

S.O.S.! Sabatini's Own Story—CAPTAIN BLOOD!

THE UNION JACK 2^D

Sexton Blake's Own Paper



The **PAUPER of PENGARTH CASTLE**

SEXTON BLAKE and WALDO the Wonder-Man!
in the first episode of a magnificent two-part story.

Captain Blood



BY RAFAEL SABATINI

CONDEMNED to the slavery of the West Indian sugar plantations for a crime he did not commit, Peter Blood, a physician of the little Somersetshire town of Bridgewater, is sent to Barbadoes, and there bought for £10 by the brutal Colonel Bishop.

Blood is more fortunate than his companions, and his work as a doctor exempts him from the slave-labour in the plantations. His comparative freedom gives him a chance of escape for himself and a few of his friends, among whom is Jeremy Pitt, formerly a shipmaster.

Ere the plan can be put into effect, Barbadoes is raided by a Spanish ship, the *Cinco Llagas*. The Spanish commander, Don Diego, exacts a heavy ransom and returns to his ship. Meantime, however, a party of the slaves under Peter Blood has captured the vessel, and overpower him and retain the ransom.

Don Diego, as the only available navigator aboard, traitorously steers them for the island of Hispaniola, where they encounter a Spanish galleon, and are in grave danger of capture. By a ruse, however, Captain Blood disguises the true state of affairs, and later frees his captives, putting them in a boat and allowing them to land on Hispaniola. Two days later the *Cinco Llagas* sails into the rock-bound bay of Cayona.

These adventures of Captain Blood, as chronicled by his shipmaster, Jeremy Pitt, show that his original intention was to return to France or Holland; but, finding this impossible, he decided to throw in his lot with the slaves he had rescued and become one of the "Brethren of the Coast."

AND so, to condense all that Jeremy

has recorded in the matter, Blood ended by yielding to external pressure, abandoned himself to the stream of Destiny. "Fata viam invenient," is his own expression of it.

If he resisted so long, it was, I think, the thought of Arabella Bishop that restrained him. That they should be destined never to meet again did not weigh at first, or, indeed, ever. He

conceived the scorn with which she would come to hear of his having turned pirate, and the scorn, though as yet no more than imagined, hurt him as if it were already a reality.

And even when he conquered this, still the thought of her was ever present. He compromised with the conscience that her memory kept so disconcertingly active. He vowed that the thought of her should continue ever before him to help him keep his hands as clean as a man might in this desperate trade upon which he was embarking.

And so, although he might entertain no delusive hope of ever winning her for his own, of ever even seeing her again, yet the memory of her was to abide in his soul, as a bitter-sweet purifying influence. The love that is never to be realised will often remain a man's guiding ideal.

The resolve being taken, he went actively to work. Ogeron, most accom-

modating of governors, advanced him money for the proper equipment of his ship the *Cinco Llagas*, which he renamed the *Arabella*. This after some little hesitation, fearful of thus setting his heart upon his sleeve. But his Barbadoes friends accounted it merely an expression of the ever-ready irony in which their leader dealt.

To the score of followers he already possessed, he added three score more, picking his men with caution and discrimination—and he was an exceptional judge of men—from amongst the adventurers of Tortuga.

With them all he entered into the articles usual among the Brethren of the Coast under which each man was to be paid by a share in the prizes captured. In other respects, however, the articles were different. Aboard the *Arabella* there was to be none of the ruffianly indiscipline that normally prevailed in buccanering vessels.

Those who shipped with him, undertook obedience and submission in all things to himself and to the officers appointed by election. Any to whom this clause in the articles was distasteful might follow some other leader.

Towards the end of December, when the hurricane season had blown itself out, he put to sea in his well-found, well-manned ship, and before he returned in the following May from a protracted and adventurous cruise, the fame of Captain Peter Blood had run like ripples before the breeze across the face of the Caribbean Sea.

There was a fight in the Windward passage at the outset with a Spanish galleon, which had resulted in the gutting and finally the sinking of the Spaniard.

There was a daring raid effected by means of several appropriated piraguas upon a Spanish pearl fleet in the Rio

de la Hacha, from which they had taken a particularly rich haul of pearls. There was an overland expedition to the gold-fields of Sancta Maria, on the Main, the full tale of which is hardly credible, and there were lesser adventures through all of which the crew of the *Arabella* came with credit and profit if not entirely unscathed.

And so it happened that before the *Arabella* came homing to Tortuga in the following May to refit and repair—for she was not without scars, as you conceive, the fame of her and of Peter Blood, her captain, had swept from the Bahamas to the Windward Isles, from New Providence to Trinidad.

An echo of it had reached Europe, and at the Court of St. James' angry representations were made by the ambassador of Spain, to whom it was answered that it must not be supposed that this Captain Blood held any commission from the King of England; that he was, in fact, a proscribed rebel, an escaped slave, and that any measures against him by his Catholic Majesty would receive the cordial approbation of King James II.

Don Miguel de Espinosa, the Admiral of Spain in the West Indies, and his nephew Don Esteban who sailed with him, did not lack the will to bring the adventurer to the yard-arm. With them this business of capturing Blood, which was now an international affair, was also a family matter.

Spain, through the mouth of Don Miguel, did not spare her threats. The report of them reached Tortuga, and with it the assurance that Don Miguel had behind him not only the authority of his own nation, but that of the English king as well.

It was a brutum fulmen that inspired no terrors in Captain Blood. Nor was he likely, on account of it, to allow himself to run to rust in the security of Tortuga. For what he had suffered at the hands of Man he had chosen to make Spain the scapegoat.

Thus he accounted that he served a twofold purpose; he took compensation and at the same time served, not indeed the Stuart king, whom he despised, but England and, for that matter, all the rest of civilised mankind which cruel, treacherous, greedy, bigoted Castile sought to exclude from intercourse with the New World.

One day, as he sat with Hagthorpe and Wolverstone over a pipe and a bottle of rum in the stifling reek of tar and stale tobacco of a waterside tavern, he was accosted by a splendid ruffian in a gold-laced coat of dark-blue satin with a crimson sash, a foot wide, about the waist.

"C'est vous qu'on appelle Le Sang?" the fellow hailed him.

Captain Blood looked up to consider the questioner before replying. The man was tall and built on lines of agile strength, with a swarthy, aquiline face that was brutally handsome. A diamond of great price flamed on the indifferently clean hand resting on the pommel of his long rapier, and there were gold rings in his ears, half-concealed by long ringlets of oily chestnut hair.

Captain Blood took the pipe-stem from between his lips.

"My name," he said, "is Peter Blood. The Spaniards know me for Don Pedro Sangre, and a Frenchman may call me Le Sang if he pleases."

"Good," said the gaudy adventurer in English, and without further invitation he drew up a stool and sat down at that greasy table. "My name," he informed the three men, two of whom at least were eyeing him askance, "it is Levasseur. You may have heard of me."

They had, indeed. He commanded a privateer of twenty guns that had

(Continued on page 27.)

Tortuga.
(Continued.)



The PAUPER of PENGARTH CASTLE



This story of Rupert Waldo, commonly known as the Wonder-Man, is better than usual, fine as Waldo yarns always are. You will realise the truth of that assertion when you have read to the end of it. Moreover, this is a double-length, two-part story. The first episode is complete in this number, and ends with a smashing climax that leads to even more surprising events in the second, which will be recorded next week. Our normal policy, as you know, is to have one long complete story each week. But we make an exception in this case, for we think the yarn itself justifies the experiment. Tell us what YOU think about this.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

"My Name is Sexton Blake."



RUPERT WALDO, behind the wheel of his rakish-looking two-seater, had some difficulty in keeping the car on the road. His pipe had blown out between his teeth, and it was useless to refill it. The wind was blowing at almost hurricane force. Somehow, the fury of the elements rather appealed to this strange mixture of crook and gentleman. For Waldo, although as crooked as a corkscrew, possessed many surprisingly fine qualities.

He was nearing Launceston, in Cornwall, and was hardly over the border from Devonshire. It was afternoon, and the grey sky, with its ragged, scurrying clouds, looked more suitable to mid-winter than late spring. On every hand there were signs of approaching summer.

But on this particular afternoon, at least, the howling gale, sweeping in from the Atlantic, was buffeting Cornwall from end to end. Within the last half-hour the hurricane had increased enormously.

Waldo was on his way to Falmouth, having in mind a little stroke of business connected with a consignment of Brazilian gold specie. It was in the strong-room of a steamer, due in at Falmouth on the morrow.

Waldo was in no hurry, particularly as this gale had sprung up. The boat was bound to be a day late. In any case, he wasn't at all sure that the coup would come off. He was going down partly on chance.

The Wonder-Man had been enjoying himself for some weeks, touring the country and staying in different towns as the fancy pleased him. More often than not he carried loot away with him, and was not in the least troubled about any possible chase.

He was taking life easily, filling in a few odd weeks before he got down to his next big undertaking. He had several ambitious schemes brewing, but the time was hardly ripe for their exploitation.

Waldo was in no way disguised, and in his comfortable tweeds he looked less like a criminal than one would imagine. With his fine figure, his pleasant face, it was hardly to be wondered at that hotel proprietors welcomed him. He was open-handed to a degree, and popular with everybody.

The car was running well, and the road was practically devoid of any other traffic. Waldo enjoyed this battle with the hurricane. Even the car could scarcely be described as his own property, for he had obtained it quite cheaply some weeks earlier in one of the residential thoroughfares of Edgbaston.

Turning a bend, he entered upon a straight stretch of road, with the gale sweeping across broadside, and unchecked by any hedge. The car was nearly forced out of Waldo's control.

"... and yet here stands the castle, desolate and poverty-stricken!" said his lordship bitterly. "I, who should be reaping the benefit of this great estate, reap nothing."

(See page 7.)

But with a laugh he accepted the challenge and pressed on the accelerator. In the distance he could see a solitary cyclist, and he instinctively slowed down again. Waldo was a keen motorist, and in normal circumstances he never indulged in road-hogging.

The cyclist, he could see, was a lady. He pitied her. She was struggling valiantly against the gale, and he rather wondered how she could maintain any control at all.

And it was at this moment that something occurred which led to a most surprising string of circumstances—something which neither Waldo nor anybody else could have possibly foreseen. It was just one of those tricks of fate for which there is no accounting.

A solitary tree grew by the roadside—a sturdy old warrior which had successfully battled against many a storm. But it seemed that it had met its conqueror now, for the gale was causing it to sway ominously.

The girl, fighting against the wind, probably knew nothing about the tree whatever. And Waldo was startled when a heavy branch tore itself away from the tree in the midst of a violent flurry and swept down on to the roadway, completely enveloping the fair cyclist in the lashing foliage.

Waldo's heart leapt. The tree itself, giving up the struggle, was about to crash over.

The girl, as it happened, had been hardly hurt. Knocked from her machine by the force of the impact, she was bruised and dazed, but otherwise unharmed. But to disentangle herself was impossible, for the twigs and branches of the great limb held her down.

And as the foliage lashed about it in the hurricane she caught a brief glimpse of the great tree. Groaning and straining, it was being literally torn up by the roots, and was on the point of falling.

It would be death—swift and sudden—if that trunk fell across the road where she lay. Panting with alarm the girl tried to struggle up. And again she glimpsed the tree falling.

She saw something else, too.

A man—goodness knows where he had sprung from—stood full in the path of the falling giant. With a final groan of anguish, accompanied by a shriek of triumph from the gale, the great tree leaned over.

And Waldo, his muscles tensed to their utmost, met that fearful weight. He was not mad enough to imagine that he could stop the tree falling. Even he, with his amazing strength, was not capable of miracles.

But as the tree fell he managed to divert it a trifle. Instead of falling upon the helpless girl it slewed partly sideways. The impact sent Waldo crashing over backwards, and he was aware of a thunderous, devastating commotion as the trunk fell.

The very ground shook; but Waldo was up in a moment, unhurt except for a slight graze or two. With a single heave he pulled the fallen branch aside, and found the girl lying amid the tangle.

"Hurt much?" he asked briskly. "Splendid! that's the way! I'm afraid your machine's in a bit of a mess, but we must be thankful for small mercies, eh?"

The girl was on her feet now, pale and trembling, but rapidly regaining her self-possession. Waldo's cool, reassuring tones were good to listen to, and his smile was comforting.

She was rather tall, with a fine figure and deep grey eyes. Her dark hair was

dishevelled, but in spite of these misfortunes there was a grace and dignity in her bearing which Waldo did not fail to observe.

He would not have called her shabby, but there was an indefinable something which indicated poverty. And yet, at the same time, the girl was obviously of high breeding. Every inch of her proclaimed the fact.

"Thank you! Thank you ever so much!" she said in a soft, husky voice. "How did you do it? I thought the tree was falling straight on me. You've saved my life!" she added simply.

"Don't mention it!" smiled Waldo. "A mere trifle, I assure you. That's the worst of these trees—they have a habit of falling upon one at awkward moments. Perhaps I may have the honour of giving you a lift? Your machine, I'm afraid, has met its Waterloo."

The bicycle was completely out of commission with a buckled front wheel and twisted forks.

"Thank you! I shall be grateful for—"

The girl swayed as she spoke, and was on the point of fainting. The reaction had left her weak. Waldo caught her just in time, and a minute later she was comfortably ensconced in the two-seater. But she was struggling to strengthen herself. Perhaps she felt that it was unwise to take advantage of this stranger's hospitality.

"Really, I ought not to bother you in this way!" she faltered. "I—I think I can walk—"

"You mustn't think that at all!" interrupted Waldo. "If you'll tell me where to go, Miss—Miss—"

"Pengarth Castle is where I live," she said. "I am Lady Betty Hamilton-Page. My father is the Earl of Pengarth. It is really too good of you to take all this trouble!"

"On the contrary," put in Waldo, with his reassuring smile. "I am highly honoured to be of service. My name is Blake—Sexton Blake."

The girl revealed sudden interest.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Blake! The—the great criminologist?"

Waldo smiled.

"My talents, I'm afraid, have been grossly exaggerated by certain young enthusiastic newspaper reporters," he answered calmly. "I can assure you, Lady Betty, that I am a mere ordinary mortal."

He jumped into the driving seat, and had soon turned the car round. He was feeling happier than ever, and took keen delight in the fresh battle with the elements.

His audacious assumption of Sexton Blake's identity, was characteristic of the man. Quite on the spur of the moment, and without any previous premeditation, he had named himself as Sexton Blake. After all, why not? He would be away on his travels again within half an hour, and it was quite a piece of fun.

Waldo had a very real respect for Sexton Blake. Although the famous detective had frustrated him so many times, Waldo bore Blake not the slightest animosity. Quite the opposite. He held Blake in high esteem, for a man who could check Waldo was worthy of respect.

Both the occupants of the car were surprised. Lady Betty was pleased and thrilled that such a celebrated man had

saved her from death. She had often wondered what Sexton Blake was like in the flesh, and she was not disappointed. After all, Waldo had a charming personality.

And Waldo himself was astonished that his fair companion was the daughter of an earl. True, her blue blood was obvious, but it struck him as rather incongruous that an earl's daughter should be alone on the high road riding a mere bicycle. Her dress, moreover, was hardly what he would have expected.

"If you will go down the next turning on the right we shall be at the castle within five minutes," said Lady Betty presently. "I can't understand one thing, Mr. Blake. How in the world did you save me from that tree?"

The point had been concerning her ever since she had been rescued. She had fully expected to see her rescuer crushed to death, and yet he had diverted the tree from her sufficiently to save her by the tiniest margin without any apparent injury to himself.

"Oh, that?" smiled Waldo. "It looked very much like a feat of miraculous strength, didn't it? Just one of those little deceptions, Lady Betty. I fancy the tree would have fallen as it did without my aid. My one object was to be at your service."

The girl was silent. He had made it no clearer. She was convinced that he had saved her life—and this, in fact, was the literal truth.

Proceeding down the side turning they had the gale behind them, and after a short run, mounting a rise, Lady Betty pointed.

"There is Pengarth Castle," she said.

The old place stood on the opposite hilltop—a fine granite pile, looking gaunt and almost forbidding in the greyness of the wild afternoon. Waldo eyed the scene with interest. It was a real old Cornish castle, the scene of many an historic battle.

Approaching nearer, they turned into a drive. There were no gates, and the lodge was empty, with boarded-up windows. The drive itself, with parklands on either side, was more or less a wilderness. Grass grew in profusion, and there was a ragged air of neglect—neglect of many years standing.

Emerging from the drive, they came out in front of the grey old mansion. There was something indescribably impressive about the place. As far as Waldo could see, most of the ancient windows were bare and grimy. Only those adjacent to the great door were clean and curtained.

Poverty was written over the entire castle.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. The Poverty of Pengarth.



LADY BETTY HAMILTON-PAGE was so far recovered that she was able to get out of the car unassisted. She looked very charming as she stood there, with the gale blowing her hair and bringing back the colour to her cheeks.

"You'll come in and meet my father, won't you?" she asked. "Please do, Mr. Blake. And I hope you'll excuse his manner. He is rather blunt and brusque, particularly with strangers. You must forgive him."

ANSWERS
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for he is really the kindest and dearest old gentleman."

"I am afraid I shall be imposing——"

"No, no!" she interrupted. "Certainly not, Mr. Blake! You must come in! Please do!"

Waldo bowed.

"If you insist," he said resignedly.

He had intended slipping away at once, but his curiosity was now piqued. He was rather keen upon meeting the owner of this wild, dilapidated place. He couldn't help feeling a tinge of regret that such a stately castle should be so pitifully poverty-stricken.

Lady Betty went up the great steps and pulled at an enormous handle. Waldo, having stopped his engine, joined her. The castle doors were of an enormous size, of solid oak, and metal-studded. But instead of the doors opening, a kind of wicket was pulled back, revealing a barred square.

A face appeared behind the bars—an old, lined face which lit up with surprise at the sight of the pair outside.

"It's all right, Jelks," said Lady Betty quickly. "Open the door. I had a little accident, and this gentleman was kind enough to bring me home."

"An accident, m'lady!" ejaculated the face behind the bars. "The saints preserve us!"

His voice was agitated, and Waldo heard the pulling of bars and bolts. He was more interested than ever. The whole procedure seemed so quaint and extraordinary.

In these enlightened days, he had expected to find the castle replete with every modern improvement—with gardeners busy in the grounds, with footmen ready at the door, and similar up-to-date conventions.

He felt that there was something wrong. Lady Betty ought to be attired in old-time dress, and Jelks, the butler, was quite incongruous in his modern setting. Waldo felt that time had slipped back a couple of hundred years.

Why on earth was the castle barred in this fashion? Why was it made impregnable against even the return of its owner's daughter? Waldo was more than ever keen upon entering.

He always hankered after the unusual. He was attracted by anything out of the ordinary. Commonplace crime had no interest for him whatever. He would much prefer a small reward and an interesting tussle to an easily-won fortune.

The big doors swung heavily open, and Lady Betty entered. Waldo, removing his cap, followed her. And he had already decided that he would indulge this whim of fate to the full. If necessary, he would even abandon his project in Falmouth. The latter had never appealed to him greatly, and this gaunt, old, poverty-stricken castle was already exerting its influence over the impressionable Waldo.

He found himself in a great hall, with massive oaken beams far overhead, a stone floor, and oak-panelled walls, with dingy, but probably priceless, tapestries.

There was an air of astonishing peace here. Scarcely any echo of the raging storm came within these massive walls. The silence, compared to the rush of wind without, was almost uncanny.

"If you will take a seat, Mr. Blake, I will go to my father, and bring him here," said Lady Betty. "I want him to thank you personally for your bravery and——"

"Please!" interrupted Waldo. "There's no need to tell him of that insignificant incident, surely?"

"Indeed, there is!" declared the girl firmly.

She tripped away up a great wide staircase which looked more suitable to



Waldo, even with his great strength, was not mad enough to think he could stop the tree falling. But with his muscles tensed, he met that fearful weight and managed to divert its direction a trifle. (See page 4.)

a feudal king's palace than to a twentieth century residence. Waldo seated himself upon a carved settee, and waited.

His fondness for the unusual was being gratified. And his audacity, his amazing strength, his extraordinary daring, made him quite easy in mind regarding the outcome. No matter what cropped up, he would be ready for it. And his assumption of Sexton Blake's identity—a mere caprice of the moment—now seemed likely to involve him in a far deeper deception than he had at first intended.

He heard voices on the staircase, and rose to his feet. Lady Betty was coming down with her father. There was no shadow of doubt that the old gentleman who appeared was the Earl of Pengarth.

His personality was a powerful one. He was talking angrily, petulantly, and with unrestrained force. He came into view round the bend in the staircase—a tall, bent-shouldered figure, with white hair and a grizzled moustache. He was dressed in rusty black, but in spite of his bent shoulders he had an unmistakably military bearing.

Rupert Waldo caught the old man's eye, and bowed.

The Earl of Pengarth advanced towards the visitor, paused a few feet away, and glared.

"Well, sir!" he growled, in a voice which could scarcely be called hospitable. "I understand that I must make you welcome to Pengarth. You saved my daughter's life, eh? I owe you a big debt—but I'm afraid it is a debt which can never be paid. I am grateful, sir—deeply grateful."

"Please refrain from mentioning the subject, sir," exclaimed Waldo, with real distress. "I am afraid Lady Betty has somewhat exaggerated the circumstances of the incident——"

"Nothing of the sort, sir!" interrupted his lordship. "I won't be contradicted! How dare you tell me that my daughter exaggerates! Blake, eh? Sexton Blake! H'm! I'm not sure that I altogether approve of you, sir. D'ye hear? One of those infernal spies, eh?"

"Really, sir——"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if this is a piece of your clever trickery!" went on the Earl of Pengarth, adjusting his spectacles, and giving Waldo an even closer scrutiny. "Come, sir! Let me have the truth! Have you been sent here by that jackal, Slingsby, or have you not? A ruse to get into the castle—that's what it is! If such is the case, I'll kick you out with the toe of my own boot!"

Waldo was rather taken aback, particularly as the old earl had worked himself up into a towering passion. Lady Betty was standing by, flushed and distressed.

"Please, father!" she exclaimed, gripping his arm. "Oh, how can you? Just as if Mr. Blake would descend to such despicable methods! I am sure he doesn't even know who Mr. Slingsby is."

The Earl of Pengarth cooled down and grunted.

"Eh? Then he's fortunate!" he exclaimed gruffly. "Anybody who doesn't know Simon Slingsby is fortunate!" He glared at Waldo. "A rat, sir—a miserable, despicable rat! That's what Slingsby is! A robber, too—nothing more nor less than a blackguardly thief!"

Waldo had the grace to feel rather self-conscious. Somehow, this soldierly old fellow made him feel very mean and small. He was indulging in the basest form of deception, and was in such a position that he couldn't very well admit

the fact. He resolved to make his excuses and leave as soon as possible.

"I regret to learn that Mr. Simon Slingsby is such an undesirable character, sir," he said smoothly. "Need I give you my word that I have never met the man, and have no association with him? My presence here is purely accidental. And as I have business in Launceston, I beg to crave your indulgence—"

"Rubbish, sir!" interrupted the earl sourly. "Nonsense! My daughter insists upon your staying to dinner—and I won't hear any refusal. What is more, the hospitality of Pengarth Castle—such as it is—is open to you for as long as you care to stay. You have acted like a brave man, sir, and my gratitude is very great."

Waldo hardly knew what to say. The old man's words contradicted his attitude. And Waldo remembered what Lady Betty had told him—that her father, in spite of his brusque tongue, was really one of the dearest old gentlemen.

"Nevertheless, Lord Pengarth, I must insist—"

"Insist!" roared the Earl of Pengarth. "And so do I insist, sir—in my own house, too! As for your business in Launceston, it can go to the devil! H'm! Launceston, eh? A disgraceful town—a place of iniquity!"

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Lady Betty.

"Simon Slingsby lives in Launceston! And that is enough!" rapped out Lord Pengarth. "Any town that harbours such a reptile is not deserving of recognition."

"Please, Mr. Blake, you really mustn't take too much notice of father," said Lady Betty, with a smile. "He doesn't mean what he says. Launceston is as dear to him as the castle itself. Mr. Slingsby, I may mention, is our family lawyer."

"Oh!" said Waldo, with a sudden smile. "That explains his lordship's vitriolic tirade. As I have every reason to know, lawyers are divided into two classes—honest and shady. When they are honest they are as true as steel, but when they are shady, they are worse than serpents in the grass."

Lord Pengarth rapped his stick on the floor.

"What are we standing here for?" he demanded. "Sit down, Mr. Blake! Your legs may be young, but mine are not! Sit down, sir!"

They seated themselves on the carved settee.

And to Waldo's embarrassment Lady Betty went into a full account of the mishap in the gale. The master-crook could easily see that Lord Pengarth was well disposed towards him, and accepted him without question as Sexton Blake.

His lordship's gruff manner of speech was only characteristic of him, and he meant nothing by it. Waldo was already beginning to reverse his decision.

He had been asked to stay. Well, he would stay—until the morrow, in any case, and perhaps two or three days. Being a shrewd man Waldo easily connected Lord Pengarth's poverty with Simon Slingsby's villainy. In all probability the old earl had a bee in his bonnet on the subject. But Waldo was now keen upon learning more.

He had sometimes read of impecunious noblemen who stuck to their ancestral castles in spite of straitened circumstances. But he had never met one before, and he had never imagined it possible that any peer of the realm could be so akin to a pauper as Lord Pengarth obviously was.

The Wonder-Man, in fact, was becoming exceedingly interested.

Half an hour later Waldo was an established guest.

Having accepted the invitation to stay, he obtained his traps from the car, and Jelks carried them into the castle. In the absence of any groom or chauffeur Waldo himself drove the car through a granite arch, into a vast weed-grown courtyard at the rear.

Here he found a colossal amount of storage room—stables, coach-houses galore, all of them decaying with disuse. By the time he had walked back to the front of the castle he found Lord Pengarth waiting for him.

"A wild day, Mr. Blake," grunted his lordship, who was wrapped in a shabby ulster. "We will go for a walk in the grounds. I have a mind to talk to you."

"Nothing will suit me better, Lord Pengarth," said Waldo promptly.

In the meantime Jelks, the butler, was having a word with Lady Betty in the great hall. At his feet were Waldo's bags. Following the practice of years, Waldo had seen to it that his baggage carried no labels or identification marks of any kind.

"Whatever is the matter, Jelks?" asked Lady Betty. "You are looking unusually thoughtful this afternoon."

"With good reason!" said the butler, shaking his head. "With good reason, m'lady! His lordship was saying that you nearly got killed this afternoon. Haven't I told you again and again, child, that I don't like that bicycle. Unnatural things—that's what they are!"

Lady Betty laughed.

"Well, Jelks, you needn't worry about it any more," she said, patting him on the shoulder. "The bike's finished—smashed beyond all hope of repair. Now, if you say you're glad, I shall hate you!"

"I'm glad, m'lady, and I'm sorry," said the butler. "Without that bicycle we sha'n't be so anxious when you're out. But I'm afraid it'll mean an awful lot of walking."

"Oh, well, Jelks, it can't be helped," said the girl. "One of these days, perhaps, we shall have a fine motor-car."

Oh, there's Mr. Blake's car, you know. I shall be all right for a day or two, Jelks, sha'n't I?"

Jelks stroked his hair slowly.

"Mr. Blake, m'lady?" he said. "Did ye say that gentleman is Mr. Sexton Blake?"

"Yes, the famous detective, of London."

"It's queer, m'lady—mortal queer!" muttered the old butler, as though to himself. "Maybe I'm wrong, but—Oh, well, I don't suppose I ought to interfere. 'Tisn't my business."

"What isn't your business, Jelks?"

"Nothing, m'lady—nothing!" said Jelks, picking up the bags.

He moved off upstairs; and the girl looked after him wonderingly. Old Jelks had been born in Pengarth Castle, and had served the family throughout his life. He was a real example of the "old retainer," and even in these poverty-stricken times he was as staunch as ever. Nothing could have induced Jelks to desert his master.

Lady Betty wondered why he had seemed so strange while referring to Sexton Blake. She concluded, after a moment's thought, that his old-fashioned notions clung to him, and that he disapproved of a detective being a guest under the roof of Pengarth Castle. Jelks did not make any distinction between the common detective and the specialist.

And so, although Lady Betty dismissed the subject from her mind, Jelks deposited Waldo's bags in the guest chamber, and then made his way down by a rear stairway into the domestic quarters.

The castle was more or less a ruin. Although the roof was intact over the hall, the entire east and west wings were unused. Vast corridors, enormous halls and reception chambers, and other rooms by the score, were closed and empty. Furniture—ancient and decaying—reposed in some of them, but neither of these great wings was habitable.

Only the comparatively small frontage was used—with the great hall, a drawing-room, and Lord Pengarth's library. At the rear of this front block was an inner courtyard, and the windows which looked out upon it belonged to the domestic quarters.

The entire staff at the castle consisted of Jelks and his wife. Over a period of twenty years the household had grown smaller and smaller. First an under-butler, then a housemaid, then a footman or two, and so on until the once great domestic staff had been whittled down to two.

Only the residents in the immediate neighbourhood of Pengarth Castle knew the unhappy truth. But even these had no real knowledge of the cause of his lordship's fallen fortunes.

Affairs had started going wrong long before Lady Pengarth's death, sixteen years earlier. And since that sad event the magnificent castle parklands had grown ragged and more ragged, and the castle itself had taken on a forlorn, dilapidated appearance.

And now, according to local gossip, the end was not far off. There were even whispers about the famous old Pengarth curse. Nobody knew exactly what the curse was and how it had originated, but among the villagers in the neighbourhood it was said that once the curse placed its hand upon the castle nothing could prevent it passing from the Pengarth family. It certainly seemed that this disaster was approaching.

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THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Pengarth Spirit.

JELKS was an elderly man, and though he never grumbled his duties were long and arduous. When he got into the servants' hall he lowered himself slowly into a big chair and rubbed one of his knees.

"It's the rheumatism again, old lady," he said ruefully.

"Can't seem to get rid of it no how. Getting ready to go to the village? I thought you weren't going until to-morrow?"

Mrs. Jelks, busy with the strings of her bonnet, glanced round across the long, quaint old apartment with its uneven stone floor. She was some years younger than her husband, an active, able woman.

"To-morrow, indeed! Law, Jelks, whatever are ye thinking of? Isn't there a fine gentleman come here to stay? M'lady told me, not ten minutes ago, that we've got a guest! The first guest this many a month!" she added thoughtfully. "It's more than I can make out."

"Ay, and it beats me, too!" said Jelks, looking at the housekeeper with a curiously intent expression. "Do ye remember, Martha, when we went to London five years ago?"

Mrs. Jelks could hardly repress a smile.

"Seeing that we haven't been to London since, it's hardly likely that I'd forget," she replied. "What about it? What's wrong with ye, father? You're looking rare worried!"

"When we were in London," said Jelks, "the master lent us to one of those relatives of his, and while you helped below stairs at that big wedding-party I announced the guests. Maybe ye'll know nothing about it, old lady, being five years ago, but Mr. Sexton Blake was at that party."

"Then ye know him?" asked his wife in surprise.

"I reckon so," replied Jelks, with a frown. "Leastways, I thought I did. I ain't got such a bad memory for faces, Martha, and it was Mr. Blake himself who picked me up when I fell down them stairs. Ye remember? There was a loose rod, and I gave my leg a rare twisting. Ay, and Mr. Blake was a real gentleman, too—gave me a pound, he did, and it isn't likely that I'd forget his voice and his smile."

"It's a wonder he didn't recognise ye to-day, father," said Mrs. Jelks. "They do say that Mr. Blake never forgets a face once he's seen it. But there, I dare say it's all so much talk. And I can't stay here, wasting my time. I've got to order eggs and butter and—"

"Wait ye a minute!" interrupted her husband. "It's queer, you think, that Mr. Blake didn't recognise me? Maybe, old lady. But it's downright puzzling why I can't recognise Mr. Blake!"

The housekeeper stared.

"What are you trying to tell me, Jelks?" she asked firmly. "I know your little ways. There's something you haven't said yet."

"Then I'll tell ye!" said Jelks, with sudden vehemence. "That gentleman who saved m'lady and who is now with the master is no more Mr. Sexton Blake than I am! Ay, ye can stare!" he added, rising to his feet. "It's a fact, Martha! I'd swear to it!"

Mrs. Jelks was aghast.

"Ye're daft, father!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"But I'm not doddering!" said Jelks grimly. "And my eyesight's as good as ever it was, old lady, and so's my memory. That gent isn't Mr. Blake, that I know! But it's a real awkward thing to deal with. Maybe I'd better tell the master."

"Maybe ye'll do nothing of the kind!" interrupted his better half sharply. "Lor', father, whatever are ye thinking about? Mr. Blake has changed, I suppose, and, what with different clothes and—"

"It's no good, Martha—I know what I'm saying!" interrupted the old butler. "He ain't Mr. Blake. But if I tell the master he'll only call me a fool, and that'll make things worse."

Mrs. Jelks was thoroughly unconvinced.

"You'd best send the real Mr. Blake a telegram!" she said tartly. "That'll fetch him down here to prove that ye're right. Sakes alive, father, I can't make ye out! Just as if a gentleman would come here pretending to be Mr. Sexton Blake when he isn't Mr. Sexton Blake!"

She pulled her jacket on with an indignant tug, and prepared to leave.

"Wait!" said Jelks tensely. "A telegram, eh? You've hit it, Martha—you've hit it! That's what I'll do! I'll send Mr. Blake a telegram. If I'm wrong it won't do no harm, and if I'm right, as like as not Mr. Blake will send a reply. Then we'll know what to do. While you're in the village you'll send that telegram."

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At first Mrs. Jelks flatly refused, saying that she wouldn't be a party to any such nonsense. But her husband was so insistent, and he was apparently so set upon the plan, that at last she gave in.

And so, all unknown to Rupert Waldo, a telegram to Sexton Blake was dispatched that very afternoon. The Wonder-Man seldom made a miscalculation, and in this instance he could hardly be accounted careless.

He had been accepted without question by Lord Pengarth and his daughter. What earthly reason should he have for assuming that Jelks, the old butler, knew the real Sexton Blake by sight? If such a thought had entered his mind, Waldo had naturally dismissed it without the slightest consideration. The chance seemed too remote for serious reflection.

The butler's position was rather a delicate one. To openly denounce the visitor was out of the question, and he knew his master too well to approach him on the subject even in private. His only course was to communicate with Sexton Blake, and await the result.

In the meantime, Waldo was beginning to obtain a grip on the situation.

Lord Pengarth stood upon a rising knoll, his back to the wind, gazing across at the gaunt old castle. He had said very little to Waldo during the walk, and Waldo himself had remained silent—keenly studying his host. He had an idea that the earl would soon lose his reticence.

"A fine old pile, sir!" he ventured at length.

"Eh? What's that?" said Lord Pengarth, with a start. "Yes, yes! Pengarth Castle is one of the most ancient—one of the most honourable—inhabited castles in the whole of Cornwall. None can compare with it, Mr. Blake. For eight hundred years a Pengarth has lived under that roof. Think of it! Eight hundred years!"

"A wonderful record!" commented Waldo.

"Gadso! And does that snake Slingsby think that he'll turn me out?" demanded Lord Pengarth fiercely. "Does he imagine that a Pengarth will relinquish the castle to a stranger—a moneyed upstart, a common usurper with nothing behind his name but a cheap party-bought knighthood?"

"I am afraid Mr. Slingsby is optimistic," said Waldo. "You must remember, however, that I am in a state of almost complete ignorance regarding your affairs, Lord Pengarth. Not that I desire to share your confidence in any way—"

"Nonsense, sir! Nonsense!" interrupted Lord Pengarth. "I want to talk to you. I don't often have the opportunity of talking to anybody, and perhaps you can give me some advice. Heaven knows that I need it! Not that I can pay you!" he added, frowning. "I can't! Paupers are hardly in a position to pay your fees, Mr. Blake!"

Waldo waved a deprecating hand.

"Really, Lord Pengarth—" he began.

"I'm not ashamed of it!" broke in his lordship. "I've been robbed, sir—swindled, victimised, betrayed by that viper Slingsby. I'll tell you about him, and then you'll be able to judge. Come, we'll walk."

They paced slowly back towards the castle, and it was some moments before Lord Pengarth broke the silence. Waldo was genuinely curious to hear about this mysterious Mr. Slingsby. He had an instinctive feeling that Lord Pengarth was a man with a real grievance.

"For over fifteen years the tragedy has been developing," said the earl. "Heaven granted me no son, Mr. Blake, and when the Countess of Pengarth passed away I was left lonely and desolate, with only my daughter for comfort. At that time Pengarth Castle was rich. There were scores of servants—grooms, carriages, everything!"

"And to-day the great Pengarth estates are as rich as ever. Gaze over the valley, Mr. Blake," he added, raising his stick and pointing. "As far as the eye can see these rich lands have been controlled by the Pengarth family for generations and for centuries."

"A wonderful vista!" commented Waldo.

"And yet here stands the castle, desolate and poverty-stricken," said his lordship bitterly. "I, who should be reaping the benefit of this great estate, reap nothing. It is Simon Slingsby who holds the reins. Not that I blame him any more than I blame myself. I am a fool, Mr. Blake—a weak, blundering imbecile! Had I possessed an ounce of common-sense in the past, had I possessed an inkling of business instinct, this disaster would never have come. The tragedy you see is the tragedy of one man's trust in another."

"Slingsby betrayed you!"

"Basely—hideously!" replied Lord Pengarth, his voice quivering with intense emotion. "Forgive me, Mr. Blake, for talking to you in this way, but I need it. For months I have been pent up—unable to speak to any save my own child. And she knows all. Moreover, why should I bring worry to her pretty head? Heaven knows, she

has enough trouble managing my house. As for appearances, we gave them up years ago. Throughout Cornwall we are known as the titled paupers."

He bowed his head, and Waldo had nothing to say. The old man's agony was intense.

"From boyhood I had known Simon Slingsby as the family lawyer—the man who managed our affairs, and who had the implicit trust of the countess and myself," continued his lordship at length. "I never questioned his statements, I never even read his documents presented to me for signature. I signed them trustingly, believing this man to be my friend and adviser. At that time the Pengarth fortunes were considerable."

"And what caused the crash?" asked Waldo quietly.

"There was no crash, sir—no crash!" said the earl. "It has been a gradual process—extending over many years. Sometimes I am ready to convince myself that there is more than legend in the old family curse. For it was after the burglary, seventeen years ago, that the first signs of trouble commenced. The Countess of Pengarth's jewels were stolen at that time, Mr. Blake—and with them the historic Pengarth Cross."

"Possibly you have some recollection of the crime? The jewels were never recovered—the thief was clever enough to make his escape without leaving a trace."

Waldo remembered nothing of the affair, but he nodded.

"Yes, now you mention it, I recall the case," he replied. "And was there any special significance attached to this Pengarth Cross?"

"Only the significance of legend," replied his lordship. "Since that date, Mr. Blake, matters have grown gradually more serious. They have gone from bad to worse, until now—well, sir, I have been given to understand that I am virtually a trespasser on this property."

"A trespasser?" repeated Waldo.

"That reptile Slingsby holds the title-deeds!" exclaimed Lord Pengarth, his whole manner grim and fierce. "His scheming plans have at last matured, and I am on the point of being turned out. Indeed, Slingsby has sold the castle—he has sold the entire estate—and I am soon to be evicted, like any drunken cottager who fails to pay his rent!"

Waldo shook his head in silent sympathy.

"What is your advice, Mr. Blake?" demanded Lord Pengarth, turning upon his companion and grasping him. "What is your suggestion? Shall I resist this accursed villain? Shall I refuse to leave? Or shall I defy these usurpers?"

"Defy them!" replied Waldo promptly. "Stand your ground, Lord Pengarth, and send this Slingsby viper about his business!"

His lordship actually smiled, but it was a fierce smile.

"Splendid!" he said gruffly. "That's the advice I wanted. Not that it would have made any difference, whatever advice you had given me," he added frankly. "For no power on earth will force me out of the castle! A Pengarth has lived here for eight hundred years! The invader will conquer over my dead body! Here I am, and here I remain—and let those who would arouse me beware!"

He spoke with concentrated intensity, and Waldo could do nothing but admire the old man's spirit—that same spirit which had characterised the Pengarth family throughout the centuries.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Sexton Blake is Amused.



MR. SEXTON BLAKE, the celebrated criminologist, looked round rather impatiently as Tinker appeared at the door of the laboratory.

"I distinctly told you, Tinker, that I didn't want you to disturb me!" he said irritably. "This experiment is delicate, and—"

"Sorry, guv'nor," interrupted Tinker, "but it's a telegram!"

"Take it away! I don't want to see it!"

"But it seems urgent—"

"Confound you, Tinker, nine telegrams out of ten seem urgent—and they are no more urgent than four meals a day are necessary for the human frame!" said Blake curtly. "People bother me with their trivialities, and are aggrieved when I refuse to pander to their whims! Go away, Tinker! Open the telegram yourself and deal with it!"

"I've opened it, guv'nor," said Tinker. "You told me to attend to all business this evening—"

"Then for Heaven's sake carry out your instructions, and leave me alone!" broke in the detective tartly. "My mind must be concentrated on this stuff. Peculiarly enough, Tinker, at the present moment you inspire me with fury. And unless you get out of that doorway I shall have no alternative but to throw a bottle at you!"

Tinker hesitated.

It was evening, and Sexton Blake's Baker Street chambers were quiet. He was intent upon completing this laboratory task, and he had given strict orders that he was not to be disturbed. Under ordinary circumstances Tinker would have refrained from interrupting his master. But this telegram seemed to require special attention.

"I think you ought to read it, sir," said Tinker firmly.

He dodged in alarm and closed the door, for Sexton Blake had picked up a big glass retort in a most suggestive manner. Tinker retired to the consulting-room and grunted.

"He's always the same when he's messing about with those chemicals!" he grumbled. "Like a bear with a sore head! The chances are he won't appear until about three o'clock in the morning. So what am I going to do about this business?"

He looked at the telegram again, and frowned.

"Sexton Blake,
Baker Street,
London.

"Gentleman arrived this afternoon calling himself Sexton Blake. Now staying here as Lord Pengarth's guest. Please wire if in order or not. Suspect deception.

"JELKS (Butler),
Pengarth Castle."

"I don't know who Jelks is, but he's a pretty smart chap for a butler," mused Tinker thoughtfully. "And if this isn't urgent, what is? Somebody staying at Pengarth Castle as Sexton Blake! And the guv'nor's here, wasting his time on that silly laboratory work!"

Tinker was rather disgusted. He sat down in a chair and glared round the

room helplessly. He had been having a trying time for the past two days, and was longing for a change.

His famous master had got into one of his "touchy" moods. There had been no case to interest him for some time, and he had been irritated for weeks by spending his energies on affairs which turned out to be trivial and uninteresting.

As a balm to this period of inactivity Blake had now turned to his laboratory. It wouldn't have mattered so much if the experiment had been essential to a criminal investigation. It wasn't. And Tinker wondered what he should do about this telegram.

He decided that it would be better to send an answer, telling Jelks that Sexton Blake was in London, and that he had better get the police on the job. Then he concluded that it would be better to give his master a couple of hours. The telegram wouldn't be delivered until the morning, anyhow, so there was no hurry about its dispatch.

Within forty minutes Blake made an unexpected appearance.

"A success, Tinker!" he observed, yawning. "I reached my desired end long before I anticipated. Well, has anything startling happened? There's no need to look at me so morosely, young 'un."

"What about this telegram, sir?" asked Tinker. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to look at it now? It may not be important, but there's no telling. Personally I think something ought to be done."

He spoke indifferently, being rather huffed, but he watched Blake with intentness as the latter glanced over the message. Sexton Blake's only emotion was amusement.

"This appears to be interesting, Tinker," he murmured. "So a gentleman is now staying at Pengarth Castle under my name? I can only conclude that he is there for nefarious purposes. What is the time? Barely eight o'clock. We will look in at one of the musical comedies. I am in the mood for a little relaxation."

"But what about this wire?"

"To the best of my belief, there is a midnight train to Cornwall," said Sexton Blake smoothly. "We will travel down personally, and have a look into this affair first hand. It will probably be a wicked waste of time, but as I shall be neglecting no important work it won't matter."

Tinker was quite pleased. He hadn't expected his master to go all the way down to Cornwall to investigate the little mystery. But it was just as well, for perhaps the journey would bring Sexton Blake out of his present contrary mood.

Fate was working overtime against Rupert Waldo!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. The Invader.



"GOOD-MORNING, Mr. Blake!" said Lady Betty briskly as Waldo came downstairs. "You're just in time! My father ought to be here in less than a minute, and breakfast is waiting."

The hall at Pengarth Castle was used as a dining-room—not the entire apartment,

but a small corner of it, where an old-fashioned window allowed one to look

out upon the weed-grown terrace and the ragged lawns.

It was a brilliant morning—as summer-like as the previous day had been wintry. The storm had gone, leaving the air peaceful and balmy, with a hot sun shining down from a cloudless sky.

Waldo had slept well, and he was very interested in his novel surroundings. The more he thought of Lord Pengarth's position, the more he was convinced that the old earl was a victim of misplaced trust. There had been no riotous expenditure of money in his lordship's past—no reckless gambling which had resulted in his own downfall. The unknown Simon Slingsby was the villain in the case.

From Waldo's point of view, there was nothing to be gained by remaining. There was not much chance for him here—in an impoverished castle, where there was nothing worth stealing except one or two rare "old masters." Even these were not Lord Pengarth's property, since they had been sold over his head.

But Waldo lingered. He decided to wait and see how things developed. He was personally interested, and from his point of view that was all that mattered. The Wonder-Man was no common grabber, but a real artist. And a dim plan had already begun to take shape in his fertile mind.

Lord Pengarth came downstairs, grumbling about the draughts in his bed-room, and he took his seat at the table and gave Waldo a curt nod. As a host, he was scarcely the ideal.

"Any letters?" he demanded. "Yes, yes! What's this? Upon my soul! One from that infernal Sir William! I won't open it! Do you hear me, Betty? I won't open it!"

"I wouldn't if I were you, dad," said Lady Betty, as she prepared to pour out the coffee. "It'll only upset your appetite, and you'll be cross all day. Leave it until you get into the library."

The earl glared at her over the top of his spectacles.

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" he snorted. "Have I to ask my daughter's permission before I can open my own letters? Upon my soul, Betty, you're getting impudent!"

She smiled, and took no further notice. And Lord Pengarth, seizing a knife, slit the envelope open with a vicious thrust. He pulled out the letter, adjusted the glasses, and commenced reading. Then, to the surprise of Waldo, and the consternation of his daughter, he leapt to his feet, sending the heavy chair over with a crash.

"I won't admit him!" roared Lord Pengarth, pacing up and down. "No, by gad! I won't let him set foot into the place! The rascal—the upstart! This is more than flesh and blood can stand!"

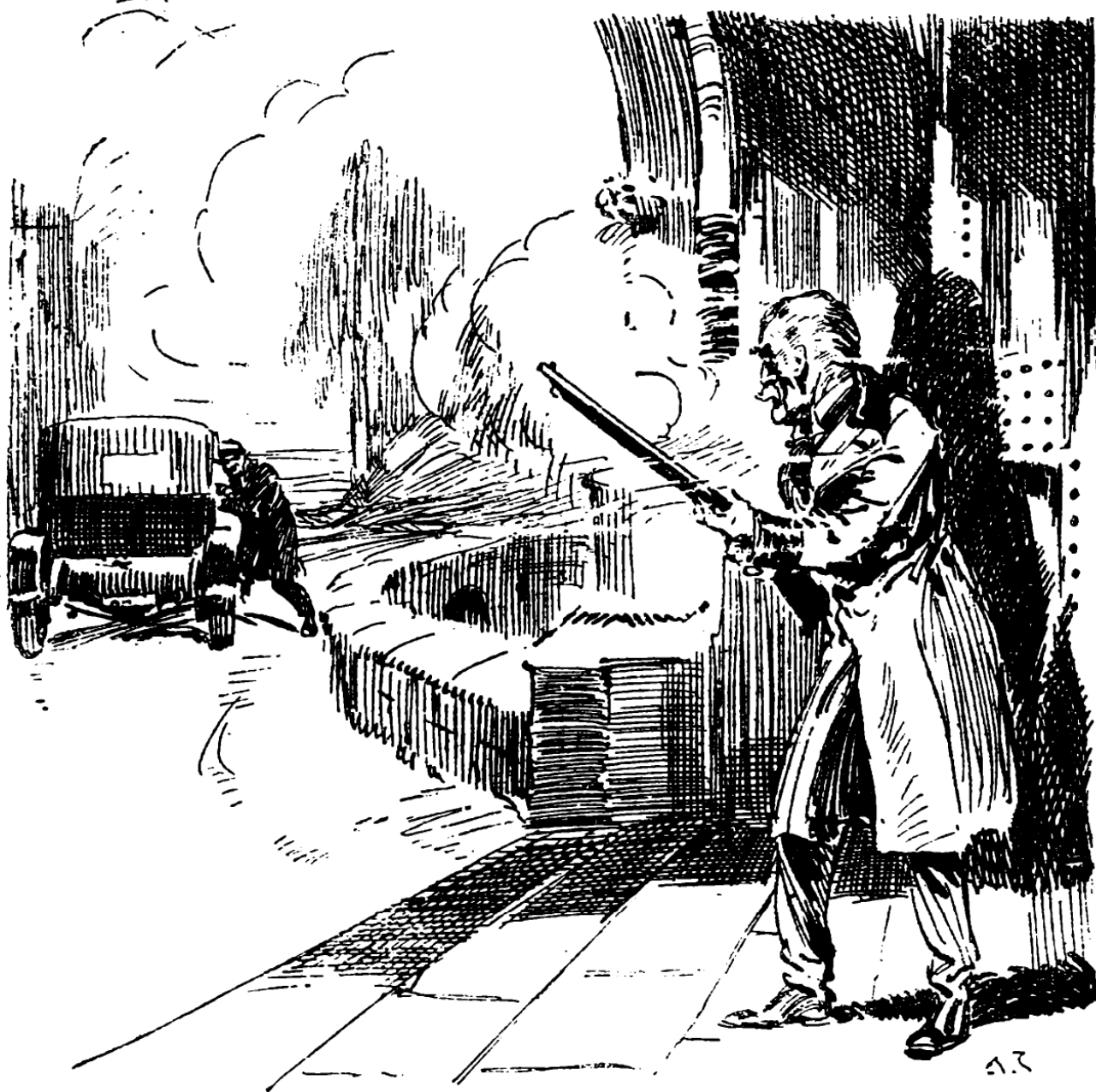
"What ever is the matter, father?" asked Lady Betty, running over to him.

"Matter!" thundered his lordship. "That rascal, Sir William Brag, is coming here this morning to take possession! We are to be turned out, Betty—pitched out of Pengarth Castle this morning! Do you understand—this morning?"

Lady Betty was distressed and alarmed.

"There must be a mistake, father," she ventured.

"There is no mistake!" snapped the earl. "The man states his intentions in plain language. Good gad! He's blunt to the point of insolence. He has bought the property, and intends to enter into possession to-day. And he will be pleased, mark you, if I can make arrange-



"You'll hear more about this!" gasped Sir William as he bolted for the car. "Drive away, Parker—Mr. Slingsby's house. And hurry! That old man's mad—raving mad!" (See page 19.)

ments to hand him the keys upon arrival, and make my own arrangements for leaving!"

Lady Betty lost some of her colour.

"Oh, dad," she exclaimed, "what shall we do?"

Lord Pengarth paced up and down, hitting his heavy stick fiercely upon the floor. And Waldo watched silently. The crisis, apparently, had arrived.

Sir William Brag had something to be said in his favour. In all probability, he had bought the property in good faith, and naturally he expected to take possession of it. But it was characteristic of Lord Pengarth to vent his wrath upon any head that happened to be nearest.

"What shall we do?" repeated his lordship after a while. "I'll tell you what we shall do! Jelks—Jelks! Confound the man! Where the deuce are you, Jelks? Never about when you're wanted—"

"Are you calling, sir?" asked Jelks, as he appeared breathlessly from one of the angles of the old hall.

"Yes, confound you, I am!" shouted Lord Pengarth. "Bolt every door! Put every bar in position! And if anybody comes here, refuse them admittance. If necessary, shoot them!" he added grimly.

"Yes, your lordship!" said Jelks, with a kind of feverish joy. "I'll get the gun ready at once!"

Lord Pengarth sat down at the table again and breathed hard.

"I'll show them whether I'm in earnest or not!" he said fiercely. "I'll show them whether a Pengarth will tamely submit to being ejected from his

own castle! I'll shoot them, by gad! That's what we did hundreds of years ago. And that's what we'll do now! Death to the invader!"

"But, father, we're not living in the Middle Ages now!" protested his daughter gently. "It'll be dreadful if you resist Sir William. He has bought the property, and we ought to explain to him—"

"I'll explain nothing!" roared her father. "I don't care what he's bought—I don't care whether we're in the Middle Ages or not! This is my castle, and no usurper will set foot inside it! What's this? Coffee? It's cold, Betty—stone cold! Haven't I told you fifty times that I won't drink cold coffee? Take the infernal stuff away!"

He stirred it vigorously and drank.

"You intend to defy Sir William when he arrives?" asked Waldo, with interest. "I don't want to interfere, Lord Pengarth, and perhaps I had better take my leave—"

"You will do nothing of the kind!" interrupted his lordship. "I want you here, Mr. Blake—I want you to help me in resisting these rascally invaders!"

Lady Betty looked alarmed.

"Oh, father, you can't ask Mr. Blake to do that!" she said quickly. "It isn't right—he's our guest. And if you resist Sir William, it's almost the same as resisting the law—"

"Who cares about the law?" rapped out her father, as he attacked the eggs and bacon. "Here, in my own castle, I make my own laws! The Pengarths have always done so—and always will, by gad! What do you say, Mr. Blake? Do you suggest that I should tamely

submit—that I should leave my ancestral home at the command of this interloping jackanapes?"

Waldo shook his head.

"I strongly advise you to remain firm, Lord Pengarth," he replied. "Resist to the last ditch. The Pengarths have never surrendered in the past, and it is your duty to live up to the traditions of the family."

"Splendid, sir—well said!" roared Lord Pengarth approvingly. "And I will resist—as you say, to the last ditch! I am glad you are here, sir—infernally glad! Just the kind of man I want by my side! I've had enough of feminine weakness!" he added, glaring at his unhappy daughter.

Lady Betty glanced rather appealingly at Waldo, but said nothing. She didn't quite understand it. She had expected a man like Sexton Blake to talk Lord Pengarth round, and to show him the futility of resisting the law. It upset all her calculations to find that the guest was urging his lordship to fight.

But Waldo was not only amused, but thoroughly interested. And he was anxious to see how the affair developed. Resistance was the one thing necessary in order to precipitate some excitement. And Waldo lived for excitement. He grasped at the nearest possibility of it.

"Possibly my advice to your father struck you as being somewhat strange," said Waldo, after breakfast, when Lord Pengarth had gone off to make an inspection of the doors and windows. "But I can assure you, Lady Betty, I have excellent reasons."

"But, Mr. Blake it seems so futile!" said the girl earnestly. "We know that Mr. Slingsby has swindled us, but he cannot be touched by the law. My father has signed all the documents unwittingly, and Mr. Slingsby is lawfully in the right."

"Exactly!" agreed Waldo.

"And Sir William Brag is only exercising his legal claim when he demands possession of Pengarth Castle," went on Lady Betty. "It would be foolish to resist—it would only lead to terrible trouble. And I fear it would finally result in sheer humiliation. For Sir William will probably appeal to the sheriff of the county, and have us ejected. We couldn't stand that, Mr. Waldo. It would be too dreadful!"

Waldo smiled reassuringly.

"Take my word for it, Lady Betty, there will be no such disaster as that," he said smoothly. "I have decided to help your father, and although I do not wish to make any rash promises, I rather fancy your days of anguish will now be few. I admire Lord Pengarth's fine independence—his undying spirit of dogged resistance."

"Yes, he is a real Pengarth," said Lady Betty thoughtfully. "I wonder what you mean, Mr. Blake? How can you help us? As far as I can see, it only remains for us to go as quietly and as unobtrusively as possible. Perhaps I shall be able to obtain some employment—"

"Don't think of it!" interrupted Waldo lightly. "Leave everything to me. Hallo! A motor-car, unless I'm mistaken. Sir William has arrived to turn the despot out of his castle. The next episode promises to be rather entertaining."

He walked to the nearest window and looked out upon the terrace. A fine limousine had just driven up, and it held a solitary occupant, in addition to the chauffeur.

Sir William Brag had come to take over his new domain.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Two Different Things.



SIR WILLIAM BRAG looked what he was—a merchant prince who had risen from the lowest rung. He was, in fact, a woollens manufacturer. Brag's Invincible Serge was famous throughout the cloth-trade.

He was a short, stoutish man, but in no way resembled the typical parvenu. His face was not red, and his voice was not blaring. In repose, as now, he had a refined, almost aristocratic, appearance. There was a certain dignity about him as he stood surveying the gaunt old castle.

Finally, he approached the great door and pulled at the bell. Waldo heard it jangling somewhere in the rear. By looking through one of the side mulioned windows, the Wonder-Man could just see Sir William as he stood there waiting.

Jelks answered the ring, but he did not open the door. Instead, he slid back the small wicket, and gazed out through the strong iron bars.

"Open the door, please!" said the visitor. "What's the idea of this extraordinary business? I have come here to see Lord Pengarth. I am Sir William Brag."

"I am sorry, sir, but Lord Pengarth is not at home to any visitors," replied Jelks firmly. "If you will be good enough to communicate by letter—"

"I will do nothing of the sort!" interrupted Sir William angrily. "My correspondence with Lord Pengarth has been absolutely one-sided. I have never received a line from him, and his attitude is beyond all understanding. I am here to settle this matter once and for all."

Jelks sighed.

"I am sorry, sir, but the master gave very strict orders," he replied.

"Open this door at once, and don't stand there arguing!" shouted Sir William. "Do you hear me, you infernal lackey? Do you think I'm going to be defied by a common servant? Open the door!"

Sir William's manner betrayed his origin. He had schooled himself for years to look dignified and refined. But when he was angry his repose vanished. He became almost vulgar in expression, and his carefully trained voice lost all its polish.

"I regret, sir, that I cannot open the door," said Jelks.

"You—you fool!" roared Sir William. "Do you realise that I'm the owner of this property? It's mine—every inch of it! Bought and paid for! Why, confound you, I hold the title deeds in my pocket! Open this door at once!"

But Jelks merely shook his head again.

"Lord Pengarth's orders were final, sir," he replied. "I will take him a message if you desire it."

"I've never heard of such idiocy in my life!" raved Sir William. "Yes, take him a message. Tell him that I want to speak to him. That's all. Here, give him this card!"

Fairly quivering with indignation, Sir William Brag scrawled something on one of his cards and passed it through the bars. Jelks took it with becoming dignity and retired. And Waldo, watch-

ing from the little window, chuckled with enjoyment.

There was something really original about this affair. And Sir William Brag, for all his arrogance, was more to be pitied than blamed. He had bought the property from the Launceston lawyer, and, quite naturally, he desired to take possession.

Neither he nor Mr. Simon Slingsby had dreamed that Lord Pengarth would resist. It had never occurred to them that the stubborn old earl might bolt himself in his castle and refuse to shift. Here, in this twentieth century, his lordship was acting in exactly the same way as his ancestors might have acted in medieval times.

There was a quaintness about the situation which attracted Waldo's whimsical mood. And he was determined to do everything possible to spur his lordship on. Something of the spirit of Pengarth Castle was entering his own veins, and he, too, looked upon Sir William Brag as an impudent intruder.

More money and title deeds counted for nothing. This was a case of man against man, and Lord Pengarth, with the knowledge that his ancestors had always owned this property, had the moral right on his side.

His lordship was waiting in the big hall, pacing up and down, and muttering to himself. He glared at Jelks as the butler stood before him. Jelks was holding out the card.

"What's this?" rapped out Lord Pengarth.

"Sir William asked me to present it to you, my lord," said Jelks.

"Then take it away!" roared the Earl of Pengarth. "Do you hear me, Jelks? Take it away! I won't look at it."

He grabbed the card and adjusted his spectacles so fiercely that he nearly knocked them off.

"H'm! What's this? 'A few words in private will be much appreciated.' Oh, will they?" he exclaimed grimly. "We'll see about that, Jelks. We'll see about that. Like his confounded impudence!"

"Sir William is waiting, my lord!" exclaimed Jelks tentatively.

"Let him wait!" stormed Lord Pengarth. "And I won't see him, either! I won't demean myself by arguing with the rascal! Go and tell him that he can get off my premises, Jelks!"

"Yes, my lord," said Jelks.

"Come here, sir! Don't walk off like that!" thundered the earl. "What on earth's the matter with you, Jelks? I'll go to the door myself, and, what's more, I'll let this impudent tradesman have a piece of my mind! Gad, I'll send him off!"

"Please, dad," urged Lady Betty, taking his arm. "you'll only excite yourself, and you know the doctor has told you to be careful! Besides, Sir William is probably acting in all innocence."

"Fiddlesticks!" shouted her father.

"As for the doctor, he is a fool! All doctors are fools! For twenty years they've been telling me that I'm on the point of dying, and I'm stronger than ever I was. Go away, child, and leave this to me!"

He pushed her arm away, set his shoulders back, and marched towards the great door with a light in his eye which boded ill for the waiting Sir William Brag.

Fuming and fretting, Sir William waited.

He was in a fine state of fury and indignation. For weeks he had been negotiating about this castle. He had seen an advertisement in one of the

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The PAUPER of PENGARTH CASTLE

(Continued from page 10.)

papers, and had made inquiries. And although he had never seen the interior, this wasn't really necessary. For Pengarth Castle was one of the most historic piles in the West of England.

And, what was more to Sir William's liking, it was in the market cheap. The price of the castle and the magnificent park land struck the woollens merchant as being ridiculously low. He had interviewed Mr. Simon Slingsby, and he had heard all about Lord Pengarth's die-hard attitude.

And as it was not necessary to deal direct with his lordship, the entire transaction had been completed between himself and Mr. Slingsby. On the previous day the final deeds had been signed and witnessed, and the final cheque paid.

Pengarth Castle and Pengarth Park now belonged to Sir William Brag in their entirety. He was gazing upon his own domain, and the door of the castle was barred against him, and he could gain no admittance. The situation was not only irritating, but positively ridiculous.

This was no villa, a small house among hundreds of others. Pengarth was a veritable fortress, with oaken doors and iron bars that had withstood many a siege. If the earl was obstinate enough, he could withstand any invasion or attack short of artillery.

But Sir William refused to admit this possibility. A few private words with his lordship, and the latter would realise his position, and relinquish the castle.

Possibly there was a misunderstanding, and that could be cleared up in a very short time. Sir William paled as he thought of the other alternative. Why, the earl might resist for weeks—he might refuse to get out, even if the police were brought! It would require a regiment to take the castle by storm.

At this alarming point in his thoughts, Sir William observed the figure of Lord Pengarth behind the bars of the wicket gate. Sir William was rather startled. Seldom had he seen such a fierce, grim visage.

"Well, sir?" demanded the earl tensely.

"Er—really!" protested Sir William, confused. "If you will give instructions for the door to be opened, so that I may talk in private—"

"I have no private business with interlopers, sir!" thundered Lord Pengarth. "Leave this property at once, and never return! Do you hear me? The Pengarths have never surrendered, and never will!"

Sir William felt more helpless than ever.

"But—but this is preposterous!" he broke out. "Do you realise, Lord Pengarth, that I have bought this castle?"

His lordship laughed.

"I don't care if you have bought the whole of England!" he replied. "This is my home—the home of my ancestors—and no power on earth will make me shift from it! So you can go back to that rat, Simon Slingsby, and obtain what consolation you may!"

Sir William lost all control of himself.

"You're mad!" he shouted furiously. "I demand admittance! Good heavens! Do you think I have paid tens of thousands of pounds for nothing? This is my property, and I demand instant

admittance! What is more, Lord Pengarth, I shall take full means to obtain redress for this extraordinary conduct!"

The Earl of Pengarth quivered.

"Go!" he thundered. "Good gad! Do you imagine that I will allow a man of your type to walk these ancient halls? Never, sir! I don't care what you have paid, and I don't care what you do! While I live, you will never cross this threshold!"

"I will have you ejected by force!" yelled Sir William.

"Get out, before I shoot you!" retorted the earl. "Jelks—Jelks! Bring that gun! By gad, sir, I mean it! I'll give you two minutes to get out of sight! Jelks, you old rogue! Where's that gun?"

"Coming, sir!" came the voice of the scared butler.

Sir William went a greyish colour. There was something about Lord Pengarth's attitude which meant grim business. And the prospect of being peppered at close quarters with a shot-gun was not exactly enticing.

"You'll hear more about this!" gasped Sir William frantically.

He bolted to his car like a rabbit, and leapt in.

"Drive away, Parker!" he gasped. "Drive to Launceston—Mr. Slingsby's house! And hurry! This old man's mad—raving mad!"

"Yes, sir," said the chauffeur breathlessly.

He went round the drive, and he had hardly taken the car a hundred yards before a shattering report came from the main door of the castle. A cloud of smoke hovered there. And Sir William went positively white.

The Earl of Pengarth had fired a shot into the air as an evidence of his determination. And Sir William drove off to Launceston with a sensation of unreality.

He had bought Pengarth Castle, but that was all it amounted to. Buying the place, and taking possession, were two entirely different things!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. The Situation is Entertaining.



"LOOKS more like a ruin than an inhabited castle, guv'nor," remarked Tinker interestedly. "I say, it strikes me we've been hoaxed! Somebody has been having a lark, sir."

Sexton Blake shook his head.

"I think not, Tinker," he replied. "I will admit that Pengarth Castle has a deserted, dilapidated air, but I know for a fact that the earl lives here with his daughter. They are greatly impoverished, and Lord Pengarth is more or less of a hermit."

They had turned the bend in the drive, and were just driving up to the main frontage of the castle. Arriving in Launceston early, they had breakfasted, and Blake had easily hired a motor-car.

Pengarth Castle was looking picturesque in the sunshine. But no blue sky and no sunlight could disguise the pitiful air of neglect. Both Blake and Tinker regarded the old pile with interest as they drove up.

On the road from Launceston they had passed a big limousine, and had caught sight of a furious-looking man in the interior. Both had wondered if this stranger had just come from the castle. And they had received confirmation

almost at once, for the neglected drive showed distinct traces of motor-car tracks.

Blake shut off his engine as they arrived opposite the moss-grown steps. Then they walked up, and Blake pulled the heavy bell. Dimly, they heard the jangling far away.

"I believe the place is ruined, guv'nor," murmured Tinker. "It seems impossible that anybody can live here. There's not a soul about—"

The little wicket opened, and the face of Jelks appeared.

"Mr. Blake!" he ejaculated hoarsely.

Jelks was trembling with excitement. At the very first glimpse, he recognised the famous detective. That five-year-old incident came back to him with perfect clarity. It was this gentleman who had assisted him to his feet, after he had fallen over a loosened stair-rod.

"You are Jelks, I take it?" said Sexton Blake. "I seem to remember your face, Jelks. It was you who sent me a telegram—"

"Yes, sir—yes!" whispered the butler. "There is a gentleman staying here who calls himself by your name! He's imposing on the master, and I'm glad you've come, sir! I'm mortal glad!"

"Well, Jelks, don't you think it would be a good idea to open the door?" asked Blake smoothly. "Surely it is not necessary to talk through this wicket?"

"No, sir—beg pardon, sir!" muttered Jelks. "But I'm afraid of his lordship, sir! I've got strict orders to admit nobody. So I'd be obliged, sir, if you'd keep as quiet as mice! The young gentleman is a friend of yours, sir?"

"I'm Mr. Blake's assistant," said Tinker. "What's the idea of this mystery? Anybody might think we were planning to burgle the place, or something!"

Stealthily, Jelks withdrew the bolts, and Blake gave Tinker a warning glance. When the great door opened, they stole silently in. And Jelks set the bolts once more, and then led the way to a narrow archway in the quaint old lobby.

Instead of taking the new arrivals straight into the hall, he led them down a narrow, solemn passage, and by a roundabout route into a cold, musty-smelling apartment, which had not been used for years.

"We can talk here, sir," said Jelks, resuming his normal voice. "Nobody can hear, and I'm relieved that the master doesn't know yet. There's been rare happenin's this morning, sir—only just before you came, too!"

And, in a somewhat scared voice, Jelks gave a brief account of Sir William Brag's visit, and the outcome of it.

"By jingo, our worthy host appears to be a bit of a firebrand!" remarked Tinker, as he digested the story. "Sent him off, and fired a shot after him—eh? That's the real old-fashioned way, guv'nor! We shall have to be careful about meeting old Pengarth!"

"That ye will, sir, an' no mistake!" agreed Jelks earnestly. "Like as not, his lordship will turn ye out befor' ye can have time to explain! This other gent has wormed his way into the master's confidences, an' they're like brothers! The queerest thing I ever saw, sir! But, then, this other gent saved my Lady Betty's life, an' that makes a real difference!"

Sexton Blake was thoughtful for a few moments. This stranger had gained admittance to the castle by a mere chance, it seemed. Rendering a service to Lady Betty, he had brought her home, and had naturally been asked to stay. But it was a poser why he had given his name as "Sexton Blake." The man

was obviously up to some mischief, or he would never have adopted such a subterfuge.

Blake did not quite understand the affair of Sir William Bragg. He thought the butler had got hold of it wrong. If Sir William was really in possession of the title-deeds, Lord Pengarth would never refuse him admittance. It was unthinkable. But Sexton Blake didn't know Lord Pengarth yet.

"As far as you know, we have been admitted without anybody knowing?" he asked.

"Yes, sir! The master and the other gentleman are in the library, and the windows overlook the north wing," explained Jelks. "My lady is upstairs, so I don't think your arrival is known yet."

"I would like to get a glimpse of this masquerader without his knowing it, if I could," said Blake thoughtfully. "It would be a big help—"

"Ay, sir, I've got it!" interrupted Jelks quickly. "I never thought of it before! There is a way, sure enough!"

Without explaining he led the way out of the apartment, and they went along a hollow-sounding paved passage with an arched roof. After one or two turns Jelks led the way through a tiny slit of a stone doorway. They were now in almost total darkness. And the passage which Jelks walked along was extremely narrow.

"This way, sir!" he whispered. "Just ye look here, an' you'll see right into the library. At one time o' day this was a secret passage, but his lordship had it opened years ago."

He fumbled in the darkness and slid something back along the wall at about the height of his shoulders. Then, drawing Sexton Blake further along, he whispered for him to look.

Blake found himself opposite a round kind of spy-hole as big as a tea-saucer. He was looking straight into Lord Pengarth's library. And at the very first glance Blake caught his breath in sharply.

For he was looking straight at Waldo, the Wonder-Man!

Waldo was taking his ease on a soft lounge, and indulging in a cigar. Lord Pengarth was standing with his back to the fireplace, and he was grimly declaring that he would never give way. He liked this visitor of his—this Blake. He was a man after his own heart!

For Waldo had been urging Lord Pengarth on from the very start, and was still doing so. After his daughter's continuous advice that they should quietly vacate the castle, Waldo's attitude of defiance was agreeable.

Neither of the men was aware of a change in the appearance of the wall.

The spy-hole was high in the library wall, and cunningly concealed at the base of some ornamental moulding. And so, although the hole was so big, only the sharpest of sharp eyes could have detected it from the library.

Blake closed the little shutter, and he and Jelks and Tinker made their way out of the gloomy passage.

"Well, sir—well?" asked Jelks tensely.

"You acted with great discretion in telegraphing me last night, Jelks," said Sexton Blake quietly. "The man in Lord Pengarth's company is a famous criminal named Rupert Waldo."

Tinker clutched at the air.

"Waldo!" he gasped excitedly.

"There is no necessity to go into those melodramatic gestures, Tinker," said Blake. "I am very glad we came. I cannot possibly imagine what Waldo's game can be, but there is no question of its crookedness."

"The—the man is a criminal, sir?"

asked Jelks in alarm. "May the saints save us! What can he be doing here? An' he savin' m'lady's life, too! I don't believe it, sir! There's trickery—"

"No, Jelks, I can quite believe that Waldo saved Lady Betty's life in the way you have described," said Sexton Blake. "Although a dangerous criminal, he has a gallant side to his character. Waldo, indeed, is a most surprising man. And the situation is rather awkward. We cannot deal with him as we would with any ordinary malefactor."

"That's a fact, sir!" agreed Tinker. "With his terrific strength and his monkey tricks he can evade us without any trouble. And even if we brought a dozen policemen here, he'd still escape us!"

Blake frowned.

"For once, Tinker, you have not exaggerated," he said thoughtfully. "Your statement sounds absurd, but it happens to be the truth. I think I shall face Waldo at once and ask him what his game is. There is no sense in letting this deception go on."

"You'll take the bull by the horns, sir?" asked Tinker eagerly.

"Yes, it is the better way."

Blake had decided on brisk action. He believed that Waldo was merely pandering to his craving for the unusual. He could hope to gain nothing by staying in this poverty-stricken castle. And, obviously, he had given the false name in order to obtain Lord Pengarth's confidence. It was high time that his lordship was undeceived.

"Jelks, you will please go into the library and announce us in the formal manner—Mr. Blake and Mr. Tinker," said the detective. "You can then leave the rest to me."

"But the master gave orders, sir—" "I will take all responsibility," interrupted Blake.

There was something about his manner which Jelks could not stand up against. Although agitated and worried, he led the way to the library, knocked at the door, and entered.

"If you please, my lord—" he began.

"Well?" barked Lord Pengarth, looking across the quaint, old-fashioned apartment. "What is it you want, Jelks? I distinctly told you not to bother me! Bless my soul, I can't have five minutes alone without an interruption from you! What do you want, sir?"

"Mr. Blake, my lord, and Mr. Tinker!" announced Jelks, with a kind of gasp.

Sexton Blake and Tinker entered quickly, and Lord Pengarth stared in anger and amazement. To Tinker's astonishment Rupert Waldo remained at his ease on the lounge. A genial smile played round his mouth.

"Splendid!" he murmured. "If there was one thing required to make the situation entertaining that one thing has happened. Blake, old man, how are you? Haven't seen you for weeks!"

The Wonder-Man's cool assurance was at his service on the flash. He rose leisurely, and for a moment he and Blake eyed one another.

"What are you doing here, Waldo?" demanded Blake quietly.

"Confound it, what's all this business?" roared Lord Pengarth, breaking in. "And who, sir, are you? And what do you mean by addressing Mr. Blake as Waldo? Jelks, didn't I tell you to admit nobody—"

"One moment, Lord Pengarth—please!" interrupted Waldo smoothly. "I must confess to a little deception. I had hoped that it would continue longer, but no matter. In one way the

situation has increased the interest, for it is always gratifying to meet old friends."

"I don't understand you, sir!" growled the earl.

"But you will, sir—you will!" said Waldo patiently. "I offer you my humble apologies. I am not Mr. Sexton Blake, as I intimated—for Mr. Sexton Blake now stands before you, accompanied by his brilliant young assistant, Tinker. Are they not a handsome pair?"

Lord Pengarth spluttered.

"Have you gone mad, sir?" he demanded, glaring.

"I am merely pointing out that I am not everything I have appeared to be," replied Waldo gracefully. "The time has arrived for me to make my bow and depart in peace. So, Lord Pengarth, with your permission—and yours, Blake—I will leave the stage. Good-morning, gentlemen! It is quite possible that we shall soon meet again!"

He bowed, smiled, and strolled leisurely out of the library.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. Advice on Both Sides.



SEXTON BLAKE had made no attempt to hinder Waldo's departure, for the simple reason that any such attempt would have been foredoomed to failure. He, Tinker, Lord Pengarth, and Jelks, with their united efforts, could not have stopped Waldo from going, and he knew it.

For the Wonder-Man had earned his name by reason of his amazing strength and cat-like agility. He had been known to outwit a dozen detectives, even at close quarters. It was far better to let him walk out unhindered, and thus avert a scene—for he would have walked out, in any case.

Everybody was startled—at least, Lord Pengarth and Jelks were. They watched Waldo go rather blankly. He passed through the doorway and completely vanished. Even Lady Betty, who came in a moment later, had seen no sign of the Wonder-Man.

"Oh!" she exclaimed as she entered. "I am sorry! I did not know there were visitors—"

"Jelks!" thundered Lord Pengarth, recovering himself. "Jelks, go out and bring Mr. Blake back at once! I don't know what he means by that extraordinary story of his!"

"The man was speaking the truth, Lord Pengarth," interrupted Blake. "He is Waldo, a criminal, and I am Sexton Blake. If any doubt lingers in your mind with regard to that point I can prove my identity at once."

"Prove nothing, sir!" roared the earl. "Jelks, what the devil do you mean by admitting these people? More of Slingsby's spies? The sheriff, probably, with a warrant to have me ejected. You infernal fool, didn't I tell you—"

"It's Mr. Blake, sir!" exclaimed Jelks, scared. "I—I knew the other gentleman wasn't Mr. Blake, and I sent off a telegram."

"Wh-at!" ejaculated Lord Pengarth. "Do you mean to stand there, man, and tell me that you sent for this gentleman?"

"Yes, my lord. I—I—"

"There is really no necessity for this

confusion," interrupted Blake smoothly. "It can be explained in a few words. The situation is quite simple."

And, in his own level manner, Blake put the facts in a nutshell. Even Lord Pengarth was compelled to quieten down under the famous detective's calm, dignified manner. But even though Lord Pengarth was convinced, he didn't seem to like the change.

"We have no intention of intruding, Lord Pengarth, but it was necessary for us to come down in order to ascertain the facts," concluded Blake. "I must warn you, also, that Waldo is a dangerous man, although I do not fancy he was engaged in any criminal work under your roof."

"I should think not, sir. I should think not!" growled his lordship. "A fine fellow! I cannot doubt your word, although I am still astonished. But this Waldo, whatever you say about him, is a gentleman! You hear me, sir—a thorough gentleman!"

"Oh, father, you must be wrong," exclaimed Lady Betty. "Mr. Blake tells us that the man is a criminal."

"I can't help what Mr. Blake tells us," grunted Lord Pengarth. "The man's gone, and I'm infernally sorry. I liked him. A man after my own heart. Plenty of strength and determination."

He turned to Blake coldly.

"Don't think me inhospitable, sir, but you will oblige me by leaving these premises at the earliest possible moment," he said, with a defiant glare. "You gained admittance without my knowledge, and now you will please me if you take your departure."

Sexton Blake bowed.

"As you wish, Lord Pengarth," he replied quietly.

"Jelks," snapped the earl, "show the gentlemen out! And remember, open the door to nobody! I won't have my instructions defied!"

He turned his back and fumed. Lady Betty was greatly distressed, and hardly knew what to do.

Sexton Blake and Tinker left the library, and walked out into the big hall.

"Well, this is a rummy business, sir," murmured Tinker. "First we meet Waldo, and then we're politely kicked out! I can't say I think much of Lord Pengarth as a host. I've known more hospitable men."

"His lordship is a bit of a character," replied Blake. "I have never met him before, but I have heard quite a lot about him. His action in no way surprises me. We can do nothing but go."

"And what about Waldo?"

"I hardly know what to do," admitted Sexton Blake thoughtfully. "To attempt any search for him would be a mere waste of time. As we have good reason to know, he is as elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp. But I would give a great deal to know what his exact game is."

Tinker smiled.

"That's all right, sir; you'll know," he said confidently. "I can't imagine you leaving this district without getting to the root of things."

Lady Betty Hamilton-Pagc approached Sexton Blake and Tinker before they could take their departure. She was looking flushed and rather distressed. Her father's brusque behaviour was always a worry to her.

"Please don't go, Mr. Blake!" she said quickly. "You mustn't take any notice of my father. He doesn't mean to be rude. It's only his way."

"So I gather," said Blake, smiling. "But I am afraid we are mere intruders; and now that my mission is accomplished it only remains for us to go."

"But I don't understand, and I want



Somewhere in the castle a scream had sounded—a long, horrible sort of sound—which had been abruptly cut off before reaching its climax. Blake stood up, rigid. Instinctively he knew that a tragedy had happened.

(See page 24.)

you to explain!" insisted the girl. "Please come over by the window, and sit down. And you mustn't think of leaving the castle in this way. It would be dreadful!"

"It is very nice of you, Lady Betty, but I am afraid we must respect your father's wishes," said Blake gently.

"But you needn't—really!" she insisted. "I can soon talk him round. I always can. Of course, there's no doubt about—about—" She paused rather awkwardly.

"About my identity?" smiled Blake. "Well, hardly, Lady Betty. Jelks, for one, can vouch for me. It was he who sent me a telegram, telling me that somebody was masquerading here under my name."

"Forgive me, Mr. Blake, for appearing to doubt you," said Lady Betty. "But I am really quite confused. This man you called Waldo was so charming, so gentlemanly in every way. It seems incredible that he can be a criminal."

"Charm of manner is one of Waldo's greatest assets," said Blake gravely. "He is constantly using it to gain admittance to the best circles. I can assure you, Lady Betty, that Waldo is a dangerous man. At the same time, he has many gentlemanly instincts, and I do not believe that he was staying under your roof with the idea of personal gain."

"I agree with you when you say that he has gentlemanly instincts," replied the girl quietly. "He has been most charming ever since he arrived. At the same time, I am afraid he has done much to encourage my father in his obstinate attitude. I do wish you would stay, Mr. Blake, and convince my father that the position is hopeless."

"I am afraid I do not quite follow."

"But you know of our dreadful predicament?"

"Jelks gave me a hint or two, but they sounded so extraordinary that I gave them scant attention," replied Blake. "I understand that you are in danger of being evicted? Surely that is an incorrect statement?"

"Unfortunately, it is only too true," replied Lady Betty sadly. "The castle has been sold over our heads, Mr. Blake, and the new owner desires possession. It is only natural, of course. But my father refuses to leave. He swears that he will die rather than surrender."

Blake shook his head.

"I admire your father's spirit; but that sort of thing cannot be done nowadays," he replied. "And I hope you will not press me in this matter, Lady Betty. I should not like to interfere in this delicate situation."

"Oh, but you won't be interfering!" she said quickly. "The situation is now so extreme that you must stay, Mr. Blake—you really must! I don't know what we shall do if you go. It will all end up in some terrible tragedy."

"But Lord Pengarth wouldn't really shoot this Sir William Bragg would he?" asked Tinker curiously.

"He would," she declared. "I am sure of it!"

Sexton Blake looked grave.

"Your father is several hundred years behind his time!" he exclaimed. "He should have lived in the fifteenth century, and then this sort of thing would have been quite permissible. But he really cannot take the law into his own hands in such a drastic way. It will only end up in disaster and humiliation."

The girl took hold of Blake's arm in her anxiety.

"I am glad to hear you say that, Mr. Blake!" she exclaimed. "I want you to stay here, and please talk to my father and bring him round. This man—this Waldo—only had the opposite effect upon him, and I was getting quite frightened. Sir William Brag is not to blame. He has bought the property, and it is our duty to go. If you can only convince my father of that you will have done us an incalculable service."

Blake hesitated.

"It really seems like interfering in a purely family affair," he demurred. "Honestly, Lady Betty, it is not my style of thing at all. And, while agreeing that there is no other course, it certainly goes against the grain. My sympathies are all with your father. I have nothing but admiration for his rocklike attitude. At the same time, it won't do."

"No, we must go—there is no other course," said the girl. "It pains me as much as it pains him, for I love the old castle. It will be a dreadful wrench to leave it, and to know that it is in the hands of strangers. But having fallen victims to Mr. Slingsby's treachery, it is my father's duty to abide by the result. Please make him realise that, Mr. Blake."

Blake could not refuse her. But he only promised to stay on consideration that she told her father at once. The detective was certainly not going to remain an uninvited guest.

And thus it was that Sexton Blake and Tinker became involved.

Sir William Brag paced up and down like a cat on hot bricks. He was so furious that it was impossible for him to sit down.

"I tell you I'll have the police into this affair!" he threatened. "That's not a threat, Slingsby, it's a statement! Man alive, do you think I'm going to be fooled about like this? I won't have it! That castle is mine, and I mean to gain possession!"

Sir William was in the privacy of Mr. Simon Slingsby's study. The house was an old-fashioned one on the outskirts of Launceston, and its meanness of appearance matched that of its owner.

Mr. Slingsby was seated at his desk—a thin man, with drooping shoulders and a lean, cadaverous face. He was sixty, at least, and his clean-shaven cheeks were lined, wrinkled, and sallow. Two deep-set eyes watched Sir William as he paced up and down.

"It's all right, Sir William—there's no need to get excited," said Mr. Slingsby, in a soft, caressing voice. "It's only a matter of arrangement."

"Arrangement be hanged!" shouted the knight. "That's what you told me last time—and look what's happened. I'm not going to be fooled about like this!"

"Yes, but if you will only be calm—"

"Have I bought that property or have I not?" demanded Sir William, pausing in front of the desk, and bringing his fist down with a crash. "That's what I want to know, Slingsby! Have I bought that property, or have I not?"

"Of course you have bought it, Sir William," said the lawyer gently. "There has never been any dispute on that point. Pengarth Castle is yours—"

"My freehold property!"

"Exactly—your freehold property," agreed Mr. Slingsby. "But it won't help matters if you persist in this excited attitude, Sir William. We shall be able to deal with Lord Pengarth to our mutual satisfaction if you will only regain control of yourself."

Sir William Brag sat down heavily.

"Very well!" he panted. "If you are so clever, perhaps you will tell me what is to be done. Personally I am at a loss. I have bought this property—I have paid you for it—every brass farthing, and now I come to you for an explanation."

Mr. Slingsby shrugged his shoulders.

"An explanation?" he repeated.

"Yes, confound you—an explanation!" rapped out Sir William. "Don't I deserve one? You are Lord Pengarth's lawyer—you have dealt with this transaction from first to last. And now, after everything is signed and settled, and with the title-deeds in my pocket, I can't even get in the place."

"Of course, it is perfectly preposterous—"

"It's insane!" snapped Sir William. "I've bought plenty of property in my time, Slingsby, and I've never had this experience before. And Pengarth Castle, too—my future home!"

Mr. Simon Slingsby leaned back in his chair and removed his glasses. He was upset and alarmed, but he took care not to show it. He had never suspected that Lord Pengarth would be such a hard nut to crack in the end. He had thought, indeed, that his lordship

would knuckle under without a trace of fighting, after all hope had gone.

Slingsby had at last reached the point he had been striving at for years. He had drained the Earl of Pengarth to the last penny, and had sold his castle over his head. It was an awkward contretemps when Lord Pengarth refused to acknowledge the sale. Unless dealt with delicately, it might mean all sorts of inquiries.

And Mr. Slingsby was particularly anxious to avoid inquiries. There was no trickery about the documents—everything was in perfect order. But, at the same time, Mr. Slingsby's reputation would not be enhanced if all the facts were dragged into the light of day in a civil court.

"You tell me that Lord Pengarth flatly refused to admit you?" he asked.

"He not only refused to admit me, but he had the infernal impudence to fire a gun at me!" snorted Sir William, with righteous indignation. "I've a good mind to go and tell the police about it!"

"Do nothing rash, Sir William—it will only make things more difficult," said the lawyer. "Naturally, Lord Pengarth takes this thing to heart. He is an obstinate old man—a crank. You must bear with him, and where direct methods fail you must apply indirect methods."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean that you must gain admittance to the castle by stealth," said Mr. Slingsby smoothly. "I can supply you with several men—"

"No, I'll be hanged if I will!" interrupted Sir William, jumping to his feet again. "I'm not going to break into my own property! Keep your preposterous idea to yourself, Slingsby. I'll apply for an eviction order—"

"Well, of course, you can do that," said Mr. Slingsby coldly. "That is your own look-out. You will certainly gain your end, but it will be very costly."

"I don't care what the charges are!" stormed Sir William.

"I was not talking in terms of money, Sir William."

"What the thunder do you mean?"

"It is your intention, I think, to take up your residence in the castle?" asked Mr. Slingsby. "You will not be popular in Cornwall if you submit Lord Pengarth to such a grave humiliation. Socially, you will be an outcast, and life at Pengarth Castle will not be very pleasant. His lordship, although poor, is greatly respected."

Sir William paused, thinking of Lady Brag and her social ambitions.

"I hadn't looked at it in that way!" he growled. "Well, what alternative is there? What do you suggest?"

And Mr. Slingsby talked quietly for ten minutes, and Sir William Brag's eyes began to sparkle.

THE NINTH CHAPTER. Tragedy.



DINNER was in progress at Pengarth Castle.

It was a picturesque little scene. Outside the dusk was deepening, and the corner of the big hall was illuminated by bunches of candles. The table was simple, but nevertheless dignified. At the head sat the Earl of Pengarth, and at the foot his daughter acted as an admirable hostess. On either side sat Sexton Blake and Tinker.

"I am glad you stayed, Mr. Blake,"

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said his lordship gruffly. "Trust my daughter to know the right thing! But I'm an excitable old man, and it's just as well to take no notice of me."

"I shall know in future, Lord Pengarth," smiled Sexton Blake. "At the same time, I don't quite agree with you. In my opinion, you have every reason to be angered and incensed. The prospect of losing Pengarth Castle must be galling."

"Galling, eh?" said Lord Pengarth. "Not at all, Mr. Blake—not at all! For I have no intention of losing the castle. Not the slightest intention! I shall not shift. Not one foot will I set outside this house at the command of the intruder!"

His die-hard spirit was as strong as ever, and, even as he spoke, some of his old fire returned.

During the afternoon Lady Betty had "talked him round," as she had promised, and the old gentleman was now mightily pleased that Sexton Blake and Tinker were remaining as his guests. His one regret was that Blake failed to see eye to eye with him in this momentous crisis.

He had already told the famous detective the story of Simon Slingsby's treachery. And Blake inwardly sympathised with the unfortunate old peer. To express open sympathy was to invite an outburst, however.

"People declare that my fallen fortunes are all due to the Pengarth Curse," continued his lordship, as the meal was drawing to a close. "Sometimes I think they are right. It is certainly very extraordinary."

"The Curse?" asked Tinker interestedly.

"Yes, my boy," said Lord Pengarth. "Perhaps—who knows?—Slingsby is merely the ordained instrument. For generations—for centuries—there has been a Sacred Cross in the possession of our family. Legend has it that if this Cross leaves our possession, misfortune will fall upon the Pengarth family. Be that as it may, since the night the Cross was stolen misfortune has slowly and surely overwhelmed me."

"Perhaps it is merely coincidence," said Blake.

"That is my own opinion; but at the same time I sometimes find myself thinking differently," admitted the earl. "The Pengarth Cross was taken at the same time as Lady Pengarth's jewellery. We were rich then. The Pengarth fortunes were in a healthy condition. The first tragedy was the death of my dear wife. Did I suspect Slingsby of treachery? Never! In my folly, I allowed the reptile to have complete and absolute control over my affairs. It was not until recently that I received the shock."

Lord Pengarth's voice had dropped now, and he was talking quietly.

Sexton Blake could well understand the terrible blow that had fallen when his lordship had discovered the truth.

The man he had trusted all his life had basely betrayed him. And, what was more to the point, he had betrayed him in such a way that there was no possible redress.

In his own blindness, he had even signed away his rights to the castle itself. Things had grown from bad to worse. He had obtained mortgages, little realising what Slingsby had in mind.

And now, too late, he was a pauper—and Slingsby was wallowing in the spoils of his victory. He had drained his client of his last penny, and the end was in sight.

"But I won't go!" declared Lord Pengarth. "Never! They can bring police

here—they can bring the British Army itself! But when I leave Pengarth Castle for good, I shall be carried out in my coffin! Never will I relinquish my rights!"

There was something rather fine about his bearing as he spoke, and Sexton Blake was at a loss. It was very difficult to deal with the old gentleman.

"I have nothing but admiration for your wonderful spirit, Lord Pengarth, but is this attitude wise?" asked Blake quietly. "Would it not be better to avert all further trouble and humiliation?"

His lordship shook his head.

"This affair is bigger than mere wisdom, Mr. Blake," he replied. "When I am calm and cool—as now—I realise that it would be wise to accept defeat. But I will never do that. I am a Pengarth—an old-fashioned man, perhaps, but that cannot be helped. I regard this castle as mine, and any man who tries to turn me out of it is my enemy. Let him arouse me at his peril!"

"But, dad, Mr. Slingsby and Sir William Brag have the law on their side," put in Lady Betty softly. "And we must bow before the law. That is inevitable."

"Your daughter is right, sir," said Sexton Blake. "I wish I could advise you otherwise, but I cannot. Let me urge you—"

"No! I won't hear a word!" interrupted Lord Pengarth, glaring fiercely. "Not a word, sir! This castle is the stronghold of the Pengarths—they have held it for centuries against the invader. My duty is plain. They will only enter over my dead body!"

And there was something in Lord Pengarth's tone which proved that he was in deadly earnest.

Like shadows of the night, a number of forms crept up towards Pengarth Castle.

It was later in the evening, and the dusk had deepened into night. It was, of course, still comparatively early, and Sexton Blake and Lord Pengarth were in the library. Tinker was with Lady Betty in the drawing-room, listening to a further account of Simon Slingsby's villainy from the worried girl.

But outside, unknown to all, lurked these forms.

There were five of them altogether. Sir William Brag had arrived with four helpers, and this time his mission was clear. He had decided to take Simon Slingsby's advice, and enter the castle by stealth.

He was doing nothing against the law. It was his own property, and so he had a perfect right to enter or leave it as he pleased, and in any way he pleased. And once inside with his men, it would be all plain sailing.

He would then be lord of his own castle. And he gloatingly pictured to himself what would happen then. Let Lord Pengarth rave and threaten as he pleased! If there was any nonsense, the old fool would be thrown out, and his own bolts and bars would be used against him!

Sir William was filled with glee at the very prospect. Not usually a ferocious man, his fight to gain possession of his own property had rendered him almost bloodthirsty. And he looked forward with acute pleasure to the coming meeting—once he was inside.

"I'll get my own back with interest!" vowed Sir William to himself. "I'll teach the old idiot to bar me out! Any nonsense, and out he'll go with his daughter and his two servants! Then they'll know what it's like to be bolted

out! I'll have my own way in this affair, by Heaven!"

It was with real pleasure that he watched the proceedings.

The four men were quite honest fellows, and they had been told just sufficient to satisfy them that everything was above board. As Mr. Slingsby had explained, Lord Pengarth was an obstinate man, and this drastic course was being taken to save him from the humiliation of an eviction order.

One of the men was a blacksmith, and, having mounted some steps, he lost no time in getting to work upon one of the smaller windows. It was heavily barred, and impregnable against the bare hands.

But the blacksmith was armed with a hacksaw, files, and other tools. The hacksaw was sufficient. He commenced cutting the first bar, and soon conquered it.

The next one followed, and then a third. All were torn out from the upper sockets. The window itself proved no great barrier. Five minutes' work, and it succumbed.

"All ready now, sir," murmured the blacksmith, as he descended the steps. "I think you said you wanted to get in first?"

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Sir William. "Splendid! You men had better remain out here."

"Won't ye want us to come in, sir?"

"Not yet—not yet!" replied the knight. "If possible, I wish to avoid all unpleasantness, much as I have been angered. You will only be required in case of need. It is possible that Lord Pengarth will resist. If so, I must reluctantly call you in. Otherwise, you will remain here until you get further orders from me."

Sir William mounted the steps, and a glow of triumph surged through him as he set foot inside the castle. In spite of the old earl's obstinacy, he had been conquered! It was the only way to deal with such pig-headedness! Ordinary methods were useless.

Outside, the men stood near the wall, talking in low tones. They didn't quite like the affair, but they were being well paid, and were assured that everything was in perfect order.

In the library, Sexton Blake and Lord Pengarth talked. They were discussing antiques now—one of his lordship's favourite topics. The earl excused himself, in order to fetch a particularly prized object of art. And, by a curious coincidence, Lord Pengarth left the library alone at almost exactly the same moment as Sir William Brag entered the castle by means of the window.

Thus the situation stood.

Sir William Brag entered by the window, and at the same time Lord Pengarth left the library and went out along the dim passages.

Not one soul in that gaunt old household suspected that tragedy—stark and horrible—was in the air. Sexton Blake, sitting in the library, was idly wondering what his course of action should be. He had half a mind to take Tinker with him on an exploration of the deserted buildings.

He finally decided upon this course. Then he started and rose sharply to his feet.

Somewhere in the castle a scream had sounded—a long, horrible sort of sound—which had been abruptly cut off before reaching its climax. Blake stood rigid.

Instinctively he knew that a tragedy had happened.

Tinker, in the drawing-room, looked quickly at Lady Betty. She had paused

in her playing, and was looking for another piece of music.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

"What ever can have happened?" said the girl, catching her breath in. "Do—do you think—"

She didn't exactly know what she meant, and she ran from the room, with her cheeks paling. Tinker followed.

They found Sexton Blake in the big hall.

"Did you hear it, too, sir?" asked Tinker swiftly.

"Yes," replied Blake. "Lady Betty, please remain here."

Without another word he hurried down a corridor. His sense of direction told him that the sound had come from somewhere on this side of the building. He and Tinker made all haste.

Outside, the four men were running helter-skelter across the parklands. The sound had reached them more clearly than any of the others, and they were badly frightened. They fled.

Blake's electric torch was switched on, and he went down passage after passage, keen and grim. And then, turning a corner, he suddenly checked. The light from his torch revealed a dreadful scene.

The Earl of Pengarth was standing there, apparently dazed. In one hand he held a guttering candle. A window stood open near by, and the night wind was blowing in with a chilly touch.

In the earl's other hand he held his heavy stick—without which he never moved. And on the floor, huddled at his feet, lay something as still as death. It was the figure of a man.

"Keep back, Tinker!" muttered Blake tensely.

He moved forward, and, taking no notice of Lord Pengarth, he knelt down, flashing his light upon the huddled form. It was that of Sir William Brag. Blake had never seen the man before, but he recognised him on the instant from Lord Pengarth's description.

And Sir William Brag was dead.

Sexton Blake, who had seen death in many forms, knew this at the first glance. The unfortunate knight had met his end in a dreadful manner. The

front part of his skull was crushed. He must have received one awful blow which had brought instantaneous death. His scream had evidently been uttered as the death-thrust was about to be dealt.

Grimly Blake rose to his feet and faced the Earl of Pengarth. It seemed to him that the facts were obvious. The earl had accidentally come upon Sir William Brag breaking in, there had been a second's altercation, and this tragedy was the result.

Instinctively Blake glanced at the earl's heavy stick.

"Lord Pengarth, what has happened?" asked the detective sternly.

The Earl of Pengarth looked at Blake in a strange way, his eyes burning with a kind of dazed-looking light.

"I—I don't know!" he muttered. "I came along this passage—I heard a scream—Uuugggh!"

Suddenly he grew absolutely rigid, and a curious gurgle sounded in his throat. Then, before Blake could touch him, he just as suddenly became limp and collapsed into an inert heap. His eyes were open and staring, and his lined old face was almost waxen.

"Good heavens!" muttered Blake.

"He's dead, sir!" panted Tinker, coming up. "Apoplexy!"

"A stroke of some kind, certainly," agreed Blake swiftly. "Hold the light, Tinker—hold it! No, he's not dead. His heart beats and he breathes. But I am afraid it will be touch and go."

Gently they carried the stricken peer into the hall, where Lady Betty and Jelks and Martha were waiting in a little frightened group. The girl ran forward as she saw the still form of her father.

"Dad!" she breathed, with a little scream.

"Please, Lady Betty—please!" exclaimed Sexton Blake. "Your father has had a stroke, but he still lives. Tinker, you must go at once for the doctor and for the police. Every second is of value."

"The poor master—the poor master!" moaned Jelks, looking ten years older.

"What's happened, sir?"

But he soon knew what had happened, and so did the others. And the same thought was mutual. The Earl of Pengarth had settled this crisis by committing the act of murder!

In his grim determination to obtain possession of the castle he had struck the intruder down with all the strength of his fierce obstinacy. But as he was near to death's door himself the whole problem was solved.

But Sexton Blake was not satisfied.

He could not forget the earl's last words:

"I came along this passage—I heard a scream."

If his lordship had spoken the truth, the crime had taken place before he arrived. On the face of it there seemed no possibility of Lord Pengarth's innocence being proved. His guilt was beyond all question.

Everything pointed to it from first to last.

If such was actually the case and he died, then the whole affair was over and there was no further problem.

But Sexton Blake could not forget that Rupert Waldo was probably within the castle. Did Waldo know anything about this tragedy? Even this seemed incredible, for the Wonder-Man was famed for his clean fighting. He never killed; he seldom even injured. It was not like him to commit such a pointless, needless murder.

On the other hand, the Earl of Pengarth had every motive.

"I rather fancy, Tinker, that our work here is done," said Sexton Blake a little later, while they were waiting for the doctor to conclude his examination. "The police will soon be here, but their presence is needless. With Lord Pengarth dead, the case ends."

But even as he spoke these words Blake inwardly felt that he was wrong. This episode was closed.

But there was another episode to follow!

End of Part One.

THE SEQUEL—

to the events narrated above will be recorded in next week's issue of the U.J.

Therein you will read of the even stranger events that befell at Pengarth Castle—how the stricken earl fell under the shadow of suspicion for the death of Sir William Brag.

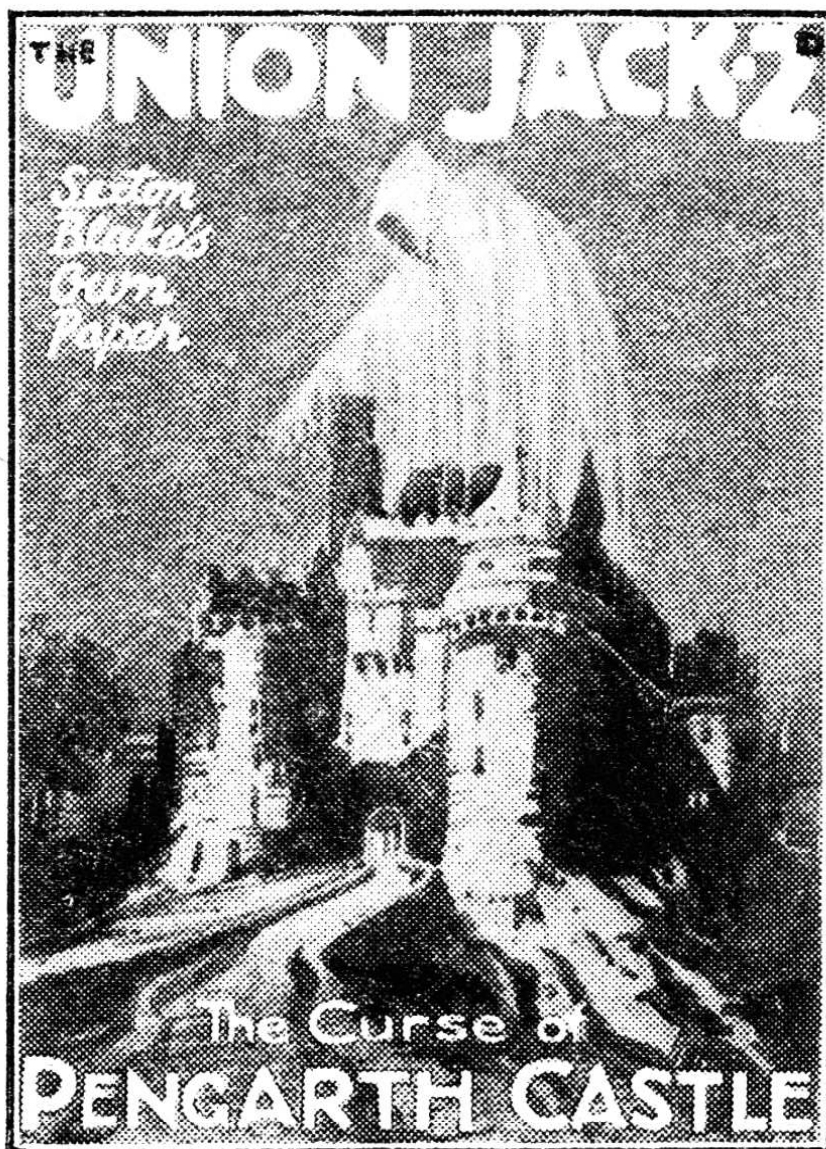
And rightly so. Had he not motive enough, according to his warped ideas? It is a clear enough case that stands against him, but there are complications.

What of Waldo? Has he any part in this mysterious affair? Yes, he has; but it's a different one from what you might think. You will read how he approached Simon Slingsby; how Sexton Blake took a hand in their affairs; and finally of the lifting of the castle's curse.

Moreover, there is a second climax to the yarn—a strange event which fully explains the death of Sir William Brag. You haven't guessed this, either.

All these things will be told next week under the title of "The Curse of Pengarth Castle."

One final remark: Make sure of getting your copy!



"WHY DON'T YOU PUBLISH TWO U.J.'s EVERY WEEK?"

That's what many readers have asked at various times. — We can't do that; but, anyway, here's a suggestion!

When the summer evenings tempt you outdoors, and you don't feel so keen on reading, and you're inclined to forgo your weekly "U. J."—remember the winter. It's then that you want two every week.

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Our £10 Detective Competition

"WHO IS THE MAN?"

RESULT AND SOLUTION.

We are now glad to be able to announce the result of the competition in connection with the story entitled "Who is the Man?" which appeared in this paper of April 18th last, No. 1,123.

The problem of trying to answer the question embodied in the title of the yarn, and in finding the author's original solution to the mystery, proved a very popular one.

The name of the £10 winner, together with those of the twenty runners-up who have been awarded original U.J. cover designs as consolation prizes, are given overleaf. Meantime, in order to refresh your memory of "Who is the Man?" a short summary of the story appears here, followed by the concluding portion which contains the solution.

This was, of course, withheld pending the receipt of competitors' entries, but now, in conjunction with the summary, you will see how the various clues dovetailed into each other, and how the discoveries of Sexton Blake form a fitting and feasible conclusion to a very ingenious yarn.

THE STORY.

WILBUR KING, an eminent financier, is found dead in his City office by Miss Phyllis Dean, his typist, at 11.15 one morning. A look of intense fear is stamped on the dead man's face.

Harry Hall and Jonas Starke, members of the office staff, send for a doctor—Dr. Sylvanus Batterbee—who states that the financier is the victim of an unknown assassin.

Inspector Coutts, Sexton Blake, and Tinker arrive later from Scotland Yard, where the Baker Street man and his assistant happened to be when the news came through. The members of Wilbur King's staff are interviewed, with results that indicate suspicious circumstances.

Harry Hall, the private secretary, last saw his employer alive at 10.35, when he was in his usual health and spirits. Jonas Starke, a clerk, had not seen him that morning at all. Phyllis Dean gives an account of how she found her master.

The interview is interrupted by the sudden appearance of a snake in the room. The resulting scare is nullified by the discovery that it is not venomous, but quite harmless. It belonged to the financier, who kept it in a ventilated safe in the office with the object of scaring away burglars from the valuables the safe contained.

The private secretary knows the combination number, and opens the safe so that the snake may be replaced. It is then found that £20,000 worth of Chilean bonds are missing from it. The natural inference is that Hall has taken them, for he knows the combination; also, it comes out that Hall had quarrelled that morning with his employer, who had been pestering Phyllis Dean, the typist, with his attentions—and Hall was engaged to Phyllis.

Blake also interviews the commissionaire and the lift-man of the building, Joseph Turner and Michael O'Brien. They stated that the dead man had arrived at ten, had had no visitors during the morning, and that there was nothing unusual about him. Sexton Blake, however, finds that there was at least one visitor, who, being a regular caller, the two men had forgotten to mention—the waitress from a near-by cafe with a cup of coffee for the financier.

A visitor is announced at this point—a man named Horace Wills. He confesses that he poisoned King by means of a dose of atropine dropped in the coffee-cup unseen by the waitress. This confession is negatived later by the fact that the original cup of coffee was dropped in the street and spilt. Wills therefore did not poison the financier, for a second cup was taken to him. Meantime, however, a supply of atropine is found in Phyllis Dean's desk, which may or may not have been used in making-up her eyes.

A telephone call comes through for King, and Blake, answering it, receives a message intended for the dead man. He is warned to beware of "Bill," who has sworn to "get him." It is a girl speaking, and apparently Bill's anger against King is caused by jealousy. The man's full name is William Hoxon, of Rubenstein's Turf Agency. Blake discovers, and is further told that Bill has conveyed a warning about a rose. It seems that the speaker is employed in a florist's

shop, for she mentions having sold a rose to King that morning.

On Blake interviewing Jonas Starke, the "sporting" clerk, the man tries to attack Blake. The missing bonds are found in his room at the office, and he confesses to having stolen them, but denies having murdered his master. It is later definitely stated by Blake that King did not die of atropine poisoning, and this is confirmed by the doctor who made the post-mortem examination. He states that the poison used is unclassified.

Meantime, Sexton Blake has found, on the fire-escape overlooking the room in which Wilbur King died, the imprint of a pair of small shoes—those either of a man or woman—whose soles were of crepe rubber, and also a cigarette-end.

Blake sends Tinker to investigate the movements of William Hoxon, the racing tout who is friendly with the girl at the florist's from whom the dead man bought a button-hole every morning. Tinker trails his man to the Oriental cookery establishment of one Idris Ben Hassan, in the East End, posing as a drug addict the better to spy on him.

His imposture is discovered, however, and he is overpowered, but eventually gets back to Baker Street with the information that the rose of which Wilbur King was warned was not the flower he wore in his button-hole, but Abe Rosenblum's gang, the leader of which was usually referred to as "The Rose."

At a fancy-dress ball at the Hotel Olympic Blake is present, and, by means of a detectaphone, overhears a conversation between two masked dancers, a man and a woman. The man confides to his companion that he is morally guilty of the murder, but it was not his hand that did the deed. He says also that he has an unassailable alibi.

Next morning Sexton Blake and Coutts go to the building in which is Wilbur King's office. There a man is arrested, but his identity is not disclosed to the public, for he had hidden his face from the photographers.

Later during the morning Press reporters visit Baker Street, and ask for the identity of the prisoner, together with the names of two other persons Coutts has also arrested on Blake's instructions. Two visitors have also come at Blake's request, but it is arranged that the detective asks them to wait while he gives his disclosures to the Pressmen.

THE SOLUTION.

SEXTON BLAKE crossed over to the half-opened door, while Tinker, Coutts and Robson, the reporter, waited impatiently, consumed with curiosity. From behind the portal they heard the low hum of voices, and the closing of a door.

A moment later the detective re-entered—alone.

"I have asked our visitors to wait a few minutes in the waiting-room," he explained. "Their presence is not yet necessary."

He crossed over to his chair and sat down. The inevitable briar dangled from his finely-chiselled lips, his eyes were half-closed, and the tips of his

long, tapering fingers were pressed lightly together.

"The problem of the murder of Wilbur Wright," began Sexton Blake quietly, "is one of those fascinating tangles which occasionally occur in the history of criminology. A crime that at first seems extraordinarily simple, and yet develops into an exceedingly complex and intricate problem."

"You are all conversant with the bare facts of the case. Wilbur King was murdered at about eleven-fifteen yesterday morning. The post-mortem examination revealed traces of an obscure and unclassified poison. The features of the dead man were contorted with a look of horror and an unnatural fear."

"It is known that he had many enemies. From what I can gather he was a ruthless, unscrupulous man, with many shady and nefarious transactions in his past life. The problem of motive, therefore, was not hard to seek. Where the mystery deepened was the fact of so many people having a more or less strong motive for his death. That I think is sufficiently clear."

"Now the problem becomes more abstruse," continued the detective.

"When, accompanied by Inspector Coutts, I arrived at Threadneedle Street, my mind was ready to receive any and every impression from the facts. I suspected nobody in particular—and everybody in general."

"The first person I met was the commissionaire. He was obviously an ex-Service man, and was to be reckoned with as capable as the next man of murder—all things being equal."

"The next person was O'Brien, the lift-man. From a tattoo-mark on his wrist it was easy to deduce a sailor with plenty of foreign experience, for the tattooing was expertly done, and suggested Japanese work. I also noticed his large and extraordinary red hands, rather like sausages; and this drew my attention to a curious ring he was wearing."

Tinker coughed and broke in excitedly: "Now I see, guv'nor, a glimmer of light in those weird notes of yours."

Blake smiled.

"Perhaps you would read them out again, so that we can check up."

Tinker unearthed the scrap of paper torn from Blake's memo-book:

King—alive, healthy, normal. Time 11 a.m. (waitress corroboration.) No sign of virulent poison. Matossian cigarette. Sausages. Caesar. Ring missing. Cigar butt. Was telephone disinfected?

Acid stain on Hill's finger—obviously chemical. Memo hobby? Starke's automatic. Typist's curious eyes. Corpse—Italian.

"You must remember," continued Sexton Blake, "that those notes were jotted down after I received the impressions, and are not, therefore, in strict sequence. It struck me as worthy of note, however, that ring of O'Brien's, the lift-man. I am rather a connoisseur of jewellery, and it struck me as strange that a man like that should wear an exquisitely-wrought gold ring, obviously dating from the Renaissance period of Italy."

"Association of ideas, as you will see from my rough memo. Sausages—his fingers reminded me of. The ring reminded me of Italy, and the Borgias."

"The Borgias, as you are all aware, were the most fascinating, powerful family of the mediæval period. They were utterly unscrupulous, and master-murderers, through their vast knowledge of poisons. Poison-rings were one of the many methods by which they got rid of their victims."

"Yes, but guv'nor, what's Cæsar got to do with it?" demanded Tinker. Blake shrugged his shoulders, and Tinker blushed slightly.

"Sorry, guv'nor, I ought to have known."

"Well," pursued Sexton Blake, puffing slowly at his pipe. "That was interesting, but I did not attach undue importance to it. After all, O'Brien may have picked up the ring as a curio during his travels, and I concentrated on the expression of fear in the dead man's face."

"He was obviously frightened—almost to death. It was therefore safe to assume that Hall was not responsible for that look. According to Hall's own version King held him in his power, and a blackmailer is seldom frightened of his victim. The same applied to Starke and Miss Dean."

"I then noticed that the fire escape overlooked the window of King's office, so that if a man were to sit on the second step he would be able to watch Wilbur King."

"Investigation verified this—I found a Matossian cigarette and the footprints of crepe-soled shoes."

"The result of those clues clinched the matter. I had arranged with Dr. Batterbee for the photograph of the retina of the dead man's eye. I have already explained that phenomenon, and now you can see the photo of the man who sat watching the death agony of Wilbur King."

Blake handed the newspaper man an enlarged photograph of the image thrown on the screen in the laboratory the previous afternoon.

"Why!" gasped Robson. "I know this man, Mr. Blake. It's Marini. Mr. C. B. Marini—the famous inventor, at present at the Hotel Olympic."

Coutts chuckled. "At present in the 'Hotel' Brixton, on remand, you mean."

"But—but I don't understand!" exclaimed the bewildered reporter. "Such a well-known man as Marini—"

"Notice his initials?" said Sexton Blake quietly. "C. B.—Cæsar Borgia. Another link."

"Now I will rapidly go over the rest. My suspicions were increased tenfold when O'Brien came to be interviewed by Coutts. The ring was missing from his finger! I noted that at the time; and then, in his excitement, the lift-man used the Italian word for body. He said 'The corpo'."

"Freud, and other psychologists have taught how important a lapsus linguæ, a slip of the tongue, can be, and from that moment O'Brien was suspect."

"Yes, but why should a lift-man poison his employer? And what's this inventor chap, Marini, got to do with it?" demanded Tinker.

"That," replied Sexton Blake, "as Coutts will recall, was one argument in O'Brien's defence. An ignorant lift-man would hardly know the properties of a Borgia ring. It needed someone with a cunning brain and plenty of power, money, and determination."

"Well, a few discreet inquiries and a little eavesdropping on the detectaphone furnished me with the main part of the story. The rest I verified from O'Brien himself."

"Many years ago, Wilbur King, while on tour in Italy, fell in love with a beautiful Italian girl, Lucrezia Marini. She and her brother were the last representatives of the great Borgia family, as proud as they were poor."

King, who as I have hinted, was an unscrupulous blackguard, soon tired of his wife. He ill-treated her abominably, until finally she died of a broken heart. Her brother Cæsar, now C. B. Marini, swore to be avenged on the scoundrel, but he was poor, and King a rich English 'milor'."

"For ten years Cæsar nursed his burning hatred of King, when suddenly fortune's wheel turned and the young Italian became famous and rich."

"He came to England with his fiancée and watched, planning with devilish ingenuity the death of the scoundrel who had ruined his sister's life. You must remember that all the force of the hot blood of one of the proudest and greatest Italian families burned in his veins, together with an inherited knowledge of poisons unequalled in the world."

"He laid his plans carefully, and fortune favoured him, by sending the Irish-Italian, O'Brien, across his path."

"Irish-Italian, did you say?" interposed Coutts.

"Precisely," said Blake. "The lift-man's mother was a Sicilian. He was born in Italy, and later migrated to

Ireland. While in the land of his birth, on one of his numerous voyages, he joined a Sicilian secret society. Don't forget he was half Italian. As it happened, the president of that society was young Marini."

"When O'Brien left Italy he probably thought that the wild escapades of his youth were over. A chance meeting with Marini, however, convinced him of his error."

"Marini paid him well to further his private vengeance, using the society as a bludgeon in the case of remonstrance. Add to that the fact that O'Brien had little cause to love King, who was a domineering bully, and you have the motive—while Marini supplies the brains."

"By Jove, guv'nor, you're a giddy marvel!" said Tinker, with boyish enthusiasm. "But how was it worked? I mean the poisoning."

Blake smiled.

"I have written a small monograph on obscure poisons, and from what Batterbee tells me, coupled with a knowledge of Borgian toxicology, I should think this was the method used."

"An Italian chemist—this is a historical fact, not fiction or fantasy—has discovered a poison so nicely gauged that it can cause death in a given period—a day, or a week, or a month—or even an hour."

"The poison is distilled from a special gland secreted in a particular variety of mussels, and I should deduce that Marini placed sufficient into the Borgia ring for his needs."

"He gave it to O'Brien, with instructions to prick King's arm with the ring as he was carried up in the elevator. The prick would have been hardly noticeable to a man suffering twinges of gout—or perhaps he may have noticed it and O'Brien explained it away by saying he had a pin sticking from his clothes, and apologising. There, I think, you have the explanation of the mystery in all its diabolical ingenuity."

"O'Brien has in part confessed, and Marini will, I am confident, corroborate. It was a foolish move on his part to watch King's death agony from the fire-escape, but Italians are fond of melodrama. No wonder Wilbur King's face was fear-stricken as he discovered his villainy avenged at last. It was the double clue of the small-size footprint and the cigarette end on the fire-escape which helped me identify Marini, and, once I had suspected him, I had no difficulty in discovering he was to dance at the Hotel Olympic with his fiancée, at which I overheard his admission of his part in the crime."

Sexton Blake yawned slightly, then suddenly rose to his feet.

"By Jove! I was forgetting! Tinker, ask Mr. Harry Hall and Miss Dean to come in. I want to tell them the good news. They have suffered enough to deserve a lasting happiness."

As Tinker crossed over to the waiting-room Coutts and Robson rose to their feet, with up-raised glasses.

"Here's to you, Sexton Blake! More power to your elbow!"

Sexton Blake's lean, clear-cut face flushed a little, but his keen grey eyes held an unwonted gleam of pleasure at the sincerity of the spontaneous tribute.

THE END.

THE RESULT

of our "Detective" Competition.

None of the entries received gave the correct solution of the mystery of Wilbur King's death as originally conceived by the author of this story and as revealed on this page.

Of those who succeeded in naming the actual murderer as Michael O'Brien, the lift-man, two were in the final selection, and they were of such equal merit as regards accuracy of observation and deduction that it has been decided to divide the Prize of £10 between them.

The sum of £5 has therefore been sent to the following two competitors:

MR. EDWARD S. HARDY, 82, Folkestone Road, Dover.

MR. GEORGE L. GREET, Filmore, Pinhoe, Devon.

To the twenty entrants, names and addresses as below, whose efforts came next in order of merit original UNION JACK cover designs have been sent, in accordance with the terms of the contest:

Mr. George Church, 6, Kitchener Road, East Finchley, N. 2; Mr. James Lynch, 59, Lr. Dominick Street, Dublin; Mr. S. J. Moffatt, 14, King's Road, Belmont, Surrey; Mr. Arthur Brown, 1, Back Marton Street, Lancaster; Mr. James E. Condon, 22, Greenmount Road, Terenure, Dublin; Mr. F. Spotsworth, 47, Clyde Street, Cheetham Hill, Manchester; Mr. T. Horrocks, 684, Warrington Road, Park Lane, Wigan; Mr. E. H. F. Bish, 15, Haldane Road, Fulham, S.W. 6; Mr. K. H. Flintoff, Belvedere Cottage, Burnham-on-Crouch, Essex; Mr. T. J. Phillips, 38, Bishopric, Horsham, Sussex; Mr. H. Hampton, 18, Vale Road, Camberley, Surrey; Mrs. M. Muntz, 37, Festing Road, Southsea; Mr. E. A. Royle, 232, Greame Street, Moss Side, Manchester; Mr. G. Trueman, 19, Ravensdon Street, Kennington, S.E. 11; Mr. Alfred Tranter, 33, Catharine's Cross, Darlaston, Staffs; Mr. A. Cook, 22, Middle Street, Hull; Miss Ethel Keays, Devon Villa, Richmond Hill Avenue, Clifton; Mr. R. J. Thomas, 7, Church Place, Neath, Glam, South Wales; Mr. Charles Wright, Groveley Road, Wilton, Salisbury, Wilts; Miss G. Keays, Devon Villa, Richmond Hill Avenue, Clifton.

* See UNION JACK Supplement, Vol. 2, Page 252, "Poisons You Cannot Buy."



(Continued from page 2.)

dropped anchor in the bay a week ago, manned by a crew mainly composed of French boucan hunters from Northern Hispaniola, men who had good cause to hate the Spaniard with an intensity exceeding that of the English.

Levasseur had brought them back to Tortuga from an indifferently successful cruise. It would need more, however, than lack of success to abate the fellow's monstrous vanity. A roaring, quarrelsome, hard-drinking, hard-gaming scoundrel, his reputation as a buccaneer stood high among the wild Brethren of the Coast.

He enjoyed also a reputation of another sort. There was about his gaudy, swaggering raffishness something that the women found singularly alluring. That he should boast openly of his bonnes fortunes did not seem strange to Captain Blood; what he might have found strange was that there appeared to be some measure of justification for these boasts.

It was current gossip that even Mademoiselle d'Ogeron, the governor's daughter, had been caught in the snare of his wild attractiveness, and that Levasseur had gone the length of audacity of asking her hand in marriage of her father. M. d'Ogeron had made him the only possible answer. He had shown him the door. Levasseur had departed in a rage, swearing that he would make Mademoiselle his wife in the teeth of all the fathers in Christendom, and that M. d'Ogeron should bitterly rue the affront he had put upon him.

This was the man who now thrust himself upon Captain Blood with a proposal of association, offering him not only his sword, but his ship and the men who sailed in her.

A dozen years ago, as a lad of barely twenty, Levasseur had sailed with that monster of cruelty L'Ollonais, and his own subsequent exploits bore witness and did credit to the school in which he had been reared. I doubt if in his day there was a greater scoundrel among the Brethren of the Coast than this Levasseur.

And yet, repulsive though he found him, Captain Blood could not deny that the fellow's proposals displayed boldness, imagination, and resource, and he was forced to admit that jointly they could undertake operations of a greater magnitude than was possible singly to either of them.

The climax of Levasseur's project was to be a raid upon the wealthy mainland city of Maracaybo; but for this, he admitted, six hundred men at the very least would be required, and six hundred men were not to be conveyed in the two bottoms they now commanded. Preliminary cruises must take place, having for one of their objects the capture of further ships.

Because he disliked the man, Captain Blood would not commit himself at once. But because he liked the proposal he consented to consider it. Being afterwards pressed by both Hagthorpe and Wolverstone, who did not share his own personal dislike of the Frenchman, the end of the matter was that within a week, articles were drawn up between

Levasseur and Blood, and signed by them and—as was usual—by the chosen representatives of their followers.

These articles contained, inter alia, the common provisions that should the two vessels separate, a strict account must afterwards be rendered of all prizes severally taken, whilst the vessel taking a prize should retain three-fifths of its value, surrendering two-fifths to its associate.

These shares were subsequently to be subdivided among the crew of each vessel, in accordance with the articles already obtaining between each captain and his own men.

For the rest, the articles contained all the clauses that were usual, among which was the clause that any man found guilty of abstracting or concealing any part of a prize, be it of the value of no more than a peso, should be summarily hanged from the yard-arm.

All being now settled they made ready for sea, and on the very eve of sailing Levasseur narrowly escaped being shot in a romantic attempt to scale the wall of the governor's garden, with the object of taking passionate leave of the infatuated Mademoiselle d'Ogeron.

He desisted after having been twice fired upon from a fragrant ambush of pimento trees where the governor's guards were posted, and he departed vowing to take different and very definite measures on his return.

That night he slept on board his ship, which with characteristic flamboyance he had named La Foudre, and there on the following day he received a visit from Captain Blood, whom he greeted half-mockingly as his admiral. The Irishman came to settle certain final details of which all that need concern us is an understanding that in the event of the two vessels becoming separated by accident or design, they should rejoin each other as soon as might be at Tortuga.

Thereafter Levasseur entertained his admiral to dinner, and jointly they drank success to the expedition, so copiously on the part of Levasseur that when the time came to separate he was as nearly drunk as it seemed possible for him to be and yet retain his understanding.

Finally, towards evening, Captain Blood went over the side and was rowed back to his great ship with her red bulwarks and gilded ports, touched into a lovely thing of flame by the setting sun.

He was a little heavy-hearted. I have said that he was a judge of men, and his judgment of Levasseur filled him with misgivings which were

growing heavier in a measure as the hour of departure approached.

He expressed it to Wolverstone, who met him as he stepped aboard the Arabella.

"You over-persuaded me into those articles, you blackguard; and it'll surprise me if any good comes of this association."

The giant rolled his single bloodthirsty eye, and sneered, thrusting out his heavy jaw.

"We'll wring the dog's neck if there's any treachery."

"So we will—if we are there to wring it by then." And on that, dismissing the matter: "We sail in the morning, on the first of the ebb," he announced, and went off to his cabin.

IT would be somewhere about ten o'clock on the following morning,

a full hour before the time appointed for sailing, when a canoe brought up alongside La Foudre, and a half-caste Indian stepped out of her and went up the ladder. He was clad in drawers of hairy, untanned hide, and a red blanket served him for a cloak. He was the bearer of a folded scrap of paper for Captain Levasseur.

The captain unfolded the letter sadly soiled and crumpled by contact with the half-caste's person. Its contents may be roughly translated thus:

"My well-beloved,—I am in the Dutch brig Jongvrouw, which is about to sail. Resolved to separate us for ever, my cruel father is sending me to Europe in my brother's charge. I implore you, come to my rescue. Deliver me, my well-beloved hero!—Your desolated Madeleine, who loves you."

The well-beloved hero was moved to the soul of him by that passionate appeal. His scowling glance swept the bay for the Dutch brig, which he knew had been due to sail for Amsterdam with a cargo of hides and tobacco.

She was nowhere to be seen among the shipping in that narrow, rock-bound harbour. He roared out the question in his mind.

In answer the half-caste pointed out

Levasseur's Heroics.



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Is it in YOUR district yet? If not, it will be later.
Watch this space for dates and places.

beyond the frothing surf that marked the position of the reef constituting one of the stronghold's main defences. Away beyond it, a mile or so distant, a sail was standing out to sea.

"There she go," he said.

"There!" The Frenchman gazed and stared, his face growing white. The man's wicked temper awoke, and turned to vent itself upon the messenger. "And where have you been that you come here only now with this? Answer me!"

The half-caste shrank terrified before his fury. His explanation, if he had one, was paralysed by fear. Levasseur took him by the throat, shook him twice, snarling the while, then hurled him into the scuppers. The man's head struck the gunwale as he fell, and he lay there, quite still, a trickle of blood issuing from his mouth.

Levasseur dashed one hand against the other, as if dusting them.

"Heave that muck overboard," he ordered some of those who stood idling in the waist. "Then up anchor, and let us after the Dutchman."

"Steady, captain. What's that?" There was a restraining hand upon his shoulder, and the broad face of his lieutenant, Cahusac, a burly, callous Breton scoundrel, was stolidly confronting him.

Levasseur made clear his purpose with a deal of unnecessary obscenity.

Cahusac shook his head.

"A Dutch brig!" said he. "Impossible! We should never be allowed."

"And who the devil will deny us?" Levasseur was between amazement and fury.

"For one thing, there's your own crew will be none too willing. For another, there's Captain Blood."

"I care nothing for Captain Blood!"

"But it is necessary that you should."

He has the power, the weight of metal and of men, and if I know him at all he'll sink us before he'll suffer interference with the Dutch. He has his own views of privateering, this Captain Blood, as I warned you.

"Ah!" said Levasseur, showing his teeth. But his eyes, riveted upon that distant sail, were gloomily thoughtful. Not for long. The imagination and resource which Captain Blood had detected in the fellow soon suggested a course.

Cursing in his soul, and even before the anchor was weighed, the association into which he had entered, he was already studying ways of evasion. What Cahusac implied was true: Blood would never suffer violence to be done in his presence to a Dutchman; but it might be done in his absence; and, being done, Blood must perforce condone it, since it would then be too late to protest.

(Next week: "Kidnapped!")



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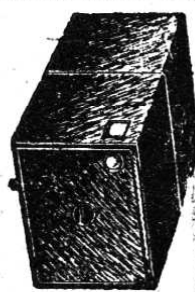
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