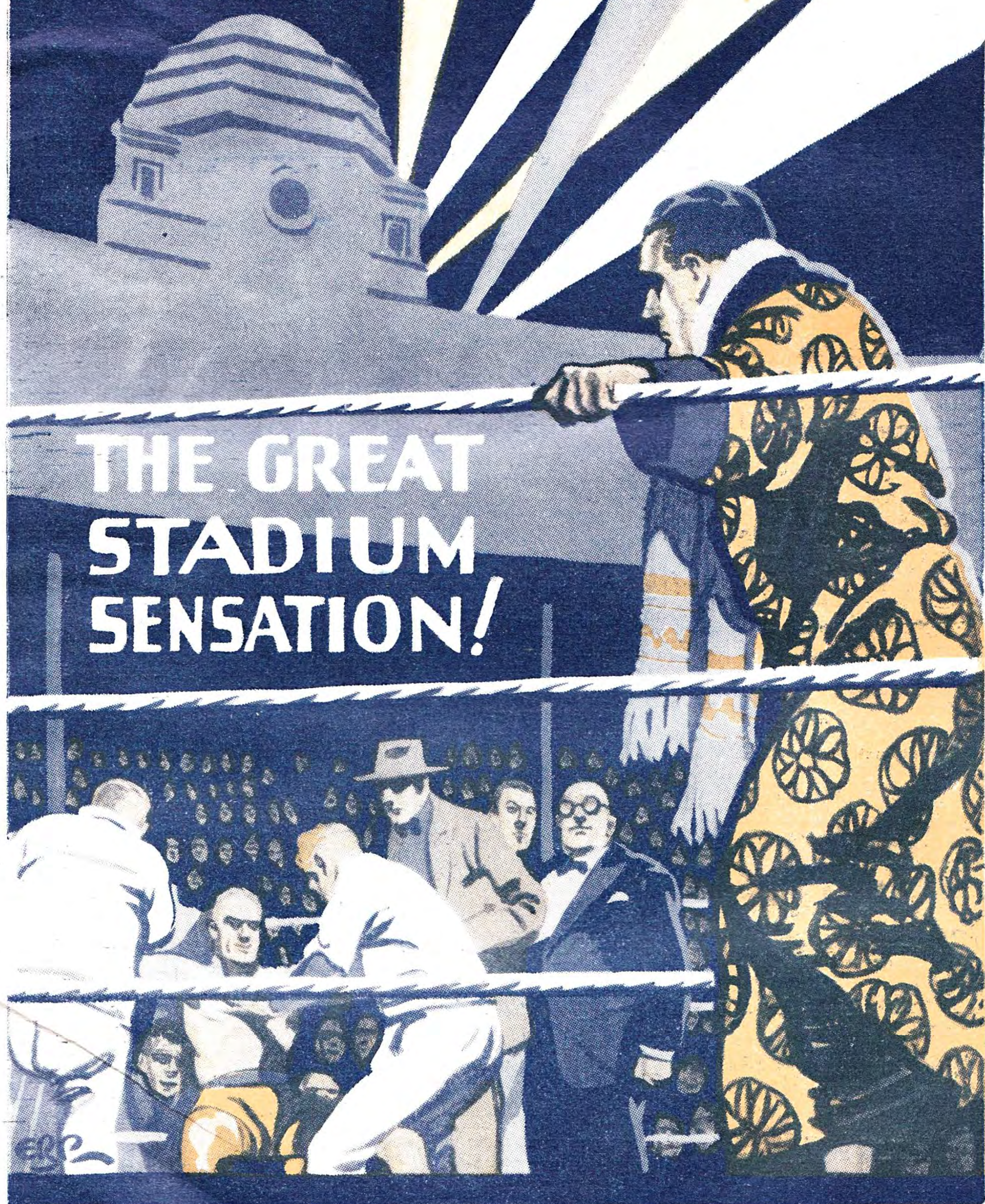


LONG, COMPLETE Detective Story—Captain BLOOD Serial.

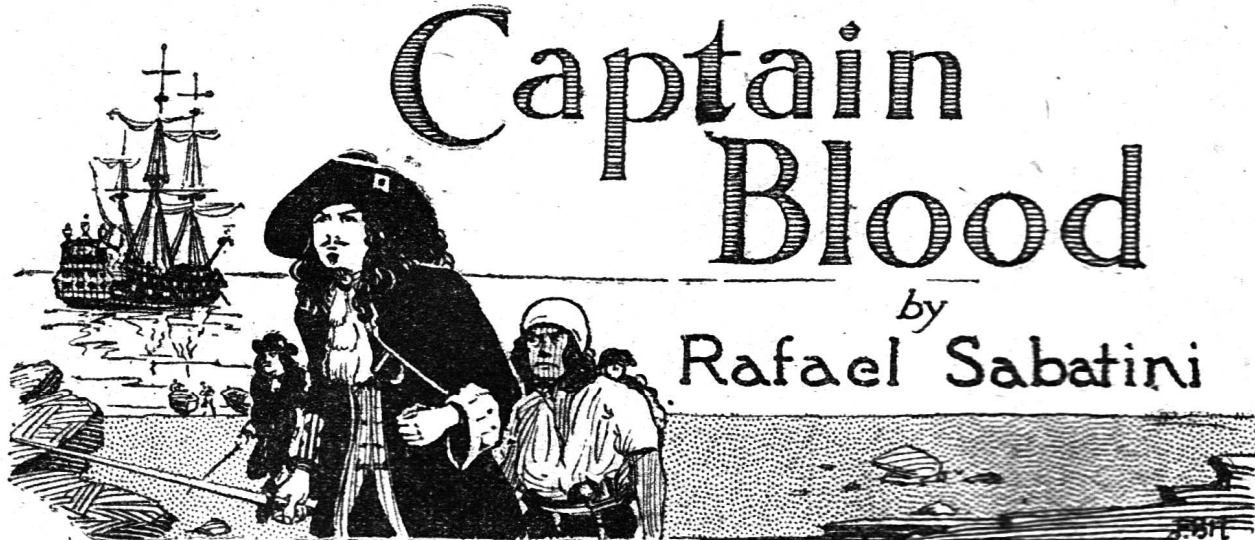
# THE UNION JACK 2<sup>D</sup>

*Sexton Blake's Own Paper*



THE GREAT  
STADIUM  
SENSATION!

**WALDO the Wonder-Man—SEXTON BLAKE.**



# Captain Blood

by  
Rafael Sabatini

**C**ONDEMNED 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.

A Spanish galleon, the *Cinco Llagas*, which comes to raid the island, is captured by Peter Blood and his comrades, and the crew and commander captured. They sail away from Barbadoes—and release the Spaniards near the Island of Hispaniola. Thereafter circumstances compel Blood and his comrades to become "Brethren of the Coast"—in short, pirates.

After several months of successful venturing upon the Main, with *Tortuga*, the pirates' head quarters, as his haven, he succeeds in adding to his company and in acquiring more ships, and a force of five hundred men.

With these he decides upon a raid on the city of Maracaybo. Disaster comes of the project, for, being in the inlet, they find that a Spanish fleet is stationed in the bottle-neck through which they will have to pass to the sea.

An attempt to break through fails, and Blood retreats back to the city. Here he threatens to burn the place down unless they are allowed safe conduct past the fort at the entrance to the harbour. The Spanish admiral, Don Miguel, refuses, but Don Francisco, deputy-governor of the city, offers to raise the money in three days if Blood will hold his hand for that time.

"BY the saints, ye're a bold man, Don Francisco, to come to me with such a tale—to tell me that ye know where the ransom's to be raised, and yet to refuse to say. D'ye think now that with a match between your fingers ye'd grow more communicative?"

If Don Francisco grew a shade paler, yet again he shook his head.

"That was the way of Morgan and L'Ollonais and other pirates. But it is not the way of Captain Blood. If I had doubted that I should not have disclosed so much."

The Dupes.  
(Continued.)



The captain laughed.

"You old rogue!" said he. "Ye play upon my vanity, do you?"

"Upon your honour, captain."

"The honour of a pirate? Ye're surely crazed!"

"The honour of Captain Blood," Don Francisco insisted. "You have the repute of making war like a gentleman."

Captain Blood laughed again, on a bitter, sneering note that made Don Francisco fear the worst. He was not to guess that it was himself the captain mocked.

"That's merely because it's more remunerative in the end. And that is why you are accorded the three days you ask for. So, about it, Don Francisco. You shall have what mules you need. I'll see to it."

Away went Don Francisco on his errand, leaving Captain Blood to reflect, between bitterness and satisfaction, that a reputation for as much chivalry as is consistent with piracy is not without its uses.

Punctually on the third day the deputy-governor was back in Maracaybo with his mules laden with plate and money to the value demanded and a herd of a hundred head of cattle driven in by negro slaves.

These bullocks were handed over to those of the company who ordinarily were "boucan-hunters," and, therefore,

skilled in the curing of meats, and for best part of a week thereafter they were busy at the waterside with the quartering and salting of carcasses.

While this was doing on the one hand and the ships were being refitted for sea on the other, Captain Blood was pondering the riddle on the solution of which his own fate depended.

Indian spies whom he employed brought him word that the Spaniards, working at low tide, had salved the thirty guns of the *Salvador*, and thus had added yet another battery to their already overwhelming strength.

In the end, and hoping for inspiration on the spot, Captain Blood made a reconnaissance in person. At the risk of his life, accompanied by two friendly Indians, he crossed to the island in a canoe under cover of dark. They concealed themselves and the canoe in the short thick scrub with which that side of the island was densely covered, and lay there until daybreak.

Then Blood went forward alone, and with infinite precaution, to make his survey. He went to verify a suspicion that he had formed, and approached the fort as nearly as he dared and a deal nearer than was safe.

On all fours he crawled to the summit of an eminence a mile or so away, whence he found himself commanding a view of the interior dispositions of the stronghold. By the aid of a telescope with which he had equipped himself he was able to verify that, as he had suspected and hoped, the fort's artillery was all mounted on the seaward side.

Satisfied, he returned to Maracaybo, and laid before the six who composed his council—Pitt, Hagthorpe, Yberville, Wolverstone, Dyke and Ogle—a proposal to storm the fort from the landward side. Crossing to the island under cover of night, they would take the Spaniards by surprise and attempt to overpower them before they could shift their guns to meet the onslaught.

With the exception of Wolverstone, who was by temperament the kind of man who favours desperate chances, those officers received the proposal coldly. Hagthorpe incontinently opposed it.

"It's a harebrained scheme, Peter," he said gravely, shaking his handsome head. "Consider now that we cannot depend upon approaching unperceived to

a distance whence we might storm the fort before the cannon could be moved. But even if we could, we can take no cannon ourselves; we must depend entirely upon our small arms, and how shall we, a bare three hundred" (for this was the number to which Cahusac's defection had reduced them) "cross the open to attack more than twice that number under cover?"

The others—Dyke, Ogle, Yberville, and even Pitt, whom a loyalty to Blood may have made reluctant—loudly approved him. When they had done: "I have considered all," said Captain Blood. "I have weighed the risks and studied how to lessen them. In these desperate straits—"

He broke off abruptly. A moment he frowned, deep in thought; then his face was suddenly alight with inspiration. Slowly he drooped his head, and sat there considering, weighing, chin on breast. Then he nodded, muttering: "Yes," and again "Yes." He looked up, to face them. "Listen," he cried. "You may be right. The risks may be too heavy. Whether or not, I have thought of a better way. That which should have been the real attack shall be no more than a feint. Here then is the plan I now propose."

He talked swiftly and clearly, and as he talked one by one his officers' faces became alight with eagerness. When he had done, they cried as with one voice that he had saved them.

"That is yet to be proved in action," said he.

Since for the last twenty-four hours all had been in readiness for departure, there was nothing now to delay them, and it was decided to move next morning.

Such was Captain Blood's assurance of success that he immediately freed the prisoners held as hostages, and even the negro slaves, who were regarded by the others as legitimate plunder. His only precaution against those released prisoners was to order them into the church and there lock them up, to await deliverance at the hands of those who should presently be coming into the city.

Then, all being aboard the three ships, with the treasure safely stowed in their holds and the slaves under hatches, the buccaneers weighed anchor and stood out for the bar, each vessel towing three piraguas astern.

The admiral, beholding their stately advance in the full light of noon, their sails gleaming white in the glare of the sunlight, rubbed his long lean hands in satisfaction, and laughed through his teeth.

"At last!" he cried. "God delivers him into my hands!" He turned to the group of staring officers behind him. "Soon or later it had to be," he said. "Say now, gentlemen, whether I am justified of my patience. Here end to-day the troubles caused to the subjects of the Catholic King by this infamous Don Pedro Sangre, as he once called himself to me."

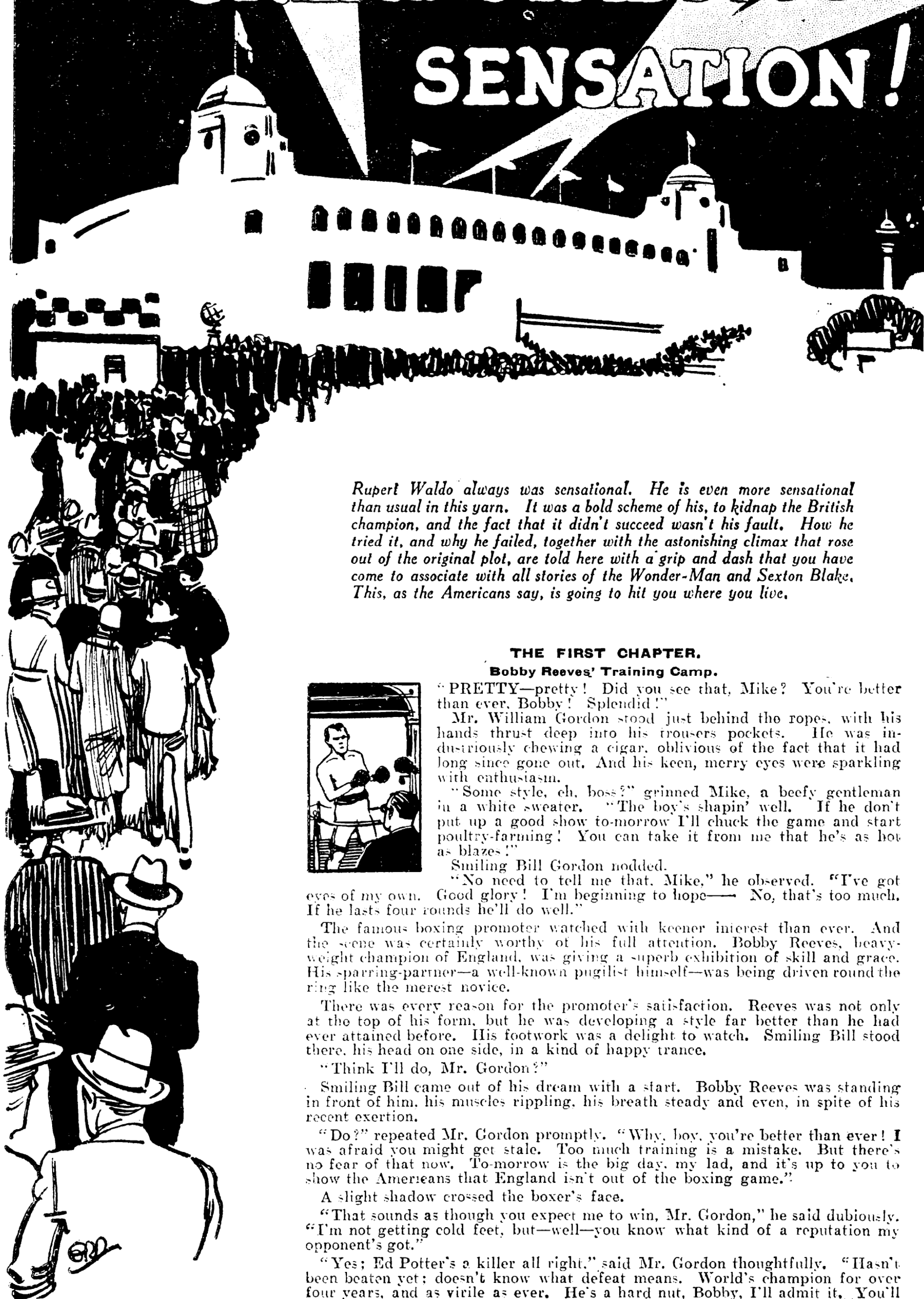
He turned to issue orders, and the fort became lively as a hive. The guns were manned, the gunners already kindling fires, when the buccaneer fleet, whilst still heading for Palomas, was observed to bear away to the west. The Spaniards watched them, intrigued.

Within a mile and half to westward of the fort, and within a half-mile of the shore—that is to say on the very edge of the shoal water that makes Palomas unapproachable on either side by any but vessels of the shallowest draught—the four ships cast anchor well within the Spaniards' view, but just out of range of their heaviest cannon.

Smilingly the admiral laughed.

(Continued on page 26.)

# THE GREAT STADIUM SENSATION!



*Rupert Waldo always was sensational. He is even more sensational than usual in this yarn. It was a bold scheme of his, to kidnap the British champion, and the fact that it didn't succeed wasn't his fault. How he tried it, and why he failed, together with the astonishing climax that rose out of the original plot, are told here with a grip and dash that you have come to associate with all stories of the Wonder-Man and Sexton Blake. This, as the Americans say, is going to hit you where you live.*

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### Bobby Reeves' Training Camp.



"PRETTY—pretty! Did you see that, Mike? You're better than ever, Bobby! Splendid!"

Mr. William Gordon stood just behind the ropes, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets. He was industriously chewing a cigar, oblivious of the fact that it had long since gone out. And his keen, merry eyes were sparkling with enthusiasm.

"Some style, eh, boss?" grinned Mike, a beefy gentleman in a white sweater. "The boy's shapin' well. If he don't put up a good show to-morrow I'll chuck the game and start poultry-farming! You can take it from me that he's as hot as blazes!"

Smiling Bill Gordon nodded.

"No need to tell me that, Mike," he observed. "I've got eyes of my own. Good glory! I'm beginning to hope— No, that's too much. If he lasts four rounds he'll do well."

The famous boxing promoter watched with keener interest than ever. And the scene was certainly worthy of his full attention. Bobby Reeves, heavy-weight champion of England, was giving a superb exhibition of skill and grace. His sparring-partner—a well-known pugilist himself—was being driven round the ring like the merest novice.

There was every reason for the promoter's satisfaction. Reeves was not only at the top of his form, but he was developing a style far better than he had ever attained before. His footwork was a delight to watch. Smiling Bill stood there, his head on one side, in a kind of happy trance.

"Think I'll do, Mr. Gordon?"

Smiling Bill came out of his dream with a start. Bobby Reeves was standing in front of him, his muscles rippling, his breath steady and even, in spite of his recent exertion.

"Do?" repeated Mr. Gordon promptly. "Why, boy, you're better than ever! I was afraid you might get stale. Too much training is a mistake. But there's no fear of that now. To-morrow is the big day, my lad, and it's up to you to show the Americans that England isn't out of the boxing game."

A slight shadow crossed the boxer's face.

"That sounds as though you expect me to win, Mr. Gordon," he said dubiously. "I'm not getting cold feet, but—well—you know what kind of a reputation my opponent's got."

"Yes; Ed Potter's a killer all right," said Mr. Gordon thoughtfully. "Hasn't been beaten yet; doesn't know what defeat means. World's champion for over four years, and as virile as ever. He's a hard nut, Bobby, I'll admit it. You'll

need all your pluck and skill to-morrow."

Smiling Bill was speaking no less than the truth. And his opinion was shared by everybody in and out of the boxing world. If Bobby Reeves lasted six rounds in to-morrow's big fight against the celebrated Chicago Ed, it would be something akin to a miracle.

The fight had created more interest than any such contest for twenty years. A great deal of this was due to Smiling Bill Gordon's personality, and to his intensive publicity methods.

This fight had been fixed up over six months ago, and since then the British public had been kept well informed from day to day. Whatever the result, the whole affair was a triumph for William Gordon. His protege had challenged the world's champion, and the challenge had been accepted. The fight was due to take place on the following evening in the great Stadium at Wembley.

And so the culminating point was being reached. After months of hard work and harrowing anxiety, Smiling Bill was about to reap his reward. But everything depended upon Bobby Reeves.

He was certainly the finest fighter that England had produced for a decade. Victory after victory had given him the topmost position in British boxing, and at last he had found himself in a position to challenge the world's heavy-weight champion.

Bobby was no mere bruiser. He was a Portsmouth man—the son of a sea-captain, and with a line of honest, sturdy ancestors which could be traced back almost to the time of Drake. British to the backbone, he was a fine example of perfect manhood—handsome, keen-witted, and one of Nature's gentlemen. A more ideal type to fight in Great Britain's cause could not have been found.

He had the whole country behind him.

Enthusiasm had reached such a high pitch that not a single seat was left for the big fight. The entire Wembley Stadium had been sold out weeks earlier, and the highest prices on record had been paid.

Incidentally, high prices were necessary, for Chicago Ed's manager had insisted upon a guaranteed sum—win or lose—which would have frightened most promoters completely off. But Smiling Bill was an exception. He had set his heart on this fight, and he had achieved the apparently impossible.

And although his anxiety would not be over until the fight was an actual fact, he was now feeling more happy than he had felt for months. Bobby Reeves was fulfilling every hope. He was shaping so well that Mr. Gordon was beginning to hope that his champion would last beyond the fourth round.

Ed Potter, the American, had the reputation of "killing" his man during the first four rounds, and it was, indeed, the truth. Ed had invariably delivered the knockout in the third or fourth round. Nobody had ever succeeded in entering a fifth. If Bobby Reeves only achieved this distinction, it would be a triumph.

As for winning the fifteen-round contest, this was too much to be even considered. Not even Mike Dennis, Bobby's trainer, believed that a win could seriously be contemplated. It was, in truth, an absolute fact that Bobby Reeves had absolutely no chance of

winning. He would cover himself with glory if he merely lasted into the fifth round.

Mr. William Gordon was an honest boxing promoter—a man who had always played square with the public, and in whom the public had implicit trust. And he was determined that this affair should be a square deal.

There would be no knockout in the first few seconds—no farcical end to the fight before the first round was over. Smiling Bill was convinced that Bobby would give the public a good run for their money. Indeed, but for this conviction, Mr. Gordon would not have promoted the fight at all.

"You'll do, Bobby," he said, as he lit a fresh cigar. "I'm proud of you, boy, and I hope to be even prouder by this time to-morrow evening. Look after yourself well, and, above all, get a good night's sleep."

Bobby laughed.

"You needn't worry about me, Mr. Gordon," he said lightly. "Everybody knows I'm a loser, and there's not much chance of my bed-time cocoa being doped. That's one advantage of being a certain loser," he added drily.

"I'm not thinking of that," said the promoter. "There's no fear of your being tampered with, boy. But you've got to look after yourself—it's more important now than ever before. Mike, see that he gets to bed in good time."

"Leave it to me, boss," said the trainer, nodding.

A few minutes later Mr. Gordon passed out of the well-equipped gymnasium. He found himself amid idyllic surroundings. For the British champion's training camp was situated on the riverside some distance above Stains.

Mr. Gordon had acquired an old-world bungalow, creeper-covered and picturesque. There was a wooded garden, with flowers and lawns and fruit-trees. Just beyond the bottom wall flowed the Thames, and the view was wonderful.

At the moment the evening was drawing in, and Mr. Gordon paused for a moment to drink in the beauties of the scene. He was a hard-headed business man, but he had an appreciative eye for scenery.

Even the gymnasium fitted with the other surroundings. It was a recent addition, it is true, but it had been built in the same style as the bungalow, and proved no eyesore. Looking beyond the garden, and over the low stone wall, Smiling Bill nodded approvingly. This was one of the prettiest reaches of the Thames, with deep woods growing down near the opposite bank, and undulating hills rising beyond. There were one or two boats about, with white garbed occupants, and the whole spirit of summer was in the air.

"Charming!" murmured Smiling Bill. "Wonderful!"

He had never ceased to congratulate himself upon the selection of this site as Bobby Reeves' training quarters. There was peace here—just the kind of atmosphere that a man in training needed. Moreover, there was a quiet lane leading away from the garden gate, and Bobby had been able to go for his morning runs in complete privacy.

Peace was the keynote of the whole camp. There was no bustle, no noise; nothing to upset the nerves of a man who had to be in perfect mental and physical condition at a given hour.

Going round to the front, Mr. Gordon entered his big limousine, and was soon being driven away. His time was valuable, and out of every twenty-four hours he usually worked eighteen. But he always found time to pay a daily visit to Bobby's training-camp.

Work was practically over for the day, and the champion's sparring partners were now at liberty. The gymnasium was unoccupied, save for the trainer and one or two newspaper reporters, who had come down to glean some last-minute information.

Reeves himself had retired into the bungalow, where he changed into easy flannels, and gave himself up to the luxury of a lounge-chair and a magazine. Mike Dennis came in and found him thus.

"Got a cigarette, Mike?" smiled Bobby.

"None o' that, laddie!" said the trainer, frowning. "You can have as many cigarettes as you like after to-morrow evening, but not while you're in training."

"You old ass! I was only joking!" chuckled Reeves. "I'll admit I could do with a smoke, but I don't think it'll kill me to go without for another twenty-four hours. Clear off, you old worry! Can't you see I'm in the middle of a story?"

"Mind it ain't too excitin'!" said Mike severely.

Bobby was left alone, and he spent quite a pleasant hour. By this time the dusk had set in earnestly, and outside the peace of the summer evening was more complete than ever. Darkness enshrouded the river, and except for the twinkling lights from some neighbouring bungalows, and the gleam from one or two houseboats, the surroundings were deserted.

It was getting near Bobby's bedtime, for the boxer adhered to a rigid routine while in training. One result of this was his present fitness. He passed out of the bungalow for his usual nightly stroll.

It was his custom to take several turns round the garden before retiring. He always enjoyed this brief respite, and loved to have ten or fifteen minutes alone. And he was never allowed to go beyond his scheduled time, for Mike would invariably come out and order him in.

Fifteen minutes later the trainer came out through the porch of the bungalow and glanced keenly round. It was darker than usual to-night. There was no moon, and clouds were obscuring the last glow of sunset. Darkness had descended before its time.

"Time's up, laddie!" said Mike, as he stepped out across the lawn. "It's a good thing I shall have some rest after to-morrow. Chasin' you about is gettin' on my nerves—"

He broke off and looked round more searchingly.

"You there, Bobby?" he asked, raising his voice.

But there was no reply, and he turned back to the bungalow.

"Gone indoors, I suppose?" he muttered, frowning.

But a few minutes later Mike Dennis was getting rather anxious, for a search of the bungalow proved fruitless. Reeves was certainly not indoors. Neither was he in the gymnasium.

"What's the matter, Mike?" asked

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one of the newspaper reporters, as the trainer was about to leave the gymnasium. "You're looking pretty worried."

"And so would you be worried if you had to deal with young Reeves!" growled Dennis. "Can't find him anywhere, and he ought to be in bed by this time! Week after week he's had his stroll round the garden, and he's never moved out of it. And now to-night, the most important night of all, he takes it into his head to go beyond the grounds."

"Well, don't get anxious about it," laughed the reporter. "Thank goodness I'm not a champion boxer! I'm hanged if I'd like to be watched over and ordered about like a kid of five!"

The trainer went out into the garden again and marched round. The reporter accompanied him out of sheer curiosity. They were going down the path when Mike suddenly paused.

"I thought as much!" he said fiercely.

The garden door stood half open. It was quite a low one, for the wall itself was no higher than four feet. But at nightfall it was always latched and bolted, and the fact that it was open could mean only one thing. Reeves had passed out on to the private lane.

It was an unusual thing for him to do, and there was some little cause for the trainer's anxiety. Reeves knew better than anybody else the importance of getting to bed in good time to-night. And yet he had deliberately left the bungalow grounds, and was now completely out of sight.

"Reeves!" called the trainer loudly.

There was no reply as the two men stood silent. Only the rustle of the wind in the trees came to their ears. It was impossible to see up the lane, for there were high hedges on either side, and the darkness was thick.

"It does seem a bit queer," admitted the reporter.

He struck a match to light his pipe, and as the flame flared up Mike Dennis uttered a sharp ejaculation.

"Gosh! What's all this?" said the reporter.

The trainer said nothing. He pulled out his own box of matches and struck a light. He held it low, so that he could examine the ground at his feet. One glance was significant—indeed, ominous.

Just near the gate the ground was decidedly soft, and a thunderstorm the previous day had left the surface still damp. There were the distinct marks of many footprints—and more. The marks were confused, many of them deep and peculiar, as though there had been a fierce struggle. But the most alarming feature of all was the sight of several drops of blood—still fresh and glistening, and obviously only recently shed.

"Good heavens!" muttered the trainer hoarsely. "See this. Foul play! Something's happened to Bobby. There must have been three or four men—"

He broke off as the appalling nature of the affair came upon him with full force. On the eve of the great fight—the biggest boxing contest that London had ever planned—the British champion had been decoyed away. It was so unexpected and so unaccountable that the trainer was momentarily bereft of his senses.

The reporter, on the other hand, was as keen as mustard. All his professional instincts rose to the occasion. Here was a real story. Something to startle the country with. And he would be first with the news. His paper would gain the scoop.



"Mind where you're standing, Mike!" exclaimed the reporter. "Don't disturb anything; we don't want any confusion! By George! Look there! Isn't that the track of a motor-car?" (This page.)

"Mind where you're standing, Mike!" he ejaculated tensely. "Don't disturb anything for Heaven's sake! We don't want any confusion. It looks to me that Bobby was set on by three or four men. By George! Look there! Isn't that the track of a motor-car?"

They struck other matches, and sure enough they could see the marks left by the tyres of an automobile. The affair, while becoming clearer in one respect, was becoming more complex in another. Reading the marks on the ground, it was clear that Bobby Reeves had been lured outside the gate, and had then been set upon and bundled into a waiting motor-car.

But who had done this trick—and why?

The American camp would certainly have no finger in this criminal business, for they regarded their own champion as unbeatable. There was no necessity for them to "monkey" with Reeves, even if they were unscrupulous. And they weren't. Ed Potter's manager was as straight a boxing promoter as America had ever produced. And it was most unlikely that any outside influence would interfere with the Englishman.

The whole disappearance was inexplicable.

And within ten minutes the training-camp was humming and buzzing. Telephones were in use, messages were being

sent here and there, the police were informed, and excitement reigned generally. Mr. Gordon was recalled from town as soon as he arrived there, and it was a wonder he didn't break his neck, for he instructed his chauffeur to drive back to the camp, regardless of all speed limits.

Fortunately, Smiling Bill was in time to prevent the newspaper reporters sending in their messages. Above all, publicity must be avoided. Not a word of this affair must creep out in the morning papers.

"We've got to get the boy back! We've got to find him!" declared Smiling Bill. "Good glory! If this leaks out I shall be accused of monkey business. They'll think I'm afraid to match my man against the American, and that the whole thing's a frame-up. And with the seats all sold it would be a frightful calamity! We've got to find that boy to-night."

The promoter was almost in despair, but he maintained a bold front. No longer was he smiling, but tense, alert, and grim. He didn't worry himself over theories. He concentrated all his energies on finding Bobby Reeves and getting him back. And the police got going in earnest. The most rigid inquiries were made. A country-wide search was instituted for the motor-car which had carried Bobby Reeves off.

But the great public knew nothing. In the West End clubs, in thousands of saloon bars, at street corners, people were talking about the great fight on the morrow. And not a soul outside the British champion's training camp knew that Bobby Reeves had been mysteriously spirited away!

## A CONFEDERATION STORY COMING!

See next week's UNION JACK.

# THE SECOND CHAPTER. A Time-Limit and Some Tyres.



MR. SEXTON BLAKE laid his newspaper aside, and frowned across to Tinker as he selected a piece of toast from the rack.

"There is no need to get excited, Tinker," he remonstrated mildly. "Reserve that until this evening."

"Yes; but supposing Reeves should win, sir?" asked Tinker. "I say, wouldn't that be a smack for Chicago Ed? I'd love to see it! Ed's been getting a bit too big for his boots recently."

"You hopeless young ass!" said Blake. "Pass the marmalade, and don't entertain such ridiculous notions. If Reeves enters the fourth or fifth round, he'll do wonderfully well. Chicago Ed is the finest boxer the world has ever produced, and it's no good thinking otherwise. I'd like to see Great Britain gain the championship. Come in!"

Mrs. Bardell entered the dining-room with a card. Blake glanced at it, and then slightly raised his eyebrows.

"Please show the gentleman into the consulting-room, and tell him I will be with him in a moment, Mrs. Bardell," he said. "Rather curious, that," he added, after the housekeeper had gone. "Our caller is Mr. William Gordon."

Tinker was greatly interested.

"Smiling Bill!" he ejaculated. "Just as we were talking about the fight, too! I wonder what on earth he's come to see you for, guv'nor?"

"Wondering is a bad habit, Tinker!" retorted Blake.

He did not wait to finish his breakfast but rose after emptying his coffee-cup. It was unusual for a visitor to call at such an early hour as this—barely nine-fifteen. And Sexton Blake instinctively guessed that his visitor had come on urgent business.

Both Blake and Tinker had got tickets for the big fight that evening, and it was only natural that they should discuss the contest during breakfast. Practically

every breakfast-table in Great Britain dealt with the same topic of conversation. For this was the great day.

Blake found that Smiling Bill was pacing restlessly up and down the consulting-room. The famous boxing promoter was a big man, with a somewhat aggressive type of face, but his expression was relieved by the good-natured wrinkling round his eyes. And usually those eyes wore a twinkle. This morning they were grave and troubled.

"Forgive me for disturbing you so early, Mr. Blake, but I have come to you in desperation," said Mr. Gordon, getting to the point without delay. "Bobby Reeves disappeared last night, and we can find absolutely no trace of him. If you can find him in time for the fight, I'll give you five thousand pounds."

"You are rash with your promises, Mr. Gordon!" interposed Blake drily.

"Rash!" repeated Smiling Bill. "Good glory! I'd pay ten thousand—anything—to get Reeves back! My whole reputation will stand or fall to-day! If this fight doesn't take place I shall be ruined! I shall be discredited for all time! Just think—"

"Just a moment, Mr. Gordon," interrupted Blake. "If I am to help you, I must know all the facts—and there is very little time at our disposal. In what circumstances did Reeves disappear?"

"The most mysterious circumstances—the most sinister," said the promoter, sitting down as Blake indicated a chair. "I've been up all night. I've been chasing about here, there, and everywhere. And half an hour ago I thought of you, Mr. Blake. You're the last hope!"

Sexton Blake shook his head.

"I am afraid I am not a magician," he said. "If the police have failed to trace Reeves since last night, I must tell you frankly there is little hope of my succeeding in the few hours that remain."

"I know that, Mr. Blake—I know that," said the other. "But I'm desperate—absolutely desperate! I'm ready to clutch at any straw. And even if you find Reeves, I doubt if he'll be able to fight. There's been foul play—I fear he's injured. But it'll be something if we can produce him. If he doesn't appear in the Wembley Stadium to-night, there'll probably be a riot, and it's quite on the cards that I shall get lynched."

Blake could hardly help smiling.

"The matter is undoubtedly serious, but hardly as grave as that," he exclaimed. "Perhaps you'll tell me the exact circumstances?"

Mr. Gordon did so, and Blake listened carefully. By this time Tinker had come in, and he took in the details, and made a good many notes.

"The police have discovered nothing—positively nothing," concluded Mr. Gordon. "It seems hopeless to trace the car, and any attempt to find Reeves now seems like looking for a needle in a haystack. They've got him, and they evidently mean to keep him until it's too late."

"They?" repeated Blake.

"The gang that set upon him last night and took him away in the car," said Smiling Bill. "We've established that much, at all events. There must have been four men, at least. And they worked quickly, too, for in less than fifteen minutes they had utterly vanished, leaving no indication as to their destination."

"Was everything quiet at the bungalow during this time?"

"Yes, everything."

"And did nobody hear this mysterious car?"

"Not a sound of it—not a throb," replied the promoter. "That's one of the most puzzling features—although, of course, most motor-cars are silent nowadays. But why? In Heaven's name, why? Who in glory wants to ruin this fight? Reeves hasn't got an earthly chance of winning, and everybody knows it. Why should he be spirited away like this?"

"You can suggest no motive?"

"Absolutely none," replied Mr. Gordon. "Unless, of course, it's a plot to ruin me. But I've got no enemies of that sort, Mr. Blake—at least, none that I know of. If Reeves doesn't appear in the ring to-night, though, I'm finished for all time. The public will never forgive me for such a fiasco. There'll be no chances of making an explanation. Everybody will assume that I've shown the white feather."

"I am afraid you are right there," agreed Blake. "I see no report of this affair in the morning papers. I take it you have purposely held the news back?"

"Yes; not even the rival camp knows a word," said the promoter. "We've kept it a dead secret. Heavens, if this story leaked out now, at the eleventh hour, I don't know what would happen! I tell you I'm desperate, Mr. Blake—I'll pay anything to see Reeves before this evening. Even if he's hopelessly crooked, it'll be something to have him on the spot."

"I'll do my best, Mr. Gordon, but I'll make no promises," said Blake quietly. "Tinker and I will go out to the bungalow at once, and have a look round. We can't do better than start our inquiry there."

"I wish you luck, sir—I wish you luck!" said the other. "My only regret is that I did not communicate with you last night. I'm afraid it's too late now, but I can only hope. You'll find Mike Dennis there—he'll give you every assistance!"

"You are not coming yourself?"

"No, I can't," said Mr. Gordon. "I've got to go to my offices. I've several appointments, and it would look funny if I didn't keep them. Whatever happens, I've got to put a bold face on, and keep up appearances. And I urge you to ring me up if there's the faintest atom of hope. I don't know how I shall live through this day!"

Blake and Tinker were genuinely sorry for the unfortunate promoter. His anguish was grievous to witness. But, although he revealed his heart to them, he was a very different man when he arrived at Wembley. He entered the office he had rented at his usual hour, he wore his usual smile, and he was the same bluff, hearty Bill Gordon as ever.

In the meantime, Sexton Blake and Tinker motored out to the bungalow. Blake was by no means optimistic. Cases of this kind rarely appealed to him, and it was only his knowledge of Smiling Bill's thorough honesty, and the latter's pitiful anxiety, that had led him to accept the commission.

Blake was taking a big risk.

The time limit was brief, and it was any odds against him being successful. Failure would do nothing to enhance his reputation, and he could see very little prospect of success. On the other hand, success would mean a veritable triumph. Not that Blake was thinking of himself in the slightest degree, or of the absurdly high reward which Mr.

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Gordon had mentioned. He was an investigator, first and last, and he centred his whole thoughts upon the problem.

When he and Tinker arrived at the bungalow they found the whole place enshrouded in gloom. There were one or two reporters there—chafing rebelliously, and eager to receive permission to publish their sensational news. They found Mike Dennis haggard and desperate. They found a local police-inspector, who refused to view the disappearance with the same importance as those of the camp.

"Looks to me like a faked-up affair, Mr. Blake," he said in confidence, after Blake and Tinker had made themselves known. "Not much good wasting your valuable time on it. Some hokey-pokey, or I'm a Dutchman! That's the worst of these big fights—you can never be certain!"

"Quite so!" said Blake, nodding.

There he saw the keynote of the entire situation. The police had naturally investigated in lukewarm spirit from the very start, taking it for granted that Bobby Reeves' disappearance was a pre-arranged plot, probably with the connivance of Mr. William Gordon himself.

The matter was in the hands of the local authorities, and they had refused, in spite of Mr. Gordon's entreaties, to appeal to Scotland Yard for assistance. That was one of the main reasons why Smiling Bill had come direct to Sexton Blake. It was the only hope of gaining expert assistance.

As far as Blake could make out the investigation was entirely in the hands of Inspector Raine, and the brief conversations Blake had with him revealed him as a somewhat wooden-headed specimen. He was an excellent man for the usual routine work of an urban police-station, but when it came to finesse he was quite out of his depth.

A report had been circulated throughout the country instructing the police to look for the mysterious car, but this was more or less of a formality. The police couldn't very well locate a car of which they had absolutely no description, bar the one fact that it was fitted with nearly new Dunlop tyres.

"I'm rather pleased, Tinker," said Blake, as he and his young assistant walked out into the garden. "This means that we've got practically a clear field. Raine's investigations have been half-hearted from the start, and I even doubt if he has gone over the ground."

"Well, I can't see much hope, anyhow," said Tinker. "We simply know that Reeves went out for a stroll last night, that he was grabbed by three or four men, and bundled into a car. It's a tall order, gov'nor."

"I'm afraid so, but we can only try," said the great criminologist. "We are surely not dealing with expert criminals, and it will be a poor lookout if we cannot pick up some sort of trail."

Inspector Raine didn't even trouble to accompany the famous Baker Street pair. And Mike Dennis had apparently lost all hope, for he kept to the gymnasium, talking with the impatient newspaper men.

Out in the lane Blake and Tinker made a brief survey.

"Nothing much here, sir," commented Tinker. "A few footprints, and the marks of the car tyres. But I don't see how these clues are going to lead us anywhere. Nobody saw the car, and I—"

"Humph! Rather curious!" said Blake absently.

"What's rather curious, sir?"

"Everything, Tinker—everything!"

said Blake. "In fact, I can't quite understand how— Yes, by Jove! This is decidedly strange! But why on earth didn't Raine see it? Is the man blind?"

Sexton Blake was speaking to himself, rather than to Tinker. He stood there, gazing down at the ground with searching, inquisitive eye. Obviously, he had noticed something which Tinker's usually keen eyes had missed.

The scene was just as Mr. Gordon had described.

A quiet, deserted private lane, with grass borders and hedges on either side. Just near the bungalow garden wall the surface was rather uneven and patchy—hard, for the most part, but with little spots of loose, clayey surface. A few yards farther away it was wholly hard, and no wheel tracks of any kind were visible.

But it was quite obvious that a motor-car had been standing near the gate. The tracks were visible in all the soft places. And there were the footprints, too—a great many of them.

Moving along the grass, Blake made his preliminary survey. Then he walked down the lane until he arrived at the junction. Here the private lane entered a small public byway, which, in turn, joined up with one of the main roads, half a mile away.

"What's the idea of coming all down here, sir?" asked Tinker.

Blake didn't seem to hear him. He walked on for two or three hundred yards, and then he abruptly turned back. There was a keen expression in his eyes, and Tinker felt annoyed. It was clear to him that his master had hit upon something of importance. And it irritated Tinker to realise that he himself was in the dark.

When they got back to the garden wall Tinker examined the ground more closely than before, but for the life of him he couldn't see anything that could account for Sexton Blake's intent expression.

"Hold this, young 'un!" said Blake briskly.

He had taken out a tape measure from his pocket, and Tinker took one end of it with alacrity. They proceeded to measure the exact width of the motor-car's track, by taking the tape from one wheel mark to another, across.

"H'm! A somewhat remarkable measure!" commented Blake, as he noted the figure. "Precisely four feet nine and a-half inches, Tinker. Isn't that unusual? Practically all cars standardise their size with a fixed wheel track—say four-foot six, or four-foot-eight. It isn't usual to go into the half inches."

"It does seem a bit unusual, sir."

"Let's have another try," said Blake.

They moved a short distance away, to a spot where the marks were again visible. And once more they took exact measurements.

"More remarkable still!" said Blake grimly. "Indeed, we may count this as a startling discovery, Tinker. While the track of the motor-car is certainly four foot nine and a-half inches in one spot, it is four foot ten and three-quarter inches in another. A somewhat curious discrepancy."

Tinker stared at Blake in astonishment.

"But it's impossible, sir!" he said.

"Impossible?" repeated Blake. "My dear boy, we've just taken the measurements!"

"I know that, but it's impossible, all the same!" insisted Tinker. "The track of a car means the distance between the wheels. And it can't vary an inch and a quarter from one place to another. What on earth do you make of it, sir?"

"The solution is quite simple; there was no car at all!"

"No car?" yelled Tinker.

"You needn't let the whole county know," remonstrated Blake. "There was no car at all, Tinker."

"But—but these marks?"

"Faked."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Tinker blankly. "Faked?"

"Undoubtedly," said the detective. "If you will take the trouble to walk up the lane you will find one or two fairly loose pieces of surface, but you will find no wheel marks over them. There was no car, Tinker—only a wheel. Indeed, it may have been just a portion of a motor tyre—sufficient to make these very clearly-defined tracks."

"I say, this is getting interesting, sir!"

"Far more interesting than I anticipated," said Blake, nodding. "These faked tracks were made for the express purpose of fooling the police, and they succeeded. The tyre was obviously pressed upon the loose earth until a clear impression was made. This was done on both sides, and it is quite possible that careful measurements were taken. But it is so easy to make a slip when it comes to a matter of inches—and in the dark, too."

"But if there was no motor-car, how was Bobby Reeves taken away?" asked Tinker, staring. "And what about all those footprints? Were they faked, too?"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," said Blake calmly.

"Then you mean—you mean that Reeves planned the whole thing himself, and simply walked off!" said Tinker with a whistle. "By jingo, I hadn't thought of that before, and yet it's so simple! I expect he faked up those spots of blood, too."

Sexton Blake smiled.

"Really, Tinker, you are getting ahead with wonderful speed," he said dryly. "As a matter of fact, your theory is entirely wrong. As I read these signs Reeves indulged in no fakery, but fell a victim to an actual plot. He was certainly captured in this spot, and spirited away."

Tinker's satisfied expression vanished.

"Oh, well, it beats me!" he admitted gruffly. "If Reeves didn't plan all this himself, how was he collared? And where was he taken to?"

Blake looked dreamily at the river.

"The Thames flows immediately past the garden wall, at the rear," he said softly. "If you wanted to kidnap a man from this bungalow, Tinker, would it not be ideal to carry him off by water? No trail, no incriminating evidence of any kind. Yes, the river would certainly be the better way."

"Then you think——"

"I think we shall stand much more chance of success if we turn our attention to the river," said Sexton Blake. "But, first of all, it might be instructive to make a careful survey along the foot of this wall."

Tinker was keen. The entire field of the investigation had suddenly changed, and there were big possibilities. Since Reeves' disappearance the police had confined themselves to a search for a mythical motor-car, and had naturally failed.

Sexton Blake, less than half an hour after his arrival on the scene, was starting on a totally different trail, and it seemed to Tinker that the problem was not quite hopeless, after all.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER. The River Trail.



TINKER watched his famous master with more interest than ever. He was finding it necessary to completely readjust his focus. In the light of Sexton Blake's recent discoveries, the disappearance of Bobbie Reeves had to be regarded from another angle.

Blake was certainly right in assuming that the river was the most likely field for investigation. But the mystery of the champion's abduction was just as complex as ever.

Neither Blake nor Tinker could think of any feasible explanation for the boxer's seizure. Not that Blake exercised his mind on that point now. He was trying to discover how Reeves had been taken away, and he was attempting to get on the trail. Blake believed in doing one thing at a time.

"Not a trace—not a sign of any kind," he murmured, as he carefully followed the wall to the end of the garden. "Rather disappointing, Tinker, but we mustn't be discouraged by such a small set-back."

The low, old-fashioned wall ran right down to the river-bank, and then turned at right-angles along the bottom of the bungalow garden, parallel with the river. Indeed, when one leaned over the lower wall, one looked straight down into the Thames.

Blake was examining the ground from the side garden door to the river. If Reeves had been taken in this direction there would surely have been some tell-tale marks. The lower part of the wall was thick with tall grasses and weeds, and there were one or two clumps of bushes to be negotiated.

"There's been nobody here, sir," said Tinker at length.

This was only too obvious, as Blake could see. Was it possible that his river theory was at fault! He retraced his steps, and reached the door again. He was by no means at the end of his resources.

"Ah, this is rather more promising!" he said, after a few moments. "Have a look at this, Tinker! Enlightening—eh?"

He was now examining the top of the wall, which, four feet high, had a perfectly flat top about eight inches wide. It was of rough stone, mellowed by age, and considerable portions of it were moss-grown.

Tinker could now see that there were some faint marks on the top of the wall—not exactly scratches, but almost invisible blurs. Unless his attention had been specially attracted he would have noticed nothing.

"There's something there, sir," he admitted.

"Footprints, Tinker—made apparently by a man wearing shoes with crepe rubber soles," said Blake. "See, there are similar marks farther down, particularly where the moss is abundant."

He took out his magnifying lens and examined the faint footprints with closer attention. He satisfied himself that his first surmise was correct. Somebody wearing crepe-soled shoes had walked along the top of this wall and had taken the direction of the river.

"It must have been Reeves himself!" declared Tinker. "He went away of his own accord—"

"And yet Reeves was wearing gymnasium shoes with ribbed soles," interrupted Blake. "I have found no trace of a ribbed sole, except on the ground, among the other confused footprints."

"But, hang it all, that won't do, sir!" protested Tinker. "If only one man walked along this wall you're implying that one man carried Reeves away. And he's Britain's champion boxer!"

"Even Britain's champion boxer possesses a head which is susceptible to a sandbag," said Blake grimly. "I'm not saying that any such disaster occurred, but it would at least account for the bloodstains, and it would also account for this one set of footprints. One man did the job, and after hoisting his victim upon this wall, he carried him along it to the end."

"And dumped him into the boat?"

"Presumably. But we will make a close examination."

They went to the bottom of the wall, intent and eager now. But when they leaned over the river they could see nothing to enlighten them. The water flowed gently past the wall, lapping the brickwork. A glance down the river revealed a tiny landing-stage, the property of an adjoining residence. And a small river-boat was moored to the landing-stage.

"I think, Tinker, we will annex that little boat," said Blake briskly. "If there is any trouble afterwards we must hope to be forgiven."

They passed along the river-bank, trespassed upon the adjoining property, and seized the boat. Before doing so, Blake had looked round in case the owner was in sight. But the property seemed deserted.

In the boat Blake and Tinker sculled gently to the corner of the bungalow wall, to the spot where a boat would probably have been moored the previous night. And Blake's deductions were so accurate that he made a discovery during the first minute.

On the face of the stonework, just above the water-line, there was a distinct scar. It was obvious, too, that the scar had been recently made. It had been caused by the nose of a boat butting gently against the wall.

"I'm jiggered if you're not right, sir!" said Tinker excitedly. "This is proof, with a vengeance! There was a boat here last night, and—"

"She was moored to this overhanging piece of creeper," interrupted Blake. "You see the bruised stems, Tinker? The marks where the rope was tied."

The overhanging creeper was sturdy, and quite capable of holding a boat against the gentle current. As Blake had said, one stem of the creeper was distinctly bruised and a few leaves were missing.

The problem was becoming clearer and clearer. Indeed, the method employed by the kidnapper or kidnappers was laid bare. Sexton Blake's tactics had borne rapid fruit.

After examining the scar on the wall through his lens, he took out his pocket-knife, and instructed Tinker to keep the boat pressed well against the wall. Leaning over, Blake scraped the ancient brickwork with his knife, a certain amount of deposit falling into his other palm.

"I think that will do," he said, as he tipped the fragments of dust and stonework into an empty matchbox. "Our next investigation will be indoors, Tinker. It is quite possible that the contents of this matchbox will prove very enlightening."

Tinker was puzzled. For the life of him he couldn't understand how Blake expected to learn anything from that

scrap of brickdust. But, knowing his master's methods so thoroughly, he was agog with excitement. Blake would not have made such a statement without good reason.

Returning the boat to the adjoining landing-stage without invoking the wrath of the neighbouring householder, they hurried to the bungalow and went indoors. Mike Dennis met them in the little square hall.

"No luck, Mr. Blake?" he asked listlessly. "The boss just rang up, and it fair broke my heart when I had to tell him—"

"Never mind the boss just now, Dennis," interrupted Sexton Blake briskly. "I might want to ask you a few questions in a short time, so please be handy."

Something in Blake's tone caused the trainer to glance up sharply.

"Have you found something, sir?" he ejaculated.

"I've found a great deal," replied Blake. "And there's a slight hope, Dennis, that we may locate our man yet."

The trainer was so startled that he flushed deeply. The excitement shone in his eyes. All night long he had been depressed by the attitude of the police—by the utter lack of news. It came upon him as a shock to learn that Sexton Blake had already made progress.

They went into the sunlit sitting-room, and Blake unlocked his research case, as he called it. He took out a small, but very efficient, microscope, and set it up on the window-table where the full sunlight streamed in.

"We will soon know if this experiment is fruitless or not," he observed, as he tipped the brickdust on to a slide.

For two or three minutes Blake sat there with his eye to the microscope, stirring the dust on the slide with the point of a pencil. Tinker and Dennis stood by, silent but tensely anxious.

"Have a look, Tinker," said Blake at last. "Tell me what you make of it."

A glance into the microscope was a revelation. What had previously been just ordinary dust became an amazing mass of different particles of matter. There were even a number of minute insects crawling about, so tiny as to be invisible to the naked eye.

But what attracted Tinker's attention most was a considerable number of vividly green specks, and it seemed to him that they were not vegetable matter, for the green was of a different shade.

There were black specks, too—intensely black. But for the most part the mass was plain brickdust.

"I can't make much of it, sir," confessed Tinker. "These black particles look a bit like paint to me."

"Or possibly tar," suggested Blake.

"By jingo, yes!" ejaculated Tinker. "Tar! Off the boat—eh, as it rubbed its nose against the wall? There would naturally be a certain amount scraped off. But what about these green specks?"

"Paint," said Blake.

"You—you mean that the boat had originally been tarred and was repainted green?"

"A fair shot, Tinker, but I should not explain the matter in that way," replied Blake, shaking his head. "To my mind, it seems that the boat was tarred, and that it has been in the habit of butting against a green-painted structure. Thus, in this dust, we have particles of both. The structure might be a landing-stage or some steps, or probably a houseboat."

"Ye gods!" gasped Mike Dennis, staring at Blake with wide eyes. "A houseboat—a green houseboat?"

"Have you seen such a craft?" asked Blake sharply.

"Seen one!" roared the trainer. "Why, it's moored right opposite us—on the other side of the river! Been there for weeks!"

"There's no such houseboat there now," said Blake, shaking his head.

"But, man, I tell you—"

Dennis broke off and rushed to the other window. One look was enough for him, and he turned back into the room with a dazed, excited expression.

"She's gone!" he said thickly. "But she was there yesterday; she was there last night. Mr. Blake, she's been there for weeks! Gosh! And you found this out from that dust?"

"Never mind how I found it out, Dennis," interrupted Blake. "One can do wonderful things with a microscope. You say there was a green houseboat moored on the opposite side of the river? Look at the dust on that slide, and tell me if the green specks are of the same shade."

The trainer looked and gasped.

"Yes, sir; that's the green," he said breathlessly.

"Good! Now, can you tell me who occupied that houseboat?"

"You've beat me there, sir," replied Mike Dennis, scratching his head. "I never noticed the craft much, except in a general sort of way. She had a flat roof with a rail all the way round. And sometimes there was an old gentleman sitting up there under the awning."

"An old gentleman under the awning—eh?" mused Blake. "I have not the smallest doubt, Dennis, that there was also a powerful telescope under the awning, through which the amiable old gentleman kept a constant watch on these premises. He could even see into the very rooms themselves, and into the gymnasium, for it has clear glass windows."

"You mean that Bobby was carried off by—"

The trainer paused and breathed hard. Even Tinker was flushed. With a certainty which was absolutely startling, Sexton Blake had elucidated the precise nature of Bobby Reeves' abduction—and from the smallest possible material. It was rather uncanny. Yet, at the same time, it was purely logical and matter of fact. Blake had gone at the problem with his usual close attention to detail.

"Come, Tinker; we are wasting our time here now!" he said crisply. "We've got to search the river for a green houseboat, and then, I fancy, our quest will be at an end."

"I'd like to be in this, sir, if I may," said the trainer eagerly.

"By all means, Dennis. Come along," replied Blake.

They hurried out, and although they caught sight of Inspector Raine in the offing, they went off without consulting him. Blake felt that it would be better to deal with this affair without the inspector's presence.

"We really need a motor-boat," he observed. "We want to cover the distance as quickly as possible, and I don't fancy a rowing-boat in this heat, particularly as every minute is precious."

"There's a gentleman not three hundred yards away, sir, who's got a motor-boat," said Dennis quickly. "I've often seen it about—a smart little craft, and fast, too."

"We'll see what we can do," said Blake promptly.

In a very few minutes they were in the garden of a neighbouring bungalow, and it didn't take Sexton Blake long to borrow the motor-boat. The



There was a luxurious easy chair in the centre of the room. In this, securely roped, and with a gag round his mouth, lay Bobby Reeves. (This page.)

owner was only too anxious, indeed, to lend his craft to such a famous man.

Thus, very shortly afterwards, Blake and Tinker and Dennis were speeding downstream, keeping a sharp look-out. Blake was certain that the green houseboat would be down the river, having probably been allowed to slip gently down on the current during the night.

"There's one thing, guv'nor, we sha'n't go far before we find somebody who can give us some information," remarked Tinker. "A houseboat can't be spirited away like a rabbit in a conjurer's hat. And once we've located it we shall be at the end of the trail."

"Apparently so, Tinker. But we mustn't take anything for granted," replied Blake. "Everything points to this green houseboat as our objective, but there is such a thing as coincidence. It may be pure chance—"

Blake broke off as they passed round a bend of the river, and another reach came into full view. And there, moored placidly against the nearer bank, lay a smart, roomy houseboat. She was a luxurious affair, gay with canvas awnings, glittering brass work, and her predominant colour was green.

"That's the one!" ejaculated Dennis, pointing. "That's the boat, sir. She only just came round this bend, you see."

"Yes," said Blake slowly. "I am rather puzzled as to why she shifted her position at all. But perhaps the explanation is simple. This particular spot is lonely, whereas the other was comparatively close to a bungalow or two. It is merely another indication that we shall find Reeves on board. His captor or captors were anxious for seclusion."

"What are we going to do, sir?" asked Tinker eagerly.

"In a case of this sort we must act boldly and chance the consequences," replied Blake. "We cannot afford to wait even a minute. If Reeves is on board he will probably require attention, and there are none too many hours between now and the contest."

The motor-boat was slowed down, and she glided up smoothly. As far as Blake could see the houseboat was deserted. One or two windows were open, but there were no indications of life.

A moment later Blake leapt on board, and Dennis was quick to follow, the trainer being agog with keen excitement. Tinker could hardly wait to make fast before he joined the others. Sexton Blake, in the meantime, had walked boldly into the living-room of the houseboat, the door opening readily to his touch.

"Anybody at home?" called the detective loudly.

It was merely a precautionary measure, in case the whole fabric of his reasoning was at fault. But no reply came, and he moved forward to an inner door. One fact immediately caught his attention. The inner door was newer than the rest of the houseboat, and much stronger than one would have thought necessary. Furthermore, it was fitted with two powerful bolts, which were shot home.

Blake flung the bolts back and turned the handle.

The door opened, and the detective found himself looking into a curious little central compartment—one with no windows, and little bigger than a cupboard. There was a luxurious easy-chair in the centre. In this, securely

roped, and with a gag round his mouth, lay Bobby Reeves.

"It's him—it's him!" shouted Dennis over Blake's shoulder.

He pushed his way in so precipitately that he nearly knocked Blake over. And, with feverish fingers, he commenced unfastening the ropes. The joy in his face was good to see, although it was not unmixed with a certain expression of anxiety.

"Good old Mike!" panted Reeves, as soon as the gag was removed. "I knew you'd find me sooner or later. Phew! Thank goodness I've got rid of that infernal thing! I was nearly choked!"

"Boy, are you hurt?" gasped the trainer tensely.

"Hurt? No," replied the boxer. "Not even bruised. The fellow was careful enough to keep me whole."

"Thank the stars for that!" ejaculated Mike. "But you've got to thank this gentleman, Bobby. Mr. Sexton Blake—ay, and Mr. Tinker, too! I'm telling you Mr. Blake's a magician! The way he located you was the most wonderful thing I've ever seen!"

Reeves stood up and stretched himself with great relief.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Blake," he said frankly. "I'm glad enough to be free. I can assure you. I suppose the bees brought you into this—Mr. Gordon. He must have been worrying. Poor old Smiling Bill! I've been thinking about him for hours."

The trainer was so overjoyed that he was laughing and talking and feeling the champion all over as though he were some prize animal. They passed out on to the small deck, and Blake soon explained how he had arrived at his conclusions. Reeves listened with amazement.

"And do you mean to say you found out about this houseboat merely by examining a scrap of dust through the microscope?" he asked. "It's incredible, Mr. Blake!"

"Put in that bald way, perhaps it is," smiled the detective. "But you must remember there were other lines of reasoning. We knew that you had been taken away in a boat, and thus the river was a certain field for search. But we don't need to go into that now. You have a story of your own to tell."

The boxer nodded.

"And it's even more amazing than yours, Mr. Blake," he said grimly. "I'm not sure that you'll even believe it—I can hardly believe it myself!"

"I think I can tell you what you are going to say," interposed Blake. "If I have got hold of the correct theory, you were seized and borne away by one man only, and not by a gang, as the police suggested. Am I right?"

Reeves was dumbfounded.

"How did you know?" he asked, staring. "Yes, you're right, Mr. Blake."

"Right!" yelled Mike excitedly. "One man?"

"Yes."

"And you weren't even sandbagged or drugged?"

"It was the most staggering experience of my life," declared Reeves. "I was out for my usual walk last night, and an old gentleman leaned over the gate and asked me for a light. I couldn't oblige him; but we got talking, and the next moment he grabbed hold of me, lifted me in his arms like a feather, and leapt to the top of the wall."

"You're dreaming!" ejaculated the trainer.

"Not at all," said Sexton Blake. "Reeves has told us the perfect truth. And, of course, there is only one man who could be the author of this extra-

ordinary business. Surely you have heard of Rupert Waldo?"

"Waldo!" breathed Tinker.

"You mean the fellow they call the Wonder-Man?" asked Reeves, taking a deep breath. "Yes, I've heard of him. But—but I never thought—Honestly, Mike, I was as helpless in that man's arms as a rat in the grip of a ferrier. I struggled, but I couldn't move. And he'd got me in such a position that one of his hands muffled my mouth. And I'm no weakling, Mike."

The trainer shook his head dubiously.

"Well, all I can say, I take off my hat to this Mr. Waldo!" he said, with the air of one who is thoroughly unconvinced. "Either you were dreaming, or you're trying to pull my leg!"

But Sexton Blake and Tinker, at least, knew that Reeves had been telling sober truth. And their interest in the case was increased by several hundred per cent.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER. "What do you say to ten thousand pounds?"



WEMBLEY was gay with visitors. The great Exhibition grounds were more than usually packed, for the day was sunny and enticing. Moreover, this was a very special day, and unusual crowds had been drawn.

Within the great Stadium active preparations were being made. The ring was already fixed, with powerful electric arcs in position overhead. Cinematograph operators were testing their machines. Special towers had been erected near the ring, so that the whole fight could be photographed from start to finish.

Everything was going on in exact accordance to plan. There was only one man in that whole vast army of people who knew that one of the principals for the evening had mysteriously vanished. In his office, Smiling Bill Gordon was attending to his usual business.

He had been interviewing representatives from Ed Potter's camp; he had been talking with newspaper men, with a dozen other important people—and not a single one had noticed any difference in the famous promoter's demeanour.

They little guessed that he was a human volcano—calm on the exterior, but a raging furnace within. For Smiling Bill was well-nigh off his head with anxiety and worry. According to the latest report, communicated to him by telephone from the training-camp, the police hadn't moved a step further—and even Sexton Blake had done nothing.

And Bobby Reeves was still missing.

Before very long Mr. Gordon would be obliged to produce his man, or admit his inability to do so. And failure to produce him would mean stark ruin for the promoter.

One of his secretaries came in with a card, and Smiling Bill took it rather wearily. This pretence was nerve-wracking; he wouldn't be able to keep up his false front much longer. He glanced at the card, assuming the caller to be another business representative of some kind.

"Glory!" muttered Mr. Gordon, with a start.

For the card was blank, except for the one pencilled word "News" in the centre. That word was amazingly significant, under the circumstances. The

promoter turned to his secretary with a glint in his eye.

"Show him in—show him in!" he said curtly.

The man, startled by his employer's unusually sharp tone, hurried out, and presently returned, ushering in a benevolent-looking old gentleman, attired in loose flannels and a panama.

"Good-morning, Mr. Gordon—good-morning!" said the visitor genially. "Much as I hate to bother you on such a busy day, I feel that I have no alternative. A matter of business, sir."

Smiling Bill was more astonished than ever, and he waited till his secretary had passed out of the room and had closed the door. Then he removed the cigar from the corner of his mouth and threw it down.

"Well?" he asked hoarsely. "That card you sent in? You've got news? I suppose you mean—"

He paused, hesitating, before committing himself.

"Regarding Reeves?" smiled the old gentleman. "Exactly! My news certainly concerns our mutual young friend. Indeed, I am in a position to supply you with some very accurate information."

"You know where Reeves is?" shouted the promoter, leaping up.

"I left him less than half an hour ago—well and unarmed," smiled the old gentleman, sitting back in his chair with perfect composure.

"Half an hour ago!" muttered Mr. Gordon, in a dazed kind of voice, and repeating the words mechanically. "Well and unarmed! But—but I don't understand. Who are you, sir? What do you know of this affair—"

"Well, without boasting, I think I know more about it than anybody else," interrupted the visitor. "As for my identity, that is a matter of no importance. You may, if you wish, call me Mr. Smith. The fact that Smith is not my name is a mere trifle."

Smiling Bill was more astonished than ever, and, now that he was recovering some of his composure, a glint of suspicion was appearing in his quick, alert eyes.

"You are a detective?" he asked sharply.

"On the contrary," smiled the old gentleman. "No, sir, I regret that I cannot lay claim to any such distinction. But I know where Bobby Reeves is, and I am here to discuss business. Before proceeding any further, let us understand one another. It is always trying to be at cross-purposes. At a price, I will produce Reeves within the hour!"

"At a price?" echoed Mr. Gordon, slowly sinking back into his chair. "Glory! So that's the game! You're not a detective, but a representative from the other side? You're one of the crooks?"

Rupert Waldo—for of course the mysterious Mr. Smith was that cheerful rogue—shrugged his shoulders. He was perfectly at his ease, and rather enjoying himself.

"One of the crooks?" he repeated. "Hardly, sir; I am the only crook! To be quite plain, it was I who borrowed Bobby Reeves last evening, and I can assure you he has had every care and attention!"

"You infernal rascal!" shouted Mr. Gordon furiously.

"Exactly," smiled Waldo. "I agree, sir. When one is bent upon such a mission as this, of what avail would it be to protest? We will take it for granted, then, that I am an infernal rascal. Splendid! We now begin to understand one another. The position becomes easier."

(Continued on page 19.)

## The GREAT STADIUM SENSATION!

(Continued from page 10.)

Smiling Bill calmed down. His companion's easy manner, his semi-humorous tone, had a soothing effect. It was really impossible to flare up into a rage in the presence of this benevolent-looking old gentleman. Waldo's latest character sketch was as clever as any of his former impersonations. He seemed to be as harmless as a country curate.

"How do I know that you are not lying to me?" demanded Mr. Gordon slowly. "What proof have you got that Reeves is in your power? And how do I know that you will produce him, even if we do come to an—er—an arrangement?"

"I see that you are a cautious man, Mr. Gordon," said Waldo approvingly. "Nothing pleases me better. I have provided myself with various little articles which I hope will convince you. Here, for example, is Reeves' pocket-book. Here we see his belt, and here his pocket-handkerchief. Possibly you can identify these trifles?"

"It amazes me that you can come here so boldly and so brazenly," ejaculated the promoter thickly. "Do you realise that you have placed yourself entirely in my hands? Within two minutes I can call a dozen police-constables! The Exhibition is swarming with them. There are a score within shouting distance. By gosh! Your nerve is astounding!"

Waldo nodded.

"So others have led me to understand," he agreed. "But surely you will do nothing so rash, Mr. Gordon? I assume that you are rather anxious to produce Bobby Reeves in time for the big fight. If you were to call the police, the results would be far more disastrous for you than for me. It was my impression that we could settle this trifling problem just between ourselves."

Bill Gordon lay back and pursed his lips. He knew that his visitor was speaking the truth. To have the man arrested would be worse than useless—for he would never reveal the prison of Bobby Reeves if he found himself in the hands of the police. The promoter realised that there was only one course open to him. Much as he hated it, he would have to make terms.

"Well," he said grimly, "what do you propose?"

"Ah, a moment's thought has had a good effect, eh?" chuckled Waldo. "You are satisfied with these articles of identification?"

"Yes, I am satisfied," granted the promoter.

"It is not my desire to be grasping or greedy," continued Waldo. "So we will fix upon a moderate sum. What do you say to ten thousand pounds?"

Mr. Gordon was shaken to the core.

"Ten thousand pounds!" he shouted, his face flushing with sudden indignation and fury. "Man alive, you're mad! Ten thousand pounds! No, by gosh! Not five thousand—not one thousand! I'd rather abandon the fight!"

He stood there, breathing hard, and Waldo laughed.

"Not you!" he said coolly. "You'd pay twenty thousand at a pinch, Mr. Gordon, and you know it! Come, my demand is quite reasonable. You know



The young fool at the wheel lost his head. With a giddy swerve the car just caught Bobby's foot as he was being pulled to safety. (Page 21.)

as well as I do that stark ruin stares you in the face if Bobby Reeves fails to show up for this fight. Are you going to let ten thousand pounds stand in your way?"

Smiling Bill gave a gulp, and subsided again.

"You confounded rogue!" he panted. "I've never heard such an infernally exorbitant demand in my life! You've got me—I know it! But ten thousand! By the Lord Harry, no! Make it five thousand, and I'll meet you; but you'll have to bring Reeves right into this office before I pay you a cent!"

Waldo shook his head.

"I want ten thousand pounds now, or Reeves doesn't appear at all!" he said calmly. "You've got to take me on trust, Mr. Gordon. It's a tall order, but you're in no position to pick and choose. Either you pay me the ten thousand, or I—"

Zzzzzzz—zzzzzz!

The twin bells of the telephone purred urgently, and Mr. Gordon turned to the instrument on his desk, frowning.

"Wait a moment!" he said curtly. "Yes? What's that?" he added, into the transmitter. "Yes, this is Mr. Gordon speaking."

"I am Blake," came a voice over the wires. "Good news for you, Mr. Gordon—the best possible news."

"What's that?" ejaculated Smiling Bill, with a gulp.

"My little investigation has proved much more successful than I anticipated," went on Sexton Blake. "Reeves is with me—"

"He's what?" roared the promoter breathlessly.

"He is beside the telephone," came

Blake's pleasant voice. "We found him up the river, a prisoner on a houseboat. Wait a moment, Mr. Gordon—he wants a word with you himself."

Even in the tense excitement of this moment, Mr. Gordon kept his presence of mind. Waldo was listening to every word, and the promoter had no intention of giving him the tip that his plot had failed. The situation, indeed, was dramatic. Even while the master crook was here, demanding his money, Sexton Blake was ringing up to say that the missing man had been found.

"That you, chief?" came Bobby Reeves' voice across the wires. "Buck up, sir! Everything's all right—I'm as fit as a fiddle—not even scratched!"

"Splendid!"

"We're coming over within half an hour," went on the champion. "Mr. Blake's offered to drive me up in his car. He's a wonder, sir—it was a brain wave on your part to bring him into the case."

"Yes, yes, exactly," said Mr. Gordon, keeping his voice even and calm. "You don't know how pleased I am. But listen! I'll ring up in ten minutes, and have another chat. I'm engaged just now. Right! Good-bye!"

He hung up before Reeves could say anything further, and he knew that both Sexton Blake and the boxer would be curious at his abrupt tone. But under the peculiar circumstances, he could act in no other way.

Waldo, sitting on the other side of the desk, had gathered nothing from the few words which Mr. Gordon had spoken. And the big man's attitude had not altered one whit as he again faced his visitor. He was acting his part with consummate skill.

"Now, sir," he said gruffly. "You were saying that you require the ten thousand in cash?"

"I'm afraid it is the only satisfactory method," replied Waldo.

"You have got me in a cleft stick, so I must agree," said Smiling Bill, his eyes glinting with anger. "Very well, wait here. It will take me some minutes to get this money together, but I'll do my best."

He walked out of the room, leaving Waldo lounging in his chair. But as soon as Mr. Gordon got outside, his whole expression changed. Blake's news had filled him with an overwhelming joy, and he was feeling inclined to execute a war dance in the passage. But he sternly repressed this instinct—there was something more important to be done. Entering an adjoining office, he beckoned to one of his secretaries, and drew him out into the corridor.

"Wilton," he said crisply, "go to the entrance, and fetch two policemen. Bring them straight to my office."

"Two policemen!" ejaculated the secretary, staring.

"Yes; and don't stand there goggling at me!" snapped the promoter. "Hurry! And not a word to anybody else, either! Look here, you'd better take them into your office, and bring them straight into me as soon as ever I ring. That's all! Go to it!"

Wilton knew better than to question his boss any further. He hurried off at once, and Mr. Gordon returned to his own office. He was feeling complete master of the situation now, and his heart was light.

"I have made all arrangements," he said, as he closed the door. "One of my secretaries will soon be in."

Waldo nodded.

"You have been remarkably quick, Mr. Gordon," he observed. "I hope you are not attempting any trickery with me? It is to our mutual interest that this little matter should remain private. I admit that you have every reason to be annoyed, but as a man of the world, you will appreciate that these little things are sent to try us."

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Gordon grimly. "It may interest you to know, confound your impudence, that I haven't had a wink of sleep since the night before last. You may be further entertained by the knowledge that I have not the slightest intention of paying you a farthing."

"Oh!" said Waldo evenly. "That's a pity, Mr. Gordon. I was under the im-

pression that you were going to be reasonable."

"You would certainly have forced me into an agreement but for a timely interruption," said Smiling Bill. "I am referring to the telephone call. In fact, I have just heard that Bobby Reeves is free, and about to start for Wembley," he added, with a carelessness which matched Waldo's own composure.

The Wonder-Man merely smiled.

"Trying to bluff me, eh?" he said. "It won't do, Mr. Gordon—"

"The gentleman who phoned me was Mr. Sexton Blake," added the promoter. "In order to rid you of any further idea that I am bluffing, I will mention that Bobby Reeves was discovered on a houseboat—"

"That's enough!" rapped out Waldo, with a sigh. "Good gad! Blake again! And I thought I was on a cert this time. It's all right, Mr. Gordon—I believe you now. Well, the whole thing's a frost—thanks to Sexton Blake! If that man has upset my apple-cart once, he's upset it a dozen times! Confound his infernal cleverness!"

Mr. Gordon was rather surprised at the cool way in which Waldo had taken the news. Except for a brief start, and a frown of annoyance, the Wonder-Man had shown no other emotion. He was as cool and smiling as ever. He rose leisurely to his feet.

"Well, I might as well be going," he said regretfully. "Awfully pleased to have met you, Mr. Gordon—hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again. It's a pity—"

"Just one minute, Mr. Smith," interrupted the promoter, as he touched his bell. "There are two gentlemen I would particularly like you to meet. And they, on their part, are very anxious to make your acquaintance. Come in!"

A tap had sounded on the door, and in response to Smiling Bill's command, Wilton flung the door open, and two policemen entered. Mr. Gordon held himself ready, expecting a sudden rush on Waldo's part. To his surprise, his visitor remained in the same easy, lounging attitude.

"Ah, splendid!" he said genially. "I see you have plenty of protection, Mr. Gordon. I am delighted to note the perfection of your arrangements. At the same time, I must reluctantly bid you good-morning."

The two constables were looking surprised. They didn't quite know what to make of the situation.

"Any trouble here, sir?" asked one of them awkwardly.

"Trouble? Yes," snapped Mr. Gordon. "I give this man in charge. He is guilty of kidnapping, and he tried to rook me out of ten thousand pounds not five minutes ago!"

"Sad, but true!" agreed Waldo, nodding. "Officers, I must plead guilty. At the same time, I fear that I can afford you no satisfaction. Once again, Mr. Gordon, I bid you a very good day."

"By gosh!" gasped Mr. Gordon. "Of all the nerve!"

He regarded Waldo's attitude as sheer bravado. The two officers closed in upon the Wonder Man, and one of them firmly seized his arm. But the next moment they all received the surprise of their lives.

"Sorry—but don't do that!" said Waldo smoothly.

With a lightning-like movement he whirled round, lifted the amazed constable off his feet, and flung him completely across the room as though he were a sack of feathers, on to a big lounge. The other policeman was given a seemingly gentle shove, which nevertheless toppled him backwards over Mr. Gordon's desk. And Waldo, dusting his sleeves, strolled out of the room.

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Smiling Bill, aghast.

He ran out into the corridor, and just caught a glimpse of his late visitor disappearing round the corner. A minute later, when the flustered constables gave chase, the Wonder-Man had made his exit, and was mingling with the throngs outside.

#### THE FIFTH CHAPTER. A Trick of Chance.



MR. WILLIAM GORDON looked rather blankly at Wilton, and Wilton looked rather blankly at Mr. William Gordon.

"Amazing, sir!" ejaculated the secretary.

"Good glory, it's more than amazing!" said the promoter.

"Did you see it, Wilton? Did you see

the way he lifted that fourteen-stone constable and threw him across the room? Hang it all, I believe I'm still dreaming!"

They had every reason to be startled. Waldo's appearance suggested an old gentleman, and he was apparently no match for even the smallest police-constable in the Metropolitan Police Force. Yet he had dealt with one of its most burly members with consummate ease. And the second officer had received no better shrift.

But, above all else, Waldo's startling coolness had impressed Mr. Gordon. He had bested the two policemen with a bored kind of air, and had disappeared within the space of thirty seconds. For the first time the promoter realised the nature of the man he had been dealing with.

"All right, Wilton! If the police come back, deal with them," he said crisply. "Don't interrupt me, I shall be busy."

He closed himself in his office and seized the telephone. Two minutes later he was speaking to Sexton Blake, having caught the great detective just as he was about to start for Wembley. In crisp-

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sentences Mr. Gordon explained just what had happened.

"I'm not surprised to hear that your eccentric visitor made such a spectacular exit," laughed Blake. "It was quite characteristic of the man."

"Good heavens! Do you know him?"

"I have had more than one brush with Mr. Rupert Waldo," replied Blake, his voice becoming grim. "You have heard of him, surely? He's known as the Wonder-Man—"

"The Wonder-Man! repeated Mr. Gordon faintly. "He's a wonder man all right. The confounded scoundrel! Thank heaven you were in time, Mr. Blake! And I've got to express my appreciation of your amazing success, too; not that I shall ever be able to put my feelings into words. I couldn't talk as I would wish when you rang me up because that infernal rogue was sitting on the other side of my desk, listening to all I said!"

"I thought you were rather abrupt," commented Blake. "Well, Mr. Gordon, don't worry about the incident; Waldo won't bother you again, I fancy. His little game is knocked on the head, and he's not the kind of man to chase a will-o'-the-wisp. He'll quietly drop into obscurity again. I shall be with you shortly, and we can discuss the matter then."

At the other end of the line Sexton Blake hung up the receiver and gave a brief account of the affair to Tinker. They were in the bungalow, waiting until Mike Dennis had satisfied himself that Reeves was thoroughly fit again.

"Just like Waldo, sir," remarked Tinker. "I say, what a nerve! Calmly walking in and demanding ten thousand quid! And he'd have got it, too, if you hadn't chipped in. You've saved old Smiling Bill a small fortune."

Blake was not looking very satisfied.

"I'm sorry events have turned out like this," he said slowly. "I would have given a great deal to have been in Mr. Gordon's office when Waldo walked in. In fact, Tinker, the whole case has been disappointing. It has more or less fizzled out."

Tinker grinned.

"It's fizzled out because you've extinguished it, guv'nor!" he replied promptly. "Of course, the whole thing's obvious now. Waldo must have planned the affair weeks in advance. Just like him to think of such a dodge. Hallo! Time we were moving."

Mike Dennis and Bobby Reeves had just come in. The champion was like a schoolboy—laughing, happy, and full of enthusiasm. The trainer had just put him through his paces, and he had proved that he was as fit as ever.

In less than three minutes they were driving towards London in the Grey Panther, Blake at the wheel, and Reeves beside him.

"I can't help having a little respect for this chap, Waldo," remarked Reeves. "From first to last he treated me with surprising care. He said he was particularly anxious that I shouldn't even be bruised. Wanted to deliver me up in brand new condition, as it were."

"Waldo is a surprising fellow in his way," commented Blake. "He has more nerve than any man I know of, and yet, paradoxically, he has no nerve whatever. And whilst being unscrupulous where money is concerned, he is a genuine sportsman to his finger-tips."

There was light-heartedness in the very air as they drew nearer to Wembley. Mike Dennis was showing signs of reaction; after his gloom and despair of the night he was now gay and cheerful. Reeves himself declared that

he was feeling in better condition for the match than he had ever dreamed of. And in his office Mr. William Gordon was waiting, eager and jovial. His assistants were marvelling at the sudden change in their chief.

Everything, in fact, was going smoothly now.

The day was fine, the Exhibition crowds were bigger than ever, and the great contest promised to be the most successful venture of its kind that had ever been promoted. The general enthusiasm was enormous.

When the Grey Panther arrived at one of the Wembley main entrances Bobby Reeves grew impatient at the crawling pace; for Blake had been compelled to drive at a mere crawl for some time, owing to the congested traffic. He was making for the car park.

"Look here, you'll find me with Smiling Bill!" sang out Reeves as he stood up. "You don't mind if I go in ahead of you, Mr. Blake?"

"Not at all," said Blake. "You and Dennis had better—"

"Go easy, boy! Go easy!" warned Mike sharply.

He regarded his charge in very much the same way as a nursemaid regards a child. He was afraid to let Reeves move a yard unattended. And Britain's champion had just leapt out of the Grey Panther, laughing and excited.

"Hold on, Mr. Blake! I'll go with him," said the trainer. "Thank goodness the crowd hasn't recognised him, or he'd be mobbed. The young idiot's too excited—"

He broke off with a startled gasp, for Bobby Reeves, still skylarking, had turned and waved his hand. At the same instant a trifling mishap occurred which was destined to lead to enormous consequences.

Reeves placed his foot upon a discarded banana skin.

So simple—so ordinary amid these surroundings, and yet so fraught with possibilities. In the act of moving forward the boxer slipped, lost his balance, and fell heavily.

"For the love of Mike!" gasped the trainer, aghast.

He wasn't so much alarmed at Bobby's fall; it was the imminent danger from another quarter which caused Dennis to pale beneath his ruddy tan. A small two-seater, recklessly driven by a youth in white flannels had suddenly accelerated, the youth seeing an unexpected opening.

It was all over in a flash.

Reeves sprawling on the ground, the car charging full tilt at him, a quick, lithe form darting out from the heedless crowd. In one flash the boxer was pulled clear. He had been saved from grave injury, and possible death, for in his original position his head would have met the car's radiator.

But the young fool at the wheel lost his head.

He wrenched at the steering and trod on the accelerator, probably mistaking the latter, in his confusion, for the brake. With a giddy swerve the car just caught Reeves' left foot as he was being pulled into safety. There was a jolt, a sharp cry from Bobby, and the two-seater careered round and struck a motor-omnibus with a grinding, shivering crash.

There was a wild uproar—shouts, shrieks, and a volley of indignant abuse from the bus driver. From first to last, the incident had occupied about ten seconds.

Had the idiot at the wheel of the two-seater kept his head, Bobby Reeves would have suffered no harm whatever.

But that unexpected swerve had done incalculable harm—for one of the front wheels had run over the boxer's left ankle.

He didn't realise it himself until he stood up, and found that it was impossible to put any weight on that foot. He was being supported by a clean-cut stranger in flannels.

"Sorry!" said the latter quickly. "I pulled you free, but that infernal dolt swerved. Afraid your foot's badly crocked—and that means serious consequences to you."

"Thanks awfully!" gasped Reeves. "How on earth did you pull me away like that? It's a wonder I wasn't killed! My ankle seems a bit painful, but I don't think it's much."

Nobody took any notice of them as they drew back from the crowds. The smashed car and the bus, locked together, formed the centre of attention. The crowds were pressing up, and eight or nine policemen were hurrying to restore order.

Mike Dennis and Tinker came shoving through the throng, their thoughts centred wholly upon the champion. Blake was obliged to remain at the wheel of the Grey Panther.

"Boy, are you hurt?" panted the trainer.

"My ankle!" said Reeves, with a wry grimace. "Nothing much, Mike!"

"Nothing much!" moaned the trainer. "It's enough to crock you! You don't seem to realise—"

"I'm afraid he's pretty well useless," interrupted the tall stranger. "I did my best, but that lunatic in the two-seater swerved after I'd pulled him clear."

"You saved his life, sir—no question of that!" ejaculated Dennis, with a grateful glance at the other. "Never saw such speed in my life! I thought he was going to be mangled up for sure!"

He paused, looking at Tinker curiously. In spite of his keen anxiety for Reeves, he could not help noticing the flushed, startled look on Tinker's face. Tinker was staring straight at the stranger.

"Ye gods!" he breathed. "Waldo! Waldo himself!"

The trainer gave a violent start.

"Waldo!" he panted. "You—you mean—"

"Why waste time in this fashion?" interrupted Rupert Waldo crisply. "At any moment Reeves might be recognised, and then we should have the very devil of a job! Let's get him into the Stadium as quickly as we can, and examine his ankle. That's the most important thing at the moment."

"Golly, you're right!" agreed Mike, nodding.

He didn't know whether to believe Tinker or not. It seemed impossible to him that this stranger—this man who had saved Reeves' life—could be the perpetrator of the previous night's abduction. And in his present frame of mind, Mike didn't particularly care. Bobby himself thought that Tinker had gone off his head—for the stranger bore not the slightest resemblance to the benevolent-looking old gentleman who had taken him to the houseboat.

The meeting was just one of those peculiar tricks of Chance. Waldo, disgusted at the non-success of his venture, had quickly realised that his only course was to gracefully retire. He bore no animosity against Sexton Blake—in fact, his respect for the great detective was increased.

His first move had been to remove all traces of the benevolent old gentleman.

In a place like the Wembley Exhibition this had been easy enough. His description had probably been circulated among the police, and Waldo didn't believe in taking chances. He had no fear of arrest—with his enormous strength and facility for stunting, he knew that he was safe—but he had a horror of scenes.

So he had quickly recovered his own personality. Then he had become interested in the Exhibition—for Waldo's nature was complex and peculiar. His venture had failed, and there was nothing more to be said. His equanimity and his peace of mind were unimpaired.

Sauntering out at last, he had caught sight of Bobby Reeves just as the latter tripped over. And Waldo had acted instinctively in leaping forward to the rescue. And now, instead of making himself as scarce as possible, he was calmly proposing that he should accompany the others to the Stadium! There was no accounting for the workings of Waldo's astute mind.

"Hold on!" gasped Reeves, after the first step or two. "I can't do it, Mike—I can't do it!"

His face was distorted with agony, and steaming with perspiration. And as he came to a halt, he literally turned pale with the excruciating pain. Mike Dennis was fairly panting with alarm.

"If you'll take his other arm, Mr. Tinker—" he began.

"Leave him to me!" interrupted Waldo briskly.

In spite of Bobby's protests, he lifted the boxer in his arms, and walked off with a quick stride. After a brief delay in getting past the barriers, they walked quickly through the Exhibition grounds, causing no little comment among the crowds—who seemed highly amused at the sight of such a big young fellow being lightly carried in the arms of another man.

They little guessed the real import of this incident.

"I'll take him straight to the dressing-rooms," said the trainer anxiously, as they neared the Stadium. "If you'll hurry to the boss' office, Mr. Tinker, I'll be obliged. Tell him to come—"

"You bet!" interrupted Tinker briefly.

He parted with the others just within the Stadium building, and rushed off to Mr. Gordon's office. One or two swift inquiries, and he was there. He broke in, without waiting for the secretary to announce him. Fortunately, Smiling Bill was alone.

"Ah, young man!" ejaculated the promoter, his face wrinkling up into a smile of welcome and geniality. "So you've got here, eh? Splendid! Where's Bobby? And Mr. Blake—"

"There's been an accident, Mr. Gordon!" interrupted Tinker bluntly.

"An accident? Glory! Not to Bobby?"

"Yes—just outside the barriers," said Tinker. "It was partly his own fault. He dashed into the traffic, and slipped on a banana-skin. He might have been killed but for—"

"Where is he?" demanded Mr. Gordon hoarsely.

"Mike's taken him to the dressing-rooms!"

With his face becoming more haggard than it had been even before the good news, Mr. Gordon fled from the office, and rushed madly towards the dressing-rooms. This latest development was the cruellest blow of all. Just when everything had seemed smooth, too!

"Bobby!" panted the promoter, as he rushed in. "What's wrong, Mike? Tell me, man! Is it serious? He looks all right!"

"It's no good, boss—we're finished!" said the trainer, turning a troubled face to his employer. "I've just examined the ankle, and there's one of the small bones broken! Bobby Reeves will do no fighting for months!"

#### THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Honesty Is the Best Policy.



SMILING BILL GORDON stood there as though turned to stone. His face was set and rigid, his eyes staring. But there was a light of anguish in them which the others could not fail to observe.

Fate had dealt the bitterest, cruellest blow of all! On the eve of the fight—

within an hour or two of admitting the crowd—Bobby Reeves was lying in the dressing-room with a broken ankle!

"I'm sorry, Mr. Gordon! It was my own fault entirely!"

Smiling Bill seemed to hear the voice in a dream. Reeves was speaking to him, and the boxer's tone was just a little shaky. His own disappointment was so keen that he almost felt a lump rising in his throat. But the sight of Mr. Gordon's face caused Reeves to forget his own misfortunes. Smiling Bill was the man who would suffer most.

"It was my fault, chief," went on Reeves quietly. "I acted the fool—jumping out of the car like that. After Mr. Blake had found me, too!—If it hadn't been for this gentleman, I should have been killed!"

Waldo waved an impatient hand. "If it hadn't been for me you would have been safe now!" he retorted curtly. "But it is no good going through these 'ifs.' The position is a serious one, and we've got to face it. If there's anything I can do—"

"Haven't you done enough, Waldo?" asked Tinker grimly.

"That's unkind from you, Tinker!" said Waldo. "I didn't harm a hair of Reeves' head, and his present misfortune is due to circumstances. I nearly dragged him free."

"Sorry!" interrupted Tinker, flushing. "I was wrong, Waldo! You did much more than any other man could have done."

"Waldo!" repeated Mr. Gordon dazedly. "But—but that's the name of the man who—"

"Yes; this is Waldo!" put in Tinker. "He's taken off his disguise now, that's all. We've really got to thank him!"

Smiling Bill took four quick strides, and stood in front of the Wonder-Man with blazing eyes. His momentary spell of dazed misery had gone.

"You treacherous hound!" he panted thickly. "I've got to thank you for this. But for your accursed interference Reeves would have come to no harm. As it is, I'm ruined. Do you realise that? This business will mean the finish for me."

Waldo shook his head. "Not necessarily, Mr. Gordon," he replied quietly. "And why this invective against myself? I seized Reeves, I will admit. But my scheme failed. I have to thank Sexton Blake for that—"

"Well, upon my word!"

Waldo turned at the interruption, uttered in astonished tones. Sexton Blake himself had just walked in, and he had taken in the situation at a

glance. But even Blake was surprised out of his usual immobility to see Waldo there in his own personality.

"Good-afternoon, Blake!" said Waldo calmly. "Congratulations, old man. When we get time you'll have to tell me how you located Reeves on the houseboat. I rather prided myself that I'd done the job thoroughly."

"Mr. Blake, hadn't we better call the police?" asked the promoter huskily. "This is the man whom I told you about—"

"And it is the man who saved Reeves' life," interrupted Blake. "It is not my business to lift a finger to cause his arrest. Waldo, you had better get out of this place—"

Another interruption came at this moment. A big, burly man in a wide-brimmed hat came charging into the dressing-room, accompanied by one of Mr. Gordon's secretaries and two or three other men of a pugilistic type. They were all looking deeply concerned. The big man, indeed, was flushed and perspiring.

"Where's Reeves?" he rapped out. "What's this story about—Gordon, is this true?" he went on, glancing from the British champion's reclining form to the promoter. "Is Reeves crooked?"

"Ankle bone broken," said Mr. Gordon briefly.

"By gee!" ejaculated the newcomer, aghast.

He was practically bowled over, and small wonder. For this man was Mr. Gene Hardy, Ed. Potter's world-famous manager. There was no keener American than this big-featured gentleman in the broad hat.

"Crooked!" he ejaculated, his words short and tense. "Then, by golly, the fight's off! Say, Gordon, what's the idea? I'd like to have a look at that ankle of Reeves'."

"Are you suggesting there's something funny about it?" demanded Smiling Bill, his jaw jutting out in an aggressive way.

"Well, it's mighty queer, that's all!" retorted Hardy. "Your man hasn't got an earthly chance against Ed, and you know it. And when he gets crooked within a few hours of the fight—well, I'm not saying anything, but I'm thinking a whole lot!"

Smiling Bill was furious. "That's an insinuation, Hardy!" he shouted hotly. "Man alive, what should I want to fake anything for? This means ruin! The public's been disappointed, and I shall never be forgiven—"

"We should worry over that!" snapped Gene Hardy curtly. "That's your funeral, not mine! Maybe you'll remember that there's a contract. Ed gets twenty thousand, win or lose, fight or no fight!"

"Ed won't get a cent, and neither will you!" roared Mr. Gordon. "This contest is off—abandoned! In the course of twenty-five years promoting I've never failed to give the public a square deal, and I'll give 'em one this time. Every penny of the box-office money will be returned—"

"Gentlemen—gentlemen!" interrupted Waldo smoothly. "You don't mean what you're saying, and it's no good getting excited or angry. If there's no big fight to-day it'll be a tragedy. The whole country's on tenterhooks for it, and you're not the only people who've spent money. It'll mean ruin for dozens of smaller men if—"

"It's no good talking, Waldo," put in Blake. "Reeves has a broken ankle, and he can't do any fighting. You ought to know that a substitute is impossible."

"I don't know it," said Waldo.  
"You're mad!" shouted Gordon.  
"How can we produce a substitute within an hour? Reeves is the only man in the British Isles with qualifications for meeting the world's champion. Besides that, there's the contract—"

"Hang the contract!" broke in Waldo. "This isn't the time to talk about contracts and qualifications. Good heavens! Can't you gentlemen rise above such trivialities in an emergency? Let contracts and qualifications go to blazes! The public wants a fight, and you can give them one. Are you both going to let a fortune slip through your fingers?"

Everybody gazed at the Wonder-Man rather blankly. His cool, compelling tones forced them to attention. Even Sexton Blake was impressed. And, not for the first time, he realised what an enormous power Rupert Waldo could be if he chose to stick to the straight path.

"This Stadium will contain a crowd of something like a hundred and fifty thousand to-night," went on Waldo grimly. "At a rough guess, I estimate the takings at something between sixty and eighty thousand pounds. Are you going to return all that money, Mr. Gordon?"

"What else can I do?" demanded the promoter fiercely.

"What else? Why, match a substitute against Ed Potter, that's what else," replied Waldo. "And you needn't worry about the substitute, either. I'm here, and I'll meet Potter with pleasure. Anything to save the public from being disappointed."

"You!" yelled Gene Hardy contemptuously.

"Why not?" said Waldo. "I'm within one stone of Bobby Reeves' weight, and I know as much about boxing as he does."

"And your qualifications?" demanded the American manager.

"None," replied Waldo calmly. "As a matter of fact, I have never appeared publicly in the ring."

"Cut it out, boy—cut it out!" snapped Hardy. "This is a serious discussion, not a joke! Who's this guy, anyhow?" he demanded, turning to Mr. Gordon.

But Smiling Bill was standing there, as though dazed.

"A substitute!" he murmured absently. "And he could do it, too. The way he lifted that constable—Eh? What's that?" he went on, turning. "Look here, Hardy, the man's right! If we can give the public a real fight it'll be no swindle. In an emergency like this we've got to do the best thing we can."

"I'm willing to take my chance," said Waldo coolly. "If I'm knocked out within the first three rounds I won't take a cent. If I carry the fight into the fourth I shall want a thousand pounds. And if I win I shall want twenty thousand."

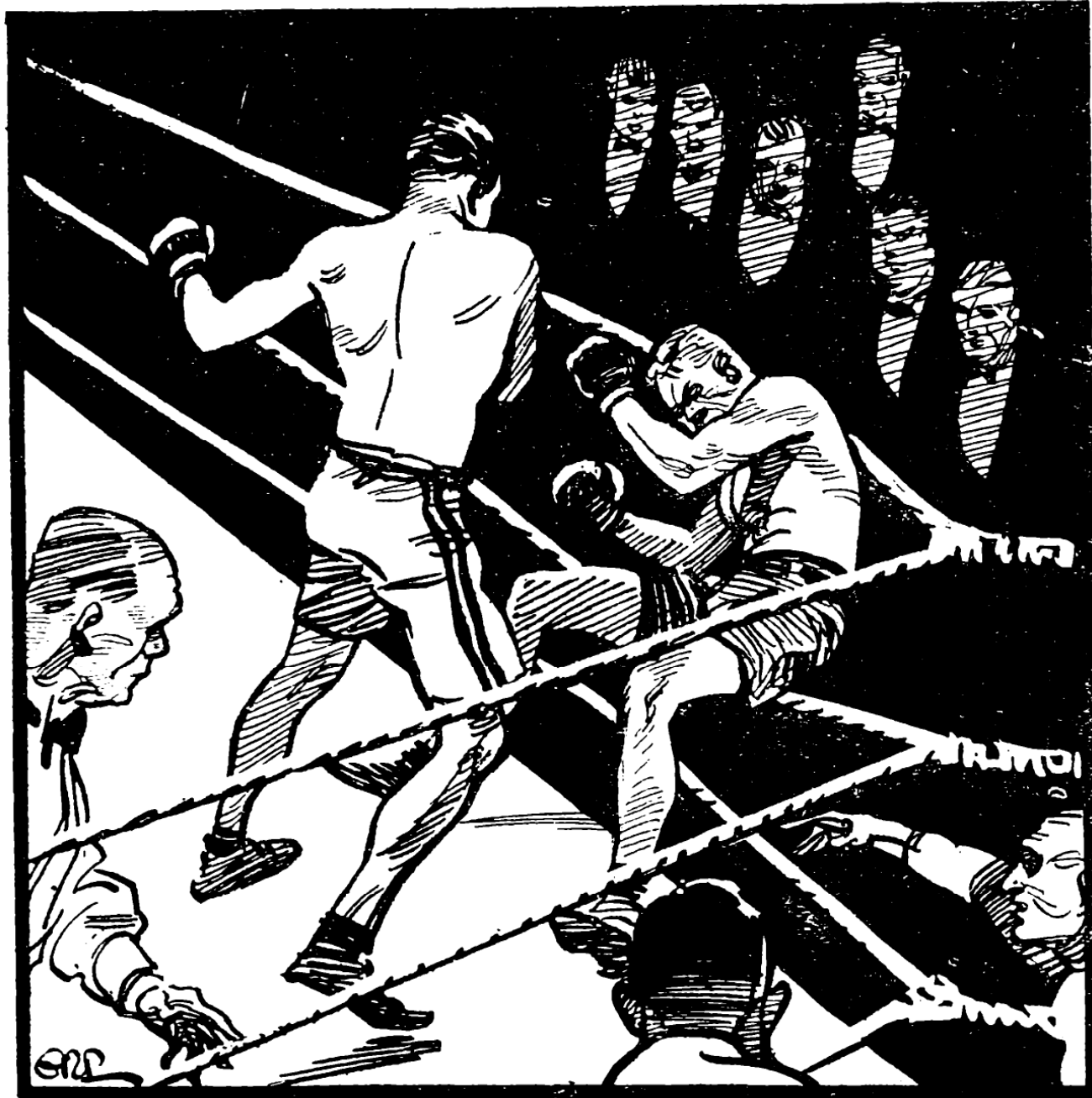
"If you win!" roared Hardy with a yell of laughter.

"It's not so impossible as you seem to think," said Waldo.

Tinker gave Sexton Blake a quick glance.

"Impossible—eh, guy'nor?" he whispered. "By Jove, it's the most likely thing that could happen. Waldo in the ring! Waldo fighting against the world's champion! Ye gods and little fishes! What next?"

"The man's an enigma!" said Blake slowly. "In this one case alone, Tinker, just review his extremes. He kidnaps a man, he attempts to obtain ten thousand pounds by conspiracy, he saves a man's life at the risk of his own, and now he



Even the referee was unable to follow what happened, so quick was it. He only knew that Chicago Ed gave a gurgling grunt, staggered back, and half fell through the ropes. (Page 26.)

is proposing to meet Ed Potter for the world's heavy-weight championship. What a fellow!"

"He's a sportsman, anyhow," said Tinker stoutly.

By this time both Gene Hardy and Smiling Bill had cooled down considerably. Waldo's proposition, impossible as it had seemed at first, was beginning to appear in a new light. As manager to the world's champion boxer, Hardy was all against his man meeting an unknown substitute. But as a business man he realised that something drastic would have to be done, or a whole lot of money would be dropped.

"We needn't bring Ed into this affair," he said gruffly. "I'm his manager, and Ed does what I tell him. He's the fighter, I'm the brains. If the public will stand for this substitution we'll put it over. But they'll have to know that it's a last-minute stunt. And if this guy gets the k.o. within the first three rounds he doesn't touch a cent."

"And if he wins he gets the twenty thousand," said Mr. Gordon slowly.

"Sure!" grinned Hardy.

"Of course, I can announce the facts from the 'ring,'" went on Smiling Bill musingly. "I'll tell the crowd squarely what's happened, and I'll ask them if they're agreeable to seeing this unknown Englishman meet Chicago Ed. And if the public wants its money back, the public will get it!"

"Cut that out!" said Hardy curtly. "Say, I don't like this thing at all. It's degrading for my man—"

"All right, then; it's off!" broke in Mr. Gordon promptly. "Every cent shall be returned and the contest aban-

doned; or, at least, postponed until Reeves has recovered. And Potter doesn't see a single farthing, Hardy! I can't pay money that I haven't got."

"There's no need to get excited!" growled the American. "Maybe I was a little hasty. It's a pity to spoil everything at the eleventh hour. And I'd just hate returning money. We'll talk calmly, and we'll fix it. Listen! Maybe we can put something over. We'll give the crowd two or three rounds to please their hearts—"

"No!" interrupted Mr. Gordon firmly. "I shall instruct my man to fight, Hardy—to fight! There's going to be no monkey business. You'll instruct your man to fight, too, and if he delivers the knock-out in the first round it won't be the only time that's happened."

Rupert Waldo laughed.

"Don't worry, Mr. Gordon," he said calmly. "There won't be any knock-out in the first round."

"Go to it, boy!" said Gene Hardy, in a patronising tone.

"Well, we shall see," chuckled Waldo, in no way annoyed. "Hadh't we better go to your office, Mr. Gordon, and sign a few agreements? When I leave this place again, I'm figuring on having twenty thousand pounds in my pockets. After all, honesty is the best policy!" he added dryly. "I was only expecting ten thousand in the first place."

Exactly half an hour later came the news that an arrangement had been made. The apparently impossible had been achieved. The public knew nothing as yet; but in spite of Bobby Reeves' accident, the big fight was a certainty.

### THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. Knocked Out!



THE Stadium was packed. Although it was still daylight, scores of powerful electric arc lamps were blazing. The spectacle, indeed, was an impressive one.

Every seat in that enormous enclosure was occupied. And those tens of thousands of people were on edge. A kind of subdued excitement rippled through the stupendous crowd.

Seen from the cheaper seats—and even these were expensive to-night—the ring looked a tiny affair, far below. But the lighting was so perfect that everyone within the Stadium could see the figures in the ring with astonishing distinctness.

There were microphones and loudspeakers, too, so that all announcements were amplified a thousand times, and rendered audible to the most distant spectator. So far, the preliminary fights had not begun. The crowd had only just got settled down, and a massed band was still playing.

Mr. William Gordon appeared in the ring resplendent in evening-dress.

He was recognised by a small percentage of enthusiasts, who commenced clapping and cheering, and the big majority of the audience, realising that this personage was an important one, took up the applause. Smiling Bill bowed, and the music of the great band died away.

In two of the best seats, nearest the ring, Sexton Blake and Tinker were already in their places. Blake had decided, with very little consideration, that it was in no way incumbent upon him to inform the police that a wanted criminal would be found in the Stadium ring that night. If the police made the discovery of their own accord, it was up to Waldo to submit to arrest, or escape. This business was no concern of Sexton Blake's. He was taking no part in the affair, except as a spectator. And he was quite comfortable in watching the events as a non-interested onlooker.

"I expect there'll be a bit of a rumpus, sir," murmured Tinker. "The crowd's expecting to see Bobby Reeves, and there'll be trouble when they find out that an unnamed stranger is to appear."

Mr. Gordon, having finished bowing, stood there, apparently calm and smiling. Inwardly, he was full of uneasiness and uncertainty. Near the ring, Gene Hardy was watching with no less concern.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is my duty to make an announcement of the highest possible importance."

Smiling Bill's voice, amplified to a tremendous extent, fairly roared at Sexton Blake and Tinker, and was similarly audible throughout the entire Stadium. It was rather uncanny to see the man speaking there, and to hear his voice like a roll of thunder.

"You have come here to witness a fifteen-round contest for the championship of the world," continued Mr. Gordon. "This contest was to have been between Bobby Reeves, the challenger, and Chicago Ed Potter, the championship holder. I must announce, with infinite regret, that Bobby Reeves has met with a slight accident—"

He was interrupted by a perfect roar from the crowds. It was not so much anger as consternation.

"One moment, please!" continued

Smiling Bill quickly. "You are assuming that a fight will not take place, and you are wrong. Bobby Reeves has broken his ankle, and will not be able to fight for several months. But I am fortunately in the position to bring forward a substitute."

"Take him away!"

"We want Bobby!"

"It's a swindle!"

A confused roar of shouts went up, but the majority of these came from inexperienced enthusiasts of comparatively tender years. The vast bulk of the audience sat listening, concerned and excited, but without making any comment. They knew that Smiling Bill Gordon had the reputation of being a square man. Never once, in all his career, had he participated in any swindle upon the public. And Smiling Bill's reputation stood him in good stead now.

"In case there should be any misapprehension, I am now making this speech with the one object of clearing your minds of any doubt," continued Mr. Gordon. "I am taking a big risk, but I have taken risks all my life. I am not afraid of the result. The new challenger prefers to remain incognito, and I am therefore forbidden to reveal his name. But let me assure you that this is no hokey-pokey match, fixed up for the purpose of providing you with a balm for your disappointment. It will not consist of a few exhibition rounds, but will be a genuine fight, and I am hoping that the challenger will put up as good a battle as Bobby Reeves would have done."

"Good old Smiling Bill!"

"We're willing to trust you!"

"In case there should still be any misunderstanding in your minds, let me hasten to add that I am willing to return the admission money to any members of this audience who feel dissatisfied," went on the promoter. "I give you my word that you will witness a good fight. My word is never given lightly. However, it is my wish to be absolutely fair and square. All those who desire their admission money returned shall have it!"

"No, Bill! We'll trust you!"

"Hear, hear!"

The roar which went up completely drowned anything further that Smiling Bill might have said. And out of that entire audience only a few dozen left their seats, determined to get their money back. And a good few of these were persuaded to go back by the sarcastic shouts from the crowd.

Smiling Bill's speech, in fact, was a huge success.

He had told the audience the plain, blunt truth, and the audience trusted him. Indeed, there was now an element of mystery in the fight, and a feeling was going round that Smiling Bill Gordon was preparing to spring a surprise. There was something rather stirring in this affair—the appearance of an unknown boxer, who preferred to remain nameless. The audience was on tenterhooks with excitement and anticipation.

"Good!" said Gene Hardy, as Mr. Gordon joined him. "Listen! You put that over fine, Mr. Gordon! And now I guess it's up to your man to justify himself. There'll sure be trouble if he doesn't."

This, indeed, was the thought which was at the back of Smiling Bill's own mind. It was one thing to make the speech, and to get the audience in a good humour. But everything else rested entirely with Waldo. If he failed in the first or second round there would be trouble—trouble with a capital T. So Mr. Gordon's anxiety was still acute.

True, he had seen Waldo with the

gloves on, and he had been deliriously overjoyed to find that this Unknown really knew how to use his fists, while his footwork was equally satisfactory. Mr. Gordon had been compelled to admit that Waldo was nearly as good as Bobby Reeves. And Mike Dennis shared his chief's opinion. Neither of them was aware that the Wonder-Man, with his usual tantalisation, had revealed to them a very indifferent exhibition of his true form.

Waldo, in fact, was enjoying himself hugely.

The instant Bobby Reeves had met with the accident, Waldo had made up his mind that he would meet Chicago Ed in the ring. In a flash, he had seen the opportunity of getting away with twenty thousand pounds. And with all his customary coolness he had forced his will upon the others. When Waldo made up his mind upon a certain course, that course was generally adhered to. He had an amazing knack of compelling others.

He had planned for weeks to obtain an easy ten thousand pounds. Owing to the astuteness of Sexton Blake, the plot had failed. And Providence had provided him with an opening to gain double his prize—and to gain it openly and honestly. Waldo was immensely tickled by the fact that for once in his life he was preparing to turn an honest penny!

The American camp was merely amused.

Ed Potter, without a single defeat to his record, was preparing to eat up this impudent unknown. He was, in fact, fully determined to finish the fight in the first round. Mr. Gordon would have to suffer the consequences. But Ed would obtain his twenty thousand, even if he only delivered two punches. And the world's champion was determined to show everybody that a mere upstart couldn't stand up to him for more than a minute.

His manager was rather against this attitude. Hardy had advised Chicago Ed to go easy for a round or two, just to give the public something for its money. But Potter for once wouldn't hear of it. He had his reputation to think of, and was out for grim business.

Afterwards, of course, he would repudiate the match completely, and wipe it off as though it had never been fought. He was only taking part in the contest so that he should get his money—for solid cash, after all, was Chicago Ed's real objective.

There were two or three minor fights to start with, and the crowd was entertained for well over an hour. These minor bouts proved to be very attractive, and some first-class boxing resulted. But, after all, it was the big fight that mattered—the big fight that everybody had come to see.

And, at last, a ripple of intensely subdued excitement passed through the Stadium. The last preliminary fight was over, and the ring had been clear for some minutes. But now, escorted by a host of attendants with towels and sponges and other impedimenta, Chicago Ed entered the ring.

He was given a tremendous ovation.

Cheering was long and continuous, thousands of people standing up in their seats, and yelling at the top of their voices. This man was the world's champion, and thoroughly deserved his due.

Ed Potter was a big, powerfully-built man, but his appearance was somewhat marred by the brutal type of his features. He was coarse-looking, and his very attitude was aggressive. The very manner in which he strutted round the ring, staring rather insolently at the

audience, told its own story. He had come to London to show these "hicks" what boxing really was!

A few minutes later Waldo entered the ring.

His reception was almost as tumultuous as Chicago Ed's—for, although he was unknown, he was here to represent Great Britain. And Waldo's appearance struck confidence into the crowd.

There was something indefinably magnetic about this stranger. He was modest, he was unassuming—in striking contrast to the American. But his very quietness instilled the audience with expectation. They felt that this man was going to do something exceptional.

He was refined-looking, too—obviously a gentleman. Whispers were already going round that the Unknown was a member of the British nobility. The great audience would have been shocked if they had known that he was a wanted crook!

"The joke of it is, sir, scores of policemen are looking at Waldo all the time!" chuckled Tinker. "They don't know who he is, and they don't ever recognise him, although he hasn't taken the trouble to change his appearance. They've seen his photograph, and they've had his description, and there he is, as bold as brass."

"It's just an example of what can be done by audacity, Tinker," replied Blake. "You know as well as I do that cool cheek is Waldo's greatest asset. He is always exploiting that characteristic."

The preliminaries seemed unending. Fixing on the gloves; discussions between Gene Hardy and Smiling Bill and the referee; preparations by the seconds. The crowd waited with growing impatience.

But at last came the order "seconds out." And at last the tense minute of the actual start arrived. A kind of thrill went through the audience, and a hush fell over the entire Stadium. Cameras began to click, and everything was forgotten except those two figures in the ring.

The gong sounded, and the fight began.

Stripped, except for their boxing shorts, the two men were now fully revealed. There was little to choose between them as regards physique. But Waldo was more cleanly built; his muscles were not so prominent, and the set of his head was less animal-like than Potter's. Already this Unknown had become favourite. His very appearance was inspiring.

But Chicago Ed meant business.

His one determination now was to give his opponent the knock-out at once. He'd show those guys! The American took it as an affront that he should be in the ring, facing a man who had absolutely no boxing record.

He leapt in, and there was none of the usual wary watching for an opening. The fight started with a bang from the first sound of the gong. With a spring like a tiger, Chicago Ed went for his man. And with all the strength of his powerful muscles, he brought his deadly right into play.

It was a swing that would have felled an ox. But it never got through the Unknown's guard. There was a clash of gloves, a grunt from Potter, and he fell back, surprised and hurt. Something had hit him on the chest. He hadn't seen Waldo's glove at all, but it had got there.

Again he leapt in, and after a moment or two of clinching, the referee broke them apart. But during those few

seconds Chicago Ed received a bit of a shock. He was finding it necessary to readjust his former opinion.

His opponent looked soft, but he was as hard as steel. There was something uncanny about him. The touch of his flesh was queer. It seemed to Ed Potter that an electric shock went through him at the contact.

The American remembered his promise—he remembered the cheerful grins on the faces of his seconds as he had assured them that he would finish the fight in the first round. And the first round was half over. He set his jaw, and tried again.

And this time, with a flush of satisfaction, he got home. An uppercut forced its way through Waldo's guard, and caught the Wonder-Man a deadly blow on the chin. By sheer weight of the blow, Waldo staggered back, tripped, and fell.

"Oh!"

Half the audience was on its feet, gasping with consternation. Chicago Ed's seconds gazed, fascinated. He had kept his word! The champion himself, knowing the weight he had put behind that blow, never expected to see Waldo rise again.

Unhappily for his calculations, however, the Wonder-Man was on his feet in a flash. Not only on his feet, but attacking him with startling forcefulness.

Slam! Bang! Crash!

A hurricane of blows, coming from apparently nowhere, shattered the American's guard. He fell back, confused. Vainly, he attempted to stem this unexpected tide. And he was conscious of a rising roar from the audience.

Tinker was gripping his seat feverishly. And even Sexton Blake was fascinated by Waldo's performance. His skill was perfect—his technique something to gaze at and wonder. His footwork was positively superb. And for a few moments he literally played with the world's champion.

With his back to the ropes, Chicago Ed found that escape was impossible. Blow after blow rained upon him—little gentle taps, they seemed. But each one had an amazing amount of sting in it. The watching crowd had no inkling of the force contained in those taps.

Clang!

The gong sounded, and a yell of cheering went up. The first round was over, and the hopes and anticipations had more than come true. This Unknown was not merely a boxer, but a super-fighter. Whilst Chicago Ed was panting for breath as he went to his corner, the Unknown strolled over to his seconds, blithe, unconcerned, and smiling. He wasn't even out of breath. The audience gazed, the audience stared, and the audience wondered.

"Boys, he's a terror!" panted Ed Potter, as his seconds swarmed round him like a crowd of bees. "Gee! He's tough!"

"You'll fix him, Ed!"

"You bet I'll fix him!" retorted Ed. "I'll tell the world I'll fix him! But it's gonna be harder than I thought."

"He don't look tough," remarked one of the seconds.

"You said it, but you're wrong!" replied the champion. "This guy is a surprise package, surest thing you know!"

Smiling Bill was just out of a kind of trance. He hadn't been able to believe his eyes. Waldo's exhibition in the dressing-room had been absolutely nothing compared with his performance in the ring. He was not merely as good

as Bobby Reeves, but twenty times better. His science was something that Smiling Bill had never believed possible. And Smiling Bill could tell the form of a boxer quicker than any other man in England.

Clang!

The second round started, and there was a noticeable difference. Ed Potter no longer attempted his rushing tactics. He was cautious, and this very fact proclaimed that he was gaining a respect for his opponent. His arrogant attitude of superiority had gone. He was watchful and cautious.

And the crowd could hardly keep their seats. Everybody had the impression that something unusual was going to happen. People had come to this match with the faint hope of seeing the British champion last out until the fourth or fifth round. They had come with the conviction upon them that the American would deliver the knock-out when it pleased him.

But all that was changed now.

The fight had taken on a dramatic turn. The positions, in fact, were reversed. It was this unknown who was playing with his opponent, and Ed Potter himself was the very first man to realise it. During that second round he suffered agonies of mind.

Waldo hardly attacked him at all, but Waldo never permitted him to get anywhere near with one of his blows. There was a faint smile of amusement upon the unknown's face, and it exasperated Chicago Ed to such an extent that on more than one occasion he nearly lost his head.

He could do nothing—absolutely nothing. In all his experience he had never encountered anything like this before. His opponent was playing with him, amusing himself at his—Potter's—expense. And that, indeed, was the literal truth.

Before the end of the round Waldo had instilled the fear of defeat into Ed Potter's heart. The American knew that he was a beaten man. He needed no telling—it was unnecessary for him to listen to the shouts of the audience. He had met his match!

"Guv'nor, it's too amazing for words!" whispered Tinker tensely, as the gong sounded. "He's got his man whacked to a frazzle! Did you notice the way he was playing with him? My hat! Just listen to that!"

"I'm not surprised," commented Blake. "Upon my word, Tinker, I feel like joining in myself! What a pity it is that Waldo won't go straight!"

"Perhaps this affair will change him, sir."

But their voices were drowned by the excited thunder from the audience. The possibility of the champion being beaten had now seized the crowd. And thousands of people nearly went off their heads with delirious joy.

The third round was watched with bated breath. The American, desperate and now fully alive to the situation, attempted to force the pace. He went for Waldo in a series of mad rushes, and more than once he was cautioned for fouling. And while all his attempts to reach this wizard were of no avail, he received a number of blows which completed the opening of his eyes, whilst helping to close them in quite another sense.

For Waldo's light taps were like the caress of a sledgehammer. To the eye they seemed nothing, but the force behind them was staggering. To the audience it seemed that Chicago Ed

was softening. An apparently light blow would cause him to stagger back as though poleaxed. Only Ed knew the sting and driving force of those thrusts.

The fourth round had hardly commenced when Rupert Waldo decided that this game could not go on. This was a fight, not an exhibition. It was becoming more and more obvious that Chicago Ed was wearing himself out. And Waldo was a sportsman. He had no desire to carry on the fight for the mere object of giving the audience something to look at.

Potter came at him with a grim, evil glint in his eyes. It was a wild rush, and the champion put every ounce of skill and science he knew into that attack. It had staggered him to find that his blows had no effect. More than once he had delivered a heavy punch, and the uncanny feeling had come over him that Waldo had deliberately allowed it. But on every one of these occasions the blows had had no perceptible effect.

This time Chicago Ed was out to justify his reputation as a killer.

Crash!

Something struck him on the point. Waldo's movements were so lightning-like that even the referee was unable to follow. He only knew that Chicago Ed gave a gurgling grunt, staggered back, and fell half through the ropes. He lay there, motionless.

"One—two—three—"

Amid a wild tumult, the referee counted. Everybody could see that the fight was over. Ed Potter was out, and by the time the referee had counted ten he was still on the boards.

Rupert Waldo was the world's champion!

And he was as fresh, as smiling, and as untouched as he had been at the commencement of the fight. That was the overwhelmingly amazing feature! The crowd simply let itself go.

Hundreds of people near the ring made a rush, completely carried away by their excitement and enthusiasm. But Waldo managed to get away in time. He was hustled out by Smiling Bill, by his seconds, and by police.

In the dressing-room the promoter grabbed Waldo's hand fervently.

"I'm lost for words!" he panted. "Good glory! I've never seen anything like it! You've got to let me fix up your next fight—"

"No, thanks, Mr. Gordon," laughed Waldo. "This game isn't in my line. I've helped you out to-day, but I renounce all titles to the world's championship. Thanks all the same, but that's final. If you'll oblige me with twenty thousand—"

Mr. Gordon was staggered and disappointed. But he kept his word. He handed the money over. And five minutes later, when he returned to the dressing-room with Sexton Blake and Tinker, the Wonder-Man had vanished.

"Why, boss, he said he was going to your office," declared Dennis.

"Don't trouble to look there, Mr. Gordon," said Sexton Blake. "You can take my word for it that Waldo has gone. He's slipped off quietly, and we shall probably hear nothing more of him for weeks."

Smiling Bill drew a deep breath.

"And they call him the Wonder-Man!" he murmured. "By Peter, I'm just beginning to understand!"

THE END.



(Continued from page 2.)

"Aha! They hesitate, these English dogs! Por Dios, and well they may."

"They will be waiting for night," suggested his nephew, who stood at his elbow quivering with excitement.

Don Miguel looked at him, smiling. "And what shall the night avail them in this narrow passage, under the very muzzles of my guns? Be sure, Esteban, that to-night your father will be paid for."

He raised his telescope to continue his observation of the buccaneers. He saw that the piraguas towed by each vessel were being warped alongside, and he wondered a little what this manœuvre might portend. Awhile those piraguas were hidden from view behind the hulls.

Then one by one they reappeared rowing round and away from the ships, and each boat, he observed, was crowded with armed men. Thus laden, they were headed for the shore at a point where it was densely wooded to the water's edge. The eyes of the wondering admiral followed them until the foliage screened them from his view.

Then he lowered his telescope and looked at his officers.

"What the devil does it mean?" he asked.

None answered him, all being as puzzled as he was himself.

After a little while Esteban, who kept his eyes on the water, plucked at his uncle's sleeve. "There they go!" he cried, and pointed.

And there, indeed, went the piraguas on their way back to the ships. But now it was observed that they were empty, save for the men who rowed them. Their armed cargo had been left ashore.

Back to the ships they pulled to return again presently with a fresh load of armed men, which similarly they conveyed to Palomas. And at last one of the Spanish officers ventured an explanation:

"They are going to attack us by land to attempt to storm the fort."

"Of course." The admiral smiled. "I had guessed it. Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad."

"Shall we make a sally?" urged Esteban, in his excitement.

"A sally? Through that scrub? That would be to play into their hands. No, no, we will wait here to receive this attack. Whenever it comes, it is themselves will be destroyed, and utterly. Have no doubt of that."

But by evening the admiral's equanimity was not quite so perfect. By then the piraguas had made a half-dozen journeys with their loads of men, and they had landed also—as Don Miguel had clearly observed through his telescope—at least a dozen guns.

His countenance no longer smiled; it was a little wrathful and a little troubled now as he turned again to his officers.

"Who was the fool who told me that they number but three hundred men in all? They have put at least twice that number ashore already."

Amazed as he was, his amazement would have been deeper had he been

## An Uncommon Cover

—an uncommon story. This yarn of the Sheffield Sampler is distinctly one of those yarns which have placed the U.J. in the lead and kept it there so long.

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It must be a very long time since you read the last story as good as—



## "The CLUE of the SHEFFIELD SAMPLER!"

told the truth: that there was not a single buccaneer or a single gun ashore on Palomas. The deception had been complete. Don Miguel could not guess that the men he had beheld in those piraguas were always the same; that on the journeys to the shore they sat and stood upright in full view; and that on the journeys back to the ships, they lay invisible at the bottom of the boats, which were thus made to appear empty.

The growing fears of the Spanish soldiery at the prospect of a night attack from the landward side by the entire buccaneer force—and a force twice as strong as they had suspected the pestilent Blood to command—began to be communicated to the admiral.

In the last hours of fading daylight, the Spaniards did precisely what Captain Blood so confidently counted that they would do—precisely what they must do to meet the attack, preparations for which had been so thoroughly simulated. They set themselves to labour like the damned at those ponderous guns emplaced to command the narrow passage out to sea.

Groaning and sweating, urged on by the curses and even the whips of their officers, they toiled in a frenzy of panic-stricken haste to shift the greater number and the more powerful of their guns across to the landward side, there to emplace them anew, so that they might be ready to receive the attack which at any moment now might burst upon them from the woods not half a mile away.

Thus when night fell, although in mortal anxiety of the onslaught of those wild devils whose reckless courage was a byword on the seas of the Main, at least the Spaniards were tolerably prepared for it. Waiting, they stood to their guns.

And whilst they waited thus, under cover of the darkness and as the tide began to ebb, Captain Blood's fleet weighed anchor quietly; and, as once before, with no more canvas spread than that which their sprits could carry, so as to give them steering-way—and even

### THE GREAT VITAGRAPH FILM

of our story, "Captain Blood," is showing at these theatres on the dates mentioned:—

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these having been painted black—the four vessels, without a light showing, groped their way by soundings to the channel which led to that narrow passage out to sea.

The Elizabeth and the Infanta, leading side by side, were almost abreast of the fort before their shadowy bulks and the soft gurgle of water at their prows were detected by the Spaniards, whose attention until that moment had been all on the other side.

And now there arose on the night air such a sound of human baffled fury as may have resounded about Babel at the confusion of tongues. To heighten that confusion, and to scatter disorder among the Spanish soldiery, the Elizabeth emptied her larboard guns into the fort as she was swept past on the swift ebb.

At once realising—though not yet how—he had been duped, and that his prey was in the very act of escaping after all, the admiral frantically ordered the guns that had been so laboriously moved to be dragged back to their former emplacements, and commanded his gunners meanwhile to the slender

batteries that of all his powerful, but now unavailable, armament still remained trained upon the channel.

With these, after the loss of some precious moments, the fort at last made fire.

It was answered by a terrific broadside from the Arabella, which had now drawn abreast, and was crowding canvas to her yards. The enraged and gibbering Spaniards had a brief vision of her as the line of flame spurted from her red flank, and the thunder of her broadside drowned the noise of the creaking halyards. After that they saw her no more.

Assimilated by the friendly darkness which the lesser Spanish guns were speculatively stabbing, the escaping ships fired never another shot that might assist their baffled and bewildered enemies to locate them.

Some slight damage was sustained by Blood's fleet. But by the time the Spaniards had resolved their confusion into some order of dangerous offence, that fleet, well served by a southerly breeze, was through the narrows and standing out to sea.

Thus was Don Miguel de Espinosa left to chew the bitter end of a lost opportunity, and to consider in what terms he would acquaint the Supreme Council of the Catholic King that Peter Blood had got away from Maracaybo, taking with him two twenty-gun frigates that were lately the property of Spain, to say nothing of two hundred and fifty thousand pieces of eight and other plunder.

And all this in spite of Don Miguel's four galleons and his heavily armed fort that at one time had held the pirates so securely trapped.

Heavy indeed grew the account of Peter Blood, which Don Miguel swore passionately to Heaven should at all costs to himself be paid in full.

Nor were the losses already detailed the full total of those suffered on this occasion by the King of Spain. For on

(Continued overleaf.)

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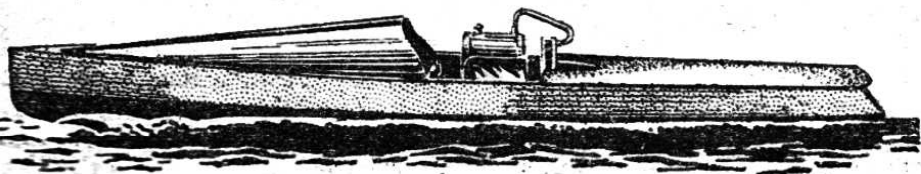
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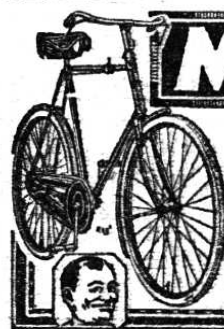
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the following evening, off the coast of Oruba, at the mouth of the gulf of Venezuela, Captain Blood's fleet came upon the belated Santo Nino, speeding under full sail to reinforce Don Miguel at Maracaybo.

At first the Spaniard had conceived that she was meeting the victorious fleet of Don Miguel, returning from the destruction of the pirates. When at comparatively close quarters the pennon of St. George soared to the Arabella's masthead to disillusion her, the Santo Nino chose the better part of valour, and struck her flag.

Captain Blood ordered her crew to take to the boats, and land themselves at Oruba or wherever else they pleased. So considerate was he that to assist them he presented them with several of the piraguas which he still had in tow.

"You will find," said he to her captain, "that Don Miguel is in an extremely bad temper. Commend me to him, and say that I venture to remind him that he must blame himself for all the ills that have befallen him. The evil has recoiled upon him which he loosed when he sent his brother unofficially to make a raid upon the island of Barbadoes. Bid him think twice before he lets his devils loose upon an English settlement again."

With that he dismissed the captain, who went over the side of the Santo Nino, and Captain Blood proceeded to investigate the value of this further prize. When her hatches were removed, a human cargo was disclosed in her hold.

"Slaves," said Wolverstone, and persisted in that belief, cursing Spanish devilry until Cahusac crawled up out of the dark bowels of the ship, and stood blinking in the sunlight.

There was more than sunlight to make the Breton pirate blink. And those that crawled out after him—the remnants of his crew—cursed him horribly for the pusillanimity which had brought them into the ignominy of owing their deliverance to those whom they had deserted as lost beyond hope.

Their sloop had encountered and had been sunk three days ago by the Santo Nino, and Cahusac had narrowly escaped hanging merely that for some time he might be a mock among the Brethren of the Coast.

For many a month thereafter he was to hear in Tortuga the jeering taunt:

"Where do you spend the gold that you brought back from Maracaybo?"

THE affair at Maracaybo is to be considered as Captain Blood's buccaneering masterpiece.

#### The Milagrosa.



The fame which he had enjoyed before

this, great as it already was, is dwarfed into insignificance by the fame that followed. It was a fame such as no buccaneer—not even Morgan—has ever boasted, before or since.

In Tortuga, during the months he spent there refitting the three ships he had captured from the fleet that had gone out to destroy him, he found himself almost an object of worship in the eyes of the wild Brethren of the Coast, all of whom now clamoured for the honour of serving under him. It placed him in the rare position of being able to pick and choose the crews for his augmented fleet, and he chose fastidiously.

When next he sailed away, it was with a fleet of five fine ships in which went something over a thousand men. Thus you behold him not merely famous, but really formidable.

The three captured Spanish vessels he had renamed with a certain scholarly humour the Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos, a grimly jocular manner of conveying to the world that he made them the arbiters of the fate of any Spaniards he should henceforth encounter upon the seas.

In Europe the news of this fleet, following upon the news of the Spanish Admiral's defeat off Maracaybo, produced something of a sensation.

And meanwhile in the Caribbean, the Spanish Admiral Don Miguel de Espinosa might be said—to use a term not yet invented in his day—to have run amok.

(You simply must not miss next week's thrilling instalment. Be wise, and order your copy of the UNION JACK at once!)



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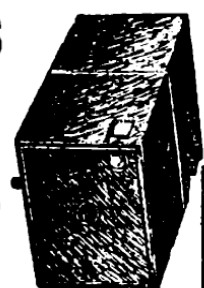


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