

A GRAND COMPLETE TALE OF **SEXTON BLAKE & LOBANGU!**

THE UNION JACK LIBRARY

1 $\frac{1d}{2}$

THE ISLAND OF DEATH



TINKER IN THE SAND STORM

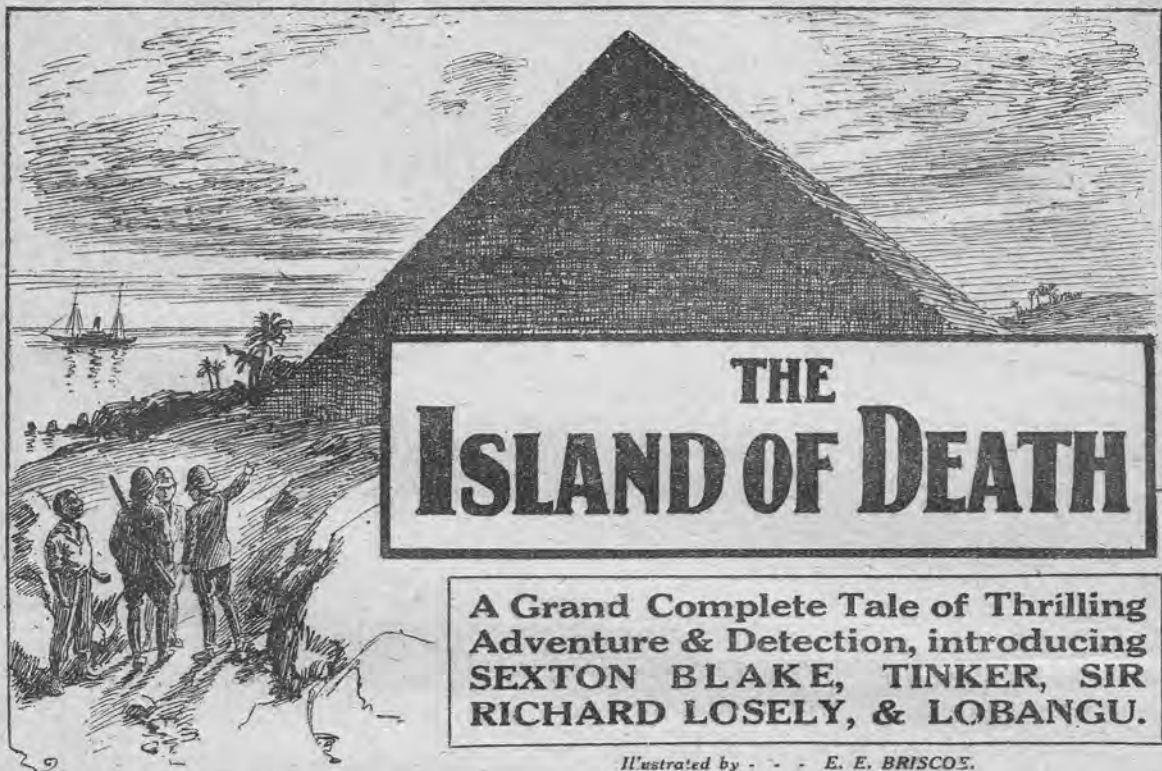
The UNION JACK Library

With Which is incorporated the Pluck Library

No. 878.

THREE-HALFPENCE.

August 7th, 1920.



THE ISLAND OF DEATH

A Grand Complete Tale of Thrilling Adventure & Detection, introducing
SEXTON BLAKE, TINKER, SIR RICHARD LOSELY, & LOBANGU.

Illustrated by - - - E. E. BRISCOE.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

S.Y. Sirius.

SIR Richard Losely closed the binoculars with a vicious snap. "Well, I'm hanged!" he said impatiently.

"My dear Spots!" came a voice from the depths of a deck-chair. "I'm no prophet. I'm not even a thought reader, or one of those new-fangled clairvoyants whom the papers have been booming lately. But your statement is hopelessly inaccurate. You are not hanged—yet! Possibly—even probably—you may be at some future date, but one can't bet even on that. In this sinful world one doesn't always get what one deserves."

"I am quite prepared to admit that, from what I know of you and your horrible past, you ought to have been comfortably and decently hung long ago. There have been times when Tinker, Pedro, and I would cheerfully have assisted at the ceremony. Just at the moment, however, I do wish you'd stop playing with those binoculars slung round your neck. They happen to be mine. A very excellent pair, which I paid quite a lot of money for—or stole—I forget precisely which at the moment."

"Anyway, don't jar the prisms like that or I shall have to wake Pedro and set him on to chew your ankle. I don't want to be obliged to go to extremes like that. The poor dog has had quite a decent luncheon, and raw meat is bad for him."

"Confound you and Pedro, too!" said Sir Richard; and he made a wild clutch at the bridge-rail as the yacht heeled suddenly to an incoming swell. "Get up

out of that chair, you lazy beggar, and come and have a look at this."

Sexton Blake, gracefully attired in pyjamas, an old pair of slippers, and a battered old rush hat, got lazily out of his chair, and, balancing himself to a nicety against the next swell, joined Sir Richard at the rail.

"I thought this was by way of being a holiday trip," he grumbled, "and yet I can't even enjoy my after-luncheon siesta in peace. What's the trouble? Why this unseemly energy?"

"Don't be an ass," said Sir Richard, handing him the glasses. "What do you make of that?" And he pointed across the glassy swells. "No, over there, a couple of points off our starboard bow."

Sexton Blake took the glasses, and refocused them.

At first he could make out nothing but unstable slopes of vivid blue-green water, and a blazing hot sky.

Then, quite suddenly, there leapt into his field of view a dark object scarcely six miles away. He lost it momentarily, picked it up again, and held it.

The object was a barque with single topsails, and all plain sail fully set.

There was nothing particularly extraordinary about that. She was of an old-fashioned type—had probably roamed the seas on her lawful occasions for half a century or longer, and was of about two hundred tons burthen.

When he first sighted her she was moving through the water at a fair pace, every sail drawing.

Then suddenly she yawed, fell off the wind, and her canvas flapped idly and uncertainly.

Then her sails filled again, and she staggered along in another direction on quite a different course, but only for a little while.

She hadn't gone more than a couple of cables' length before she suddenly altered her mind again, with the result that she was taken aback and reeled about unsteadily.

"Now, what's the meanin' of that?" asked Sir Richard plaintively. "What the deuce are they playin' at? She's been actin' the goat just like that since I first spotted her a quarter of an hour ago or more."

Blake shook his head.

"Can't make it out at all. She's flying no flag of any sort; not so much as a house flag or a burgee. Her gear looks sound enough from here. Nothing carried away, and she's got a new fore topsail bent."

"If she'd got sickness or trouble of any kind on board she'd be flying a flag of distress from her mizzen peak, you'd imagine. By the lines of her I should say that she came out of the Mediterranean. One of the southern French or Italian ports. By Jove! Look at that. She's coming to pay us a visit on her own account."

It certainly looked like it, for the barque, after zigzagging about in a disgracefully drunken fashion, had suddenly spun round on her heel, and was charging straight down on them, every sail drawing, and carrying a bone in her teeth.

Suddenly Blake gave a low whistle.

"Well, there's one thing queer about her, anyway," he said. "All her boats

have gone! I thought she might have been carrying them on deck, but she isn't. When she heeled over just then I got a fair look at her. There's not so much as a dinghy on board her, and her davits are empty, and the falls hanging loose as far as I can see."

He turned to the quartermaster, who was at the wheel just behind them, and handed him the glasses.

"What do you make of her, Jenkins?"

The man stared at her steadily for a moment or two.

"Well, sir, saving your presence and Sir Richard's," replied the man, with a grin, "I should say that she must have a cargo of that liquor they've turned out of the States on board, and that the whole shebang, including the cat, have gone on the spree and are down below nursing sore heads. There's not a living soul on deck."

"They wouldn't have wanted all her boats for that," said Blake. "She carried three at least by the look of her. It's my belief that, for some reason or another, she's been abandoned. She looks sound enough. She's certainly not waterlogged. Yet there's no sign of life on her anywhere, and she's certainly not under control."

Sir Richard turned to the quartermaster.

"Give me the wheel, Jenkins, and take my compliments to Captain Raven. I shall want a boat ready in a quarter of an hour. Let the crew stand by. We should be abreast of her soon after that, and I'm going on board to have a look!"

The quartermaster touched his cap and pattered off down the bridge ladder, whilst Sir Richard, hand on the wheel, manoeuvred to get under the barque's lee.

Their own vessel, the s.y. *Sirius*, was a fine steam-yacht of six hundred tons, which Sir Richard had chartered for their present trip, and they were heading down the West African coast on a trip of exploration, having picked up Lobangu at Lagos, where he had been cabled to come and meet them.

They were closing up with the barque fast now, for the *Sirius* could do her sixteen knots under plain draught, and the unknown vessel, by some freak of chance, held steadily on her course.

Captain Raven, the yacht's skipper, a short, thick-set man with a face like a chunk of teak, and merry blue eyes, came hurrying up on to the bridge in answer to Sir Richard's summons.

The bos'un's whistle squealed shrilly, and a boat was swung smartly outboard.

Captain Raven stared hard at the barque, rubbed his eyes, and stared again.

"She's been abandoned right enough," he said; "but there's nothing wrong with her so far as I can see. I'll come along with you if you've no objection, Sir Richard, and if I might suggest, it wouldn't be a bad thing if you and Mr. Blake were to carry a gun apiece. One never knows."

Sir Richard nodded, and rang the engines down to slow, and then to stop.

Just then Tinker came sauntering up.

"No peace for the wicked!" he grumbled. "What's up now? I was having a lovely sleep when I heard a boat bein' called away, and someone trying to play 'Home, sweet home' on the engine-room telegraph, and I came up to inquire and give advice, and— My hat! What's that?"

That was the barque, now trying to execute a complicated jazz dance of her own abeam of them a short cables length away."

"That, my dear Tinker, is a boat," said Blake solemnly. "She is the type known as a barque, and moves by sail power. Usually barques carry men on board, known as crews. This one apparently doesn't. Captain Raven thinks she is probably a Genoese."

"So do I, and we're goin' to have a look at her. Where are Lobangu and Pedro?"

"Lobangu is lying down and groaning. He says his stomach is walking about, and he is disgustingly sick. Pedro's helping him. He is demanding bubbly water for his inside—Lobangu, I mean, not Pedro."

"They can stop where they are. I'm coming along."

They hurried down the accommodation ladder into the waiting boat, and by this time every available man on the *Sirius* was giving himself a crick in the neck peering over the rail at the barque, and at the yacht's boat gliding smoothly over the long swells on her way to try and solve the mystery.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Derelict.

BLAKE was the first to make a fresh discovery. It was when they were still several boat lengths away.

The barque swung slowly round stern on to them, and there where her name should rightfully have been shown in bold lettering there was no name, merely a thick daub of obviously fairly fresh black paint or tar to match the rest of her hull.

A rope ladder dangled over her side amidships. Captain Raven tested it, and then clambered lightly on board, followed by the others, the crew being left in the boat to fend her off in case of need.

For a moment or two the four stood on deck, looking about them frankly puzzled.

Halliard-sheets, standing rigging, and all seemed perfectly sound.

More than that, not only was some of her canvas nearly new—and it was all good—new running gear had been rove here and there, or a block or sheave replaced.

In fact, she had evidently quite recently been partly refitted.

Wherever a minor repair had been needed it had been carried out.

As Blake and Sir Richard had guessed, she had carried a boat on deck amidships as well as those on the davits. For there were a pair of brand-new chocks made fast there, and the boat's canvas cover, showing signs of having been hastily cut away, lay in a crumpled heap near by.

From the size of it, and the distance between the chocks, they guessed the boat to have been a large one—an eighteen-foot whaleboat—probably purchased at the time the refitting was done, for the canvas cover was nearly new. It was Tinker who found ominous bloodstains and smears on it.

Blake pointed to other stains on the unclean deck, and in three separate places the rail was freshly chipped by bullet-marks.

"Oh, let's get down below!" said Captain Raven. "I never was any use at riddles, even when I was a kid," he added plaintively.

The cabin companion hatch was closed, but not fastened in any way.

Blake pushed back the slide, and they went down, being met by a blast of stifling hot air, and a loud buzzing of flies.

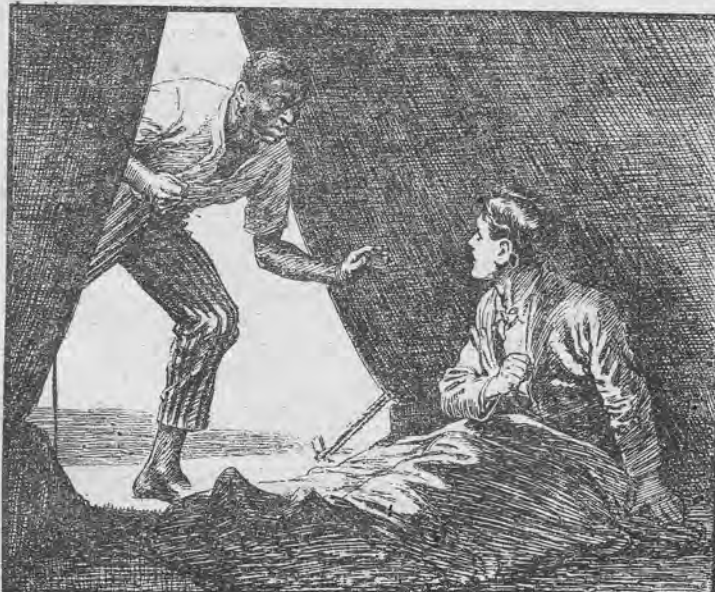
Here, at any rate, there were ample evidences of tragedy.

It was a biggish cabin, with a big skylight and plenty of head room. The walls were panelled, and there were traces of some rather elaborately-carved moulding. But for the rest the place was a shambles, though the remains of a meal were on the table, and the coarse blue and white cloth partially dragged aside, and bottles, two still uncorked, stood in the rack.

There was blood everywhere. Some of the panels were splintered with bullets. Two of the state-room doors, of which there were four, had been hacked and burst open.

Two more had been hooked back.

But everywhere drawers had been pulled out or forced, boxes wrenched open, and the contents scattered.



"Listen!" exclaimed Lobangu. "The red veil draws close and clearer, M'olo. I tell thee this place is tagati!"

The curious thing about it all, however, was that such contents as had been left behind afforded no real information, though Blake went through them carefully.

They were just commonplace objects, which could be bought in any seaport.

There was nothing even to hint at the identity of their former owners. No papers, not even so much as a faded photograph. All had been carefully destroyed, or thrown overboard.

Blake glanced at the chronometer over the sideboard. It had stopped at half-past seven—but how many days ago, or whether it had finally run down in the morning or evening, he could not tell.

Captain Raven was examining some carving roughly done on a beam, and turned away with a shrug.

"No name—nothing," he said. "Just the ordinary official figures, giving measurements and the gross tonnage."

Just then Tinker, who had been up for'ard on an exploration trip of his own, came back.

"Well?" asked Blake sharply.

"Nothing doing," said Tinker.

"There's blood all over the ship, everywhere. There must have been a pig of a fight in the fore'sle; splintered woodwork, bullet splashes, and broken bunks, but someone tidied up afterwards."

"The men's chests have gone; there isn't a thing left anywhere, except an old worn-out boot, a two-bob case-knife with a snapped-off blade, and a ragged, oily coat, which might have been bought in any shop from Liverpool to Singapore."

"The galley is the same; pots and pans, and unwashed dishes, some sort of a sea-pie in one, just beginning to ruff a bit, but not much. Stove-pipe carried adrift, and a squashed mouth-organ, which someone had stamped on, in a corner."

Blake nodded. "I fancied you wouldn't find a heap!"

"What do you make of it, old man?" asked Sir Richard. "This sort of thing is in your line?"

Blake glanced at the captain, who was sitting perched on the table swinging his legs.

"I sympathise with Raven when he says he has no use for riddles," he said, smiling.

"All I can make out so far is this—I agree with Raven in thinking this barque had probably been in the Mediterranean coastal trade for a good long time. But quite recently a very considerable sum, in a small way, has been spent on refitting her. From that fact, and others I'm coming to shortly, I fancy that on this trip she had been privately chartered by someone, possibly even by a small syndicate."

"Mediterranean coasting companies don't spend a copper on repairs if they can help it. Nor do they carry a big afterguard."

"Yet look at these cabins—four of them, with two berths in each—and each berth has been quite recently occupied. That's why I say she was carrying passengers."

"Again, look at this wine in the rack. Rioja—a couple of bottles of Moselle, and in the other rack some really good, and expensive, brandy."

"Skippers of traders don't indulge in luxuries like that, and I dare say there are more cases of wine down below in the lazarette."

"Again, what would a trader be doing down here, roughly 3 deg. N. and 15 deg. W., right off any beaten track? I should be inclined to say that this was some exploration trip, or, maybe, a looting trip—after a hoard of ivory, for instance,

U. J.—No. 878.

farther down the coast. Something off the square.

"Anyhow, four men sat down here to a meal, either four passengers, or three and the skipper. From the state of the food—we're not far off the Equator, mark you—that can't have been much more than twenty-four hours ago."

"In fact, I should say they were foreigners, accustomed to have their big meal at mid-day."

"The chronometer up there has stopped at half-past seven. It's only a cheap affair, and if someone was accustomed to wind it, say, just after the mid-day meal, and omitted to do so yesterday, seven or eight in the evening is just about the time that it would run down automatically."

"It hasn't been wound, in fact, as you can see. The wine, barring one bottle, is still uncorked, and the meal had, obviously, only just begun when the outbreak, or mutiny, or whatever it was, took place."

"Two of the men were killed here, in the main cabin. The other two made a dash for those state-rooms there, and bolted themselves in."

"The doors were broken open, and they were killed later."

"But it was no ordinary mutiny."

"Someone with brains, and very good brains, was at the head of it, and someone who wanted some especial object—say, a packet of papers."

"Ordinary mutineers might have ransacked the cabins for the ship's money—they might have thrown their victims' bodies overboard, and painted out the name on her stern, hoping to sell her later on to some unscrupulous dealers."

"But they wouldn't have left that liquor there untouched, or obliterated every trace of the identity of their victims."

"That needed forethought and brains."

"Again, if they intended to take to the boats, they would probably have set fire to the vessel, making a blaze, the reflection of which could have been seen in the sky eighty miles or more away, and might have caused inquiries."

"This man, the leader, said 'No; we're miles off any of the trade routes. The chances are thousands to one against any other vessel sighting her. Leave her to drift ashore, and break herself up, or get dismantled, and smashed in a gale.'"

"That's sense," broke in Captain Raven.

"The trade routes, and steamer routes, are regular highways, and not a whole heap broader, but for the fact that Sir Richard ordered me to follow this special course, and so we stumbled across her, she might have drifted here till she rotted, without being sighted."

"But why they should have left her so quickly stumps me. A man doesn't often leave a perfectly sound ship until he must."

"I think I can answer that," said Blake thoughtfully. "They hadn't a navigator amongst them—though I dare say quite half the crowd would be good small-boat sailors, and we're barely a hundred miles from the African coast. Also, they'd be anxious to get away from the scene of the crime as quick as they could."

"Tinker, just have a squint down the lazarette, and see what's there."

Tinker went down with a lantern.

He was up again in a few minutes.

"Stacks of stores," he said. "Not ship stores. I suppose those are forward somewhere, but real high-class stuff, tinned chicken, preserved pies, fruit, and all sorts of things, and cases and cases of wine."

"They've six months' supplies down there, I should say, and there are some

heavy cases which look to me like rifles and ammunition."

"They must have spent a pot of money."

Blake nodded.

"I wonder what they've got in the main hold. Captain Raven, could you call up the boat's crew, and get one of the hatchets off, and have a look? We may learn something important."

"Spots, you and Tinker go and lend a hand, whilst I have a final prow around here."

He heard the boat's crew, who, though waiting patiently, had been bursting with curiosity, come swarming on to the deck overhead, and then set himself once more to systematically search the cabin and state-rooms.

It was in the second of the two state-rooms that he made his only real discovery.

He had taken down a heavy and shabby old coat, and was examining it beneath the skylight.

Its owner had evidently been an elderly man, with rather long white hair which overhung the back of his collar.

For there were hairs adhering to the cloth still, and it was dusty.

It was not the kind of coat any man could wear only a few degrees north of the Equator, and it had in all probability been hanging there on its peg for a long time.

Sexton Blake searched it mechanically, wondering who its white-haired owner might have been.

A snuff-taker, certainly, and also a big pipe-smoker, for there were grains of snuff adhering to it here and there, and it still reeked of strong, coarse tobacco such as only a pipe-smoker could use.

A student and a man who wrote a great deal, he decided, for the underside of the lower part of the right sleeve was worn and shiny, and there were marks of a pen having been impatiently wiped on the cuff of the left sleeve.

He shook it, and something rustled faintly between the lining and the cloth.

Papers of some sort.

It had slipped to the bottom of the coat, having fallen through a hole in the lining of the inside pocket.

He worried it out.

It was an envelope, soiled from much handling. It was made of tough parchment paper, and there was writing on the outside of it.

Sexton Blake was about as hard an individual to astonish as you could find anywhere.

But at the sight of the superscription on that dirty, soiled envelope, and a brief glance at the inside, which contained two or three flimsy pages, covered with crabbed writing, he fairly stood and gaped.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Off to the Island of the Dead.

IT was the sound of the others coming back down the companion stairway which finally roused him, and he thrust the envelope into his jacket-pocket and lit a cigarette.

"Well, this is a rum go!" said Sir Richard. "What on earth do you think we found down in that hold? Give you twenty guesses."

"Prew! Let's open a bottle of that Rioja, or whatever it is."

"It was stuffy down there, and my throat's like a limekiln."

"Tinker, roust out some glasses."

"The beggars have deserted the ship, so they can't blame us if we scoff some of their liquor."

"In fact, it belongs to us now by right of salvage. Guess what we found."

"There was store grub for the crew, of course, but the main cargo is picks and

shovels and blasting-powder. Then they've got an elaborate camp equipment, and some enormous tanks for water, I suppose, and a rock-drill.

"Looks as if they'd been going on some mining show, not after loot, after all."

"Perhaps they were, or quarrying," said Blake.

"Well, anyway, the boat's ours now, what ever they were after."

"Raven here has been all over her, and says she's as sound as a bell."

"Doesn't leak a drop anywhere, even if she is an octogenarian."

"He says she's worth a tidy fat lump of money, if we salvage her."

"They're getting some of the canvas off her now, and are going to anchor for the night; and we'll leave an anchor watch, in case of trouble."

"I've told him that if he can spare enough hands from the Sirius, under Jenkins or the first mate, he'd better let them sail her into the nearest British port. No dago harbours for me, with their swindling officials."

"A British port or none, and, later, we can claim a thumping good salvage fee."

"He and the crew share up half, according to ratings; we take the other half."

"The idea we fixed is this. As far as we can work it out, we're only a little more than a day or a day and a half's steam from our destination."

"He can land us and our stores, then come back and convoy this old tub into safety, see the agents or Lloyd's people about the salvage, recoup, if necessary, and then come back again for us later on."

"We're in no hurry."

"A month one way or the other, doesn't matter to us, if necessary."

"Ah, there goes the anchor!"

"Let's get off now, before it's dark. We're leaving two men to mind and tend lights, and I've told 'em they can have the run of the lazarette grub, so long as they don't overdo the wine department; and Tinker and I have left 'em a gun apiece, in case of accidents."

"We shall be lying less than half a mile off, and if anything goes wrong they're to loose off a few shots rapid, and we'll come and inquire."

"They're as happy as sandboys, and the rest of the boat's crew are swearin' at 'em like mad for havin' all the fun to themselves."

"Come along!"

They scrambled down to the boat, the two men left behind grinning like Cheshire cats at the rest, and making signs of emptying innumerable bottles; whilst Blake, Tinker, and Sir Richard were rowed back to the Sirius in the afterglow.

They found Lobangu completely recovered, the Sirius being at anchor.

So much recovered, in fact, that he was sitting gracefully in a deck-chair, with Pedro at his feet, and a tumbler and a half-empty bottle of bubbly water, purloined from the steward, on a table at his elbow.

"Inkoos," he said gravely, "why can't we always stop still like this?"

"It is much better than hurrying through the black waters which never keep at rest."

"See, my insides are at rest, and those of the king of all the beasts also."

"Your insides will blow up and bust, and you'll go pop with a most horrible bang," said Sir Richard, "if you drink that bubbly water by the jugful."

"Wow, Inkoos!" said Lobangu reproachfully. "It is very good bubbly water!"

"So it ought to be! Heidsick at

twenty-five bob a bottle! Come and grub, you villain!"

Lobangu, gracefully attired in some crimson striped pyjamas of Sir Richard's, rose a trifle uncertainly.

It was nothing to do with the little matter of the Heidsick, but due to the fact that the Sirius was rolling leisurely to a ground swell.

Securely seated, Lobangu was all right, but once on his feet he was impelled to shut his eyes and clutch at the nearest thing handy—even if it was only Pedro's tail.

Yet the curious part is he could have swum for half the day in twice as big a sea and never turn a hair.

After dinner was over and the desert was on the table, Captain Raven, who always preferred to dine in his own cabin, came down for a smoke and a chat and a glass or two of port.

"Look here, Spots," said Blake, lighting a cigarette, "I think it's high time you told Captain Raven a bit more about this show of ours. So far he's practically been sailing under sealed orders."

"As a matter of fact, gentlemen," said Raven, "all I know is that you engaged me to bring the Sirius down to a point on the chart marked as approximately 3 degrees N., 15.55 degrees W."

"After that I gathered we were to cruise about looking for an island of a certain shape, not shown on any chart."

"Till then I was to pick my own route and use my own discretion."

"I've got that right, haven't I?"

"I admit I'm a bit curious, but it's no business of mine."

"Still, I'm human."

"I couldn't help wondering at the rifles and ammunition brought aboard, for one thing. There's nothing to shoot hereabouts that I know of, except seagulls and alligators."

"You insisted on my shipping a crew nearly twice as big as I really need—you gave preference to men who could handle a rifle. And you've got a whole lot of truck below I don't understand the meaning of."

"You've done us all top hole—from me right down to the galley-boy in the fo'c'sle—and I've never enjoyed a trip more."

"But as for understanding it, I'll be hanged if I do!"

"You're after something—a Barbary ape could understand that. And it can't be black ivory, because the Sirius isn't rigged up exactly for the slave trade," he added, with a laugh.

"Nor do slavers usually fly the squadron ensign!"

Sir Richard grinned.

"Have some more port, skipper."

"The fact is, we're on a bit of a wild goose chase, which may turn up trumps or may not."

"Personally I believe it will."

"If it doesn't—well, I didn't want you to be laughing up your sleeve at me all the way out as well as all the way home."

"As a matter of fact, I got the yarn from a trader from these parts—a man called Jackson—nearly a year ago."

"He used to work up and down the mainland coast hereabouts, picking up freights at various stations too small for the steamers to worry about, or where they had to lie too far out. Palm-oil and betel, and all the rest of it."

"You know the kind of game."

"He ran a forty-ton schooner, with a native crew; and, as a matter of fact, he did jolly well out of it."

"Well, one fine day he was blown

out to sea in a gale, and sheltered behind an island he had never seen nor heard of before, and hove-to under the lee of it until the wind blew itself out."

"Of course, there are hundreds of uncharted islands off the coast here, and out of the steamer lanes."

"But this one struck him as very peculiar, and he says there's no mistaking it."

"It's a fair size, by all accounts, mostly mangrove swamp at one end, but higher at the other, and on this higher end he declares there is a tremendous, great stone pyramid, built just like the pyramids at Cairo."

"He was fascinated all to pieces with the thing, and questioned his krooboy."

"They were a bit reluctant to talk, but by dashing them a couple of bottles of 'square-face' he learnt that it was known as the 'Island of the Dead,' or sometimes as the 'Island of Hathor.'"

"They also told him that it was taboo—Ju Ju tagati, anything you like."

"That there were many dead of 'Ka Ka,' ever so long ago, that is buried there, and much treasure."

"So he went ashore for a stroll to have a look at it. His boys were terrified, and nothing would induce 'em to go farther than a spring on the beach. They had to go there, because the schooner was dead run out of water, and they had to fill up the water-casks."

"Well, my pal was a bit of a scholar in his way—learned sort of josses—and he assured me that not only was the pyramid genuine pukka Egyptian, but that it was evidently the tomb of some royal person, possibly of a whole family-tree of them, because on one of the stones there was a great carving of the goddess Hathor, who was the daughter of Ra, and used a cow as a family crest, or something like that, and that only a very great man would dare to have that on his tomb."

"He said it was sure to be full of wonderful loot, if one could only find the way in; but he couldn't stop, for fear his boys would bolt and leave him stranded."

"As a matter of fact, he came back to England some months later and inherited some money, and though he was absolutely positive about the island and the pyramid, wild goats wouldn't induce him to leave England again."

"Well, skipper, you may think it a pretty thin kind of a yarn, but it fascinated me; also there was the undoubted fact that the native name for it, or one of them, and the inscription my man saw tally, as it were, making the yarn, such as it is, hang together."

"I had some time to burn, so I determined to come and see for myself. And here we all are on the old Sirius."

"At the worst I shall have had a pleasant trip, a whiff of sea air, and a bit of excitement."

"As to the rifles—well, I brought 'em along as a precautionary measure."

"Mr. Blake and I have knocked about a good deal, as I dare say you've heard, and we've always found that when there's any loot lying round there's generally some other Johnny after it as well, even if the place is off the map; and in that case it's generally mighty useful to have a good, serviceable rifle or two amongst your personal belongings."

"If things turn up trumps I'll stand you the best dinner that can be got, and if they don't—well, you can laugh at me all the way home!"

Captain Raven shook his head.

"I'm not laughing, Sir Richard," he said. "I've knocked about the world too long and seen too much to laugh at

yarns of that sort. It's the fools who stay at home who do most of the laughing, simply because they don't know. And, look here! I'll tell you something else. This isn't the first time I've heard of such an island hereabouts.

"I've never heard the fancy names you've put to it before, but I have heard of men up and down this coast who swear they have sighted an island with a great stone monument on it. Some have called it a stone cairn, others a hill of stone, but one man called it, as you do yourself, a pyramid.

"He was first officer on an intermediate boat, and they had come closer in than usual to get out of some dirty weather.

"He told me that he saw it plainly in the morning watch. Hull down it was, and a matter of ten miles away, so far as he could judge. Later on he checked off his position on the chart at the time, and made a note of it. But he lost his pocket-book and most of his gear on the next trip, and couldn't remember the position within a degree either way."

"By James!" said Sir Richard. "I believe the yarn is true."

"One moment," said Blake. "You remember that when all of you were busy exploring down in the hold I stopped in the cabin to see if I could discover anything?"

"Yes; go on, old man!"

"Well, in the lining of a dusty old coat, hung up in one of the state-rooms, a coat which had belonged to an old man with white hair, I found this. It had slipped down through a hole in the lining of an inside pocket, and if I'm not mistaken it was this paper which the men who murdered him were rummaging for."

He flung the envelope on the table, and Sir Richard snatched it up, whilst the others leant forward and stared.

"Read it out, Spoils!" said Blake. "I've done no more than glance at it up till now."

Sir Richard glanced at the soiled, discoloured envelope, and read:

"Isle of Hathor, daughter of Ra. Approx position 3 degrees N., 15.40 degrees W.

"PIETRO PAOLO, Genoa."

"Great Scott!" said Sir Richard. "And you found this in an old coat on the barque?"

Blake nodded.

"Not only that, but I happen to know something about Pietro Paolo by repute."

"He is, or was, one of the foremost Egyptologists of his age."

"He was quite one of the biggest authorities on the subject, and a practical man as well. He has superintended and directed excavations all over the place."

"I haven't a doubt that that derelict barque is all that is left of a private expedition, fitted out for the express purpose of exploring this 'Island of the Dead.'"

"Phew!" said Sir Richard. "Then that would account for the milk in the coconut; or, rather, for the picks and spades, and blasting powder and so on."

"That's the idea!" said Blake.

"Look what's inside! I haven't read it myself."

"Humph! In Italian," said Sir Richard. "Never mind, I can manage somehow."

He spread out three or four sheets of cheap foreign notepaper, and read, translating as he went.

"The evidence as to the existence of U. J.—No. 878.

the pyramid on the Island of Hathor, otherwise known as the Island of the Dead is, in my opinion, quite conclusive. The island is 3 degrees N., 15.40 degrees W. approx, and presumably belongs to the 15th Dynasty.

"The tomb is presumably that of Menes, the great pro-consul, together with his wife and daughter and several favourite slaves, who perished in the great plague of that time."

Sir Richard broke off.

"He gives a whole long string of references here to some papyzi and things in the museum at Cairo, and to a notebook of his own, marked A," he said.

"Then he goes on:

"There is little doubt that the pyramid, besides containing things of unique historical value, holds jewels and gold ornaments of enormous intrinsic worth, especially the famous emeralds of which all trace had hitherto been lost."

"The main entrance, so far as I can ascertain, is probably on the eastern side, hermetically sealed, but indicated by the royal scarab of Menes and the symbol of Hathor."

"There are, probably, also many other carvings and picture-writings of the period in the interior. There are also, in my opinion, likely to be both an upper and lower chamber with transverse passages. See diagram."

"The value of the jewels alone, if found, should, according to my friend Dr. Hobson's estimate, be at least fifty thousand English pounds. Others place it higher still. I myself consider these estimates exaggerated, and, granted the Menes emeralds are there, place the value, as near as one may judge from contemporary reports, at between twenty and thirty thousand. It is for this reason that I am fitting out this small expedition. Leaving the actual details of the arrangements, the chartering of the vessel, and the purchase of necessary stores and equipment to Tino, my nephew and secretary, I hope all will go well, and that we may return in safety. The crew will need to be chosen with care and discretion, and for actual research and excavation work I am taking four of my most trusted assistants."

"That's all," said Sir Richard. "Poor old beggar! He seems to have had a sort of premonition that he was running into trouble. This is dated from Genoa, and written about seven weeks ago. I suppose that rascally nephew of his was at the bottom of the whole business?"

Blake nodded.

"I expect it was his brain at the back of the thing. He would have considerable technical knowledge probably, and as soon as they were nearly on the spot he thought the time had arrived to spring the mine."

"By sheer chance, though, he missed these papers and the diagram."

"The old man evidently kept them very carefully. He may even have slipped them down through the lining of that shabby old coat of his on purpose."

"Well, if I ever come across Master Tino I'll wring his neck!" said Sir Richard cheerfully.

"I think," he went on, looking round, "that on the whole this is an occasion which ought to be duly celebrated. Skipper, if you'll kindly ring for the steward we'll drink to the success of our venture, so ask him to bring along some champagne—a couple of bottles—and four glasses."

"Wow, Lukuna, but we be fire!" said Lobangu.

Sir Richard eyed him sternly for a moment.

"Four large tumblers, then, and a

small sherry-glass for Lobangu, please, skipper!" he said, and grinned.

"But my insides, Lukuna—" began Lobangu dolefully.

"Confound your insides!" said Sir Richard. "You've eaten enough grub to fill a house, pretty well! What's the matter with your insides?"

"But, N'kose—" Lobangu's face was so pitiful that they all burst into a shout of laughter.

"Oh, make it five tumblers, then!" said Sir Richard, chuckling. "You'll be the death of me one day, you black ruffian!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Land, Ho!

THEY were all up just before the dawn broke the next morning.

In fact, Blake and Sir Richard didn't go to bed at all, but sat on deck in a couple of deep chairs, smoking and discussing plans, and watching the stars.

The outcome of their discussion was this. Old Professor Paolo had come out fully equipped for his expedition with mining tools and blasting powder, and a very clear notion of the difficulties that were likely to hamper him in his excavation work, at which he was an expert.

His notes and his diagrams showed that he had studied and thought out everything carefully, with one exception.

Like so many other brilliant scientists he had overlooked the human element.

It had never occurred to him that his nephew, knowing the huge sums at stake, might conceivably knock him on the head in the hopes of collaring the lot.

They, on the other hand, regarding the scheme more or less as a wild gamble, and very much in the dark as to what might turn up, had come with scarcely any preparations, as far as excavation work went.

They had brought along a few army pattern entrenching tools, it is true, as an after-thought, and they had a plentiful supply of ammunition and provisions, also electric-torches and a case of specially-charged batteries, but that was about all.

They had been prepared to trust to luck and their native wits for the rest.

"It comes to this," said Blake, with a yawn in the end. "Our best plan will be to put half a dozen more men on board the barque. There should be an off-shore breeze in the morning, and if there is, and it's anything like a favourable slant, she can lounge along after us, and we'll go half-stem ahead, so as not to lose sight of her. If the wind is unfavourable, then we must roust out a hawser and give her a tow."

"It will mean taking another twenty-four hours, probably, in either case before we raise the island. But it will be a good deal quicker, and involve much less hard work for everyone, than transshipping all that heavy stuff out of her here by boat, and then having to do it all over again when we arrive."

"If we take her along we can just dump everything straight on to the beach and fetch it along as we want it."

"That's a good scheme," said Sir Richard.

"After that," Blake went on, "they can leave us on the island. The Siricus can convoy her to the nearest British port and arrange about the salvage. You'd better give Raven a note to the consul, by way of explaining things and the pigs' mess we found on board. Then the yacht can come back, and stand off and on until we signal her. She should be back in about three weeks at the outside."

Sir Richard nodded.

From down below in the saloon came

the clink of coffee-cups, and they could hear Tinker squalling what he fondly believed to be a song as he splashed about in his tub.

"By Jove, this mist is thick!" said Sir Richard. "It'll pass as soon as the sun gets up, and we shall have it blazing hot again. At present I can't see over our own bows, let alone the barque. She might be down at the South Pole for all one can make out of her whereabouts."

The words had hardly left his lips when across the mist, sounding unnaturally loud and close, for mists play strange tricks with the hearing, came two revolver-shots, short and sharp and close together. Then a third, followed by two more.

Blake was out of his chair and into the deckhouse in three strides. When he came out he was carrying his heavy Smith and Wesson. He ran to the rail and fired two answering shots into the air.

Sir Richard was also up and busy, and Captain Raven, who had heard the alarm, was already ordering a boat away.

In under three minutes the crew were in their places, and Blake and Sir Richard were in the stern-sheets.

"Careful of these, men!" he cautioned them, handing out half a dozen Winchesters which he had taken from the arm-rack. "The magazines are fully loaded. Give way!"

"Hang on a moment!" came a yell from above; and Tinker, gracefully attired in a bath-towel and a cartridge-belt and holster, came scrambling down, followed by Lobangu with his big war-spear. The sound of firing had acted on him like a tonic, and he had completely forgotten his "insides" for the moment.

The boat fairly hissed its way through the calm, oily water; and Blake, with one eye on the boat's compass, steered blindly through the mist.

Suddenly, sooner than he expected, he caught the loom of the barque almost on top of them, and hailed.

There was no answer, and he made a spring for the ladder hanging over-side, followed by some of the others.

They gained the deck and peered round, but could see nothing.

Then, suddenly, from up towards the bows, they heard a shout.

"Don't fire!" cried Blake, recognising the voice.

"What's up?"

Two figures came pattering aft through the mist, revolvers in hand.

"Oh, it's you, sir!" said the foremost, with obvious relief. "I thought for a moment it was them beggars back again."

"Let's hear about it!" said Sexton Blake sharply.

"Well, sir, it was like this: Jim and I had been keepin' look-out all night, watch and watch, an' a little while back I came up, havin' had my trick below, and seen' it was just on dawn I went for'ard to put out the ridin' light, as

there didn't seem no sense in wastin' good oil.

"I was just close up to it when I heard a funny sort o' noise away over there to the east'ard. Then I heard the chunk-chunk of oars and voices.

"I knew it couldn't be any of our crowd, because the Sirius is moored outside of us, and this boat was comin' from shoreward.

"I was just goin' to challenge 'em, though I couldn't see 'er, when a voice sings out in English: 'By gosh! It is a light! There's someone got aboard 'er.'

"An', biff, bang, a bullet comes 'umming past my 'ear, an' smashes the bally old lantern!

"I was glad it did that, sir, beggin' your pardon, for the light was showin'

listenin', I s'pose, sir, when you came along."

"That will have been friend Tino come back for another look for those papers, I expect," said Blake.

"He must have had the scare of his life when he saw that ridin'-light, then," chuckled Sir Richard.

Blake nodded.

"And a deuce of a long, stiff pull for nothing. It must be at least ten miles to the nearest point of the mainland. There's not a breath of a sailing breeze yet, and they'll have to pull another ten to get back. They'll be a pretty sick crowd when they do arrive. Here, hold up, man! What's the matter, Sykes—hurt?"

The man who had been explaining what had happened suddenly staggered. His knees gave, and he would have fallen if Blake had not caught him and laid him on deck.

His right sleeve was soaked with blood, and, unnoticed by anyone, even by himself, probably, it had been running down his fingers and dripping on to the deck.

One of the bullets had grazed his arm—a mere scratch, to look at, little more than skin deep.

In the excitement of the moment, as likely as not, he didn't even realise that he had been touched. But it had severed a vein, and the man had fainted from loss of blood.

Blake put a rough tourniquet on him and gave him a drink, and then, having made him comfortable, they began to get busy.

The mists were clearing as though by magic. Already the Sirius, half a mile away, was plainly visible in all the magnificence of her white paint and glittering brasswork.

A feather of steam came from her exhaust, and across the still water came the clank-clank of her steam windlass as she hove her anchor short.

Blake looked shoreward, too, through his glasses, and away in the distance he could make out a white-painted boat, making for land as hard as she could.

Lobangu, meanwhile, had been prowling round on his own—this being his first visit to the barque.

Presently he came sauntering back, looking very pleased with himself, and holding something in his hand.

"Look you, Untwana, my father," he said. "Tell me what these letters may mean?"

He held out a long, slim-bladed stiletto, with a brass handle.

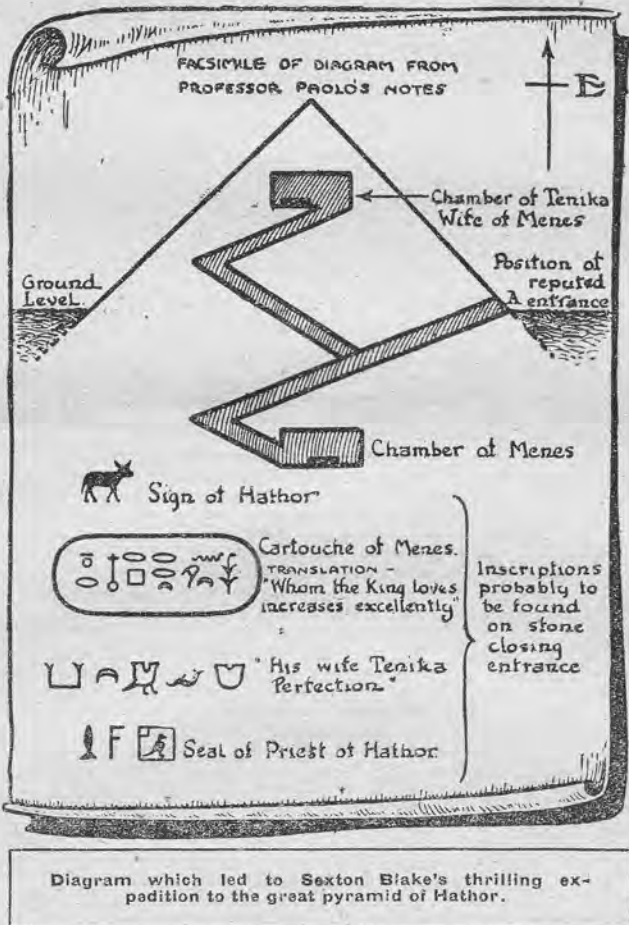
On the steel was engraved the word "Traditore," and the steel was stained to the hilt.

"Hallo, old man!" said Blake. "Where the deuce did you find that?"

"Yonder, Inkoos," said Lobangu, pointing up to the bows. "In the dark hole where the common sailor-folk live. It was in a big boot, such as sea-folk wear."

"That's one on you, Tinker," said Blake. "You went to the fo'c'sle, and though you saw the boot, you missed the

U. J.—No. 878.



me up unpleasant conspicuous, as it were. I ducked and ran for the rail.

"I just got a glimpse of a boat, white painted she was, with half a dozen or more men in 'er; almost under the rail, she was, not a couple of oars-lengths away.

"Well, sir, I let 'em 'ave a couple of chambers for luck, an' I think I bagged one of 'em. Anyway, one jossler started yelling and cursin' in dago language. The man in the stern cried out something, and plugged at me again.

"Jim came runnin' up from below, sir, feelin' kind o' mad at 'avin missed the show, and 'e looses off one for luck, but by that time, sir, you couldn't see nothin' but mist. There wasn't no boat to be glimpsed anywhere. We could hear the chunk-chunk of her oars, an' voices jabberin', and then that stopped.

"We was still there watchin' and

knife. The word is Italian for traitor, old man," he went on to Lobangu.

"It is a good weapon, though small," said Lobangu, "and the steel is of the finest, and very sharp. It should bite deep, like a snake's tooth. One day I must try it."

With which hopeful remark he wiped it carefully on a corner of Sir Richard's pyjamas, which he was wearing.

The Sirius had broken out her anchor by now, and was moving slowly towards them. A line was thrown and made fast; then a stout coir hawser was hauled on board.

Blake and the others, including the wounded man, returned to the yacht.

Four others went back to the barque to take charge of the wheel and get the remaining canvas off her, and before the sun was fairly clear of the tree-tops they were heading cautiously south-west at under half-speed, for fear of snapping the hawser in the long swells outside.

By midday the low-lying African coast was out of sight.

In order to save time they arranged to send a boatload of the Sirius' crew back to the barque to strike the cargo out of her hold on deck, so that it could be landed at once on reaching the island.

This was done, a make-shift derrick being rigged to her mainmast.

The big tanks proved on closer inspection to be intended to contain gas under pressure, not water.

There was a case containing chemicals for making a form of acetylene gas to be stored in the tanks, and another containing some portable lamps, which could be filled by means of a flexible tube and nozzle, and burnt with a flame like an incandescent burner, giving an intensely brilliant light.

It was a new Italian invention, and old Professor Paolo had evidently thought that it might be useful for interior exploration work.

It was intensely, stiflingly hot that night, and Tinker, unable to stick his cabin any longer, dragged a blanket out on deck, and curled up alongside Pedro.

It was just after dawn when he was awakened by the shrill, long-drawn cry of the man on the look-out for 'ard.

"La-and-ho!"

He rubbed his eyes, and sat up with a jerk, rolling Pedro over.

"Where away?" he heard Captain Raven ask sharply.

"Point and a half to starboard, sir," came the answer. And the next moment Tinker was out of his blankets and racing for the bridge.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER, The Island of the Dead.

TINKER'S first glimpse of the Isle of Hathor, daughter of Ra, was distinctly disappointing.

To begin with, it was the false dawn. The false dawn is that which heralds in the dawn proper. In it things look pretty much the same colour, and cold and cheerless.

All Tinker could see from the bridge was a cold, grey slab of sea, another of sky, and away ahead a thing that might have been the top of an extra big wave sticking up clear of the horizon. The wind struck chill and cold, too, through his thin pyjamas after the stifling heat of the previous night.

The barque was steering a bit wildly, and sagging and snatching at the tow-rope.

He noticed that at some time during the night they had set the mizzen to steady her, and he shivered.

Captain Raven, beside him, also in U. J.—No. 878.

pyjamas and slippers, had been wise enough to slip on a coat.

Then quite suddenly there came a change. The sea seemed suddenly to grow darker. There was a momentary pause, and then straight up out of the water there seemed to grow a livid, golden-crimson cone-shaped mass of fire, clear cut, sharply defined.

He watched it turn from crimson-gold to pure molten gold.

"Matter of twelve miles, or a bit more," he heard Captain Raven say. "Don't know its height, but it's it."

The next moment Tinker was flying down the bridge-ladder to rouse out the others.

They came hurrying up, but even in that short space of time the transformation was completed.

The sea no longer looked chill and sullen, it was all sparkling golds and greens.

The great pyramid, no longer hulk down, stood up golden and majestic against the sky, and they could see a dark strip of low-lying land stretching out to the southward.

"Any idea of its height, Sir Richard?" asked Captain Raven.

"Over three hundred, I believe."

Captain Raven nodded.

"We should be close up in an hour," he said. "Your man was nearer right than Paolo, by my reckoning."

"I make 3 degrees N., 15.30 degrees W."

"That's ten whole minutes different to the Italian's figures. But I haven't checked my own yet."

"Never mind!" said Sir Richard, laughing. "We've got there, that's the main thing. And you can tell the look-out that there's a liver to come his way after breakfast."

They were lucky to find deep water close up in-shore, and no dangerous out-lying reefs. The island was almost certainly volcanic rock, and the mangrove swamps at the far end merely silted-up deposit on the rock.

It was a good-sized place, too. Five miles long, as near as they could judge, by three or more across at the wider and higher end, though a mere insignificant speck on the chart, if it happened to be there—which it wasn't.

Two things about it were most impressive. First, its utter loneliness. It might have been the only speck of land above water in the world, for all there was to be seen. Secondly, by what means had the huge blocks of stone been transported there by the old Egyptians? Had it been quarried on the spot, and all traces of the quarrying work lost? Or had it been brought from the interior of the mainland, block by block, in fleets of trimmers?

In fact, as Tinker said:

"It was a rummy place for any chap to go to all that trouble to bury himself in."

The Sirius lay close in, not two hundred yards from the shore, just opposite to a little shelving bay of sand, which looked as if you could paddle in it. You could have. But two boats length out you would have gone plop into fifty fathom of water or more.

Leaving the quartermaster, Jenkins, to see to the unloading and landing of the stores, the others hurried ashore in the yacht's dinghy, and landed in the small bay.

Everywhere on that end of the island there was loose, reddish-white sand—angle-deep in some places—interspersed with boulders and rocky outcrops and patches of low scrub.

The nearest side of the base of the pyramid was barely three hundred yards from the bay, and as they stood and

stared up at the huge mountain of masonry they were filled with a feeling of awe.

It seemed to tower above them almost to the sky, no longer crimson and gold, but a grim reddish-grey, menacing in its strength, pitted and worn by the sands and storms of century upon century, rugged and ominous but, to all intents and purposes, as strong as the day it was finished.

The steeply-slanting sides had once been of smooth-hewn stone, the blocks keyed together. But time and weather had bitten deeply into the outer surfaces of these, and, with care, it looked a fairly easy job for an active man to scramble his way to the summit.

Everywhere at this end was sand and low, prickly scrub. At the southern end lay the stretch of dark green mangrove swamp.

Of animal life there was no sign. That was natural enough, seeing the distance from the mainland.

Possibly they might find turtles' eggs, but apart from that, and any fish they might catch, they would be entirely dependent on their own supplies.

For, though the mangrove swamp swarmed with clouds of birds, they were all of the fish-eating variety, and no use as food.

Water was naturally the vital question, and they had proposed bringing ashore a plentiful supply from the yacht, and also a small patent still, simple and easy to work, for getting fresh water from salt.

Luckily, they found that they would only have to rely on these in cases of extreme emergency. For, extraordinary though it may sound, they found two holes or springs of perfectly sweet water, all brackishness having been filtered out of it by Nature.

After a general brief tour of inspection the first thing to do was to fix a site for their camp. This they naturally wished to have as near the base of the pyramid itself as possible, and also in a sheltered position. For the island was obviously swept by terrific gales now and then, and, judging from the growth of the stunted scrub, the prevailing winds came from the south-west across the great desolate stretch of open water.

There was a perceptible depression in the general level of the ground almost at the base of the eastern side of the pyramid. They chose that.

It had two obvious advantages—it was close to the supposed entrance on which they would have to work, and scarcely fifty yards from the nearest water-hole.

By Blake's urgent advice they had brought along a small wooden hut in sections, all ready to bolt together, and big enough to hold four of them comfortably.

"It's all very well, my dear chap," he had said, when Sir Richard had grumbled at what he called molly-coddling rubbish. "You like your comforts as much as the rest of us, old chap. Tents are all very well, and I like 'em, but a tent is no bally use to you if a gale springs up, and whisks it off into mid-Atlantic. And shelter of sorts we must have in that blazing heat. Then there'll be sandstorms most likely. A tent is about as much good in a sandstorm as a butterfly-net is to bale out a boat. You tote along a nice little wooden hut or you go on your own! If you don't have to use it, it will do to keep our stores in or make a kennel for Pedro."

Consequently the hut was put up and bolted together in the centre of the hollow, and wedged down with big boulders.

The stores and other gear were stacked round it with stout canvas lashed over

them, and a couple of tents erected close by.

Every man on the Sirius worked like a nigger, for word had got round that they were to have a share in any discovery made, and, apart from that, they would have done anything for Blake and Sir Richard.

By dusk every load, including the tanks, had been brought up and placed in position.

Captain Raven stopped on to join them in the first dinner on the island, which was duly celebrated. The crew were given an extra tot all round, and at ten o'clock Captain Raven was rowed aboard the Sirius.

An hour later she and the barque were hull down and just visible in the moonlight.

"Well, here we are, old man," said Sir Richard. "All snug and tight on our own little island, and there's the bally old pyramid which we came for to see! I'm as tired as the proverbial dog! Pedro, by the way, is snoring already, and old Lobangu is blinking like an owl."

"That's the effect of the mental strain involved in carefully shrinking every blessed job he was given to do!" said Blake gravely. "Old Lobangu is a top-hole fighting-man, as we all know, but if he was turned loose to do a little honest manual labour he'd starve. I don't believe he's carried anything but himself the whole blessed day!"

"Wrong," said Tinker. "He moved a case of his beloved bubbly-water a whole yard, and then sat on it, and took snuff, and scratched Pedro's ear for about an hour."

"That reminds me," said Sir Richard. "I vote we have a final peg, and turn in. They may say that this island is haunted, but I shall sleep like a log, even if a ghost comes and tickles my toes!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. The Great Pyramid of Hathor.

THEY were all active soon after sunrise the next morning; and the sunrise from the island was a wonderful sight.

They strolled down to bathe, and Lobangu, who was an expert on such matters, having pronounced the little bay free from sharks, they went for a swim, including Pedro.

Lobangu, who could hold his own with any pearl divers, and stay under water for a couple of minutes with ease, swam down into the depths below.

When at last he came up again, after what seemed an interminable time, he announced that a little way out the cliff went down sheer as a wall.

There were huge great weeds growing up from below, twice as thick as a full-grown man's body—like the weeds off the Cape Verde Islands—also he had seen several shoals of fishes and two large turtles swimming lazily along.

This was good news for everyone except Lobangu himself, for he, being of the royal house of the Etbaia, and akin to the Zulu, had a horror of even touching a fish, regarding them as things unclean—tagati.

To the others, however, it meant a lot, for turtle eggs are a luxury. And a plentiful supply of fresh fish makes a welcome change from a constant diet of canned and potted things, however good they may be.

As a matter of fact, Tinker was lucky enough to find a batch of freshly-laid eggs buried in the sand on their way back to camp, not a dozen paces from where they had been bathing, and they had them fried for breakfast. Directly the meal was over they set out to inspect the pyramid in earnest.

First of all, with a piece of stick of

measured length—four foot—and a simple calculation which any Boy Scout is familiar with, Blake made an estimate of its height.

It worked out at four hundred feet exactly, allowing a foot or so for erosion by sand and weather.

Pacing carefully the sides—all four were the same—they found them to be five hundred feet. As Tinker said, "some pyramid."

He and Lobangu climbed part of the way up the shady side.

It was tougher going and steeper than it had looked; but there was no real difficulty.

All they could see everywhere was empty ocean, with here and there to the westward a few little wispy trails of smoke low down, marking the inner limit of the steamer tracks.

Below them, spread out like a map, lay the rest of the island, and Tinker scrawled a rough diagram of it.

Whatever it may have been at the time the great pyramid was built on it, it was now, without doubt, as desolate a spot as could well be imagined.

Not a sign or vestige of life anywhere but the sea birds. Arid sand and scrub everywhere except at the lower end, where the mangrove swamp lay, its dense, green masses split up by several lagoons and waterways.

A series of hails from below brought them hurrying down.

"We've found it!" shouted Sir Richard. "We've found the entrance! Come and look!"

They scuttled over the soft sand, and discovered Blake and Sir Richard examining a huge slab of stone, which was exactly in the centre of the base of the east side.

Old Professor Paolo had been right.

At a casual glance this particular slab looked much like its neighbours, reddish-grey, rugged, and weather-worn. But on closer inspection deep-cut carvings were easily traceable, and Blake was busy scraping away the caked sand with his case-knife.

This sand had clogged into the lines of the carvings till it almost looked like part of the rock itself; but as it was cut away the lines showed plainly half an inch to an inch wide, and fully an inch deep. In some places a whole design had been chipped out of the rock in the parts shown solid block in the old professor's diagram.

This Sir Richard was holding in his hand, and studying carefully.

"Great Scott!" said Tinker. "What's that thing that looks half-way between a goat with rickets and a pantomime donkey?"

"Shut up, sacrilegious ape!" said Sir Richard. "That's the sign, or crest, or what d'ye call 'em of Hathor the goddess, daughter of Ra, and it isn't a goat; it's a cow."

"Humph!" said Tinker. "And what's this next bit he's chippin' at now—the thing with the skittles in it, and a worm in one corner?"

"That's Mene's epitaph or motto. Paolo says here it means: 'Whom the king loves increases excellently.'"

"Humph!" said Tinker again. "I suppose that's a polite way of sayin' that he was a war profiteer in his time. Got a soft job, and swindled everyone in sight. What's the next?"

"The next says 'his wife, Tenika, was perfection.'"

"I bet she nagged his head off and went through his pockets every Saturday night," said Tinker. "I know something about epitaphs."

"The last," said Sir Richard coldly, "is the seal of the priest of Hathor."

"Oh, is it? That thing with the cocky-olly bird or the raven in the corner?"

"Hi, Pedro, what the deuce are you doin'?"

"There aren't any rabbits on the island, and if there were, you're no kind of a terrier, you lump of iniquity!"

The others stopped and stared, and even Blake gave up his work to look.

Pedro, usually so sedate and dignified, was lying half on one side, scrabbling away in the soft sand at the base of the rock for dear life with both forepaws, and emitting weird grunting noises.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Tinker, and Lobangu regarded his "king of beasts" with pained astonishment.

"By Jove! He's after something!" cried Tinker. "Lick 'em out! Good dog! My hat! Look there, he nearly had it!"

A little pale-coloured animal about the size of a rat had suddenly poked its head out, and quickly vanished again.

Tinker flopped down on his hands and knees to help for want of something better to do, and began to scrabble away alongside Pedro, using his hands and his case-knife.

Suddenly he stopped and gave a low whistle.

"I say," he cried, "I can get my arm right under here, and it's all soft sand below."

"What!" shouted Blake and Sir Richard together.

"Fact," said Tinker. "Try for yourselves. There won't be any need to blow your old door down. You could dig 'under it in no time. Either a bit of masonry has given way or something, but it's a dead easy job!"

"Lobangu, cut back to the hut and fetch spades, three, four of 'em—hurry!" said Sir Richard.

"N'kose!" said Lobangu.

"And bring a couple of the large torches," Blake yelled after him.

It was as Tinker had said.

In under twenty minutes they had a hole dug big enough for even Sir Richard to crawl through with ease, in spite of the fact that a lot of the loose sand fell inwards as fast as they dug it away.

Even Lobangu condescended to work.

Tinker was all for diving in at once like a rabbit into its burrow, but Sir Richard held him back.

"Easy does it, sonny. Better let's try the air first."

Blake shook his head.

"I don't think there's much fear on that score. They nearly always had ventilating shafts. However, here's a stump of candle I brought along on the off-chance and some matches."

"Try that, Tinker, old man. Light it and push it ahead of you at arm's length. If it begins to burn blue or goes out, come back at once."

Tinker squirmed forward, and then came out again.

"It burnt as right as rain," he said, "until the draught blew it out. It blew the flame away from me, so there must be an air shaft of sorts up above. Give me a torch, someone."

He grabbed a torch and scrambled in, and Blake went after him with the others.

They found themselves in a huge rock passage nearly twenty foot square.

The floor sloped downwards at a fairly sharp angle, and the walls, as they could see, were richly decorated with paintings in reds and blacks and dingy whites, and with carvings.

But their immediate concern was with the inner side of the door itself, and they flashed their torches over it.

Suddenly Blake cried out sharply: "There's metal-work here. Bronze, by the look of it. I expect it's a lever or the spring of something. Stand well clear. I'm going to try!"

Tinker stood back, and Blake pressed and pulled this way and that.

Suddenly there was a grating noise, and Blake himself sprang back swiftly.

So swiftly that he took Tinker unawares, and sent him reeling. His heel caught against some hard object, and with a yell of anguish he toppled over backwards, and fell with a crash, his torch flying from his hand and splintering to atoms. He lay for a minute wondering whether he was dead or not.

Finally concluding that he was not, he picked himself up, gingerly rubbing the back of his head, and stared.

The great stone door had swung back wide, and out beyond was the glaring, dazzling sunlight with Sir Richard and Lobangu standing in the glare staring open-mouthed, and Pedro snarling with hackles raised.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said Sir Richard. "How did you do it, old man?"

"How did he do it?" said Tinker, rubbing his head gingerly. "How did he do it? Oh, I can tell you how! First he trod on my toes, then he kicked me, and then he knocked me backwards over a jolly great lump of stone, and nearly brained me!"

"Quite impossible!" grinned Blake.

Tinker snorted.

"Bother Tinker's brains or lack of 'em," said Sir Richard, with a chuckle. "This is a bit of luck. Let's go and explore."

"Not till I find the trick of this door first, old man," said Blake. "Something has evidently gone wrong with the works somewhere, and I want to make sure and see that it can't close on us and catch us unawares."

"N'kose!" said Lobangu, whose eye-sight was keen as a hawk's. "Look you, I was watching closely, when there came a sound of old iron grating on iron. There was a faint click. Untwana, and see, this small piece of picture-writing moved inwards—so. Once before I have seen the same sort of thing in an old building of some long dead and gone peoples in the Umfalali country, which, as thou knowest, lies beyond the Etbaia, ay, and beyond the Askari!"

Blake whistled thoughtfully, and nodded.

"This one?" he asked, and pressed the square with the carving of the bird on it, which, according to Pietro Paolo's notes, was the seal of the priest of Hathor.

"Even so, N'kose," said Lobangu.

"Well, we'll try. Get out, all of you!"

"Get out! I should think I would," said Tinker, feeling the bump on his head. "If you're goin' to try any more fool monkey tricks, it's me for the woods."

Blake pressed hard on the square, and again there came that harsh, grating sound.

The big stone slab moved slowly outwards, and then, with a click hardly louder than the click of a key in a lock, swung into place.

So perfectly did it fit that after centuries of storm and stress the joint was scarcely visible, though they knew where to look for it.

"Go and get two more torches and a couple of revolvers, just in case of accidents," he said to Lobangu.

Meanwhile, he tried the door several times, both from inside and out, and set U. J.—No. 878.

Sir Richard and Tinker to clear away the loose sand.

"How on earth is it done?" asked Sir Richard. "That slab must weigh goodness knows how many tons."

"Counterpoise. There are two things those old builders were marvellous at—the use of the counterpoise for moving great weights easily, and the inclined plane."

"Here's the reason we were able to burrow in. See that big stone back there which Tinker was clumsy enough to stumble over and bump his head?"

"Clumsy!" snorted Tinker. "I like that."

"That, I fancy, was the original lintel of the door. But there must have been a terrific pressure of sand against it, piled up by a succession of storms, which shifted it out of place somehow. This passage slopes steeply, and under the pressure it was pushed two or three yards down this smooth slope."

"Here comes old Lobangu with the torches, so now we understand the working of the door let's go and explore."

And so it came about that for the first and only time, save once, Lobangu entered the pyramid of Hathor, daughter of Ra, the tomb of Menes the pro-consul, and his wife, Tenika.

To that other time they were to owe their lives; but that they did not know then.

As for Pedro, nothing would induce him to come in at all.

He did, indeed, venture some thirty yards down the slope, stepping very gingerly and cautiously. Then he sat down and howled like a banshee. Finding that the others wouldn't wait for him, he howled some more, and then slunk off, never stopping till he had reached camp and curled himself up on all the available blankets.

Half-way down the slope they came on another passage leading upwards at an angle.

"Which is it to be?" asked Sir Richard, "up or down?"

"Down," said Blake decisively. "I always like to know what is behind me first."

They went on down for a matter of another hundred and fifty feet or more, and then the passage turned at an acute angle on itself, and sloped downward again.

Everywhere the rock underfoot and all around them had been hewn smooth as a London street pavement, or rendered smooth in some way by a hard cement. And all the way the walls were profusely ornamented with mural paintings in dull reds and blacks and whites, or covered with elaborate carvings of hunting scenes and weird-looking boats, now and again interspersed with slabs of hieroglyphics, presumably a history of the doings of Menes.

"My hat!" said Sir Richard, under his breath. "This must have cost half a dozen fortunes, and taken dozens of years to build. Why, the carvings and paintings alone must have taken years. There seem to be acres of them."

Twice they disturbed a flight of great white bats, who, alarmed and dazzled by the lights, dashed blindly at the glare of the torches.

Finally they came into a great oblong chamber, thirty feet by twenty at the least.

Here the decorations were even more elaborate. And in the centre stood a great sarcophagus of dull, polished stone.

The tomb of Menes!

All round it were set golden vessels of various shapes and sizes.

Sir Richard plunged his hand into one at random, and brought out a great handful of jewelled ornaments. The gold work, like that of the vases, was sadly dulled, and tarnished, but the jewels glinted and gleamed evilly in their settings.

They, too, were dulled, but a rub of a sleeve or the hand revived them in all their pristine beauty.

Other vessels contained food, now shrivelled into dust, and drinking-vessels ages long dried up. But the most gruesome discovery of all was made accidentally by Tinker.

Stepping carelessly, something snapped under his foot like a brittle stick, and he looked to see what it was.

With a scarcely-suppressed cry of horror he stepped swiftly aside.

It was the arm bone of a skeleton that had snapped under his heel.

"Wow!" muttered Lobangu, and sprang back. For though he hadn't the slightest objection to killing a dozen men or twenty as an afternoon's amusement—in fact, he was an expert at the game—he had a horror of contact with the dead, whether friend or foe.

"This place is assuredly tagati, Inkoos," he said. "It is, in truth, a place of death. Why else should the king of beasts have fled and left us?"

"It's the skeleton of a slave," said Blake, bending and examining it closely. "A Negroid type. See the gold slaving ring still round what used to be the neck, and the curious formation of the skull. A man's skeleton."

"Great Scott! There's another of 'em!" said Sir Henry.

There was. In fact, there were no less than twenty in all ranged round the walls.

How they had been killed, by steel or poison, it was impossible to say. But the reason of their being killed was obvious.

It was in order that their master, the great pro-consul, should not lack service in another world.

"Menes must have been a man of tremendous importance in his time," said Blake, "if, at his death, it was necessary to sacrifice twenty slaves. Obviously, no attempt was made to embalm them. I suppose it wasn't thought worth while. Come on, and let's go and have a quick look round at the chamber up above. We must hurry, though, or our torches will be giving out."

They made their way swiftly to the upper chamber, the resting-place of Tenika, wife of Menes. Here the scene was much the same, equally lavish, but on a smaller scale.

Here, also, were the remains of dead slaves. All women by their skeletons and ornaments, and numbering ten instead of twenty.

"Poor things! It's pretty ghastly!" said Sir Richard. "I dare say some of 'em were mere youngsters, full of life and enjoyment."

They hurried away, for one of the batteries had given out already, and the others were burning dimly, and they were all glad enough to find themselves out in the glaring hot sunlight once more.

Tinker, always matter of fact, announced that he was ravenous.

Sir Richard, for his part, poured himself out a stiff mate's peg and sparklet, and gulped it down.

"Exploring is all very well, old man," he said, "but it can be a bit gruesome at times. Hallo! What's up with old Lobangu?"

Lobangu had seated himself apart from the others.

He had wrapped a blanket round him, and was sitting staring into space, with



Pedro lying shivering at his feet, and his great stabbing spear across his knees.

"What's the matter, old man?" asked Sir Richard.

"I have been thinking thoughts, Lukuna," said Lobangu quietly. "Look you, and you, too, Untwana, this is an evil place. As thou knowest, at times I dream dreams and see things that you, who are so much cleverer than I, cannot see. Even but now a thin red veil was spread before mine eyes. It was but thin and faint. But even so, as thou knowest, that assuredly means a killing. Nay, who shall kill, or who be killed, I cannot say. Nor can I tell thee when it shall be. But there will be a killing, and it will be done in that tagati place there above us. That I know. For if it were

half-prophetic moods of his. But he ate his food, and, curiously enough, as had happened before, he seemed to have utterly forgotten his words of a few moments back.

Blake, who had been watching him curiously, asked him a question or two, but his answers showed that his mind was a complete blank as to anything that had happened since they left the pyramid.

Even when Sir Richard opened a bottle of bubbly water and handed him a fizzing tumblerful, it made no difference.

It might have been tea, or coffee, or water from the spring.

He drank it more out of politeness than anything else, set the glass down, and relapsed into a moody silence.

breath of wind anywhere; in fact, it was so still that a candle unshaded would burn in the open with a perfectly steady flame, and the air was full of clouds of small flies.

There was something quite uncanny about the stillness, and for no particular reason a strange silence fell upon them all.

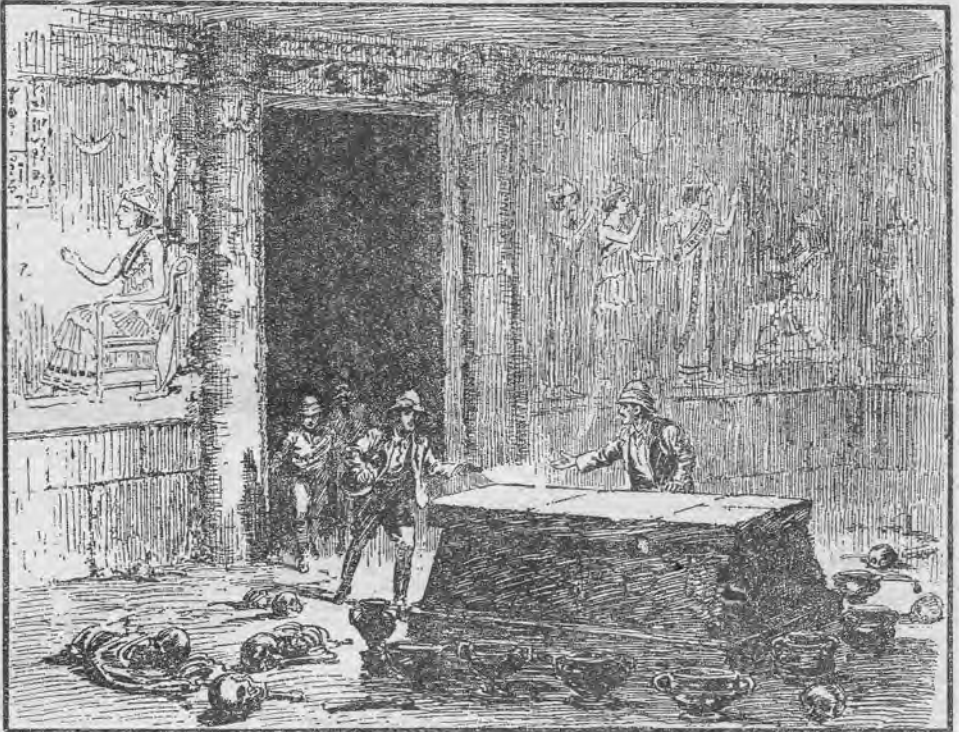
They were conscious of a peculiar tingling sensation of the skin, as though small electric currents were playing all over them.

Pedro was obviously uneasy, making a faint whimpering noise from time to time, and old Lobangu seemed restless, and kept constantly glancing at the sky and out seawards.

The after-glow that evening was uncannily beautiful. A gorgeous display of



In the centre of the large oblong chamber stood a great sarcophagus of dull, polished stone. It was the tomb of Menes!



otherwise I should not have seen the red mist. Look you now at the king of beasts! He knows, and he knows the place is evil. Has he ever deserted you in danger before, and slunk away as a beaten cur shrinks from the kraal?

"Never! Always it has been hard to hold him back and keep him out of the forefront of the battle. Wow! He knows, even as I know.

"See! Why else should he lie here at my feet, shivering like a leaf in the dawn breeze though the sun is hot? Why else should his coat be darkened and clammy with sweat?

"Because he knows. Because he can see what you white lords may not see, for all your wisdom. And the sweat is the sweat of fear!"

"Oh, cut it out, old man, and come and have some grub!" said Sir Richard.

"For a matter of that I think it's a beast of a place myself, and it gave me a fit of the blues, I admit. But I'm deuced hungry, and shall feel better when I've had some grub, and so will you."

Lobangu rose and walked away a little by himself. Then he came back, and joined the rest.

He seemed curiously tired and inert, as he always did after those strange,

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. The Sandstorm.

THAT afternoon they rested off until the fiercest heat of the sun was passed, and then, at Blake's suggestion, they set to work to try and rig up Professor Paolo's incandescent lamps.

To all appearances it would be necessary to spend days, perhaps weeks, in the caves to thoroughly search and examine them, and their supply of torches and batteries were strictly limited.

At the best the life of a battery is a matter of a few hours; also Blake was particularly anxious to obtain a series of photographs of the carvings and paintings of the interior, and for this torches were quite inadequate.

They had an ample outfit of cameras and plates, or, rather, films, but their flashlight apparatus had been smashed in transit, and they had no magnesium.

The lamps proved simple and effective. When filled could be carried about anywhere, and burnt with a white light as brilliant as to be almost dazzling.

Thoroughly satisfied with their experiments, they determined to rest up and laze about for the rest of the day.

The sun sank lower and lower till its rim touched the top of the mangroves.

The air was stifling; there wasn't a

vivid and ever-changing colours of every conceivable hue from brightest blues and emeralds to rose carmines and gold and crimsons and violet.

It was, in fact, as Blake said, "like a spectrum gone mad."

"You can call it what you like, old man," said Sir Richard, wetting his fingers and trying to catch the faintest indication of a breath of air. "Personally, I feel as if I had a bad attack of malaria and prickly heat ralled into one. I don't believe I could produce as much as a single bead of perspiration if I were to run to the top of that old pyramid and down again; and, in my opinion, we're in for something like the first cousin to a cyclone."

"N'kose," growled Lobangu, "you have seen the lightning play on the mountains of the Etbaba, and run along the ground where the ironstone is from which we make our young men's spears. It is just so that the air feels before the lightning comes."

There was not the slightest hint or sign of a thunderstorm to be seen, for all that.

The sun dropped down behind the mangroves with true tropical suddenness.

There was the usual interval of com-



plete darkness lasting perhaps twenty minutes to half an hour, and then gradually the stars blazed out in all their southern brilliancy against a background of deepest, purest blue.

A more perfect night it would be hard to imagine. Yet dinner was a farce; no one had any appetite or desire to eat. They scarcely spoke a word to one another, and by common consent they turned in unusually early.

Tinker, who occupied the second tent with Lobangu, and Pedro, who slept across the entrance, felt strangely wakeful.

In the other, a few yards away, he could see the light still burning, and smell the whiff of mingled cigarette and pipe-smoke.

Then that light, too, was extinguished, and everything was deadly still.

Tinker badly wanted to get to sleep, but he couldn't. He counted innumerable sheep, and tried all the old-fashioned dodges in vain, and finally he gave it up, and began wondering who Menes and Tenika really had been, what sort of lives they had led, and how they had come to build the great pyramid.

Suddenly a low voice came through the darkness.

"M'lolo, art thou awake, slippery one?"

"Listen! The red veil draws closer and clearer. M'lolo. I tell thee this place is tagati.

"But a moment or so back I heard a voice whisper in my ear the Eriana war-cry: 'S'gee, s'gee! (kill, kill); and behold!"

He held out the dagger-like stiletto which he had found on the barque, and Tinker looked.

Now—and this is important—Tinker was as wide awake as he had ever been. He was shrewd far beyond the average, and the only light in the tent was the faint starlight filtering through the entrance flap of the tent.

Yet he saw.

The stiletto blade, slim and venomous-looking, sharp as a needle at its point, and three-edged, after the manner of its kind, was reddened up to the hilt—red and wet looking.

Yet he himself had seen Lobangu wipe it on the corner of his pyjama jacket soon after finding it, and, later on, polishing it industriously on a little bit of oilstone which he always carried about with him, till the blade had shone like silver. For Lobangu was always an epicure in the matter of weapons.

In spite of himself, Tinker felt a certain uncanny sense of awe, which he wouldn't have had Lobangu guess at for worlds.

"Oh, chuck it!" he said angrily. "Don't try any of your rotten bush mesmerism stuff on me!"

Lobangu slid the weapon back into its sheath.

"As you please, M'lolo," he said. "I have spoken, and thou hast seen. Now we will sleep."

And, curiously enough, sleep they did.

Tinker, for his part, slept as soundly as ever he had done in his life, until he was suddenly awakened by a shriek like the shriek of a legion of ghosts, and before he could draw three breaths the tent above him was whirled away into the darkness, the poles snapped off short like twigs.

He tried to sit up, but was instantly flung flat, eyes, mouth, and nostrils clogged with stinging sand, driven along with hurricane force.

He was stunned, blinded, and half-suffocated, but he did the one thing possible. He rolled over, and flung himself flat on his face, head down-wind.

U. J.—No. 878.

and clawed at the ground, to try and anchor himself. Where the others were he could not tell.

In fact, it was well-nigh impossible to think at all.

He had been in sandstorms before, but never in one of such violence.

His one subconscious hope was that it was travelling at such a pace, and under such pressure, that it could not last long.

Twenty minutes at the outside; and in the meantime he clawed frantically at anything within reach, when the storm fairly lifted him, and shifted him along a yard or two.

He lost all sense of space or time for a bit, and then finally he became conscious that the wind had dropped to a dead calm, that it was daylight, though the sun hadn't yet risen, that there was what felt like half a ton of sand on his back, and that he was clinging head-on to a heavy case, probably an ammunition box.

He wriggled himself carefully free of superfluous sand.

The tents had gone.

Everything seemed to have gone except the pyramid—which had seen thousands of such storms—and the sea.

Suddenly he heard voices, and realised that a particularly straight ridge of sand in front of him was the roof of the hut.

A moment or two later Blake and the others came wading out, nearly knee-deep, to search, and Blake let up a yell at the sight of him standing there.

"We thought you were all in, old man," said Blake. "What happened to you?"

"Old Lobangu managed to fight his way to the hut. Luckily for us, the door faced down-wind, and all our gear in there is stacked round it.

"Spots and I were already there. Our tent had gone, and we got old Pedro in. But, though we tried half a dozen times or more, we couldn't get out to find you. It was impossible to stand, or even crawl. And, of course, one couldn't open one's eyes for a fraction of a second."

"I think the tent-pole must have caught me a whack on the head when it snapped," spluttered Tinker. "and knocked me out for a time. Give me some water to rinse this grit out of my mouth; and then it's me for a swim. At present I feel like a piece of emery-paper!"

They all went down and bathed, and the next two days were spent in about the hardest and most tedious work they could any of them remember.

Tons of sand had to be shovelled away; and not only that, the spring had to be cleared.

Both tents were gone for good; but, apart from that, they had lost nothing except time and a few odd-and-end trifles, thanks to Blake's insistence in having the sectional hut brought along.

It was the better part of a week before they could start serious work again.

The Paolo lamps acted splendidly, and would burn for twelve hours and more without recharging.

Their first task, naturally, was a search for the jewels.

A great quantity they had already discovered in the gold vases in the two burial chambers; and under an inscribed flagstone in the lower chambers they found a great bronze casket containing more—evidently the jewels of State, including the famous emeralds and other ornaments.

These were all fully mounted in gold and platinum and other cunningly-worked metals and enamels; whereas those in the vases were mostly unset, many even uncut.

There might have been more—probably there were in the two sarcophagi;

but these, by common consent, they refused to attempt to get.

"We're not grave robbers," said Sir Richard, expressing the general feeling.

"I'm as keen after legitimate loot as a school kid is after the local farmer's apples, and if there happens to be a bull in the field, why it just adds to the fun of the thing."

"I haven't the slightest scruple about annexing these things, and the gold vases, too, for a matter of that, for poor old Menes and his missis haven't had any use for 'em for two thousand years and more."

"But I'm hanged if I disturb them where they lie, or touch so much as a silver bangle off one of those poor murdered slave girls!"

"We'll leave that to some scientific expedition that will drift along some day, and collar the lot, mummies and all."

"We've made a big pile as it is. If I'm any judge, the English savant, Hobson's estimate is a good deal nearer the mark than Pietro Paolo's."

"The point is, what are we going to do with 'em till the Sirius comes back?"

"We don't want to risk 'em gettin' buried in another sandstorm."

"I suggest we take everything to the upper chambers," said Blake. "Then, when the Sirius comes back, we'll bring Raven up to see 'em, and he can give directions to the ship's carpenters to knock up some strong cases. They can be packed in those and sealed, taken aboard, and placed in one of the state-rooms, the door of which can be screwed up until we get back."

This was done, but all through that time nothing would induce either Pedro or Lobangu to set foot inside the place again.

They either mooned about the camp together, sharing surreptitious tins of food looted from the stores, or sat in the shade of a rock, staring out to sea.

Twice Lobangu went to the far end of the island, with Sir Richard's shotgun, and explored the mangrove swamp.

He was a rotten shot with a gun, unless he was near enough to pretty well blow a bird to pieces.

The second time he went there he did bring home a couple of duck.

One was a common black duck, utterly uneatable; the other, as Tinker explained, would be mostly molten lead if cooked, for it had had two barrels at about a ten-yards range, and all that remained was mostly No. 12 shot and feathers.

But, apart from these occasional expeditions, he spent most of his time in a little nook he had found half-way up the outside of the pyramid itself—a place where a block of stone had slipped away and left a space not unlike a gigantic armchair.

Here he would sit by the hour in the blistering heat, thoughtfully polishing his big spear and the stiletto—especially the stiletto, which seemed to have an extraordinary attraction for him.

"I can't understand old Lobangu," said Sir Richard one day, as they sat at luncheon. "If I didn't know him so well I should say he had gone queer in the nut—doddy! This is the third day he's missed grub!"

"He's seen the 'red mist,' or whatever he calls it," said Tinker, and explained what had happened on the night of the sandstorm.

Sir Richard and Blake instantly glanced at one another, and became grave.

Two less superstitious men it would have been hard to find. But they knew Lobangu. They knew his strange moods; and, above all, time and again they had

known by bitter experience that whenever Lobangu had seen the 'red mist'—or the 'red veil,' as he sometimes called it—bloodshed in one form or another had invariably followed. They said nothing further, made no comments; it was, not their way.

Yet it is significant that instead of taking their usual siesta after luncheon they set to work to clean and oil the lock actions of their rifles and revolvers, and to move an extra case of ammunition into the hut.

Lobangu had not returned when the three went back to their work—the completion of the set of photographs in the upper chamber.

They had with them three of the Paolo lamps, as they called them, and left Pedro in charge of the hut. A fourth lamp, ready lighted, for it was dark, without a trace of a moon, they left beside the camp table, at which they had snatched a hasty supper.

The entrance door to the pyramid they left open, as they always did when at work inside.

It helped to freshen the air, for one thing, and it saved the bother of waiting whilst it swung ponderously, opening or shutting.

For though it moved smoothly and evenly enough, it moved in its own good time, and they were none of them overburdened with patience when they had work to do.

Also, for convenience, they always left an ordinary camp-lantern alight on a stone ledge just inside the entrance, where there was a stone ledge.

Tinker trimmed this and turned it down, lest a chance gust of wind should make it flare.

Then they went to the upper chamber along the steeply-sloping passages.

The silence of the place was almost uncanny, for their soft-soled deck-shoes made no sound on the smooth rock floor; and as for the outside world, the thickness of the masonry was so enormous that had there been a dozen air-raids going on, or a naval battle raging, they would have heard nothing—felt nothing except, perhaps, a very faint quivering vibration.

The big bats were unusually troublesome that night, as Tinker remembered afterwards—dashing towards the strong lights, with querulous squeakings, and then blundering away again into the darkness.

Big brutes: some of them were nearly a couple of feet from wing-tip to wing-tip.

He often wondered what they lived on, and where their secret exits and entrances might be—small crevices between the great boulders which one might pass and repass time and again without noticing.

For the only time since their first visit they were all carrying revolvers.

Lobangu's dream was really responsible for this, though possibly not one of the three would have admitted as much—even to himself.

However, when they settled down to serious work they unstrapped them and laid them on the big stone sarcophagus.

Sir Richard and Tinker had to manipulate the lights whilst Blake did the actual photographic work. It was the last of the series to be taken to complete the collection, but in its way it was perhaps the most important and most difficult.

Before they had been in the place twenty minutes they were all completely absorbed in their various tasks.

Suddenly a strange thing happened. Blake had just taken a picture of the skeleton remains of some of the poor slave girls, as they lay with their hangings

and ear-rings, and shreds of what had once been priceless silk about them.

He had altered the position of the camera, and was adjusting the focus on an effigy of Tenika herself, the consul's wife.

He was in the act of telling Tinker to shift his light a little so as to throw the image into higher relief, when there came a weird, shrill, squeaking noise, and a great grey bat came darting into the chamber with such swiftness that, blinded by the light, it knocked the lamp clean out of Tinker's hands and sent him reeling backwards. For the grey bat was nearly as heavy as a young partridge, and flying at a tremendous pace.

The lamp crashed on to the floor, with a sound of splintering glass, flared, and went out.

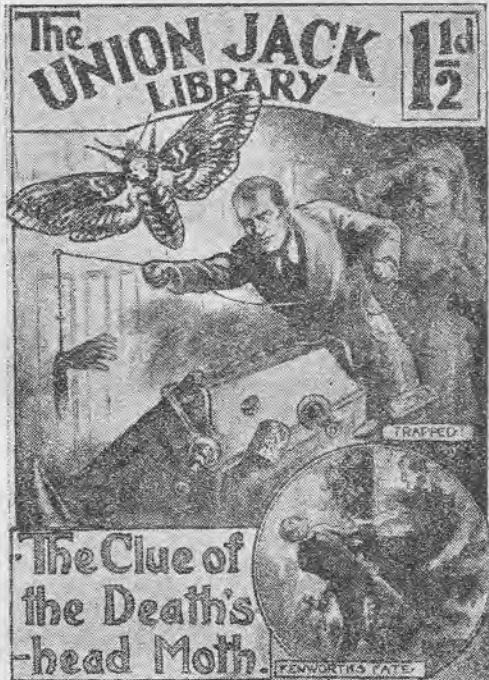
hot—and clambered down to level ground.

He could see the light shining some distance off in the hollow where the camp-table lay, and sauntered towards it, humming an Etbai war-song under his breath, and passing a thumb gingerly along the sharpened edge of his groat stabbing-spear. Again he couldn't have told why. Both actions were entirely subconscious. Suddenly he checked in mid-stride, stiffened, and passed his hand across his eyes. The red mist had come close up.

In a flash he was heading for the camp-light, at a pace that would have broken the heart of most men, though he seemed to run without effort. And he ran with head down, body bent low, till he was almost in a crouching position; not chest

NEXT WEEK'S STRIKING COVER!

Don't Miss this
Absorbing Story
of
SEXTON BLAKE
and TINKER.



"Well, I'm hanged!" said Sir Richard. "I've never known one of the beggars come up as high as this before! Something must have scared him!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. The Fight in the Pyramid.

MEANWHILE, Lobangu, lost in his dreams, was sitting high up on his self-chosen perch, crooning an old war-song of the Etbai to himself, and every now and again polishing his spear and the "little knife which bites," as he had named the stilleto.

Darkness had fallen long ago, yet he had paid no heed. He had eaten no food since two hours after sunrise, but of that also he had taken no heed. When he was in the mood he would stuff himself like a gluttonous alderman, and it must be confessed that he generally was in the mood. On the other hand, he could go forty-eight hours, or sixty for that matter, with neither food nor so much as a cup of water to drink without the slightest inconvenience, especially when one of his dreamy fits was on him.

At last he rose, stretched himself, shivered a little—though why he could not have told, for the night was stiflingly

thrown forward and head thrown back as an Englishman runs.

It took him a matter of seconds—noiseless seconds—to reach the little camp in the hollow across that stretch of soft sand.

The lamp burnt steadily, the remnants of a meal were on the table. But the hut door was shut, and barred on the outside, and from the inside he could hear Pedro snuffling at the cracks and whining.

He glanced at the ground, where the strong light threw each little mark into relief, and gave an inarticulate grunt.

His keen eyes had noted a strange footprint, both coming and going—Blake's and Tinker's and Sir Richard's he knew at a glance, as well as an Oxford professor knows his alphabet.

He gave a swift glance up and down the strange tracks. They had come from the south—the mangrove swamp. They had gone west to the entrance to the pyramid, where the lantern still gleamed in the opening, and they were the tracks of a man wearing boots.

He flung up the bar of the door, and Pedro leapt out, whimpering.

There was a strong lock to the door, and the key hung on a nail beside it.

U. J.—No. 278.

He paused just long enough to lock the door and hide away the key, for there were rifles and other weapons of offence inside, and the next instant he and Pedro were racing across the sands almost neck and neck. It was so that they made their second and only other entrance to the great pyramid of Hathor, daughter of Ra.

He knew the way—if twenty years had passed since he last traversed it he could still have found it—and side by side man and dog raced up the broad, sloping corridors of rock.

He saw the bright lights of the Paolo lamps ahead of and above him, and he saw something else, a dark figure, silhouetted against the light—a figure in rough European clothes, creeping quietly, stealthily towards the entrance of the chamber of Tenika.

He saw the light glint on the metal work of a heavy, long-barrelled revolver; saw Blake busy with his camera, and Tinker and Sir Richard busy with a broken lamp, all unconscious of their danger; and, worst of all, he saw their revolvers lying unheeded on the big sarcophagus out of reach.

That other figure was barely ten paces from them, creeping—creeping stealthily.

But neither Lobangu nor Pedro were creeping. They were twenty yards behind, but they were making twenty to the other man's two.

Lobangu had his great spear slung behind him, but in his hand he held the "little knife which bites."

The man raised his right arm slowly to take deliberate aim at Blake. He knew of no reason to hurry, and he wished to make sure of his aim. Three careful shots, and success was certain.

It was as his arm was almost horizontal that Lobangu sprang. With his left hand he caught the man's wrist and twisted it upward, with his right he drove home the "little knife which bites" right up to the hilt.

The man's finger pressed the trigger in his dying convulsion, and some rock-flakes pattered down from the roof above. But the "little knife" had bitten deep, and as Lobangu let go his hold and drew out the blade the man sagged limply to the ground.

Now, it was an unwritten code amongst the four that talk or fulsome overflowing on such occasions was not only unnecessary but bad form. Sir Richard deliberately lighted a cigarette, his fingers may have quivered a little—not from personal fear—and patted Pedro's head.

"Thanks, old man!" he said slowly. "Who's your pal?"

"N'kose," said Lobangu simply. "I have not seen his face." And, being always particular, he wiped the stiletto carefully on the dead man's coat.

Blake came forward with a lamp.

"If I'm any judge," he said, "I should say it was Tino Paolo—old Pietro Paolo's nephew."

Tinker had been feeling in the man's pockets, and produced some papers.

"Right!" he said.

"The chatter-guns, Untwana!" said Lobangu quickly. "There are others who came! I hear them even now!"

They snatched up their revolvers, and Lobangu dragged Pedro into cover.

They came, a ragged crowd a dozen strong, and variously armed, one of the leaders carrying the camp lantern taken from the ledge by the entrance. One of them fired a shot at random, but the rest paused at the sight of three men with

U. J.—No. 878.

levelled revolvers, and a fourth with a big spear.

The leader fired a second shot, which knocked chips off the roof.

"Have it, then, you fools, if you must!" cried Sir Richard, and the three revolvers spat angrily.

The two foremost men dropped limply silent. The third—he who carried the lamp—dropped it and spun round, shrieking, his hand clapped to his shoulder.

"If one of you raises his hand an inch, we fire again!" said Sir Richard sternly. "Drop your weapons—quick! If I find a single man with so much as a pocket-knife on him by the time I've counted ten, I'll shoot him myself!"

There was a clatter and a tinkle of metal on rock, and many muttered oaths.

"Now, come in here, one by one! If a man offers any resistance whilst he is being searched it will be his last act in this world."

One by one they came in. Tinker and Lobangu searched them, and they were lined up against the wall under Pedro's watchful eye. And, to tell the truth, they seemed more scared of Pedro than of even Sir Richard's revolvers.

Pedro being black, and they being for the most part low cast dagos, they probably took him for a first cousin of Old Nick himself.

"Now," said Sir Richard, "we'll have a few words. You all richly deserve hanging, to begin with. What are you doing here, and what happened on the barque you deserted? Only the truth will help you."

"Signor," said one man, who was evidently in authority—he had been mate on board the barque—a beetle-browed ruffian, "we were engaged by that man who lies there"—and he pointed to Tino—"to sail in the barque Santa Maria on a venture. Some days out from Genoa it was whispered that we were come for a great treasure. One of us, Antonio, who served in the cabin, saw a certain paper which the Signor Paolo often studied."

"Then there came a night when he, Tino Paolo, came amongst us and said that if we would obey him a certain share of this great treasure should be ours. We of the crew were willing, but certain workmen engaged by the professor were not willing. No."

"Signor, it was arranged for the mid-day, whilst the professor was at table. Tino Paolo gave the word."

"We ran in, and two we killed as they sat; two more in their cabins, where they had fled, also the workmen who would not join us. But it was all in vain. The officers were dead."

"Tino Paolo and I knew nothing of the navigation outside our own waters, and though we searched everywhere, we could not find the papers which told of the treasure."

"Then came word that the bodies were to be thrown overboard, and the Santa Maria abandoned. So we took the boats—all of them, and much provision—and set sail for the mainland. We had killed, and we had gained nothing."

"Then, after many days, this Tino, who had taken with him certain papers, found mention of an island, and its direction. He had been secretary to his uncle, and knew part of his secrets. Ah, he was a false one, that Tino!"

"We sailed here in two of the Santa Maria's boats, and landed in the swamps, three days after the great storm."

"We saw this great building of stone, of which we had heard much talk, knowing that the treasure was here. And

once at night we saw strange, bright lights, which moved."

"To-night, whilst we ate, one said suddenly: 'Tino is not here.'"

"Signor, he had gone away, and we knew he had gone to find the great treasure. We tracked him across the sands, and came to a small house of wood. Then we saw a light shining down below here, and ran to it. We took the light, and came to a great passage. At a certain place there were two—one up and one down. Then we heard a shot from up above. That is Tino, we said, and that is where the jewels are, and the treasure. So we came quickly."

Sir Richard nodded.

"And now you will go quickly," he said sternly. "By rights you should all be hung, but the biggest blackguard of the lot of you lies there. So I'll give you a sporting chance, the rest of you. Pick him up, and those others, and go!"

"You've got your boats, you've got your provisions, and you can easily make the mainland. There you can tell what lies you like, and do as best you can. You can't cut each other's throats because you haven't got a knife between you."

"But, understand this, if I find one of you on this island one hour after sunrise to-morrow I shall give him a choice of one of two things—of being taken back home and tried for murder, or of being shot here. Understand that clearly. Now go!"

"Lobangu, you and Tinker follow them down, and see them well on their way back to the swamp. If a man resists or attempts to turn back, deal with him as you think best."

"N'kose, Lukana," said Lobangu. "The red mist has cleared. But they were true words I spoke, I said there would be a killing—here, in this chamber. Behold, Inkoos!" And with his big spear he pointed to the men picking up the bodies of Tino Paolo and the others.

They were all aroused at dawn next morning by a prolonged hoot from the siren of the Sirius, and turned out to see her steaming cautiously in through the dawn mists.

There came a hoarse rattle of chain-cables as her anchors were let go, and the captain's gig shot away from her side.

It took two days to show Captain Raven the wonders of the place, and to get the jewels and other treasures packed and safely stowed on board.

Then, when all was ready, Blake pressed the spring of the great stone door, closing the secret passages, and left Menes, the great pro-consul, and his wife, Tenika, to sleep in peace.

"And what about Mr. Lobangu, Sir Richard?" asked Captain Raven that night, as they all sat at dinner, and the Sirius was nosing her way northward. "Do you wish me to land him anywhere?"

"Not much," said Sir Richard. "Old Lobangu is coming home with us for a bit, and we're all going on the spree. I've an idea of teaching him the joys of riding to hounds, and—"

"My insides, N'kose," said Lobangu, and there was a general howl of laughter.

THE END.



Curtis of the Fifth.

A Tale of Fun and Adventure at Wenhaston College.

(By the Author of the "Waldo" Series.)

The Chief Characters in this wonderful new school story are:

FRANKFORT K. CURTIS, an American youngster, **OSWALD RAYMOND**, and **"SHERLOCK" HOLMES**, who share a study at Wenhaston College.

WALTER HAVILAND, Oswald's cousin, a young scoundrel who means to get Raymond into the bad books of their uncle, **SIR GEORGE RAYMOND**.

Thanks to an unscrupulous trick Walter plays upon his cousin, the Head "gates" the whole of the Fifth until the culprit owns up. The Fifth rebel, and take up their quarters in an old tower near the school. The Head realising the injustice of his sentence, the rebellion ends in Curtis promising to find the culprit before the end of the term.

The Paper-chase.

"**W**ELL, this," replied Curtis, "if you must know. It's my firm opinion that Haviland will make another attempt to ruin you before the term is out; and if that is the case I reckon I'll show him up, whether you like it or not, Raymond! Such vermin oughtn't to be allowed to walk about!"

Oswald protested, but it was no use. Curtis was firm, and said that for two pins he would go straight to the Head and tell him about Haviland—he had pretended to be in ignorance as to who was the culprit all through this affair, but another time he would not be so merciful.

In an hour's time things were going on as usual. Fires were lighted in the studies, and the Common-room was once more tenanted. Haviland and Richmond, who had been left out of it, were greatly pleased when they saw the notice in Hall.

So it all ended. The rebellion had only started the previous afternoon—a very short time ago, when you come to look at it.

Fortunately, the Head did not inquire as to how the Fifth had procured the blankets and sheets, having taken it for granted that they had stolen into school while the others were at prep. So the secret of the underground passage was kept private by the Fifth, who had agreed not to mention a word about it.

And so, in this abrupt fashion, the long-remembered, much-talked-of rebellion of the Fifth Form at Wenhaston ended.

But how about Mr. Meredith and his plans for ruining Oswald Raymond? the reader will no doubt ask. Well, the master had no opportunity at this period, and it was not until a few weeks later that it came. And then it was merely Haviland's idea—a hastily-formed idea—and as such could not fail to end in disaster. It all began some three weeks after the rebellion, when the weather had got colder and a Fifth Form paper-chase was being run. As it had turned out very fine one half-holiday, Mr. Beaton had decided to have a paper-chase. A paper-chase at Wenhaston was always considered something of an event, and was eagerly partaken of by the fellows of all Forms.

There had not been one for some little time—not that term, anyway—and when Mr. Beaton announced his intention of running a Fifth Form chase, everyone was delighted. This was not until the rebellion had entirely blown over—was a thing of the

past, only to be talked of—and when the autumn was drawing to a close, and the winter showing signs of beginning early. Already there had been a slight fall of snow.

Less than a week after the mutiny the chums of Study No. 12 had been invited by the Beetle to tea in his own study, and while there they had enlightened him on the chair incident, which had been puzzling both himself and Monsieur Luchaire not a little.

He laughed heartily as they related what befell before he arrived, and then had suddenly become serious, although there still remained a twinkle in his eye.

"I'm sure I don't know what I ought to do," he had said. "But it seems to me you deserve a jolly good flogging!"

"But it's a secret, sir!"

"Just so! And that's where I am handicapped, worse luck! I've half a mind to set about you myself, this moment, and teach you a lesson!"

This, however, as the boys well knew, was only playfulness on the Beetle's part, and that he had no intention of carrying his threat out, so they laughed, and the subject was changed.

This particular October afternoon was a lovely one. For one thing, there was not a breath of wind stirring, the sky was cloudless, and the sun shone brilliantly, but, withal, there was a sharp touch of frost in the air, which gave a keenness to the chase, and made the fellows feel more springy and active. In fact, to find a better all round day for a paper-chase would have been an impossibility.

Directly after dinner the Fifth collected in Common-room with the Beetle, and the master at once commenced proceedings.

Each boy wrote his name upon a piece of paper, and then they were all placed into a bag, and shaken up. The two first names withdrawn were to be the hares.

Mr. Beaton performed the operation, and the first name to be taken from the bag was Holmes. The Fifth looked pleased. There would not be much difficulty in catching him, anyway.

The Beetle dived his hand in again.

"Raymond!" he read aloud.

The Form's spirits dropped dead.

"They're as good as home!" Wellinson grumbled.

"How's that?" Curtis inquired.

"Why, Raymond's never been caught yet by the Fifth in any paper-chase. He's the fastest man we've got—he won the Glanville, you remember—and we were relying on him to catch the hares!"

"That's bad, then!" Curtis said.

He was rather pleased at his not having been picked as one of the hares, for, as he himself had said, he was not much good at long-distance running.

The chase was to last not less than two hours, and during that time the hares had to keep out of bounds, under pain of disqualification. If they returned before the two hours were up, they had lost. If they entered school bounds before the two hours were up they had lost also. To win, they were required to stay away from Wenhaston for the specified time, or longer, and leave a trail of tell-tale paper behind them at intervals of not less than twenty yards.

Any dodge or strategy could be adopted, provided that the trail was left clear. It

was a curious fact that any hares except Oswald and a companion were continually being sighted, and then, of course, the hounds at once cut off at a right-angle, and more often than not headed them off.

With Oswald, however, things were different. He was acknowledged the best hare in college. If any hound caught sight of him, they considered themselves lucky. Generally the hounds had to rely solely on the trail of paper.

The lots were cast, so the Fifth could do nothing but accept them as final, although one or two stated their opinions that they might as well give the game up. For all that they were keen, for if they succeeded in catching Raymond and Holmes their laurels would be added considerably.

There was no time lost, so, directly after changing into running shorts, the two hares strapped their bags over their shoulders, and went into West Quad. I have never actually made clear that West Quad and East Quad were really one; only East was on one side and West on the opposite, there being no barrier or division between the two.

The Beetle was already awaiting them. Two minutes afterwards the hares were started. The hounds did not take up the chase until fifteen minutes later.

"How do you feel?" inquired Oswald, as they jogged along.

"Right, as a trivet!" Holmes replied. "Never felt better in my life! I'm glad I'm going with you. I'm hanged, if I know what I should have done if Spence had been with me!"

"Got captured, no doubt!" Oswald laughed.

"Round here!"

He turned off as he spoke, and they made their way down a little lane, scattering the paper at intervals. They settled down to a trot, always bearing round in a big curve, which in some unaccountable way, Holmes observed, always managed to keep some object between themselves and the hounds.

Sometimes it was a tall hedge, others a foil in the ground, a hill, or a belt of trees. When they had to cut across country Oswald managed to cover their advance by making a straight line from behind a spinney, so that before they could be seen by the pursuing hounds they were once more behind cover. In this way the hounds had nothing but the paper trail to guide themselves by.

"I can't make out how you do it," Holmes said. "If I were by myself I should have been spotted long ago, I bet. Where are we making for, though?"

"I've got an idea of bearing away to Haseborough. It's only three miles, and once there we can have a rest and something to drink."

"But we're not allowed to enter any house or building while we're out," protested "Sherlock."

"We shan't," Oswald returned, smiling. "Can't we make old Widow Stenfield bring something outside? We can sit down on the seat and have a good rest before the hounds appear."

"Right-ho!" replied Holmes. "I'll leave it all to you."

Not once, on the whole way to Haseborough, did they allow the hounds to catch sight of them. Once or twice, as they were resting, they caught a glimpse of white objects running in a compact body, far away.

These were the Fifth, feeling rather gloomy at being unable to even sight their quarry.

At one spot Oswald put them off the scent all together. This was by the River Ryll. They came upon the water some little distance from the footbridge.

Oswald told Holmes to make towards this, distributing the trail liberally, for it was to be the true scent. Meanwhile, Oswald himself ran a mile up-stream, and dropped the paper the whole way. In addition to this, he put some into the water. Then he retraced his steps with all speed, and rejoined Holmes by the bridge. By this strategy they gained a good rest. When the hounds came up, the first thing they saw was the paper floating down-stream in a leisurely fashion, and two distinct trails—one leading one way, and one the other.

"They thought they'd diddle us," Wellinson chuckled, as he observed these. "But, look here, it's as plain as your hat that they're gone up-stream. There's the paper floating down which they must have accidentally dropped!"

The others grinned, and made all haste away, only to find that they themselves had been the ones "diddled," as Wellinson put it. Oswald and Holmes, from half a mile away, watched the white shirts in amusement, and when they were once more coming down-stream, they started on again, considerably refreshed.

They reached Haseborough a good twenty minutes before the hounds could possibly be due, and tapped at the door of Widow Stenfeld's cottage.

In a moment or two it was opened, and the old lady was greatly pleased and surprised at seeing the Wenhamstonians.

"Come ye in!" she cried. "Come in an' warm yerselves! Ye'll be perished in them things, standin' outside."

"That's all right, thanks, Mrs. Stenfeld," laughed Oswald. "We're not allowed to enter a house in this game, you know."

"Oh, yes, I forgot!" the widow exclaimed. "Ye told me that last time, but I'm that worried— But there, it's no use a-botherin' you with my troubles."

Both boys had noticed that their old acquaintance was looking harassed and wan, and now Oswald glanced at her quickly.

"It's not troubling us, Mrs. Stenfeld," he exclaimed. "Do you think we could help you in any way?"

The two seniors seated themselves on a garden bench, and after fetching the two drinks the widow remained leaning against the door.

"I don't know as it's right, young sirs, worryin' you like this," she said, in reply. "But I'm in sore trouble at present—sore trouble!"

"Tell us what it is," Holmes urged. "Very well, young gentlemen, it's this: In two days' time I'm a-goin' to be turned out o' my home, an' left to starve, for all that brute cares!"

"What does this mean?" Oswald inquired. "Who is going to act in this disgraceful manner?"

Mrs. Stenfeld looked at them wearily.

"It's no use askin' you young sirs to do anything," she said, with a sigh, "but I may as well tell ye. I get my money from my son—bless his heart!—an' he lives over at Liverpool. Well, this week, for some reason, he's away, an' says he can't send me my allowance till November 4th. I didn't mind a bit, 'cos I knew that Mr. Thomas, at the village shop, would allow me to go on gettin' things. But I'd forgot the rent o' this little cottage. The landlord is a hard man, cruel, an' unfeelin'."

"What with some little arrears which I got behind in some time ago, an' this now, it comes to over two pounds, an' if I don't pay 'im by Friday—that's the day arter to-morrow—he's goin' to turn me out, stick an' stone. An' me sixty-five years old, an' bin ere nigh on thirty year! My, don't I wish the old master 'ad never died!"

A tear or two appeared in the old widow's eyes, but she quickly dried them, and attempted to smile on the Fifth-Formers.

"It's serious, Mrs. Stenfeld," said Oswald gravely, "and if I had the money I'd let you have it like a shot! But I haven't, and I'm sure I don't know where to get it!"

"There's Curtis," Holmes began.

"I know that, but—Scott! Look down there! The hounds are already in sight."

As Oswald spoke he pointed, and far away, on the straight road, the hounds were coming into view. They bade the widow a hasty

U. J.—No. 878.

good-bye, and told her that they would do all they could to help her.

After their rest and refreshment they were feeling considerably more supple and lively. The hounds saw them, and sent up a yell. But they were done up in comparison to the hares, and very soon had lost sight of them again. When they were well away, Holmes spoke.

"Well," he said, "why not ask Curtis for the two pounds? He could give it, and never know the difference."

"Perhaps so," Oswald returned, "but I don't like to keep bothering him. Goodness knows he's had enough expense already. Look at the tin he spent in supplying for the rebellion. Look what it must have cost him to buy those pea-shooters, and liquid pistols, which, by the way, were never used."

"But you can't raise the money in any other way," protested Holmes.

"Very likely not," replied Oswald, "but I shall have a good try."

Not much more was said, and when at last they turned up at Wenhamston, the hounds were a good mile behind them.

"You've done very well," the Beetle said, as he watched them come in, ten minutes after the specified two hours. "I expect the others are feeling a trifle disappointed—eh?"

He smiled, and awaited the hounds return, who presently appeared in not the best of tempers. They were flushed, hot, and out of breath.

"You might have let us see you more than once," Spence said plaintively, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

Curtis was looking done to a turn, and went off to change, accompanied by the late hares.

"I guess I'm no match for you, Oswald," the American said. "The only time we saw you was at Haseborough, and the way you bamboozled us at the Ryll was real smart."

Raymond smiled, and, as he and Holmes had changed before the others, they strolled down into Hall, and so on to seniors' passage. There was no one in sight, so Oswald was speaking in his ordinary voice.

"I tell you, Holmes," he said, "I must have three pounds by to-morrow. That'll be a bit over what the old lady wants."

"But suppose you can't—"

"I mean it," Oswald said firmly. "That three pounds is going to be in my hands to-morrow, even if I have to steal it," he added laughingly.

As it happened, they were just passing Haviland's study, and Oswald's cousin heard every word. His eyes gleamed as he thought of the possibilities of those words, and he turned to Richmond, who was with him.

"Come along," he said curtly.

They left the room and made all haste to masters' passage, where they entered Mr. Meredith's study.

A Plot Hastily Planned.

MR. MEREDITH was at home, and in no way surprised at the abrupt entry. It was the usual way in which Haviland and Richmond were accustomed to enter.

Perhaps it will be as well to briefly state at this point what hold the Fifth-Formers had over Mr. Meredith.

The previous term, when Haviland and his chum were out one night—after paying a surreptitious visit to a local bookmaker—they had come across, quite by accident, the master of the Remove in a state certainly unfit for entering the College.

Had the Head seen him in that condition, helplessly intoxicated, he would have received his dismissal immediately. But Haviland had seen that by keeping the matter quiet he might make use of Mr. Meredith by threatening to expose him.

So they had taken him back to the College and put him into his bed-room unseen. In the morning he was once again in his normal condition, and Haviland boldly told him of the occurrence. At first the master had denied it, but when Haviland had said he could prove it by producing the innkeeper who had turned him out, Mr. Meredith was compelled to give in.

It had been very indiscreet on his part to even allow himself to get into such a state; but a horse which he had backed rather heavily with a round sum had romped home a winner, and he was elated in consequence, and had partaken of "real old Scotch," not wisely, but far too well!

And so it came about that Haviland and Richmond were constant visitors in Mr. Meredith's study, which formed a retreat wherein they could smoke and gamble. Altogether the master was not sorry; it gave him the chance of having a pleasant evening

after his own heart. Sometimes it was nap, sometimes poker, and sometimes bridge, and invariably Mr. Meredith won, in consequence of which the two boys were already in his debt to a considerable amount.

They had a hold over him, and he had a hold over them. It is probable that had the incident not occurred, Haviland would have been a better fellow than he was, and very likely never thought of the plot to ruin his cousin. Mr. Meredith was largely responsible for his bad habits, for lately Haviland had been going from bad to worse.

On this occasion the master looked casually up from his book, and then went on reading. But Haviland uttered an impatient exclamation, and intervened.

"Look here, Meredith," he exclaimed. "I want your attention for a moment."

"Certainly!"

Mr. Meredith put his book down. "I've just heard something which gives us a good opportunity to make an attempt on my cousin again."

Mr. Meredith sat up straight.

"Tell me all about it," he said curtly.

"As I was just about to open my study door," went on Haviland, "I heard Raymond and Holmes approaching. My cousin was telling Holmes that he must have three pounds by to-morrow."

"Well?"

"Don't you think we could do something?" Haviland asked eagerly. "Can't we make three pounds disappear, and then lay the blame on to Oswald?"

"It might be possible," Mr. Meredith said. "But, my dear fellow, in such a short time as this we could never work it out successfully."

"Rot!" said Haviland rudely. "There's not much to do. Both Richmond and I heard Oswald say that if he couldn't get the three pounds any other way he'd steal it. Holmes heard it as well."

"By Jove, did he say that?" said Mr. Meredith. "That alters matters considerably." He paused for a moment, deep in thought. Then he resumed, "I may be able to do it, but if I were you, Haviland, I should wait until the end of November, when I have got another and much more secure plan to work out, in that there will be not the slightest risk."

"Hang that!" Haviland said impatiently. "If we succeeded in this attempt it wouldn't be necessary, and I dare say your plan will be much more complicated."

"As a matter of fact it is, and perhaps it would be as well to do as you say. I have an idea wherein if it fails no harm will be done, as nobody can be accused."

"What is the idea?"

"Never mind that now. You will hear it all in good time. I shall not act until to-morrow, and then you will discover all about it."

So Haviland had to be satisfied. Had he stopped to think a little he would have made more searching inquiries, and then found out what his over-cleverness was leading him into.

The morning following—Thursday—Mr. Meredith took the Fifth Form in mathematics, as was his usual custom on that day. He had scarcely seated himself at his desk, however, than he made an impatient gesture.

"I have forgotten my algebra," he said testily. "Raymond, you are nearest the door; kindly run to my study and fetch it for me. It is on the desk, I think. Here is the key of my room."

Oswald stepped from his place and took the big bunch of keys which Mr. Meredith handed to him, and, opening the door, started on his errand.

The master had separated one particular key, and Oswald now had this in his hand. Arriving at the study, he fitted it into the lock and turned it. It refused to budge, so Oswald took it out and tried another. As often is the case, he had to go through the whole bunch before he found the right one, and while he was occupied in this, little Reynolds came up and stood watching him. Like his fog-master, he had been sent on an errand, and was certainly not hurrying himself. At last the right key was found, and Oswald stepped into the room. In one minute he was out again, little Reynolds seeing him pick up the book from the desk and then re-enter the passage.

He locked the door, and, after giving his fog a word of advice on dawdling about, made his way to the Fifth Form class-room.

"You have been an unaccountably long time, Raymond!" said Mr. Meredith sternly. "May I ask you what you have been doing all this while?"

"You picked out the wrong key, sir."



Oswald replied, "and I had to go through the whole bunch before I found the right one."

The Form laughed, but the master silenced them.

"Nonsense!" he snapped. "I handed you the right key. I have no doubt that there is something behind this. Get to your place!"

Oswald went, flushing redly. The incident was forgotten in five minutes, and the Fifth Form were soon engrossed in the lessons—some with worried looks on their faces, others smiling and happy, and still others looking hopelessly miserable.

The morning passed uneventfully, and when the bell rang for dismissal they had forgotten every word about the affair earlier in the morning.

They were to be reminded of it in a startling manner, however, and before many hours had passed—indeed, immediately after dinner, to be exact.

During dinner-time Mr. Meredith had been observed walking in the direction of the Head's study, and now the canon himself appeared, looking worried and uneasy.

"Boys," he said, "you will all assemble in Big Hall at once. There is a matter of the gravest importance which I wish to speak to you about."

The School wondered what was in the wind now, but all gathered in their accustomed places in Hall, and waited the arrival of the headmaster.

He appeared at last, accompanied by Mr. Meredith, who was looking grave and pre-occupied. The Head mounted on his dais, and addressed the assembled boys.

"I am grieved to once again call you together to get to the bottom of a mysterious and distressing occurrence," he said, "to gather you here to pick out a boy who is accused of being a thief—not from any malicious motives, but simply and purely because I desire justice to be done. Mr. Meredith is the victim of the robbery, and brings the accusation, and as such will be allowed to speak."

The Head sat down, and Mr. Meredith took his place, looking unusually serious. He coughed, clearing his throat, and then commenced:

"This matter—this most grave and distressing matter—is of the greatest abhorrence for me to address you upon," he began. "Indeed, it is only by a great effort of will that I have persuaded myself to make my accusation, which I can do nothing but hate myself for, because I have a liking for the boy I am about to accuse. But in such a case as this I can do nothing but cast these feelings from me and do my duty."

He paused and looked round at the eager, upturned faces, all impatient for the thief's name.

"The boy to whom I allude, and who I am compelled to suspect, is Oswald Raymond," he resumed, but was interrupted by a buzz from the fellows in Hall. Oswald started up, and went as pale as death. Curtis, who was seated beside him, drew him gently back into his seat, and told him to be patient and listen.

"This task is of the utmost aversion to me," went on Mr. Meredith, "but I will state the facts plainly and concisely. This morning, while taking the Fifth Form in mathematics, I was thoughtless enough to leave my Algebra in my study."

Finding this was the case, I requested Raymond to slip out and fetch it. I handed him the bunch of keys, and gave him a particular one—the one belonging to the lock of my room."

"You were mistaken, sir," cried Oswald. "The key you gave me was—"

"Silence!" thundered the Head.

Little Reynolds was seen struggling to rise, but on receiving a warning look from Oswald subsided. Already Oswald was beginning to feel better. He knew he could prove his innocence.

"I say that the key I handed to Raymond was the one belonging to my door, and yet he was away quite ten minutes, whereas I myself could have gone there and back in five. When at last he did return he said that I had given him the wrong key, and that he had to try all the others in the bunch before he could gain admittance. To continue, I had in my cashbox the sum of six pounds this morning; but when I went to it directly after lessons I discovered, to my surprise, that only three pounds were left. I was at a loss, and could not account for the disappearance of the other three. Then I remembered Raymond's unaccountable absence, and could only conclude, much to my reluctance and regret, that he could disclose something about the matter."

Haviland started to his feet excitedly.

"I think I can tell you something which will shed a light upon this affair," he cried. "Last night, as I was leaving my study, Holmes and Raymond were strolling along, talking. I had no intention of eavesdropping, but I could hardly help overhearing the words Raymond was saying. They were these: 'I must have three pounds to-morrow, even if I have to steal it!' Holmes was with him and must have heard it, as it was addressed to him."

Haviland sat down, looking flushed, and the Head looked frowningly at Holmes.

"Does Haviland speak correctly?" he queried. "Did Raymond say those words?"

"I'm afraid he did, sir," Holmes replied reluctantly. "But I am sure they were only spoken in—"

"That will do, Holmes, thank you!" the canon said. "Raymond, what have you to say against this grave charge? What explanation can you give?"

Oswald stood up in his place, and looked round Hall smilingly, and this made Mr. Meredith and Haviland feel rather uneasy.

"Well, sir, I can only say that I am entirely innocent of this foul charge, as I shall now proceed to prove."

"You can prove that you are innocent, Raymond?" the Head exclaimed. "I am extremely glad to hear it! Proceed!"

"Well, sir, for the first thing, does Haviland know what I wanted the money for—for what purpose, I mean? No? I thought not. It doesn't really matter, as it has nothing to do—"

"I command you to state for what reason you required the sum of three pounds!" the canon said sternly.

"Well, sir, since you will know it, I wanted the money for old Widow Stenfeld, over at Haseborough. She was to be turned out of her cottage to-morrow, and I wanted to save her from such a calamity as that."

The school hummed, and looked at Oswald approvingly, and the Head's worried appearance began to disappear. Not so Mr. Meredith's.

"I am very glad to say, sir," Oswald continued, "that I have been enabled to send it to her, and by now she has doubtless received it."

"I fail to understand, Raymond. You say you have sent it to her? Where did you obtain such a sum?"

"From Curtis, sir," Oswald replied. "At first I did not intend to bother him, but when I thought of the impossibility of obtaining it myself, I reckoned it would be advisable to let him know of the case, and, like the good-hearted fellow he is, he gave me the money without a word. No doubt Haviland heard me talking before I decided to tell Curtis."

"I understand, my boy," said the canon. "You have done away with any possible motive. And now as to the rest?"

Oswald smiled.

"Well, sir, I am afraid that I shall have to get a junior into a scrape, but no doubt he will be let off. Although Mr. Meredith is so positive that he gave me the right key, I know very well that he gave me the wrong one, and can prove it. While I was trying the keys, little Reynolds, my fag, came along, and idly looked on, when he ought to have been hurrying off somewhere."

"Is that so, Reynolds?" Canon Lethbridge asked.

"Yes, sir," cried the fag. "I stopped, and watched Raymond trying to open the door. He was a good time before he succeeded; but he did it at last, and went in."

"How long was he in the room?"

"Not more than half a minute, sir, and I saw him all the time, and I know he didn't do anything but fetch a book away. I'll swear it, sir!"

"Thank you, Reynolds!" the canon smiled. "I think there is amply proof, Mr. Meredith, that Raymond is innocent, is there not? It is rather a curious coincidence, however, that both incidents should happen simultaneously."

Mr. Meredith was looking relieved and pleased, to judge from his outward appearance, and Haviland chagrined, although he strove in vain to hide it. The school set up a cheer as Oswald resumed his seat.

"Nobody knows what relief this has brought me," said Mr. Meredith. "I brought the accusation purely because it appeared to be conclusive, and now that Raymond is proved innocent, not a soul in college is more pleased than I."

Mr. Meredith smiled, and, crossing Hall,

took Oswald Raymond's hand, and shook it heartily.

"The fact still remains, Mr. Meredith," the headmaster said practically, "that your three pounds are missing. Somebody took it, and that somebody must be discovered, and justly punished!"

"The three pounds are nothing to me, sir, now that the bottom of the affair has been revealed," said the master of the Remove, "for that I don't care a jot!"

"But I do, Mr. Meredith," the Head replied, "and I intend to probe the matter to the very bottom! Boys, as nothing can be done at the present, I will give you your dismissal!"

The fellows all crowded out in Quad, eagerly discussing the quickly-refuted charge, and the members of the Fifth seized Oswald, and carried him shoulder high until he was aching. In Mr. Meredith's study the same subject was being talked of, but in a different strain.

"So much for your foolish ideas!" Mr. Meredith snapped, as he closed the door on Haviland.

"How the deuce was I to know that it would turn out like this?" the boy protested. "Hang that Curtis for interfering!"

"Nothing of the sort. You might have known that he would have supplied the money. It was absurd ever thinking of the plot. We had no time in which to elaborate it. There is no harm done, however, and the plan I have in mind will not fail. I shall not enlighten you on the subject until the time arrives, and then I shall want the co-operation of both yourself and Richmond."

In Study No. 12 another conversation was in progress, again concerning the same subject.

"It's my opinion that it was another attempt to get you into disgrace," Curtis said, with conviction.

"But Meredith wouldn't be in it!" Holmes protested. "He's got nothing to do with Haviland."

"I'm not so sure about that," Curtis replied sagely. "You know that he and Haviland are as thick as thieves together. There may be some understanding between the two, for all we know."

"Perhaps there is," said Oswald thoughtfully, "but I don't think so. A master wouldn't plot against the boys; it's absurd on the face of it!"

"So it appears; but you can't always go by appearances!" Curtis retorted. "Anyway, I guess I'll keep a sharp eye on both your cousin and Mr. Meredith, and, if I see anything suspicious, go straight to the Beetle, and tell him everything!"

That night at calling-over, much to everybody's relief, the school heard from Mr. Meredith himself that he had been much too hasty, and that had he looked properly in the first instance he could not have failed to find the money.

When dressing for the evening he had discovered it in his dressing-table drawer, and now he remembered placing it there. The master of the Remove seemed truly sorry, and apologised to Oswald for having suspected him. It was his frightful memory again, he said laughingly.

And so the whole matter came to an end—and a very sudden end, too.

But before the plot which the master had hinted at could come into force, and some two weeks after the incident just related, other and more exciting happenings were going on at Wenhamston—happenings which drew the three chums' attention from the plots on Oswald Raymond's honour, and, for the time being, at any rate, his peril was forgotten.

The Ghost of Rylcroft Grange Reappears

WITHIN the last day or two it had got about the village that the ghost had started walking again at the Grange. It had been seen by—and terrified—more than one worthy inhabitant.

Years ago the old house—which was situated some little distance from Wenhamston, and half-way to the village—had been inhabited by an old man named Davidson, a hermit, who had a bad reputation in the district. One morning he had been found dead in his bed, and ever since that day his ghost had taken to walking at periodical times.

For the last few months he had been resting, but now, according to various accounts, he was appearing again, to the consternation

and terror of the villagers. One and all they shunned the Grange, and would have given all they possessed rather than pass the house after dark.

Even Stratford of the Fifth had seen it while riding home from Backton the previous evening. When about six miles from Wen-haston his machine had broken down, and, being at that particular time without a brass farthing in his possession, he had perforce to walk home, pushing the bicycle along with him.

It was about ten o'clock when he passed the Grange, and, according to him, saw a truly terrifying spectacle at one of the upper windows.

It was the figure of a monk dressed in a black cloak, which entirely covered him, with the exception of the eyes. These were of a fiery red, and little jets of flame appeared to dart out of them. And even as he watched the whole thing—monk, cloak, and fiery eyes—seemed to grow misty, and then vanish into nothingness.

Stratford, being of a rather nervous temperament, had, at the termination of the scene, hurried the rest of the way to the college, at which he arrived in a breathless condition.

All the fellows in Fifth Form Common-room were discussing the subject, but Curtis refused to believe a word. Ghosts were things that had no existence, he said.

"Pooh!" he remarked, leaning comfortably on the mantelpiece, and looking round the room amiably. "You don't reckon I'm going to believe that rot, do you?"

"Believe what rot?" queried Holmes, entering at that moment. "What's the squabble about?"

"We've been talking about Ryllcroft Grange," Wellinson said, "and Curtis refuses to believe it's haunted. A lot he knows about it!"

"Of course not!" said the captain of the Fifth. "Just because some fellow fancies he sees something, you must all go and think the place is haunted!"

"But I know the Grange is haunted!" Wellinson persisted.

"How do you know?"

"Why, there's Stratford here, who says he's seen it, and nearly all the villagers have."

"I guess they haven't. They daren't go out after nine, and the ghost isn't supposed to appear before ten, from what I've heard."

"But Stratford saw it—a monk with fiery eyes!" protested Butcher.

"That may be; but you must remember that it was dark, and, knowing the place bore the reputation of being haunted, he fancied he saw something!"

"Fancy be hanged!" snapped Stratford. "I saw the thing as plain as I see you standing there!"

"I don't want to call you a fibber," smiled

the American boy, "but I guess you've drawn in a trifle long, Stratford!"

"Well, I shouldn't like to spend the night there, anyway," put in Spence. "I don't believe in ghosts myself, but I reckon that place would give me the horrors, without any spectre thrown in!"

"Well, you are a set of chicken-hearted bouncers!" said their captain. "I admit it wouldn't be cheerful, but I wouldn't mind staying there for two or three hours."

"At night?"

"Yes. Why not?" Curtis smiled as he warmed his hands by the fire. "I tell you what," he added. "If Raymond and Holmes'll come with me, I'll go there to-morrow night, and stay for an hour or two."

"I bet you wouldn't!" Butcher exclaimed. "You'd be afraid to go in when you got there!"

"Who'd be afraid?" Oswald cried. "Not Holmes or Curtis, I know!"

"No jolly fear!" declared Holmes. "I should just enjoy it!"

Curtis laughed.

"Do you think we'd funk it?" he exclaimed. "Fancy thinking we would be afraid to stay in that old place! It'll be a bit of a change."

"Well, there's one thing," Spence said, "you won't be hard up for furniture, because when old Davidson died he left it all there."

"Naturally!" smiled Curtis. "He couldn't very well take it away with him, could he?"

He crossed the room and approached Stratford, who was sitting there reading a story-book.

"Look here, Stratty," he said, "tell me exactly what happened, and what you saw."

"Well, you know, I had a puncture in my back tyre, and had to walk home. When I was passing the Grange I happened to look up at the windows, and then I saw that monk."

"What wretched luck it is you having all the fun! We missed having an enjoyable time, I reckon."

"I don't know about enjoyable!" Stratford exclaimed. "But I know that I was considerably frightened—so would anybody have been if they'd seen what I've seen!"

"Is that all? Didn't you see anything else?"

"I didn't stop after I saw the thing vanish!"

Curtis grinned.

"Vanish!" he said. "Why, the most likely explanation of that is, in my opinion, that you, being tired after your long walk, saw the reflection of some lights in the window! The shape of the monk must have either been a shadow, or you fancied it!"

"Got you there, Curtis, old man!" Oswald put in. "Every pane of glass was smashed out years ago—as long as I can remember, anyhow."

"I forgot that!" said Curtis, with a smile. "Anyway, I don't believe he saw a ghost! There aren't such things."

"Well, I believe there are," Wellinson said. "Stratford isn't the first one who's seen it."

"Oh, rats!" Curtis said slangily.

"It's easy enough to talk now it's daytime!" Spence exclaimed, with a solemn shake of his head. "But at night, when it's cold and dark, you won't be so ready to get up and go!"

"Very likely," Holmes said; "I won't deny it. But we shall get up, all the same, and show you other fellows that we're not funky of your silly ghost."

"I've got an idea," said Appleyard. "It's not much, but why not all go down to-night and keep watch from the road, and see if the ghost appears? If it does, perhaps you three won't be so ready to go. Then to-morrow we can go down and see you into the Grange and then wait outside for you."

"Well, that's not a bad plan," Spence said. "I second it."

"So do I," said Curtis. And all the others agreed with him, except Stratford.

"Don't go, for goodness' sake!" he interjected. "I've seen the thing, and know what it's like."

"Don't be an ass!" Holmes said politely. "We're going to enjoy ourselves there."

"I say, you fellows," said the Beetle, putting his head in the door. "The dinner-bell went five minutes ago. If you don't look sharp, you'll get none."



ROBIN HOOD.

A grand complete story of the Outlaws of Sherwood Forest appears in this week's "Nugget Weekly," entitled "How Robin Hood Despoiled the King."

Also complete stories of Buffalo Bill, Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee, and the Boys of St. Frank's

Published on Fridays. Price 1½d. Ask for—

NUGGET WEEKLY

Whereupon the Fifth Form hurried off to Dining Hall.

To add to all this excitement, the preceding day the news had got round that little Lucy, the Head's youngest daughter, had been kidnapped. The nurse had been returning from a visit after dark, and suddenly, whilst walking along the road, the child had been snatched from her arms. The thing had happened so quickly that the culprit got clean away, and the nurse hurried on to the college well-nigh demented. The Head, when he heard the news, was absolutely stunned. He had set out, and searched high and low with his male servants and one or two of the masters. But the child remained undiscovered, and the headmaster was at his wits' end, and the boys had never before seen him look so haggard and worn as he did that morning at prayers.

The canon was known to possess a comfortable sum of money, and the abduction was evidently planned with the intent to extort it from him as ransom.

Curtis, with his quickness of perception, had already formed an opinion on the occurrence. The two happenings—the re-appearance of the ghost and the kidnapping of Lucy—had come very closely upon one another, and he could not help thinking that they were in some way connected.

That afternoon he and Holmes took a walk to the haunted Grange. Holmes could not see the reason of the visit, and Curtis did not intend to enlighten him until he had some proof of his suspicions.

It was freezing hard, for the winter had really set in. The ruins of Ryllcroft Grange were situated about half-way to the village, and when they drew opposite the house they looked curiously at the old place. A massive iron gate gave access to the garden. It was rusty, and twisted, in the course of time, considerably out of its original shape. A few dismal-looking evergreens still grew about the place, and behind these stood the house itself.

Every pane of glass in the whole front of the building had disappeared long since. The roof in two or three places had fallen through, making the once grand mansion look an utter wreck. A broad carriage-drive led up from the gates—now overgrown with thick weeds—ending in a large flight of marble steps to the massive front door.

As the boys stood there Curtis noticed some footprints on the soft earth of the drive, where the weeds were thin. It was clayey soil, and showed the marks to perfection. At first he took hardly any account of them, then it struck him that they looked quite fresh, and as he knew that the villagers

GRAND BOY SCOUTS' INTERNATIONAL



JAMBOREE Number!

Many special star features, including a long complete tale of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood School, at the Jamboree, and a striking article on the great Boy Scout festival by "Scoutmaster."

Get your copy TO-DAY. Ask for


The Boys' FRIEND

The Story Paper for Every Boy.



would hardly dare venture within the gates, even in the day-time, he was curious to know where they were.

"I wonder who the dickens has been in here?" he said. "I guess it's none of our fellows."

"What are you talking about?" asked Holmes, whose brains were not made to think very swiftly. "How do you know there's been anybody in here?"

"Look at those footprints there. I reckon they're not more than two days' old, at the most."

He pushed open the creaking gate, and they entered the garden. The footmarks, which led indistinctly to the hall door, were plain enough on closer observation. One pair were presumably made by a man, for they were of medium size. It was the others, however, that riveted Curtis' attention, and he examined them eagerly. They were very small, with peculiar pointed toes, such as may have been worn by a child. His eyes gleamed as he recognised them, for his suspicions were being verified. They were the footprints of Lucy Lethbridge, the canon's little girl, who had been stolen the previous day.

"That's the solution, for sure," Curtis muttered. "She must be in here."

"Who must be in here?" Holmes asked.

"What are you mumbling about?"

"Don't you see what I mean?" Curtis asked him, in surprised tones.

"Can't say I do."

"Well, look at these small footprints. Don't you know whose they are? Think!"

"Sherlock" looked.

"No," he said, "I've not seen them before that I know of."

"I guess you have," said Curtis quietly.

"Do you mean to say that you don't recognise them as Little Lucy's?"

Holmes looked again, seriously enough this time—before, he had not the faintest suspicion of what Curtis was driving at. He stared at them for a moment, and then turned round.

"By Jimmy!" he cried. "I believe you've got it. Now I come to look at them closer, I seem to recognise them."

"And don't you realise what it means?"

"No, not exactly."

"Well, this. When Lucy was kidnapped she was brought here, and considering that this place is supposed to be haunted and that the villagers wouldn't enter the house even if you paid them, there couldn't be a better hiding-place in the whole district."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Holmes. "Then you think that she's in here at the present moment?"

"Yes; in all probability, she is," Curtis replied. "And, now I come to think of it, it was somewhere close to here that she was stolen, you know. If we—" He broke off suddenly and made a grab at something on the ground which he had just noticed.

"What's that you've got?" asked Holmes.

"I think," Curtis replied, "that if we wanted any further proof, this about supplies it."

And he held up a little nickel whistle attached to a piece of white cord, which he remembered often noticing round the missing child's neck.

"By Jimmy!" cried Holmes again. "Then she's as good as found."

"Well, I think we have got plenty of proof that she's here, and, of course, it's all rot about the ghost. I've no doubt at all that the kidnapper and the ghost are one and the same, especially as none of the villagers dare venture here."

"Then, if there's not a ghost here at all," said Holmes, "what are we going to do about our proposed expedition to-morrow night?"

"It doesn't alter that a bit. We shall go on just the same as we arranged, and not say a word to the other chaps yet. We'll all go down to-night, as Appleyard suggested, and that will give us a chance of having a good look at the 'ghost.' Of course, they'll still think it's real, and get half frightened to death."

"Yes, but don't you think it would be wisest if we told old Lethbridge about his daughter being here before to-night?"

"No," Curtis returned decisively. "I want us to pull it off by ourselves. It's pretty evident, I guess, they don't mean to harm her, or they'd have said so, and, as that's the case, I think she'll be all right until to-morrow."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And now about our going. An idea has just struck me. I'll tell you."

He stepped a little closer to Holmes, and talked in a low tone for a few moments. "Well, what do you think of it?" he queried.

"I think it's a ripping plan," Holmes replied, "and if it doesn't work out as you say, I shall be considerably surprised."

They discussed the plan further as they strolled back to Wenhamston, and made one or two minor improvements. When Oswald—who had been unable to accompany them—heard everything, he was as astounded as Holmes had been, and his opinion on Curtis' plan was most flattering.

By the time tea was ready they had decided on their course of procedure, and Curtis immediately sat down and wrote a letter to a certain man in Backton, whom he requested to forward to him several articles, to be delivered the following day without fail.

Curtis Makes a Few Discoveries.

IT had been arranged that Curtis, Raymond, Holmes, and three others were to keep watch for the ghost at the haunted Grange that night.

It was freezing hard when the time came for them to get up, and the coldness was intense. Not one of the fellows who were to accompany the three chums were at all anxious to leave their warm and cosy beds. Curtis was really anxious to make the journey. The school clock had just struck half-past nine, and most of the boys were sleeping the sleep of the just.

Spence sat up in bed and shivered.

"I say, Curtis," he said to that individual, who, with Holmes and Oswald, was getting dressed, "you're not going to that old place to-night, are you? Let's chuck up keeping watch to-night—it's too confoundedly cold! Hark at the wind whistling, too!"

"All right, I don't mind. You can stop behind if you like. We're going, anyway!" Curtis said, putting his head into Spence's cubicle.

"Don't be a fool, Curtis, there's a good chap!" Wellinson exclaimed, who slept next door. "It's snowing like the very dickens!"

"All right; that's all the better!" remarked Holmes cheerfully. "We can have a game of snow-balls as we go along to keep ourselves warm!"

"Don't, for goodness' sake, be such asses!" Spence said, hugging his knees under the bed-clothes. "You're not really going, you three, are you? It's all silly rot!"

"See here," said Curtis. "We told you that we were going to keep watch to-night, and you all agreed to come. If you choose to be so cowardly as to back out at the last moment, just because of a little bit of cold, we'll go by ourselves, that's all!"

This was more than the others could stand. In a moment they were all out of their cots, and had commenced dressing themselves.

"Make yourselves nice and warm," Curtis advised. "I've put on two pair of trousers."

It was a good suggestion, and the rest followed suit. At last they were dressed—doubly dressed, in fact—and with their boots in their hands the six Fifth-Form fellows descended the staircase. Everything was silence, and a streak of light gleaming from under the Beetle's bed-room door warned them of the necessity of keeping quiet. The passage leading to the back door was in pitch darkness.

It did not take them long to slip their boots on, but more than one started grumbling.

"Look here, you fellows," Curtis said warmly, "why can't you be quiet, now that you are dressed? What's the good of making such a fuss over a trifling bit of cold?"

"Trifling bit!" Spence said, with chattering teeth. "I like that!"

"I don't want you to come if you don't feel like it," continued Curtis, "only you said you'd come. But if any of you feel funky if it you can go back to bed. I thought the Fifth were made of better stuff!"

After the way in which they had gone through with the rebellion, nobody liked to own up that they were feeling afraid, so they went, without further grumbling, through the back door into the yard, and so on to West Quadrangle.

They slipped out of the masters' gate as quietly as possible—for some of them had not yet retired—and started off at a trot for the haunted Grange.

The run did them good, for it not only made the fellows warm, but cheered them up wonderfully, and by the time they reached the old-house they were in fairly good spirits.

The sky, which had for the most part been clouded, now cleared, and the moon shone brilliantly, making everything look ghostly and unreal.

"Perhaps he's not going to show himself to-night," Wellinson said hopefully, "and then we shall get half frozen to death through standing about in the cold wind."

"If you can't talk sense," snapped Holmes, "you'd better be quiet!"

NOW ON SALE

LATEST POPULAR BOOKS.

EACH A 65,000-WORD NOVEL COMPLETE IN ITSELF.

DETECTIVE TALES.

SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY.

Sexton Blake Figures Prominently in all the following stories:

No. 136.—THE SHEIKH'S SON.

A Thrilling and Original Detective Story of Adventure in England and Syria, introducing Sexton Blake, Tinker, and the Hon. John Lawless. By the author of "The Red Crescent," etc., etc.

No. 137.—THE TWIST OF THE TRAIL.

A Stirring Detective Narrative, introducing Sexton Blake and Tinker in Exciting Adventures in the mountains of Kerry and by the lakes of Killarney. By the author of "The Clue of the Charred Diary," etc.

No. 138.—THE BLACK STREAK.

The author of "African Gold" narrates in his best and most holding style an Enthralling Adventure of Sexton Blake and Tinker in England and Spain.

No. 139.—THE KESTREL'S CLAW.

A Complete Drama of Mystery and Deception, introducing Sexton Blake, Tinker and Pedro, and Leon Kestrel (the Mister-Mummer). By the author of "The Kestrel Syndicate," etc.

SCHOOL, SPORT, and ADVENTURE TALES.

BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY.

No. 518.—MOXON'S FAG.

Magnificent Yarn of Schoolboy Fun and Adventure. By JACK NORTH.

No. 519.—THE BLACK HOUSE.

Thrilling Tale of Nelson Lee and Nipper in a Case of Absorbing Mystery. By MAXWELL SCOTT.

No. 520.—THE ARMOURER'S APPRENTICES.

Splendid Story of Cavaliers and Roundheads. By MORTON PIKE.

No. 521.—THE TREASURE-SEEKERS.

Grand Adventure Yarn. By REGINALD WRAY.

PRICE
4d.
EACH.

DON'T HESITATE GET YOUR COPY NOW!
EVERY NEWSAGENT SELLS THEM.

PRICE
4d.
EACH.

At All Newsagents.

The American boy pushed open the rusty gate, and entered, closely followed by Raymond and Holmes. The other three hesitated.

"You aren't going to keep watch in there, are you?" inquired Appleyard. "I meant outside!"

"Well, we don't mean outside," said Oswald. "How do you reckon we could see plainly if we stood all this way away? Come on in. We are going to conceal ourselves behind that clump of laurels there."

The boys pushed one another in the gates, and took up their positions behind the trees.

It seemed as though Wellinson's words would come true, for after ten minutes' watching not a sign or sound from the house had proclaimed whether the ghost was there or not; and the boys were getting cold—even wrapped up as they were behind the bushes, and unable to move or stamp their feet.

"I think Wellinson's about right," said Spence. "If I don't move soon I shall be frozen to—"

"What's that?" Oswald said suddenly.

"What's what?" asked the others in one voice.

"I don't know. I thought I heard something. Fancy, I suppose."

"By Jiminy, look over there!" cried out Holmes suddenly. He jumped up, and stood gazing at one of the upper windows.

The others followed his example, and simultaneously gave a gasp of surprise and consternation.

At one of the windows stood a figure. It was attired in a black cloak, with a great hood which covered the head, after the fashion of a monk. Its right arm was outstretched, pointing in the direction of the gate, as if motioning them to go. But it was the thing's face that was the worst. It was a death's-head, grinning horribly in the cold moonlight, with two glaring and terrible-looking red eyes.

With one accord Spence, Wellinson, and Appleyard jumped to their feet and rushed hither-skelter across the garden in the direction of the gates. Curtis and his companions, however, stood their ground, and looked curiously up at the spectre.

"I say!" exclaimed Oswald. "Quick! Throw a stone at it, and see if the thing is real or not!"

"Good idea," replied Curtis, picking up a

pebble. Going a little closer to the house, he took careful aim, and let fly.

There was a muffled "pop," and the ghost staggered back, and the three boys perceived that only one of its eyes remained red, the other having gone out, as it were.

This was quite sufficient to satisfy Curtis that the thing was no more of a phantom than he was, so, after a last look up at the window, he made for the gate, with Holmes and Oswald close behind.

The other three were crouching outside, thoroughly unnerved—too frightened, in point of fact, to have noticed the incident just recorded.

"What the deuce did you stop for?" asked Spence.

"Why, to have a good look at the thing, I guess," said Curtis easily. "I can't make out why you fellows ran off like that, can you, Holmes, old man?"

"I can't, and that's a fact," Holmes replied. "I don't see the sense in getting half scared out of your life by a ghost such as that."

"Oh, dry up, and let's get back to the college!" growled Wellinson irritably. He had begun to feel that he had acted childishly in retreating, and, in consequence, was not in the best of tempers.

"Yes, come along," Spence put in. "I'm half-frozen to death."

The half a dozen seniors left the Grange and started for the school at a steady run, and as they entered by the wicket-gate the clock chimed half-past ten.

"By jingo!" muttered Curtis. "I didn't think it was so late as that. Tread quietly, you chaps," he added, when they reached Big Hall. "I guess there'll be the very deuce to pay if we are caught by the Kettle."

But Fortune favoured them, and they reached the Fifth Form dormitory unmolested, and in a very few minutes they were in bed, fast asleep, dreaming of haunted houses and ghosts in general.

The next day a rumour got round that the Head had received a demand for a hundred pounds, and that he was to take the money to Kyllcroft Grange and put it in the kitchen window. If he failed to do so by the end of twenty-four hours the life of his daughter would be forfeited.

Nobody knew whether this was true or not, but it was thought to be, and this belief

was strengthened by the fact that Canon Lettbridge did not appear in Hall for prayers directly after breakfast.

Something occurred, also, which cleared up a good deal that Curtis had been worrying over.

He had obtained permission to run down to the village—which was out of bounds—to inquire after some skates from the ironmonger's which he had ordered.

It was snowing when he started, and continued doing so throughout the whole journey. It was real winter-time now, with a vengeance, the cold weather having come sooner than usual. It was freezing hard, and as he walked briskly along his thoughts were busy.

He reached the village, and turned in to the ironmonger's, to find a customer already in there. He looked casually round the shop, waiting to be served. There was only one assistant, however, and Curtis looked uninterestedly on as he served his customer.

Curtis had often seen the man before, and knew him by name. It was Bryant, Dr. Brader's man.

Dr. Brader, as he was also aware, was a scientist living in the district, and he was considered a rather big pot. His house was situated farther up the road to Wenhamston, about a hundred yards off Kyllcroft Grange, the grounds of the two houses adjoining. He was rather eccentric, and Bryant, his all-round man, was not the kind of fellow Curtis would have cared to trust twenty pounds with. He appeared to be having some difficulty in obtaining what he wanted.

"I'm afraid we haven't got one," the assistant was saying. "You see, electric-light isn't much used about these parts."

"I'm aware of that," Bryant replied; "but jest 'ave another look, will you? I got some of the same sort here some time ago, I remember."

The assistant disappeared. In a few moments he returned.

"I've found one," he exclaimed. "Try it, and see if it will lit."

Bryant took the thing. "Yes, that's all right, thanks," he said. "Ow much is it?"

The article he held in his hand was a tiny incandescent electric-lamp, the bulb being of red glass.

(Another Rattling Long Instalment Will Appear on Thursday Next!)

ARE YOU SHORT?

If so, let the Glavan System help you to increase your height. Mr. Briggs reports an increase of 5 inches; Driver E. P. 3 inches; Mr. Ratcliffe 4 inches; Miss Davies 3 inches; Mr. Lindon 3 inches; Mr. Ratcliffe 4 inches; Miss Leedell 4 inches. This System requires only ten minutes morning and evening, and greatly improves the health, physique, and carriage. No appliances or drugs. Send 3 penny stamps for further particulars and £100 Guarantee to Enquiry Dept., A.M.P., 17, Strand Green Road, London, N.4.



NERVOUSNESS

Self-Consciousness and Nervous Shyness.

In one week's time I can cure you of these terrible afflictions. Think of it! In **One Week My System**, perfected through long years of study and experiment, will overcome all your **Nervousness, Blushing, Stuttering, and Timidity**, and give you that splendid confidence which commands business success and social popularity. Don't hesitate! Write now, mentioning **UNION JACK**, for full particulars and my **FREE** booklet, "The Power to Win," sent in plain envelope. Address—**Specialist, 12, All Saints Road, St. Anne's-on-Sea.**

"**CURLY HAIR!**" "My bristles were made curly in a few days," writes R. Welch. "**CURLIT!**" curls straightest hair. 1/5, 2/6. (2d. stamps accepted.)—**SUMMERS (Dept. A. P.), 31, UPPER RUSSELL STREET, BRIGHTON.**

WONDERFUL WAY TO INCREASE HEIGHT.  **Carne's Royal Copyright System.** Supplier to Kings, Royalty, Generals, Prime Ministers. Particulars 2d. stamp. Apply—**PERCIVAL CARNE, Caerphilly, Cardiff, 2.**

CUT THIS OUT

"Union Jack." **PEN COUPON.** Value 21.

Send this coupon with P.O. for only 5/- direct to the **Fleet Pen Co., 219, Fleet St., London, E.C.4.** In return you will receive (post free) a splendid **British Made 14 ct. Gold Nibbed Fleet Fountain Pen, value 10/6.** If you save 12 further coupons, each will count as 2d. off the price, so you may send 13 coupons and only 3/-. Say whether you want a fine medium or broad nib. This great offer is made to introduce the famous **Fleet Pen** to the **UNION JACK** readers. (Foreign postage extra.) Satisfaction guaranteed or cash returned. **Self-Filling, or Safety Models, 2/- extra.**

S



FACTORY TO RIDER

Packed Free. Carriage Paid. **Fifteen Days' Free Trial.** **LOWEST CASH PRICES. EASY PAYMENT TERMS.** Prompt delivery. Save Dealers' Profits. Big Bargains! Shop Soiled and Second-hand Cycles. Satisfaction guaranteed or Money Refunded. Write for **Monster Size Free Lists** and **Special Offer** of Sample Bicycle.

MEAD CYCLE COMPANY, Incorpd. Dept. B 607, BIRMINGHAM.

ELECTRIC LIGHT. Battery, lampholder, lamp, wire, switch, re-Model Engines, Motors, Railways, dynamos, etc., 3d.—**Small Power Co., 38, Queen's Road, Aston, Birmingham.**

SHORT MEN AND WOMEN

are often ignored and looked down upon. Tall people receive favourable consideration and attention in every walk of life. By my easy, scientific, and safe method you can grow several inches taller. Many people have added 1 1/2 in. to 4 in. to their height by My System. Write at once for **FREE** particulars, mentioning **Union Jack**.

Address: **Inquiry "N" Dept., 51, Church Street, South Shore, Blackpool.**

PHOTO POSTCARDS, 1/3 doz., 12 by 10 ENLARGEMENTS, 8d. ALSO **CHEAP PHOTO MATERIAL, CATALOGUE AND SAMPLES FREE.** **HACKETT'S, JULY ROAD, LIVERPOOL.**

IF YOU SUFFER

from nervous, worried feelings, lack of energy, self-confidence, will-power, mind concentration, or feel awkward in the presence of others, send at once 3 penny stamps for particulars of the **Mento-Nerve Strengthening Treatment**.—**GODFREY ELLIOTT-SMITH, Ltd., 527, Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus, London, E.C.4.**

WHEN ANSWERING ADVERTISEMENTS
BE SURE TO MENTION THIS PAPER.
