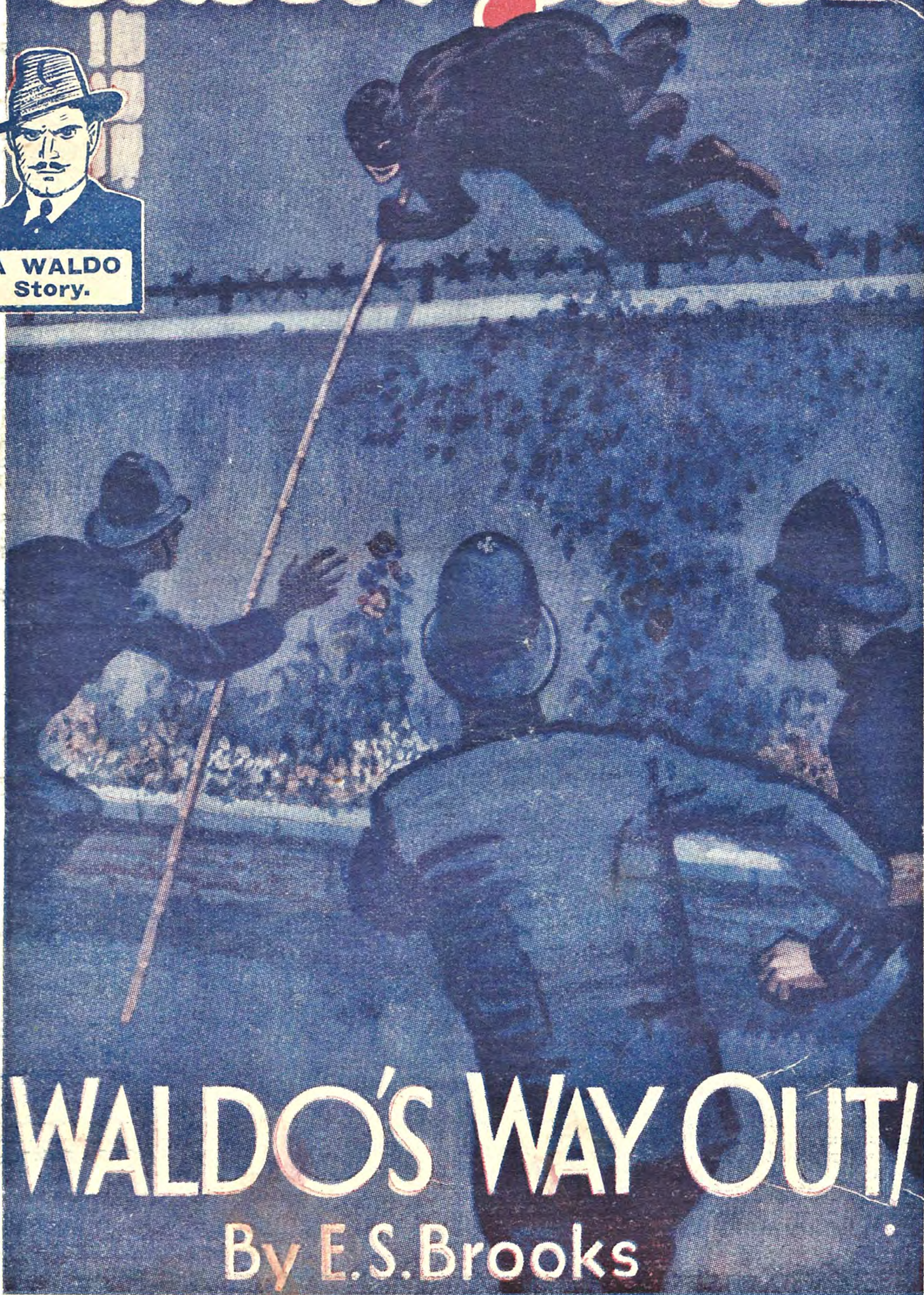


SEXTON BLAKE

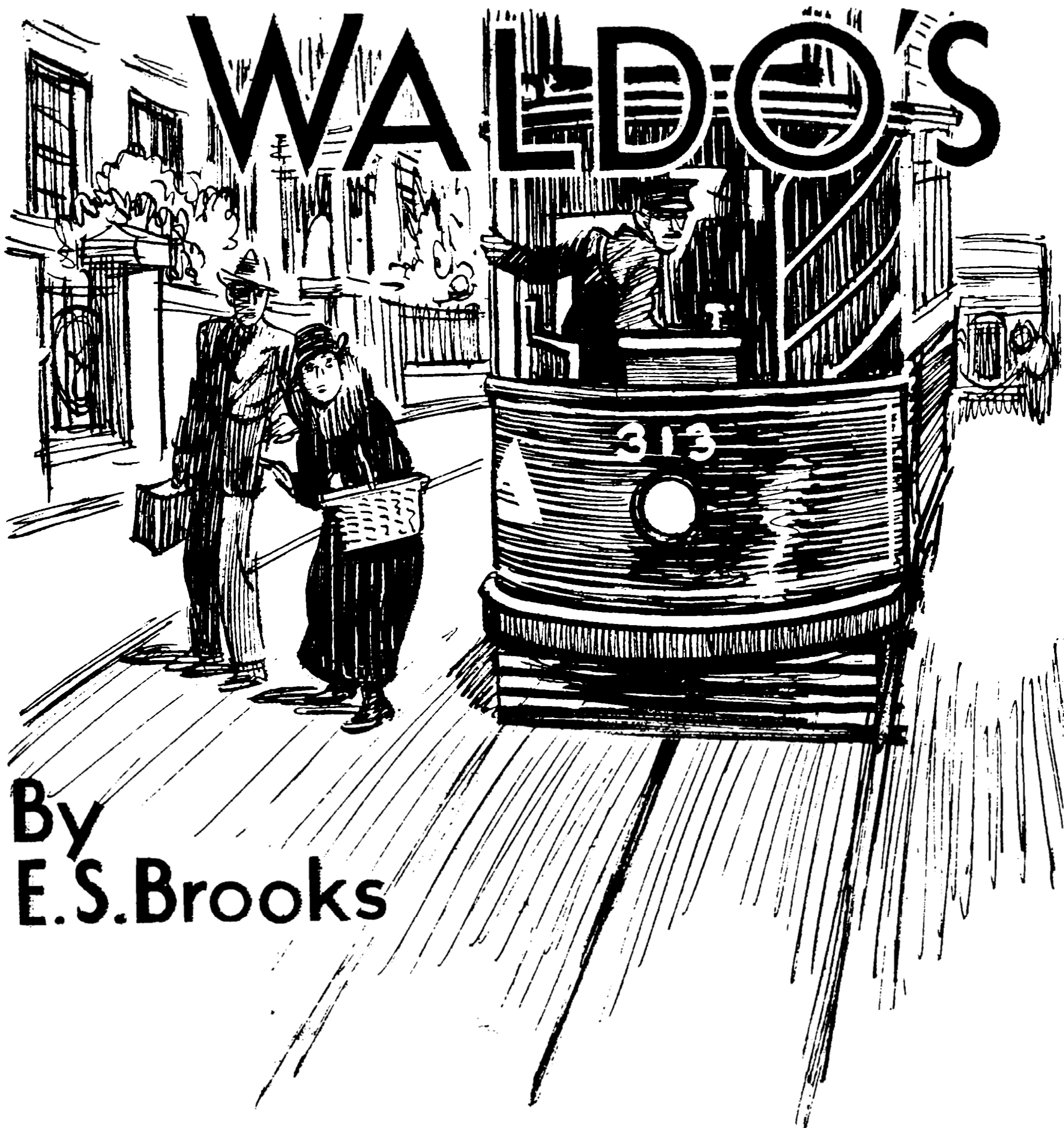
A Complete Detective-
Adventure Story.

UNION JACK 2^D



WALDO'S WAY OUT!

By E.S. Brooks



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E. S. Brooks

Sexton Blake, Detective, versus Waldo the Wonder Man.
Complete Story.

Chapter 1.

The Woman Who Screamed.

THE strange thing about Mr. James Glenthorne was that he always had plenty of money. He paid his landlady with unfailing regularity, and he was positively reckless in the lavishing of sixpences and shillings on the landlady's two little girls and one little boy.

Mrs. Alloway had had artists in her boarding-house before, but their financial eccentricities had imposed such a strain on the good lady's patience that she had made a solemn vow to henceforth give all artists a miss in baulk.

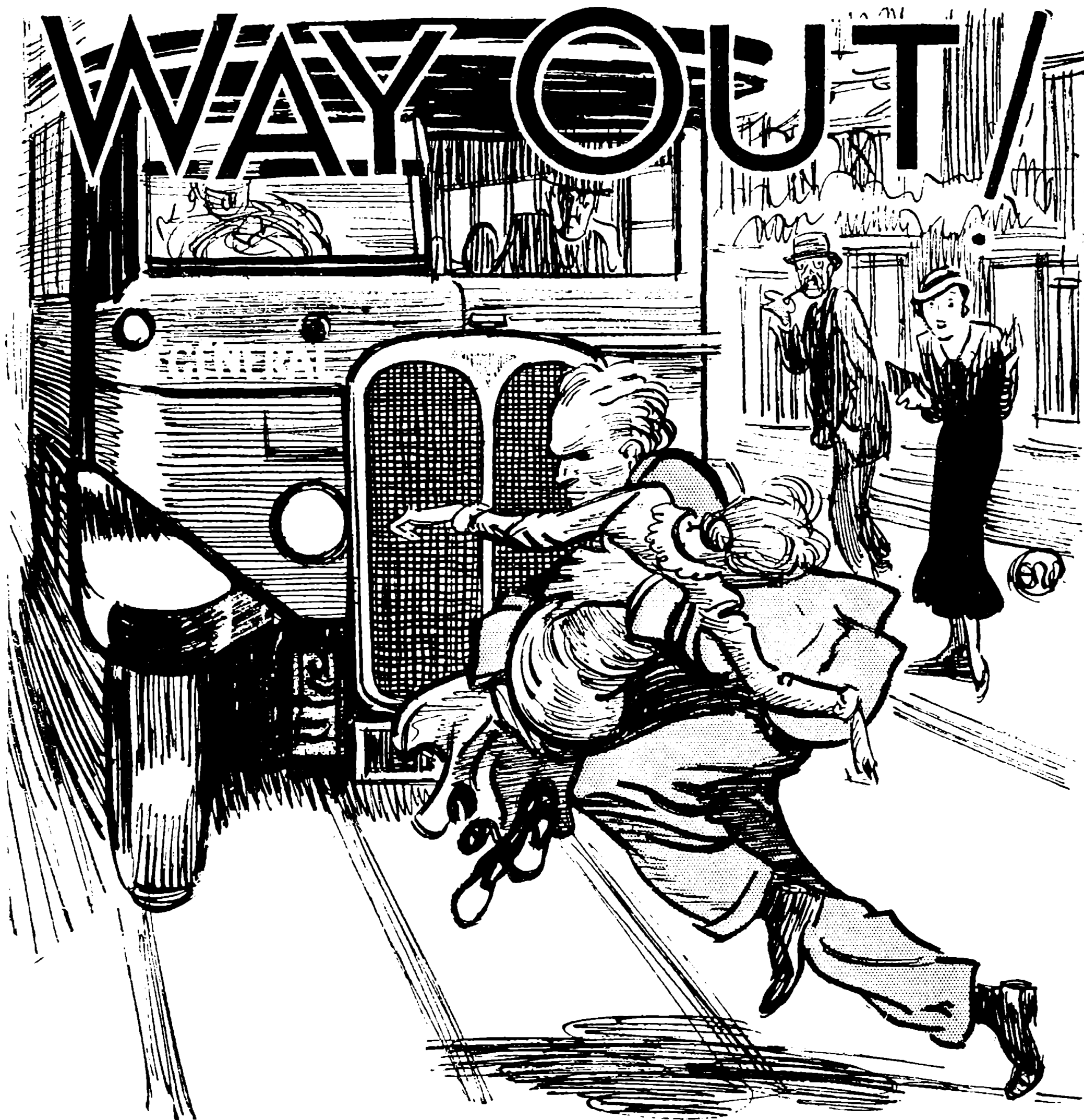
And then Mr. Glenthorne had come along; carelessly attired, baggy-kneed, and with a necktie so atrociously knotted that he advertised his profession as blatantly as a chimney-sweep advertises his. The dog-eared portfolio was quite unnecessary as a clue to Mr. Glenthorne's precarious calling; yet he had such a "way" with him

that Mrs. Alloway weakened on the very doorstep, and within five minutes she was letting the rooms and scorning his suggestion of advance payment as though it were the utterance of a polite lunatic.

He had boarded in this respectable Camden Road establishment for three weeks now, and Mrs. Alloway was readjusting her views on artists. Mr. Glenthorne evidently had a ready and lucrative market for his sketches—or it was just possible that a considerate relative had died and had left him a comfortable annuity. That Mr. Glenthorne had robbed a bank never occurred to the good lady; and that he was contemplating the robbing of another, his funds running low, was even farther from her thoughts.

Yet such was the simple truth.

As Mr. Glenthorne sat on the old-fashioned veranda outside the "first-floor-front," with a newspaper on his knees, he absent-mindedly contemplated the Camden Road traffic. It was really a glorious summer's evening,



Waldo shot across the bows of the speeding bus and whisked up the demented woman in his arms.

Illustrated by E. R. Parker.

Rupert Waldo, the strong-man Robin Hood crook with a personality, is up against it. He is wanted by the police on a murder charge. It was his chivalrous nature that got him into that undeserved fix—and in spite of his danger he still continues to risk his liberty and indulge his chivalry. Even the cops who are hunting him have a soft spot for Waldo; so it's certain you will.

and the setting sun bathed the big double-decker motor-buses in a golden glow as they passed up and down. But Mr. Glenthorne did not actually see the traffic; he was mentally viewing the premises of a bank in the Finsbury Park area. Twice he had had a casual look round. . . .

At this point of his cogitations Mr. Glenthorne did an extraordinary thing.

He suddenly gripped the edge of the veranda-rail and launched himself into space. It was a fair distance to

the ground, but he landed on the little patch of "lawn" with the springiness of a panther; and as though he were made of rubber he rose again, soared clear over the spiked railings, and dropped into the road on the other side of the pavement.

People were staring in amazement; some were shouting with alarm. For they had just seen what Mr. Glenthorne had seen five seconds earlier—a screaming, wildly hysterical woman running madly out of a gateway on

the opposite side of the road—running past the rear of a stationary tramcar, and into the path of a swiftly moving bus.

Mr. James Glenthorne, artist, alias Rupert Waldo, bank-robber and crook extraordinary, had judged, with uncanny accuracy, that he could just make it. He shot across the bows of the speeding bus, meeting the demented woman half-way. He whisked her up as though she weighed a mere pound or so, and gathered her into his arms as he reached the safety of the opposite pavement.

The whole startling incident had occupied no more than twelve seconds. Unquestionably, Waldo's lightning action had saved the woman from certain death.

"Pardon the he-man stuff," said Waldo. "But, really, in the circumstances—"

He broke off. She was limp in his arms and as pale as death. She had fainted. And people, wild with enthusiasm, were crowding round.

Waldo ignored them. He carried the unconscious woman into her own gateway and up the weed-grown path to the fine old mansion which had the "Sale" notices in the front windows. The door stood wide open. Waldo entered, kicked the door to with his heel—and the incident, so far as the startled public was concerned, was over.

Carrying the woman into a front room, Waldo placed her on a couch. Then he smiled ruefully. If this affair got talked about, the police might become suddenly interested in the elderly-looking man who had vaulted down from a first-floor veranda. But what did it matter? Rupert Waldo had been inactive for some weeks. The craving for excitement and action was upon him.

"Anybody at home?" he called, striding out into the big hall.

As though in answer to his shout, a key turned in the lock of the front door, and a slim girl entered.

Her fine eyes revealed her anxiety as she beheld the mild-looking stranger; her pretty features were so wan and strained that Waldo hastened to reassure her. But she spoke first.

"Has something happened to mother?" she asked quickly. "The people crowding outside—"

"Your mother, I am afraid, has fainted—but that is all," interrupted Waldo. "I took the liberty of carrying her into this room. She ran into the road and collapsed. What the doctors call a brain-storm, I believe, and—"

He broke off as the girl hurried past him into the room. In a moment she was on her knees beside the faded, haggard woman.

"Oh, I'd better run for a doctor!" she said, in fear. "Poor mother! The strain has been so great—" She checked herself, looking at Waldo gratefully. "I heard what some of the people were saying out there," she went on. "Mother would have been run over, wouldn't she? You saved her life. One man was saying that

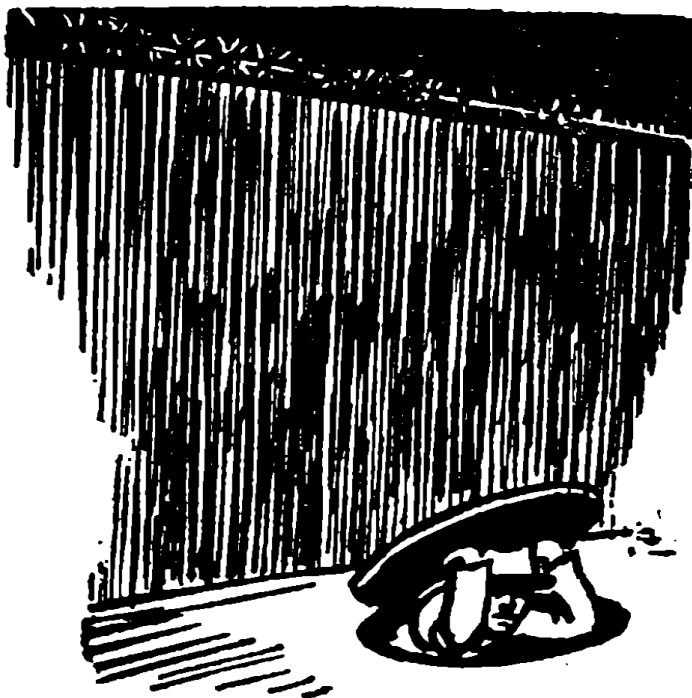
it was the most wonderful thing he had ever seen."

"He was talking nonsense, Miss Gresham," said Waldo cheerfully. "Now, I wonder if you can get me a glass of cold water? Smelling-salts might help, too. I don't think brandy would be advisable. We'll soon have your mother ship-shape."

She flew to obey, and soon Waldo was applying the simple restoratives; and Mrs. Gresham was showing signs of recovery.

"Nothing to worry about," he said. "Just a matter of a few minutes now."

"I don't even know who you are," said the girl, watching him wonderingly. "You're so gentle and so skilled—"



"I'm afraid I'm an inquisitive fellow, Miss Gresham," said Waldo apologetically. "My name is Glenthorne, I'm an artist, and I lodge across the road at Mrs. Alloway's. And during these past two or three weeks I've been very interested in this house of yours; that's how I know your name, by the way; I hope you'll excuse me. I've watched the auctioneer's men coming and going, putting up the notices, and all that sort of thing. The sale comes off to-morrow, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said the girl, in a low voice. "Mother has been very low-spirited for weeks. I—I suppose the strain became too great for her. I've tried to get her away—we've booked rooms at a private hotel—but she wouldn't leave. She's clinging to the place until the last."

Waldo nodded, and continued his first-aid efforts. He knew more about this tragic widow and her pretty daughter than the girl realised. He knew that the last of the servants had gone a fortnight ago, and since then the mother and daughter had been living alone. He knew that Mrs. Gresham was the widow of the late Brigadier-General Gresham, D.S.O.

Mrs. Alloway was a great gossip; she had told Waldo of the former glories of the "house opposite"; of the many servants—the butler, the footman, the maids, the chauffeur. Everybody in this part of Camden Road knew of the tragedy of Mrs. Gresham.

And Rupert Waldo, lying low in that quiet boarding-house, became fascinated by the many stories he had

heard. Waldo was no ordinary criminal; it cannot be said, with great accuracy, that he was a criminal at all. Certainly, he had a supreme contempt for the law; he took things that did not belong to him; but never in his life had he committed a mean action.

Known as "The Wonder Man" because of his uncanny strength, his singular sense of hearing, his amazing eyesight, he was admirably equipped for a lone fight against odds. For some time he had tried going straight, but life had become so dreary that he had thrown it up. He craved thrills—danger—excitement. But he possessed infinite patience; he could wait until something in his own particular line cropped up.

He believed that something had cropped up now.

"YES, dear, I must have gone mad," said Mrs. Gresham tremulously. "I—I don't seem to remember much. I had been going through the house, to take a last look at our most prized belongings. But I couldn't see anything. I only saw the labels—'Lot 62'—'Lot 127'—'Lot 201.' Oh, they dazzled me, Mary! I saw nothing but Lots—Lots—Lots!"

"Don't excite yourself, mother dear," said the girl gently. "You're all right now. This gentleman was kind enough to bring you indoors."

"I'm so afraid I made a dreadful exhibition of myself," said Mrs. Gresham, looking at Waldo gratefully. "And you saved my life, sir."

"I wish I could also save your home, dear lady," said Waldo gallantly. "I understand that it is to be sold over your heads to-morrow?"

"Everything—everything!" whispered the stricken woman. "My furniture—which I have had since I was first married—my pictures, my trinkets—even the house itself. Everything!"

Waldo was sympathetic. This was a case where the innocent were suffering for the guilty. He remembered the crash some months earlier. It had caused a great sensation in the newspapers. The Grant River Lead and Spelter Syndicate, Limited, had toppled, and thousands of shareholders had badly suffered. The chairman of the company, Brigadier-General Gresham, had been arrested on a charge of fraud with his co-directors, George Crofton and Walter Tiverton.

General Gresham had been sentenced to three years' penal servitude, and he had died in prison within a month. The other two gentlemen, irretrievably ruined, escaped prison. It had been a nine-days' wonder.

And this was the aftermath.

"It's more than I can bear," sobbed Mrs. Gresham, suddenly giving way. "It killed your poor father, Mary, and it will kill me! Oh, I know it!" She raised her tear-stained face and looked at Waldo. "Why did you save me?" she asked wildly. "It would have been more merciful—"

"Mother! You mustn't talk like

that!" cried the girl. "You frighten me so!"

"Forgive me, dear!" whispered the distracted woman. "But as sure as there is a judgment, that Billings will pay the penalty!"

"Billings?" murmured Waldo, with sudden interest.

"You won't believe me, but I swear to you—I swear by everything that I hold holy—that Sir Montagu Billings was the guilty man," said Mrs. Gresham, her voice becoming fierce in her indignation and anger. "My poor husband was tricked—trapped! He lost every penny of his own money in that dreadful crash."

"This is more important than you realise, Mrs. Gresham," said Waldo. "Do you seriously tell me that Sir Montagu Billings was at the back of the Grant River Lead and Spelter Syndicate? I am well aware that Sir Montagu is a great City magnate, but——"

"He's a shark! He's a vampire—a devil!" said Mrs. Gresham. "It was he who induced my husband to sink his money in that company; it was he who dragged Mr. Crofton and Mr. Tiverton into it. My husband and these other men were just dupes; they did not know that the company was crooked. Billings made tens of thousands out of the fraud, and——"

"And your husband and the other directors stood the racket?" murmured Waldo. "It's the same old story, Mrs. Gresham. With all my heart, I sympathise with you. Your husband was disgraced, and that disgrace killed him. Now you are losing the home that you loved. Perhaps it won't come to that. Billings may come to your rescue at the last moment."

"You don't know him, Mr. Glenthorne," said Mary Gresham quietly. "Sir Montagu is as hard as flint. He disowns all responsibility. His name was not mentioned once during the trial of my father. With all his millions, he kept himself out of the case."

Waldo was not surprised. He knew something of Sir Montagu Billings, the financier. He had received his knighthood during the War, when knighthoods were bestowed somewhat carelessly. He was a financial genius, and at the very mention of his name Waldo was on the alert. He knew that Billings always kept within the law; he induced the "suckers" to accept the responsibility in his questionable companies, and then, if anything went wrong, they "took the rap." He himself remained immune, and to the world at large he was a man of unimpeachable integrity and honour.

"Now, Mrs. Gresham," said Waldo cheerfully, "I am nobody, of course—just an artist of sorts—and I don't expect you to take much notice of me. But try not to worry too much. Billings will probably do something for you at the last moment—and he'll do it secretly."

"You don't know him, sir," said Mrs. Gresham sadly.

But when Waldo took his departure

—having received Mary's assurance that she would take good care of her mother—he was in a gleeful mood. He could see some vastly interesting work ahead of him.

This was just the kind of job he specialised in—making financiers do philanthropic things secretly.

Chapter 2.

Will o' the Wisp Waldo!

MRS. ALLOWAY, stout and homely, regarded her lodger with open-eyed wonder.

"I don't know how you ever come to do it, Mr. Glenthorne, sir," she exclaimed. "The pity is, I never saw it. I was busy with the mangling——"

"I can assure you, Mrs. Alloway, that the mangling was far more entertaining than anything you could have seen in the street," put in Waldo cheerily. "Who's been making all this fuss? I saw the poor woman running hysterically into the road, so I just hopped down from the veranda, dodged across, and helped her to safety. Surely there was nothing remarkable in that?"

"You're a caution, sir—that's what you are," said Mrs. Alloway. "Mrs. Munroe saw the whole thing, and she says it was impossible. The very word she used, Mr. Glenthorne. 'Impossible!' says Mrs. Munroe. 'Why, to see that gentleman, at his time of life, jumping off that veranda——'"

"I would like you to inform Mrs. Munroe that I am in my prime," said Waldo firmly. "A Spartan youth, Mrs. Alloway, and a due regard for daily exercising have kept me singularly fit. Now, my good lady, kindly drop the subject. What have we for supper to-night? Smoked haddock? Splendid!"



Waldo was not exactly uneasy; but he was thoughtful. There had evidently been a lot of talk about his "impossible" feat. It was quite likely that there would be a paragraph in the morning newspapers. Still, there was really nothing to connect the amiable Mr. James Glenthorne with Rupert Waldo, who was rather badly wanted by an anxious constabulary.

After supper Waldo announced that he was off to pay a visit to an imaginary friend in Chelsea.

"It will be a Bohemian affair, Mrs. Alloway, and it is quite on the cards that I shan't be home until the small hours of the morning," he said. "However, you need not be afraid that I shall roll home in an inebriated condition. I am not a teetotaler, but I am careful."

Mrs. Alloway heard him depart after she herself had retired to bed. Thus she did not see him—otherwise she might have been mildly surprised at his appearance.

For Waldo, letting himself out by the area door, was wearing blue workman's overalls, and on his head there was a peaked cap. But even if Mrs. Alloway had seen him she would not have been greatly surprised; for she had always been given to understand that those Bohemian parties down Chelsea way were queer affairs, where there were rare goings-on.

Waldo made his way leisurely to the fashionable district of Mayfair. He found that Alford House, Berkeley Square, was a large, imposing mansion, standing on a corner.

It was the London residence of Sir Montagu Billings, and lights were glowing in many of the windows. The hour was not yet late.

Waldo killed time by making a complete survey of the property. He found, to his satisfaction, that there was a quiet side road, one side of which was almost entirely occupied by the backs of some buildings which were flush with the pavement. On the other side there was the high wall of the Alford House garden. It was an exceedingly high wall, imposing and substantial—like everything else connected with Alford House. All along the top of it were lots of spikes.

Choosing a moment when nobody was in sight, Waldo leapt lightly upwards, and with the agility of a monkey he grasped the spikes, eased himself over, and dropped gently to the ground on the other side.

He had deliberately come early, so that he could get the lie of the land before he commenced the actual "job." He found the gardens to be limited but picturesque. There was a beautifully kept lawn, with a fountain in the centre of it; there were exquisite flower-beds, and he was particularly charmed by the rose-trees.

"An excellent specimen, this," he told himself, as he inspected one beautiful tree which was assisted in the way it should grow by means of a long bamboo pole. "H'm! Very interesting. I must bear this tree in mind."

He approached nearer to the house, and even peeped into some of the windows. On the face of it, his activities were rash; but he moved with the stealthiness of a shadow, and all his acute senses were on the alert.

Some of the curtains were drawn to, and some were not. He easily recognised the drawing-room, and he was lucky enough to locate Sir Montagu's library. He even spotted Sir Montagu himself, big and florid, chatting with one or two guests.

Having satisfied himself to this extent, he retired to a quiet, shady

part of the garden, and here he coolly squatted down and prepared for a long wait. By way of a change, after about half an hour, he leapt to the top of the wall and took a careful, yard-by-yard survey of the quiet side street.

He watched the lights go out one by one in the lower part of the house; he saw some upper windows glow; he waited until these, too, became darkened.

He was very gratified. It was not at all late yet—not much after eleven. Sir Montagu's household, apparently, kept highly respectable hours.

"The Bohemian party promises to break up early," murmured Waldo complacently. "I shall be able to get to bed like a decent citizen."

He went into action at once. Approaching the library window, he produced a small, ingeniously made jemmy of his own device. At the present stage of his operations he had no need of an electric torch; his eyesight was so cat-like that he could see perfectly. Having satisfied himself that there were no electrical connections attached to the window, he calmly and skilfully forced the catch.

Before entering he turned, and took another look at the garden. He mentally jotted down distances and other details.

Then he slipped through the window and carefully pulled the heavy curtains to.

He now removed his peaked cap, turning it inside-out. It was a most ingenious affair, for by this simple process a black mask formed by the lining came down, covering Waldo's face; and the cap itself became an ordinary-looking one, of a loud check pattern. He gave a tug at his blue overalls, and a fold of cloth came out, dropping down into a black silken cloak. Waldo had made these things with his own hands, and he was rather proud of them. He was something of an artist—but not the kind of artist that Mrs. Alloway took him to be.

The silken cloak in no way hampered his movements. He flashed an electric torch round the room, and he quickly located the heavy, substantial safe which was built into one of the walls. Crouching down, he chuckled contemptuously.

"The poor man might as well use a sugar-box!" he murmured.

From an inner pocket—an invisible "skin" pocket, which was attached to his waist—he took two or three gleaming pick-locks. These, too, were of his own invention.

Waldo was probably the most skilful locksmith alive. For years he had made a close study of every type of safe, of every design of lock. This particular safe in front of him was a good one, but Waldo knew every trick of the lock as though the steel was transparent and he could see through it.

He manipulated the first pick-lock, withdrew it after a few moments, and tried another. Then a third. And now he smiled. There was a certain "feel" about this one.

His sensitive fingers were so highly trained that he could detect the slightest "give." A gentle twist here,

a cautious turn there, and at the end of three minutes he sensed a welcome click. He turned the handle, and the safe door swung noiselessly open.

No, not quite noiselessly. There was an almost inaudible snap, like the sound of an electric spark there was a tiny bluish flash. Waldo pursed his lips and nodded.

He found, within the safe, an electrical connection—and the opening of that door had broken it. He sat there, listening intently. But there was no sound of a burglar alarm, as he had half expected. He rose quickly to his feet, went to the door, and opened it. The house was undisturbed.

"This is rather exciting," murmured Waldo, grinning. "I'll bet a penny to a quid that the electric wires connect direct with the nearest police station! That's a pity—because I shall have to hustle. And I hate being hustled."

HE went back to the safe, and, quite unconcerned, he proceeded to examine the contents. The knowledge—or the belief—that police officers were hurrying round to Alford House did not make him turn a hair. He had come here with a purpose, and he was not to be denied.

He fancied he heard the faint tinkle of a telephone-bell somewhere, but he only smiled. The police, no doubt, ringing up Sir Montagu and giving him the warning. He proceeded with his exploration work, and he became vastly interested.

For one thing, he found a considerable sum of money—ten thousand pounds in banknotes. This was excellent. He pocketed the notes coolly. Then he proceeded to go through various documents. One document, enclosed in a sealed envelope—which he ruthlessly broke open—he pocketed with immense gratification. Then he became interested in a certain book, and he even dipped into Sir Montagu's diary. He was certainly in no hurry.

Yet from time to time his acute ears caught the sounds of stealthy movements in the hall and out in the garden. He carried on blithely.

He was not in the least startled when the door suddenly burst open, lights came up, and an inspector of police and two constables barged in. In the background hovered Sir Montagu Billings, red of face, and evidently in a considerable stew.

"Well, well!" said Waldo, straightening himself. "This is most unkind, inspector! You might have given me a warning."

"Better come quietly, my man!" said the inspector sternly. "It's no good you trying to escape by the window. The garden is full of police officers, and you wouldn't get ten yards. This place is completely surrounded."

"You're not telling me that the Flying Squad is on the job?" asked Waldo. "What a fool I was not to guess! I saw that electric gadget, but as I heard no alarm bell, I thought it was disconnected. Well, so-long!"

The inspector and the constables were advancing quickly upon him,

their truncheons ready. But Rupert Waldo did not wait. With a spring which took him completely over the big desk, he reached the window curtains. Flinging them aside, he leapt out. Shouts sounded; men appeared from all parts of the garden, running towards him.

"Get him!" yelled the inspector.

"Some hopes!" sang out Waldo mockingly.

He had half expected this. The police and the Flying Squad officers had been silently admitted into the garden, and they were now surrounding the mansion. But—as Waldo was well aware—none of these police officers carried firearms. Waldo regarded the whole thing as an enjoyable game.

His actions now had the precision of a prearranged plan. He had not expected this development—but he was ready for it.

Three police officers rushed at him, converging from different directions. Waldo rose clean into the air in a perfect double somersault; and the startled officers gaped as they saw their intended prisoner soaring over their heads. He landed nimbly on the lawn, dodged two other men, and like a flash he grabbed the long bamboo pole which he had previously noted. He was sorry about the rose-tree, but no doubt Sir Montagu's gardener would come to the rescue in the morning.

"Well, cheerio, everybody!" shouted Waldo. "Sorry I've got to dash away in such a hurry."

He judged his distance with accuracy. The end of the pole jabbed into the lawn, and the Wonder Man soared upwards in one of the most magnificent pole-jumps the police officers had ever seen.

He cleared the wall in that leap, and as he landed squarely on his feet he saw that the side road was utterly deserted.

Waldo had not leapt over that wall at random; he had chosen his spot. Almost at his feet lay the heavy cover of a manhole. Reaching down, he gripped the metal-work, and the cover, despite its enormous weight, came up as though it were merely the lid of a coal-shoot.

Waldo slid into the depths, lowering the cover after him.

Not three seconds after he had leapt over the wall, detectives, shouting, appeared at both ends of the road; others, scrambling up the wall, stared over.

The road was empty.

The bamboo pole lay in full sight, but this extraordinary burglar, like a will-o'-the-wisp, had disappeared!

"But it's impossible!" snorted the police-inspector furiously. "The fellow hadn't time to get out of this road—and there's only a blank wall opposite. Where the devil did he get to?"

"Beats me, sir," said one of the constables helplessly. "You ought to have seen what he did in the garden! Talk about acrobats! Why, we never got a chance of getting near him!"

Meanwhile, Rupert Waldo, on the iron ladder which led down to a

sewer, coolly reversed his dress. Once again he became a workman in blue overalls with a peaked cap.

He reached the sewer, and was somewhat disgusted to find a good deal of mud, through which he was forced to walk. He carried on for some distance, found another shaft, mounted, and coolly raised the cover.

He was in another street—a fairly busy thoroughfare. With the utmost sang-froid he climbed out, lowered the manhole cover, and walked away. Various people who happened to see him took no notice. A workman on the job.

Cutting through another street, Waldo hailed a passing motor-bus and climbed aboard.

"You've been somewhere, ain't you, mate?" said the conductor, looking at Waldo's feet. "Where'd you get all that mud from?"

"I've been doing some gardening," replied Waldo facetiously, as he mounted to the upper deck.

Chapter 3.

The Wonder Man's Challenge.

SEXTON BLAKE, with a hard light in his eyes, shook his head. It was just after midnight, and the famous detective, telephone to his car, and in a state of considerable undress, was squatting on the corner of his desk in the consulting-room.

"I am very sorry, Sir Montagu, but I am altogether too busy," he said decisively.

"Don't say that, Mr. Blake!" came an agitated voice over the wire. "You are at liberty to name your own fee. I tell you this infernal burglar has stolen some vital documents. The money doesn't matter so much. I must get those documents back."

"The police are very efficient, Sir Montagu," said Blake curtly.

"That may be—but I'm willing to pay for the best brains," retorted Sir Montagu Billings. "I'm not flattering you, Mr. Blake, when I say that your brains are better than the best brains of Scotland Yard. If you'll come round at once I'll give you an open cheque—"

"I am singularly disinterested in your open cheques, Sir Montagu," interrupted Blake. "I'm sorry, but pressure of work prohibits me from accepting this commission."

And without another word he hung up.

Tinker, attired in a flowery-looking dressing-gown, appeared in the doorway.

"What's that you were saying about an open cheque, guv'nor?" he asked.

"It appears that Alford House, the West End residence of Sir Montagu Billings, has just been burgled," replied Sexton Blake. "Sir Montagu told me that I could name my own fee if I took on the case. I politely told him to go to the devil."

"But why, guv'nor?" asked Tinker, in astonishment. "You're not particularly busy just now—"



The door burst open, lights came up, and an inspector and two constables barged in on Waldo at the safe.

"Sheer idleness is preferable to accepting a commission from Sir Montagu Billings," said Blake, as he went back to his bed-room. "I know the man too well—and all my sympathies are with the burglar. Billings is one of the biggest crooks in London, young 'un. And he's one of those slimy, slippery crooks who keep within the law. I wouldn't touch his money with a barge-pole. He has ruined more homes, he has driven more men to suicide, than I care to think of. And the law cannot touch him. Like an ugly spider in the corner of his web, he ensnares his victims."

"What kind of job was it?" asked Tinker. "I mean, what did the crooks get away with?"

"I did not inquire—I was not interested," replied Blake.

He spoke with unusual brusqueness, for the very thought of Sir Montagu Billings angered him. The burglar who had broken into Alford House was probably a saint in comparison to the man he had robbed. Such men as Billings always made Blake see

red. It took him half an hour, with the assistance of a book, to calm his mind.

Then the telephone-bell again. Blake had switched the instrument through to the bed-room. He reached out, unhooked the receiver, and placed it to his ear. His eyes were harder than ever.

"Well?" he almost barked.

"You sound a bit peevish, Blake," said a familiar voice. "Not in bed yet, surely?"

"Oh, it's you, Lennard?" said Sexton Blake. "Sorry, old man. I didn't mean to roar at you."

Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of the C.I.D., was a personal friend of Blake's.

"It seems," came Lennard's voice, "that we have been treated to a spectacular display by our mutual pal, the one and only Waldo."

"Indeed!" said Blake, with sudden interest. "I have been wondering for some weeks when Waldo would crop up."

"He's cropped," said Lennard.

"Busted Sir Montagu Billings' safe not an hour ago, and lifted ten thousand quid and sundry priceless documents. At least, Sir Montagu says they're priceless. But he won't give us any hint as to their nature. Looks a bit fishy to me."

Sexton Blake considered.

"Where are you now, Lennard?" he asked abruptly.

"At Alford House," replied the inspector. "Mind you, there's no definite proof that the burglar was Waldo; but, whoever it was, he did rather an extraordinary disappearing act. The place was surrounded, but this burglar performed a few somersaults over the heads of the constabulary, did a neat pole-jump into an adjoining street, and—bing!—he just wasn't. If that isn't Waldo's trade-mark, whose is it?"

"I'll be with you within twenty minutes, Lennard," said Blake crisply.

"Well, I'm glad you're coming," said Lennard. "I've only just got on the job myself. I thought somehow that you would be interested."

Blake rang off and called to Tinker.

"Dive into your clothes, young 'un, and fetch the car," he said rapidly. "I've changed my mind about that Billings burglary. It seems that Waldo did the job—and my high opinion of Waldo is strengthened."

"If you think that, guv'nor, why take on the case?"

"Because I'm very keen on getting in touch with Waldo again," replied Blake. "I'm highly interested in his methods."

Tinker got into his clothes in record time, and by the time Sexton Blake was ready the Grey Panther, pulsating gently, was waiting outside the door, in Baker Street.

"No need for you to come, Tinker," said Blake, as he got into the driving-seat. "You'd better stay here—"

"Well, that's a bit thick," protested Tinker. "After fishing me out of bed, and making me fetch the car, I'm not wanted any more!"

"Don't be a young ass! I shall probably ring you up soon," said Blake. "There may be something for you to do at this end. At any rate, be ready to go into action when you get the word."

HE left Tinker much disgusted, and, judging by his smile, he appeared to be singularly callous regarding his young assistant's feelings.

He was overtaking an open-topped motor-bus a minute later when there was a heavy thud beside him. The Grey Panther sagged on its resilient springs at the shock.

"What the——" began Blake.

And then he broke off. Sitting beside him, without a trace of disguise, was Rupert Waldo. The effrontery of the Wonder Man's action almost took Blake's breath away.

"Sorry to drop on you so unexpectedly, old man," said Waldo cheerfully. "How are things going? No mistaking this car, you know. I was on the top of that bus."

"You needn't explain," interrupted Blake. "It may be past midnight, Waldo, but I'm not asleep. What's the idea of this move?"

"I was just coming along to see you, as a matter of fact," confided Waldo. "Am I right in suggesting that you are on your way to Alford House, Berkeley Square?"

"What if I am?"

"So you are, then," nodded Waldo. "The excellent Sir Montagu has called you in. I am surprised at you, Blake. I thought you were rather particular about your clients."

"Confound you, Waldo, I declined the man's commission!" growled

Sexton Blake. "It was only when Lennard rang up and told me that you were concerned in the case that I changed my mind. You have practically admitted——"

"To you, old friend, I would admit anything," said Waldo blithely. "Yes, I'm proud to say that I busted Sir Montagu's safe. But look here. As a favour to me, I want you to keep out of this business. There's only one crook in the case—and that's Billings."

"I am well aware of Billings' character."

"Good enough! Then you'll leave me alone?" asked Waldo. "Frankly, old man, I'm a bit scared of you. I don't mind the police a bit; they rather amuse me. But if you're going to butt in there might be some awkward complications. I'm only just starting on this stunt, and I don't want your interference. In fact, I won't have it."

"Aren't you a little cocksure about that?" asked Blake steadily.

"Cocksure or not, I'm going ahead, and I'm giving you the straight tip," replied Waldo. "That's why I came along to see you—just to be on the safe side. You needn't try to 'get' me—because you'll fail."

"That sounds very much like a challenge," said the detective. "And it's a very rash thing to challenge me, Waldo."

"You can take it as a challenge if you like," said Waldo. "It might make the affair more piquant. With you on the job, I shall need all my wits about me to win through. All right, then—that's understood."

"You're several kinds of a fool, Waldo," said Blake, with annoyance, as he kept his eyes on the road ahead. "I had half made up my mind not to interfere with you. This challenge of yours is unfortunate. I should advise you to withdraw it——"

He broke off suddenly, for, turning and looking at the seat beside him, he was startled to find it empty.

"What in the name of wonder——"

Glancing back, Sexton Blake understood. The Grey Panther had just overtaken a big lorry—and that lorry carried a great number of steel girders, which protruded from the rear of the vehicle. Blake was just in time to see Waldo dropping lightly to the ground from one of those girders. He had gripped it as the Grey Panther had passed, and had thus lifted himself out of the car. A mad thing to do—but quite characteristic of Waldo.

By the time Blake pulled his car up and jumped out, the Wonder Man had effected one of his rapid disappearing acts. Blake laughed ruefully.

"The infernal impudence of the fellow!" he muttered. "All right! I'll get him for this!"

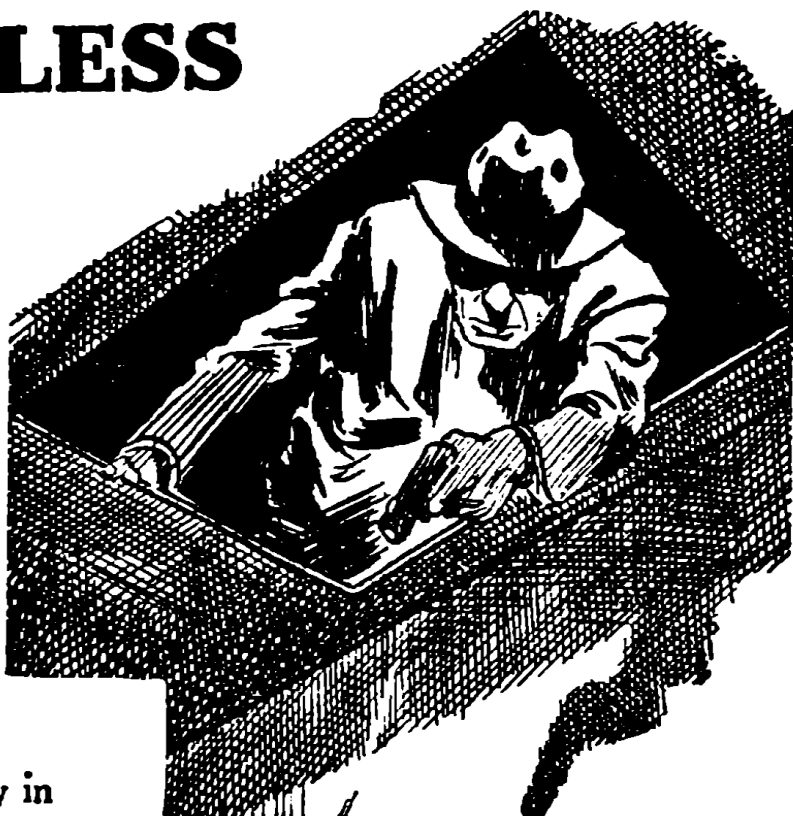
SIR MONTAGU BILLINGS, millionaire, had stark fear in his eyes. Money had always been his god, but as he faced Sexton Blake he temporarily abandoned his lifelong creed.

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"Recover those documents for me, Mr. Blake, and you can name your own figure," he said hoarsely. "The money doesn't matter—a mere ten thousand. We can leave it to the police to get that back. But those documents are of vital importance."

"May I know the nature of them?" asked Blake.

"They are contained in a sealed envelope; and they can be of absolutely no use to the burglar," replied Sir Montagu, his flabby face joggling unhealthily up and down as he jerkily paced the floor. "The envelope is plain, except for two words—'Branson Trust.' And the documents themselves are private papers intimately connected with the Branson Trust itself, which, as you may know, is in the hands of the Official Receiver. Mr. Blake, those papers are valuable only to me. Get them back"—he gripped Blake's arm tightly and lowered his voice—"get them back before the police can secure them, and you can put your own figure to an open cheque. I don't want those papers to fall into the hands of the police. It might mean—publicity."

"Or something else, perhaps, Sir Montagu?" asked Blake quietly.

The millionaire seemed to swallow something.

"The affairs of the Branson Trust are in a bad way," he replied. "There is a strong possibility that a crash can be averted; but not if these stolen documents fall into the hands of—of unauthorised persons who may make certain facts public."

Sir Montagu was at some difficulty to select his words. Sexton Blake understood perfectly. The documents were incriminating. If they fell into the hands of the police, they would be forwarded to the Public Prosecutor—and for the first time in his career Sir Montagu Billings would find himself in the dock. That was the simple truth, as Blake guessed it.

Blake secretly admired Waldo's discretion. Waldo had selected the Branson Trust papers deliberately. Yet, in thinking this, Blake wondered. It wasn't like Waldo to descend to blackmail—the dirtiest and most contemptible of all crimes.

"I'll be perfectly frank, Sir Montagu," said Blake calmly. "If I get hold of the Branson papers and return them to you, how much will it be worth?"

"If you return them to me intact, with your assurance that they have not been seen by the public, or by newspaper men, I will pay you any figure you care to name."

"If I bring them to you, Sir Montagu, I shall require ten thousand pounds," said Blake bluntly.

The millionaire stared.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated. "But—but that's an outrageous—"

"And yet you told me to mention my own figure?"

"I certainly did, but I had no idea that you would— All right—all right," said Billings suddenly. "You're a business man, Blake. I can see that. Ten thousand it shall

be—if you bring me those papers intact."

Sexton Blake was filled with contempt. He had put the screw on deliberately. Ordinarily he would not have entered this case at all; but Waldo had challenged him. He was determined to get those stolen papers—and just as determined to accept Sir Montagu's cheque for ten thousand pounds.

There were at least four charities, Blake remembered, which would be mightily glad of two thousand five hundred each.

Chapter 4.

Sexton Blake—Burglar.

RUPERT WALDO spent the next morning very enjoyably.

Quietly but tastefully dressed, and bearing no resemblance



to Mr. James Glenthorne, he attended the sale in the Camden Road. Although he wore practically no make-up, he succeeded in giving the impression that he was something between a lawyer and an old-fashioned business man.

He bid quietly, expertly. The first lot was knocked down to him; the second; the third. After a while the auctioneer found that he had practically nothing to do.

This quiet gentleman, giving the name of Robert Scott, was buying everything. Nobody else had a look in. People who had come to the sale to pick up bargains were disappointed; dealers very soon became discouraged.

It was obvious, in fact, that Mr. Robert Scott was determined to buy everything at whatever price was necessary. The auctioneer discreetly requested Mr. Scott to produce his credentials. Waldo was very polite, and very charming. He was, he said, acting under instructions. He regretted that he could not go into further details, but he produced ten thousand pounds in cash, and pressed the auctioneer to hold it as an earnest of his good faith. And the auctioneer, naturally, beamed all over his large face, and carried on.

Waldo was quite comfortable about that money.

He was certain that neither Billings

nor Billings' bankers had any record of the notes. There were notes of all denominations, and the serial numbers were not in sequence. It would be possible, of course, within a period of some weeks, to trace them. But to-day there was not the slightest danger.

The sale proceeded rapidly—and somewhat flatly. For as soon as the bargain-seekers thoroughly understood that Mr. Robert Scott was determined to buy everything, bidding became half-hearted.

Waldo made a thorough job of it. He purchased not only the contents of the house, but the house itself; and the sale concluded, as he had hoped and expected, in record time. Instead of dragging on until late in the afternoon, it was finished by lunch-time.

In order to complete the purchase, Waldo was obliged to provide another one thousand three hundred and seventy-four pounds, ten shillings. He did this cheerfully, obtained the receipts, and went his way.

Sundry merchants who were ready with vans to remove the furniture, were disappointed. They had never known a sale like it. For the furniture, instead of being removed and carted off in a dozen different directions, remained in the house.

The sale over, the new owner took possession of the keys, locked the house up, and—briefly—that was that.

At about two o'clock, Mrs. Gresham had a card, bearing the name of "Robert Scott," sent up to her. She and her daughter were in a small private hotel a mile farther up Camden Road. Mrs. Gresham was more resigned now; the blow had fallen, and she was dull and listless.

"I can't see anybody, Mary," she said wearily. "Oh, what does this man want? They've taken everything from us! There's nothing left—"

"But, mother, there are two pencilled words on the back of the card," said Mary Gresham, in wonder. "Look! 'Good news.' The gentleman wouldn't have written that unless he had something important to tell you!"

"There can be no good news for us now, child!" said Mrs. Gresham sadly. "The worst has happened!"

But she consented to see Mr. Scott; and two minutes later Waldo was ushered in.

"Ah, Mrs. Gresham, I am obliged to you for granting me this interview!" he said brightly. "I shall not keep you long; my business will take but a few minutes."

He found Mary's gaze fixed steadily upon him; so steadily, in fact, that he knew what was coming.

"Haven't we met before, Mr. Scott?" asked the girl quietly.

"I think not," he replied, returning her scrutiny. "No, Miss Gresham, I don't think I have had that pleasure!"

"Then may I ask, Mr. Scott, if you are in any way related to a gentleman named James Glenthorne?" asked the girl.

Waldo coughed.

"Does it really matter?" he said softly. "It is a point of small importance. Now, Mrs. Gresham, to business. We have here the auctioneer's receipts for the furniture and household effects. And here we have the title-deeds of the house itself."

Mrs. Gresham was bewildered.

"But—but I don't understand!" she faltered.

"It is quite simple," beamed the genial Mr. Scott. "The sale is over, and you are at liberty to return to your home just as soon as you please. But I forgot. Here is the key!"

Mrs. Gresham took the documents and the key mechanically.

"Oh!" murmured Mary Gresham, her eyes full of wonder—and understanding.

"And now, really, I must be hurrying away," said Waldo, reaching for his hat. "I have another urgent appointment—"

"But, please!" interrupted Mrs. Gresham. "I—I thought everything was sold, Mr. Scott! You bewilder me. Why have you given me the receipts and the title-deeds and the key? The property is no longer mine—"

"It has become yours within this last minute, my dear lady," said Waldo calmly. "I very much regret that I cannot disclose the identity of my client; but I can assure you that there is no suggestion of charity in this action. Merely justice!"

Mrs. Gresham rose to her feet, her face flushed, her eyes glowing.

"If that man Billings has done this, I refuse!" she said, with spirit. "I will not accept—"

"I give you my word, madam, that Sir Montagu Billings is not the kind of man to make a gift to anybody," said Waldo vaguely. "I will only hint that this is merely a beginning. There is much more to come—a great deal more. I wonder if you will be good enough to tell me the name of your bankers?"

"My mother's account has been virtually dead for some time," said Mary quickly. "It is at the Camden Road branch of the London & Home Counties Bank."

"Splendid!" said Waldo, giving her a quick look. "Well, Miss Gresham, I will leave you to talk this over with your mother. I can rely on you, can't I? And I do hope that you will both return to your home at once. Everything is quite undisturbed—and will remain so. Not a single article of furniture has been taken away. Well, good day—good day!"

He bowed himself out, and he was glad that the ordeal was over. This part of the game was not at all in his line. But he did not mind, really.

He was having a good time. There was something quite humorous in the situation. Sir Montagu Billings had robbed these unfortunate people; and Waldo, having robbed Sir Montagu's safe, had bought Mrs. Gresham's home with the money. Not that Mrs. Gresham would ever know anything about that.



The Wonder Man had his plans all cut and dried. So far, everything had gone famously. But the real adventure of the day had yet to come.

He hired a taxi, and was soon bowling citywards.

SEXTON BLAKE did not feel in any way called upon to take Inspector Lennard into his confidence. Lennard had called his attention to the case, it was true; but Sir Montagu Billings had commissioned Blake quite independently. And that placed the detective on a footing of his own.

He was interested for two reasons. Firstly, to secure the arrest of Rupert Waldo; he could not let that challenge go unanswered, much as he privately favoured the nature of Waldo's work. Secondly, charity would benefit by his efforts if he succeeded.

Blake's aim was to get on Waldo's track as quickly as possible. In the small hours of the morning, after he had solemnly agreed with Inspector Lennard that the case undoubtedly carried Waldo's trade-mark, he made a general survey of the area round and about Alford House.

No finger-prints had been found on the safe, or on the library furniture, or on the window-frame. Waldo had not left that kind of trade-mark. He was far too wily. But the fact that

the safe had been picked without even damaging the lock was suggestive enough of the Wonder Man's uncanny skill.

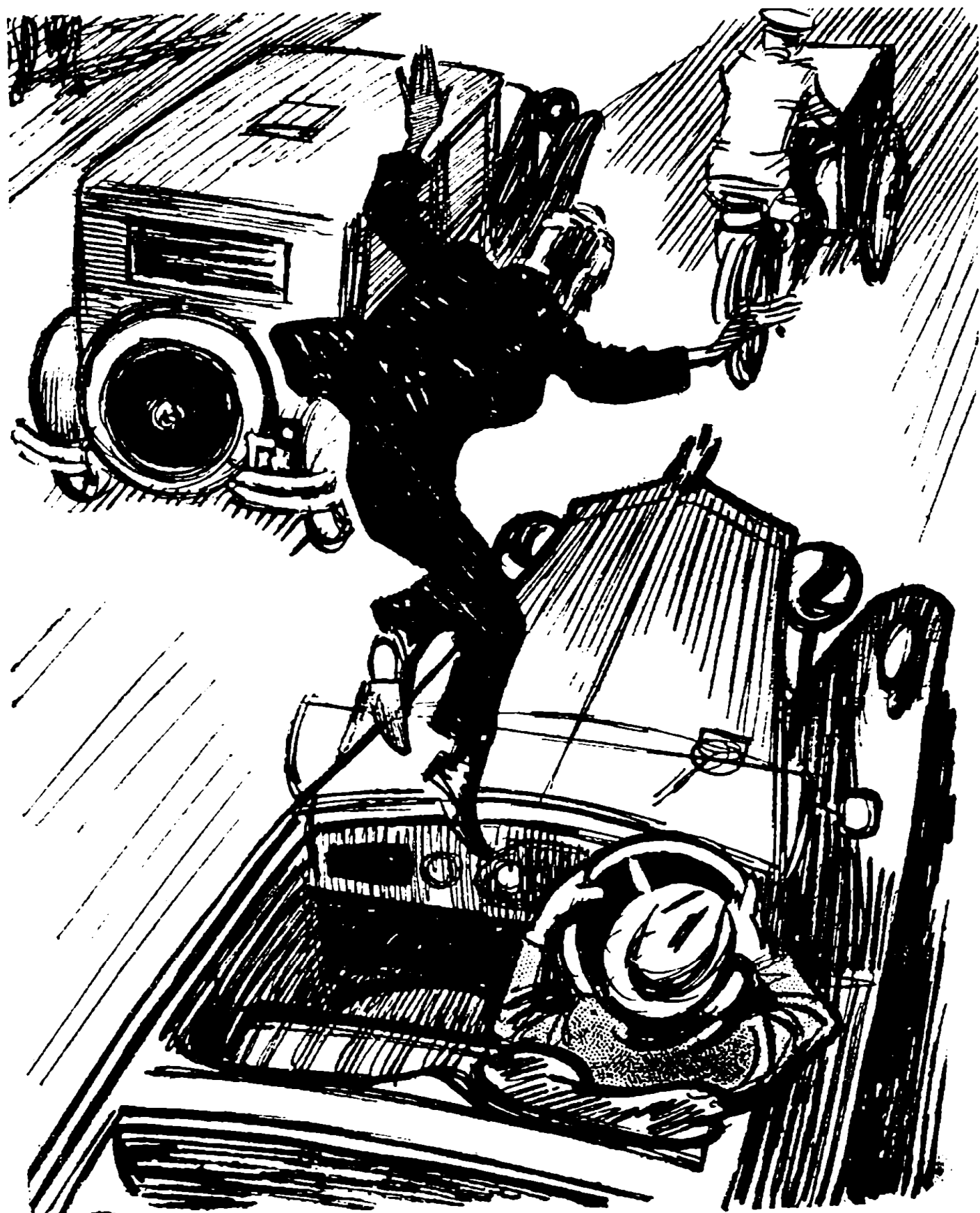
The police were only guessing—but Blake knew.

Waldo's extraordinary disappearance, after he had vaulted over the wall, was a facer. Lennard had a theory that Waldo had made his getaway by using a fast car; and it so happened that a sports two-seater had been seen dashing across Berkeley Square at almost the identical moment of the burglar's leap.

Blake favoured the idea that this was a coincidence. He had a look at that side road, and although he knew Waldo to be as fast as a hare, he did not think it possible for any human being to have reached the end of the road in time to get into that passing car.

It was true that the police officers, and the detectives, were all concentrated within the grounds of Alford House. There was nobody to definitely say whether a man had leapt into that passing car. Lennard, fastening his faith to this theory, spent the rest of the night in making futile efforts to trace the sports two-seater.

Blake had a theory of his own. He tested it later, when he had that side road quite to himself.



As Blake was overtaking an open-topped bus there was a heavy thud beside him. Waldo had timed his leap to a nicety.

He had examined the exact spot of Waldo's jump—and the approximate spot where Waldo had landed in the road. And it was significant—to Sexton Blake—that there should be a manhole cover not two yards away. The police had not given that manhole cover a second glance. From Inspector Lennard downwards, they all seemed to be fascinated by the burglar's speed.

Blake, knowing definitely that Waldo was the thief, remembered Waldo's uncanny strength.

Being quite unable to lift that manhole cover single-handed, Blake calmly attached a rope to it, tied the other end to the rear of the Grey Panther, and the cover was hauled off with perfect ease.

Blake descended the shaft to the sewer, and his efforts were quickly rewarded. There had been no rain for several days, and the sewer was comparatively dry.

But all along the floor there was a thick layer of mud—and there, clearly impressed, were recently made footprints.

Blake followed them. They seemed

to go on endlessly; but at length he came to another shaft. He mounted and arrived at the top. Everything was quiet.

By utilising every ounce of his strength, he managed to lift the cover an inch or two—realising, even as he did so, that it was a risky proceeding. Any passing vehicle might strike that cover, with disastrous consequences.

However, Blake risked it. He took one look and was satisfied. Breathing hard after his exertions, he descended the shaft, retraced his steps, and mounted the original shaft. He found a suspicious police-constable awaiting him.

"What's the idea of taking this cover off without leaving any danger lights?" demanded the officer. "You ought to know better—Why, I thought—It's Mr. Blake, isn't it?"

"Sorry, constable, if I've broken any by-laws or regulations," said Blake lightly. "I had a fancy to look down this shaft, that's all. I was hoping to get back before one of you fellows spotted anything wrong. In any case, I backed the car so that nobody could fall down."

"Why, that's all right, sir," said the constable, relieved. "You don't think that burglar escaped by the sewer, do you? Why, he couldn't have lifted the cover without help. I see that you had to use the car."

"I believe in exploring every

avenue," said Blake, with a smile. "Now that you're here, you can lend me a hand with this cover."

He tipped the man half-a-crown, and then he drove off in the car. But only for a short distance. Turning out of one street into another, he finally reached a spot he had recognised when he had peeped through that second manhole. In a direct line, it was not a great distance from the back wall of Alford House; but, owing to the intervening buildings, the detour was considerable. Blake appreciated the wiliness of Waldo's escape.

There was a cab rank within sight, and here he made some inquiries. Yes, one of the taximen remembered a workman coming up from that manhole at about midnight. It might have been before midnight, or after. Anyhow, he was a man in blue overalls with a peaked cap.

This taximan proved very useful. For it so happened that he had been hired at that particular moment, and, cutting through into a main thoroughfare, he had again seen the man in overalls—and the man had been getting on to a passing motor-bus.

"You didn't happen to notice the number of that bus?" asked Blake.

"No, sir; but I did see that it was going to Finsbury Park."

"Well, that's something," said Blake. "A late bus, going to Finsbury Park."

Blake tipped the man and drove straight home.

AFTER a few hours' sleep and an early breakfast, Sexton Blake was out on the scent again.

He knew that it was advisable to wait until now. He would not have learned much in the small hours of the morning; for at that hour the buses were in the various depots, and the busmen were off duty.

Now, however, he pursued his inquiries. By diligent work he identified the particular bus which he sought; he obtained the address of the conductor. For that man was not on duty now, and would not report until the afternoon.

As a matter of fact, Blake fetched him out of bed, and the conductor immediately remembered the man in the blue overalls and the peaked cap who had got aboard his vehicle in the neighbourhood of Grosvenor Square.

"Why, yes, sir," he said. "Cheery sort of fellow. He had muddy boots—couldn't help but notice him, with all that mud on him."

"Did he say anything about his boots?"

"Said he'd been gardening, sir—although I didn't believe it."

"Do you happen to know where this man got off?"

"Why, yes, sir—in the Camden Road, not far from the York Road stop. I can tell you the exact spot where he pulled the bell."

The conductor did so, and Blake memorised it. There was a very keen expression in the detective's eyes now. Something had stirred in his memory.

He tipped the man liberally, and his next move was in the direction of

Camden Road. He recalled an item he had seen in the morning newspaper; just a trifle.

An elderly man, living at a house in Camden Road, had made a spectacular leap from a first-floor window, or veranda, and had rescued a woman from being run over. Ordinarily, Blake would not have paid much attention to that trivial piece of news.

But he now saw the significance of it. Who else but Waldo would have done such a thing? And Waldo, after his daring exploit at Alford House, had travelled by bus to the Camden Road!

The next link in the chain—and the strongest link of all—was virtually forced upon Sexton Blake's attention. Reaching the bus stop, where, according to the conductor, the man in overalls had alighted, Blake saw a stir about one of the big houses. He saw the sale boards, and he paused to light a cigarette opposite a grocer's boy, who was leaning against his bicycle.

"Somebody being sold up?" he inquired casually.

"Serve 'em jolly well right," said the grocer's boy. "It's them Greshams."

"Oh?" said Blake. "What have they been doing?"

that the unfortunate woman had attempting to commit suicide.

A thought occurred to Blake, and he turned back. The grocer's boy was still wasting his employer's time.

"Do you know the name of the man who jumped down from that veranda?" he asked.

"Why, Mr. Glenthorne," said the boy. "He don't live there really—he lodges with Mrs. Alloway. She's one of our customers, so I ought to know."

Going to the boarding-house, he rang the bell, and the door was opened by Mrs. Alloway herself.

"I've called to see Mr. Glenthorne," said Blake.

"Sorry, sir; he's out!"

"When do you expect him back?"

"I can't rightly say, sir; he didn't leave word," replied Mrs. Alloway, mentally deciding that Blake was respectable. "Being one of them artist chaps, he's a bit erratic."

"Well, I don't think he'll be long. He knows I'm coming to see him," said Blake glibly. "You don't mind if I come in and wait, do you, Mrs. Alloway?"

"You're not one of them reporter chaps?" asked the landlady suspiciously. "Mr. Glenthorne didn't like that bit in the paper this mornin'. He said it was making a fuss

tion of the documents within confirmed Sexton Blake's earlier suspicions.

Those documents were indeed incriminating—and they would be well worth ten thousand pounds to Sir Montagu Billings. It was a moot point in Blake's mind whether he was justified in restoring them.

But his hesitation was only momentary. He even chuckled. Waldo would soon discover that the papers were gone, and it was any odds that Waldo would get them back again. In the meantime, Sir Montagu would part with ten thousand pounds, and charity would benefit to that extent.

Sexton Blake did not wait. He made his excuses to Mrs. Alloway, and he requested her to give his compliments to Mr. Glenthorne, and to say that they would meet later.

"He'll understand perfectly when you tell him that it was Mr. Blake who called," said the detective, smiling.

He was tempted to make inquiries opposite—for he had a shrewd idea that Waldo was interested in that sale—but the business now appeared to be over, for there was much less activity.

But Blake did not want to take his eyes off Mrs. Alloway's boarding-

We want the best Bardellisms; YOU have them.



But he knew perfectly well. Gresham! Gresham was the man who had been sentenced to three years' penal servitude for fraud in connection with the failure of the Grant River Lead and Spelter Syndicate. He had died in prison. In that instant Blake detected the hidden hand of Sir Montagu Billings—and Rupert Waldo's activities became clearer.

"You've heard of that bloke Gresham, ain't you?" said the grocer's boy scornfully. "Him what was sent to prison for fraud. This is where he lived—an' the old girl is bein' sold up. I'll bet she was just as bad as her old man!"

"You shouldn't judge so hurriedly, my lad," said Blake, shaking his head.

"Well, anyway, she tried to commit suicide last night," said the grocer's boy triumphantly.

"How do you know that?"

"I see her, didn't I?" said the boy. "She run out of the house an' tried to chuck herself in front of a bus. Crumbs! Some bloke jumped down from that there veranda"—he pointed—"and picked her up as though she didn't weigh no more than a kid's balloon! Never saw anything like it! There was a bit in the paper about it this mornin'."

Blake nodded and walked on. His morning was proving singularly instructive. It was Waldo, without doubt, who had saved Mrs. Gresham from death. Blake was not prepared to believe the grocer-boy's statement

over nothing—although, if it comes to that, I didn't agree with him."

"I'm one of Mr. Glenthorne's friends!" laughed Blake. "He's told me all about you, Mrs. Alloway; and it's a wonder your ears haven't burned!"

"Well, really!" said Mrs. Alloway, flustered.

"He says that he never had more comfortable lodgings," continued Blake cheerfully. "I'll give him twenty minutes; and if he hasn't turned up by then, I'll call again later."

He got into Waldo's rooms with supreme ease; and during the course of three or four minutes he pumped Mrs. Alloway so skilfully that the good lady had no knowledge of it. Blake obtained all the details of the previous evening's affair.

Then, left to himself, he commenced a swift and systematic search of Waldo's sitting-room. He was far more successful than he had expected to be.

In the second drawer of an old-fashioned bureau he found a bulky foolscap envelope. The flap was securely fastened, and there was nothing on the outside to indicate the contents.

Blake felt it carefully; his fingers detected the broken seal of another envelope within. Without compunction, he tore it open. And then he smiled grimly.

For there was a second envelope within, and on it were the words: "Branson Trust." A quick examina-

house. He had already noticed a concrete telephone booth within easy reach. Entering this, he was still able to watch the house.

He phoned through to Tinker, and told the young detective to come and meet him straight away.

DURING Blake's wait, nobody remotely resembling Waldo entered Mrs. Alloway's establishment. Upon Tinker's arrival, Blake gave him his instructions. And Tinker's eyes opened wide when he learned that Waldo had already been tracked down.

"Yes, young 'un, he lodges here," said Blake. "Watch this house until you hear from me again—or until Waldo returns. If he comes, take care to avoid being seen. If he goes out again, follow him. He challenged me to 'get' him, and I'm not going to rest until I've handed him over to the police."

"It doesn't sound like you, guv'nor," said Tinker, troubled. "After all, Waldo isn't an ordinary crook and—"

"You young ass!" interrupted Blake. "How long do you suppose Waldo will remain in the hands of the police? I'm going to get him—that's all. After that he can make his break for liberty as soon as he pleases—and good luck to him!"

"I get you, guv'nor!" grinned Tinker. "Just a personal matter between the two of you, eh? And you mean to win!"

THE ROUND TABLE

FOR OR AGAINST— WHAT SAY YOU?

"I should like to see your correspondence column withdrawn. It seems incredible that the 'U.J.' should sink to such a low ebb as to publish such rot as appears there every week."

"I noticed the return of the Round Table. This feature is absolutely necessary as a connecting link between Editor and readers. It was always popular, and I could never understand why it was absent for so long."

THERE you have it—another demonstration of the old truth that you can't please everybody! From a Birmingham reader, J. Grubb, as quoted above, the Round Table gets it in the neck; from Reader Will Jones, of Lower Edmonton, and others, it gets the glad hand.

pieces picked out of their favourite author or character, and consequent dampening of their entertainment.

I say emphatically that unless they possess a head so thick that nothing affects them, nobody can enjoy an author's work to the full after it has been labelled "puerile," "nonsensical," etc.

Several months back you endeavoured to find who were the favourite authors. G. H. Teed, I think, was elected for that honour, yet week after week for four months you have published letters which make it appear that Mr. Teed's yarns were so much scrap paper. If your correspondence column can do no better than that, then I suggest you withdraw it.

You could easily act upon suggestions to please the majority without publishing such rot. I quite realise that, if the correspondence column is popular with the overwhelming majority of your readers, it cannot be withdrawn, but at least publish letters dealing with other subjects, such as suggestions for more stories of certain characters, etc.

You could make some reference to this

author is under fire from some other quarter it usually causes a dampening of the entertainment the author's admirer anticipates. I should suggest that the general reaction would be: "The other fellow doesn't know what he's talking about; doesn't know a good story when he sees one!"

Perhaps our pal from Birmingham overlooks the function of this get-together page. This committee meeting at the Round Table is not so much a correspondence column as a place where we can all air our views, as the name implies; not so much a voting-booth as a forum. Readers can, and do, state their preferences for certain authors and characters; but they can give their opinions on any other relevant matters that may interest them, too.

And if they can state their likes, they can equally well state their dislikes. It would, I admit, lead to an unbalanced state of things if opinions went all the same way, or if I printed only one side of the argument. Therefore the comment containing the words "puerile" and "nonsensical" which disturbed Mr. Grubb was bracketed with another reader's letter giving just the opposite opinion of the same G. H. Teed story: "... I think he has reached the A1 point... one of the greatest favourites."

MRS. BARDELL Says:—

"Mr. Blake has a new Portugal wireless set, cemented to him by a client that he successfully electrocuted a case for."

"The times Mr. Blake 'as 'ad 'airbrush escapes is too humorous to mention."

"I still maintains that all persons the worse for drink, inoculated, in short, should be confirmed in a deformatory."

The above Bardellisms were sent in by the following readers respectively, and Ten Shillings has been sent to each of them: Miss M. Rapley, School Hill, Storrington, Sussex; Mr. A. Wiltshire, 83, Eugenia Road, London, S.E. 16; Mrs. C. Crowhurst, 49, Mann St., Walworth, London, S.E. 17.

WE want to add to our collection of Bardellisms to get one or two extra laughs into your life weekly.

The "U.J." offers **TEN SHILLINGS** to the author of each original pearl of Bardell wisdom selected for publication here each week.

Think out as many Bardellisms as you like, write them on a postcard, and send them to: "Mrs. Bardell": **UNION JACK, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.)**—and don't forget to include your own name and address.

Merit alone counts; one reader can win more than one prize, but, everything else being equal, preference will be given to the previous non-winner.

I say "and others" because practically everybody who mentions this mutual page of ours does so with commendation. In fact, the counterblast from Birmingham is the first kick that has come its way. So, following our policy of giving both sides of a question a hearing, I will print Reader Grubb's argument in full:

Before laying down my complaint against "U.J." correspondents, I should like to say that I am writing in all sincerity, and not for something to write about.

The reason I am sending this letter is: that I should like to see your correspondence column withdrawn. It seems incredible that the "U.J." should sink to such a low ebb as to publish such rot as appears there week after week.

When the majority purchase a paper such as the "U.J.," they do so for the enjoyment they get out of the yarns, not to have

subject in your editorial, and invite letters as to withdrawing it or not.

Anyhow, please do not keep publishing letters concerning the authors or characters.

WELL, we're all eligible to say our piece on this question, but as I have the advantage of a good start over the rest of you, I'll give my own preliminary response to Mr. Grubb's remarks while waiting the comments of other Round Table-sitters.

It seems to me (if he doesn't mind my saying so) that he has an admiration—and rightly—for G. H. Teed's stories, which he cannot bear to have disturbed—but not so rightly. I don't think it can be a general feeling that nobody can enjoy a favourite author's work after seeing it criticised as "puerile" or "nonsensical." I don't think either that when a favourite

It may be overlooked, too, that by opening these columns to the clash of opinions and comment in general, this page attains a brightness that would quickly fade away if it contained nothing but correspondence asking: "Please-give-us-more-stories-of-such-and-such-character," as Reader Grubb suggests.

In fact, as he will readily recognise, his own letter has charmingly given brightness to our Round Table discussion this week.

Your Editor

Blake took the Grey Panther, and drove straight to the Strand. He parked the car, and then walked to the palatial edifice, known as Billings' Building, which Sir Montagu had erected as a monument to his industry and power.

It was just half-past two, and Blake was hoping that Sir Montagu would be back from lunch. Arriving at the fourth floor, where the millionaire's private office was situated, his card acted like magic. He was immediately escorted to the great man's sanctum.

On the way through an outer office, bristling with clerks and girl stenographers, he caught a glimpse of a gaunt, haggard man, who was creating a bit of a scene.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but you cannot possibly see Sir Montagu without an appointment," a suave clerk was (Continued on page 16.)

A FEW months ago the attention of the world was focused on the Mediterranean island of Corsica, where the French Government was having a large-scale bandit-hunt. Six hundred French troops, tanks, machine-guns, blood hounds, armoured cars, aeroplanes, three battle cruisers, and even a submarine, to intercept possible outlaw fugitives fleeing from the island, were used in this somewhat farcical war against forty elusive brigands of

MEN of the MOUNTAINS

The brigands in their rocky fastnesses may be picturesque, but their crimes are real enough.

the wild Corsican mountains.

Some were captured or killed, and the war petered out to the accompaniment of gentle laughter from those who saw the humour of the situation; meantime the traditional trade of banditry is probably building up afresh.

Certainly it had got out of hand in Corsica; it was ruining the island's trade and undermining its morale much as the American gangsters are undermining America's. But brigandage is by no means a Corsican monopoly; it thrives to greater or less extent in many nearer parts of Europe—wherever, in fact, the local conditions favour it, and especially in the mountainous and wilder parts of southern and eastern Europe.

In essentials, the picturesque mountain bandit is much the same as the slinking American gunman. Both prey on honest people for a living. But somehow the bandit has got a saving touch of romance, a sort of Robin Hood flavour, about him, that gives him a little something the gunman hasn't got. A glamour; a theatrical appeal.

Georges Ponard may be mentioned as a case in point. His early career was more or less sordidly commonplace as a crook always in and out of prison for robberies and other crimes, until he took to the trade of mountaineer brigand; and he operated in the Jura, the mountain range that separates France from Switzerland—only a few hours from London by rail.

The terror of his name and his many fearsome exploits held the whole countryside in awe of him. At last the police organised a manhunt, and a strong force of gendarmes advanced across his territory with a sweeping movement designed to brush him into the net.

Dodging from point to point in his rocky, thicket-covered fastnesses, Ponard was many times within half a minute of capture. Only his knowledge of every goat-track and cranny saved him as the line advanced.

Twice he eluded capture by risking his neck in making astonishing long-jumps across mountain chasms where no one else dared to follow him, and for a night and a day the gendarmes toiled after him in vain.

Then they closed in on a peasant's hut to which his tracks had led. The last twelve-foot jump across the abyss had landed him with a broken ankle, and he had limped for two hours to reach the hut, where he had collapsed exhausted, and the peasant gave him up to the manhunters.

Rumania has always had her bandit outlaws also. One of the latest, whose name is unknown, and has not yet been caught, held in thrall a district between Bucharest and Galatz, and made it so unsafe with his murders and pillaging that the Rumanian Government detailed a detachment of troops to guard travellers on the road where he operated. Once or twice a day convoys were formed, and a long procession of cars dashed through



ANDRE SPADA, one of the bandits killed in the Corsican bandit drive. He was a typical example of the colourful brigand of the mountains.

the danger area at speed, with an armed soldier sitting alongside each driver.

Probably the most famous of these modern Robin Hoods of the road was Jovo Carug, the criminal king of Slavonia—a district in Yugoslavia about as large as Wales.

The romance in his case was more apparent than real, for he was an out-and-out villain. Most crimes from murder down were on his record, and all of them so frequently repeated that nobody knows the total—burnings of villagers' houses, robberies, hold-ups, plunderings, killings. The Government put a price on his head of £1,000, dead or alive. When he was ultimately captured there were over a hundred charges against him, apart from seven murders and eighteen robberies to which he freely confessed.

A sample exploit will serve to show the measure of Jovo Carug.

He disguised himself as a cattle dealer and obtained the hospitality of a farmer, with whom he stayed for a week. Nobody connected him with the occurrence, but one night the place was raided by a gang of robbers, and all the farmer's money stolen.

Sympathising with the farmer (who had no suspicions as to who might have told the raiders where he kept his money) the cattle-dealer bandit, who passed under the name of Baricz, stayed with him a few more days.

During that time he met and fell in love with a village girl, and became engaged. He left eventually, but returned at various times later, and corresponded with her between-whiles.

Then he planned a second robbery of the same farmer, to take place after the harvest, when he knew there would be a lot of money in the house. The scheme was that, while his gang set fire to an outlying haystack, he would enter the farmhouse when the occupants had rushed out to deal with the fire, collect the money from the hiding-place, and afterwards to rob as many of the village houses, likewise left empty, as he could while the confusion lasted.

At the last minute, however, he could not attend personally to this little job, and had to leave it to the gang. But for some reason the gang failed him, also, and there was no rick-burning and no robbery at the farmer's.

Hearing no news where he was living in a distant part, he tried to get it in a roundabout way from his village sweetheart. He wrote saying he had heard

From Info Received

TERS

SNAKES.

IN Hamburg, Germany, timorous taxi-riders may be sure of sober drivers.

Badged officially, Prohibitionist taximen who are abstainers wear another badge, voluntary, unofficial.

It denotes their sympathy with the Dry cause, suggests their safe sobriety.

The badge: The snake of Strong Drink being crushed to death in the fist of Prohibition.

SHARE.

IN Berlin many were the complaints of non-receipt of expected letters; mysterious the leakage. None of them was believed to contain money.

Solved at last was the problem when snooping detectives caught a postal worker examining the mail and removing a letter, pink and perfumed; and found also at his house a further huge accumulation.

They were all love-letters.

Said the letter-lifter:

"I am forty-two and lonely. I feel an irresistible impulse to have my share of love."

NECK.

AT Penge Police Court the magistrates' clerk addressed a Labour Exchange official in terms of stern rebuke. Said he:

rumours of hayrick burnings in the district, and inquired whether it were true. By a freak of chance there had been some hayricks set alight, and the police were opening letters to try to trace the culprits. They arrested both the girl and the alleged cattle-dealer.

The girl was acquitted at the trial, but Baricz seemed certain of a sentence. In desperation, his sweetheart appealed to a former flame of hers to try to do something for him. This old lover was a police sergeant. He went to the court, looked at the prisoner—and was certain that he had seen him somewhere before.

Days of brain-cudgelling brought the sudden realisation that he was none other than Jovo Carug, the elusive bandit whom every policeman in Yugoslavia was seeking. He was different now, with beard and long hair, but the sergeant was sure. He had a vivid recollection of a time, two years before, when he had been present at an attack on a farm by bandits, and for a moment had stood face to face with the brigand chieftain, both of them having expended their last cartridge in the fight.

He confronted the alleged cattle-dealer Baricz in the presence of the prison governor, and challenged him with the words: "You are Jovo Carug!"

Taken aback for a moment, the will-o'-the-wisp brigand admitted it.

It was an admission that put him on trial for a much more onerous crime—or series of crimes—than mere rick-burning, and that removed the most formidable bandit of modern Europe.

And, while he lay in the prison at Belgrade under multiple charges of murder and lesser crimes, the long-memoried sergeant became the richer by the Government's £1,000, and the village girl the poorer by a prospective husband whose loss was really a gain.

mation

OUR WEEKLY BUDGET OF ARTICLES AND
NEWS ITEMS CONCERNING CRIME AND
DETECTIVE WORK IN ALL VARIETIES.
FROM ALL ANGLES.

TALES

"Your conduct will be brought to the notice of the Ministry of Labour. This is a court of justice, not a sports meeting!"

His sportive conduct—wearing an open-necked tennis shirt.

DOOR.

IN Berlin, two officers of the Flying Squad, called to an alarm of burglars in a flat, stood outside the door, heard movements inside, demanded:

"Open for the police!"

The door remained shut. They fired through the wood.

Forced, the opened door revealed a body just inside—a policeman who had been about to unlock it, who was dying of his wounds.

He it was who had given the alarm to the Flying Squad.

REFERENCE.

AT Tottenham, London, the police court magistrate was asked advice by a woman applicant as to the regulations concerning pawnbrokers, and the question of a time-limit for redemption.

Authoritatively the magistrate made reply. His authority: The rules printed on the back of a pawnticket in his own possession.

THE other week, in the garden of a private house at Welling, Kent, a party of perspiring policemen spent several futile hours digging for the body of a missing woman.

The reason their digging was futile was that the woman was still alive in Southend.

FALSE ALARM!

Legs, flies, parrots,
mummies—these
and things even less
likely may be the
raw material of a
mare's nest.

plausible, just as firemen have to turn out for any fire alarm. Missing persons, missing jewellery, rumours of uncommitted murders, burglaries that haven't happened, stolen articles that are merely lost—these and all sorts of things have, as Mrs. Bardell would say, jerked the police up to a state of execration.

A £5,000 pearl necklace was reported as missing, and found later in a pocket of the owner's coat. She had been to the Horse Show at Olympia, and couldn't be sure whether she had worn it there or not, till it turned up safe at home, and the police hunt was called off. Another pearl necklace, worth only £2,000, but giving just as much unnecessary trouble, was similarly lost and reappeared in a garment lying in a chest of drawers. Meantime the butler had been arrested.

"When we receive complaints of thefts, we usually inquire first whether there has been any mistake," said a Scotland

Yard man. "Sometimes we have hunted for 'stolen' jewels, or luggage containing valuables, or even motor-cars, only to find, after going to endless trouble, that they have been merely mislaid.

"People are often reported missing, and we find they have been staying with friends for a night or two, or maybe have only missed the last train home. One old lady I know reported her son-in-law as missing three times for that reason."

Still, it's a human failing. Even Scotland Yard itself isn't immune from mislaying things. When Sir Basil Thompson, then director of the Special Branch, was leaving a hotel where he had been staying in Newport, Virginia, he reported the loss of his wallet. His train was just leaving the station when the hotel porter came running up and handed it over. It had been left under Sir Basil's pillow.

And in a similar case that happened at Wroxham, on the Broads, a wallet full of banknotes, which had mysteriously vanished from a houseboat—and which couldn't be found when the boat was emptied and even the floorboards taken up—was ultimately discovered at the local laundry, where it had journeyed in company with the wash.

SOME people are so apt to jump to conclusions, too. It must have been an embarrassing moment for the lady who ordered the driver of the taxi she had hired to take her to the police station, and she there realised she had made a mistake. She had missed some valuable rings while in the cab, and accused the driver of taking them.

It was while she was signing the charge sheet that she found the rings in her coat pocket. Having proceeded thus far, the matter had to go to court. The driver was, of course, acquitted, and the magistrate told him that it was open to him to bring a charge against the woman of malicious prosecution.

Turning to something more unusual, the police at Waltham Abbey had a curious case of false alarm when they were notified of clouds of smoke high up around the tower of the abbey church. Several constables climbed right up to the belfry, but never a sign of fire could they see; though apparently dense clouds of smoke still drifted round the topmost pinnacles of the tower.

The mystery was solved when the clouds were found to be myriads of flies which had emerged from their breeding place and were swarming in preparation for a general exodus.

Many a murder sensation has lapsed into laughter. The people of the Yorkstrasse, Berlin, once rumoured some dark deed of death and reported a murder to the police. There was an unpleasant odour, they said.



"... accused the driver of taking them."

There was, sure enough, and the police eventually tracked it down to a coffin under a pile of timber in a carpenter's yard. The coffin contained human bones and a skull. They were those of an Egyptian mummy not so well preserved as it might have been. The owner had forgotten it and gone abroad.

THEN there have been sinister finds in the shape of severed limbs. At Sacramento, California, a leg, apparently a child's, was found in the street, and a few hours afterwards a similar leg turned up in another part of the city. Within the next few hours child-murder was the theme of the headlines and the preoccupation of the police. And then a doctor carefully examined the relics and showed them to be the legs of a bear cub.

Apparently a practical joker had been active. This scare certainly worked, and was widely reported at the time. But it's news to us that a bear-cub's leg looks like a human child's.

The finding of artificial limbs has given rise to similar scares in various places also; at a township called Cudahy,



"Several constables climbed right up to the belfry..."

Wisconsin, for instance. What threatened to become a local murder sensation petered out when it was found that a woman who had thrown away a pair of artificial legs had done so because she had some new ones and had no further use for the old. But people ought to be careful where they throw their cast-off limbs; it's so unsettling to the public and the Press.

A New York telephone operator recently sent in a hurry-call to the cops, giving the address of a flat where murder was being done. A sergeant and six policemen rushed there at full tilt in a patrol wagon with the gong clamouring for the right of way, and got the facts.

What had happened was this: A telephone call had come to the flat, and the woman occupant had answered it. There were two parrots in the place, but their chattering had prevented her from hearing. Leaving the receiver off the hook, she had gone into another room and transferred the call to an extension telephone.

Thereupon the two parrots, as if actuated by pure devilry, had hopped to the first phone and screamed their piece:

"Kill him! Call the police! Shut the door!"

The phone-girl's false alarm was the natural result.

The old line about the policeman's life not being a happy one may be denied nowadays, but while there is such scope for sending them off on wild-goose chases it will certainly not be a restful one.

(Continued from page 13.)

saying. "Sir Montagu is very busy at—"

"I will see him—I will!" shouted the gaunt man wildly. "You can't stop me. The rat! The swindler! If you don't let me into his office—"

"Unless you go quietly, sir, we shall be compelled to call the police," said the clerk, his voice becoming hard. "I tell you it's no good acting in this way—"

Blake heard no more, for he was being ushered into the inner sanctum. Sir Montagu, jumpy and nervous, was alone.

"Well?" he asked eagerly, as the door closed.

Blake advanced, took the papers from his pocket, and placed them on the desk. Sir Montagu fairly pounced upon them.

"The seal is broken!" he panted. "Who did this?" He glared suspiciously. "Look here, Blake—"

"That seal was broken by the thief," interrupted Blake curtly. "There are your papers, Billings, and I'll trouble you for a cheque for ten thousand pounds!"

"It's robbery!" stormed Sir Montagu. "Ten thousand pounds for one morning's work! By Heaven, I knew that some of you detective fellows were pretty crooked, but I had an idea, Blake, that you were an exception!"

Sexton Blake eyed him steadily; and the big man's gaze quailed.

"Would you have preferred me to spend a fortnight in the search?" asked Blake contemptuously. "You wanted those documents back quickly, Billings—and there they are. Not a police officer nor a newspaper man has seen them. Do you think I want your dirty money? You told me to name my own figure, and I named it."

"You'll oblige me by speaking civilly."

"Civilly, be hanged!" snapped Blake. "I'd speak civilly to a pick-pocket, or to a bank robber—but not to you, Billings. That ten thousand is going to charity—and it's going anonymously. You're not going to get the credit for it, and I don't deserve to, since it's not my money, and I wouldn't contaminate myself by touching it."

Sir Montagu went pale with anger. "If you think you can come into my office and talk to me like this—" he began.

"Give me that cheque!" demanded Blake dangerously. "I've said all I intend to say to you, Billings!"

And something in his tone, something in his manner, made Sir Montagu sit hurriedly at the desk and write out the cheque. Blake took it, saw that it was in order, and without a word he walked out.

He had no sooner reached the other side of the door than he beheld a flushed, frantic-looking man who was demanding to see Sir Montagu—and who was being told by distracted clerks that Sir Montagu was engaged. There appeared to be an epidemic of unwanted callers to-day.

Blake acted with commendable promptitude.

Whisking a newspaper from his pocket, he opened it and held it close to his face, as though he were short-sighted. Thus he passed out, and the frantic man did not even see his features.

Blake reached the marble lobby in a thoughtful mood. For he had seen through the disguise of the frantic gentleman. And Blake knew him to be Rupert Waldo.

And the detective, remembering Waldo's challenge, came to the conclusion that a brief wait would not be to his disadvantage.

Chapter 5.

Waldo Acquires a Father.

RUPERT WALDO, in his enthusiasm for the work in hand, completely left Sexton Blake out of his calculations, and that was a dangerous thing to do, as he would have recognised had things not been going so well. He certainly had not the remotest idea, as he stood arguing with the clerks, that Blake had only just left Sir Montague Billings' private office.

Waldo was enjoying himself thoroughly. This was a big day. He had had a great morning; and, if everything went right, he would have an even greater afternoon. When it came to a matter of cool, unadulterated cheek, Waldo was supreme. His audacity was staggering.

If Waldo had elected to go on the stage he would rapidly have won his way to front rank. His acting now was superb. He had all the appearance of a distracted man on the verge of collapse. He was frantic; he was a bundle of nerves.

"I must see Sir Montagu," he pleaded, wild-eyed. "I must—I must! He's the only man who can help me. Won't you please take me to him? Gentlemen, I beg of you—"

"Come, come, sir," interrupted one of the clerks, "you mustn't make a scene here! I've already told you that Sir Montagu cannot see you unless you have an appointment."

"You can't keep me from him!" shouted Waldo despairingly. "I will see him!"

And with one sudden, standing leap he cleared the mahogany barrier and, before anybody could stop him, he reached the door of Sir Montagu's private office.

The millionaire looked up angrily as the door burst open; but after the first shock he was not alarmed. The palpitating wretch who stood in the doorway inspired no fear.

"Sir Montagu!" panted Waldo, staggering forward. "Please, please! They wouldn't let me in; I apologise, but I must see you, sir! I know how good you are; you can help me!"

He collapsed into the big easy-chair which was reserved for visitors, and, sobbing, buried his face in his hands.

There were two startled clerks standing in the doorway, and Sir Montagu, after a look at his trembling visitor, waved an imperious hand.

"I'll deal with this man," he said brusquely. "Come in when I ring."

The clerks, relieved, departed; and Waldo secretly gloated.

"Oh, Sir Montagu, how can I thank you?" he muttered, looking up. "Here, sir, look!"

With fumbling, trembling hands he took some War Loan Stock from his pocket.

"That's of no interest to me," said Sir Montagu curtly. "What the devil do you mean by forcing your way into my office like this?"

"My name is Turner, sir—Arthur Turner," said Waldo, looking at the millionaire with feverish eyes. "My father— But, no; you wouldn't understand. There's five thousand pounds of War Loan Stock here, Sir Montagu. I want you to let me have three thousand pounds in cash—now—immediately—this minute!"

"You're talking wildly," retorted the other. "I'm no moneylender—"

"I know it, sir!" interrupted Waldo. "The stock's genuine. I'll—I'll redeem it within a week and pay any interest you like to name. I daren't go to a moneylender, because that would mean delay. But you're different, sir. The security is good, and—"

"Yes, this stock is all right," said Sir Montagu, who, with an expert eye, had been glancing at the stock. "You can get five thousand on this without any trouble—"

"But not at once, sir!" panted Waldo. "I was afraid that a moneylender wouldn't have three thousand pounds in cash, and any delay will mean disaster!"

"Come, come!" said Sir Montagu impatiently. "This is all very well, but I'm not going to help you. The whole thing is preposterous. With such security as this you can get your money without any difficulty."

Waldo suddenly came nearer; his eyes were burning, and his voice, when he spoke again, had dropped to a mysterious whisper.

"May I speak to you in confidence, sir?" he asked. "You swear you won't breathe a word?"

"Confound you! I'll do no such thing—"

"I need the money for my father, sir; he's one of the directors of Thorpe's Bank—"

"What!" ejaculated Sir Montagu, with a start.

"Yes, sir—Thorpe's Bank," muttered Waldo, looking round him fearfully. "It's a private bank, sir; nothing to do with the big combines."

"I know—I know!" said the millionaire sharply. "What about it? You say that your father is a director of Thorpe's Bank? In Heaven's name, man, what are you getting at?"

Sir Montagu by now was not only interested, but thoroughly alarmed. He had a very big account at Thorpe's Bank. It was a private banking house, and one of the most exclusive in the City. Its integrity was of wrought iron.

Waldo secretly gloated as he saw the change in his victim. He knew well enough that Sir Montagu kept a large balance at Thorpe's Bank, for Waldo had very carefully inspected the millionaire's bankbook, which he had found in the Alford House safe. He knew, in fact, that this Thorpe's Bank account was a purely secret one.

"If you'll let me have the three thousand, sir, I can get my father safely out of the country—to-day—before the crash!" whispered Waldo.

"The—the crash!" stuttered Sir Montagu.

"Oh, it doesn't mean anything to you, sir!" went on Waldo. "But Thorpe's Bank will fail to-morrow—when the truth gets out. Oh, it's dreadful! My father's a director—"

"Hang it, man, you said that before!"

shouted Sir Montagu. "What are you getting at?"

"Half a million!" panted Waldo, clutching at the desk for support. "Heaven help my father; he's robbed Thorpe's Bank of over half a million—squandered it—speculated with it! But the truth won't be known until tomorrow, and by then, if you'll lend me this money, I can get my father safely on a boat. I didn't want to tell you all this, but you must see how urgent it is!"

"You're crazy!" snarled Billings. "Half a million wouldn't break Thorpe's Bank!"

"It's not a big bank, sir, and my father says that when the truth gets out there'll be a dreadful crash," said Waldo despairingly. "The bank will have to stop payment to-morrow, and that'll mean a run; and—and then they'll never be able to save themselves from disaster! But don't you see, Sir Montagu, that if I get my father out of the country to-day—"

"Yes, yes, I see!" interrupted Sir Montagu, staring fascinatedly at the clock. "Great heavens! Five minutes to three! Wait here, you! I'll—I'll get that money!"

"Oh, I'll be eternally grateful, sir!" breathed Waldo with tremulous fervour.

BUT Sir Montagu Billings was dashing out of his private office at full speed. Startled clerks and stenographers watched him as he blundered through the outer office and reached the elevator. In an absolute fever, the millionaire went down to the street level; hatless, he dashed along the Strand.

Exactly as Rupert Waldo had anticipated; he had precipitated the millionaire into this action. Four more minutes and Thorpe's Bank would be closed for the day! Waldo had given Sir Montagu no time to think, no time to detect any possible flaws. The one staggering fact—or supposed fact—that hit Sir Montagu between the eyes was the knowledge that Thorpe's Bank would suspend payment in the morning.

So far the dreadful truth had not leaked out. Sir Montagu thought only of himself—of his money. At all costs he must make certain of it!

He reached the bank just as the great doors were on the point of being closed. He had no knowledge that Sexton Blake, from a safe distance, had been watching him with quite unusual interest; he was just as ignorant of the fact that a gaunt, haggard man, with a motor-cycle, was equally interested in him.

With a supreme effort Billings composed himself as he crossed to the dignified, old-fashioned counter. The elderly chief clerk was smiling.

"Only just in time, Sir Montagu," he said pleasantly.

"I—er—I find myself in sudden and unexpected need of a large sum—in cash," said Sir Montagu, striving to speak normally. "I want you to tell me, Mr. Hubbard, the exact amount of my balance in this account."

"With pleasure, sir," said the chief clerk politely.

He was surprised, but perfectly dignified. He disappeared for some moments behind a glass screen, and Sir Montagu heard the pages of a ledger being turned over. And Sir Montagu was relieved to note that the bank wore its usual air of quiet, solid placidity.

"Yes, Sir Montagu, here we are," said Mr. Hubbard, appearing again. "Your balance stands at exactly ninety-



"As a beginning we'll try this scarf," said Blake. Pedro sniffed at it eagerly.

four thousand eight hundred and fifteen pounds."

"Give me a blank cheque," said Sir Montagu. "I want to withdraw ninety thousand now—in cash."

"As you wish, Sir Montagu," said Mr. Hubbard politely.

He watched interestedly as Sir Montagu made out the cheque; he took it with a smile.

"If you will excuse me a minute," he murmured apologetically.

Billings was in a fever, for he knew that the head clerk had gone into the manager's office with that cheque. It was a dreadful minute. Had Turner's defalcations been discovered? Would the bank stop payment—

"Good-afternoon, Sir Montagu!" said another voice.

It was the manager, and Sir Montagu looked at him through a kind of mist. He was reputed to be a millionaire, but a great deal of his vast wealth was floating, and, indeed, illusory. This money of his in Thorpe's Bank was solid—his own private fortune.

"How would you like this money, Sir Montagu?" asked the manager smoothly.

"How? Oh, it doesn't matter!" said Billings, with a start.

His relief was enormous.

"I suggest that you take it in one hundred and eighty five-hundred-pound notes," said the manager.

"Certainly! That will do splendidly!" said Sir Montagu. "Thank you—thank you!"

He watched almost fascinatedly as the notes were counted out as though they were sixpenny postal-orders. They were checked, rechecked, the numbers were noted, and then they were placed in an envelope and passed across the counter.

Sir Montagu was ushered out of the bank in the same polite, placid way. And, for the first time, he wondered, vaguely, if there was something wrong about this. Well, it didn't matter. He had his money. And if Thorpe's Bank crashed, it could crash, and he would only lose a few thousands. If he had had the courage, he would have withdrawn his entire balance.

"Good-afternoon, Sir Montagu!"

Mr. Hubbard closed the heavy door after him, and Billings, taking a deep breath, started across the pavement. An alert-looking man, in a bowler hat, with a short, scrubby moustache, touched him on the arm.

"Sir Montagu Billings, I think," said this man, in a firm, hard voice.

"Well?" said Sir Montagu, staring.

"I am Detective-Inspector Williams, of Scotland Yard, sir, and I have here a warrant for your arrest," said the alert man.

Sir Montagu's heart nearly stopped

beating, and every atom of colour had drained from his face.

"My—my arrest!" he almost squeaked.

"I'm sorry, sir," said the other. "I don't want to embarrass you, and I hope you won't make a scene. But here's the warrant, and—"

"You're crazy!" broke in Sir Montagu. "The thing is preposterous! On what charge—"

"The charge, Sir Montagu, is that you have wrongly converted some stock belonging to the Branson Trust," said Detective-Inspector Williams steadily. "I happened to see you go into this bank, so I waited. Now, sir, I shall be obliged if you will accompany me."

And so brilliant was Rupert Waldo's acting that Sir Montagu Billings, looking straight into his face, was without a single suspicion of the startling truth.

Chapter 6.

The Man on the Common.

SEXTON BLAKE was intrigued. He had a shrewd notion as to the nature of Waldo's game, for there had been something vastly significant in Billings' frantic dash to Thorpe's Bank.

Quite obviously Sir Montagu had been tricked into withdrawing a heavy sum of money—in cash. And it was just as obvious that Rupert Waldo had designs upon that money.

But there was another factor. Blake had not failed to observe the gaunt, haggard stranger with the motor-cycle. This man had been hanging about the Billings Building when Blake had emerged, and the detective had recognised him as the man who had made an unsuccessful attempt to see the millionaire. The man had been about to ride away on his motor-cycle when Sir Montagu had emerged, and since then the motor-cyclist had waited.

Blake, lounging in a deeply recessed doorway, was watching carefully. This comedy, or drama, or whatever it was, gripped him.

Immediately after Sir Montagu left the Billings Building, Waldo himself emerged—much less frantic-looking now. He went straight to a shabby-looking coupe which was parked farther along. He got into the car, and Blake could not fail to notice that the windows of both doors were splashed with mud to such an extent that they were virtually screened.

The windscreen itself, except in the spot where the electric wiper had been in operation, was in the same condition. That car, in fact, was as private as though blinds were drawn across the glass.

Presently the car shifted, and it went slowly along until it reached Thorpe's Bank. Here it came to a standstill, and a perfect stranger emerged.

Even Blake for the moment was taken by surprise. Then he knew the truth. Waldo had entered that car in one guise, and he had got out of it in another. During that brief interval the Wonder Man had effected a brilliant change.

Glancing round, Blake noticed that the gaunt motor-cyclist was still in evidence.

"H'm! This is becoming quite entertaining," murmured Blake. "You appear to be enjoying yourself hugely, my dear Waldo. But don't be too sure of yourself! I'm very much afraid that you're going to get a shock pretty soon!"

For Sexton Blake was determined to act. He was hardened by the recollection of Waldo's challenge. For his very reputation's sake he must take Waldo. But he had a mind to give the Wonder Man a little more rope.

He moved across to the Grey Panther and got in.

LOOK here, my friend, this is an absurdity!" said Sir Montagu impatiently.

Yet within him he was charged with alarm. The Branson Trust papers! Already the police had taken action!

"If there's been a mistake, sir, there's nothing to worry about," said Waldo, with stiff politeness. "Anyhow, you can explain things at the station. I've got a car here, as I thought you'd like the thing to be done quietly. I'm sure you wouldn't have a scene, Sir Montagu."

And Waldo suggestively jingled some handcuffs in his pocket. The very sound of them sent cold shivers down Billings' spine.

"All right—all right!" he said hastily. "Where's the car? The whole thing's an infernal blunder, and I'm going to make it hot for somebody, I can tell you! We'd better go."

Waldo opened the door of the car, and there was such a bland air about him that Sexton Blake, from a distance, could imagine Waldo whispering to himself: "Walk into my parlour, said the spider to the fly!"

Sir Montagu walked in, and Waldo entered the other door.

"Glad you've been so sensible, Sir Montagu," said Waldo calmly. "I'm only doing my duty, sir."

His duty took a strange turn, for Waldo had calmly produced a little phial, and he was deliberately pouring some pungent-smelling liquid on to a cotton pad. He did so coolly, in such a matter-of-fact way, that it was some moments before Billings took notice. And then Billings stared.

"What on earth are you doing?" he asked, coughing.

"This?" said Waldo gently. "It's nothing much—only chloroform."

"Chloroform!" ejaculated the millionaire. "What are you doing with chloroform, you fool?"

"Just a little idea of mine."

"But what's it for?"

"For you," said Waldo softly.

And in the same second he placed a grip round Sir Montagu's shoulders which was like the clutch of a steel vice. With his other hand he clapped the chloroformed pad to Sir Montagu's face. Only for a few moments did Billings struggle; then his movements became more and more feeble, and, finally, he slumped down, unconscious.

The audacity of the thing was startling. Here, in the busy Strand, with the traffic ceaselessly moving up and down, with pedestrians walking within a few feet of the car, Waldo had done this thing. True, the windows and windscreen of the car were so mud-bespattered that none of the passers-by could see within. But it was a daring act, nevertheless.

"Phew! I'm getting dizzy myself!" muttered Waldo, opening the driving-window.

He let in some fresh air, closed the window again, and then he took the bulky envelope from Sir Montagu's breast pocket. His eyes gleamed with satisfaction as he roughly calculated the value of the notes.

"Close upon a hundred thousand, or I'm the ghost of Dick Turpin!" murmured Waldo. "By the Lord Harry,

even better than I expected! This is certainly the stuff to give them!"

He pocketed the prize, started the engine, and the car glided away.

He did not know that two people were tremendously interested in his movements. Waldo had done exceedingly well, but so engrossed was he in his own activities that he was just a little careless. And carelessness, in a man of his brilliance, was an unforgivable sin.

He drove off, and, being an expert driver, he was soon bowling across Trafalgar Square, and heading for Whitehall. Not a great way behind came a shabby-looking motor-cyclist. And the Grey Panther followed.

By this time Blake was puzzled. He knew that Sir Montagu was not taking this ride willingly. There was something very queer about the whole business. Well, he would follow the muddy coupe, and sooner or later—

Then it was that Fate took a hand in the game, and Fate favoured Waldo.

For a young fool in a rakish sports midget came cutting in recklessly in front of the Grey Panther. Blake swerved adroitly, but he was a shade too late.

Crash! There was a shriek of buckling metal, and the midget rocked against Blake's big Rolls, and both cars came to a standstill. It was one of those unforeseen trifles which are deliberately sent by an unkindly Providence to try us.

The damage to the Grey Panther was small; but precious minutes were necessarily wasted. Two constables came up, and they both recognised Blake. The young fellow in the sports midget, pale and shaken, was entirely occupied by babbling out his excuses.

The policemen were efficient. They rapidly disentangled the two cars, and they made no attempt to detain Blake.

But what with the gathering crowds and the fact that the Grey Panther's steering was affected, Blake was not able to resume his journey until fifteen minutes had elapsed.

He learned from a point-duty constable that the muddy coupe had gone across Westminster Bridge, but after that he lost track of it completely.

Blake shrugged his shoulders ruefully, and, accepting the set-back in a philosophical way, he drove home.

Blake had tea alone. Tinker was still on the watch in the Camden Road, and Blake was counting upon that fact. He had lost track of Waldo, but probably Tinker would soon report progress. In fact, Blake had more than half a mind to go along to Waldo's lodgings himself. It was practically certain that the Wonder Man would return to Mrs. Alloway's, after he had completed his "business" with Billings.

Then came the bombshell.

Blake was on the point of leaving when the telephone bell rang. Inspector Lennard was at the other end of the wire, and his voice was grave.

"I'm speaking from the Balham district," he said. "I thought you might like to know, Blake, that Sir Montagu Billings has been found on Tooting Bec Common with his head smashed in."

"What?" ejaculated Sexton Blake, thoroughly startled.

"Fact!" said Lennard. "I hate to think that Waldo has done this, but it looks mightily queer. Some children came across the body behind a bush; handcuffs on the wrists and ankles, and, mercifully, a big scarf tied completely round the head. So the kids didn't know what they had actually found. They told a policeman, and it was he

who removed the scarf. There's another thing—Billings evidently knew nothing of the blow, because he was chloroformed."

"Waldo didn't do it, Lennard!" said Blake almost angrily. "Don't be an idiot! You know perfectly well that Waldo wouldn't murder a man in cold blood while that man was unconscious."

"Well, it looks very funny!" said Lennard gruffly. "There were some finger-prints on the handcuffs, and I've sent them up to the Yard. The report ought to be here by the time you arrive—if you're coming."

"I'm coming," said Blake briefly.

GRAVELY troubled, the detective reached Tooting Bec Common in record time, and he took Pedro with him in the Grey Panther. On a quiet part of the common, just off the road which leads from Balham to Streatham, he found a group of police officers and Scotland Yard detectives.

The body had not yet been moved.

"You've been quick, old man," said Lennard, as Blake came up. "Well, you were wrong."

"How was I wrong?"

"The man who put those handcuffs on Billings left his finger-prints, and those finger-prints have been identified as Waldo's," replied Lennard.

"That doesn't prove that Waldo committed murder; it only proves that he put the handcuffs on Billings."

"Yes; but hang it, that's a bit thick, isn't it?" protested the inspector. "We were pretty certain last night that Waldo was the man who had broken into Billings' house. Now we find Billings dead, handcuffed, and Waldo's finger-prints on the handcuffs."

Blake examined the body. Death had been caused by a crashing blow on top of the head, which might have been made by a heavy spanner, or some such implement.

"We've been making inquiries, and we've learned that a dirty-looking coupe was seen in this neighbourhood in the late afternoon," went on Lennard. "It stopped here for a bit, after driving right on to the turf. We're looking for that coupe now."

Blake nodded. He could have told Lennard something about that coupe.

"I don't believe Waldo did this," said the detective bluntly.

Lennard shrugged.

"If he didn't, who did?"

"That's what we've got to find out," replied Sexton Blake. "Look here, Lennard, there's one point you have apparently missed. The evidence last night hinted that Waldo was the masked man who opened Billings' safe; yet that masked man did not leave the slightest trace of a finger-print. You only guessed that he was Waldo."

"That's true."

"That affair was a commonplace burglary," continued Blake. "This is murder, and yet Waldo is fool enough to leave his finger-prints on the handcuffs! He is careful enough to use gloves when he opens a safe, yet he commits the incredible folly, according to your theory, of leaving his finger-prints on the body of a man he has just killed. It doesn't fit."

"He might have done the thing in a sudden fit of temper."

"That doesn't fit, either, and you know it," said Blake. "Billings was chloroformed. It's my belief that Waldo brought him here in that coupe, handcuffed as you found him. All Waldo did was to lift Billings out of the car and dump him behind these bushes."

"And I suppose some passer-by found Billings, disliked the look of his face, and whacked him over the head?" asked Lennard sarcastically.

"Haven't you found anybody who actually saw the man with the coupe?" asked Blake, ignoring the inspector's remark. "We know that Waldo is an audacious beggar. It would be characteristic of him to bring Billings here in broad daylight, and coolly drop him behind a clump of bushes. Waldo would do a thing like that without turning a hair. But you're not going to make me believe that he would dump a dead body in the same way, or that he would make a murderous attack upon his victim after he had lifted him out of the car."

"The funny thing about the whole business is that we can't find any reliable witnesses," grumbled Lennard. "This thing happened in the afternoon, and that's really the unfortunate part about it. It was nearly tea-time, you see, and hardly anybody was about. This road is a quiet one, and these bushes form an effective screen. Nobody would take much notice of a car drawn up against them, and Waldo could have pulled his man out without a soul seeing him. But I admire his nerve!"

"Did you find any money on Billings?"

"Nothing much—fifty pounds or so in his wallet, and some loose silver in his trousers pocket. I'm having inquiries made—"

He broke off as a Flying Squad car came up. Two men jumped out, and one of them took Lennard aside and talked to him earnestly for some minutes.

"This looks thunderingly ugly, Blake!" said Lennard, when he again joined the detective. "We've just learned that Billings went to his bank at three o'clock, and withdrew ninety thousand pounds in solid cash."

"Oh!" said Blake thoughtfully.

"You don't seem very surprised."

Blake wasn't surprised. He had fully expected to hear some such report:

"Waldo must have known about that big sum of money, and ninety thousand pounds is a good enough motive for murder," said Lennard grimly. "And don't forget, Blake, that Waldo is a crook. Big money like that is a huge temptation."

"Do you know what the money was—I mean, what notes?"

"It was all in five-hundred-pound notes."

"Then, my dear Lennard, there's a snag," said Blake. "Waldo isn't a fool. Do you think he would murder a man, steal ninety thousand pounds, in five-hundred-pound notes, and expect to get away with it? Even Waldo couldn't change such money, with all his nerve. It's so much waste-paper to him."

"Yes, that's true," admitted Lennard, puzzled.

"But if Waldo had left his victim here, practically unharmed, the whole thing would be different," continued Blake. "I believe Waldo took something else from Billings' safe last night—in fact, I know he did. Something that gives him a hold over Billings, and I believe he was going to use that in a rather cunning way. In short, he meant to force Billings to keep quiet about the stolen money until it was all legitimately changed into non-traceable cash. How could he have done that if he had killed Billings?"

"I see your point," said Lennard, with a startled look in his eyes. "And that reminds me of something else. There was a note in Billings' breast pocket—"

just a scribbled note on a sheet torn from a pocket-book. Look!"

He produced it, and Blake's eyes gleamed. The note, which was unmistakably in Waldo's handwriting, without any attempt at disguise, ran:

"Be sure to be at home this evening at seven-thirty, as I am coming to see you, and we'll talk business. Until then—mum's the word.—BRANDON TRUST."

Blake nodded keenly. The thing was perfectly clear to him. Waldo, of course, had written that note on the assumption that he still had possession of the Brandon Trust documents.



"Lennard, we're going to clear Waldo of this murder charge," said Blake, his voice becoming hard. "And you're going to help me. I've just thought of something. This note makes it clear that Waldo left Billings alive. Otherwise, why should he tell him to be at home at seven-thirty?"

"I thought it was a sort of blind—to make us think—"

But Blake was impatient.

"Man alive! Waldo leaves his finger-prints on the handcuffs—he leaves his note, in his own handwriting, which you and I know perfectly well," he said. "The evidence, as it stands, is absolutely damning against Waldo. It's so damning, in fact, that he cannot be guilty. Look here, Lennard. Have the newspapers got hold of this?"

"Not yet."

"Then, as a personal favour, I want you to keep it dark," said Sexton Blake. "I'll tell you more of this later. But on no account must the evening newspapers publish a report of Billings' death. By the way, have your men heard anything about a motor-cyclist who might have been near this spot?"

"A motor-cyclist?" repeated Lennard, staring. "No, I've heard nothing like that."

"Then I should advise you to make inquiries," said Blake. "In fact, I think I can put you on to the real murderer—and without much difficulty."

"The deuce you can!"

"As a beginning, we'll try this scarf," went on Blake. "I'm sure it's not Waldo's—and I'm equally sure that Billings wouldn't wear a scarf. Pedro might be able to help us here."

Blake, in fact, had seen that selfsame scarf adorning the neck of the gaunt-faced motor-cyclist in the Strand. It was an important clue. As Blake saw this affair Waldo had dumped his victim, and the motor-cyclist had approached, had found Billings unconscious—or perhaps just recovering—and he had tied the scarf round his face before striking the fatal blow. The purpose of

the scarf had been twofold—to prevent Billings from seeing what was about to happen to him, and to muffle any cries he might have made.

Pedro sniffed at the scarf eagerly, and not a minute had elapsed before, after nosing about, he set off across the common. He had picked up the trail.

Chapter 7.

No Blackmailer!

MEANWHILE, Rupert Waldo was supremely happy.

Having left Sir Montagu Billings behind the bushes on Tooting Bec Common—very much alive, as Blake had deduced—the Wonder Man coolly drove into Streatham, and took the muddy coupe into a lock-up garage. It was one of those places, familiar enough in the suburbs, where dozens of lock-up garages are built round a big concrete yard. Entirely unauthorised, Waldo drove in, placed the coupe in an empty garage, and then he calmly closed the doors. It was this action of his which had so baffled the police—for that car had not yet been traced, and wasn't likely to be traced until the real owner of the lock-up garage came back and found a strange car within.

The coupe had been hired by Waldo, and he was perfectly easy in mind about it. The rightful owners would get it back in due course.

By taxi, he went back to London, and here he spent an interesting half-hour in looking up newspaper files and other records. Then he went into a post office, purchased some official registered envelopes, and busied himself at one of the telegraph counters.

He sent three letters—one to Mrs. Gresham, containing forty-five thousand pounds in banknotes; another to Mr. George Crofton, who lived near Romford, containing ten thousand pounds in banknotes; and a third to Mr. Walter Tiverton, of Surrey, containing fifteen thousand pounds. He dispatched all these letters at once, expressing them in order to ensure quick delivery.

And in each letter he placed a little slip of paper, containing the words: "This money is yours—justice has been done."

He knew that these sums represented the exact amounts which the three directors of the Grant River Lead and Spelter Syndicate had lost in the crash. That money, actually, had been stolen by Sir Montagu Billings; the private fortunes of the three victims had gone to the shareholders. In a word, Billings had rooked the shareholders, but the directors had stood the racket. So Waldo, by this one stroke, had indeed administered justice.

General Gresham had been the greatest sufferer, for his fortune had been much larger than the others, and he had suffered disgrace, and that disgrace had killed him. But it was not too late to help the widow.

"Yes, I'm rather pleased with myself," mused Waldo, as he returned to Camden Road. "It has been a busy day, with plenty of quick work. And I still have a cool twenty thousand pounds in my pocket, as my own personal fee."

He felt that he was on perfectly safe ground.

Billings would never dare to claim that money—he would not even report its loss, and have the notes stopped. For Waldo held the Branson Trust papers—

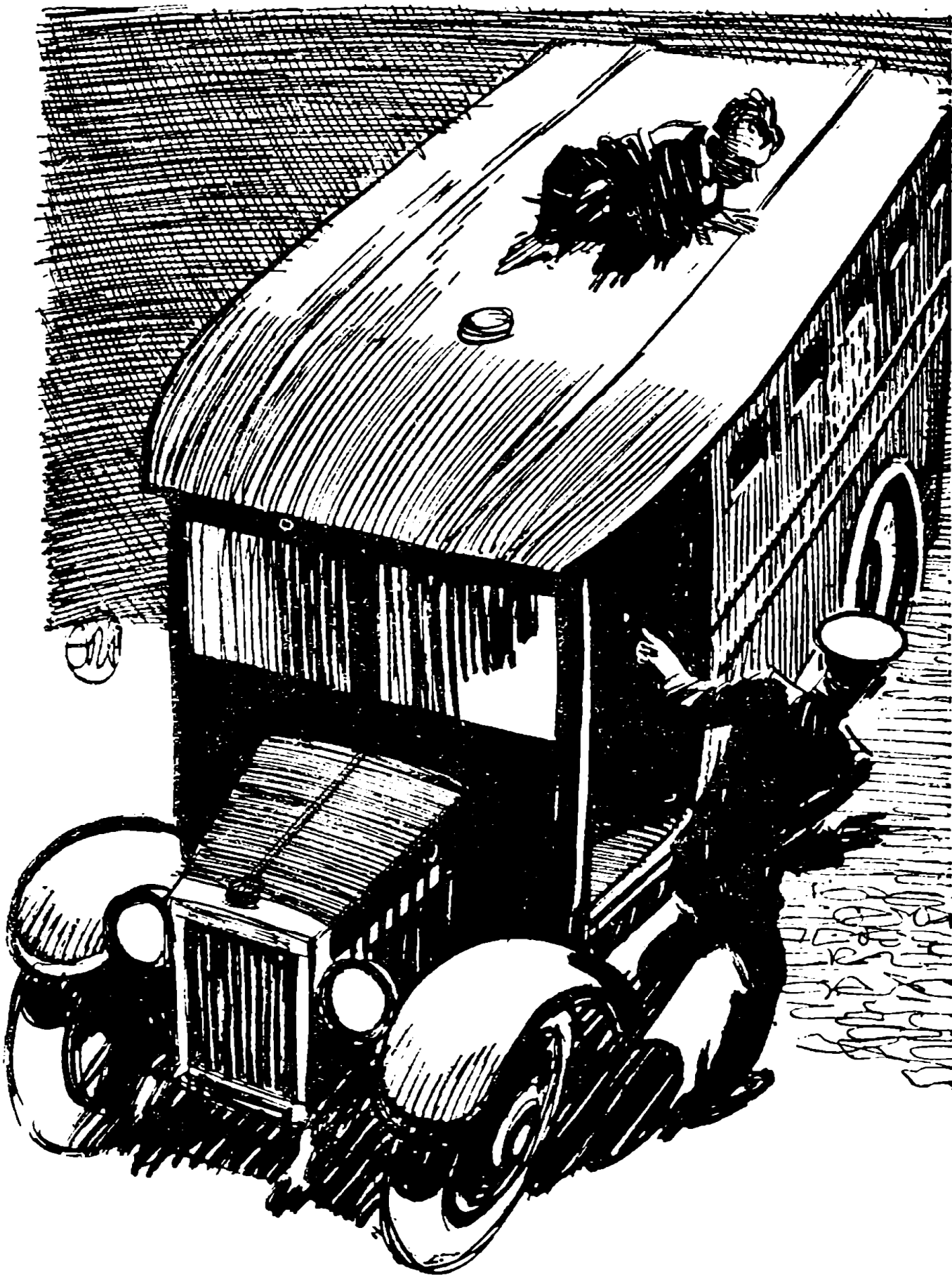
or he thought he did—and Sir Montagu knew it. Waldo was looking forward to the interview at seven-thirty. It would be the end of a very perfect day.

The Wonder Man, of course, was labouring under the delusion that Sir Montagu, upon recovering consciousness, would yell for help and attract attention. Then a kindly police officer would remove the handcuffs, and Billings would find that little note in his pocket,

He realised that he would have to go warily. Nothing must interfere with his seven-thirty appointment. He would have turned back, without entering the boarding-house at all, if it hadn't been for the fact that the Branson Trust papers were in the bureau—

"By the Lord Harry!" muttered Waldo, with a jump. "I wonder!"

He was certain that Tinker had not spotted him, and now he made a quick



instead of the ninety thousand pounds. And that note would effectually keep his mouth shut.

At seven-thirty, with Sir Montagu in a feeble and frightened state, the interview would take place. Waldo had it all cut and dried. He was no blackmailer, but he was certainly going to use those documents as a gentle lever.

Arriving near his lodgings, he got off the bus—for he had travelled humbly. And within half a minute Waldo came to a sudden halt, his eyes filled with mingled amusement and annoyance, and even consternation.

He had just spotted Tinker.

He cursed himself heartily and called himself a fool for ever having had the impudence to challenge Sexton Blake to "get" him. Here, in front of his eyes, was the evidence of that foolishness.

It gave Waldo much food for thought. What, exactly, did Blake know? How had Blake trailed him to this humble Camden Road boarding-house? Waldo had been fondly telling himself that he had covered up all his tracks.

detour, and arrived in a little mews which branched out from a quiet side turning. Soon he came to a gate, and, opening this, he found himself in Mrs. Alloway's untidy back garden.

Incidentally, Waldo had spent a few minutes in the shadow of a wall transforming himself into "James Glen-thorne" once again. But he got indoors without encountering the landlady, and he went straight up to his room, closed the door, and opened the bureau.

"Gone!" he muttered. "Well, well!"

It was a nasty blow. His hold over Billings was gone, and it meant that Billings would circulate the numbers of those banknotes and have them stopped.

Waldo sat down to think things out.

This was a great pity. Everything would have been so easy. His plan, as he had formed it, had been to face Billings and tell him calmly that nothing would be done with the Branson papers until all the money had been cleared and definitely credited to the accounts

of Mrs. Gresham, Mr. Crofton, and Mr. Tiverton. Then Waldo would return the documents—and Sir Montagu would be unable to prove a thing. It had all been so simple.

"You're a blithering idiot—that's what you are!" grunted Waldo, as he glared at his reflection in the old-fashioned mirror. "This is what comes of being cocky!"

He went to the door, opened it, and,

than ever necessary that he should keep that appointment. There was just a chance that Blake had not yet returned the Branson Trust papers.

CHIEF INSPECTOR LENNARD nodded.

"Yes; these are the marks of motor-cycle tyres. You're right, Blake. It seems that there was somebody else in the business."



Waldo tore at the edges of the hole he had driven, making a gap large enough for him to squirm through on to the roof of the police van.

as it happened, Mrs. Alloway was down in the hall.

"Oh, there you are!" said Waldo in his usual cheery way. "Good-evening, fair lady!"

"Why, Mr. Glenthorne, sir, I didn't know you was in!" said the landlady.

"Came in the back way," explained Waldo. "Anybody been to see me to-day?"

"Why, yes, sir—just about dinner-time!" said Mrs. Alloway. "The gent said that you expected him."

"The gent was right," replied Waldo. "I ought to have expected him, but I've been a bit careless to-day. Did he leave any name?"

"Yes, sir. Name of Blake. He said you'd understand," replied the landlady.

Waldo thoroughly understood, and said so.

But he wasn't done. It was more

"And I think I can put you on the track of him fairly easily," said Sexton Blake. "But first of all we must nab Waldo. We can set a trap for him very easily—and he'll walk head-first into it."

Pedro had had a simple enough task. Trailing across the grass of Tooting Bec Common, he had followed an erratic, zigzag course, which took Blake and Lennard behind every available clump of bushes. And then Pedro had come to a halt on a little cross-road. It was little more than a track, and the surface was sandy and dusty.

The trail ended here—but clearly impressed in the sand were the marks of motor-cycle tyres.

"It's easy enough to reconstruct what happened," said Sexton Blake. "Waldo drove up in the coupe, and he lifted Billings out and carried him behind the bush. This man on the motor-cycle took this other little road and waited. After Waldo had gone he approached the spot, delivered the blow, and then went off."

"This is only a theory," objected Lennard. "You mustn't forget that we've got the goods on Waldo—"

"I'm not forgetting that," interrupted

Blake. "Now, Lennard, listen to me! I know that Waldo did not commit this sordid crime. I want you to be at Alford House at seven-fifteen with at least half a dozen men. I'll be there a few minutes afterwards."

They talked earnestly for some minutes, Lennard nodding with appreciation.

"All right!" he said at length. "It might work, Blake; and if it does, the rest will be easy."

Blake hurried away immediately, but he did not go straight to Baker Street. He drove to the Billings Building and sought out Sir Montagu's secretary, who, needless to say, was in a state of bewilderment. His employer had dashed out, hatless, just before three, and he had not been seen since. Not a soul in Billings' office knew what it meant.

"I'm afraid that something has happened to Sir Montagu," said the secretary. "He's never done anything like this before. That man who came to see him—"

"You may be right," interrupted Blake. "In any case, Mr. Waldron, it's very unlikely that Sir Montagu will return this evening. I came here on quite another matter. You remember a shabby, gaunt-faced man who was here at about half-past two, demanding to see Sir Montagu? He was using abusive language—"

"I'm not likely to forget him, Mr. Blake!" said the other impatiently. "That was Crofton."

"Oh! Crofton?" said Blake. "One of the directors of the Grant River Syndicate?"

"Yes. He has been here many times since the crash," said Mr. Waldron. "He has made himself an infernal nuisance. Sir Montagu was in no way connected with that wretched business, and Crofton's wild accusations were preposterous. It's a wonder to me that Sir Montagu hasn't given the fellow in charge. I believe he's a bit mad."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Down at Romford, in Essex," said the secretary. "I can give you his address, if you like; he has written many times. I hope you'll be able to do something, Mr. Blake, to stop him making such a nuisance of himself."

"I think I can do something," said Sexton Blake quietly, and took his departure for Baker Street.

Curiously enough, no sooner had he arrived home than Tinker rang up.

"I tried to get hold of you once before, guv'nor," came Tinker's voice. "I'm speaking from that public booth. I haven't seen Waldo yet—"

"I'm glad you phoned, Tinker," said Blake. "I didn't want to keep you hanging about there for nothing. You can abandon that watch now. Come straight home."

He rang off, and then he set to work on one of the most difficult impersonations of his career. He was assisted in this by a number of photographs, but more from his own photographic memory.

When Tinker arrived the young detective was startled.

"What on earth are you doing, guv'nor?" he asked.

"Trying to save our mutual friend Waldo from the scaffold!" retorted Sexton Blake.

"What!" gasped Tinker.

"If you haven't had anything to eat, shovel something down, and then get outside and wait in the car!" said Blake crisply. "Look at the time! It's seven o'clock! I'll be ready in five minutes, Tinker. No time to explain now, but you'll understand later."

AT 7.30 to the minute Waldo rang the front-door bell at Alford House.

He was still in his "Glen-thorne" get-up, for he had seen no necessity to make any alteration. He had already appeared before Sir Montagu as Turner, the son of the imaginary director of Thorpe's Bank, and as the equally imaginary Detective-Inspector Williams. There was no reason why Sir Montagu shouldn't now see him in this other guise. If Billings was shrewd enough, he would very soon see that all three men were one and the same. It would not matter in the least. He would have to know, anyhow.

The door was opened by a dignified butler.

"Sir Montagu is in?" asked Waldo politely. "I have an appointment with him."

"Yes, sir," said the butler. "Will you come in, sir? What name?"

"My name," said Waldo, "is Trust—Mr. B. Trust. If you give that name to Sir Montagu, he will thoroughly understand."

"Very good, sir!" said the butler.

He went to the library, and Waldo heard a few words of murmured conversation. Then the butler returned.

"This way, Mr. Trust, if you please!" he said.

Waldo went to the library, where he was gravely announced. The butler withdrew, closing the door. At the desk sat Sir Montagu Billings—or somebody so exactly like him that even Waldo's keenly penetrative eye detected no flaw. No lights were on, for it was still daylight. But the heavy curtains were half-drawn, and the man at the desk had his back to the light.

"Now, you infernal scoundrel, what have you got to say?" came Sir Mon-

tagu's hoarse, strained voice. "Are you mad enough to think that you can victimise me further?"

Waldo sat down, without a suspicion. Sir Montagu's voice was exactly as he had expected it. He saw a man who was in a highly nervous condition—a man who was even desperate.

With very good reason had Sexton Blake kept the report of Billings' death from the evening newspaper. Only by doing that had he made this trap possible. Waldo had come unsuspectingly. He was actually facing Sexton Blake, who was playing a trump card. Little did the Wonder Man realise that in various parts of the room, hidden by the heavy furniture, were no less than seven Scotland Yard detectives.

And Blake's purpose was clear-cut.

By this piece of make-believe he was definitely establishing Waldo's innocence—of the murder. Waldo had come, just as Blake had told Lennard that he would come. And it was an unquestionable fact that Waldo would *not* have come if he had battered Sir Montagu's head in on Tooting Bec Common. His presence alone was conclusive proof. But more was to follow.

"Let's talk this thing over quietly, Billings," said Waldo. "I'm not giving anything away when I tell you that it was I who busted your safe last night. I took ten thousand pounds, and with that money I bought Mrs. Gresham's house and furniture."

"Oh?" sneered Blake, in Sir Montagu's most arrogant manner. "And what interest have you in Mrs. Gresham?"

"None—except that she was one of your innocent victims," replied Waldo. "I have handed her the key of the house, the title-deeds, and the auction-

eer's receipts. That property is hers—and there my interest in the lady ends. I have been after you, Billings, and nobody else. So don't cast any rotten insinuations or I may cease to be polite."

"All right, all right!" muttered Blake.

"In your safe I also found some rather interesting documents connected with the Branson Trust," continued Waldo smoothly. "I had a look at your pass-book, and I tricked you rather neatly, I think, this afternoon, when I frightened you into withdrawing ninety thousand pounds from your bank."

"No need for me to tell you that I was the fellow who came to your office. I was also the 'detective' who arrested you. You may remember that I used a little chloroform, and I'm sorry that I wasn't on the spot when you recovered consciousness, on Tooting Bec Common, to find yourself handcuffed. But you evidently got that little note of mine."

"Go on," said Blake, knowing full well that the Yard men were taking down every word. "Be careful, my friend; I shouldn't use any names, if I were you."

Waldo looked at him curiously.

"Does it matter?" he said. "Well, perhaps not. I have distributed seventy thousand pounds of that money amongst your victims, Billings. They had no redress from the law, so I took the law into my own hands. The remaining twenty thousand I am keeping for myself."

"You fool!" snarled Blake. "Do you think you can get away with this? I'll have those notes stopped—"

"I don't think you will," interrupted Waldo, his voice becoming grim. "That's what I'm here for—to have this matter out, and to get it straight. You'll take no action with regard to that money, Billings, because, if you do, I shall immediately send the Branson papers to the Public Prosecutor."

Blake laughed harshly.

"You poor fool!" he retorted. "Do you think I'm frightened of that threat?"

"You're so frightened that you're trying to bluff," said Waldo. "I'm no blackmailer; I'm not going to use those papers for any ends of my own. I am not using them to menace you. They were merely spoils of my burglary. I'm just holding them—as security. They're safe with me, and nothing will happen to you so long as you do as I tell you. Your victims are not to be interfered with—"

"Just a minute!" interrupted Blake curtly.

He deemed that the Yard men had taken down enough. The dialogue had completely cleared Waldo already.

"There's something you don't know, you fool!" continued Blake harshly. "The Branson Trust papers are here! What do you think I paid Blake for? He recovered them and returned them to me. Now what have you got to say? Where's your lever?"

Waldo smiled.

"I wasn't sure whether Blake had returned them or not," he said frankly. "But it doesn't make any difference, Billings; I have photographic copies of all those documents, and the Public Prosecutor will be just as interested in the copies. Furthermore, I intend to have the originals."

And with one movement he leapt round the desk and gripped the figure which sat in the chair. One hand was reaching for the sealed envelope on the desk. And in that moment Waldo received a shock.

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For the figure he gripped was not flabby, as he had expected. He could feel the strong muscles under his fingers; also, strong hands seized him.

"You lose, Waldo!" said a familiar voice.

"Blake!" ejaculated the Wonder Man, powerless in the surprise of the moment.

At close quarters he detected the make-up. But it was too late now.

"Well, you certainly know how to spring a surprise, Blake," said Waldo ruefully. "I hadn't the faintest idea—Hallo! Quite a party! Kindly allow me a minute while I severely kick myself."

Inspector Lennard and his subordinates had appeared as though by magic, and they closed round Waldo grimly.

"Good enough, Blake," said Lennard. "You were right. But I'm going to arrest you, Waldo, on a charge of burglary—and you can thank Blake that it isn't a charge of murder."

"Murder!" repeated Waldo, mystified. "The body of Sir Montagu Billings was found on Tooting Bec Common this evening," said Lennard. "His head had been battered in."

"You don't think I did that?" asked Waldo, pained. "This is a staggerer! When I left Billings he was almost on the point of recovering from the dope."

"I'm satisfied that you didn't kill him," said Lennard. "All the same, Waldo, you're in a nasty fix. I advise you to make a frank statement."

"It seems to me I've been rather frank already," said Waldo, with a glance at two notebooks which were in evidence. "Billings dead—murdered! Whew! That's a knockout! But if you think I can give you the slightest hint as to the identity of the murderer, you're wrong. I don't know a thing."

He suddenly looked at Blake squarely. "What about that money?" he asked. "It'll be a dirty trick if those unfortunate people—"

"I should advise you to keep your mouth shut, Waldo," broke in Blake. "Billings is dead, and you were warned to mention no names. Billings made no charge, and there's not likely to be any complaint to the police. What Billings did with the money he withdrew from Thorpe's Bank is his own affair."

And as Blake spoke he looked meaning at Chief Inspector Lennard; and the latter nodded.

"I shall charge you, Waldo," said the inspector, "with being in unlawful possession of twenty thousand pounds."

"Save your breath, old man," said Waldo cheerfully. "I'm not going to pretend that I'm sorry about Billings' death. He only got what was coming to him. As for me—well, you know what to expect, don't you? If you think that you can hold me, I can only say that you've got another think coming!"

He readily submitted to the handcuffs; they were of a specially heavy type, which Lennard had brought in expectation of this moment, and his wrists were secured behind him. Then, closely guarded, and hemmed in by detectives, he was taken out to the waiting Black Maria.

Chapter 8.

Waldo's Way Out.

GEORGE CROFTON sat in his cottage, near Romford, with his tightly clenched knuckles pressed to his forehead.

"I don't remember, I don't remember!" he muttered feverishly.

It seemed to him that he had passed through a nightmare. His haggard face

was as pale as death; his eyes burned with feverish intensity. A broken man, destitute, without a soul in the world to care for him, he had lived a lonely life in this humble cottage during the past few months.

One of Billings' victims!

He had jumped at the chance, a year earlier, to invest his savings—the results of a lifetime's honest trading—in the company which had promised so well. Billings, the millionaire, had assured him that it was a certainty. He had associated himself with General Gresham and with Walter Tiverton. For some time everything had gone famously; he had believed himself to be on velvet.

Then the crash—ruin—disillusionment. Every penny had gone, his little home, his income. Disgraced and broken, he had been almost on the point of starvation during these past few weeks.

And all his efforts to see Billings were in vain. Billings would not acknowledge him. Gresham was dead.

Dead!

Was Billings dead, too?

Crofton could not remember. It was all a hideous nightmare. He had been up to London to-day, in an effort to see Billings; he remembered following Billings, after the millionaire had got into that shabby looking car. Yes, then he had found him on the common, handcuffed, slowly recovering. . . .

But after that everything was hazy.

"It didn't happen—it didn't!" muttered Crofton hoarsely. "I dreamed it! I saw Billings there, and—No, I didn't dream it!" he added tremulously. "Heaven forgive me! I killed him!"

Yes, he had to face it. The mists cleared. He had seen Billings helpless, and something had seemed to snap in his brain. He had a heavy spanner in his pocket, and—yes—he used it. In a mad frenzy, seeing that hateful face, he had—

There was a knock at the door—a double rat-tat.

Pulling himself together with an effort, Crofton went to the door of the little cottage and opened it. It wasn't the postman, but a telegraph messenger. There was a registered letter, and it had been expressed right through to its destination. That was why it had been delivered after the normal post-time.

Crofton signed for it, and the telegraph-boy, wondering, went his way. He was rather frightened. The man in the cottage looked mad.

"A registered letter—and for me!" muttered Crofton dully. "It can't be a mistake. Who can it be from?"

He tore it open, and in his hands he held ten thousand pounds in banknotes.

Ten thousand pounds—the exact amount he had lost in the crash! His money had come back, and he had killed Billings, and . . .

"No, no!" cried Crofton, in despair. "It can't be! Who could have done this?"

He read the words on that slip of paper, and, trembling in every limb, he sat down. Why couldn't this money have come earlier? Why couldn't it have come in the morning? Then he would have been saved—

The door abruptly opened, and three men strode in. They were Sexton Blake, Finker, and Chief-Inspector Lennard.

"Who—who are you?" croaked George Crofton. "What do you want? How dare you burst into my house—"

"Is your name George Crofton?" asked Lennard, not unkindly.

"Yes."

"I have a warrant for your arrest, and I am going to charge you with the wilful murder of Montagu Billings," said

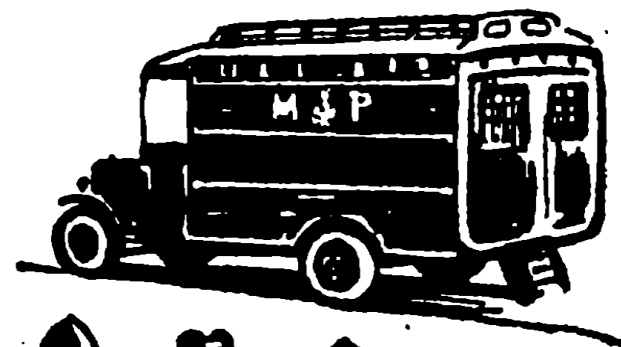
Lennard formally. "Anything you say—"

"No, no! It isn't true!" panted Crofton wildly. "I didn't do it! I've got my money here—all of it! Everything I lost! I don't understand—"

He broke down, sobbing hysterically.

"That money was sent to you by Billings," said Lennard deliberately. "At least, that's what I understand, and it's not my business to make any further inquiries. You killed Billings—"

"I didn't know he had sent me this money," whispered Crofton. "Why didn't he tell me? I didn't mean to kill him! I found him there on the common, and I went mad. I'm not a murderer! I went mad, I tell you!"



"It is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be taken down—"

"Take it down!" shouted Crofton. "I don't care! Take it down! Billings was a shark, a vampire! I didn't mean to kill him, but I'm glad he's dead, all the same! He won't ruin any more poor victims now. Yes I killed him—I know I killed him. And I don't believe he sent me this money; he was too much of a crook to give money to people. He only took it—he only robbed people."

The wretched man suddenly drew himself up straight.

"Take me!" he went on. "I don't mind answering for what I've done. I've done a service to humanity, and I'm glad! Yes, glad!"

"**H**E'LL never hang," said Lennard, later. "They'll pronounce him insane, and he'll spend the rest of his life in Broadmoor. Not that he'll live long, for if ever I saw a man in rapid consumption, he's one. Poor devil! I'm thundering glad he hasn't any relatives!"

"He wants that ten thousand to go to charity," said Sexton Blake. "Billings' money is being put to a good purpose to-day, Lennard!"

THE police certainly guarded Rupert Waldo extremely well. The Black Maria in which he was to be conveyed to the police station was a formidable vehicle. It was motor-driven, and in addition to the driver another officer sat in front in the cab.

Waldo's hands were manacled behind his back and he was locked in one of the box-like cells that lined either side of the van. The rest of these cubicles were empty. The authorities had paid Waldo the compliment of giving him a Black Maria to himself—that was as regards other prisoners; but two of the biggest men in the police force took up their position in the narrow little gangway that ran down the centre of the van.

Then the doors were slammed fast and

looked from the outside by the guard who would sit up with the driver.

"You won't try any tricks, Waldo, will you?" said one of the constables doubtfully. "It wouldn't do you no good, anyhow."

"No?" said Waldo, in his most charming manner.

"We've had instructions to use our truncheons if you start anything funny," said the man. "We don't want to do that, but it's just as well that you should know."

"Stout fellows!" said Waldo. "But isn't that warning just a bit superfluous? How do you suppose I can get away? I'm not such a magician as you fellows seem to think."

Through the narrow little grating that gave him a very restricted view of the gangway, Waldo grinned amiably at his guards. Even in this tight fix, his good humour and nerve had not deserted him. He was consoling himself with the thought that, whatever happened to him, the money he had distributed would not be interfered with. Blake had made that very clear.

But Waldo was far from resigning himself to imprisonment. As soon as the van gathered speed, he got busy. The first job was to free his hands. The very narrowness of the cubicle he was in aided him. He was able to brace his knees against the side partitions and so gain added purchase for the terrific pull he was exerting on the connecting chain of his handcuffs. His palms were pressed together for leverage, whilst his forearms strained outwards to the limit of the chain.

Strong as those handcuffs were, they had not been designed for supermen. The chain was suddenly wrenched in half—and Waldo's hands were free.

He now pressed his back against the side of the van which made the rear wall of his cell, and splayed his hands against the door. There was only room for him to straighten his arms from the elbow, but he was able to exert all the force of his powerful frame as he strained back-

wards with his shoulders and forwards with his hands.

Being flimsier, the door went first. It ripped outwards across the gangway, startling the two guards. It was the first intimation they had had of Waldo's activities.

The nearest one received Waldo's fist full between the eyes as the Wonderman squirmed past the hanging door into the constricted space of the passage. The policeman fell like a log. The other gave a shout of alarm and hammered on the van roof with his truncheon to warn those up in the front. Then, gauging his moment, he brought his truncheon down with a terrific swipe across Waldo's head.

He gave a grunt of satisfaction as Waldo pitched in a heap on the floor. He bent over him to drag him into another cell. But he had forgotten the Wonderman's imperviousness to pain. The blow had dazed Waldo, but he had not lost his senses. His hand suddenly shot up and gripped the policeman round the neck. His powerful fingers tightened round the other's throat; slowly the man's head was pulled lower and lower as Waldo got to his knees and then stood up.

Holding the man almost bent double, Waldo quickly rifled his pockets till he found a ring of keys. In a trice he had bundled the man, head downwards, into one of the cells and locked the door. The man began an instant drumming with his boots on the sides of the van, and shouted as loudly as his position would permit.

Moving like lightning, Waldo then imprisoned the guard he had laid out first. The van was slowing, braked to a standstill. The two guards up in front had obviously taken alarm. In a moment they would be at the door, perhaps armed. There was not a moment to lose.

Crash!

With one terrific drive of his bare fist Waldo smashed a hole clean through

the roof of the van. His knuckles were bleeding, but he felt no pain. The feat was an amazing one. And he followed it up with another no less amazing.

Grasping the edges of the hole he had driven, he tore the woodwork aside, making a gap large enough for him to squeeze through.

Like an eel he squirmed through the hole and pulled himself on to the roof. The noise from within was now tumultuous. The driver and the other officer, dashing round the rear, had no knowledge of the man on the roof. They could not even guess what had happened. If they had any idea at all, they thought that Waldo was engaged in a frantic rough-and-tumble with the two constables.

With frantic haste the Yard man unlocked the doors and flung them open.

"Why! They've gone! Bates! Finch!" The officer stared in consternation. "And Waldo! He's bashed his door down—"

The van gave a sudden lurch forward. The officer was tilted back into the arms of the driver who had run up behind him.

"What's that?" yelled the driver. "I left the brake on—"

"It's Waldo got through the roof! He must have got round to the cab, and—"

But further words were needless. The Black Maria, with its doors swinging crazily, was gathering speed.

And Rupert Waldo, laughing gaily, was at the wheel.

That Black Maria was found ten minutes later down a quiet side turning, with two indignant and demoralised police officers banging at the walls of their cells. And on the driver's seat there was a ten-pound note, and written across it:

"To pay for the damage."

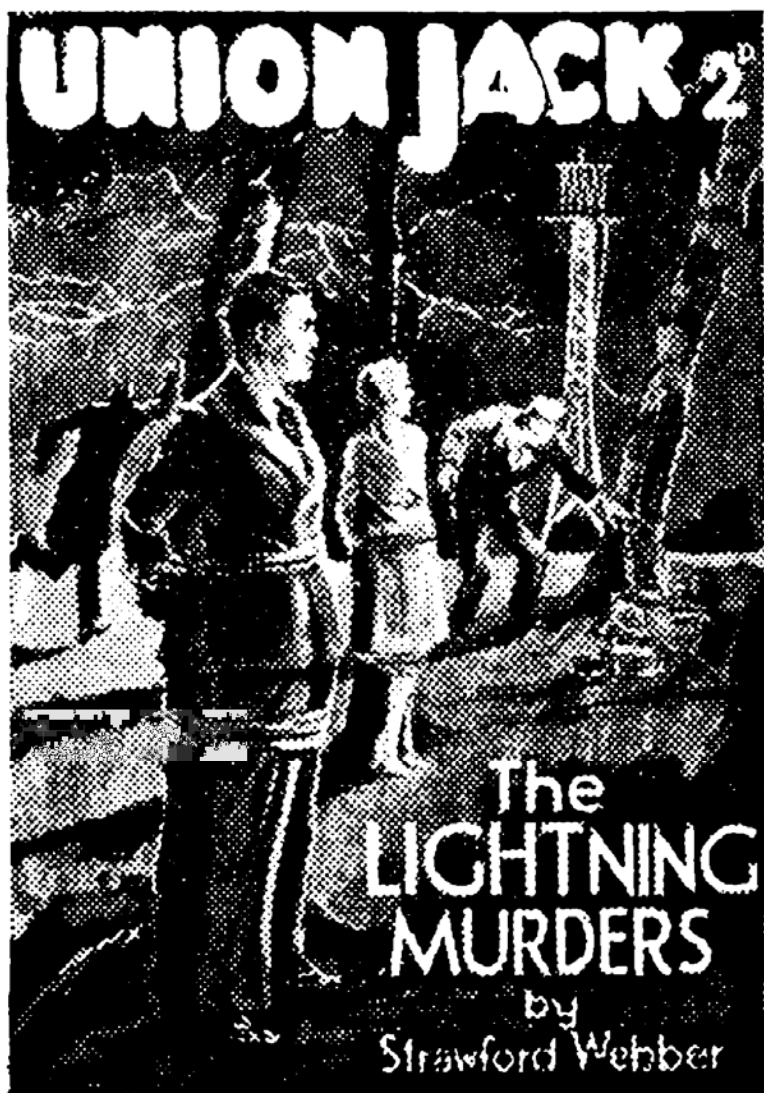
And Waldo had gone! Like a will-o'-the-wisp he had vanished once again into London's teeming millions.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK—A NOVELTY STORY!

New Author Stages Great Entry
to "U.J." Public.

A Strange Plot, Vividly Described.



STORIES by new authors in UNION JACK are comparatively few. The majority's clear and certain verdict is that it prefers pre-eminently the yarns told by that gifted group whose names have long been known and whose fiction-characters even longer appreciated.

But it would be foolish, on that ground alone, to deny the gifted newcomer his hearing. When a stranger's story is submitted to us it is read in the hope that it is worth placing alongside the work of such men as G. H. Teed and Gwyn Evans. More often than not it isn't; but sometimes there is that rare exception.

Hence our next week's story.

It's novel in theme, style, and treatment. It corresponds to the usual run of Sexton Blake stories only in the high level of its thrills and excitement, and its artistry of workmanship.

More than that it will not be well to reveal here—except that the great novelty of this yarn, and one of the factors that makes for its vividness and reality, is that it is told in the first person; not by Blake or Tinker, but by the other principal character of the story. He himself describes, in his own convincing words, how the mystery broke upon him, and how he saw Sexton Blake solve it.

Merit alone is the test for all "U.J." stories, whether by new men or old, and it's because of its outstanding merit that we are printing, as our big attraction for next week:

THE LIGHTNING MURDERS
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Stand by to give a welcome to this newcomer to our band of authors. Reserve your judgment till next Thursday—but reserve your copy to-day!



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**This Ranks in the Forefront of Our Fine Serials.
Begin it NOW!**

How It Started.

AN anonymous ring of wealthy art collectors whose methods are as unscrupulous as they are secret, are bent on securing the Gyrth Chalice, an historic heirloom which since Saxon times, has been guarded by the Gyrth family at the Tower, Sanctuary.

Albert Campion, a moneyed young man whose hobby is solving the mysterious, gets wind of this proposed coup, and warns Val Gyrth, son of the present owner of the Tower, Sir Percival Gyrth.

With Campion's bruiser-valet, Lugg, they hurry to the Tower, and partly take into their confidence Val's sister, Penelope, and her friend, Beth Calrey. On the day after their arrival, Val's aunt is found dead in the Tower grounds. Beyond an expression of terrible fright on her face, there is nothing to suggest foul play; but the villagers assert that it is witchcraft that has caused her death.

The Chalice, which is kept on an altar in the Chapel of the Cup, is veiled in accordance with the Gyrth tradition after a death; but when a few days later Sir Percival is forced to conduct an unwelcome visitor, the masculine Mrs. Dick Shannon, to see the Chalice, they find it has vanished.

'Two Angry Ladies.

MRS. DICK was the only person who did not realise immediately that some calamity had occurred.

"Not my idea of humour." Her stentorian voice reverberated through the cool, dark chapel. "Sheer bad taste."

But Val stared at Mr. Campion, and his father stared at Branch, and there was nothing but complete stupefaction and horror written on all their faces.

It was Colonel Gyrth who pulled himself together and provided the second shock within five minutes.

"Of course," he said, "I had quite forgotten. I'm afraid you'll be disappointed to-day, Mr. Putnam. The Chalice is being cleaned. Some other time."

With remarkable composure he smiled and turned away, murmuring to Val as he passed him:

"For Heaven's sake get these people out of the house, my boy, and then come into the library, all of you!"

COLONEL SIR PERCIVAL GYRTH walked up and down the hearthrug in his library, while his two children, with Mr. Campion and Branch, stood looking at him rather helplessly.

"Thank Heaven that woman's gone!" The old man passed his hand across his forehead. "I don't know if my explanation satisfied her. I hope so, or we'll have the whole country buzzing with it within twenty-four hours."

Val stared at his father.

"Then it really has gone?"

"Of course it has." There was no misunderstanding the consternation in the colonel's voice. "Vanished into thin air. I veiled it myself on Sunday evening, just after you said that busybody Calrey was fooling about in the courtyard. It was perfectly safe then. I brought the keys back and put them in my desk. Branch, you and I, I suppose, are the only people who knew where they were kept."

Branch's expression was pathetic, and his employer reassured him.

"Don't worry, man—I'm not accusing anybody. It's ridiculous. The thing can't have gone."

For a moment no one spoke. The suddenness of the loss seemed to have stunned them.

"Haven't I better send someone for the police, sir? Or perhaps you'd rather I phoned?"

It was Branch who made the suggestion.

Sir Percival hesitated.

"I don't think so, thank you, Branch," he said—"anyway, not yet. You see," he went on, turning to the others, "to make a loss like this public entails very serious consequences. We are really the guardians of the Chalice for the Crown. I want the chapel locked as usual, Branch, and no mention of the loss to be made known to the staff, as yet."

"But what shall we do?" said Val breathlessly. "We can't sit down and wait for it to reappear."

His father looked at him curiously. "Perhaps not, my boy," he said. "But there's one point which must have occurred to all of you—the Chalice is

both large and heavy, and no stranger has left the house since I locked it up myself. No one except ourselves could possibly have had access to it, and we are all very particularly concerned in keeping it here."

"According to that argument," said Val bluntly, "it can't have gone. And if so, where is it? Can't you send for the Chief Constable? He used to be a friend of yours."

His father hesitated.

"I could, of course," he said, "though I don't see what he could do except spread the alarm and question all the servants—search the house, probably and make a lot of fuss. No, we must find this thing ourselves."

There was an astonishing air of finality in his tone, which was not lost upon the others.

"I'm not calling in the police," he said—"not yet, at any rate. And I must particularly ask you not to mention this loss to anyone. I'm convinced," he went on, as they gasped at him, "that the relic is still in the house. Now I should like to be left alone."

They went out, all of them except Val, who lingered, and when the door had closed behind the others he went over to the old man, who had seated himself at his desk.

"Look here, dad," he said, "if you've hidden the Cup for some reason or other for Heaven's sake let me in on it! I'm all on edge about this business, and frankly I feel I've got a right to know."

"For Heaven's sake, boy, don't be a fool!" The older man's voice was almost unrecognisable, and the face he lifted towards his son was grey and haggard. "This is one of the most serious, most terrifying things I have ever experienced in my whole lifetime," he went on, his voice indubitably sincere. "All the more so because, as it happens, we are so situated that at the moment it is impossible for me to call in the police."

He looked the boy steadily in the eye. "You come of age in a week. If your birthday were to-day perhaps I should find this easier to explain."

Early the following morning Mr. Campion walked down the broad staircases

through the lounge-hall, and out into the sunlight. There seemed no reason for him to be particularly cheerful. So far his activities at Sanctuary seemed to have met with anything rather than conspicuous success. Lady Pethwick had died mysteriously within eight hours of his arrival, and now the main object of his visit had disappeared from almost directly beneath his nose.

Yet he sat down on one of the ornamental stone seats which flanked the porch and beamed upon a smiling world.

Presently, as his ears detected the sound for which he was listening, he began to stroll in a leisurely fashion down the drive. He was still sauntering along the middle of the broad path when the squawk of a motor-horn several times repeated made him turn to find Penny, in her little red two-seater sports car, looking at him reprovingly. She had had to stop to avoid running over him. He smiled at her foolishly from behind his spectacles.

"Where are you going to, my pretty maid?" he said. "Would you like to give a poor traveller a lift?"

The girl did not look particularly pleased at the suggestion.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I'm running up to town to see my dress-maker. I'll give you a lift to the village if you like."

"I'm going to London, too," said Mr. Campion, climbing in. "It's a long way from here, isn't it?" he went on with apparent imbecility. "I knew I'd never walk it."

Penny stared at him, her cheeks flushing.

"Surely you can't afford to go off and leave the Tower unprotected," she said—and there was a note of amusement in her voice.

"Never laugh at a great man," said Mr. Campion. "Remember what happened to the vulgar little girls who threw stones at Elisha. I can imagine few worse deaths than being eaten by a bear," he added conversationally.

The girl was silent for a moment. She was clearly considerably put out by the young man's unexpected appearance.

"Look here," she said at last. "I'm taking Beth with me, if you really want to know. I'm meeting her at the end of the lane."

Mr. Campion beamed.

"That's all right," he said. "I shan't mind being squashed. Don't let me force myself on you," he went on. "I shouldn't dream of doing that. But I've got to get to London somehow, and Lugg told me I couldn't use the Bentley."

The girl looked at him incredulously. "What is that man Lugg?" she said.

Her companion adjusted his spectacles.

"It depends how you mean," he said. "A species, definitely human, I should say—oh, yes, without a doubt. Status—none. Past—filthy. Occupation—my valet."

Penny laughed.

"I wondered if he were your keeper?" she suggested.

"Tut, tut," said Mr. Campion, mildly offended. "I hope I'm going to enjoy my trip. I don't want to be 'got at' in a parrot fashion all the way up. Ah, there's your little friend waiting for us. Would you like me to sit in the dickey?"

"No!" said Penny, so vehemently that he almost jumped. She bit her lip as though annoyed with herself, and added

more quietly: "Sit where you are. Beth can squeeze in."

She brought the car to a standstill against the side of the road where Beth Cairey—smart and coolly attractive in navy and white, stood waiting. She seemed surprised to see Mr. Campion and her greeting was subdued.

"This appalling creature has insisted on our giving him a lift," said Penny. "I do hope you won't be squashed in front here."

Mr. Campion made way for her between himself and the driver.

"I couldn't very well refuse him," Penny added apologetically to Beth. "We shall have to put up with him."

Mr. Campion continued to look ineffably pleased with himself.

"What a good job there's no more for the Skylark, isn't it?" he remarked, as he shut the door on the tightly packed little party. "I love riding in other people's motor-cars—such a saving of petrol, for one thing."

"Silly, and rather vulgar," said Penny; and Mr. Campion was silent.

"I suppose I can eat my sandwiches and drink my ginger-beer so long as I don't throw the bottle on the road?" he said meekly, after they had progressed a couple of miles without speaking. "I've got a few oranges I could pass round, too, if you like."

Penny did not deign to reply, although Beth looked upon him more kindly. Unabashed, Mr. Campion continued.

"I've got a rattle to swing in the big towns," he said. "And a couple of funny noses for you two to wear. If we had some balloons we could tie them on the bonnet."

Penny laughed grudgingly.

"Albert, you're an idiot!" she said. "What do you think you're doing here, anyhow? What are you going to do in London?"

"To buy a ribbon for my straw hat," said Mr. Campion promptly. "The thing I've got now my aunt knitted. It's not quite the article, as Lugg would say."

Penny slowed down.

"You're just being offensive," she said. "I've a good mind to make you get out and walk."

Mr. Campion looked apprehensive.

"You'd regret it all your life," he said warningly. "The best part of my performance is to come. Wait till you've heard me recite—wait till I've done my clog dance—wait till the clouds roll by!"

"I should turn him out," said Beth stolidly. "We've come a long way—it would do him good to walk back."

They were, it happened, in one of the narrow, cross-country lanes through which Penny was threading in her descent upon the main Colchester motorway, some distance from a house of any kind, and the road was deserted.

"Don't turn me out," pleaded Mr. Campion. "I knew a man once who turned such a respectable person out of his car after giving him a lift for a long way, just like you, and for the same reason, all because he'd taken a sudden dislike to him. And when he got home he found that his suitcase—which had been in the back of the car, was missing. Suppose that happened to you? You wouldn't like that, would you?"

Penny stopped the car, engine and all. Both girls were scarlet, but it was Penny who tried to rescue what was obviously an awkward situation.

"How silly of me," she said. "You'll have to get out and start her up. The self-starter isn't functioning."

Mr. Campion moved obediently to get out, and in doing so contrived to kneel up on the seat and grasp one end of the large suitcase which protruded from the open dickey. His next movement was so swift that neither of the two girls realised what was happening until he had leapt clear of the car and stood beaming in the road, the suitcase in his arms. In fact, Penny had already trodden on the self-starter, and the car was in motion before she was conscious of her loss.

MR. CAMPION put the suitcase on the bank and sat down on it. Penny stopped the car, and she and Beth descended and came down the road towards him. She was white with anger, and there was a gleam of defiance in Beth's brown eyes that was positively dangerous.

"Mr. Campion," said Penny, "will you please put that case back in the car at once? Naturally, I can't offer you a lift any farther, and if ever you have the impudence to appear at the Tower again I'll have you thrown out."

Mr. Campion looked dejected, but he still retained his seat.

"Don't be unreasonable," he begged. "You're making me go all melodramatic and slightly silly."

The two girls stared at him fascinated. He was juggling with a revolver which he had taken from his hip pocket.

Penny was now thoroughly alarmed.

"What do you think you're doing?" she demanded. "You can't behave like this. Another car may come along at any moment. Then where will you be?"

"Then where will *you* be?" said Mr. Campion pointedly.

With his free hand he slipped open the catches of the suitcase. There was a smothered scream from Beth.

"Please—please leave it alone," she whispered.

Mr. Campion shook his head.

"Sorry," he said. "Dooty is dooty, miss! Hallo! Is that a car?"

The inexperienced ladies were deceived by the old trick. They turned eagerly, and in the momentary respite Mr. Campion whipped open the suitcase and exposed a large bundle wrapped lightly in a travelling-rug.

Beth would have sprung at him, but Penny restrained her.

"It's no good," she said—"we're sunk!"

And they stood sullenly in the road with pink cheeks and bright eyes regarding him steadily as he unwrapped and produced to their gaze the eighteen inches of shining glory that was called the Gyrth Chalice.

Mr. Campion Subscribes.

FOR some moments Mr. Campion stood at the side of the glittering flint road with the bank of green behind him, and the shadows of the beech leaves making a pattern on his face and clothes. The Chalice lay in his arms, dazzling in the sunshine.

Penny and Beth stood looking at him. They were both crimson, both furious and a little afraid. Penny was fully

aware of the enormity of the situation. It was Campion who spoke first.

"As amateurs," he said judicially, "you two only serve to show what a lot of undiscovered talent there is knocking about."

He rewrapped the Chalice and put it back into the suitcase.

All this time there was an ominous silence from Penny, and, glancing at her, he was afraid for one horrible moment that she was on the verge of tears.

"Look here," he said, smiling at her from behind his spectacles, "I know you think I've butted into this rather unwarrantably, but consider my position. In this affair I occupy the same sort of role as the Genie of the Lamp. Wherever the Chalice is I am liable to turn up at any moment."

Penny's expression did not change for some seconds, and then, to his relief, a faint smile appeared at the corners of her mouth.

"How on earth did you know?" she said.

Mr. Campion sighed with relief.

"The process of elimination," said he oracularly as he picked up the suitcase and trudged back to the car with it, "combined with a modicum of common-sense, will always assist us to arrive at the correct conclusion with the maximum of possible accuracy and the minimum of hard labour. Which being translated means: 'I guessed it.'"

He lifted the case into the dickey once more and held the door open for Penny and her companion.

She hung back.

"That's not fair," she said. "Suppose you explain?"

Mr. Campion shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it wasn't very difficult, was it?" he said. "In the first place, it was obvious that the chapel had not been burgled. Ergo, someone had opened the door with the key; ergo, it must have been you, because the only other two people who could possibly have known where it was were your father and Branch, and they—if I may say so, are both a bit conservative on the subject of the Chalice."

Penny bit her lip and climbed into the driving-seat.

"Anyway," she said, "I'm the 'Maid of the Cup.'"

"Quite," said Mr. Campion. "Hence your very natural feeling of responsibility." He hesitated and looked at her owlily. "I bet I could tell you what you were going to do with it."

"Well?"

She looked at him defiantly.

Mr. Campion laid his hand on that part of the suitcase which projected from the dickey.

"You were going to put this in Chancery Lane Safe Deposit," he said.

Penny gasped at him, and there was a little smothered squeak from Beth. Mr. Campion went on.

"You had relied on the ten days' veiling of the Chalice to keep its loss a secret, and I have no doubt you intended to confess the whole matter to Val and your father before they had any cause for worry. Unfortunately, Mrs. Shannon upset the applecart, and you had to get busy right away. And that's why I was waiting for you this morning. Now shall we go on?"

Penny sat staring at him in bewilderment.

"It's not fair of you to look so idiotic," she said involuntarily. "People get led astray. I suppose you won't even be particularly bucked to know that you've guessed right?"

The young man with the simple face

and gentle ineffectual manner looked uncomfortable.

"All this praise makes me unhappy," he said. "I must admit I wasn't sure until I was in the car this morning that you had the treasure in the suitcase. It was only when you were so anxious for me not to sit beside it that I knew that the rat I saw floating in the air was a bona-fide rose to nip in the bud."

Penny drew a deep breath.

"Well," she said, "I suppose we turn back."

Mr. Campion laid a hand on the driving-wheel.

"Please," he said pleadingly, with something faintly reminiscent of seriousness on his face—"please listen to me for a little longer. You two have got to be friends with me. We're all in the soup together. Consider the facts—here we are, sitting in the middle of a public highway, with a highly incriminating piece of antiquity in the back of the car. That's bad, to start with. Then—and this is much more worthy of note—if I was bright enough to spot what you were up to, what about our nosy friends who are out for crime, anyhow?"

"You mean you think they might actually come down on us on the way?" said Penny apprehensively. This aspect of the case had clearly never occurred to her. "And yet," she added, a flash of suspicion showing in her blue eyes, "it's perfectly ridiculous. How is any outside person to know that the Chalice isn't still in the Cup House? Only father, Val, Branch, you and I know it's gone."

"You forget," said Mr. Campion gently, "you had visitors yesterday, and the unpleasant Mr. Putnam, who is making use of your retiring little friend, Mrs. Shannon, had a face vaguely familiar to me."

Penny's eyes flickered.

"That revolting little man," she said—"is he the—the big fellow you were talking about? You know—when you said the stream was full of minnows, and there were no big fish about?"

Mr. Campion regarded her gravely.

"I'm afraid not," he said. "But he's certainly in the dab class. I fancy his real name is Matthew Sanderson. That's why I kept so quiet—I was afraid he might spot me. I don't think he did, but he certainly noticed that the Chalice had disappeared. Hang it all, he couldn't very well miss it. Anyhow, if he is the man I think he is, then I'm open to bet that he's not twenty miles away from here now."

PENNY looked at him helplessly.

"I've been a fool," she said.

"We'll go back at once."

Campion hesitated.

"Wait a minute," he said, and glanced at Beth. "I don't know if we ought to drag Miss Cairey into all this—"

An expression of determination appeared upon the elder girl's face, and her lips were set in a firm hard line.

"I'm in this with Penny," she said.

To her surprise he nodded gravely.

"I told Val you'd be game," he said. "He should be waiting for us at a little pub called The Case is Altered, just outside Coggleshall."

"Val?" Penny was startled. "What does he know about it?"

"Just about as much as I do," said Mr. Campion, considering. "While you were shouting your travelling arrangements over the phone in the hall last night he and I were discussing fat stock

prices and whatnot in the smoking-room. I told him what I thought, and I persuaded him to let you carry on the good work and smuggle the thing out of the house for us."

"Then you think it's a good idea—the safe deposit?" said Beth anxiously. "I told Penny I was sure that was the only certain way of keeping it safe."

Mr. Campion did not answer her immediately. He had resumed his place in the car and sat regarding the dashboard thoughtfully, as though he were making up his mind how much to say.

"Well, hardly, to begin with," he ventured finally. "Although perhaps it may come to that in the end. In the meantime, I wondered if we couldn't beat our friend Arthur Earle at his own game. There's an old firm in the city—or, rather, the last remaining member of an old firm—who'd turn us out a first-rate copy of the Chalice, and somehow I'd rather be playing hide-and-seek with that than with the real one. I fancy we shall have to show a bait, you see, to catch the big fish."

"Just one thing," said Penny. "What about father? Does he know anything? I seem to have made a pretty prize fool of myself."

Mr. Campion looked, if possible, more vague than ever.

"Your father, I regret to say," he murmured, and Penny was convinced that he was lying, "I thought it best to keep in the dark. You left your own excuses. Val, no doubt, left mine and his own. But," he went on gravely, "that is hardly the most important point to be considered at the moment. What we have to arrange now is the safe conveyance of the Chalice to London."

Penny swung the car up the narrow white road.

"I don't know if I'm going to agree with all this," she said warningly, "but I'd like to see Val. Of course, you're not really serious about this attack on the road, are you?"

Mr. Campion regarded her solemnly.

"The chivalry of the road," he said, "is not what it was when I used to drive my four-in-hand to Richmond, don't you know. Natty Johnson is no Duval, but he might make a very fine Abbershaw, and old Putnam Sanderson can level a first-class blunderbuss. On the whole, I should think we were certainly in for fun of some sort."

"But if this is true," said Beth indignantly, "why are we going on? How do you know we shan't be held up before we get to Coggleshall?"

"Deduction, dear lady," explained Mr. Campion obligingly. "There are two roads from Sanctuary to Coggleshall. You might have taken either. After Coggleshall you must go straight to Kelvedon, and thence by main road. I fancy they'll be patrolling the main road looking for us!"

In spite of herself, Penny was impressed. "Well, you're thorough, anyway," she said grudgingly.

"And clean," said Mr. Campion. "In my last place the lady said no home was complete without one of these—hygienic, colourful, and only ten cents down. Get Campion-conscious to-day. Of course," he went on, "I suppose we could attempt to make a detour, but, considering all things, I think that the telephone-wires are probably busy, and at the same time I'm rather anxious to catch a glimpse of our friends in action. I think the quicker we push on the better."

Penny nodded.

"All right," she said without resentment. "We leave it to you."

THE Case is Altered was a small and unpretentious red brick building standing back from the road and fronted by a square gravel yard. Mr. Campion descended, and, cautiously taking the suitcase from the dicky, preceded the ladies into the bar parlour—an unlovely apartment principally ornamented by large oleographs of "The Empty Chair," "The Death of Nelson," and "The Monarch of the Glen," and furnished with vast quantities of floral china, bamboo furniture, and a pot of paper roses. The atmosphere was flavoured with new oilcloth and stale beer, and the motif was sedate preservation.

Val was standing on the hearthrug when they entered, a slightly amused expression on his face. Penny reddened when she saw him, and, walking towards him, raised her face defiantly to his.

"Well?" she said.

He kissed her.

"Honesty is the best policy, my girl," he said. "Have some ginger-beer?"

Penny caught her brother's arm.

"Val, do you realise," she said, "here we are, miles from home, with the—*the Thing* actually in a portmanteau? I feel as if we might be struck by a thunderbolt for impudence!"

Val put his arm round her shoulders. "Leave it to Albert," he said. "He spotted your little game. He seems to have one of his own."

They turned to Campion inquiringly, and he grinned.

"Well, look here," he said, "if you don't want to play darts, or try the local beer, or otherwise disport yourselves, I think the sooner we get on the better. What I suggest is that we split up. Penny, you and I will take the precious suitcase in the two-seater. Val and Miss Cairey will follow close behind to come to our assistance if necessary. Have you got enough petrol?"

Penny looked at him in surprise.

"I think so," she said; but as he hesitated she added, laughing: "I'll go and see if you like!"

Mr. Campion looked more foolish than before.

"Twice armed is he who speeds with

an excuse, but thrice is he whose car is full of juice," he remarked absently.

Penny went out, leaving the door open, and was just about to return after satisfying herself that all was well, when the young man came out of the doorway bearing the suitcase.

"We'll get on, if you don't mind," he said. "Val's just squaring up with the good lady of the establishment. They'll follow immediately."

Penny glanced about her.

"Where is the other car?" she demanded.

There was a Ford trade van standing beside the bar entrance, but no sign of a private car.

"Round at the back," said Campion glibly. "There's a petrol pump there."

He dropped the suitcase carefully into the back of the car and sprang in beside the girl.

"Now let's drive like fun," he said happily. "How about letting me have the wheel? I've got testimonials from every magistrate in the county."

Somewhat reluctantly the girl gave up her place, but Mr. Campion's driving soon resigned her to the change. He drove with the apparent omnipotence of the born motorist, and all the time he chattered happily in an inconsequential fashion that gave her no time to consider anyone or anything but himself.

"I love cars," he said ecstatically. "I knew a man once—he was a relation of mine, as a matter of fact—who had one of the earliest of the breed. I believe it was a roller-skate to start with, but he kept on improving it, and it got on wonderfully. About 1904 it was going really strong. It had gadgets all over it then. Finally, I believe he overdid the thing, but when I knew it you could light a cigarette from almost any pipe under the bonnet, and my relation made tea in the radiator as well as installing a sort of mechanical picnic-basket between the two back wheels. Then one day it died in Trafalgar Square, and so," he finished oracularly, "the first coffee-stall was born. Phoenix-fashion, you know. But perhaps you're not liking this," he ventured, regarding her anxiously. "After all, I have been a bit trying this morning, haven't I?"

Penny smiled faintly at him.

"I don't really dislike you," she said. "No, go on. Some people drive better when they're talking, I think, don't you?"

"That's not how a young lady should talk," said Mr. Campion reprovingly. "It's the manners of the modern girl I deplore most. When I was a young man—years before I went to India, don't you know, to see about the mutiny—women were women. Egad, yes! How they blushed when I passed."

Penny shot a sidelong glance in his direction. He was pale and foolish-looking as ever, and seemed to be in deadly earnest.

"Are you trying to amuse me, or are you just getting it out of your system?" she said.

"Emancipated, that's what you are," said Mr. Campion, suddenly dropping the Anglo-Indian drawl he had adopted for the last part of his homily. "Emancipated and proud of yourself! Stap my crinoline, Amelia, if you don't think you're a better man than I am!"

Penny laughed.

"You're all right, really," she said. "When does the fun begin?"

"Any time from now on," said Mr. Campion gaily, as he swung the little car into the main road. Penny glanced nervously over her shoulder.

"There's no sign of the others yet," she said.

"Can't help that," said Campion. "We'll have to look after ourselves if there's trouble—and I think that's going to be soon."

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