past sea-level the adventurers had no difficulty in filling their gourds. Of provisions, dried and tinned, they had ample to last them during the journey and the subsequent return. Hunger and thirst, therefore, they had no reason to fear. As for enemies, either biped or quadruped, they were not likely to be encountered. The ingenious savant who peopled the caverns of the earth with antediluvian monsters drew largely upon his imagination, regardless of probability. At least, so the doctor thought.

The marvellous facility of the descent began to work a change in Gerard Thorne's ideas. He no longer characterised his cousin's project as absurd. He was now inclined to place some faith in the strange tale of George Garrison, and he did not deem it quite impossible that the doctor's dream might be realised. The doctor saw, with pleasure, this alteration. Gerard had ceased to be the doubting Thomas of the party.

At noon on the fifth day the explorers found themselves upon the edge of a vast expanse of water. The cavern they had been traversing had increased in dimensions so immensely that its sides were lost to view. The top, or roof, was obscured in the gloom, beyond the reach of their electric lanterns, so that they could not tell its height.

"This is nothing less than a sea," the doctor said, halting upon the shore and looking with glistening eyes upon the underground sheet of water.

"Say a lake," observed Gerard.

"A lake, because it is surrounded by land; but a sea, from its immensity. On neither side can we perceive its limits."

"This cavern is certainly the largest in existence."

"That is probable."

"And does our path lie across this sea?"

"Certainly it does."

"You do not seem surprised at the sight of it."

"Not in the least; and for a good reason. George Garrison gave me a minute description of the route he followed, and described this sea to me."

"He crossed it?"

"Yes."

"By what means?"

"In a skin canoe, belonging to the Shasta Indian, his companion."

"What, they carried a canoe with them?"

"A canoe of animals' skins, stretched on a light, wooden frame. The Indians carry these canoes with them in travelling. The frame can be taken to pieces, and then the skin forms a cloak."

"Ingenious enough. But why the deuce didn't he leave the canoe here, for the benefit of future travellers?" said Gerard.

"That's just what he did do. Not that it will carry us all. It will bear our provisions and instruments, which we cannot suffer to be wetted."

"Where shall we find it?"

"I can easily ascertain."

The doctor speedily found the spot described to him by the dying American savant. On the rocky shore, beyond reach of the waves, lay the skin canoe, a bark so fragile that it seemed impossible that it could ever have borne two men across the subterranean sea.

"Now to load and launch it," said the doctor gleefully.

"And we are to swim, Lascelles?"

"Yes; aided by my bladders."

"Did Mr. Garrison ever speak of seeing any sharks in this sea?"

"He saw nothing alive, excepting fishes."

"Oh, there are fish? Good! we'll catch some, and have a fish supper to-night."

Gerard dipped his fingers into the water, to ascertain its temperature.

"Warm, by Jupiter!" he ejaculated.

"Well, that's all the better."

"But to make it warm, there must be heat——"

"Bah! There are warm springs on the surface of the earth."

"You won't be satisfied, doctor, until we arrive at the gates of the infernal regions," Gerard said, laughing.

"I would prefer even that to retreat."

"Ah, yes; but think of us common mortals. We were not built for martyrs. Besides, I want to see Amy again."

"I give all of you free leave to return whenever you choose. As for me, I shall go on to the end."

"You know we shall not desert you, Lascelles."

"If you do, you'll lose your share of the glory of discovering the heart of the world."

"Well, I could dispense with that, without missing it much."

"Let us launch," interrupted Corporal Bolt.

The doctor produced from his pack his valuable invention. The contrivance was really ingenious. It was composed of a series of large bladders, forming a circle, which were to be secured round the body, beneath the armpits. The swimmer's head and shoulders would thus be buoyed up beyond danger of immersion. The arrangement was far more handy than that of the common swimming-belt. With these contrivances it did not need the least effort to keep afloat; resting at ease, the swimmer could steer himself without difficulty in whatsoever direction he pleased.

The explorers stripped off their lower garments, each retaining only a thin pair of pants. Clothing and baggage were packed into the Indian canoe, which held all with ease. The doctor tied four long cords to the canoe, one to be held by each of the explorers.

"We shall tow it after us," said Shelton. "That will be little trouble."

They left the rocks, and walked down the sloping sands into the water. The warmth was rather pleasant than otherwise. The doctor would not admit that the high temperature of the water was an argument in favour of central fire. Gerard, however, had little doubt upon the subject.

It was rather a queer sight—four men encircled by bladders, floating upon the water, drawing after them the laden canoe, and casting darts of light in all directions from their electric lanterns. These they had fixed upon their heads, as when crossing the salt river. An additional lantern had also been affixed to the bow of the canoe, Chelton having provided himself with extra apparatus in case of accidents.

"If there were any inhabitants to these subterranean regions we should startle them not a little," Gerard remarked, as, pushing off from the shore, they swam, or, rather, sailed, in a southerly direction. They would take us for strange amphibian animals."

"Luckily, there are no inhabitants."

"Who knows? This journey we are making is altogether so extravagant and unheard-of, that I should now be astonished at nothing. Here we are, alive, floating on a sea fifty miles below the level of the Pacific Ocean. After that, I don't see why anything shouldn't happen. What we have done, is impossible, from the ordinary point of view. Why shouldn't other impossibilities take place?"

"Why, you are becoming as enthusiastic as I am myself," the doctor replied. "You were wrong, Gerard, ever to doubt our success. We shall succeed. We cannot fail!" And his eyes blazed again in the same way that his cousin had noted before, with misgiving.

Gerard was seriously uneasy at times about Lascelles. The doctor's horrible adventure in India had unsettled his brain, to a certain extent. Adventurous and daring before, he had become wild and reckless since. The project of discovering the earth's centre had fixed itself in his mind; had become, as it were, a part of himself. Should the journey end in failure—should the extravagant anticipations of the doctor remain un-realised, was there not danger that his reason would not survive the shock? Sane as Lascelles Chelton was upon every other point, upon this one he was certainly the victim of a mania—a mania which might end in the destruction of the intellect.

The explorers floated on, very slight exertion being needed to propel them through the water. Hours passed, and the opposite shore did not appear in view.

"Have you any idea how far this sea is?" Gerard asked the doctor.

"Fifty miles; so George Garrison computed it."

"Heavens! And cannot we rest until we have covered that distance?"

"There is an island, which the American explorer named Washington Island."

"Where is this island situated?"

"Near the middle of the sea. We shall reach it by midnight, if I am not mistaken. There we shall rest."

"Are you sure you are following exactly in Garrison's track?"

"My compass is my guide, and it cannot fail."

It did not fail, for at a quarter to twelve the doctor pointed out a dark mass ahead, upon which the electric light fell.

"There is Washington Island," he said.

Five minutes later they waded ashore, dragging the Indian canoe after them. The island was about three hundred yards in diameter, and nearly circular in shape. In the centre was a mass of rocks; around the edge was a sloping beach of fine white sand, upon which the sea broke in little ripples. Fifty miles underground, as the subterranean sea was, it obeyed the same laws as the great Pacific, which stretched so far above it, and had its ebbing and flowing like any sea upon the surface of the globe. The adventurous American had only crossed its width; its length was probably hundreds of miles.

Gerard, while the others secured the canoe, walked round the little island to ascertain its extent. Suddenly his comrades were startled by hearing a cry, or, rather, shout, which awakened every echo in the immense cavern. Fearing that Thorne had encountered some enemy, impossible as that seemed in the depths of the earth, the explorers seized their axes and revolvers, and rushed to his aid. They found him standing upon the beach, his eyes fixed upon the sand, his whole look and attitude betraying the deepest astonishment.

"What is it?" cried the doctor hastily.

"Look!"

Gerard pointed to the ground. The others followed his indication, and a simultaneous cry of amazement left their lips. For there, plainly imprinted in the soft sand, was the distinct outline of a human foot!

CHAPTER 7.

A STRANGE RACE.

"Someone has been here before us," the doctor said, in a low, constrained voice, after a long pause, during which the explorers looked at each other blankly.

No one thought of attributing the footprint to George Garrison, or to his Shasta comrade. For it was within high-water-mark. The tide of the subterranean sea, coming in, would obliterate it. Therefore, it must have been made since the last flood-tide.

"This very day a human being has stood upon this beach," the doctor continued, slowly.

That very day! The explorers gazed about them sharply, almost apprehensively. Human beings, then, inhabited this mysterious cavern, fifty miles below the earth's surface. Was it possible—credible? Could a race of their fellow-creatures exist in the recesses of this planet? A tribe of beings, cut off from their fellows by a mass of granite—by fifty vertical miles of solid earth? Dumbfounded, scarcely daring to credit their eyes, the explorers stood motionless, lost in amazement.

"It is not possible," Gerard muttered.

"But it is true."

"A man could not be here alone. If one, why not a nation? A community of beings, like ourselves, living in the dense darkness of this cavern!"

"In truth, it seems incredible."

Dr. Chelton knelt down and examined the footmark. It was large and flat; the foot which had imprinted it upon the sand must be that of a savage, which, never being protected by leather, becomes large and ugly. The toes, big and wide apart, had left distinct prints.

"If there is one mark, there must be others," the doctor said.

"Let us look, then, Lascelles."

Bending the light of their lanterns upon the sand, they soon discovered other traces.

A man had landed upon the island, walked up to the rocks in the centre, and—

The same thought flashed into each mind at once. There were no footsteps returning to the sea. The stranger must be still upon the island, concealed amongst the big rocks in the centre. The explorers returned precipitately to the beach.

"Who can it be?" Gerard muttered.

"Suppose someone fell down the Black Gap, and wandered here——" the corporal began.

"With a broken back?" asked Chelton.

"S'pose he came down with a rope, and wasn't able to get up again?"

"That is possible; but how could he live here?"

"I dare say there's fish in the sea. Don't Mr. Garrison say so?"

"It may be, though I should think such an unfortunate would be more likely to stay at the Black Gap, where he would still see the daylight, and have a chance of rescue. No; I think I have hit upon the explanation of this phenomenon."

"You have?"

"Listen. George Garrison, after his visit to Mount Shasta, wrote a book upon the manners and history of the native tribes of Northern California. This book was widely read. I read it attentively, and I remember an anecdote he relates, which I believe explains this mystery. The Shasta Indians, more than a century ago, were at war with another tribe, of the Tonaton race. A successful foray placed the whole tribe in the hands of the Shastas, who massacred many, and lowered the rest to the bottom of the Black Gap, giving to each man and woman a week's provisions. This was a true Indian vengeance. Shut up in the gloomy pit, the vanquished Tonatons were certain to suffer the extreme of human misery, and to die of hunger, after prolonging the lives of some by sacrificing others. But what if this catastrophe, so confidently reckoned upon by the victorious savages, did not take place? What if the unfortunate Tonatons, wandering through the subterranean tunnels in quest of an outlet, reached the shores of this sea, and settled here? I've no doubt there are fish in these waters. The descendants of the Tonatons still exist, a subterranean race of savages."

"But in total darkness?" said Gerard.

"Yes, that's a difficulty. However, this explanation seems to me to be the only one that is admissible."

"If you are right, there is one thing we ought to do without delay."

"What is it?"

"Beat a retreat," the corporal observed.

"That's what I was going to say," said Gerard. "The Californian Indians are none too peaceable, and their confinement in the bowels of the earth has probably not tended to make their dispositions more amiable. We do not want to be assailed by a tribe of fierce redskins, to whom our baggage would be an inestimable prize."

"They are certainly unarmed, for the Shastas would not have left them any weapons."

"But there may be hundreds of them."

"And besides, we don't want to shed blood," agreed Chelton. "Let us continue our journey without stopping here to rest. We are tired, but we can afford a little fatigue, in order to avoid a battle."

"But," put in Ebony Jem, "dar's a man on dis island now."

"He must have heard Mr. Gerard shout," said the corporal. "I reckon he's hiding among those rocks, watchin' us now."

"Perhaps he's asleep; he's made no sound."

"Hark! What's that?"

A yawn came distinctly to their ears from the pile of rocks in the centre of the island. The stranger had been asleep; but that yawn showed that he had awakened.

In the electric light the four explorers saw a short, but brawny, man rise from the ground. He was almost naked, and his skin, darker than that of an ordinary Indian, approached that of the negro in hue. This was, perhaps, accounted for by the fact that he must have been born, and have lived, in utter darkness, without ever seeing a gleam of light. For these Indians, imprisoned in the bowels of the earth, were not likely to leave the sea, whence they drew their subsistence, to traverse the two hundred diagonal miles which lay between them and the Black Gap in Mount Shasta. In one hand the savage carried a string of fish, proof that this sea was not destitute of inhabitants. In the other the explorers saw a formidable club. This weapon was formed of a jagged lump of stone, set upon a bone two feet long, the bone evidently being taken from the leg of a human being.

The light fell full upon the savage, who seemed to be listening. He did not look towards the explorers, but his head was slightly turned to them. His eyes, of which the lids were only partially unclosed, were dull and expressionless. The four men made no sound, but the savage was marvellously quick of hearing. Their hurried breathing caught his ear, and an expression of wild ferocity overspread his features.

"He knows we are here," muttered Chelton.

"Are we to kill der cuss?" Ebony Jem inquired.

"Only in self-defence. If he attacks us, let us try to shun him."

"Or fire a shot over his head," suggested Gerard. "He cannot be acquainted with firearms. Better to frighten him than to hurt him."

"Yes, you are right; but at all costs avoid his horrible club."

The face of the savage showed his hostile intentions. He dropped his string of fish upon the rock, whirled aloft his club, and rushed at the adventurers, still with one ear turned towards them, instead of his eyes. The reason was apparent to the white men. The savage was blind, and was guided only by the sense of hearing.

They separated to avoid his rush. The doctor, with a

blow of his axe, smashed the bone which formed the handle of the club, so that the stone head fell to the ground, and only the stump of the bone remained in the hand of the savage. He uttered a fearful yell, and flung himself upon the doctor with gnashing teeth. At the same instant Gerard threw up his revolver and fired, aiming at the Indian's leg, it being necessary to "down" him to save the doctor. Struck in the right knee, the savage collapsed at the feet of the savant, growling and foaming with beast-like fury.

Chelton hurriedly retreated, leaving the hideous being grovelling on the ground. Only for an instant, however, suddenly jumping up, springing along on one leg, the Indian reached the water, plunged in, and swam away with incredible swiftness.

"Horrible creature!" exclaimed Gerard. "We are well rid of him."

"If we are rid of him, Gerard. More likely he will return with a horde of comrades."

"Let us go at once."

"Forward, then."

"This encounter does not induce you to give up your project?"

"No, a thousand times no."

Gerard shrugged his shoulders. Hastily they launched the canoe, thrust into it the articles which had been already taken out, and, re-assuming their swimming-belts, continued their journey.

Corporal Bolt suggested extinguishing the lanterns for a time, so as not to offer a guide to the savages if they should pursue. By occasionally striking a match, to look at the compass, they could proceed almost as well in the darkness.

"No use," replied the doctor. "Did you not notice that that man was blind?"

"True; but the rest—"

"Are also blind."

"What! A tribe of blind men?"

"Certainly; without a single exception."

"I should like to know how you know that?"

"By the simplest of reasoning. Fish taken in subterranean waters, where the light of day never penetrates, are invariably blind."

"Yes, fish; but men—"

"For over a century these men have inhabited this cavern, without ever beholding either natural or artificial light. They, or their fathers before them—probably their grandfathers and great-grandfathers—never used their eyes. Total darkness ever enveloped them. The organs of sight consequently lost their power. The sense of hearing, constantly exerted, acquired additional power; sight was lost, because there was no use for it. As in the case of fish, so in the case of men. These children of the caverns not only do not see, but they have no wish or reason to see."

"How can they catch the fish upon which they live?"

"Probably by diving, or on hooks made of fishbones. The state of the man we have seen proves that they have fallen to the lowest stage of barbarity. No doubt they are divided into tribes, at war with each other. The fellow we saw must have taken us for enemies."

"He swam well, too; like a man who is accustomed to the water."

"They are doubtless at home in the waves. And the facility with which they traverse the sea will enable them to overtake us, unless we get beyond their sense of hearing before that wretch brings them to Washington Island."

"Isn't it strange that George Garrison saw nothing of them?"

"Not at all. We should never have encountered them had not that fisher happened to land upon Washington Island, just when we reached it."

"It was an unfortunate occurrence."

"Perhaps. Yet it will make a sensation when we relate at home the story of a tribe of human beings inhabiting the caverns of the interior of the globe."

"Nobody will believe us," said Corporal Bolt.

"That's very likely," laughed Gerard.

A loud splashing behind broke upon their ears at that moment, warning them that their foes were in pursuit. The progress of the explorers was rapid; but the savages were incomparably superior swimmers. Soon innumerable heads were seen dotting the water within the radius of the electric light. Blind the savages undoubtedly were, but they never swerved from their course, heading for the travellers with unfailing accuracy.

"At least fifty of them," the doctor said, uneasily.

"And they will overtake us in a few minutes, Lascelles. We must shoot to kill."

"I am afraid so. The revolvers are ready. Take them, my friends."

The travellers collected round the canoe, in which the loaded six-shooters lay ready for use. Each took a pistol in his right

hand, and a knife in his left. Floating beside the boat, they awaited the onslaught.

CHAPTER 8.

THE BATTLE.

The sight of the hideous barbarians who were swimming towards them might have struck terror to the hearts of the explorers, brave men as they were. The savages, stunted in growth, misshapen, but active as monkeys, with dirty faces and matted hair, and teeth that looked like the fangs of wild beast, seemed more like a horde of demons than human beings. They swam like fishes, closing in upon the Englishmen with discordant cries, grasping in their hands stone clubs and missiles. But the hearts of the Englishmen were stout. If for an instant they felt the chill of dismay, they did not show it. Calmly they faced their foes, their teeth set, and their nerves strung for the combat.

"Take careful aim," said the doctor, "and fire."

The explorers levelled their pistols, each singling out a victim. The steady rays of the electric lanterns clearly revealed the dark heads dotting the water. Four shots rang out, answered by a thousand echoes from the recesses of the vast excavation.

Every shot took effect. Four bodies floated helplessly upon the surface of the sea, dyeing the dark waters with a crimson tinge. The detonations struck the rest with astonishment. They stopped simultaneously, wonder and dread in their dusky faces. The expiring groans of the men who had received the bullets astounded them. They swam to the floating carcases, touching and rubbing them, utterly unable to conceive how they had come by their death.

"That's a surprise for them," Gerard said. "Perhaps they'll cheer off now, and give us no further trouble."

"I hope so," observed Dr. Chelton. "I hate to cause harm to such ignorant, helpless mortals as these cavern savages."

"It's a pity; but we must protect our lives."

"However, reserve your fire until they attack again."

"Certainly; but, by Jove, here they come!"

The savages had been scared at first by the sudden, and to

them inexplicable, death of their comrades. But their fear soon changed to fury. Uttering fierce yells, they again advanced towards the white men, more swiftly than before.

"Shoot!" cried the doctor. "Mow them down!"

The conflict began in good earnest now. The explorers fired fast, with fatal aim. One after another the savages turned over, and floated like logs. Suddenly Gerard felt his legs seized from underneath by a pair of strong hands.

A savage had dived, to take him unawares, expecting to drag him down beneath the water and despatch him there. But the air-belt prevented Gerard from sinking. Even the weight of the Indian hanging upon his legs only immersed him to his neck. He kicked fiercely to free himself; but the Indian, determined to kill him, came up to the surface and grappled with him.

Gerard pitched his revolver, empty now, into the canoe, and changed his knife from his left hand to his right. The savage struck furiously at him with a heavy stone. Gerard gave him a cut across the wrist, which forced him to let the stone drop into the sea. The wretch darted at him with his teeth, snapping like a wolf. Gerard drove the knife into his throat. He gave an inarticulate cry, and sank like a stone.

More than a dozen of the assailants had been slain, and of the rest a large number were swimming away, their opinion evidently being that discretion was the better part of valour.

Six desperate warriors remained, too brave or too enraged to fly. Two of them were clinging to the black colossus—Ebony Jem—who seemed fully a match for the pair. The others were attacking the doctor and the corporal.

Gerard, after ridding himself of his force antagonist, reached into the canoe for a fresh revolver, and then swimming towards the Indians who were assailing the negro, shot them both dead in a couple of seconds.

The negro then rushed to assist his master; Gerard followed. And the other four desperadoes were sent to the bottom with well-directed shots. The battle was ended. The Indians had lost eighteen or twenty men; the whites had sustained a few bruises.

No time was wasted after the lucky end of the combat. Delaying only to reload their revolvers, the explorers resumed

their journey. On they swam, fast as they could, fatigued as they were, anxious only to get beyond reach of the savages' pursuit. The hours glided by, and mile after mile was covered. At noon the next day, or, rather, the same day as the fighting had taken place, just after midnight, they sighted the opposite shore of the subterranean sea. Glad were they to view the line of frowning cliffs which closed the weary waste of water.

"Land at last!" Gerard said, with a sigh of relief.

"Land! thank Heaven!"

"A difficult shore for landin'," remarked Corporal Bolt, looking dubiously at the rocky, precipitous cliffs.

"There is a passage through these cliffs," the doctor replied. "George Garrison described it to me, and we shall easily find it."

"No. Are not, then, to climb the cliffs?"

"No. Besides, I believe that would be impossible. There is a gap there, which is the continuation of our route."

As they neared the shore—the doctor guiding their course with his compass—they perceived a huge cavity in the line of high rocks. The sea penetrated for a hundred yards or so into this gap. Swimming into it, the tired travellers dragged themselves ashore. Overhead the cliffs closed in, forming an arch; in front the gap was continued by a tunnel, which led, with a downward slope, through the earth.

"So this is the end of that vast cavern," Gerard observed.

"Yes. These cliffs, further back from the shore, no doubt rise to the roof of the vault. Our course lies through yonder tunnel."

"Do you intend to stay here, Lascelles, to rest, or to push on?"

"We must rest first, or we shall be knocked up."

"We must keep watch in turns, too. It will never be safe for us all to sleep again."

"And now, supper; or, rather, dinner. It's daytime now. Fifty miles above our heads the sun is shining, the birds are



The ground shook beneath their feet. From the roof of the tunnel several pieces of rock became detached, falling with loud crashes.

singing, and everything is bright. By Jove! I'm longing to look at the sun again."

After a hasty meal, they rolled themselves up in their blankets. Watch was kept all the time; but nothing happened to disturb their slumbers.

CHAPTER 9.

AN UNEXPECTED OBSTACLE— A DESPERATE EXPEDIENT.

If the blind inhabitants of the great cavern attempted any further pursuit of the daring explorers, they did not succeed, for the brave fellows passed the rest of that day unmolested at the mouth of the tunnel; and at six o'clock on the following morning resumed the march to the centre of the earth. This day, the seventh they had spent in the interior of the globe, was destined to be an eventful one.

The canoe was concealed among some rocks, to keep it safe from the savage's clutches. Our adventurers re-assumed their clothing and their loads, and marched on with light hearts. The encounter with the tribe of the subterranean barbarians—unfortunate as they deemed it—had not been without a good effect. It had broken the monotony of the journey, and the sharp fight had infused new life into the breasts of the explorers, already depressed by the dull sameness of all their surroundings.

Gerard, becoming accustomed to the idea of the expedition to the earth's centre, would have entered into the spirit of the thing, and, perhaps, have become as enthusiastic as the doctor himself, but for one consideration. The uneasiness with which he had previously regarded his cousin was now increased.

The doctor's mania—for it could be called nothing else—had completely mastered his powerful mind. He was often excited for trivial causes, and impatient of the least obstacle that presented itself. The insanity which had lain latent in his brain since the time when he had been nearly murdered by the Thugs in India, was reviving under the stimulus of this all-absorbing idea. The excitement of the combat with the savages had had a fearfully disturbing effect upon his mind. Gerard, looking at his cousin at times, saw in his eyes an expression which seemed to be that of incipient madness.

The young man was sorely uneasy. Yet what could he do? He had ceased to talk of returning, for at the mention of the word Lascelles Chelton became angry and excited. He could not force the doctor to come back. So forward they went, the doctor continually muttering to himself; Gerard full of uneasy forebodings.

The manner of the savant had become so strange that Corporal Bolt had noticed it. He sometimes exchanged looks of anxiety with Gerard. Once the doctor caught one of these glances, and, reading the honest corporal's thoughts, laughed loudly, but not very heartily.

"What are you afraid of, my good fellow?" he said. "Are you uneasy because I am excited? That's nothing. Now we are nearing our goal, I am naturally anxious. It will be all right when we have reached the centre."

"Are you sure that you are not ill, cousin?" asked Gerard gently.

"Ill? What should make me ill?"

"Fatigue, and the long immersion in the water, and—other causes."

"Nonsense, Jerry! If I am excited, it is because we are nearing our goal."

"The centre is still more than three thousand five hundred miles distant."

"Ah! yes; but consider what splendid progress we are making."

"We shall be in the flames soon," said Corporal Bolt, mopping his face with a big handkerchief. It was, in fact, very warm in the tunnel, and the explorers were covered with perspiration.

"We are certainly nearing heat of some kind," said Gerard.

"We shall soon get used to it," the savant answered.

"S'pose it gets too hot for us to go further?" suggested the corporal.



The madman sprang towards the abyss of fire. But just at that moment Gerard gripped him.

"I don't believe it will. If it does, you can leave me."

"Dooty is dooty," answered the corporal. "I won't desert the colours."

Then they marched on in silence. Gerard thought of Amy Ellesmere, and wondered if he would ever see her again. The doctor's determination, which seemed to grow more obstinate every day, pretty nearly killed his hopes of ever meeting his betrothed again. Once he entertained the thought of taking the doctor at his word, and leaving him alone to carry out his mad project. But he recollected the savant's long kindness to him, the affection that had so long subsisted between them, and felt that he could not desert Chelton, even though the doctor were insane, and dragging him to a useless death. The poor savant's disturbed intellect was another reason of remaining with him and taking care of him.

At twelve o'clock they halted on the border of a stream which crossed their path, emerging from beneath the rocky wall on one side of the tunnel, and disappearing again under the other side. The water was fresh, but very warm. The doctor looked at the river with a certain anxiety in his glance.

"Did not George Garrison mention this river to you, Lascelles?" asked Gerard, correctly interpreting the savant's expression.

"He did not. Look out for a cross, cut in the rock."

At various stages of the journey they had found these signs left by the American explorer; but since entering the tunnel they had seen none. And none could they find now. The doctor decided upon crossing the river. They waded through the water, which was, fortunately, shallow. On the other side, however, they found a worse obstacle. The end of the tunnel was closed in by a wall of solid rock. Dr. Chelton, pale with anger, examined it closely; not even a crevice could he find. The advance was stopped; it was impossible to go on now.

Gerard looked at the doctor with much compassion.

"Believe me, Lascelles," he said, "I feel deeply for your disappointment."

"Do you think that I am going to return?"

"It seems to me that there is nothing else to be done."

"Then you are mistaken." And the indomitable savant threw up his head proudly, like a man who is prepared for a struggle with Fate.

"Lascelles, what desperate expedient are you thinking of?"

"I shall open a passage through that rock."

"By what means?"

"By means of gunpowder—that is, dynamite!"

"The déuce!" ejaculated Gerard, in astonishment. He had thought that the return was now inevitable. But the doctor was not, after all, at the end of his resources.

"Listen!" continued Chelton calmly; "I am certain that I have followed in the track of the bold American, George Garrison. He was not stopped by this barrier. No; years have elapsed since his visit to these regions, and since he left them some eruption has displaced this rock. Nature, resolved to baffle me, has placed this mass in my path. Well, I will not submit to defeat. I will blow this rock to atoms, and—"

"And bring down a landslide upon our heads!"

"That is a risk to run!"

"You will destroy yourself, and involve all of us in your own destruction."

"I didn't think you were afraid before."

Gerard became as red as fire.

"Afraid!" he exclaimed. "I fear no more than you do. Well, sacrifice all our lives, if you will; I will say no more!"

"That's a sensible resolve," answered Chelton coolly. The affability of the savant had given place to a brusque sullenness of humour which surprised and shocked Gerard.

Ebony Jem, by Chelton's direction, cut a hole in the opposing rock with his pick, and a certain amount of dynamite, provided by the doctor for emergencies like this, was placed within the excavation. It was then blocked in with chips of rock, after the doctor had set a time-fuse.

"Cross the water again," Chelton said. "The explosion will take place in five minutes."

"We had better retire some distance, then," the corporal observed.

"A hundred yards will be sufficient."

They placed that space between themselves and the rock. The doctor, chronometer in hand, counted the minutes. In keen suspense they waited.

A deafening roar stunned their ears. The ground shook beneath their feet. From the roof of the tunnel several pieces of rock became detached, falling with loud crashes. The doctor rushed forward eagerly.

The barrier was gone. Beyond lay the tunnel, open to their feet. Nature had planked this obstacle in their path, but the doctor had conquered nature. The way was open again; there was nothing to do but to go on.

"Forward!" Chelton said exultantly.

CHAPTER 10. THE MAD DOCTOR.

Through the passage opened by the explosion the explorers went. Gerard looked about him curiously. Great cracks appeared in the roof and in the rocky walls. The deflagration of the dynamite had caused incalculable damage. A low rumbling reached their ears, coming from afar. Corporal Bolt started as he heard the ominous sound.

"What do you take that to be, corporal?" asked Gerard.

"When I heered noises like that in Injia, Mr. Thorne, I allers knew that suthin' was going to happen—an earthquake, or a landslip, or something like that."

"It must portend the same here."

"Yes; the explosion may hev started it."

"Nonsense!" broke in the doctor. "You are scared over nothing. The noise is probably only the echoing of the detonation in some other cavern near us."

The heat of the tunnel was much increased. The travellers discarded their coats, but that did not much relieve them. Perspiration covered them, and the heat made the least motion fatiguing.

What did this excessively high temperature prove? To Gerard Thorne, it proved conclusively the correctness of the theory of central heat. It was true that hitherto they had been singularly favoured. They had penetrated to a depth of fifty-four miles without being roasted, as, according to the theories of science, they ought to have been. Perhaps the presence of the subterranean sea, which absorbed so much heat, accounted for this. Perhaps the rocks through which they had forced their way were non-conducting. But it was certain that now they were approaching some point where the heat would be too great for them to bear.

This conviction forced itself to Gerard's mind; perhaps to the doctor's also. But the savant refused to receive it; he disregarded the plainest facts when they were opposed to his project, and continued to hope for impossibilities. In his face was expressed a sullen anger, and an unshaken determination to push on to the bitter end.

The end, Gerard thought, could not be far off. The temperature was fast becoming unbearable. The doctor, the slave of a hallucination which would not permit him to feel bodily discomforts, stalked on intrepidly. But even Ebony Jem,

used to tropical deserts, was showing signs of exhaustion. As for Gerard and the corporal, they could hardly stagger onward.

"Doctor, stop!" Gerard exclaimed at last, "I can go no farther."

"Stay where you are, then," replied the doctor, without turning his head.

"The fact is," put in Corporal Bolt, "we have not dined, and we are hungry. Let us halt for dinner."

To this Lascelles Chelton assented with a very bad grace. The halt was brief; the explorers were too hot and tired to eat much, but they drank copiously. Their gourds were full, having been replenished at the hot spring. The water had only partially cooled, but it was very refreshing to the Englishmen, devoured by heat and thirst.

"How long do you intend to remain here?" the doctor asked impatiently, when the halt had lasted twenty minutes.

"I am ready to go on now," Gerard replied, getting up slowly.

"Come on, then!"

Forward they went. Fiercer grew the heat. The tunnel now sloped very slightly, and it began to narrow. The rumbling which had startled Corporal Bolt was still heard. It had increased in loudness. That some violent convulsion was impending, no one but the doctor doubted.

The madman's three companions looked at each other with haggard eyes.

"We are doomed!" each face plainly said.

The thought of forcibly controlling the doctor occurred to them all. But the savant, as if he guessed their reflections, carried his axe in his hand, and the expression of his face plainly showed that he would not hesitate to use it. To attempt to seize him meant to commence a fierce and deadly conflict, in which, at least, one death was certain to occur.

The tunnel had now narrowed to a mere corridor, about seven feet wide. The roof, too, was only a few inches above the head of Ebony Jem. From ahead came puffs of fierces heat, as from a furnace. Were they, indeed, approaching the infernal regions? The adventurers asked themselves that question with terror.

"Forward, forward!" cried the doctor, gesticulating wildly.

"What do you fear? Death comes to all, to the faint-hearted as well as the brave. Is it not better to die in the cause of science than to expire unnoticed and unknown in your beds, twenty years hence?"

"For Heaven's sake come back, Lascelles!" exclaimed Gerard.

"Bah! a coward's counsel."

"You are dragging us to certain death!"

"Leave me, then!"

"You know that we will not leave you to your fate!"

"I scorn your paltry caution! Let us live as the discoverers of the earth's centre, or die martyrs to science!"

"You are mad!"

The doctor started, and passed his hand across his brow.

"Mad!" he repeated; "perhaps I am." His manner changed; the wild excitement died out of his face; the glitter of his eyes softened. Gerard was overjoyed by the alteration. Chelton was himself again.

"Dear cousin—" the young man began entreatingly.

"Yes, you are right, Gerard," said the doctor, stopping and facing his companions, and speaking in a low, subdued voice, "I am dragging you all to death. That shall not be!"

"You will return?" asked Gerard joyfully.

Chelton shook his head.

"You will not?"

"Never, without discovering the heart of the world!"

"Can you not see that that is utterly impossible?"

"Then I will die in the attempt!" answered Chelton; "but I beg of you to leave me. Let me die alone!"

"I will not abandon you!"

"I tell you I will never come back!"

"We will die together, then!"

"This is madness!"

"Madness indeed; your actions ought to be controlled!"

The fierce blaze returned to the doctor's eyes.

"Controlled! Would you attempt to control me?"

"For your own good, Lascelles."

"Touch me, and I'll kill you!" shouted the doctor furiously.

"Cousin!"

The doctor made a strenuous effort to control his faculties. It could be seen in his face that he felt his senses to be slipping away from him.

"Go!" he said hoarsely. "I feel that my brain is turning; I can no longer restrain myself. If I become insane, I may do you an injury. Leave me while there is yet time! Leave me, I say!"

"Never!"

"Then blame me not for whatever may occur."

"Lascelles, I entreat you—"

The doctor uttered a wild laugh, which rang weirdly through the tunnel, and rushed on, so fast that the others had some difficulty in keeping pace with him.

Meanwhile, the rumbling of the impending landslide was growing louder.

CHAPTER 11.

THE STRUGGLE WITH THE MADMAN—BURIED ALIVE.

Hotter and hotter grew the tunnel. A dim light, that did not come from the electric lanterns, diffused itself over the rocky walls. They were approaching some subterranean furnace, that was evident. The rock upon which they trod scorched their boots, filling the air with an odour of burnt leather. Portions of their baggage the adventurers abandoned at different points, unable any longer to sustain the weight. The firearms, the ammunition, all the axes but one, the blankets, the electric stove, the alpenstocks, formed a kind of trail behind the hurrying travellers. If they ever returned they could recover them; if they were going to death, the articles were useless. The intense heat caused terrible pain to their skin, their eyes were almost blinded. They were really in danger of being roasted.

Indomitable, determined, the mad doctor rushed on. Mad he truly was, there could not be a doubt about it. His blazing eyes, his working features, the terrible excitement of his looks and gestures, all showed that the demon of insanity had mastered his brain.

He was insensible to fatigue. The awful heat seemed to have no effect upon him. At last Gerard, determined to end this frightful journey, resolved to detain him by force.

It was time. A red glare appeared in front of them. The tunnel ended with a precipice, which overhung a yawning gulf. From that perilous pit came the hoarse roaring of a conflagration. Smoke poured up over the cliff.

Gerard caught his cousin by the arm. The ground sloped down towards the edge of the cliff; it was fearfully dangerous ground even for persons in the full possession of sense and nerve.

"Stop!" cried Gerard authoritatively.

The doctor shook off his hand angrily.

"Away, fool!" he shouted.

Gerard grasped his collar with a tenacious grip.

"Release me!" yelled the doctor.

"Madman! you shall not sacrifice yourself—you shall not sacrifice yourself!"

The doctor, carried away, struck at Gerard. Fortunately he no longer retained his axe. His clenched fist stretched the young man upon the ground. Laughing insanely, the doctor rushed down the slope towards the precipice.

Gerard staggered to his feet.

"He is doomed!" cried the corporal, pointing at the doctor, who had nearly reached the verge of the fiery abyss.

"He must be saved!" cried Ebony Jem, rushing after the doctor.

"Yes, yes; forward and seize him!"

They darted towards the mad savant. Chelton halted within six feet of the precipice.

"Ha!" he cried, "they would stop me, they would rob me of the glory of discovering the centre of the earth! Fools! they cannot baffle me! From this cliff the path is clear; one spring will carry me to the heart of the world. Farewell, morals, farewell, faint-hearted children of earth; I am beyond your power!"

And the madman sprang towards the abyss of fire. But just at that moment Gerard gripped his arm. Both fell. And rolled helplessly down the slope!

Another instant, and the pit would have swallowed them up. Fortunately Ebony Jem seized Gerard in time, and was in turn grasped by the stalwart corporal. The doctor struggled furiously, but Gerard held him firmly, and Ebony Jem and the corporal dragged both of them back out of danger.

"Let me go!" Chelton screamed. "Fools! you cannot understand what harm you are doing! I must reach the centre—the earth's centre. Let me go!"

They carried him forcibly up the slope. Several times his frantic struggles almost sent them rolling down to death.

"We must bind him!" exclaimed Gerard.

"Villains! vipers! let me go!" yelled the doctor.

"The ropes!" cried Gerard.

In spite of the madman's desperate efforts, they tied his arms to his sides, and secured his ankles. He lay upon the hot rocks, foaming at the mouth, yelling and shrieking in the madness of impotent rage.

"What are we to do now?" Gerard muttered, looking with compassion upon the unfortunate savant.

"We must go back," Ebony Jem said.

"How can we carry him that immense distance? However, we must try. Take him up."

"Release me!" screamed the madman.

Disregarding his cries, the three men lifted him, and carried him along the tunnel, deafened by his vociferations. Louder sounded the rumbling in the earth.

"There'll be a smash soon," the corporal muttered.

"It's an earthquake," said the negro.

A loud crash reverberated through the passage. Directly in front of them the roof collapsed, and thousands of tons of rock barred their way. They stopped, shaking in every limb, and looking at each other with blanched faces.

"Blocked in!"

"Buried alive!"

"We are lost!"

Such were the words that broke from them. Their doom appeared certain now. Their retreat to Mount Shasta hopelessly cut off, how could they escape? Two walls of granite enclosed them; at one end the piling rocks, at the other the pit of fire!

"Heaven have mercy upon us!" Gerard said, in a sinking voice.

Almost stunned by this terrible misfortune, the adventurers set the bound maniac down upon the rocks, and stood silent. What was there to hope for now? They were in momentary expectation of seeing the portion of the roof which still remained intact come tumbling down upon their heads. They felt crushed, stifled, beneath the weight of fifty-five miles of solid earth.

Crash succeeded crash, like rolls of thunder. The world seemed to be torn by the fury of some tremendous earthquake.

Even the mad doctor was silenced by the fearful roar. The fire died away in his eyes, and he lay passive on the rocks.

Suddenly the ground rocked and split in twain scarce six feet from the explorers. The shock threw them down; instinctively they grasped one another. They rose unsteadily, looking with horrified glances at the abyss which had opened before them. From its depths came a bubbling, hissing sound.

"Comrades," said Gerard, "we are lost; but while life remains, let us seek to preserve it. Above all, let us not risk separation. We have ropes. We will bind ourselves together like the mountaineers of the Alps."

"You are right," answered Corporal Bolt.

A strong rope was utilised for this purpose. The separation of the four explorers now became impossible.

"Is that water we hear?" the corporal asked.

"Yes; doubtless that abyss communicates with the subterranean sea."

"We shall be drowned, then, for we are far below the level of that sheet of water."

"Nevertheless, we need not give up hope yet. Let us fasten on our swimming-belts."

The air-bladders were distended, and the belts fastened on. Gerard secured that of the doctor round the madman's body. They secured their water and provisions, and the axe, also a knife, and some lengths of rope. The rest of the baggage they left upon the ground, of all the doctor's instruments, retaining only the compass, the barometer, and the manometer.

Water, indeed, was rising in the abyss. Soon it reached the top, and came pouring over the edge. Of course, it careered without a stop, down the slope, and fell in a cascade over the precipice into the fiery pit at the end of the tunnel.

"If it all runs away—" began the corporal.

"But it won't. That pit will be filled up."

"And then this tunnel will fill?"

"Yes."

"We shall be drowned like rats in a trap."

"Well, that's better than being burnt to death, or crushed under the rocks."

"Dooty," observed the corporal meditatively, "is dooty. But, all the same, I wish we had mutinied afore."

"So do I; but it can't be helped now."

As fast as the water rose from the earth, it rushed down the declivity over the precipice. So swift was it that the Englishmen were forced to hold on to points of rock to save themselves from being swept away.

The water, cascading over the cliff, fell full into the furnace below. Fearful hissing and crackling resulted from the meeting of the opposite elements. Thick vapours rose from the pit, and filled the tunnel. The explorers were nearly suffocated. Strange to say, although they appeared to be hermetically blocked in and buried alive, they did not suffer for want of air. This circumstance struck Gerard, and made him think that there might be some other outlet to the cavern, on the other side of the pit of fire. As the thought flashed into his mind, he communicated it to his companions. Hope revived in their breasts.

Was it possible that they would escape, after all?

CHAPTER 12.

THE RISING OF THE WATERS—ADRIFT—DAYLIGHT
AT LAST—CONCLUSION.

Long the adventurers stood there, clinging to the rocks, while the rising waters swished past their feet, and foamed over the brink of the precipice. Gradually the hissing of the flames died away. The water had conquered the fire. Whatever the cause of the conflagration, it evidently did not communicate with the centre of the planet, or the water, falling into a bottomless pit, would never have filled it.

As a matter of fact, the pit was filled in about two hours. The waters no longer fell into the gulf, but flowed on past it, rising higher in the tunnel. Soon the fluid reached the swimming-belts of the explorers, and lifted them off their feet.

"We must float with the current," Gerard said. "Now, Heaven help us!"

The doctor floated between Gerard and Ebony Jem, his belt keeping his head and shoulders above water. The rope tied the explorers together in a line, side by side. Chelton was no longer violent. The reaction had set in after his access of insanity, and he was as passive as a child in the hands of his friends. Observing this, Gerard freed him from his bonds.

The current of the water carried the swimmers across the gulf into which the mad doctor had so nearly hurled them. It was now transformed into a lake. Once past the gulf, the tunnel continued on through the rocks, becoming wider, and the ground having an upward inclination. The water, coming in as swiftly as ever, and having now an outlet below, rose higher and higher. Soon it was only eighteen inches from the roof.

The adventurers were now sure that their last hour had come. If the water rose higher, they must be drowned. And it continued to rise, all the while sweeping them onward with wild velocity.

Their heads knocked against the rocks. Ebony Jem's electric lantern went out. The next moment they were whirled forth into a vast cavern; the roof of rock was no longer over their heads. The release from the confined tunnel came just in time to save their lives.

This cavern appeared to be as large—perhaps larger—than that which held the subterranean sea. As far as the Englishmen could see, it had no roof. Three of the electric lanterns were still in working order, and their rays revealed to the eyes of the explorers the scene which surrounded them. A waste of water—warm water—nothing else as far as the eye could reach. Outside the circle of electric light was the deepest gloom.

The roaring of the water was lost in the immensity of the cavern. They could now hear each other speak.

"There is an outlet," Gerard said confidently. "The air here is quite fresh, and the tunnel we have left has been blocked up for hours now, so that it cannot come from that direction. There is an outlet."

"How far are we from the surface of the earth, Mr. Thorne?" asked Corporal Bolt.

"Fifty-four miles."

"We are still rising, ain't we?"

"Yes, rising fast."

"But if this water comes from the subterranean sea, as soon as it reaches the level of that sea it will rise no more."

"Perhaps. But from the direction of our journey, we must now be near Lower California. The Pacific Ocean, if not over our heads, is near us. A landslip certainly occurred while we were in the tunnel. What if it let in the waters of the Pacific?"

"Do you think that possible?"

"Yes; and the reason is, that this water is salt."

"By Jingo! We are saved, then!"

"That is as Heaven wills."

"The doctor is taking it calmly enough," the corporal observed, with a glance at the savant.

"I am afraid he will never be himself again," replied Gerard, in a low voice.

Dr. Chelton had sunk into a kind of lethargy. His eyes were expressionless, his face set in a stony calm. He was perfectly conscious, and yet appeared utterly insensible to his surroundings.

Higher rose the water, still bearing along the swimmers at a furious speed. Hours passed. The pangs of hunger reminded our heroes of the passage of time. They made a meal of biscuit and corned beef, washed down with water. Gerard's chronometer told him that another day had dawned—the eighth of their terrible journey.

Worn out with fatigue, they nodded over the water, continually falling asleep. They resisted this at first; but, overcome by weariness, they at last slept soundly. Totally unconscious of their peril and their position, they floated like logs, their swimming-belts keeping their heads clear of the water.

What passed during their troubled slumbers? Whither did they drift? They never knew. Held together by the cord, they drifted wherever the current willed.

Gerard was the first to awake. He opened his eyes, and then gave a great shout, which awakened his companions. They rubbed their eyes, scarcely knowing whether they were awake or dreaming.

Light danced upon the waters. Not the electric light, but the light of day—the light of Heaven's blessed sun.

Daylight!

At first they could not believe their eyes. Before them was a great opening, through which the sunshine streamed upon the waters.

"This is Heaven's work!" said Gerard, in a low voice.

"While we slept the water has risen to the level of the earth." The great cavern no longer enclosed them. They were in a narrow passage, which ended at the opening where the daylight entered. They were proceeding with a velocity that almost took their breath away. A sound of falling water could be heard in front.

"We are saved!" the corporal exclaimed.

Gerard was listening attentively to the noise in advance.

"What is that?" Ebony Jem asked, noticing the anxiety in his face.

"It is a waterfall."

"We shall be drowned, after all!" the corporal exclaimed.

"No; we have escaped worse dangers than that!"

The swiftness of the river increased. They were whirled along at a breathless rate. With a sudden turn they plunged over the verge.

Down, down, in the midst of a mass of falling water. Choked, blinded, flung and tossed hither and thither, they lost their senses for one moment. The next they found themselves floating upon the placid surface of a broad river. Looking upward, they saw a cascade tumbling down a steep cliff; that was the path by which they had come.

"Saay, strangers, whar yer from?" sang out a voice with a strong nasal twang.

A group of men, with picks in their hands, were standing by the riverside, regarding them with glances of utter amazement.

"Help us ashore!" called out Gerard.

The miners did so. The explorers, with a gladness too deep for words, lay upon the grass, basking in the bright rays of the sun, which was at the meridian.

"Whar d'ye come from?" repeated the miner who had hailed them.

"From the centre of the earth!" replied Gerard.

The man stared, no doubt thinking that he had to do with a lunatic.

"What do you call this river?" Gerard continued.

"I calkerlate its the Sacramento."

"Then we are still in California?"

"Guess so, pard," said the astonished miner.

"Good!" Gerard observed to his companions. "In at Mount Shasta; out again in the Sacramento! This is a journey which ought to make some noise in the world."

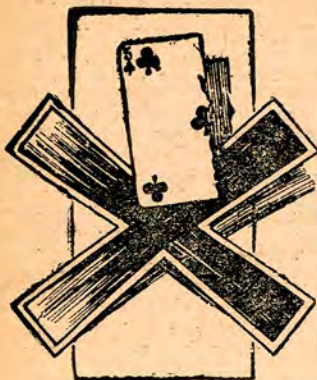
The explorers lost no time in making their way to England. Dr. Chelton, placed under medical care, recovered the use of his faculties, but he was never the same man again. He remained healthy in body, but feeble in mind; a grown-up child. Sad as this was, Gerard was glad to see that the unfortunate savant no longer felt the strange passion for dangerous expeditions. That mania had died, but in its death it had shattered for ever the mind it had dominated.

Gerard Thorne married his old sweetheart, Amy. The doctor remained with him, affectionately cared for by the kind young couple, who succeeded in making him happy, despite—or perhaps because of—his loss of mental energy. As for Ebony Jem and the corporal, they, of course, never quitted their old master. And when children blessed the union of Gerard and Amy, there was nothing the old soldier liked better than to take the youngsters upon his knees, and relate to them the dangers that the explorers had encountered during their daring attempt to reach the Heart of the World.

THE END.

*A New Serial, by Henry
T. Johnson, starts
shortly. See p. 16.*

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THE SIGN OF THE SCARLET CROSS

By CLAUD HEATHCOTE,

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

BEGIN HERE.

The mysterious sign of the Scarlet Cross—what is it? If you wish to take part in the absorbing quest in which so many readers have been engaged week by week by means of the strange story, now for the first time told in our pages, you can do so by reading the following summary of the chief events which have already been unfolded:

The starting point of the story is the fifteenth birthday of Harry. Harry and his supposed father, Pierre Evison, are about to celebrate the occasion, when Harry's great chum, Shaggy, a newsboy, enters, and tells them that a body has been dragged from the Thames at Limehouse, and that on the breast of the dead man is a strange tattoo—a scarlet cross, and half of the five of clubs. On hearing this, Pierre Evison turns deadly pale.

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

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

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

A few moments later Paul Lamaret enters, 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.

On Harry's return 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.

Through the craftiness of Mawker, a lodger in the house and the father of a fair girl, Angela, Harry is next day arrested on a charge of theft. But he escapes from the policeman, for the purpose of placing some mementoes on the breast of Pierre. To accomplish this, he is compelled to visit the mortuary at midnight, and while discharging this sacred duty, a lady (whose face he cannot see) enters and places a bunch of flowers on the shroud. Harry afterwards overhears a conversation between this mysterious lady and the organist of the church. Then, having fulfilled his duty, he voluntarily gives himself up to the police.

He is tried, and sentenced to be sent to a reformatory for a year. He escapes, in company with a lad called Probyn. They are heard by Merrick, the reformatory bully, who arouses the officials. Probyn stays behind.

Harry tramps to London, and finds Shaggy.

Harry is supposed to have been shot. Together Shaggy and he go to Stentham, and put up at the village inn. Paul Lamaret and a Mr. Trevelyan are also staying there.

Mr. Trevelyan and Lamaret fight a duel, in which Lamaret is wounded. Mr. Trevelyan disappears. Harry learns from Lamaret's mutterings that Mr. Trevelyan is really his father, Horace Temple.

Lamaret is carried to the inn. One day Merrick, who turns out to be Lamaret's son, visits the wounded man, and tells him how he has been deceived in thinking Harry dead. Lamaret disappears.

On Harry's return to London he discovers that a furore has been created by a great operatic artiste, known as Pauline Anconia. He is amazed to find that this brilliant vocalist is the lady who placed the bunch of flowers on Pierre Evison's shroud in the mortuary. Lamaret again turns up, disguised as an old crossing-sweeper. Neither Harry nor Shaggy is aware that their enemy is so near; and while Harry is engaged in writing to Probyn at the reformatory, he is startled by the door opening and the entrance of the reformatory bully. The pair are fighting when Lord Forsyth enters, and asks Harry the secret of Anconia's life. Harry refuses to tell him anything.

Harry, in company with Shaggy, calls on Angela, and, after Shaggy has left them, discloses his identity.

Mawker comes in, and Harry hides in his bedroom. To get out again he plays the ghost, with the aid of a sheet.

Harry, while returning from Pauline's flat, is struck on the head by a strange man, and it taken to the hospital.

CHAPTER 71.

ON THE THAMES EMBANKMENT—WHAT SHAGGY DISCOVERED BY THE RIVERSIDE.

If Harry endured a good deal of pain in the hospital that night, Shaggy also was the prey to a great deal of anxiety that was the reverse of enjoyable.

Harry was usually home before Shaggy; but when he reached it that night there was no sign of his chum.

At first the newsboy thought little of it. He performed the duty Harry usually performed—that of getting supper ready.

It was very humble fare—simply bread-and-cheese and cocoa; so its preparation was not a matter of many minutes. He mixed the cocoa ready for the boiling water, intending to pour on the water when Harry arrived.

But the water kept on steaming away on the hob without any sign of Harry.

The hour of midnight chimed—then the half-hour—then the dirge-like "One!" Still no Harry. The inhabitants of that quarter were usually late in going to bed. There was mostly a brawl of some sort till the public-houses closed. But the last sound of strife had died out; a solemn silence reigned throughout the flats; without—in the streets below—a solitary warbler was singing in the most melancholy fashion, as though it were a piece of the "Dead March," "We won't go home till morning!"

Presently that melancholy strain died away in the distance, and there was only the sound of the steaming kettle.

Shaggy did not attempt to eat his humble meal without Harry. Had he done so, it would have been a dismal failure. The bread-and-cheese would have choked him.

Two o'clock! Shaggy began to get alarmed. Something must have happened to Harry. Had he met with an accident, or had Lamaret got hold of him? Worse still, had his true identity been discovered, and had he been arrested?

These painful thoughts kept repeating themselves in his brain, without finding an answer. Every now and again he would pace to and fro the room, rubbing energetically his thatch, as though he experienced some relief to his feelings by that mode of action.

Then he would pause before his "picture-gallery," in the hope of finding consolation in these choice specimens of art. In vain! Their magic had, for once, disappeared. They had lost their power to interest him.

At length he could endure the suspense no longer, so he went out. But when he got out, he knew not in which direction to turn. London was such a vast city that the search in it for one solitary being was like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack.

As Harry had so often walked up and down the streets in search of his father, so Shaggy could only walk up and down the streets in the hope of falling in with his chum.

For one thing, he was not likely to be lost. Few were better acquainted with the streets of London than Shaggy, though he now saw them under a different aspect to that under which he usually saw them. When he rushed about with his papers they were full of bustle and life; now they seemed the abode of the dead.

"THE TATTOOED CODE,"

By H. S. WARWICK, is published in next Friday's "UNION JACK."

Shaggy passed along the Charing Cross Road on to Westminster.

Now and again he would meet with a waif of the streets, or a policeman, who would eye him suspiciously for a moment and pass on. But he saw nothing of the friend he was in search of.

He stood underneath the clock-tower at Westminster. It was on the stroke of three, and presently the sonorous voice of Big Ben sounded the hour. Where could Harry be?

Shaggy looked up and down the bridge; then, with a shudder, his eye rested on the gleaming water below. His thoughts flitted back to the man whose tattooed body had been found in the river on the day of Pierre Evison's death.

Had Harry suffered the same fate? Was he there—in the cold bed of the onflowing river?

"Stow it, Shaggy!" he said to himself, turning away from the water. "You're going off yer rockers, ain't yer? You're a nice sort or feller to bring out for a walk, you are? You're a lovely Merry Andrew, you are? Try a hearse-and-four next time, and you shall have the front place on the box-seat. Blow me! An outside seat's too good for you. An inside's your ticket. Here you are! Just about to start for Brompton. No return ticket! Get down at the cemetery gates! Yes, Shaggy, my charming weeping willow, that's your style. You're so saucy that that mug of yours ought to be carved on a tombstone, a-blowing a penny trumpet!"

He turned from the bridge to the Embankment.

As he reached it, he saw in the distance the form of a woman, walking slowly along by the balustrade. There was nothing very remarkable in this fact, and Shaggy might have dismissed the shadowy figure from his mind without further notice had she not at that moment stopped and peered into the dark waters below, as he had done on the bridge.

Was she also in search of someone, and had she a vague fear, as he had had, that that someone might be in the river?

She looked eagerly into the waters for a few seconds; then passed wearily on for a hundred yards or so, and again bent over the balustrade.

"Poor creature!" thought Shaggy. "She's suffering from some secret sorrow, I know."

He quickened his pace, until he came to within a few yards of her, so that he might observe her more closely.

Again she repeated her former action—walking on wearily, then pausing to gaze into the river.

She had been so absorbed in her quest that she had not heard Shaggy's footsteps; but now that he drew up at her side, she was conscious of his presence by the shadow cast on the water.

She turned a half-startled, half-eager glance at him, and the newsboy for the first time saw her face clearly.

Merciful heavens! It was Mrs. Evans, the poor widow of Merrow, who had left her cottage on the night that she had discovered the death of her son Jack, alias Bob Ayres.

It will be remembered that when Harry and Shaggy left the cottage at Merrow, they had left it in possession of Benjamin Ford, her brother, and his son the cripple. Since then, the honest carman had written to Harry telling him that all search for his sister had been in vain, and he had been compelled to look up the cottage and return home to Limehouse without her. Before doing so, however, he had left a description of the missing woman with the police, in the hope that they might succeed where he had failed. Harry's grief had been great on receipt of this letter, for he had always felt that he was in some degree responsible for the death of Jack Evans. True, it was through no suggestion of his that Jack had entered the house of Mr. Mayfield; but had Harry not exchanged clothes with him, he might not have been tempted to enter it. Once or twice since the receipt of that letter he had intended visiting Benjamin Ford, but somehow he had not carried out his intention. He could not face the grief-stricken man.

So things had remained. No tidings had been forthcoming of the missing woman. No one knew what had become of her since the night she went out into the storm, overwhelmed by the news which had been brought her by Tom Ayres the tramp.

No wonder, then, that Shaggy was startled when he found that, while searching for Harry, he had come face to face with the grief-stricken widow.

Astonished as Shaggy had been at thus meeting with her, he was yet more startled at her appearance. Her hair was now quite white; the flesh had fallen from her face; the cheeks were pinched and hollow; the kindly eyes had sunk into the head, and had in them a strange mixture of pathos and wildness, as they were slowly turned on Shaggy.

She did not recognise him. She only gazed vacantly at him, and was about to pass on again and recommence her vain quest, when Shaggy cried:

"How do you do, Mrs. Evans? Don't you know me?"

She turned eagerly round, and scanned his face.

"No!" she said, shaking her head mournfully. "Who are you?"

"Shaggy, otherwise Samuel Hobbs, purveyor of cheap literature for the rising generation. Surely you ain't forgot one of the chief pillars of literature, likewise of the State, Mrs. Evans?" said Shaggy cheerfully.

She gazed at him vacantly, and again shook her head.

"I can't remember you," she said, placing her hand to her forehead. "My memory's not so good as it was since I—I—lost Jack. When I find him it'll be better, ever so much better! I'm sure of it!"

Shaggy now understood why it was the grief-stricken mother paused every now and again to gaze into the river. God, in His mercy, had blotted from her mind the information brought to her by the tramp, and she was still searching for her lost son—the son that would never be found!

Poor woman! How many miles had she tramped on that weary search since Shaggy had last seen her? No wonder her hair had whitened; no wonder her cheeks were hollow; no wonder she was weary and footsore.

Shaggy regarded her with the deepest pity; he knew the great debt Harry owed to this good woman, and he was thinking how he could in some part repay it.

"Ah, yes, poor Jack! He got lost when he was going back to his ship, didn't he?"

"Yes, yes," she answered quickly, her eyes sparkling.

"Did you know Jack—my Jack?"

"Should think I did! Know Jack? Ra-ther! ('The Lord forgive me for an ananias,' said Shaggy aside.) He was about the smartest craft I ever saw afloat."

"Yes, yes; he was a smart lad—very smart. He knew how proud I was of him. I was obliged to hide it—keep it under. How did you come to know Jack?"

"Well, you see, before I took to literature I took to the sea," said Shaggy unblushingly. "But I was never cut out for it like Jack was. There was no one on board could splice the mainbrace like he could, and as for flying the jib-boom, I should like to see the salt who could fly it with Jack. Lor' bless yer, ma'am, there wasn't his equal in the Navy!"

Shaggy knew that he was talking rubbish, but it served its purpose. It stayed the poor, distraught mother from at once proceeding with her endless search, and gave Shaggy a moment's breathing-space for deliberation. If he could only get her to some comfortable home for a day or two, all might be well.

But where could he find such a home? His home in St. Giles's would not answer to that description, even supposing that it had been possible for him to take her there.

Her brother's home in Limehouse? That might answer to the description, but though he had often heard Harry speak of Benjamin Ford, he was not acquainted with his precise address. It was, therefore, out of the question to think of wandering about the streets of Limehouse with a poor distraught woman at an early hour in the morning in the hope of finding Benjamin Ford.

Suddenly he bethought him of one who had already proved a friend to him and Harry—Pauline Anconia, the great singer. She had a heart ever open to the cry of distress. Would it be trespassing too much on her kindness to lead Mrs. Evans to her? He determined to make the venture.

While these thoughts were rapidly passing through Shaggy's mind, a look of suspicion came into the face of Mrs. Evans.

"You say you knew my Jack. If you knew him, you can tell me what ship he was on."

"Of course, I can, ma'am, considering I was on that same ship myself."

"What was the name of it?" she asked, in the same suspicious tone.

"The name? What a question! You don't mean to say you've forgotten that as well as forgotten me? What should it be but the 'Ajax'?"

"Ha!" A happier light came into her face at the sound of the name. "Yes, yes; quite right. And you're really a shipmate of Jack's. Ah! if you could only help me to find him."

"The very thing I was going to suggest, ma'am. Of course, I'll help you to find him—ain't I looking for him now? But I'm going to cast anchor for a bit, so that I can start fresh to-morrow."

"Where are you going to?" said she, in a tone of disappointment. "While you're resting, Jack may pass by. I never rest."

"That's the very reason you don't find him. How can people look properly about 'em when their eyes are weary, and their legs ready to drop under 'em?"

"Ah, yes; I'm very weary; but I can't rest—I can't rest. I've tried it; and my eyes won't shut. They're always open, looking out for Jack. Yet, if you'll help me in my search—"

"Of course I will, if you'll only rest a bit. I know a lady

who's heard all about Jack, and who takes as much interest in him as I do. She'll give you a comfortable bed, and we'll both start out fresh and hearty next day in search of him."

Reluctantly the poor woman consented to this plan. Shaggy got her to return with him in the direction of Westminster. He had his previous day's takings in his pocket; so when he reached Westminster he hired a cab, and, to the astonishment of "cabby," ordered him to drive to the great singer's flat.

CHAPTER 72.

A PLACE OF REFUGE—VISITORS TO THE ACCIDENT WARD.

When Harry left Pauline Anconia's, the singer remained for a long time buried in thought; and then she did what she always did when she was greatly harassed, sat down at the piano, and touched the keys ever so softly—so softly that the sound barely escaped the four walls of the room; and yet loud enough for the chords which came from the instrument to reach down to her soul.

Music spoke to the singer in a way that nothing else did; and so, as her fingers wandered over the keys, the troubled look on her beautiful face gradually disappeared, and one of infinite softness took its place.

Then she rose from the piano, and entered her library.

She sat down at one of the writing-tables, and, taking out some folios of paper from a drawer, commenced writing.

At first she wrote slowly; then the pen began to fly rapidly over the paper. One, two hours passed. Still, the busy fingers of Pauline never rested.

Suddenly she was startled by a knocking on the door.

"Who's there?" she demanded.

"It's only me, mademoiselle," came the voice of the night-porter. "Mademoiselle is wanted. There's a boy named Shaggy who wishes to see mademoiselle. He's brought a ragged old woman with him in a cab, and wants mademoiselle to give her lodging for the night. I told him this wasn't a lodging-house, a casual-ward, or a Salvation Army barracks; but he won't go away until he's seen mademoiselle."

"Show him up," said Pauline shortly, much to the porter's astonishment.

"And what about the old woman?"

"Show her up, too."

If the porter was astonished before, he was doubly so now. He looked at Pauline as though he were not quite certain as to whether she were serious. Having satisfied himself that she was, he went downstairs to discharge her orders, and presently returned with Shaggy and Mrs. Evans.

Pauline was well acquainted with the sterling qualities of Shaggy, and the great friendship that existed between him and Harry; but it must be confessed that she was somewhat startled when she saw him enter the room with the thin, woe-begone, and tattered wanderer.

"I beg mademoiselle's pardon for disturbing her at this hour of the morning," said Shaggy, pulling his forelock; "but here's a poor lady who wants a night's lodging. She's lost her son, and after she's rested I'm going to help her find him. So if mademoiselle could oblige her—"

All the time Shaggy had been speaking he had kept up a constant succession of winks, to indicate that there was a great deal more beneath his statement than appeared on the surface.

Pauline could not help feeling amused at Shaggy's telegraphic code, in spite of the pitiful, forlorn condition of Mrs. Evans.

"To find my boy—to find my Jack!" said the latter, clasping her hands beseechingly together.

Pauline was about to ask who was her Jack, when another rapid wink from Shaggy stayed her. So she rang up her maid, and told her to provide a bed for the poor widow.

"Now, Master Shaggy," she said, as soon as they were alone, "kindly explain to me the meaning of this mystery."

"You've heard Harry's story about his escape from Stenham Reformatory?"

"Certainly."

"How he took the place of a sailor-boy, and was afterwards saved from being captured by the police patrol by a kind-hearted widow at Merrow?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the kind-hearted widow—Mrs. Evans; and she's still searching for her son."

"Merciful heavens! Can it be? Poor, poor woman!" said Pauline, with deepest compassion. "But where did you meet with her?"

"That's the strangest part of it. I met her while I was searching for Harry, by the riverside."

"Searching for Harry! What—what do you mean? You don't mean to tell me that he is lost?"

"Not lost, perhaps; but I'm afraid that something has happened to him. I last saw him last night, when he had just

come back from Mawker's, having got from that old rascal the portrait of his mother. I haven't seen him since. I waited for him till two o'clock at our lodgings. Then I couldn't stand it any longer, so I came in search of him; and that's how I fell in with Mrs. Evans."

"Seven o'clock! I saw him after that," said Pauline. "He came to the opera-house, and afterwards returned with me here. He left about midnight. Has Lamaret found him out? Has he at last carried out his vengeance? I—I was fearful of what might happen! It's horrible—horrible—horrible!"

Shaggy wondered at Pauline's agitation as she walked feverishly up and down the room, wringing her hands. What was Harry to her?

Something must be done—something must be done. But what—what?

She turned to Shaggy, as though unable to answer the question herself.

"Don't alarm yourself, mad'moiselle," said Shaggy, vainly endeavouring to smile. "It may be all right. Harry may be at home, snugly tucked up in his bed by this time. I'll go back now, and let you know as soon as possible if he's turned up. Meanwhile, if you wouldn't mind giving an eye to poor Mrs. Evans, and keeping her from going out in the morning, I'll manage to send word to her brother, who'll be glad enough to know she's in safety."

Pauline, of course, promised that she would do as Shaggy wished, the more readily because she knew how sincere and deep were Harry's feelings of gratitude towards Mrs. Evans.

Shaggy's heart sank when he reached home, and found that it was still desolate.

"If anything has happened to him through Lamaret," said Shaggy, "I'll hunt that fiend down, as he has hunted down Harry. I'll make a lovely paragraph for the 'Specials'—a really gory one—that'll make 'em get off like hot cakes. I'll do a good turn for the newsboys, Mr. Lamaret—see if I don't—and a jolly bad turn for you. Oushter! oushter!"

Shaggy gave such a tremendous lunge from his shoulder with the right, and followed it up with one equally strong from the left, that he nearly put both fists through the looking-glass over the mantelpiece.

Then he threw himself on the bed and tried to sleep for an hour or so; but the effort was a failure. He would be just on the point of falling off, when he would feel himself sliding down a precipice, and as he endeavoured to clutch at the sides, to prevent himself from being dashed to pieces below, he would hear a mocking laugh, and, looking up, he would see leaning over the top the demoniacal face of Lamaret.

Rest of this kind was worse than being wide awake; so Shaggy again rose from his bed, and busied himself preparing breakfast for two, trying to beguile his mind into the belief that Harry was coming home to breakfast, if he had not come home to supper.

At seven o'clock there came a loud knocking at the door. Shaggy opened it with dread. It was a policeman, who had come to inform him that an "accident" had happened to one Harry Hobbs, and that he wished to see his cousin without delay.

Shaggy hastened to the hospital, and was at once admitted to the accident ward, where Harry lay. How glad the two friends were to meet each other! Short though the time had been since they last met, to Shaggy it had seemed an eternity. The latter was the more delighted when he found that Harry's wound was not a very serious one, and that he would be out of the hospital in two or three days' time.

"But how did the accident occur, Harry?" asked Shaggy.

"Bend lower, Shaggy," whispered Harry. "It was no accident, though I want the people here to believe that it was; otherwise I shall give myself away. It was the work of my enemy; for, alas! alas! the portrait of my mother which I had only just found has been taken from me."

"Get well as soon as you can, Harry," said Shaggy, gripping his friend's hand; "and if we don't get that portrait back again very soon, my name's not Shaggy Hobbs."

As the words passed Harry's lips, the door of the ward opened, and, to the surprise of the boys, Zachariah Troad, the crossing-sweeper, entered.

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

The Tattooed Code

IN NEXT FRIDAY'S

"UNION JACK."

By H. S. WARWICK, is published in next Friday's "UNION JACK."

"THE TATTOOED CODE,"

AN INDIAN'S REVENGE.

"It has been said that the Indian is a treacherous creature," remarked a member of the Travellers' Club. "For that fact I cannot answer. I have never found him so myself; but there is one piece of information I can give you without endangering my reputation as a truthful man. He is a creature who will have his revenge, even though the hangman's rope is sure to follow it, for every insult, real or imaginary, he may suffer. I have seen many cases of it, so I can answer for the truth of my assertions."

"Most of you knew Bob Danvers when he was the most popular and best-looking British officer in India, and, perhaps, you likewise know where he is now. Yes, Carter, you're quite right—in a madhouse, and it was an Indian's revenge which sent him there, to spend what should have been the best years of his life, praying when he is sane for a knife to cut the knot which binds him to this world, and when the madness is upon him trying to throttle anyone who comes near him."

"It happened nearly ten years ago now, but the scene is as fresh in my mind as though it were but yesterday."

"Six months before it came about, you must know Danvers's wife died, leaving him one little child, a girl of five, with the sunniest smile and the sweetest head of golden curls you ever saw. Need I say that he worshipped the very ground her baby feet trod, and so did the regiment. Every man would have marched to his death for her, even though it be the death of the spy—the harsh rope."

"Well, Danvers had a valet and man-of-all-work, a native, a good servant, but a man with the pride of a prince, which every one fully believed would one day be his undoing, and a temper it was terrible to witness. He was the man who worked the havoc."

"Danvers also had a temper—his only failing, as you know, poor fellow—and one day he completely lost his head. I don't know exactly what it was, but something had managed to upset him, and his rage was fearful to see. Anyway, he gave the man a tremendous talking to before a number of lower grade servants, thus making him lose caste, a thing the good Indian most dreads, and dismissed him his service. Rab Singh—that was the valet's name—said nothing; but there was a gleam in his eyes as he turned away which boded ill for his late master."

"Danvers did not notice it. If he had done he probably would have taken precautions."

"As it was the matter slipped out of his mind."

"Rab Singh went on his way with murder in his black heart. As he pushed his way through the jungle, he suddenly saw a small snake cross his path. It was one of the most deadly known. No one has ever survived its bite more than a few seconds. In the ordinary course of things Rab would have stood stock still until it had passed him; but now, with the blood lust on him, he thought he saw the instrument with which he could satisfy the craving."

"Stealthily drawing a knife from his belt, he cut a thick branch from a tree near by, and, armed with this, advanced upon the reptile. He had the good-luck for him to hit it at the very first stroke upon the head, and stun it. Then with his knife he cut off its ugly head."

"The snake was one of that species which always move about from place to place in pairs, if they become separated the one tracking the other by its trail. Rab Singh knew this perfectly well, and had hatched a horrible revenge."

"He at once retraced his steps, dragging the body of the snake behind him, until he was a short distance from his master's bungalow; then he moved more warily. No one was in sight, and he made for the room in which little Mab's cot was placed, still dragging the loathsome body. Once in the room he drew it along the floor, and up the cot, allowing it to rest for a few moments upon the quilt. Then he retraced his steps, leaving Nature to finish his deadly work."

"That afternoon, a few hours later, Mab was put to bed for an afternoon siesta as usual. She had been asleep but a few minutes, when a snake made its way through the open door. It was the mate of the one Rab Singh had killed, and, as he had expected it to do, it had come in search of its partner. Along the floor it glided, following the track of the body until it reached the child's bed. Then it glided up, and coiled itself upon the counterpane, looking round it, and darting out its fiendish little forked tongue at intervals. Soon the child felt the weight upon it, and woke up with a cry. Immediately the snake uncoiled itself and struck. A shudder of its little limbs and the child lay still."

"An hour later, when the native nurse entered the room, she found the child dead. She ran shrieking to her master and blurted out the truth. Poor Danvers rushed to the nursery, and fell down beside the cot with his head resting against his dead child's. When they came in later he was mad!"

"That was an Indian's revenge!"

The Editor's Chat with his Readers.



The result of the first of the series of competitions I am running will be announced next week; the prizes have already been sent to the winners. If you were not one of the lucky ones do not despair, have another try. You are sure to win one in the long run, for everyone's chance is equal.

Here is the competition for this week:

THERE IS A HOLE IN THE OFFICE FLOOR TWO FEET WIDE AND TWELVE FEET LONG. HOW CAN IT BE COMPLETELY COVERED WITH A BOARD THREE FEET WIDE BY EIGHT FEET LONG, BY CUTTING THE BOARD IN TWO PIECES ONLY?

If you are unable to find the solution, ask your friends to assist you. All answers must reach me by the 25th of November. A splendid penknife each for the writers of the first twelve correct postcards picked out of my basket.

You will all, I am quite sure, be glad to hear that I have arranged with Mr. Henry T. Johnson, the author of "The Pride of the Ring," and so many other wonderfully successful stories, to write the next serial for the UNION JACK. It will begin in the issue dated December 10th. The main idea is a great novelty; you are sure to enjoy reading it. Full particulars shortly.

A new type of gun will shortly be introduced into the American Navy. It will be known as a "high-angle firing" weapon. By this is meant a gun capable of being elevated so that it will stand almost vertical with the deck if need be.

At Santiago, at San Juan, and also at Manila the fire of the American fleet could have been made far more effective against shore fortifications had there been a few guns on board capable of high elevation.

The intention of the naval officials, from what can be learned, is to mount two of the high-angle firing guns on each of the large cruisers—vessels of the type of the "Chicago," "New York," and "Olympia"—and to even give some of the smaller cruisers one of these guns each.

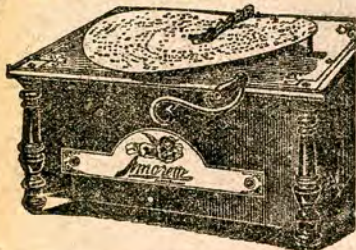
The positions to be occupied by the auxiliary weapons—for such they must be termed—will, it is said, be in the bow or stern. Situated there they can be provided with ammunition without confusing the divisions working the standard weapons.

It is thought now that the new guns will have to use ammunition different from that served to the regular guns. The charges of powder will differ, it is said, even if the projectiles do not, for in effecting what is really mortar work it may be necessary to vary the sizes of the charges employed.

The Germans are using for high-angle firing a weapon of twelve centimetres calibre (4.7 inches). They have arranged a device for their gun which permits of its being fired level with the deck or at high elevation. The Germans employ with this gun shrapnel, common shell, case and armour-piercing projectiles. All of these projectiles, save case, will be used in the new American gun, and in addition there will be a specially devised shell, to be fired with but little powder behind it, but which itself will contain a very heavy charge. This latter shell will be expected to give a good mine effect at the end of its flight.

Still another feature connected with the new piece will be the introduction of the famous Nordenfeldt breech mechanism, and it is understood that the system will be extended to embrace all the new secondary battery pieces for the American Navy.

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

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5. WILL S Y L . . D YOU TO U B F . . . E.

The "Onrios" Book of Dream Interpretations is a handy publication, beautifully bound and illustrated, and will afford you a faultless definition of your future. It is an infallible adviser to your prosperity, and will surely lead you to undeniable fortune.

WHAT TO DO.—When you have found what you think are the missing letters, write the words out on a sheet of paper, numbering them 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, as above, and send same to us, with a P.O. (not a stamp), for 2s., and stamped addressed envelope for results, and we will forward to you, post free, a copy of the "Onrios" Dream Book. (Foreign orders, 3s., payable in London.) We offer the above prizes to purchasers of our Book, in order to make this remarkable publication known to the public, and we are prepared to expend some thousands of pounds on this method of advertising our unique Dream Book.

REMEMBER, EACH ONE who correctly fills in the missing letters will receive a Solid Silver Tea and Coffee Service, value £21. These Services are of Solid Sterling Silver (Hall-marked), and consist of a 2½-pint Coffee Pot, price £7 10s.; 2-pint Tea Pot, £6 10s.; Full-size Sugar Basin, £4; Full-size Cream Jug, £3—Tea and Coffee Service, £21. They are manufactured and catalogued by one of the best known London Silver-smiths, and cannot be purchased for less than £21. As a proof of this, should you be a winner, we will give you one of the above Tea and Coffee Services on the cash, whichever you prefer.

The "ONRIOS" DREAM BOOK (COPYRIGHT) is a book which will tell you the meaning of all your dreams, and may thus be the means of guiding you to the acquisition of Fame and Fortune. This book is a translation of old Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, &c., Occultological manuscripts, parchments, and scrolls, which have come into our possession, some of them dating as far back as 579 B.C. Our book is a high-class publication, beautifully printed and bound, with 19 Engravings of well-known pictures by some of the GREATEST MASTERS. These pictures alone are worth more than the price we ask for the book. Everyone, whether they be in the highest or lowest station in life, should possess this MARVELLOUS BOOK. Nothing like it has ever been published before.

DO NOT DELAY, but send AT ONCE for the "ONRIOS" DREAM BOOK, and grasp this opportunity to win one of these beautiful solid Silver Tea and Coffee Services, as a certain portion of the issue will be reserved for Foreign and Colonial orders. Write your full name and address very distinctly, and put the name of this paper on the top of your letter. Keep the number of your Postal Order, in case it goes astray. This Competition will close on December 31st, 1903. The solution of this Competition has been sealed, and deposited with Messrs. Hibbert, Wall Street, London, N. Prizes will be awarded and results posted within the following week.

YOU CAN HAVE THE SILVER SERVICE AT ONCE

before the Competition closes. Full particulars regarding this will be sent you with the "ONRIOS" DREAM BOOK. Please address your letter to

THE "ONRIOS" PUBLISHING CO., Sydney Avenue, Moor Lane, London, E.C.