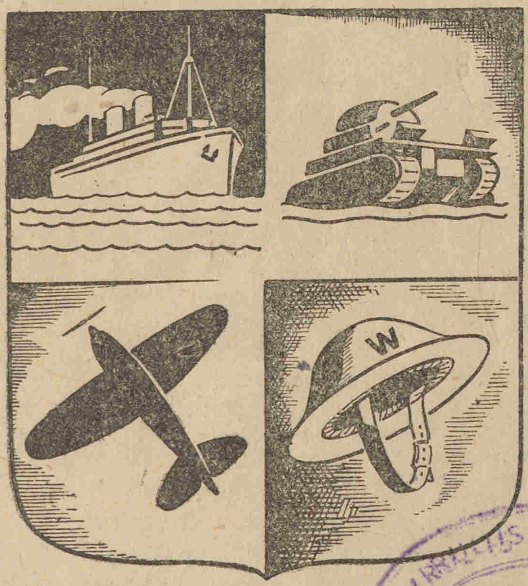
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BRAVE AND BOLD

Stories for Boys



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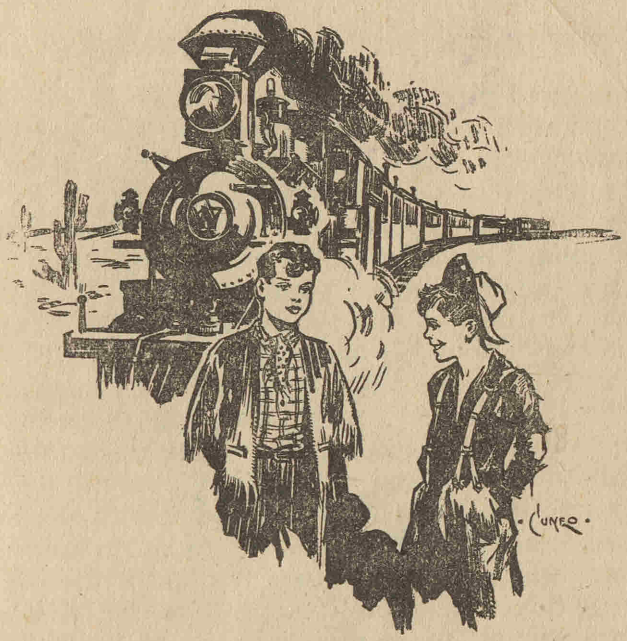
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THE TRAIL OF THE IRON HORSE

A Tale of America's Pioneers

By TERENCE T. CUNEO

I

WITH a reluctant hand Sammy Rogers loosed the throttle and turned a dirt-grimed face to the man beside him. "Gee, dad," he coaxed, "can't I carry on some more? I'm gettin' to be a swell engineer." Then, in injured tones, "Ain't I handlin' the engine right?"

The man's eyes twinkled as he surveyed his tousled offspring of twelve. He nodded. "Sammy," he said with exaggerated solemnity, "you handle an engine like your mother handles huckleberry pie. But all us railroadmen have got to have some off duty some time I guess. On your feet, son, you're quitting." And with firm hands he conveyed the reluctant young engineer from driver's seat to foot-plate.

Master Rogers writhed from his father's grasp. He cast a last yearning glance at the boiler head with its thrilling

accoutrements of pipes and gauges, and its hot oily smells and polished steel levers. He sighed a sigh of martyrdom. "All right, Mister Engineer, take her over," he ordered briskly, and made a dive for the trackside.

Bill Rogers's head appeared framed in the window above. "So long, son," he called above the hissing steam. "Cut along to the depot and draw your pay-roll." With that he pulled the throttle and No. 47 began to move gracefully away. His son cupped his hands.

"Maybe I'll be doin' something to earn a regular pay-roll one day!" he yelled. But the thunder from the stack drowned the words, and fleecy steam enveloped the untidy little urchin who stood and waved.

The 47 pulled a line of flat cars loaded with sleepers, or "ties" as America knows them, and surmounting the loads in straggling groups sat men bound for the rail-head and construction camps, at a point where the railroad was as yet but a roughly hewn path through the prairie.

Sammy remained by the track as each car went rumbling past, click-clacking over the rail joints. The men on the ties were singing. He caught snatches of a popular track-layer's song that navvies sang in the seventies as they spiked and hammered rails into position along the line.

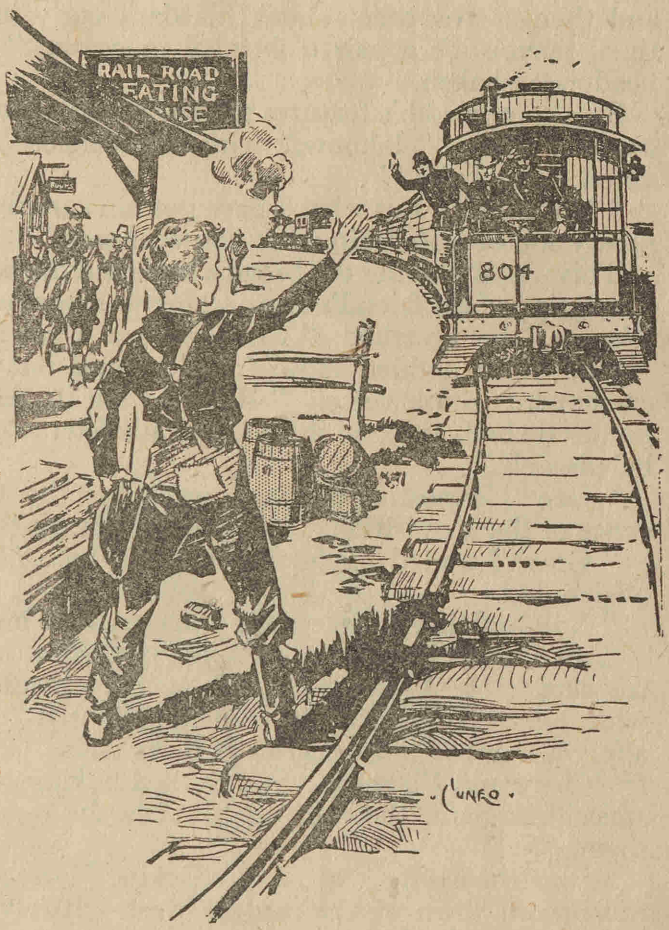
With the swing of a hammer,
And the spark from a nail,
We heave at a sleeper
And spike down a rail.
So we shout this song
To help us along,
As we toil thro' the heat of the day.

Sammy's moccasined toe jerked in time to the ditty, and the chuffing engine ahead and the rolling wheels seemed to blend in tuneful accompaniment with those rough male voices. The song faded as the dusty old caboose[1] came rattling past. Three troopers stood on its rear platform, their carbines in their hands, and as the train receded the boy raised an arm in solemn salute. With mock deference

[1] Brake-van.

the men answered, touching their cap peaks with bronzed hands.

Sam Rogers was on the point of turning away when a shrill voice close by made him start. "Lo, Sammy, I bin lookin' for you. Guess what I got right here in me pants pocket."



THE BOY RAISED AN ARM IN SOLEMN SALUTE.

The speaker was a tall, clean-cut youth of thirteen. He stood a good three inches above his companion and had the broad shoulders and slim low waist of the athlete.

Sam's turned-up nose quivered with sudden interest. His features seemed to move upwards to make room for an enormous grin. "Well, whatcha got, Tim?" he demanded.

"You guess first betcha can't!" retorted the other, with a fine contempt for the grammatical comma.

"P'raps you got a new buck-skin coat with trimmings;"

and then as the other shook his dark curly head, "Well then, maybe it's a pair o' beaded moccasins." Again the head was shaken.

Sam contorted his features afresh, an indication of painful concentration. "I know," with confidence, "you got an Injun scalp knife!"

"No, I ain't. But what I have got kin sure fix any smelly greasy son of a Redskin what you ever saw."

This was altogether too broad a hint, and the light dawned. Sam gripped his friend's arm and his eyes were wide. "Tim Weston," he breathed, "you ain't got a *gun*!"

The other nodded rapidly. He could not conceal the excitement in his voice. "Want to see it, Sam? I got a hundred shells to go in it, too, and a holster and a cartridge belt as well."

"Gee!" expostulated Sam, awestruck by the magnificence of the acquisition. "Where did you git them, Tim?"

"Guess I traded 'em for a bull buffalo hide," he answered, off-handed.

"Bull buffalo? Didn't know you owned no buffalo hides."

Tim dug his hands deep into the pockets of his buck-skin trousers. He looked upwards at the cloudless sky and whistled. "Nor did I," he confessed lightly, "but I reckon a fellow's got to protect himself these days. Come on away from here and I'll show it you." And linking arms with the speechless Sam, they set off towards the outskirts of the town.

It was the summer of 1874. Kicking Horse was a typical mushroom town of the middle west. Barely six months before not a shack had broken the undulating monotony of the prairie, nor had a single white man staked claim upon its sultry soil. But to-day shacks, saloons, eating-houses, shops, and flashy gaming-parlours stood in jumbled array and basked in the sunshine of the advancing railway. A strategic position and a reliable water supply had assured for Kicking Horse the enviable title of Terminus. Almost every day trains brought a fresh load of settlers to swell the town's vague boundaries. The railway itself only paused sufficiently to set down its motley humanity, then was hurrying on again through Kansas towards the Rockies.

And from hill top and prairie scrub, the Red Man sat his pinto and watched the Lilliputian figures with their pale faces, like ants, toiling. With a cold, unemotional hatred he saw them move slowly but surely farther and farther into his ancestral territory.

. . . .

Tim Weston led the way along the railroad, walking briskly between the metals, until they were over a quarter of a mile from Kicking Horse, then striking off to the left, he descended an inviting looking hollow and seated himself on a flat stone. He unbuttoned a generous hip pocket, and with the air of a collector handling his rarest piece, produced a somewhat rusty, long-nosed .45.

"Gee!" was Sam's tribute to this triumph of the gun-maker's art. Then, "Does it shoot all right?"



TIM RAISED HIS GUN AND PULLED THE TRIGGER.

Tim favoured him with such a look of withering contempt that the unfortunate boy shrank visibly. " Does it shoot! *Say !*" He broke the gun and crammed a couple of rounds into the chambers. Snapping it shut again he glared round him. " See that cactus there ?" Sam, dry-mouthed, nodded rapidly. "Well, just watch me blow it clean outa the prairie, will you !"

The plant in question was enjoying a healthy existence six yards distant, its prickly stems spread to the sun's rays. Tim sucked in a deep breath, raised his gun, and pulled the trigger. When the smoke had cleared the two lads ran eagerly forward. But no torn and shattered roots lay to feed their hungry gaze. The cactus stood there as smug as ever.

Here was Sam's chance to assert himself. He turned on the crestfallen Tim. " What sorta shooter do you call yourself ? Can't shoot a measly cactus at half a yard. Here, gimme that gun." And taking the weapon, he stepped out six paces. The gun roared again and lead whirred. Once more they hurried forward. But the cactus still lived, and seemed to smile up at them a prickly smile. This second frustration had a sobering effect on the two gunmen.

Sam looked ruefully down at the smoking revolver. " I guess it's practice we want, Tim," he said quietly.

" Just what I was gointa say meself, Sam. Practice is what we gotta have !"

II

The following day was Saturday, and almost before the bell of the church-room school had commenced its mournful dirge, Sam and Tim Weston could be seen beating a rapid retreat from their log-built seat of learning. Hurrying along up the main street, jostling and elbowing their way through crowds, they chattered shrilly.

All Kicking Horse was agog and seething with activity and excitement. To-day a body of pioneers was leaving the comparative security of the town to stake claims and build homes thirty miles west, at a point where the railroad with its army of navvies had barely reached. Crowds thronged the street and timbered sidewalks. Riders and horse-

drawn buggies and wagons hurried up and down. Belled harness jingled. Voices shouted, laughed, and cursed, while the jangling chords of a mechanical piano blared from the open doors of a saloon across the street. Trunks of cowhide, boxes, and weird-shaped bundles were slung from buck-board to baggage car ; women, some with babes in their arms, hustled wide-eyed kiddies up into the waiting cars. Every man wore a gun strapped to his hip, and many carried rifles slung across the shoulder. By the head coach an Indian scout stood silent and reserved, carving the butt of his pistol with a razor-sharp buffalo knife.

No. 47 waited at the head of the little train, a plume of steam hissing from her safety-valve. She was a graceful diamond-stack locomotive of the 4—4—0 class, and although over five years old, her sixty-three inch drivers were still capable of wheeling a light train as swiftly as a mile a minute. The name that gleamed on the brass plate beneath the cab windows read " CATHERINE," a name that her engineer and fireman had every reason to be proud of.

The two boys stopped and gazed wistfully at the train. Tim turned to his friend. " I'd love to see Panhandle. They say it's a grand place, Sam. Set snug in the hills, and yer kin see the Rockies through the trees. Couldn't we ride along with your dad in the cab and come back to-night?"

" Not a hope. That engine is so full of guns and troopers and things there ain't no room for a sandhopper."

" Too bad. All the same I *would* like to see Panhandle," continued Tim Weston, and something in his voice made Sam glance sharply at him. Tim's eyes were fixed with an expression of angelic innocence on the iron brace-stays that ran between the bogies beneath the coaches. Sam followed his gaze and sighed.

" Something seems to be puttin' ideas into my head," he said solemnly. And then he winked a dreadful wink.

The spell was broken. The two became galvanized into action. " Let's beat it home and pocket some eats." Sam spoke wildly. " See you under the end coach in five minutes." With that they each turned and made madly for home.

Well within the allotted time Sam was back in the main

street. Breathless and crimson in the face, he made for the end coach. A fearful distortion beneath the breast of his woollen shirt paid tribute to the success of his visit to the Rogers's pantry. Indeed, had a curious passer-by stopped and undone the first two buttons he would have discovered, in addition to the lad's well-knit torso, a half loaf of rye bread, two drumsticks torn from what must have been a substantial bird, five small apple tarts, a generous slab of currant cake, and an orange.

Pausing to take a survey to right and left, Sam ducked beneath the waiting coach, and placing his nether portions on a cross-stay, swung his feet clear of the ground. As he did so a long whistle blast ripped from the engine ahead.

Where had Tim got to ? Sam peeped anxiously through the rods at the numerous pairs of feet and hoofs that moved around him.

The whistle shrilled again, and with a sudden jolt the train began to move. There came a scuffling of feet. A hand appeared gripping the stay. Two legs shot before his eyes and turned themselves like snakes about the iron cross-bar. Then a body ducked under and revealed the perspiring but serene countenance of Tim Weston, a mighty slab of buffalo steak gripped between his teeth. " Dad was in the parlour," he gasped, cramming the meat into a side pocket. " Had to get through the larder window."

The train was slowly gathering speed, and the brass bell from the engine clanged a joyous accompaniment to the shouts and ragged cheering that broke from the people of Kicking Horse. The two lads, excited, watched all the familiar landmarks roll slowly past.

The engine whistled again ; the boys saw the last shack slip from view, and the train was running on to the open prairie and increasing speed rapidly. They looked down between their legs at the flying sleepers, at the twin ribbon of steel flowing smoothly away beneath them. The click-clack of iron wheels grew faster and yet faster, and the dust of the prairie rose up stinging their eyes. They adjusted themselves cautiously on the quivering brace-stays, and gave themselves up to the excitement of the adventure. A thought struck Sam, and he cupped his hands. "Brought your

gun ?" he yelled above the din of wheels. The other nodded, and drawing aside a corner of his jacket, revealed a neat holster strapped high up under his left armpit. The gnarled butt of the six-shooter glinted at him, and Sam experienced a sudden twinge of envy for that obsolete old relic.

Talking was not a success stretched beneath this swaying creaking coach, and after several attempts they lapsed into silence and contented themselves with watching the prairie. Here and there a rider could be seen far out in the distance, and once they passed a laden buckboard whose sweating team was cantering back in the direction of Kicking Horse.

The miles sped steadily behind the hurrying little train, and the boys, almost choked by dirt and dust, set to on their provisions and ate with a will.

Another mile had rolled by, when the train gradually began to slacken speed and finally ground itself to a juddering halt. Tim glanced at his companion.

" It's all right," Sam whispered. " We've only stopped to take on more wood for the engine from one of them big stacks by the trackside. Now's your chance to stretch."

Within ten minutes the train was once more under way, and the boys, settling again on their hard iron roost, resumed their feast.

On raced the train over the monotonous miles, raising the prairie dust in angry swirling clouds.

It was Sam, who in the act of biting the skin from his somewhat flattened orange, first saw a rider streak from the cover of the hills to the west. The fruit slipped through his fingers and his mouth fell open. Next moment he was jerking frantically at his friend, all but spilling him on to the rushing line beneath.

" Look, Tim, there !" he gasped, and pointed through the stays. " *Injuns !*"

Exactly five seconds later a trooper perched on the wood pile in the tender had spotted them. He stumbled to his feet and yelled down into the cab. " *Indians !* There to the left—swarms of 'em !"

Rogers at the throttle heard, and his jaw tightened. Reaching up, he tugged at the whistle-cord, sending out a long rending shriek of warning, and at the same time

yanked the throttle full. The *Catherine* would give 'em a run for their money, anyhow ! The fireman flung open the fire door and baled wood into the blazing furnace, and drew comfort from the steadily increasing pressure. The locomotive, as if scenting danger, roared along the straight track, her great diamond-shaped spark-arrester swaying from side to side as her pistons thrust faster and faster. Smoke churned above them and the exhaust sounded a staccato thunder. The race was on !

Along the length of the train all was activity. For most of those present attack from Indians was all too familiar, and preparations for a siege were commenced with a grim but calm competence. All firearms were loaded, and spares laid in readiness. Water, bandages, and any first aid available were placed at regular intervals, while children were herded into the comparative safety of the windowless baggage car. These precautions carried out, the women took their places beside their men-folk, their duty being to tend and reload the empty rifles.

On roared the train, its coaches rolling fearfully, its human cargo waiting and watching with bated breath the mass of galloping horses. On the footplate the fireman laughed suddenly. He turned to a grim-faced trooper. " They've left it too late, they'll never catch us now !" And indeed the Redskins, although riding transversely towards the train, were undoubtedly losing ground.

And then it happened. Springing to his feet with an oath, Bill Rogers snapped shut the throttle arm, and thrust the steam-brake into emergency. The men on the footplate pitched forward with the sudden slackening of speed and the cars behind swayed dangerously. Rogers, his face suddenly drawn, gripped the brake-lever and stared from the cab window. Ahead, barely two hundred yards distant, a stack of heavy timber had been piled across the metals, completely blocking the track. The fireman was across the footplate in a twinkling winding the hand-brake for all he was worth. Anxiously every one waited for the engine to stop herself. Nearer came the obstruction, perilously near, and then after a moment of awful suspense No. 47 came sliding to a

standstill, her driving-wheels locked solid in the grips of brakes. Not six feet in front of her lay the wood pile.

"Back up!" yelled the fireman. "We can try running through 'em, in reverse."

Rogers, the Johnson bar in his hand, looked back along the line. He loosed the lever, and moving forward, deliberately selected a rifle from the rack in the cab. "Too late, Joe; they're dragging timber across the irons behind us by pony. Guess we got to fight our way out of this."

The Indians, having closed the trap on the Iron Horse,[1] were spreading out on each side of the train, their blood-freezing war-whoops becoming ever louder: "How-kola, how-kola!"

The fireman did not hesitate. "Come on, you fellows, I'm for shifting that lumber!" And so saying, he leapt to the ground and raced forward. He was closely followed by two of the troopers, and the three men tore frantically at the heavy logs.

Rifles began to crackle and roar along the train, and the pounding of hoofs became suddenly loud; ear-splitting shrieks ripped chaotically across the still prairie. Suddenly one of the troopers clutched at his chest and pitched forward on to the line, the feathered shaft of an arrow quivering between his shoulder blades. To shift the barrier now was certain death, and the remaining trooper, flinging himself down behind the logs, opened fire. The fireman retreated to the shelter of the cow-catcher, a long-barrelled six-shooter appearing as if by magic in his hand. Apart from being an excellent "diamond-pusher,"[2] Joe Randall was a crack shot with a .45. Steadying the barrel across a boiler stay, he commenced firing, methodically and unhurriedly.

From the cab windows lurid flames stabbed at the racing hordes, and many saddles emptied before a steady fusillade.

The Indians had formed themselves into a huge circle, surrounding the doomed train; and, firing as they rode, they began to guide their sweating pintos imperceptibly closer. From engine, trackside, and coach window, a steady crackle of flame took constant toll of the red hordes, and as

[1] Name given to the steam-engine by the Redskins.
[2] Nickname for stoker.

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hot cartridge was flicked from smoking breach, yet another riderless horse could be seen plunging madly after its fellows.

The fireman crouching by the cow-catcher was grimly enjoying himself. He already had eleven Redskins to his credit, and had duly chronicled each triumph by a chalk mark on the boiler front of the 47. The hot pistol kicked again in his hand, and a half-naked young brave pitched screaming from the back of his yellow pinto. Randall's chalk hand moved lazily up. But this twelfth killing was never to be recorded! An Indian coming from the rear, and riding dangerously close, swept down on the fireman. Leaning far out from his pony's back, his arm jerked upwards, and next moment Joe Randall was sliding limply across the cow-catcher, the hurled tomahawk ricocheting in a mad arc from the boiler front.

For an hour the fight raged. But now there was an ominous difference. While the circling Indians seemed as numerous as ever, their numbers if anything swelled by reinforcements, the answering fire from the train had become thin and spasmodic. The attackers, quick to sense this evidence of diminishing resistance, pressed closer, and rained fire, spear, and arrow on the splintered coaches. With savage yells and thonged quirts, they lashed their flagging mounts back to a maddened, jerky gallop. Inside the cars men fought with the calm of desperation. Guns hot to the hand and cartridge belts pitifully empty, they knew that the siege must soon be over. A small body of troopers and scouts, preferring the open to the stifling smoke-wreathed coaches, were clustered about the engine, watching chances and shooting sparingly. From inside the cab rifles no longer spoke. Bill Rogers, his gun still within his grasp, lolled back against the tender, unconscious of the turmoil around him. By his side spread-eagled across the footplate lay the body of a trooper.

III

From beneath the end coach two scared, white-faced youngsters peered at the ring of galloping savages. Tim,

his faithful six-shooter propped on a stay in front of him, waited tight-lipped for an opportunity to pull trigger. Sam's voice came hoarsely to his ear. " I can't stand this any longer. I'm goin' to git along up by the engine and see what's happenin'."

Tim carefully uncocked his pistol. " I'll come along, too, Sammy. What say you and me stick together, eh ?"

Sam nodded his hearty agreement, and without another word they moved off, keeping low beneath the greasy axles. With a sinking feeling, Sam noticed that the firing from the train had all but ceased, only an occasional shot now answering the thunderous attack of the Redskins. Hurrying forward, the two boys made their way from coach to coach, ducking beneath bogies and dodging aside from coupling chains. At last they were scrambling beneath the tender, panting and breathless, and Sam, looking forward through the grill of the cow-catcher saw the fatal barricade. A feeling of sick panic assailed him as he took in their position. Unless that timber was cleared away a complete massacre could be the only outcome. Desperately he wondered what had happened to his father—perhaps they had got him too, and Sam bit hard at his lip.

Tim's gun exploded deafeningly almost in his ear, and Sam, glancing out, saw Indians riding alongside the engine. He saw a horse stumble, sending its rider crashing forward into the dust. Tim fired again, and to his wild delight brought a bronzed savage down, sprawling beneath the galloping hoofs.

" Tim," yelled Sam, as a sudden desperate plan surged through his mind, " I'm going on to the engine. Listen. Get to the end of the tender and pull the pin. I want the engine cut off, see ? Then tell them fellers outside to git the wounded on board somehow. Hurry."

A question framed itself on Tim's lips, but thinking better of it, he turned and commenced crawling back. " Stay by the head car and watch out for me," Sam shouted after him, " and keep on shootin' them red rats !"

Sam moved forward to where the cab steps hung down between the wheels of the engine and tender. Looking back, he could make out Tim's legs by the tender coupling.

Like a rabbit at its hole, Sam poked his dirty face from beneath the locomotive, watching for a chance to leap up into the cab.

Fear was touching him with an icy finger and his heart pounded sickeningly under his woollen shirt. Seeing a gap at last in the racing hordes, he ducked quickly out, sprang to his feet, and a moment later had clattered madly up the steps and was crouching against the cab side as lead whined over his head. Then he saw his father, an ugly smudge of red staining through his overalls. Crawling across the footplate on all fours, he shook the still form and spoke urgently. "Dad! Dad!" The other's eyelids flickered, then slowly the eyes opened. They expressed no surprise at seeing the grubby little urchin.

"Sammy boy," breathed Rogers, his voice toneless, "they—got me, Sammy. I——" He tried to rise, but fell back, gritting his teeth. "Sammy, can you——" His eyes were desperately asking a question. Sam swallowed. He understood.

"Sure, dad," he nodded, "I kin fix things. I ain't forgot my shuntin'." He sprang to his feet and crossed to the driver's seat box. Peering through the cab window, he saw the pile of timber blocking the line, saw the endless procession of moving horses as they leapt the metals in front of the engine. Sam's jaw set, and his eyes flicked up to the steam clock. The needle hovered between the 70 and 80 mark. Gathering an armful of logs, he tripped open the fire door with his foot, and then reaching up, fanned the flames with wide open blower. Quickly the deadened glow changed into a roaring furnace under the steady draught, and the heat caused his head to throb as he adjusted the dampers and worried at the grate-shaking lever. Quickly he threw the heavy Johnson bar into full forward gear, moved the brake-valve over to release and pulled the throttle towards him. No. 47 seemed to sigh, a deep-throated "whoomph" thundered from the stack, and, with blower-valve still open, she began to move. When the cow-catcher was within six inches of the obstruction the boy pulled the throttle full and clung on to the cab grimly. With a shuddering jolt the engine struck the barricade, nearly hurling



AGAIN HE REVERSED THE LOCOMOTIVE AND AGAIN BROUGHT IT CRASHING INTO THE OBSTRUCTION

Sam against the boiler head. No. 47 struggled forward for a moment and then stopped, her drivers spinning wildly beneath her. Grimly Sam shut off steam, thrust the Johnson bar into reverse, and backed away. Again he reset the reverse and brought the engine chuffing forward full into the timber in front of them. The eight-wheeler rocked with the terrific impact and Sam was all but wrenched from his seat. But doggedly he clung on, and with a surge of joy noticed two or three logs roll from the pile. Again he reversed the locomotive and again brought it crashing into the obstruction. At each onslaught the pile became more scattered, until, with a final mighty rush, the sharp-nosed cow-catcher had flung the remaining logs contemptuously from its path. With the brake full over, he brought the 47 to a bucking halt, and then sent her backing up briskly towards the waiting coaches. Wildly he pulled at the

whistle, and saw Tim get to his feet and stand boldly by the head car coupling.

The Indians had broken their circle tactics and were concentrating a savage attack on the now almost defenceless train. Hand-to-hand fighting had broken out in several places, and Indian and pale-face hacked and cut at one another through the splintered window-frames.

The whites knew too well the price of defeat, and with the vision of the scalp knife ever before them were putting up a stubborn resistance. Men and women fought doggedly with rifle-butt and pistol, stemming with heroic courage the wave of savages that clamoured at the windows. Suddenly Sam found himself in the midst of a surging, howling mob. He saw maddened horses forced by their riders against the very cab sides. In a daze he felt the couplings come together, and the next moment a painted body had flung itself on to the footplate. Before the Indian could get to his feet to use his buffalo knife, Sam, prompted by terror, had torn the feathered bonnet from his raven hair and brained him with a set spanner. Frantically he reset the reverse and yanked open the throttle as more men struggled up the gangways. And then like a flash he remembered the hose ! It lay there coiled neatly on the footplate : a short length of metal-covered tubing used for damping down fuel in the tender. Within the next second he had snatched it up and was twisting the tap. The cab seemed alive with yelling savages, their faces contorted with fury. A tomahawk flashed past his head shattering the window behind him, while a spear ripped the shirt from his shoulders and fell clattering against the boiler. Sam saw no more. A hissing spray of scalding water was enveloping the cab in a fog of wet steam. Shrill screams rent the air as the murderous jet came in contact with naked flesh. No human being could stand before that torture, and the snarling faces seemed to fade and vanish. The scalded braves turned as one man, and jumped headlong from the moving train.

Sam, his whole body trembling, somehow shut off the hose and slumped down in a cab grown strangely quiet. The war-cries of Indians came into his ringing ears, but they sounded far away and were growing fainter. The

47 was moving comfortably along, her mellow chuffing pulsing through the boy's exhausted frame. Shots rang out behind them, but the little eight-wheeler was indifferent to gun and Redman alike and continued smoothly onward.

Tim's head appeared suddenly over the edge of the tender. He scrambled across and jumped down into the cab.

"Bravo, Sammy," he croaked hoarsely, gripping the other by the shoulders. "Bravo! You're great, Sam! You've beaten 'em—the greasy red coyotes! Their mangy pintos is so dog-gone licked they can't hardly trot!"

Sam chuckled faintly. "Fine, Tim," he said, and crawled painfully into the driver's seat. The breeze coming through the shattered window revived him, and he commenced to handle his engine like a true "hogger." [1]

"A shade more cut off, son; you'll be using up all your steam."

Sam whipped round at the halting words. On the swaying footplate Rogers was smiling up at his son, and there was something in his eyes that made Master Samuel almost burst with pride.

"Right, Mister Engineer," he grinned widely as he eased back the Johnson bar until the engine's exhaust was reduced to a gentle purr. Rogers nodded his approval and his eyes closed.

Tim, leaning from the window, let out a whoop. "Panhandle!" he yelled. "We've made it, Sam! Look, the place is thick with people—they're cheering!" Crossing the cab he stood quietly by his friend's side. "Sam," he said awkwardly, "I guess I——" He hesitated, then with sudden decision he unbuckled his holster and thrust the six-shooter roughly into the other's lap.

"Guess I want you to have it, Sam." He was blushing scarlet. "Oh, shucks, ain't you earned it!"

Sam mechanically eased the 47 down to a crawl as they entered Panhandle. He did not speak or look away from the window. A tear forced itself unheeded through the dirt on his cheek. Tim Weston turned to where cheering crowds were running forward to meet the war-scarred train. He had had his thanks.

[1] Slang for engineer.



THE ORDEAL OF HORACE PENNE-FATHER

BY CAPTAIN OSWALD DALLAS

I

ALMOST from the day of their joining at Sandhurst until the day when they passed out, the two lads had been close friends. Why this should have been so it would be difficult to say, unless on the hypothesis of the attraction of opposites. Walter Festing was the making of a fine officer ; tall, slim, clever at his work, and good at sport. Horace Pennefather possessed none of these advantages. Mild of manner, untidy in appearance, dreamy and with something of the poet in his nature, he was slack in his studies and cared little for games. Hence he was unpopular with the other cadets of his company and a trial to his instructors ; yet none of these things interfered with Festing's friendship for him.

When the time approached for them to leave the college the question arose as to the regiments to which they would be appointed. It is the practice with some commanding officers to visit the college, and certain of the cadets are ear-marked, chiefly for their proficiency in the form of sport favoured of the regiment. Apart from this, the

outgoing cadets usually put down their names for some regiment, with the alternative of one or two others.

One evening the two friends went for a walk in the country, young Festing full of the life opening in front of him.

"I shall be dashed glad to leave all this," he said. "Have you applied for a regiment yet, Horry?"

"No," replied Pennefather. "I am not going to. They can send me to any regiment they like."

"What a queer chap you are! Do you mean to say you don't care?"

"Not a bit. You see I am not like you. I have no connexion with the service. All regiments are alike to me. I didn't want to be a soldier. I would much rather have been a doctor. What regiment have you applied for?"

"Oh, the South Durhams, of course."

"Why of course?"

"Because it is the finest regiment in the service, bar none. Besides, all my people have served in it at one time or another. The colonel of the Royal Yorkshires asked for me—boxing, you know—but I wasn't having any. I only hope that they send me to the 2nd Battalion. They are in India. That's the place to do one's soldiering. Always some show going on. I say, old chap, why don't you come with me? I hear they are short of subalterns."

"I should rather like to go with you," returned Pennefather. "To tell the truth, I am rather shy of going among a lot of fellows whom I don't know."

"Right," said Festing. "Send your name in for the South Durhams."

Young Pennefather did so. Then came the examination, when he passed out near the bottom of the list. The officer of his company spoke to him seriously.

"You'll have to buck up a good deal, my lad," he told him. "There is no room for slackers in the army these days."

Pennefather went on leave pending his being gazetted, and in due course there came a letter from the War Office informing him that he had been appointed to the South Durham Regiment, and that in three weeks time he would

embark in the *Brahmaputra* to join the 2nd Battalion, then stationed at Kamthi.

At Charing Cross station he met a number of the cadets who had passed out with him, all going to India, and among them Walter Festing. The latter was delighted to see him.

" So you and I are going to the old corps," he said. " Isn't it topping ?"

Never having been to sea before, Pennefather did not altogether enjoy the life on board ship, but it was when he arrived at Kamthi that his real troubles began. He had elected for the South Durhams simply because Festing was going to that regiment, and was ignorant of what his choice entailed. There is no doubt that the South Durhams is a splendid corps, but he was presently to discover that he was not in sympathy with them or they with him.

The regiment was largely recruited from the mining districts, and the men, though excellent soldiers, were rough in their ways and in their language. The officers, too, were drawn mainly from the same districts, son following father, and they understood their men. Here young Pennefather, who came from a Devonshire family, with his gentle, dreamy manner was out of place.

He was sent to " D " Company and allotted No. 13 Platoon. To some officers it would have been a difficult company, but Captain Wedderburn held it in the hollow of his hand. The men may not have loved him, but they certainly respected him. Their nickname for him was " the Butcher."

One morning on early parade the movements of the company were not satisfactory. The weather was hot and clammy and the temper of the captain was raucous. He tongue-lashed them with severity, and particularly did his animadversions fall on No. 13 Platoon.

" Company—Halt !" he ordered. " Stand at ease ! Mr. Pennefather, fall out !"

The youngster left his place, and going up to him, saluted. Captain Wedderburn looked at him for a moment with lowered brows.

" Why," he asked scathingly, " did you ever come to the army ?"

" I did not wish to come to the army, sir," returned the youngster unhappily.

" In that case, the sooner you leave it the better. You have no control over your men. A twelve-year-old-girl would have a better word of command than you have. Your voice reminds me of the curate in ' The Private Secretary.' And a curate you ought to have been. Join your platoon !" This was not supposed to be heard by the men in the ranks, but soldiers have quick ears. Thereafter young Pennefather was known among them as " the Curate."

Captain Wedderburn spoke to the adjutant.

" The fellow is useless," he said. " He will disgrace the battalion. We must get rid of him."

Life for Pennefather was very miserable. His friend, on the contrary, was quite happy ; he had fallen into the ways of the regiment at once.

" I think I'll give it up," Pennefather told him. " Soldiering doesn't suit me and I'll never get used to it."

" Rot," returned Festing. " It is all due to your confounded shyness. Stick it, old chap, stick it. You'll get accustomed to things after a bit. Never say die."

II

Pennefather honestly tried. He spend long hours over drill books in his own room, in the heat of an Indian summer night while his punkah-puller slept. While another would have thrown a boot at the native, he did not even expostulate with him. At other times he would go out alone and practise words of command, but his endeavours to improve himself were productive of no result. Save at meal hours he seldom went to the mess. A military mess is a happy family, but he was not of it. Dinner to him was martyrdom. While the other officers laughed and chatted, he sat silent, and as soon as dinner was over he returned to his room.

Then, quite suddenly, plague broke out with all its horrors. Commencing in the native quarter of the city, it presently reached the cantonments and several men of the South Durhams were attacked and died. Fear seized the whole regiment. Bravely enough they would have faced an

enemy's bullets, but this was something different, something mysterious and beyond their comprehension. An isolation camp was formed at some distance from the cantonments, and midway between, tables were placed to which food was taken and there left to be fetched by orderlies attending on the sick.

The colonel called a conference of the officers in the orderly-room.

"The men have got the wind up," he said. "They are young soldiers and all this is new to them. I don't blame them, but we must see to it that they don't get out of hand. I depend on you, gentlemen. They must be kept amused. For the present all drills are suspended. Amusement, any form of amusement, we must give them. They must not be allowed to brood, and at the same time, they must not be unduly tired. Concerts, theatricals, any dashed thing."

"What about gymkanas, sir?" asked the senior major.

"Excellent," replied the colonel. "All the officers must take part, so as to show an example, and as many of the men as possible."

A committee was at once formed under the presidency of the senior major, who was a horsy man; a programme was drawn up, and it was arranged that the first gymkana would be held on the following day.

"You are in this, Pennefather," said the adjutant. "What are you going in for?"

"Really, sir," that youth replied, "I am willing to help in any way in my power, but I am no good at that sort of thing."

"You don't appear to realize the situation," said the adjutant sternly. "You in common with all the officers must take an active part. If the men have a laugh at your expense, so much the better. I'll put you down for the pony race for a start. You can join in the donkey race afterwards."

Pennefather groaned inwardly, for, indeed, he was no equestrian.

The gymkana was held on some open ground at the back of the cantonments. With the exception of the men sick and on guard, the whole battalion was present. The band played stirring airs; the officers and non-commissioned

officers flitted about, taking names for and arranging the different events, the first of which was the officer's pony race.

Young Pennefather, having no pony of his own, had borrowed one ; indeed, it had been forced on him by the senior major. It was a little mare, 14.2, which he had discarded for polo and would willingly have sold, had he been able to obtain a buyer. The mare was distinctly skittish and showed more of the white of her eye than Pennefather liked, but there was no help for it.

He mounted, and then the bother began, so far as he was



HER RIDER DESCRIBED A PARABOLA OVER HER WITHERS.

concerned. The mare kicked up her heels and he had to hold on by the mane to save himself from being unseated.

"You dashed fool!" bawled the adjutant. "Press in your knees, man!"

"Look at the curate!" shouted one of the men. "He'll be off in two shakes." At this a great laugh went up.

"Capital!" said the colonel. "That's what we want. If the mare chucks him it will be all to the good."

"Line up!" cried the adjutant, who was officiating as starter. "Confound it all, this is a race, not a circus. Dash it, Pennefather, now you're facing the wrong way! Get your mount about. We can't spend all day over this."

Fifteen officers, mounted on various descriptions of horses, formed more or less in line.

"Ready!"

The pistol was fired and the race commenced.

There was a roar of laughter from something like eight hundred throats. The others had gone on, but Pennefather was still struggling to keep his seat. Setting his teeth, he clung on by bridle and mane, while the mare reared with head between her forelegs. The others had covered a hundred yards when she made up her mind to start. She broke into a mad gallop, Pennefather having no more control over her than a two-year-old child would have had. And she gained rapidly.

"Look at the curate!" shouted the men. "By Jinks, the curate is going to win!" And with another rider the mare might have done so, for she was as keen as mustard. Unfortunately, her keenness was Pennefather's undoing. Reaching the ruck, she was impelled to swerve for an opening, and her rider described a parabola over her withers.

"The curate is off; the curate is off!" yelled the men in glee.

The mare galloped on; Pennefather lay on the ground with a dislocated shoulder. He was also badly shaken, but worse than anything was the bitter consciousness that he had made himself the laughing-stock of the whole battalion. He rose painfully and made his way to his room.

"I believe that young fool is hurt," remarked the colonel to the adjutant. "You had better get a doctor to see him."

"Kidson is riding in the race," answered the adjutant. "I'll send him as soon as they come in."

Ten minutes later the doctor, accompanied by Festing, found Pennefather lying on the top of his bed. The former examined the injury.

"It isn't anything very much," he said. "You'll have to lie up for a day or two. Take hold of his arm, Festing, and pull like the dickens."

The operation, though painful, was soon over, and he was bandaged up.

"I'll drop in and see you to-morrow," said the doctor. "I must get back now. Are you coming, Festing?"

"I'll come presently," Festing replied. "Why did you ride that pony?" he asked when the doctor had gone.

"It was given to me," answered Pennefather wearily. "Major Dudgeon asked me to ride it."

"But he must have known that the mare wasn't safe."

"I don't know."

"I believe he knew that she would toss you, and wanted to raise a laugh."

"Perhaps so," said Pennefather. "It doesn't really matter."

"I do wish that you would show some grit, old man. You don't give yourself a chance. They all think that they can play with you. I must be off now. I'll come and sit with you when the gymkana is over."

To Pennefather's surprise, the day passed and Festing did not come. He heard tattoo beating and no one had come near him except a mess-servant with his lunch and dinner. He felt dispirited. Had Festing at last deserted him? Had the jeers of his brother officers proved too strong for his friendship?

On the following day the doctor came after breakfast and examined his shoulder.

"You are doing all right," he said. "Just keep quiet."

Pennefather's thoughts were of Festing. In spite of everything he might have dropped in, if only for a moment, to see how he was getting on. That he had not done so was not like Festing. Trying to speak lightly, he put a question to Kidson.

"Have you seen Festing this morning?"

"Yes," replied the doctor, a queer expression on his face.

"Is—is anything wrong?" asked Pennefather.

"He is ill."

So that was why he had not kept his promise. He knew that there must be a strong reason.

"What's the matter with him?" he asked anxiously.

"Don't get excited," returned the doctor. "I know that he and you are very friendly. Festing has caught—the plague!"

To Pennefather this seemed incredible; Festing of all people, who was always in the pink of fitness!

"Is—is he bad?"

"How can we say? There are the usual symptoms. He was taken to the isolation camp at six o'clock this morning, but he must have been ill last night, though he appears to have said nothing about it."

All that day Pennefather, alone in his room, thought of his friend. Had it been an ordinary illness he would have gone to see Festing, but the isolation camp was guarded by a cordon of sentries. As the day passed his anxiety became greater, the desire to see Festing irresistible. He heard the "First Post" sound, heard the drums and fifes beating off on the barrack square, the cadence falling on his heart like a knell. His friend, the only friend he had in the regiment, was going to die!

The "Last Post" sounding seemed to him an omen. The long-drawn-out notes of "Lights Out" were like an echo of his own despair. He could wait no longer. With difficulty he put on his greatcoat and stole from his room. From the ante-room he could hear the tinkling of a piano, and unthinkingly, he cursed his brother officers for their callousness, for there was much that he did not understand. He could hear the steady pacing of the sentry of the quarter-guard on the flagstones of his post. It seemed to him strange that everything was going on as usual while Festing was dying, perhaps was dead.

It was quite dark, but away in the distance he could see the faint lights of the isolation camp, and these were his

guide. By and by he drew near the cordon and dropped flat on the ground. He crawled forward and, hardly daring to breathe, managed to make his way between two of the sentries. He had still a good way to go, but painfully he crept on, his shoulder now aching badly.

He came to a marquee, and at a little distance from the marquee were two bell tents in each of which was a light. One of the bell tents, he judged, was for the attendants, the other would be that of Festing. As he lay he saw a man come out of the latter and go into the first. The coast clear : he crawled forward and entered the tent.

Festing lay on a bed, his eyes closed, and he was moaning as if in pain. Pennefather sat down on the floor of the tent and gazed into his friend's face. As if aware of his presence, Festing opened his eyes.

" Horry !" he exclaimed weakly. Then : " What are you doing here ?"

" I came to see you," Pennefather answered. " I am going to stay with you."

" You must be mad," said Festing between spasms of pain. " You can't understand what this means."

" I understand," Pennefather replied. " I am here, and here they must let me stay. I can't go back to the cantonments to carry infection, so they may as well let me remain to look after you."

" You fool !" said Festing. " You dear silly old fool !" Then, exhausted, he closed his eyes.

Soon afterwards the attendant returned and stared at Pennefather in amazement.

" How on earth did you come here, sir ?" he demanded.

" Does that matter ?" Pennefather asked with a smile. " You needn't stay. I'll look after Mr. Festing."

In the morning it was known in the cantonments that Second Lieutenant Pennefather had gone to the isolation camp, forcing the sentries in doing so. Having been in contact, he would have to remain there.

" Confounded young ass !" said the colonel wrathfully. " One hates to say so, but if he dies from the plague it is about the best thing that could happen." The colonel was

far from being an unsympathetic man, but he was going through a trying time.

Ten days passed, and to the astonishment of the doctor in charge of the camp, Festing had recovered, the only one of thirty. What was still more astonishing, Pennefather had not contracted the disease. The two returned to the cantonments together, Festing to be made much of, Pennefather to be placed under arrest for direct disobedience of orders. Next day he appeared before the colonel in the orderly-room.

"I don't know what to make of you, Mr. Pennefather," said the colonel. "You do not appear to have the slightest conception of the meaning of discipline. As an officer you are worse than useless. I need not tell you that you have rendered yourself liable to be tried by court martial, the result of which would be that you would be cashiered. I will give you the opportunity of resigning your commission quietly. You had better send in your papers at once. Until your resignation is accepted by the home authorities you will continue to do duty. That will do."

III

There was considerable unrest among the native population of the Central Provinces. In the city of Kamthi several prominent people had been murdered, among them two British inspectors of police, and the outbreak of the plague had made things worse. Illegal gatherings had to be dispersed by the troops, during which a number of soldiers had been injured. When not called out for this purpose they were confined to the cantonment, which, together with the fact that the pest was still making havoc in their ranks, caused them to become discontented.

The knowledge that he was awaiting the acceptance of his resignation put young Pennefather in a false position, which the men of No. 13 Platoon took advantage of, and they treated him more or less with defiance. Instead of taking active measures, he pleaded with them, the only result being that they laughed at him.

At one o'clock one morning he was awakened by the

sound of a bugle call. Since no call save one is sounded between "Lights Out" and "Reveille," he rose on his elbow to listen. Again came the call.

"The Alarm!" he said to himself. "I wonder what's up."

When the "Alarm" sounds every officer and man is required to rush to the barrack square and there fall in in such garments as can be donned most hastily. Second Lieutenant Pennefather dashed out attired in trousers and shirt, his boots unlaced. In less than five minutes the battalion stood in line of company columns on the square.

"South Durhams," called out the colonel, "the city is on fire, and it is for us to assist in putting the fires out. They are in different parts of the city, and officers must use their own discretion as to where their assistance is most needed. I depend on you men to do your utmost for the credit of the regiment. Form fours—right! Double march!"

Fires had broken out simultaneously in more than a dozen parts of the city, and the wooden houses were now burning furiously, while most of the native inhabitants looked on with apathy. That a conflagration had been planned was obvious enough, but by whom it was impossible to discover. The Hindus blamed the Moslems, and the Moslems the Hindus, for as always there was a great hatred between them. And among the *budmashes* this was an opportunity for looting which was being taken full advantage of. This engrossed the attention of the few native police, while the suppression of the fires was left to the military.

Their task was rendered the more difficult by the scarcity of water, which had to be obtained from wells. The native mind seems incapable of organization, and the civil authorities were helpless.

Just outside of the cantonments was a large stone building surrounded by a low wall. This building was used as a military store-house, and adjoining it were some wooden huts. A single sentry from the quarter-guard patrolled this place.

As "D" Company doubled down towards the native quarter, shadowy figures flitted about, vanishing in the darkness as the soldiers came in sight, their movements

distinctly suspicious. Captain Wedderburn was evidently of that opinion.

"No. 13 Platoon," he called out, "left incline!" and when the platoon had thus separated from the column, "Halt! About turn!"

This order surprised the men. Their platoon officer was a fool; that everybody knew, but surely they could be trusted to help in putting out a fire.

"Mr. Pennefather," went on the captain, "you will take your platoon back and guard the stores, and for goodness' sake, keep your wits about you. I should not be astonished if an attempt is made to loot them."

This seemed to the men a senseless order, since they were without arms. Not unnaturally, they laid the blame on their platoon commander. He was useless and best kept out of the way, but why should they be disgraced because he was incompetent?

"Double march!" ordered Pennefather, and they obeyed him until the remainder of the company was out of sight. Then they slackened to a walk. "Come on, men!" he said, but they took no notice. Some among them began to hoot him; others commenced to sing. "Silence!" said Pennefather, but he might as well not have spoken.

Suddenly a cry rose from a corporal.

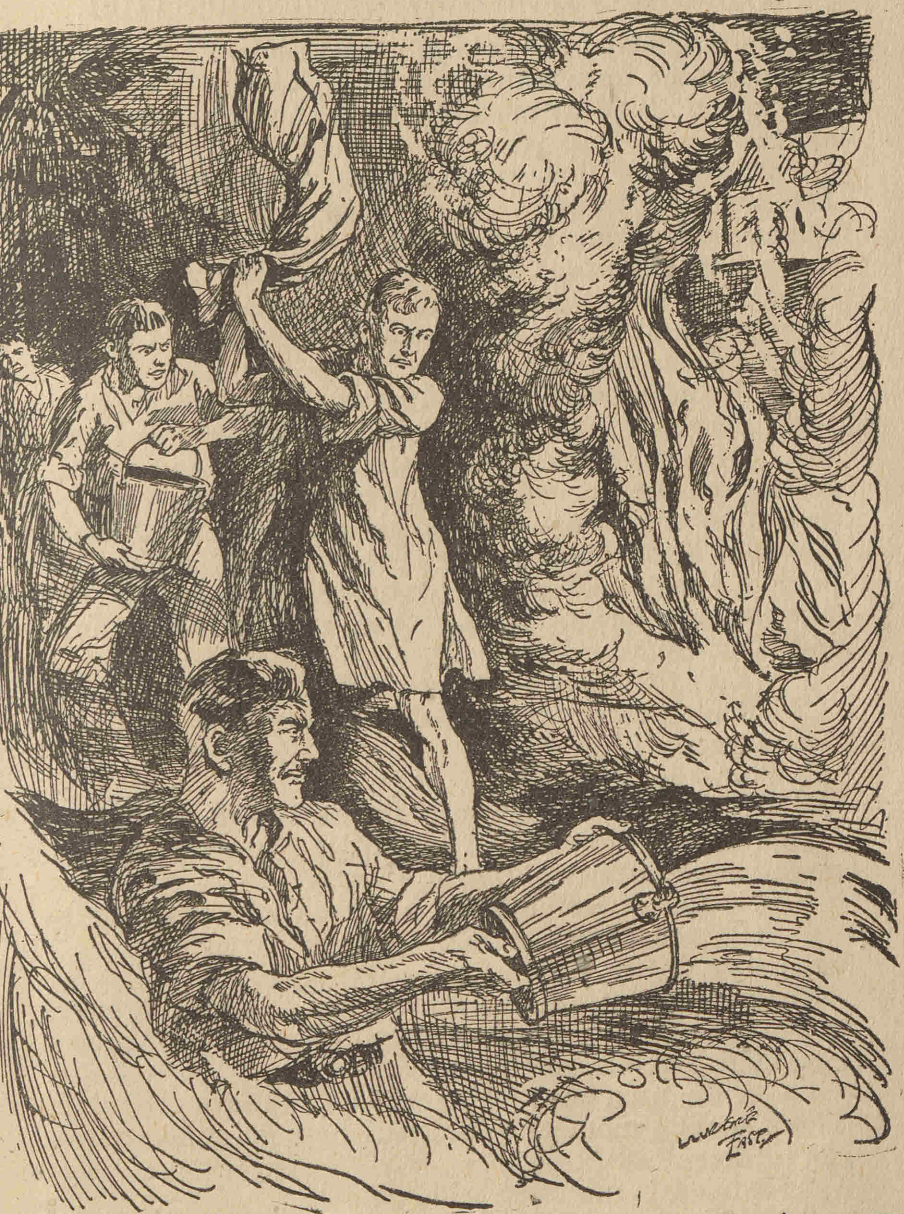
"By Cripps, the bloomin' huts are on fire!"

Here and there little tongues of flames became visible against the darkness of the night.

"Double, men!" shouted Second Lieutenant Pennefather, his voice like the crack of a whip, his tones such as the men had never heard from him before. And such was the effect that they rushed forward as they might have done in action.

The battalion possessed one antiquated fire-engine, but that had been taken by the leading company. Just within the enclosing wall and about sixty yards from the huts was a well, now long disused. Pennefather threw off the wooden cover and found that there was water in it. His orders were now terse and crisp.

"The three rear sections will double to the barracks and get pails from the rooms and a rope from the quartermaster's store. Corporal Fletcher, you will go in charge. If



"KEEP AT IT LADS!" YELLED PENNEFATHER. "DON'T GIVE IN. WE'LL MASTER IT YET."

there is any delay I will hold you responsible. The remainder of the platoon form a line from the well to the fire. Put life into it, men. The fire must be got under before it reaches the stores."

For the first time since joining the battalion Horace Pennefather felt happy. Wonderingly, the men sensed the change in him and they rushed to obey him. Buckets of water were drawn from the well and passed from hand to hand. The men worked hard, some pouring water on the flames, others beating them with their garments, but their task seemed hopeless.

"Keep at it, lads!" yelled Pennefather. "Don't give in. We'll master it yet." He himself was working as hard as any. He had stripped off his trousers in order to help in beating out the fire, and was now naked save for his shirt, several of the men following his example. And now it looked as if they were getting it under, but petrol had been poured about, and always it broke out in a fresh place.

A sergeant, looking like a gnome, came up to him quietly and whispered in his ear.

"What's that, Sergeant!" asked Pennefather impatiently.

"I don't want to frighten the men, sir, but what about the magazine?"

"The—the what?"

"The magazine, sir. Just at the back of the store."

The young officer had no knowledge of the existence of a magazine; had never heard of it.

"It is full of ammunition, sir," said the sergeant.

"You take charge here," returned Pennefather. "I am going to see."

He bounded off, and in a minute had returned. A stream of petrol had been poured right up to the door of the magazine, and on this sparks were falling.

"Get the men away!" he ordered. "Leave everything. There is not a moment to be lost. I am going to see what can be done."

"Hadn't I better come with you, sir?"

"NO!" snapped Pennefather. "Do as you are ordered."

He ran back to the magazine. He knew the risk he was taking, but he had provided for the safety of his men.

What it was possible to do he would do alone. Wherever the petrol burst into flame he beat it out with the remnants of his trousers, having nothing else. The heat from the burning huts was awful and every moment he expected the ammunition in the magazine to explode. He became faint, but he worked on. If he could only keep going until the fire of the huts had burnt itself out ! The flames had caught his shirt and he was now stark naked, and he was scorched all over, but he maintained the struggle. If the ammunition exploded the effect would be terrible.

" But the men are safe," he kept telling himself. " Whatever happens, thank goodness the men are safe."

He laboured until nature overcame him and he sank down insensible.

He regained consciousness with someone throwing water on his face. The sergeant was bending over him and the men of his platoon were crowding round.

" The magazine, Sergeant ?" he asked weakly.

" The magazine is all right, sir, thanks to you, and the fire is out. Everything is safe. Now we will carry you back to barracks."

" Carry me be hanged !" said Second Lieutenant Pennefather. " I would like you to understand that I command this platoon."

The men knew well that he had risked his life to save theirs, and they showed it.

" Three cheers for our platoon officer !" someone called out, and the cheers rang out again and again.

" That's all right, men," said Pennefather. " We have only done our duty, you and I, and that's what the South Durhams will always do. Sergeant, detail a party to remain and see that the fire doesn't break out again. Platoon, fall in ! Form fours—right ! Quick march !"

They were a queer-looking lot who, as day was breaking, marched into barracks with Second Lieutenant Pennefather, clothed only in soot, at their head.

The fires in the city had been eventually extinguished, and the officers of the South Durhams, dirty and smoke-begrimed, had assembled in the mess. There also was

Pennefather wrapped in his greatcoat, having been sent for before he had time to dress. The colonel, as dirty as any, had a glass in his hand and a smile on his face.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we have been saved from a great danger. I have just had a report from Second Lieutenant Pennefather. He wouldn't make a good war correspondent, for his report is the tamest thing I have ever listened to. Fortunately his platoon sergeant is better at that sort of thing, and what he says is somewhat different. I am not going into it just now, but this I want you all to understand; Pennefather's conduct was such as to make him a credit to any regiment, not excepting 'ours'. I ask you to drink to——"

"The Curate!" shouted Festing, waving his glass in the air.

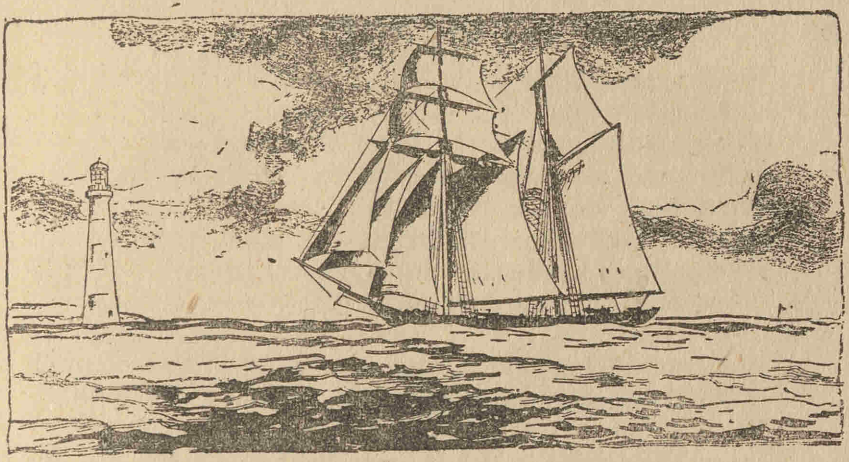
"The Curate!" cried every officer present. "And good luck to him!"

"I have taken a liberty, Pennefather," the colonel went on when the turmoil had subsided. "I have just sent a cable to the home authorities cancelling your resignation, for we can't afford to lose officers like you."

For a moment or two Pennefather was too overcome to speak.

"Thank you, sir," he answered brokenly then. "I—I am glad."





Deep Sea Plunderings

If one could be mine for the asking
Of all the ships there be,
The great and small and swift and tall
That sail the salty sea,
No battleship or mailboat,
No clipper fair and fine,
No yacht bescrolled with white and gold
Is the one I'd ask for mine.

MUNAVIRUL ISLAM HIG
Date.....
ERNAK

For some are too big for my fancy,
And some are too grand for me,
But a schooner smart is the ship of my heart,
Or a saucy brig maybe ;
I'd fit her with all things needful,
And then I would sign a crew
Of shipmates tried to stand by my side,
A cat, and a cockatoo.

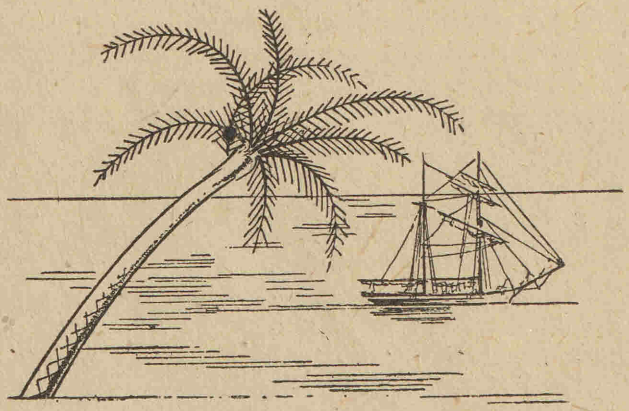
We'd wave goodbye to the lighthouse,
And the buoy on the leaping bar,
At the wind's sweet will our sails we'd fill,
We'd steer by a wandering star.
We'd follow the southbound swallow
To the coasts of sun and sand,
Where the desert drowns the ancient towns
In the heart of a thirsty land.

We'd take a slant to the northward
To the ice and the Arctic snows;
Then south again to the West Wind's reign
And the seas where the White Whale blows.
We'd bask on the tropic beaches,
And watch where the bright fish pass
In the pools sand-strewn of the still lagoon,
Through the water clear as glass.

We'd sail to the South Sea islands,
We'd call on a cannibal chief,
We'd fish for pearls where the long tide curls
On the fringe of the Barrier Reef;
We'd land on an isle uncharted,
Forgotten, far and lone,
And seek the hoard by a pirate stored
In a secret place unknown.

We'd ravage the coasts of wonder,
We'd plunder the ports of dream,
We'd store our hold with the Tropics' gold,
And the spoil of the spray-bow's gleam.
Till—weary at last of sailing,
And tired of the wind and the foam—
We'd steer once more for a well-loved shore,
And the open door of home!

C. Fox Smith.





LORD OF THE DESERT

By

JOHN TEMPLER

I

THERE was a hush as an orderly appeared in the doorway.

"Any news?"

"None, mon Capitaine."

The officer commanding the detachment of the Foreign Legion at Fort Bumo fingered his moustaches while his eyes travelled absent-mindedly round the table, resting for a moment on his subordinates before passing on to the two English flying-officers who were his guests. In the act of helping themselves to coffee Flight-Lieutenant Jayson, usually known as Jaggers, and Flying-Officer Winks, otherwise the Winkle, both of the Air Intelligence service, sensed a certain tension in the air. The others shrugged their shoulders and puffed at their cigarettes. Beyond the high adobe walls where sentries kept watch with the stars, the wash of the Atlantic surf could be plainly heard in the mess-room.

"Well, it's a great pity, but I warned him. He knew the risk; he took it and he lost. That's all there is to be said. Gold or no gold, I can do nothing more about it."

At the word gold Jaggers pricked up his ears, though the interlude had meant nothing to either of them. After a fortnight's leave, which had been spent in seeing something of the vast continent of Africa, they had arrived unexpectedly that evening *en route* from Dakar to Tangier. A strong head-wind had given them the option of landing on the emergency aerodrome at Bumo in the daylight, or risking a night landing at Fort Jebba, their objective, another hundred miles farther north. Nothing had made them regret their decision, for the Commandant had been hospitality itself. An inspection of one of the outposts of the Foreign Legion and a chat with some of the men had been followed by an excellent dinner. Throughout the meal they had been regaled with grim stories of the desert hinterland where French influence had done little more than penetrate the outer fringe ; and now that the hint of some tragedy had disturbed the conversation, they were all the more curious to know what it was.

" A queer business," observed the captain, who had caught Jaggers's look ; " perhaps you'd care to hear about it ?"

" There are very few people who don't find the subject of gold interesting. . . . You must excuse our curiosity."

" Not at all." The captain pointed to a huge map of the western Sahara that was hanging on the white-washed wall. " Can you see that range of mountains marked with a dotted line just north of latitude 27 ? Yes, Montagnes des Missas. They're about four hundred miles from here, but, apart from two lone expeditions that have almost made history, they're quite unexplored. You'll appreciate why when I tell you that every foot of that four hundred miles is sand—dry, merciless, shifting sand. There's not enough water in the whole area to moisten a postage stamp. There's not enough sustenance to keep a hunger-striking ant alive. It's never been known to rain, and if you were to go and live in the interior with a year's supply of whatever you might need, you'd never see a cloud the whole time you were there."

" What of the Arab tribes you've been talking about ?"

asked the Winkle. "Aren't they at home there? I thought they needed a mouthful of sand occasionally to help them digest their food."

"As a rule they keep to the desert tracks between the oases and the wells. All these lie round the area I'm referring to, leaving the mountains quite out of reach—but to return to the story. A year ago a prospector called Tesson turned up here with half a dozen camels, a motor tractor, and a portable wireless set, announcing his intention of making for the mountains. We did our best to dissuade him—but off he went. Strangely enough, he got through, and we've had occasional messages from him, such as, 'Am well. Good water here,' or, 'Water abundant. In good health.'" The captain grinned sardonically. "But about a fortnight ago he sent us a message that caused quite a sensation. I'll read it to you."

He took a paper from his pocket and held it up to the light.

"'Leaving here at dawn to-morrow with five camels laden with gold. Tractor disabled. Please send escort to meet me and arrange to drop supplies by air.' You can imagine that that made us sit up. Well, I telegraphed headquarters in code, but there was a leakage somewhere, and soon the news was all over Morocco that gold had been discovered in the Missas Mountains. Aeroplanes went out with water and supplies and I sent a dozen men a day's journey to meet him. Now, there was a good chance that things might have turned out all right, but as it was, luck was dead against him. Twenty-four hours after the message was received a dust storm got up that must have swept half the Sahara into the Mediterranean. The aeroplanes had to turn back, and my men just managed to crawl home, choked and half blinded by the flying sand. But that was only the beginning of it. That confounded *mistral* raged for a week. Of course the poor fellow hadn't a hope in this world of getting through. He perished as surely as if he had fallen twenty thousand feet on to a slab of stone."

The two flying-officers nodded while the others stared at the ceiling. By the strained look in their eyes it was

obvious that they knew something of the pangs of extreme thirst.

"*Ca y est.* But with the lure of gold in the distance I should have been surprised if somebody hadn't turned up to try to rout it out. Sure enough, a few days ago a queer-looking individual who appeared to be suffering from a dose of fever landed here in a Breguet and set out at dawn the next day to look for Tesson. His name was Joubert and I liked him. But I had to warn him that if he didn't come back, rescue was impossible. Nobody's heard a word from him since—so there he is, out there"—the captain waved his hand—"obviously stranded, and we can do nothing about it."

The captain was right. Both Jaggers and the Winkle knew that if a man goes ahead in defiance of experienced judgment and gets lost, he has no right to expect other men to risk their lives hunting for him.

"Supposing he's down outside the barren area," asked Jaggers, "wouldn't some of these Touaregs be likely to pick him up and bring him in?"

The captain smiled mirthlessly. "That depends. Some of them might. But if he falls into the hands of El Djibbah, I wouldn't give five sous for his chances."

"El Djibbah?"

The captain's eyes hardened. "The self-styled Lord of the Desert, or Public Enemy No. 1. With a price of fifty thousand francs on his head, he's been a thorn in our side ever since I can remember. At the head of a mob of two or three hundred picked men, he comes sweeping over the desert on his racing-camels to attack and pillage where and when you least expect him. For cunning, cruelty, and nerve, there isn't an Arab in the whole of Africa that can hold a candle to him. But in some ways he's a *grand chevalier*—what you call a sportsman. They say he talks four or five languages, and that he's a master in the art of disguise. We've had as many as three thousand men chasing after him at one time, and when we thought we'd got him, he just slipped through our fingers like butter. Mention his name in any village from Timbuktu to Agadir, and the whole population will bolt for the inside of their

huts. No, if El Djibbah has got hold of Joubert, it'll take a Rockefeller or a gold-mine to buy him out."

II

Dawn was breaking as the *Corsair*, the amphibian Jaggers was piloting, was wheeled out on to the landing-ground. The Winkle climbed into the bow cockpit and sniffed the air. Away to his left the long line of surf disappeared in a white haze against the sand-dunes ; to the right was a long ridge of sand, and beyond the limits of his vision sand, and nothing but sand, for hundreds of miles. The little fort stood out clean and white and friendly in the growing light. Overtopped by the French tricolour, which stirred slightly in the first puffs of the morning breeze, it seemed to embody the resolute attempts of a great colonial power to make an Empire out of a slice of wilderness as big as Europe. Giving it a last glance, Jaggers pressed the self-starters, and the wings and hull of the *Corsair* trembled slightly as the two engines burst into song. The captain waved his hand and stepped out of the slip-stream ; clouds of dust were hurled back, and as the wheels of the under-carriage started to bite into the sand, the sentries on the wall gave a farewell salute. A minute later the *Corsair* was in the air.

" I like this part of the world," said the Winkle presently. " In spite of the desolation, there's something in the atmosphere that gets me. What a nice crowd of fellows."

Jaggers eased the throttles back and settled himself in his seat. " Gibraltar by nightfall, and then back to Europe again. Well, I must say we've had a wonderful trip. It was pretty decent of the Old Man to let us go—though with one thing and another, it's cost us a pretty packet. . . . But I wish I could have——" He broke off and stared wistfully over his right shoulder.

" What——?"

" I'd have given a lot to meet this El Djibbah."

The Winkle snorted. " Kind'a romantic, ain't you ?" he said vulgarly. " If we had him trussed up in this cabin, I shouldn't mind saying How-de-do to him myself. That fifty thousand francs would have paid for our petrol and

left a bit over for the next time. As it is, we want no truck with bandits, and you can thank your lucky stars we haven't got mixed up in the kind of shimozzle that seems to start whenever we're around."

There was a great deal to be said for this point of view, and Jaggers knew it. But things had run so smoothly that in spite of themselves they had found the tour a trifle dull. Duller still was the fact that ahead of them stretched hundreds of miles of one of the most monotonous coast-lines in the world. The day was bright and sunny, but they had already seen too much of that long white line of surf dividing the endless sea from the endless sand to take much interest in it. All they had to do was to follow until the tall cliffs of Cape Spartel signified the last of Africa.

Thus they came to Fort Jebba, passed over it, and resigned themselves to another strip of barren and deserted coast-line. An occasional flock of sea-birds rose as they roared by, but they saw no sign of humanity until a moving dot on the sand ahead gave them something to look at. As they approached they could make out a camel and rider heading in the opposite direction, and they would have passed over had not the rider dismounted and started to wave his arms frantically above his head.

"Is he just being friendly, or does he want the latest football results?" asked the Winkle.

Jaggers frowned and banked over to the left. The man's gestures became even more frantic, and there was no doubt that he was in urgent need of something. It was impossible to neglect such an obvious appeal, and selecting a firm-looking strip of sand, the pilot brought the *Corsair* down within hailing distance. Instantly the man began to urge his unwilling animal towards the amphibian, and leaving the engines ticking over, they climbed down to meet him.

"Thanks be to Allah, the all-merciful," he cried out in French. "Had you passed over I might have been too late."

They looked at him with interest. Clad in a white jellebah and burnous, he was dressed as any Arab might be in that part of the world. A rifle was slung over one shoulder, and from the other hung a goat-skin water-bag. He was



"WHAT'S THE TROUBLE?" DEMANDED JAGGERS.

dirty and unkempt, and the harassed look on his face was accentuated by extreme fatigue. His back was bent in a pronounced stoop.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Jaggers.

Turning on his heel, the man pointed dramatically at the desert. "Back there lies an aeroplane, unable to rise," he said, in a deep voice. "The pilot was forced down and, in landing, broke his propeller. By the grace of Allah it so happened that I came across him, and he agreed to pay me two thousand francs if I would bring help. He has enough food and water for a week, but I have already been three days on the journey, and many miles lie ahead before I can reach Fort Jebba——"

"Great Scott," exclaimed the Winkle, "that must be Joubert."

Date.....

The man's eyes flashed. " That was his name. You know him ?"

Jaggers nodded, his eyes scanning the other's face. " Did he give you a message—something written on a piece of paper ?"

Before replying, the Arab turned to his camel and reached for a bundle that was hanging from the far side of the saddle. " This is all he gave me," he said simply ; " I was to hand it to the Commandant at Jebba and ask that a new one should be flown out and dropped by parachute."

In an instant Jaggers had the object in his hands. It was the boss of a broken propeller, and he could see that while one of the blades had snapped off at the root leaving a jagged edge, the other had been sawn off for lightness. After a brief examination an idea struck him, and climbing up into the *Corsair*, he reappeared a moment later with a grin on his face.

" It fits," he cried jubilantly ; " the mounting's a standard one ! If we can find Joubert, our spare prop. will do the trick. Obviously he knows he's able to take off again or he wouldn't have sent it in. Come on, Abdullah, or whatever your name is, hop in. It may not be easy to follow your tracks from the air, but we're going to have a darned good try. As long as you remember that a mistake is likely to cost you two thousand francs, we shan't be likely to go far wrong. Jump to it."

At this the man's face fell, and he spread his hands in a wide gesture of protest. " My camel," he wailed ; " I can't leave my camel. He is worth more than double the money to me; he is the only one I possess, and I can't leave——"

" Never mind the camel," snapped the Winkle. " One hump more or less in the world won't make much difference. We'll see you don't lose by this. Anyhow, he's sure to make for the nearest water, and ten to one you'll find him at Fort Jebba when we get back. Come on, now, hop in."

Muttering to himself, the Arab was hustled into the bow cockpit, while a rap on the shank sent the animal trotting off in a southerly direction. The engines roared, and the *Corsair* left the sand in a faultless take-off. A few minutes later waves of hot air rose to meet them, and while

the Arab glued his eyes to the thin line of footprints that marked the route they were to follow, they left the cool belt of the sea for the unknown hazards of the desert.

To cross a long stretch of uninhabited desert would appear no worse than flying over the empty wastes of some uncharted sea : in either case a mishap is certain to lead to the same result. But there is something active and friendly about the sea. Ships forge their way through it ; unlimited species of life abound in its depths ; and if death has to come, as a rule it comes quickly. Not so the desert. Should a man be so unfortunate as to lose himself in an eternity of sand dunes, his end is a ghastly one. At the first pangs of thirst panic seizes him, and he starts to run in wide right-hand circles, often crossing and re-crossing his tracks until madness ends a long period of unspeakable torment. Of this the two friends were well aware ; and after two hours spent in following the faint line of tracks that seemed to lead on and on into nowhere, they began to eye their petrol gauges with some misgiving. To jeopardize their chances of return was not only foolish but criminal, and Jaggers was on the point of abandoning the search when a series of violent gestures from the Arab put all other thoughts from his mind.

" By Jove, he's right," cried the Winkle breathlessly. " Look there."

Some distance ahead there was a break in the desert where the sand-dunes fell back to expose a smooth outcrop slightly elevated like a low-lying atoll in the midst of the ocean. This was by no means the first of these " breaks " they had passed on their route, but this time the unmistakable form of a monoplane stood out in sharp relief, and with a shout of triumph, Jaggers dived down towards it. But no sooner had they approached than they met with their first rebuff. Circling round, they could make out the sawn-off blade of the propeller lying close at hand, but of the pilot there was no sign whatsoever. Look where they would, he was nowhere to be seen.

On the heels of disappointment came apprehension, for presently they spotted a clue to his disappearance. Round the base of the outcrop the sand had been freshly churned up by innumerable footprints, which narrowed at one

point and led out into the desert like the tail of a comet. It was clear that they had been anticipated. Willingly or unwillingly, Joubert must have gone off with a band of visitors whose intentions could hardly have been as disinterested as their own.

"Would you believe it?" exclaimed Jaggers bitterly. "That looks mighty unpleasant to me. I don't suppose the poor blighter had much option. Of course, they might have been a friendly tribe, but—what are we to do?"

While the Winkle was eyeing the improvised landing-ground with every sign of suspicion, the Arab continued to point vehemently towards the machine. They glanced at each other and shrugged their shoulders.

"Firm enough," hazarded the Winkle, "but too many stones for my liking. Shall we risk it?"

Jaggers shut off the engines and started to descend. Then with a sudden and characteristic resolve, he side-slipped a hundred feet and flattened out. As the outcrop rose to meet them the wheels touched, rebounded, and with a series of grinding thuds the *Corsair* came to rest close to the disabled machine.

"Snappy work," cried the Winkle, wiping his brow with relief; "let's hope we can get off again as easily. Now we'll see if we can read the writing on the wall."

A brief survey of the Breguet did little to enlighten them as to the fate of the pilot. The Arab's face was glum, and to every question he pointed to the footprints, shrugging his shoulders and muttering to himself in Arabic. Various tools lay round about suggesting that Joubert had occupied himself in rectifying the fault that had brought him down, but there was neither food nor water in the cockpit, nor any message to furnish any kind of a lead. Whereupon Jaggers proceeded to make a more thorough investigation, which proved fruitless until he came to the two petrol tanks. Here he met with a discovery as unexpected as it was baffling. The front tank was almost full to the brim, and when he unscrewed the cap of the rear container he was astonished to find that petrol lay within a finger's depth of the top. Unable to believe his eyes, he put his nose to the opening. It was petrol all right, but since the

engine must have consumed at least two-thirds of the capacity of one tank in getting to the spot, where on earth had Joubert obtained his new supply ? He looked round carefully. There were no empty tins or receptacles lying about. What was the explanation ?

" At any rate," he observed eventually, " this means that we can fill up our own tanks and carry on to see where the tracks lead."

The Winkle nodded, though there was not much enthusiasm in the gesture, and they were debating the wisdom of the suggestion when something happened to change the entire situation. Engrossed in the problem, they had temporarily forgotten the man who had accompanied them, and when a shot rang out immediately behind them, crisp and startling in the heat-laden air, they whipped round in amazement to find themselves confronting their guide at an interval of ten yards. A thin trail of smoke came from the muzzle of his rifle, which he was pointing into the air with the easy nonchalance of an expert. As they stared at him uncomprehendingly, they became aware of a change in his appearance. The senile, humiliating stoop had gone, and now, erect and powerful, he towered a head and shoulders above either of them. An air of resolute purpose had displaced the worried look on his face, and this was tempered by a mocking smile that dissolved forthwith into a roar of laughter.

Jaggers was the first to recover, and as he eyed the Arab he was conscious of a queer feeling in the pit of his stomach.

" That must be a first-class joke," he said ironically. " We'd like to hear it while you're still in the mood. Will it take long, or would you prefer to reload your rifle first ?"

Without taking his eyes off them, the Arab pressed the trigger again, and a second shot rang out. Simultaneously the Winkle and Jaggers, who by this time realized that the shot was some kind of a signal, leapt forward plucking at the holsters of their revolvers ; but the bolt of the rifle flashed in and out with the speed of lightning, and before the empty cartridge case had hit the sand the muzzle was covering them with a menacing gesture that brooked no argument.

Their attack was frustrated even though it had hardly begun.

"Sit down," said the Arab quietly, in English.

The Winkle's lip curled and he turned sideways. As he opened his mouth to say something a third shot rang out, and this time a bullet whistled through the narrow gap between them.

"Sit down."

They sat down.

"Lean back on your hands. Good! Now ask your questions."

The Winkle ground his teeth. "Name, address, and purpose of visit," he snapped, "and make the answers short and to the point."

The black eyes of their captor twinkled as he grasped the defiance behind the words. He bowed slightly with an air of amused disdain.

"My name is El Djibbah"—here Jaggers's nostrils twitched—"and I have many titles, not the least of which is the Scourge of Allah. Perhaps a little later I may show you why many unbelievers, from Agadir to Timbuktu, from Algiers to Dakar, call me the Scourge of Allah—but that can wait. As to my address, it is here. My dwelling-place is the Great Sahara."

So this was the man with the price on his head! At the first sound of the English language Jaggers had guessed as much, and now he found himself regarding the man he had hoped to meet with anything but satisfaction.

"Why have you brought us here?"

El Djibbah sniffed contemptuously. "Since you have already heard of Tesson and the man who went to look for him, why ask such a foolish question? Somewhere between here and yonder mountains"—he pointed to a distant blur on the horizon—"lies the lost gold. In need of an aeroplane to find it, Allah presented me with one, and thanks to the well-known generosity of the English, I now have two. Does that satisfy you?"

"I suppose it'll have to. What happened to Joubert?"

"He will be here presently with the rest of my followers." El Djibbah had worked his way to within a couple of paces of their rear, and now, with a swift gesture, he jerked

the weapons out of their holsters and threw them far out into the sand. Never before had Jaggers realized so keenly the disadvantage of a sitting posture. "In the meantime, you can get up and occupy yourselves in fitting the new propeller."

The Winkle snorted and folded his arms. "I don't know where bad Mohammedans go when they die," he said hotly, "but I'll see you there first. I wouldn't move a finger if the whole of that engine was sitting on your chest. And don't forget you can take a horse to the water, but——"

"Perhaps not," flashed El Djibbah, "but you can prevent him from drinking, which is very much worse. Now get to your feet, or, by Allah, I'll——"

The rest of the threat, sinister as it was, would have had little effect on the Winkle had not Jaggers intervened.

"Come on, old boy," he said, getting up, "anything rather than sit around here. It's what we came to do in any case, and that ground is too hot for my liking."

Sensing some hidden motive, the Winkle followed his friend's example, and under the keen scrutiny of the sheikh and the menace of his rifle, they set about fitting the new propeller. This occupied a very short time, some of which Jaggers contrived to spend in a further examination of the petrol tanks; and they were wiping their hands when a distant sound reached their ears, and they turned to see a band of white-clad mounted Arabs breasting the ridge of a neighbouring sand-dune. In less than a minute they were entirely surrounded by a mob of plunging, snorting, racing-camels whose riders eyed them threateningly.

While Jaggers scanned the assembly in vain for a glimpse of Joubert, El Djibbah, who was greeted on all sides with profound respect, seemed equally concerned at his non-appearance. Question and answer followed rapidly in Arabic, and by the increasing hubbub that arose it was soon clear that something was wrong. Eventually, the Lord of the Desert turned to his captives and held up his hand, whereupon instant silence fell.

"Joubert is dead," he announced harshly. "When we took him the other day he was running a high fever, and in spite of every effort of my men to keep him alive, he died in the early hours of this morning."

The retort that sprang to the Winkle's lips was checked by a sign from Jaggers, who realized that in all probability this was the truth.

"Well and what now?"

El Djibbah shrugged his shoulders ironically. "Were it not for your presence I should be unable to proceed. As it is, we shall lose no time in setting out in your machine to look for the missing gold."

Jaggers glanced at his watch. The morning was well advanced and the sun's rays had already lifted the temperature to uncomfortable heights. For some moments he stood staring into space, the stern lines of his face giving no hint to his thoughts. Then his head came round until he met the hard, unyielding eyes of his captor.

"And, may I ask, what happens to us afterwards—supposing we find it?"

Pondering his answer, the sheikh looked them up and down contemptuously. "If you had been French," he said with a sneer, "I should have asked thirty thousand francs for the two of you. As it is, the English government is known to be generous in these affairs, and your price will be fifty thousand. If they pay it—well and good. If not—that will be your misfortune," and his hands spread over the desert in a gesture that left no doubt of their fate. To these merciless tribesmen a human life was worth only what it would fetch in hard cash. There was a moment's pause, and then Jaggers stepped forward.

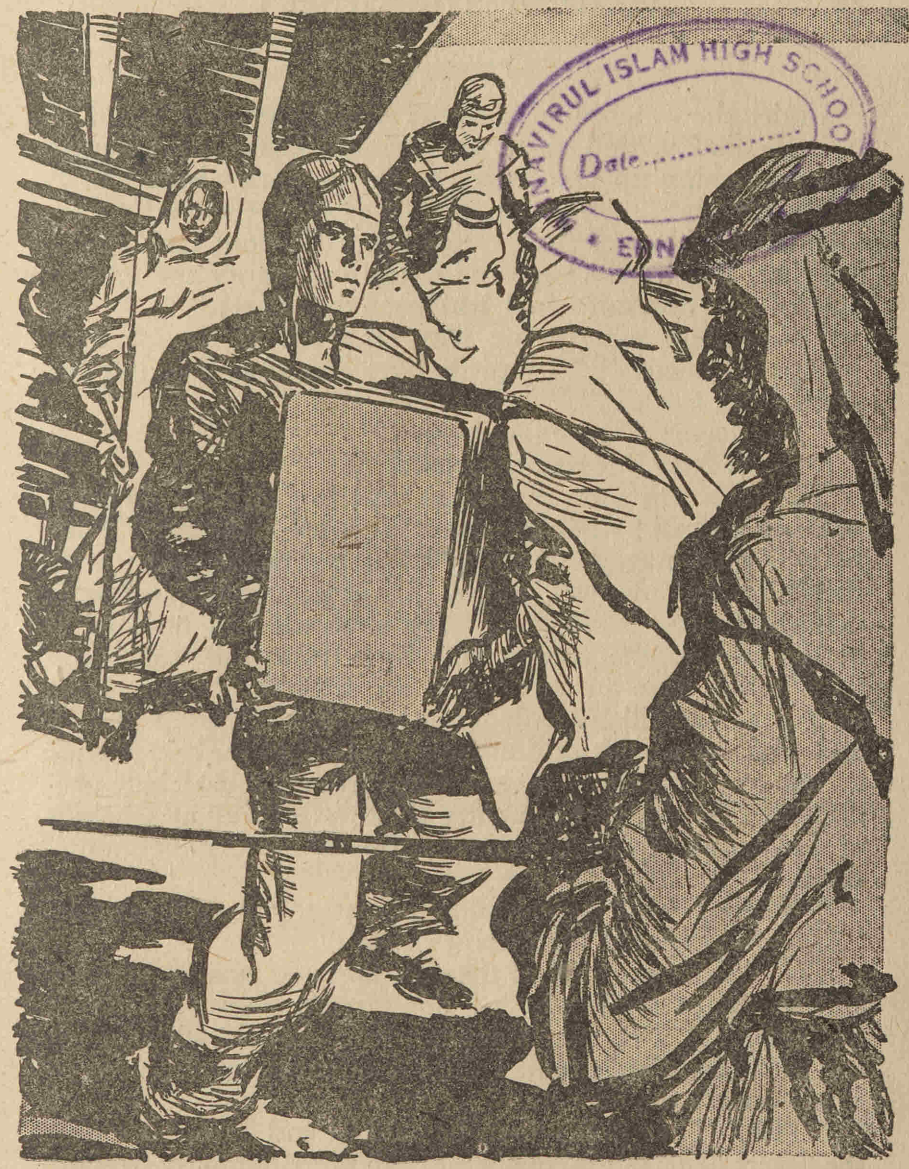
"El Djibbah," he said, and his voice was unusually mild, "we are not in a position to drive a bargain, and we know it. As soon as the necessary preparations are made we will start."

The Arab nodded, but his eyes did not leave the other's face.

"What preparations?"

Jaggers glanced at the *Corsair* and then back to the Breguet. "This search may take the rest of the day. I, for one, do not wish to run the risk of being stranded far out in this confounded desert. We must have more petrol."

"You can take what is left from the smaller machine," said the other curtly. "See to it without delay."



UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYES OF THE ARABS, THEY GOT DOWN TO IT IMMEDIATELY.

MUNAVIRUL ISLAM HIGH SCHOOL
Date.....
ERNAKULAM

III

Under the watchful eyes of the Arabs, they got down to it immediately, and since the Winkle knew that Jaggers had something up his sleeve, he set to work with a will to carry out instructions. An empty oil-drum served to replenish the tanks of the *Corsair* from the front tank of the Breguet, and by the time the latter was empty the greater part of the necessary fuel had been transferred.

"Now help me rip the rear tank out of its seating," whispered Jaggers; "I want it carried over as it is and put aboard the *Corsair*."

"But haven't we enough——?"

"Do as I say," hissed his friend.

The tank was soon dislodged, and to Jaggers's surprise, nothing was said when he asked for some assistance. Four hefty Arabs staggered across the intervening space with their cumbersome load, and by dint of great effort and some damage to the paint-work, they succeeded in housing it at the foot of the companion-way. When all was ready El Djibbah gave an order, and accompanied by an escort of two of his villainous-looking followers, climbed aboard and took up a position immediately behind the two friends in the control cabin. A hot wind from the east helped a difficult take-off, and presently they were flying at a height of five hundred feet in the direction of the distant mountains.

"Winkle," said Jaggers suddenly, steadying the controls, "are you prepared for instant death?"

The Winkle scowled at the rifle jammed against his side and scratched his head. "I don't really know, old boy," he replied. "I've been having a little trouble with one of my back teeth lately, and I think I ought to have it seen to first. What's the idea?"

"This. That rather than be yanked and bartered round the desert like a pound of cheese, I'm prepared to fly straight into the ditch. D'you agree?"

"Anything you say," said the puzzled Winkle.

"Good! Then we're now in a position to bargain. A moment for reflection and then let us proceed."

If El Djibbah missed the subtler points of this conversation, he did not fail to grasp the purport of it. A dark scowl settled on his handsome face. " Bah," he said, " keep your idle chatter for another time. Such nonsense will avail you nothing."

Jaggers feigned an air of hurt surprise. " On the contrary, O Scourge of Allah, I was never more serious in my life. Unless you or your hirelings can fly an aeroplane—which I know you can't—I now hold five lives in the hollow of my hand. Two are already worthless—you've told me so yourself. One twist of my foot, one flick of my wrist, and we all go to eternity together. Think it over for a moment."

" Idle boasting," scoffed El Djibbah. " Words, nothing but vain and empty words. Let me see you do it."

Before the sentence was out of his mouth the stick had gone forward, and the *Corsair* fell away beneath them. Straight as an arrow the bow cockpit hurled itself towards the sand. With an oath El Djibbah sprang forward and wrenched at the stick ; and the shrill whine of the dive echoed in their ears as the *Corsair* missed the sand by a margin that to inexperienced eyes seemed perilously narrow. Half-way up the zoom that carried them clear El Djibbah whipped out a knife.

" Do that again, you dog, and I'll slit your throat from ear to ear," he roared.,

" Which will amount to the same thing," came the imperturbable reply, " but mind you don't cut yourself. It's rather bumpy and that blade looks mighty sharp. Are you ready ?"

Full left rudder took them off their balance and caused the amphibian to skid wildly across the sky. The knife was drawn back ; the trigger fingers of the Arabs stiffened—but nothing happened.

" We can play at this all day," went on the pilot relentlessly, jerking the machine into a sickening side-slip ; " it's a matter of whose nerves will get jumpy first. At any moment I may go a fraction too far or one of the controls may snap. But who cares ?"

El Djibbah's eyes were blazing ; his beard quivered,

and for a terrible moment it seemed as if he would really carry out his threat. As once again the machine swooped madly, he controlled himself with a superhuman effort

"Find me the remains of Tesson and his camels and you shall go free," he hissed. "That's my last word. Take it or leave it. Not another inch will I go."

For the first time Jaggers was conscious of the cold sweat that had been trickling down his spine. When he nodded, the Winkle swallowed hard to hide his relief. "That's all I wanted. Give me your word that when I find the missing camels you'll let us take off unharmed in our machine within two minutes of putting you down among your followers."

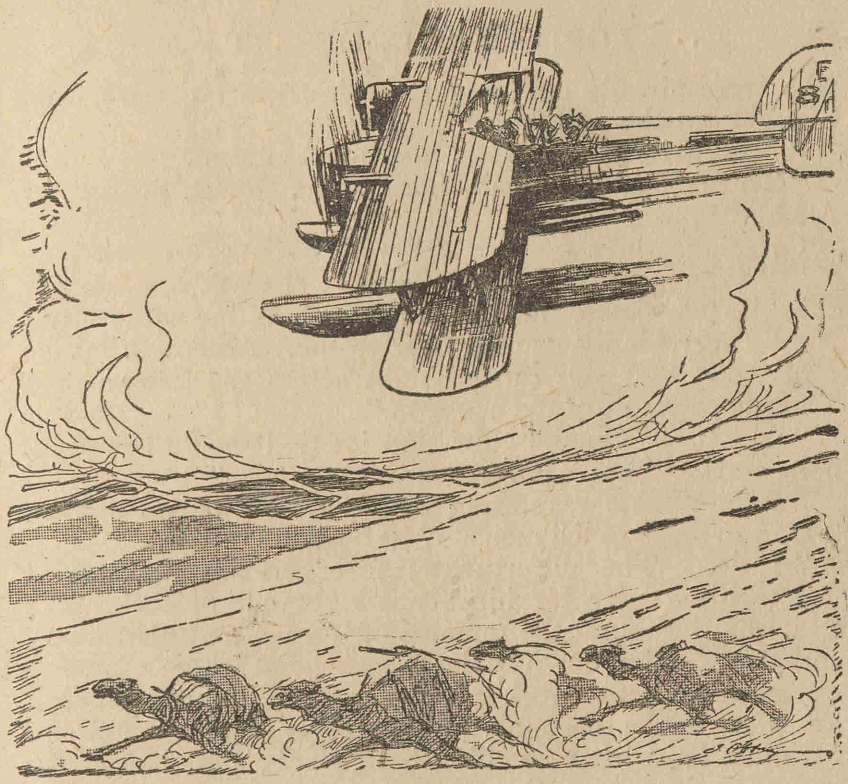
The growl of angry assent that issued from the sheikh showed that the power he wielded in his own domains had not accustomed him to opposition. But Jaggers knew instinctively that once he had given his word he would keep it, and straightway brought the *Corsair* round in a right-angle turn.

"Then we'll waste no more time," he said. "I've a strong hunch we'll find the remains not far from where we took off."

Climbing steeply, they soon had an extensive view of the interminable hillocks and valleys of sand for miles round. To El Djibbah's astonishment Jaggers proved to be right: lying in a hollow less than half a mile from the outcrop was all that was left of the unfortunate prospector and his transport. Although visible from the air, it was obvious that one might hunt for a year on the ground and never find it; and the discovery banished some of the venom from the sheikh's eyes.

"Put us down and you can go," he said peremptorily.

The landing of the *Corsair* caused a stampede among the camels clustered round the outcrop. Jaggers thought of their extra load and muttered a silent prayer; but the hot breeze had stiffened, and the amphibian hove to with her undercarriage still intact. Then El Djibbah motioned to the two Arabs, stepped into the companion-way, and looked back.



THE LANDING OF THE *CORSAIR* CAUSED A STAMPEDE AMONG THE CAMELS.

"Get you gone," he said harshly; "and be sure that next time we meet I shall not forget."

"Sheikhs and elephants never forget," murmured the Winkle.

The two friends sat motionless until three successive vibrations told them that their enemies had quitted the machine. Instantly the port engine roared, round came the tail, and the faithful *Corsair* swept past the mob of plunging camels into safety. Not until they were a thousand feet up did Jaggers relax.

"Phew," he breathed, wiping his brow, "that's quite enough excitement for one morning. Will you reach for the note-book and pencil we keep in the locker?"

The Winkle peered down at the line of white-clad riders

who were already speeding towards their objective, and brought out the note-book.

"Now write as I dictate," instructed Jaggers.

"To Sheikh El Djibbah, Lord of the Desert, Scourge of Allah, &c., &c.,

Greeting.

"When you came across Joubert, the gold was already in the rear tank of his machine which in due course your men very kindly handed over to me. Accept the piece of wood that you carried right across the Sahara as a fitting souvenir of the occasion."

"Got that? Good. Now sign it; tie it on to the prop. boss, and we'll heave it overboard."

But the Winkle was staring blankly at what he had written. "Do you mean to tell me——" he began.

"I do. The unfortunate, fever-stricken Joubert—I feel terribly sorry for him—was right out of luck. It's clear that he found the remains of Tesson and his camels, and after coming down at the nearest point where a landing was possible, set to work to transfer the gold dust, hiding it for safety in the rear tank. Those relays of journeys to and fro must have been gruelling hard work; and then at the end of it all to crash on his take-off, smash his prop., and be taken prisoner to die in the hands of those villains—a tragic affair, you must admit."

"But how in the name of Caesar did you spot that the gold was inside the tank?"

Jaggers grinned. "D'you happen to know of any make of machine that can finish a long flight with full tanks? If so, let me know and we'll buy a couple. I felt sure something else was there besides petrol, and when we were fixing the new prop. I seized the opportunity to find out. Go and take a look if you don't believe me."

Once more the mob of grunting camels scattered as the *Corsair* roared down at them from the sky. But what El Djibbah said when he picked up the propeller boss cannot be repeated here—not even in Arabic.

CASTLES IN THE AIR

By MAJOR J. T. GORMAN.

I

THE swirling skein of water, winding between clay banks, seemed to pause in its momentum to send thick threads to right and left, into the many tortuous creeks and channels. The rays of the sun, shining through the feathered tops of the date-palms, struck no glint from that cocoa-coloured stream; the Tigris wriggled its way through the dreary plains of Mesopotamia like a big, khaki snake.

At the mouth of one of the creeks a fleet of native boats, mahailas and bellums, manned by Arabs, had disembarked the advanced troops of the Indian Expeditionary Force D, brown as the Arabs themselves and unwillingly camouflaged into something quite in keeping with their surroundings.

"Shure, not even the loving eyes of our mothers would know us for the smartest men in the smartest rigiment in all India," Mike Dooligan said disconsolately to his companions, Jim Leslie and Jock McClosky of the Royal Skibbereens. "Mud pies, that's all we are."



He was making a vain attempt to remove the clinging coat of filth from his puttees with a service jack-knife, and only suc-

ceeding in transferring a certain portion of it to his hands and face.

"Ay, 'tis war, mon." McClosky passed his big red-haired hand gloomily over his bristly face. "I've not washed nor shaved for ten days, and ah'm dragging roond half Mespot on ma boots. But the papers and the generals say oor fechtin' spirit is gr-r-rand."

"They always do," Mike remarked. "I rimimber wanst the Sergeant-major asked a fellow in hospital what book he'd like to read, an' he said annything at all excipt the Life of a Gineral. Bedad, I agree wid him!"

"Oh, I don't know." Jim Leslie, having finished scraping his mud-clogged rifle, was inclined to be philosophic, as he examined the extent of the grime on his face in the mirror of a trench periscope. "It's no use grumbling after all."

"Is ut me thin?" Mike turned wondering, innocent and reproachful eyes upon his friend. "Grumble is ut, indade? I'd have ye know that I'd follow the Gineral and his Staff, as meek as Mary's little lamb, to the gates of——. All right, Jock, I'll say no more, knowing that ye're a Presbyterian."

Jock appeared as though he might have had something very explicit to answer, had not the Company Sergeant-major appeared at that moment, and all language, on the part of the men at least, was suspended.

His coming meant an end of even comparative rest.

"Dooligan, Leslie, and McClosky," rang out the stentorian voice. "You're first for fatigue. Fall in at once."

The fatigue wasn't much in itself—taking out a quantity of ammunition in bandoliers to a front line detached post a mile away. But there was not a little difficulty in finding the way, and after delivering the goods the three prepared to return campwards more tired and mud-encrusted than ever. For this was the end of an extremely imperfect day.

The encrusted mud was the most noticeable result of an attack made by the force that morning, in the attempt to advance from the landing-place at Shwayabit and take the town of Qurna. Jim, Mike, and Jock could have described that movement more graphically, if less printably, than any

military correspondent, but its main feature had been the slimy glutinous mud through which men, animals, and transport carts ploughed their way for six or seven miles, the carts often so bogged as to require sections and platoons to drag them clear.

In the end the Turks were discovered to be in greater strength than was expected, and the force retired after desultory fighting, to wait reinforcements.

"And information, too, so I heard," Jim said, as the three discussed matters during that tramp campwards. "Our Intelligence hasn't been intelligent enough, and we don't know enough about their dispositions in Qurna, how it's held and so on. We shan't make another move till we've found out more."

"Shure, it only manes sitting still in the mud instid of walking through it," Mike said despondently. "Soldiering's a rotten job, an' if I ever mate Sergeant Reilly agin I'll tell him so."

"Who was Sergeant Reilly?" Jim asked.

"Why, him that's responsible for me an' Jock being here, no less. He 'listed us for the Cavalry, but my feet were too small for the stirrups and Jock's were too large. So we transferred to the Skibbereens, eh, Jock?"

With a sideways glance at the dour Scot, the small Irishman broke into song:

'Twas at the Fair of Donnybrook that I met Sergeant Reilly,
He had a feather in his hat an' smiled at me so coyly.
To join the Army I'd no moind, so I his words resisted,
He put a shillin' in me fist, and, be the powers, I 'listed!
March an' fight, left an' right,
Advancin' and retratin',
Row-dow-dow, oh, hear the row
The merry drums are batin'.

"Ah, shut up," McClosky grumbled, scowling. "It makes me sick tae hear ye singing like a fule, when I'm wi' a blister on my heel that's like tae lame me for a week. And—I thocht ye said ye knew the way back tae camp, Jim?"

"I thought so, too," said Jim rather lugubriously. "But

it seems much further than I expected, and it's so misty all round that it's hard to see anything."

"Except that we're lost," McClosky said with gloom. "We've been tramping for hours tae get nowhere. Mespot's naught but mud, mist, and muddle."

"An mosquitoes later, they're afther telling me—the sort that's big enough to sit up an' beg, like dogs," Mike added cheerfully. "Though there's no mosquito could have the hunger that's in me this minut."

"Well, it's all right; you'll be eating your supper in half an hour. Look, there's the camp." Leslie's tone was relieved, as he pointed away across the level mud-flats.

The mist had lifted from the horizon like a curtain, and showed a grove of date-palms, and the surface of water gleaming like dull, beaten silver, with mists drifting away from it, giving a strange beauty to a scene that would have been welcome enough in any shape to the weary men.

"The camp ut is—thim white patches are the tents," Mike said with lively satisfaction, and McClosky declared that he could make out the masts of the fleet of native boats alongside the river-bank.

All their woes, including McClosky's blister, were forgotten and they plunged forward through the mud cheerfully, to the goal which had seemed at first to be a couple of miles away at the most. But distances in Mesopotamia are more deceptive than they had imagined; after tramping for half an hour they seemed no nearer to the camp, and at another hour's end Mike came to a sudden standstill, staring, and rubbing his eyes in bewilderment.

"Where's ut gone to?" he gasped. "'Twas there a minut ago, the tents an' the masts and the river, and now they're gone."

"The mist must have come up again—no, there isn't any." Leslie too was staring away across the plain, but there was dismayed comprehension growing in his face. "I'm afraid—Yes, I know what it is now, you fellows—mirage!"

II

" Mirage ?" McClosky repeated dully, and Mike added, " I've heard of that, but what is ut ?"

" Don't you have it in India ? Well, I've seen something of the sort on the east coast of England, and it's common in Arabia and Egypt and here, too, I suppose, though I didn't remember till this minute. Mirage—it's hard to explain—it's a sort of reflection on mist, I believe, the reflection of something that may be many miles away."

" D'you mane that the camp is ?" Mike demanded.

" Yes—and I don't even know that it's bound to be in that direction at all ; I've no idea except that it isn't where we thought it was." Leslie spoke hopelessly. " I suppose we may as well go that way as any other."

" Do you mean tae tell me that the watter we saw wi' our ane eyes isn't watter, nor the trees, trees ?" McClosky demanded.

" That's right," Leslie nodded ruefully.

" An' ye ca' it mirage ? It's magic, I'd be callin' it—black magic. It's no canny ; ye'd see naething like that in Scotland, nor in any ither Christian country."

" Shure, if we see things that aren't there in Ireland, we don't call it mirage." Mike's cheerfulness rose even above the shock of the disappointment. " A farmer in me town tould his friend 'twould be time to be going home whin he saw two candles instid of wan. An' the friend said he believed him so, because 'twas he himself could see three——"

" Ah, can't ye be done wi' joking ?" McClosky burst out angrily, and proceeded to curse Mesopotamia and all its works deeply. " I'll believe naething I see in this awfu' country any mair," he concluded. " Tis all lies and cheats like that watter."

" Well, if we don't make a start, the dark'll catch us out here," Jim Leslie said.

" An' perhaps you, that are so clever and talk of going in for a commission, 'll tell us which way to start ?" McClosky said fiercely. " What aboot this compass o' your's

and marching on a bearing ? Ye'll be naught of an officer if ye can't dae a wee thing like that."

" I'm afraid it's no good." Jim fingered the prismatic compass in his pocket shamefacedly. " You see, I haven't got a bearing of the camp. But we can use the compass to keep us on a straight line, and prevent us from marching in circles."

" As if I couldna' walk straight wi'out yer wee compass," McClosky protested indignantly.

However, since any direction was better than none, they set off again, on a line which Leslie decided would lead eventually to the river, although it was only Dooligan who made any pretence at keeping up his spirits, or attempting to cheer the others. And even his heart failed when, after tramping for another half hour, they encountered a new obstacle.

Mud, muddle, mist, and mirage had been bad enough, but suddenly they came upon a most unpleasant addition to the M's of Mesopotamia in the shape of a marsh, stretching right across their front, with clumps of reeds rising here and there from dark, stagnant water, which even their present thirst could not find drinkable. At first they only waded to the knees, but presently they were stumbling along waist-deep, and called upon constantly to rescue each other from hidden holes. Moreover, another very sinister possibility was suggested by Mike.

" Somewan was tellin' me that the Turks have all these marshes mined," he said. " An' there's another bad, black M for yez !"

" Nae doot this is the devil's ane country," McClosky growled, as he stumbled into a deep hole and only saved himself by clutching at a tuft of reeds. Leslie and Dooligan floundered to his rescue, but could see only a substantial and mud-encrusted pair of legs kicking amongst the rushes.

III

" Quick, help me to haul him out, Mike—he'll be smothered," Jim exclaimed, but it soon appeared that the



A SUBSTANTIAL AND MUD ENCRUSTED PAIR OF LEGS KICKING AMONGST THE RUSHES.

cavity into which the Scot had fallen was not mere marsh or natural growth. It was something that bobbed up and down in the water, making vigorous attempts to float away—a round, black shape like a gigantic reed-woven pudding-basin, covered outside with a kind of canvas, smeared thickly with black and tarry bituminous matter.

Steadying it on each side, but unsteady themselves with laughter, Mike and Leslie persuaded McClosky to right himself, and presently he sat gasping and dishevelled in the bottom of the bobbing craft, like a Scottish Wise Man of Gotham about to voyage in his tub.

"'Tis a clothes-basket of this cursed country, Ah'm thinking," he ejaculated.

"Thin you're wrong for wanst in your life," Dooligan told him. "'Tis a rale Irish boat. Shure, don't we call thim 'curraghs,' and didn't me grand-dad and his grand-dad before him use thim for ginerations?"

"Thin ye were all mair of fules than I thocht," McClosky retorted. "Nae Christian boatie was ever shaped like this."

"Mike's right though, for I've seen one something like it in Wales," Leslie said. "Coracles, they call them there. And we'll use it to get along a bit quicker; I used to be quite a dab at rowing."

The object which Mike had rightly diagnosed as a native boat, or "ghafar," gave a sideways bob, as though in mockery of this aspiration. But worse was to come when Leslie climbed in and he and McClosky endeavoured to propel it with a small paddle, found in the bottom. They hauled out from the reeds into a comparatively clear space of water, but here a demon seemed to enter into the curragh, and instead of making the faintest progress it merely whirled round and round in circles, until McClosky clung to the side and declared in muffled tones that he would be sea-sick if it went on much longer.

"Ma stomach could never stand thae swing-boats!" he gasped. "Can't ye stop it, Mike, ye dithering fule!"

Mike had been watching the naval manœuvres helpless with laughter, but now he came to the rescue and clutched the rim of the bowl.

"I'm afther rimimbering how me grand-dad managed ut," he said. "Git ye out, Jock, an' push behint whin I tell ye."

Under Dooligan's more or less skilled management, the ghafar finally consented to waddle along slowly, although, as McClosky remarked with gloom, it was *he* who acted as the propeller.

Mike's skill increased with practice: working the paddle from one side to the other, they were soon moving quite rapidly, and McClosky was taken on board. The progress was somewhat wobbly, and monotony was avoided by the ghafar's constant collisions with clumps of reeds and other obstacles.

These same reeds grew so high that they obscured the

view from water-level, and the three men in a boat voyaged for a considerable time without seeing anything but their immediate surroundings. Only when they swung out into a wider, clearer stretch of water did a sudden vision appear before their astonished eyes.

IV

A kind of Eastern fairy-tale city rose above the edge of the swamp, tall towers and flat-roofed buildings of blue and yellow, pink and white, surrounded by a fringe of date-palms, and catching the low rays of the sun.

"I say, my bearing's taken us somewhere after all!" Leslie cried, whilst Dooligan waved his paddle.

"We'll put on full steam ahead, and git there in the shake ov a lamb's tail," he exclaimed; but at this juncture McClosky suddenly and weightily assumed command.

"Ah'll not hev it," he said, nearly capsizing the ghafar by the vigour with which he brought down his huge fist on the gunwale. "Ah've had eneuch of this hanky-panky. It's not there, that town ye think ye see yonder; it's naething but anither lyin' mirage."

"Oh, come, Jock, I can't believe that," Jim protested. "Look at the colour of the houses, and I can see people moving about."

"Ye were certain before," McClosky said inexorably. "I'll nae be misled again by yer 'certains.' Keep tae yer bearing, Jim, and gae straight ahead; ye'll no mak' *me* turn off again, onyway, sae juist row on and tak' no heed of the mirage. Ah'm the oldest soldier here, and ah'll knock down either o' ye that mutinies."

There was something impressive in McClosky's certainty, as he sat glowering out over the gleaming water at the distant towers, as though he would stare them out of countenance. And it really seemed to have this effect, for wreaths of mist rose again from the marsh and veiled the horizon and the dream-city, so that even Jim began to have misgivings. After all, the camp had looked very real, too, and——

"Whist! Bob down—take cover!"

Dooligan gripped his arm and spoke in a tense whisper. "Look over there, an' git rifles ready. 'Tis an outpost of Arabs."

The little Irishman crouched as low as he could in the ghafar and then, after dragging Leslie down beside him, rested his rifle on the gunwale, whilst McClosky's deepset eyes glowed with excitement as he sighted the group of tall figures, motionless amongst the reeds, but plainly alert and watchful.

"Arabs it is," he breathed, and assumed command once more as the undoubted best shot of the party. "Make for that big clump of reeds, Mike ; we'll let them have it at five hundred yards. Aim low, an' wait for me ; Ah'll give the word."

The ghafar waddled slowly along the course indicated, and McClosky prepared to give the command which would scatter, if not completely break up, that little body of the enemy.

"Rapid——" he began, but the last word of the order was cut off, as the outpost—of flamingoes—rose majestically clear of the deceptive mists and sailed away, white and rose-pink in the upper sunlight. The crew of the ghafar resumed what is known in the Army as the rest position, and McClosky muttered savagely, "Thae cursed mirage again! We'll not be able to believe that we're oorselves soon!"

Jim Leslie found himself reduced to almost that same uncertainty. He and his companions were experiencing on a smaller scale that bewilderment, that confusion of the senses, which the whole Tigris Force for the relief of Kut was to suffer from later in the campaign—when the Battle of Sheikh Sa'ad became in part a contest against positions that dissolved into thin air when approached, against picquets of Arabs that proved to be mules, goats that were mistaken for bodies of cavalry, and artillery that turned out to be transport carts.

A land of deceit in which nothing was precisely what it seemed—that was Mesopotamia as it appeared to successive reinforcements of the Tigris column, and as it was now appearing to our small amphibious force of three.

That bewilderment—that muddle of sight and sense—thoroughly exasperated Jim Leslie, who was very stubbornly English in character, and liked things to be and to remain exactly what they appeared. He stared as defiantly as McClosky at the town, which had suddenly reappeared and seemed to have taken a great stride nearer to them. There was something very dreamlike in the way that had happened: no gradual appearance of high buildings first, as one would have expected, but the whole town in its entirety, standing up from the surrounding flatness, lighted for a moment by the sunset, which was gradually being absorbed by the surrounding shadows.

Nearest of all to the voyagers, a square-topped tower standing apart from the rest of the town rose like a guardian, its lengthening shadow stretching out across the water-spaces, a spectral sentinel.

"I don't care," Leslie answered McClosky's challenge. "It may be another mirage, but we'll treat it as if it was real, and see what happens. Turn her head round that way, Mike."

But Dooligan was already propelling the ghafar in the direction of the tower.

"Ye're going against ma orders," growled McClosky. "An' ye're twa fules, gin ye'll let yerselves be deceived again, the third time, by the mirage."

"That tower's solid enough, whatever the rest may be," declared Jim. "And there are men moving about it too."

"Birds again," said McClosky. "*Birds*, I tell ye."

"They're turkeys, so," grinned Mike. "An' that nest of theirs may have some nasty kind of eggs in ut. Not that I can see many of those mirage-men of your's, Jim, but there's others guarding the mud wall in front. Phwat if they don't vanish into air, me lad, whin we git near?"

"We'll tackle them" Leslie declared. "We've got to do something."

"Oh, I'm willing!" Dooligan agreed. "Annything for a quiet life, an' plinty ov good fighting."

"Ye can't fecht air," McClosky said stubbornly; but his shaggy brows were drawn down over his eyes as he stared at the sandbag-strengthened mud wall, and the others knew

that he would go with them anywhere and anyhow, in spite of his grumbling and mocking.

Above the sandbags the heads of detached sentries showed here and there, and Dooligan jerked his thumb towards them.

" If we're agreed to threat thim as real, 'tis some sort of plan that we should be afther makin'," he said. " Shure, it won't do to sail straight into their mouths, even if the Turks are not there at all, at all. But these reeds that's hiding thim from us now may go on doing that same thing."

Briefly, Dooligan's plan was to cut down bundles of the reeds and camouflage the ghafar with them, so that it would only seem a part of its marshy surroundings. The crew would lie in the bottom ; but since in this position the paddle could not be used, McClosky, as the strongest man of the party, was detailed to push the boat along again, keeping as much hidden as he could, until they were close to the fort.

Grumbling and muttering, he accomplished this part of the business, while the two others concealed themselves beneath the reeds. Progress was slow, and the sun was well below the horizon when they reached a point near the mud walls, and still well concealed by reed clumps, although, as Dooligan said, they " could hear the mirages talkin' Turkish !"

" An' we've played Moses in the bulrushes long enough," he added. " 'Tis time for a bit of an attack under cover of the darkness. Now's yer chanst, Jim, to show how ye'll act whin ye're an officer ; they can't see how manny ov us there are, and 'tis beholden to us to riprisint the whole of the Skibbereens, not to say the British Army in Mespot. An' if so, why wouldn't we attack an' take the place ? What d'ye say, Jock ?"

" Ah, carry on !" McClosky said ungraciously. " I'll fecht if there's onything tae fecht, and why shouldna Jim there tak' command and get us out of the fix if he can, since it was he that led us intilt."

There was no reason for delay, so plans were made and carried out swiftly. The ghafar was tied up amongst the reeds, and the Expeditionary Force took once more to the water.

Jim Leslie's heart beat fast as he realized his responsibility for this part of the affair, and that the others trusted to him to carry it through effectively. From a point close to the wall they loosed three bursts of rapid rifle fire, which, rattling out over the water, sounded like a number of machine-guns in action.

Following immediately on this, Jim shouted a succession of orders, first to the 16th Platoon, then in different and deeper tones to Number 3 Company. With the emergency inspiration came to him; he almost believed himself to be half a dozen officers at once as he bellowed his words of command, and Mike and McClosky made almost enough noise between them for a battalion of Skibbereens as they splashed up to the walls.

Another burst of fire and they were scrambling over the parapet. The Turkish sentries, thoroughly convinced that they were exposed to an attack by the whole British force, threw down their arms and fled, yelling.

Events passed with marvellous rapidity. The three turned their attention towards the tower itself, only to find themselves involved in an outrush of the garrison, which had also heard the sound of battle, and interpreted it as freely as the imaginative sentries.

With much clattering of accoutrements, stamping of feet, and shouting of incoherent commands, they poured out, helter-skelter, in uniform of all states of undress and dress, many dragging bundles with them and a few making futile attempts to saddle and mount a number of small Arab ponies.

Mike chuckled in the shadows that " 'twas like a counthry race-meeting in Oireland," the while he continued to make martial noises, and to increase that unreasoning, if not altogether unreasonable, panic which was spreading amongst the Turks.

The rabble clattered away after the flying sentries along a mud causeway which seemed to lead into the main part of the tower, leaving behind them a trail of discarded rifles and accoutrements, of ammunition, cooking-pots, and food-stuff, such as dates and oranges. But there was no time at the moment for the British force to mop up this loot, as Dooligan

expressed it. Their first business was to occupy the tower, now presumably empty, and it was at this juncture that, for the first time, Leslie and Dooligan realized that McClosky was missing.

V

As the two questioned each other regarding their companion and his possible whereabouts they were running towards the tower, and it was standing just within its dark entrance that they heard a shot fired overhead, and a well-known shout.

They made a simultaneous rush for the stairs.

"Begorra, poor old Jock's killed or wounded," gasped Mike. "Just our bad luck for that to happen at the ind of ut all. Come on thin!"

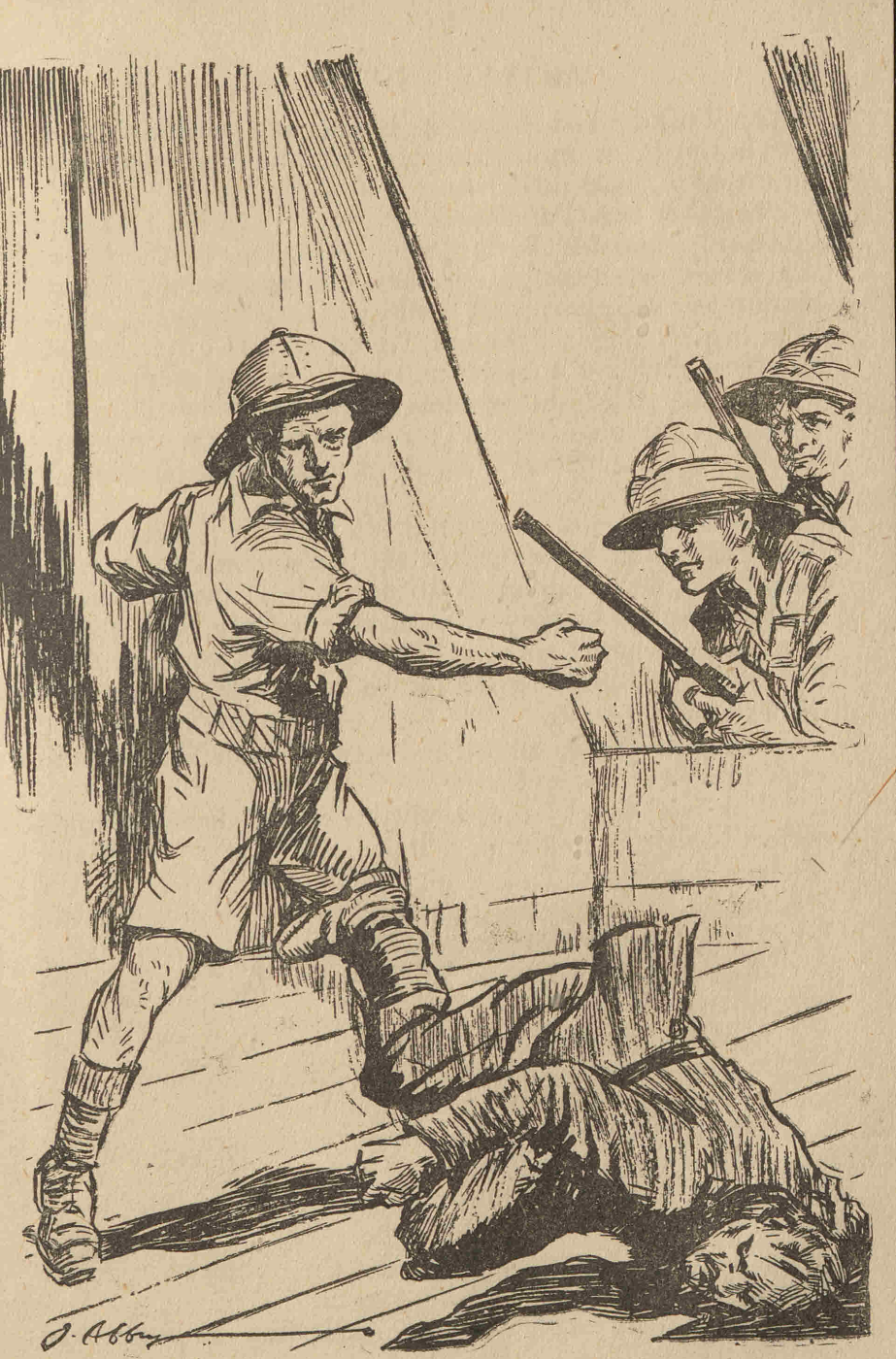
He was clattering up the stairs three at a time, with Leslie close behind him. They reached the head of the stairway, and here, in the open room which topped the tower, came upon McClosky—and the consequences of McClosky's presence there.

A Turk was just picking himself up from one corner with a profusely bleeding nose; another was lying in a stunned huddle across a table, and in the middle of the room was the Scot himself engaged in conflict.

He was showering blows on a tall, well set-up Turk, and getting them, too, for his adversary was no coward, and he was landing punches on McClosky's chest and body in spite of the Scot's countering.

For a few seconds Leslie and Dooligan looked on breathlessly; even in this moment of conflict and victory, such a fight as this was not to be missed. But it did not last long after their arrival on the scene; almost immediately the Turk took McClosky's stunning blow just beneath the jaw, and fell like a bull. Leslie and Dooligan were beside him in a moment, helping the half-unconscious man to his feet, and bringing him round with water from an earthen pot while McClosky, his face all blood and his left eye swollen and black, came over to shake the Turk's hand heartily.

"Ye're the maist substantial mirage I ever happed across," he declared. "An' mon, ye can fecht!"



SUCH A FIGHT AS THIS WAS NOT TO BE MISSED.

The Turk smiled as well as he was able, and said in uncertain but quite understandable English, " You—too good for me. You fight three men. I only one."

The other two Turks, partially recovered now, looked on sheepishly, and McClosky shook them, too, by the hands, as good tempered and genial as his comrades had ever known him under the influence of battle.

In broken English, the tall Turk told his story. He was an officer, Nadir Bimbashi, and, with his two companions, was in charge of the wireless station established in this tower, on the outskirts of Qurna—" What you Enlis' call the Garden of Eden," he explained, with a flash of beautifully white teeth.

He himself would have wished to hold the position when the British attack came, but the defenders had become uncontrollable, Buddoo Arab levies and badly trained Turkish recruits as they were, and he had not been able to stop the panic and the flight. This he feared would apply to the whole garrison of Qurna ; it would be difficult to induce them to make a stand.

" I s'all giv' parole for self and men," he concluded. " But what are your names ?"

" This is Colonel James Leslie," the Irishman answered, perfect innocence and gravity in his blue eyes. " I'm Major Michael Dooligan, and Captain McClosky here is the descendant of a great Scottish clan, faith !—attached to the Royal Skibbereens for fighting purposes. The remainder of our forces and our transport are bivouacked in the marshes just outside the town."

The Turk listened gravely, and equally gravely unbuckled his sword and handed it to Jim, who managed to control himself sufficiently to ask him to keep it.

But meanwhile an idea had occurred to him, as his eye fell on the wireless installation.

" I know a bit about transmission," he said to McClosky and Dooligan, " How would it be if we send through a message to Headquarters—give 'em the information about Qurna that they've been asking for, eh ?"

Within a very short time the following message was

concocted by the three and transmitted by Jim, while the Turks watched gravely.

" To Head Quarters,
1st Bn. Royal Skibbereens.
Shwayabit, I.E.F.D.

Attacked Turks who have retired. We hold position believed to be Garden of Eden. aaa. Time 0830. *Awaiting reinforcements.*

98146. *Pte. Leslie.*
6108. *Pte. Dooligan.*
7463. *Pte. McClosky.*
No. 16 *Platoon,* 1*st Bn. Royal Skibbereens."*



The chain of responsibility which governed Force "D" was soon in operation. The Skibbereen's Colonel reported his message to the General commanding, adding that the three men in question had been reported missing, believed dead.

Back came the message from the General that he had just received an intimation from the Turkish commander in Qurna that he was prepared to surrender the town, and that the delegates for this purpose would meet him in a Turkish gunboat to discuss terms.

The actual surrender took place a few hours later, and the general public never realized why the Turks surrendered so suddenly and unexpectedly. Only the members of the Force actually in occupation of Qurna at that hour knew all the facts, and later the Colonel of the Royal Skibbereens when he pinned D.C.M.'s on to three dirty khaki shirts.

The ghafar carried a green regimental camp colour, bearing a yellow harp and crown, with the Skibbereens' motto, " Quis Separabit," and formed part of the river transport of Indian Expeditionary Force D for as long as the Skibbereens were fighting in that land of the many M's.



THE GREEN SCORPION

By MAJOR CHARLES GILSON.

I

EVEN in the dullest lives there are joyous occasions; and Dick Kimber, though he was only eighteen years of age, had already had his triumphs. The first of these was when he got his cricket colours at school; the next, when, after some preliminary training in the work of surveying, his uncle, Sir Robert Kimber, offered to take him out to China. But probably the proudest moment of all was when he was given the first responsible job of his life.

He and his uncle had gone up the Long River in South China into the very heart of the country. Sir Robert, who was a big man in the shipping world and owned a line of coasting vessels that worked between the treaty ports, proposed to open up as a modern trade route not only the Long River and Si-kiang, but many of the larger tributaries that drain the southern province of Kwang-si.

Yunnan, which lies in the very south-west of China, is one of the richest provinces in the country; and the only trade route by means of which exports can be conveyed to

Canton and Hongkong is the Si-kiang. Since time immemorial, waterways—both rivers and canals—have been the only main thoroughfares in China ; and from ancient times until the present day these thoroughfares have always been molested by lawless bands of pirates.

These gentry interfere with trade and terrorize the peasantry. Indeed, they are at times so great a menace that commerce is brought to a temporary standstill ; and it was for this reason that a deputation of wealthy Chinese merchants journeyed from the city of Sin-chau to Hongkong to make a business proposition to Sir Robert.

It was thus that the great River Syndicate came into existence, and Sir Robert Kimber undertook to launch a fleet of steamboats on the Si-kiang, each of which would have the freight capacity of half a dozen old-fashioned junks and be capable of carrying a light quickfiring gun.

However, the scheme—which was financed largely with Chinese capital—was not so simple as it seemed ; for there were mud banks that had to be dredged, and sharp bends, which could not be negotiated by sea-going ships, where canals would have to be cut, to say nothing of the construction of suitable wharves where the Syndicate's vessels could be berthed and take on cargo.

It was therefore necessary, in the first place, to survey the main river and its tributaries, for no reliable maps existed. And it was Dick Kimber who had been entrusted by his uncle with the task of making a rough map of the lower reaches of the Yu River, which joins the Long River a little above Sinchau.

For several days now Dick had been busy with his prismatic compass, with which he took observations in the form of magnetic bearings, jotting down his results in a notebook. As is customary, he worked from a base, the two ends of which were marked by means of short steel-pointed posts, painted in alternate bands of black and white, which he hammered into the ground.

He had entered heart and soul into the work. He had gone up the river unattended by any one but the Chinese coolie in charge of his *sampan*—a grinning, good-natured fellow who never seemed to tire.

Dick had been warned by his uncle to look out for danger, since the Yu River was supposed to be the headquarters of one of the most desperate pirate gangs; and for this reason, at first he had exercised the greatest caution—especially when he had been obliged to pass through a narrow ravine where there were great boulders and scattered trees on either bank. Just the type of country a band of cut-throats would select for a happy hunting-ground—a narrow defile where the river was only a few yards across.

However, as days passed and he saw no one but the inoffensive peasants working in the rice fields, he began to suspect that all the rumours he had heard were nonsense. And it was not until he had almost finished his work and was about to return to Sin-chau, where he had arranged to rejoin his uncle, that certain misadventures came his way that made him change his mind.

Leaving the coolie in charge of the *sampan*, he had gone ashore a little below the ravine, which lay not more than half a mile above the junction of the Yu with the main river. He had taken with him his two base posts, and, having climbed to the top of a long hog-backed ridge from which he was able to obtain a good view of the surrounding country, he drove the first of these posts into the ground.

Carefully and slowly he then paced a hundred yards along the ridge in order to obtain the other end of his base—the point where he would drive in the second post. The top of the ridge, if moderately flat, was strewn with innumerable boulders of all shapes and sizes; also there were various shrubs and clumps of lank grasses growing on the crestline.

He had driven in his second post, from which he had already taken one or two magnetic observations, when he suddenly lost sight of the first post. Presuming that the thing had tumbled down, he retraced his steps along the ridge to the other end of his base.

The post had disappeared. There could be no doubt about that. It had vanished as suddenly and as mysteriously as if it had been spirited away.

As Dick himself afterwards described it to his uncle, he stood there gazing vacantly about him like a stuck pig.

For a moment he could make neither head nor tail of the business—until he used his common sense.

Clearly, since a painted wooden post can scarcely walk off on its own, it must have been stolen. In which case the thief could not be far away, since the post had disappeared within the last thirty seconds.

From his point of vantage on the ridge, he surveyed the surrounding country. To his north was the river which he knew to be unfordable. To the south and to the west was a vast plain, given over for the most part to the cultivation of rice, on the far side of which the sun was already setting beyond a range of tree-clad hills. Dick could never have made a success of the work of surveying had he not had a good eye for country ; and he was now not slow to observe the clearly defined outline of a dried-up watercourse that skirted the foot of the ridge to join the river a little below the ravine.

He was already convinced that the thief had gone in this direction when, to his utter amazement, he suddenly saw that the second post had also disappeared. Alarmed, as well as astonished, he set off running to the other end of his base.

This post, too, was certainly gone. It had been stolen within the last few seconds, almost under Dick's very nose. That he had driven it firmly into the hard ground he had not a shadow of doubt, for there was the hole that had been made by the steel point of the post—and by the side of this hole was something as surprising as it was extraordinary.

It was a round disk of yellow parchment, not unlike the top of a drum, which had at one time been covered with Chinese writing, now so faded that the characters would not have been legible even to an educated native. And in place of that writing, in the very centre of the parchment disk, was a clearly defined impression in bright green sealing-wax of a scorpion.

There was no time just then to attempt to solve the problem or to guess what such a symbol could mean. Dick Kimber, after all, was a practical young man who concerned himself in the main with practical things. Convinced that there was either a thief or a practical joker in the

neighbourhood, and resolved to catch him red-handed and bring him to book, he set off running down the slope towards the dried-up gully. And no sooner had he reached his destination than he found his suspicions verified, for he caught a glimpse of a Chinese running away from him, down the length of the gully, towards the ravine. And if any proof were needed that this man was the culprit, he was carrying under an arm the two posts he had stolen.

Dick started in pursuit. He had a loaded revolver, but he did not suppose for a moment that there would be any necessity to use it. The Chinaman, having thrown away the two posts that he might run the faster, took a bee-line along the river bank in the direction of the ravine, where he suddenly disappeared behind a huge pile of brushwood.

At that moment, for the first time, it dawned upon the young Englishman that he was being led into a trap. He had already noticed the remarkable agility of the Chinaman, who was still so little out of breath that he could run and jump like an antelope, though all the time he had kept within twenty yards of his pursuer. And no sooner had this suspicion taken shape in Dick Kimber's mind than he pulled up stone-dead and realized that he had seen his danger too late.

By then he had gained the mouth of the ravine, where he found himself confronted by a steep rocky slope, halfway up which was the narrow mouth of a cave. It was the half light of evening, and the interior of the cave was illumined by several flaming torches.

Gazing upward, Dick Kimber beheld a sight that took his breath away. Near the entrance to the cave were four men, whose attention had evidently been attracted by the fugitive. Though Dick, from a lower level, could see only their figures from the waist upward, he saw enough to make him think that he had best make tracks with as little delay as possible. For three of these men wore belts that were crammed with knives, and the fourth was the most murderous-looking scoundrel he had ever seen in his life.

He was a tall man with a shaven head like that of a Taoist priest. He wore the long robe of a Chinaman of rank. But the most remarkable thing about him was that

KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM HIGH SCHOOL
Date.....

he had no eyebrows. His head was as bald as an egg, his whole face was as smooth as a piece of yellow jade. And upon the robe he wore was the embroidered effigy of a green scorpion.

Dick turned and fled—and none too soon. The tables had been turned: the hunter had become the quarry. He raced down-stream the way he had come with a kind of human wolf-pack hot upon his trail. As they ran they shouted loud guttural oaths, and flourished knives and short swords. Their threats, if Dick had understood them, would



HE PULLED UP STONE-DEAD.

have given him nightmare for weeks.

Head over heels he tumbled into his *sampan* and shouted at the coolie. "Down-river for all you're worth!" he cried. "Back to Sin-chau!"

The coolie grinned as he swung the great *yulu*, or stern oar, from side to side, sending the little craft hurtling along with the current.

II

It was long after nightfall when Dick arrived back at the great rambling Chinese *yamen* that had been placed at the disposal of his uncle. The house, which was on the outskirts of the city of Sin-chau, was furnished in the Chinese style, but Sir Robert had brought his servants up from Hongkong, and had managed to make himself comfortable enough.

When Dick was half-way across the paved courtyard before the front door of the main building he was met by the *compradore*, his uncle's head-servant who had been with him many years. Though the countenance of a Chinese seldom expresses any emotion, it was plain to see that Lock Tung was alarmed.

"Where Sir Robert?" he asked. "What for him not come?"

"Isn't my uncle back yet?" Dick asked, in some dismay. "I understood he was attending a meeting of the Syndicate. But that should have been over hours ago."

"Him not come," persisted the worthy Lock Tung. "Too much serious," he went on, as if speaking to himself. "Dinner ready long time ago. Plenty bad people this place."

Dick passed through the hall into the dining-room, where he found the table already laid.

Uneasy in his mind, he opened the casement window that looked out upon another courtyard. Immediately in front of him was a high wall in which was an open gate that led to the *bund*, or river embankment. Over the top of this wall he could see the masts of the river junks that were tied up alongside the bamboo wharves and jetties. It was a clear starry night such as only China knows—a pale moon

that looked like a Chinese lantern suspended in the heavens, and not a breath of air.

The boy turned quickly as his uncle flung into the room.

"There you are, Dick! Glad you've got safely back. From the accounts I have heard this afternoon, the Yu River's a den of thieves. I would never have sent you there if I had know."

Sir Robert was so palpably in an agitated frame of mind that his nephew decided then and there to make light of his adventure. For Dick was interested in his work, and knew he had done it well. He had no wish to be packed back to Hongkong, as if he wasn't yet old enough to look after himself.

So, when the Chinese boy had brought in the dinner, and uncle and nephew were seated at the table, Dick recounted his adventure in the most off-hand manner he could assume. He described how his two base posts had been stolen, how he had chased the thief and run into a party of men who certainly might have been brigands. However, he had had no difficulty in getting away. He was about to mention the green seal in the shape of a scorpion when his uncle cut him short.

"Just as I've been told!" he cried. "No wonder they stole your posts! These cut-throats are up against the Syndicate. They don't want steamboats on the river. They find junks and *sampans* easier prey."

Sir Robert was still excited. He spoke more quickly than was his wont, paying little attention to the food he was eating and continually drumming with his fingers on the table.

"What can you do!" he asked. "No matter what kind of government the Chinese attempt, they are incapable of maintaining law and order. They are content to go on in the old topsy-turvy, muddled way that has satisfied them for centuries. In this country there have been brigands and pirates since the time of Confucius—and even government officials do nothing but shrug their shoulders."

At that moment Sir Robert's words were cut short by a terrific explosion outside the window in the courtyard. There was a sudden blaze of light like a flash of lightning,

and a detonation that shook the old building to its very foundations. And then all was silence.

Both uncle and nephew had sprung to their feet. For a moment they stood staring at each other across the dinner-table, unable to realize what had happened.

Then Sir Robert moved rapidly to the open window, from which a few steps descended into the court, and was about to pass out, when Dick almost roughly grasped him by an arm and hauled him back.

"Take care!" the boy exclaimed. "Don't expose yourself! You're standing right in the light—and anything may happen."

Dick then crossed to the dinner table, turned down the paraffin lamp, and blew out the light.

"You're quite right, Dick," said Sir Robert, calmer than he had been before. "I might have been shot dead. There are men outside in the courtyard, and only this afternoon I learnt for a fact that I'm shadowed."

By now Dick was able to observe that his uncle had drawn a revolver from the hip-pocket of his trousers.

"Is that why you go about armed?" he asked.

"A mere precaution," said the other. "A wise one, all the same. If we search the courtyard we had both better be armed. If you go into the study next door, you'll find a loaded automatic in the bottom right-hand drawer of the writing desk. Get it as quickly as you can, and rejoin me here."

Dick obeyed. He was not out of the room half a minute; and at the moment he re-entered he saw his uncle spring back from the casement window, as something white, that might have been a great paper dart, flew into the room and settled quivering in the very centre of the dinner table.

On the spur of the moment the boy was down the steps and in the courtyard, where a shot rang out that echoed like the report of a cannon under the high walls of the *bund*.

The whistle of a bullet that flattened itself against the brickwork of the house did not baulk Dick Kimber of his purpose. He knew that there was but one exit from the courtyard—the narrow gate that led to the *bund*. The loaded automatic pistol he now held in his hand gave him a sense of

security. In a trice he had gained the gate. Had he been a second earlier he might have cut off the would-be assassin's only way of escape. As it was, the man who was running head down, as if trying to make himself as small a target as possible, dived through the gateway a few yards in front of Dick. For all that, he looked back an instant when he was outside the wall and before he disappeared.

Dick Kimber had seen enough. Opposite the gate was a junk, half-way up the mast of which was a lighted Chinese lantern ; and the light from this had fallen full upon the man's face as he passed through the gate.

It was the man with no eyebrows—the man Dick had seen, but a few hours before, at the cave at the mouth of the ravine.

Retracing his steps, the boy encountered his uncle in the courtyard.

" Are you all right ?" asked Sir Robert, anxiously.

" Not a scratch," said the other. " But that rascal has got safely away. I might have fired at him, but I didn't like to take the risk."

" Just as well, my boy. Chinese officials are difficult people to deal with. A hundred relations would have turned up from nowhere, and they would all have wanted compensation."

By that time, when the danger was all over, Lock Tung, the *compradore*, had mustered all the other servants. Searching the courtyard with a lantern, he could discover nothing but a charred patch in the middle of the paving stones where some kind of bomb had been exploded.

" What do you make of that ?" asked Dick, who with his uncle had now joined Lock Tung.

Sir Robert shrugged his shoulders.

" I can see no sense in it," said he, " unless it was done simply to attract our attention. Just a gunpowder charge that couldn't do much harm in the open."

" There was a dart of some sort," Dick reminded him.

" I had forgotten that," said the other. " We had best see what it is."

Together they returned into the dining-room, where Dick relighted the lamp. And there, sure enough, with its

sharp metal point firmly fixed into the wood beneath the table-cloth, was a dart to which was attached a scroll of parchment.

"Be careful!" warned Sir Robert. "For all we know, the thing may be poisoned. These rascals know every trick of the trade."

Very cautiously he withdrew the parchment from the cork shaft of the dart, which was heavily weighted at the pointed end. He then unrolled the parchment and smoothed it carefully on the table with the palm of his hand.

Dick was staring over his uncle's shoulder. He beheld before him a document upon which there were seven or eight columns of ornate Chinese characters, and at the foot of it was a seal. Upon a circular wafer of bright green sealing-wax was the representation of a *scorpion*.

Sir Robert, in the meantime, was engrossed with the document itself. He was one of the few Europeans who could read Chinese writing without any difficulty. He was silent for several seconds. Then he came out with a kind of grunt.

"Much as I expected," said he. "This is nothing more or less than an open threat—a form of blackmail, if you like. And the only thing that can be said for the writer is that there is a certain amount of frankness and honesty about his methods. In the first place, he openly admits that he is the Number One man—as they call it—of a powerful secret society, the Society of the Green Scorpion. I have heard of that before. It exists for a religious motive, the performance of certain rites to Yen Wang, the king of Chinese devils. The society, however, is financed on the proceeds of piracy, and my River Syndicate scheme threatens to take the wind out of their sails. For that reason I am told here pretty plainly that, if I don't give up the whole idea by mid-day tomorrow, I am doomed. The Society of the Green Scorpion will not tolerate the foreign devil's fireboats on the river."

Dick was aghast.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked.

"Do?" said Sir Robert. "Defy them. Tell them to do their worst—and get ahead with it."

His manner was now wholly calm. Neither his voice nor the expression of his face betrayed consternation.

"These are the people who for years have been plundering the merchant junks between Sin-chau and Canton," he went on. "My colleagues on the Syndicate, honest Chinese merchants who are in favour of modern commercial methods, have suffered at the hands of these rascals for years. I will not desert my friends. I will not give up the scheme on their account. And there's another reason, which carries some weight with a man whose heart is in his business. There's a small fortune in it, and I intend to go through with it in spite of threats.

"Indeed," he went on, as if speaking to himself, "I mean to go to the Prefect of the city and ask for protection. The Prefect himself is in favour of the Syndicate; and as the representative of the government, it is his duty to protect neutrals who are, moreover, working in the interests of the country. He has several *yamen* constables and a company of soldiers under his orders. He can scarcely refuse to place them at our disposal."

At that Dick Kimber struck the table with a fist.

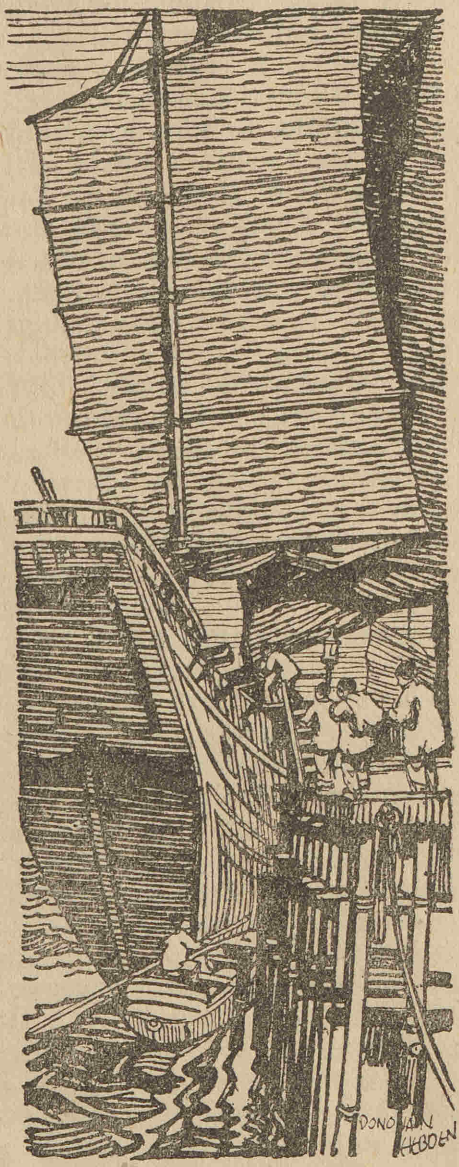
"Then I've got it!" he cried, as if he had suddenly guessed a riddle. "Uncle, we're in luck's way! If you can place yourself at the head of a body of armed men, I can lead you to the place where you can round up the whole gang. It depends whether or not we can get there secretly, so as to take them by surprise. I know where to find the headquarters of the Green Scorpion. I know the leader of the gang by sight, the very man who was here this evening, who fired the gigantic Chinese cracker to attract our attention and then hurled the dart into the room."

Sir Robert Kimber stared at his nephew in amazement.

"You don't mean it, Dick?" he asked.

"I do," said the other. "Every word of it. I didn't tell you, but I found this same green seal on the very spot where one of my posts had been stolen. And a green scorpion was embroidered on the coat of one of the men in the cave, and that was the same man I saw to-night."

"Then," said Sir Robert, "we'll dig them out like a



WITHIN THE NEXT HALF-HOUR PEOPLE BEGAN TO ARRIVE, IN PARTIES OF TWO OR THREE.

litter of rats. I'll go to the Prefect now. He'll be ready enough to help us."

III

At about ten o'clock that night three *wupans*, or large Chinese river junks, dropped downstream to a place outside the city walls where there was a broken bamboo jetty. There was nobody on each boat but the *laoban*, or captain, and one or two river coolies. There was a light easterly wind; the night was insufferably hot, as, one after the other, the three boats tied up alongside the jetty, and the three *laobans* produced their opium-pipes and squatted down on the deck.

Within the next half hour people began to arrive, in parties of two or three. These men appeared to be ordinary peasants or coolies. They strolled casually along the tow-path, walked on board the *wupans* unquestioned by the *laobans*, and disappeared

under the hatches. In this manner as many as fifty men embarked upon the three boats in the space of about twenty minutes.

One or two of the later arrivals carried loads of fodder, huge bundles of dried grass tied up with plaited straw. And an observant onlooker might have remarked that these bundles were remarkably heavy. Indeed, in some cases it was as much as the coolies could do to carry them on board. And small wonder, for each bundle contained as many as a dozen rifles.

At about half-past ten the three *laobans* bestirred themselves, the sails were hoisted, and the *wupans*, one behind the other, made up the river with a following wind. But before they had sailed more than half a mile they were overhauled by an electric launch, which drew alongside the leading boat to enable three men to scramble over the low bulwarks from the taffrail of the launch. Two of these newcomers were Sir Robert Kimber and his nephew, and the third was the Prefect of Sin-chau himself, who had not deemed it advisable to don his official robes.

The moment the Prefect had got on board, he satisfied himself that his soldiers and constables were safe and sound in the holds. Then he produced a cigar.

"I have just twenty minutes for a smoke," said he, in excellent English.

He was about right, for by the end of that time the three *wupans* had turned out of the main river into the Yu and were heading toward the ravine.

Presently the current became so swift and the water so shallow that the boats could progress no further, especially as the wind was now on the port quarter. They therefore dropped their anchors and lowered sail, and some fifty half-naked coolies emerged, like ants, from the holds. As each man waded ashore, with the water well above his waist, he carried a rifle on his shoulder. Both the two Europeans and the Prefect were carried to dry land, sitting straddle-legged on the broad shoulders of a coolie.

Led by Dick Kimber, the column began to advance in single file. The Chinese were all barefooted. They moved noiselessly and cautiously, on tiptoe. No sign disturbed

the silence of the night, except now and again a rolling stone dislodged by the boots of either Dick or his uncle.

The light of the stars was enough to enable the guide to recognise the country and to pick up his bearings. Dick led the way along the foot of the ridge where his two posts had been stolen, and a little farther on he came upon the great pile of brushwood that he had seen before.

He did not know what this was for, and he did not stop to consider the question. The only thing that concerned him for the moment was that he knew for a fact that the mouth of the cave was but a little way in front.

He could see no light. There was every reason to suppose that their approach had been unnoticed.

Signalling to the men who were following him to halt and lie down upon the ground, Dick moved on tip-toe to his uncle, in whose ear he whispered.

"The mouth of the cave is just there," said he, pointing up the slope. "If the gang's inside, we've got them caught, as you said, like rats in a trap."

"Unless there's another exit," said Sir Robert. "And you can bet your last cent, my boy, there is. I'll stay here with the Prefect and half the men. You know the country better than any of us. Work your way to the other end of the ravine. There may be another entrance there."

Dick was inclined to think so too. A gang of pirates were not likely to trust themselves by night in a cave from which there was but one way of escape. It was more than likely there was a sort of tunnel that ran clean through the hill.

It was slow and stealthy work, but the Prefect's men well understood their business and the danger of the enterprise. In single file, as silently as cats, they moved round the hill to the other end of the ravine.

Here, since there were fewer trees, the light was better; and Dick was able to see at a glance that his uncle had been right. At the foot of the slope on this side, for some reason or other, was another pile of brushwood, similar in all respects to that at the bottom of the ravine; and a little farther up was a black hole in the slope that was evidently the other end of the tunnel. And if there had ever

been any doubt in the boy's mind as to this, such doubt was immediately dispelled, when he saw upon the skyline the silhouetted figure of a man who was evidently a sentry.

For some moments he waited in suspense. The sentry did not move. He may have been half asleep, for he showed no sign that he was aware of enemies being in the neighbourhood.

The *yamen* constables had already taken up their position. Crawling on hands and knees, they had opened out into a fan-like formation, a semi-circle that enclosed the mouth of the cave, so as to make it impossible for any one within to escape.

Scarcely had this movement been completed than the sentry on the hilltop became alive to the danger, for Dick Kimber saw the man spring suddenly to his feet. He did not cry out, nor did he attempt to fire, though he carried some kind of old-fashioned musket. He did just about the last thing in the world one would have expected. He struck a match, bent down, and touched something on the ground.

The effect was instantaneous. There appeared in the semi-darkness under the starlit sky what might have been a writhing fiery snake that sped over the ground almost with the rapidity of a flash of lightning.

Dick realized the meaning of this in the nick of time. The man had fired a quick-match, a trail of gunpowder that had been laid down the hillside. A spurt of flame was rushing downward, straight at the brushwood pile.

Of a certainty, the members of the Green Scorpion knew how to take precautions. Under the brushwood was probably another pile of gunpowder as well as some inflammable material soaked in oil. The moment the burning fuse reached its destination, a great beacon would burst into a blaze, and two objects would thereby be gained. The alarm would be given to those within the cave, and the Prefect's men would be discovered and exposed, lying out in the open with a roaring fire at their backs.

Dick was not slow to act. Regardless of his own danger, he dashed to cut off that spluttering, racing trail of fire, and a second later had stamped it out with his boots.

Whilst he was thus occupied—though the whole business was over in a few seconds—one or two of the *yamen* constables had not remained idle. Seeing the sentry posted over the entrance to the cave, they made a futile attempt to overpower and capture him before the man got away across the rice fields. And by that time the fat was in the fire.

Quite suddenly the whole sky had become illumined. The bonfire at the other end of the tunnel had been lighted by a similar fuse; and even at that distance Dick could hear the violent cracking of the burning wood, while a stream of sparks shot upward high into the air. A moment later there came a burst of musketry. The pirates had opened fire from their end of the cave upon the men who had remained behind with Sir Robert and the Prefect.

As Dick realized in a flash, the business was not over yet. The majority of the rascals might manage to escape. Moreover, the Prefect's men were lying out in the open, exposed to view, with the bonfire at their backs.

Dick Kimber had not been long enough in the country to have learned more than a few words of Chinese. All the same, he saw at once that there was only one thing for him to do. If he could not give orders to his men, he could at least show them what he wanted. Without a second's hesitation, he sprang into the cave with a dozen men close upon his heels.

For the boy had seen that there was but one way to hasten to the help of his uncle and those with him—the shortest route through the tunnel, by way of which the pirates could be taken by surprise from the rear.

The passage, so it proved, was wide enough to admit five or six men abreast, and after a hundred feet or so it opened out, like the neck of a bottle, to a place where there was a large central chamber.

This was undoubtedly the headquarters of the pirates, for there were sleeping-benches all round the walls, upon which were hanging weapons of all kinds: swords, knives, and fire-arms. There were cooking utensils, too, and in one corner was a great pile of boxes, bales and barrels, obviously cargo that had been looted from river junks.

Dick went straight ahead, his men eager and valiantly



THE MAN WITH NO EYEBROWS AT LAST FLUNG UP HIS ARMS IN TOKEN OF SURRENDER.

backing him up. Beyond the central cavern the tunnel narrowed again ; and presently they could hear the muffled ring of shots.

Dick Kimber had hoped for the best, that he would not be too late to render valuable assistance to his friends, and his most sanguine expectations were realized.

For a few minutes the Prefect and his men had found themselves in an unpleasant and precarious situation. They were able neither to retire nor to advance ; and though they could reply to the fire of their opponents, they were at a considerable disadvantage. For the pirates, upon higher ground, were hidden from view in the darkness behind the many rocks and boulders on the hillside, whereas the representatives of law and order were in the full light of the fire upon the bare slope of the hill, where there was not a scrap of cover.

But Dick and those with him, issuing from the cave at the pirates' backs, turned the tables in a trice. From that moment the affair did not last two minutes. Unable to get away, seeing that the longer they held out the more casualties they suffered, they began to howl for mercy ; and the man with no eyebrows, who was the leader of the band, at last flung up his arms in token of surrender.

Thus ended the infamous career of the Secret Society of the Green Scorpion. And for many months to come there was peace on the Si-kiang, down which the River Syndicate's steamboats conveyed the merchandise of Yunnan province to Canton, and thence to the outer world.

Drum-Language

By ALEXANDER D'AGAPEYEFF.

BEFORE I went to Africa I heard a great many stories of the uncanny way in which villages far away in the bush learnt of events and circumstances which were happening in the civilized parts of Africa. A striking and well-known instance of this was seen at the time of the visit of the then Prince of Wales, now Duke of Windsor, to Lagos in Nigeria. In an out-of-the-way district, without a telegraph line, the local District Officer was told of the arrival of the son of the " great white king " before the Government runner had brought the official news.

These happenings are generally credited to telepathy, clairvoyance, second sight, and any other psychic qualities that the primitive men in the bush are still supposed to possess, and which the more civilized have lost.

None of these romantic explanations, however, is the true one, which is very much more ordinary, although few white men have bothered to investigate it. This is due partly because of the shyness of the natives, and partly to a lack of interest in native customs and habits.

When I first arrived in Africa I used to lie awake at night, as I was unaccustomed to the lack of air under the mosquito netting and the intense heat. And as I lay sweating in the camp bed I listened to the night noises of the bush just outside my window. I always heard, above the staccato shrills of the untiring crickets, a deep intermittent throbbing. It used to continue far into the night ; but after a few months I used to be able to distinguish between the various booms and bass notes, and even realized that the noises came from different directions.

One morning after the full moon when the noises had been particularly loud I discovered that they were the tom-toms, and I was shown one in the next village. It was mounted on an old ant-hill (in Africa ant-hills are about as high as an ordinary room), just outside the chief's hut, with a little rickety roof of *ndelles*—the split backs of palm fronds woven together—covering it. It was about

four and a half feet long and nearly three feet wide, hollowed, out of the solid trunk of a special tree. Along the top it had a narrow opening, the edges of which were so carved that they formed two " lips," one considerably thinner than the other. The thick one was called the " male " and the other " female," as the former when struck gave a deeper note than the thinner one.

The whole of the hollow drum reverberated when the lips were beaten with short sticks, one held in each hand. Apart from the low and high pitch of the notes, the beater varied them by making long or short sounds, rather like the tapping of the Morse code. The booming of the drum was stopped by placing the palm of the hand on the lip, in the same way in which you would stop a glass from vibrating by touching it. The ant-hill on which the tom-tom is placed is composed of a hard, clay-like substance. A hole is dug out under the drum, going right through the middle of the ant-hill to the earth. This conducts the sound down, as well as makes the gong " boom " so characteristically.

I was very interested and wanted to investigate this African bush telegraph, for such indeed it is, since all communications between the villages are made on the drum. If a white man wants porters from the next village, or the chief is organizing a hunt and wants another one of his villages to join in ; if a Government official wants some " chop " (food) for his soldiers, all these messages are passed on by the drum, relayed from one village to another if necessary, without the use of runners.

As I have already mentioned, there are four possible notes that can be made on the drum : high, low, long, and short. I found that, based on these sounds, a special drum-language is used, the knowledge of which is kept by special drum families and passed down from father to son. Not all the natives could understand this language, and even fewer actually know how to speak on the tom-toms. When I asked the natives why the drum was beaten and what it was saying, they would call up the local drum-man and he would translate the sound into a kind of sing-song, using set phrases and often words not in the native vocabulary.

When questioned, he would say that it was a drum-word meaning so-and-so. This shows that the drum language can be compared to a dictionary code, and I have an idea that it is based on vowels forming the four possible sound combinations into set words, of which there can be a maximum of 120.

I was determined to find out all I could about it, and bacause I knew that it is seldom advisable to question the natives directly and give them any suspicion of a " palaver " by making a fuss, I simply told the local chief that I wanted a drum made for me, one that could be placed in my compound so that I could communicate with the near-by villages. I thought that while the drum was being made I could learn all about.

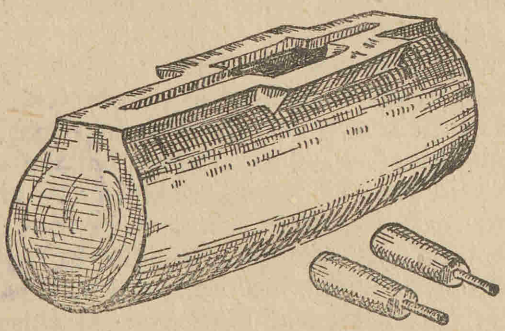
It then appeared that very few natives knew how to carve out a tree trunk to make a drum, and it was only after a considerable time that a wizened old man who, judging by the monkey cap on his head, was a village notable, was found who said that he would make my drum if I would get my own men to cut him a certain tree in the bush.

The tree was duly cut and brought to my compound, and the old man got out his tools and started to hollow it out. His tools consisted of long wooden chisels, made by the village blacksmith in the native fashion. It was a very tiring job and needed a great deal of patience ; and while he was working I used to go and watch him, and we talked about drums. He told me that the difficulty in making drums lies in the fact that all the hollowing has to be done through the narrow longitudinal opening on the top, which later is carved to make the lips. He also told me that different tribes stand on different sides of the drum when beating it, and from this one can always tell from which tribe a man comes.

It was from this discovery that I learned, quite by accident, a great deal about the migration of tribes in Africa. The boundary between the French and British Cameroons (ex-German West Africa, and after the last war mandated partly to Great Britain and partly to France) is for the major part the course of a river called the Mungo, on the banks of which live a tribe of fishermen also called by the

same name. These people always beat their drums on the female side, and strike the male note on the opposite side first.

In the Belgian Congo, along the eastern bank of the Mobangi river, a large tributary of the Congo, there lives a tribe called Mungo-Pania, usually written and pronounced Mungania. I noticed that this tribe also beat their drums on the female side, and always sounded the male note first. I was struck by this similarity, and on inquiry found that a hundred or possibly a hundred and fifty years ago their half of the tribe migrated from the river Mungo, where



the " Jermanee Whites are now " (the changed geography of the last war had not yet penetrated to them), and their chief's name was Pania, hence Mungo-Panias. As the crow flies, the Mungo river is nearly a thousand miles away from their present habitat.

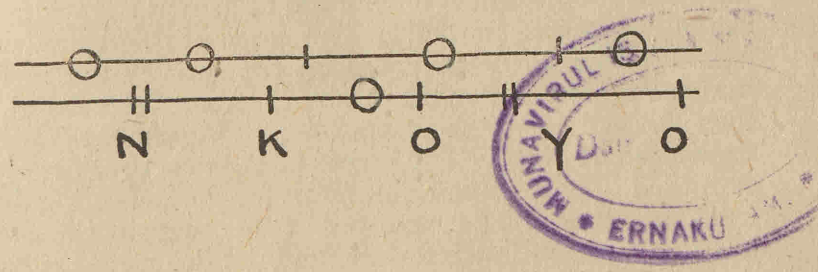
My old drum-maker tried to teach me the language of the drum, and I made out " music notes " so as to learn to beat the drum slowly at first and then faster to the proper time. The drums generally speak faster than one could write the words. Here is an example of my own native name, " Nkoy," meaning a leopard.

The top line represents the female side and the bottom the male. My teacher's tribe, as can be seen, were in the habit of beating the drum on the male side, and always prefaced their messages, rather like the signature tunes of

our modern dance bands, by three short beats on the female lip and one long one on the male.

When my friend had nearly hollowed out the cylinder, he very carefully started to carve out the top of the tom-tom, which is a very delicate operation, as the male and female sounds depend entirely on this. While doing it, he beat it very softly, and eventually reduced the whole of one side of the drum to the thickness of about half an inch.

It is considered either very bad form or unlucky to beat a drum before it has been christened. A large ceremony is held for the christening of a tom-tom, and every one asked over-eats, drinks, and dances.



MUNAVIRUL
ERNAKU

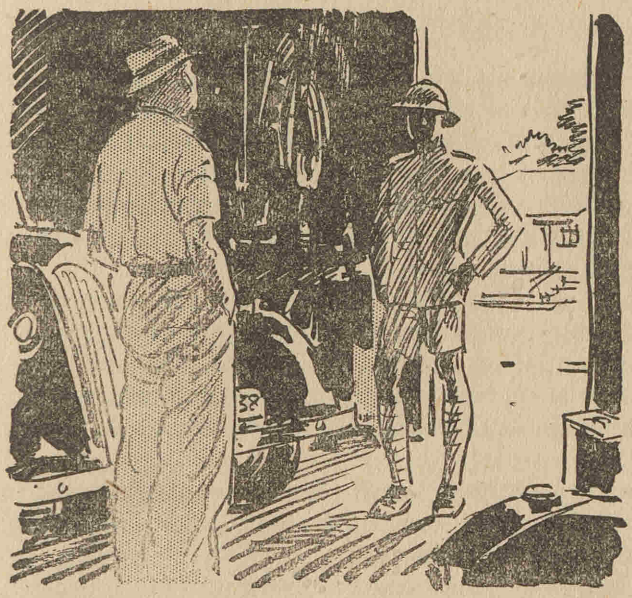
I put the drum-maker in charge of the ceremony, and was told that I would have to find a goat and some palm wine not only to pour over the drum but also for the guests—that is, any one in the neighbourhood who wished to come—to drink. On the day of the christening, in the early morning, the dancers started to come in, and sat about quietly in small groups talking amongst themselves, their leaders having first offered me a couple of eggs or a few bananas. Then the village chiefs appeared with their gifts of chicken or duiker, a tiny antelope not bigger than a hare, a very good tasty bit of game. By midday the dancers, in their war-paint, and in groups of ten to fifteen, began their performance. They kept beautiful time, very much like the well drilled chorus of an English music hall. They carried their own small drums with which they beat time.

After this prelude the chief killed the goat, and by this time the offering of chicken and duiker had been cooked

by my boys, so that every one had some food to eat and some palm wine to drink. Then the old man who had made the drum led me to it blindfolded. The drum had now been painted *ngula*—a ceremonial red paint made of palm oil and red African oak sawdust. He put into my hand a calabash full of palm wine, and, blindfolded, I had to pour it right inside the opening. To make certain of this, instead of pouring the wine along the line of the drum, I poured it across, so that some at any rate would get inside through the narrow opening at the top. The ruse was greeted with loud applause. Then, still blindfolded, I had to strike the drum. My mentor had secretly taught me already how to beat my own name, and as I did this with full force, there was great astonishment among the natives at the white man beating the drum properly. The name of the drum, which was supposed to be invented on the spur of the moment but was probably thought out by the chief beforehand, was then shouted out by the assembly : " *Monoko wa Nkoy* "—the mouth of Nkoy. The owner of the new drum was then supposed to beat its name and wait for the answering drums from the other villages, as a test of the range of the sound ; but that was too much for me, and the drum-maker had to do it in my stead.

This drum, which was nearly six feet long and over four feet high, really a very big one, had a reliable range of twenty-two miles along the river, while under suitable weather conditions, such as when the air was moist or at night, its range was found to be nearly forty miles. The average drum can be heard from about six to twenty miles away, according to its size and position.

My drum once saved the life of a European who was brought to my bungalow from a canoe. He had black-water fever and was delirious. Only half an hour earlier the weekly steam launch had left with a doctor on board. I ordered the great drum to be beaten calling the doctor back, and the captain of the boat, a native who knew the language of the drum, heard it and turned back. The timely arrival of the doctor saved the white man's life.



Porcupine Quills are Sharp

By WILFRID ROBERTSON

I

DONALD RANKIN threw down the magazine he had been reading during the midday heat, and yawned. Sitting up on the hard mattress of his cot, he glanced round the barrack room of the little Rhodesian police post, with its whitewashed walls and its six beds standing at precise intervals. He was its sole occupant; the other men, his companions, were all away on special patrol duty.

"Wish to goodness I could have gone too," he muttered to himself. "Still, I suppose someone had to stay, and it would be me, of course. Farquhar"—that was the name of the sergeant in charge—"hasn't forgotten that slip I made last month, and plumped on me to stay back in consequence, while the other blokes get their chance of promotion if they nab the fellow they're after."

Through the open window Donald could see the buildings

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of the settlement which surrounded the police post. They were a bare dozen in all, and included a general trading store, Laycock's canteen, with the word HOTEL painted in huge letters on its glaring iron roof, and Benson's third-rate garage where oil-smeared natives hammered, with the abandon of complete ignorance, at any car that fell into Benson's hands for minor repairs.

A native, a raw bush savage by the look of him, was approaching across the shimmering parade ground, a folded piece of paper in his hand. It was, Donald remembered, no business of his ; Sergeant Farquhar was sitting writing in the office, and would attend to whatever the note contained.

Presently Donald heard the Sergeant shouting his name. He pulled on his thin tunic, cast aside for the heat, and obeyed the summons.

" This," said the Sergeant holding up the soiled scrap of paper, " is apparently from Jackson, out on the border patrol. Says he's run short of stores. Can't understand it—suppose the fool didn't take enough. He's camped with the two I sent with him where the main road crosses the border into Portuguese territory—this dud note business, you know."

" The complaint that came from the Portuguese Government ?"

" Yes. It seems there's any amount of spurious Bank of Mozambique notes appearing in circulation and they are certain they emanate from Rhodesia. They want us to follow the matter up, and find out where they come from and how they are introduced. There are several places they might come from. If only we could lay hands on the go-between and catch him in the act, we'd pick up the whole string and find the issuer. But so far we're beat."

The Sergeant paused, staring out into the sunshine.

" But that's neither here nor there as far as you're concerned," he went on. " If Jackson wants stuff urgently he'll have to have it. You'd better get out the old Ford and take it. It's only thirty miles ; you'll get there before sundown."

" The Ford's smashed."

" Confound it, so it is. I'd forgotten that tree it hit. Well, you'll have to get a car somehow. Go over to Benson and hire one of his crocks." He scribbled a line on a piece of paper. " Here's a warrant for the expense."

Putting on his sun helmet, Donald stepped out into the glare of the baked parade ground and reached the dusty track that did duty for a main road. Having waited till the cloud kicked up by a passing bullock-wagon had subsided, he crossed the rutted thoroughfare towards a building whose litter of empty petrol cans and battered oil advertisements proclaimed it the local garage.

Lounging in the wide entrance, and watching his natives hammering the nuts on a long-suffering casting, was Benson, a stockily built man of forty, clad in a torn shirt and stained dungarees. He turned his head at Donald's step. " Well ?" he demanded shortly, " and what may you want ?"

Donald explained.

" I thought I'd see one o' you beggars round before long," he retorted, spitting contemptuously into a rubbish pile three yards away. " I knew your sergeant had bust that Ford o' his. So you want to hire one o' my cars ? Well, there ain't one, see ?"

Donald's glance passed over the proprietor's shoulder towards two or three cars standing in the hot dimness of the building.

" When I says there ain't one, I mean there ain't one for you police blokes. And for why ? Because I'm through with you. Every time I do a spot o' taxi work between here and t'other side o' the border, what happens ? I get held up and searched as if I was a criminal. I got my livin' to earn, and it's hard enough to do so without hindrance fron your sort."

Donald shrugged his shoulders ; it was no use losing his temper.

" Very well, don't then. I'll see if I can borrow one somewhere else, for I've got to reach Jackson's camp on the border before sundown."

He turned away. He had not gone more than a few steps, however, before Benson's voice recalled him.

" Goin' that way ? Well, look here, I gotta n'idea. You

ain't such a bad youngster yourself, and it ain't your fault. Can you drive decently ?"

" I used to drive a lot at home before I came out, and here as well. Why ?"

Benson's eyes were taking stock of his visitor.

" Because I'll meet you if you'll meet me. You see that new car ?" He jerked a thumb towards a streamlined modern vehicle, resplendent in unscratched cellulose and with its chromium radiator, bumpers, and huge up-to-date hub caps gleaming like silver. " I want it delivered to a buyer at Vila Tamua—the Portuguese township six miles beyond the border. You can take it if you'll deliver it for me. You'll have to find your own way back, but I guess you'll raise a lift somehow. How'll that suit you ?"

" Very well. I'll take great care of it and deliver it safely if you'll give me the man's name."

Benson pencilled it on a scrap of paper.

" That's the chap. Has a big store there, one o' several about that country." He turned to the car. " She's ready and full o' petrol, been waiting some time to go. Drive her easy, and for the love o' Mike don't get her scratched, and keep those pals o' yourn from scratchin' her if they want to do their silly searchin'. And lastly, mind you don't get a puncture—those tyres is new and gotta be delivered new, see ?"

" I'll nurse her all right." Donald got into the driving seat and started the engine, delighting in its soft hum. He drove out into the sunlight, halted at the police post to pick up the stores, and swung the car into the track leading towards his destination.

II

Like most Rhodesian roads, the track was mainly a dusty earthen ribbon through the bush, showing signs of definite road-building only where it crossed valleys that would be boggy during the wet season, or on ridges where dynamite had been used to shift the scattered rocks.

Leaning back in the driving seat, Donald gave himself up to enjoying the journey. The surface was better than

most of the roads of the district, and the springing of the new car left nothing to be desired. He travelled slowly, however, nursing the new engine, and remembering always that Africa is a land of surprises in the shape of vast holes that antbears delight to dig overnight in the middle of bushland trails.

Behind him the sun descended in the afternoon sky, throwing the shadow of the car farther and farther ahead of it. With the coming of the cooler air the life of the bush bagan to awake and move. Twice he saw herds of sable antelope through the trees. A trio of koodoo bulls gazed with eyes wide with curiosity at the strange apparition which glided with a purring hum through their domains; and more than one duiker and stembuck scuttled away from the roadside undergrowth.

At length Donald swung round the last curve. Ahead of him he saw a tent and several figures round it, while in the background rose the concrete pillar that marked the frontier between the territories. He saw Jackson step out into the road and hold up his hand, and he brought the car slowly to a standstill.

"Hul-lo! So it's you, Rankin. Where did you spring from, and where did you pinch that posh car?"

"You wrote for more stores, didn't you? Well, I've brought 'em."

"Why, so I did, now I come to think of it. So Farquhar got the note I sent by that passing nigger?"

"He did, and he wasn't half wild at your running short."

"Does the fellow expect us to live on air? I'm fed up with him, and with this job too," Jackson replied testily. "Nobody's going to try crossing the border by road with his pockets stuffed with flash notes; everybody knows we're here, and he'd be a fool. Anybody with sense would do it on foot along the lonely bush paths, which are impossible to picket. But you haven't told me where you raised that car; what's happened to 'auntie'?"

"Auntie" was Farquhar's old Ford. Donald explained.

"Benson must ha' had a stroke I should think, or else you've found the trick of handling the beast, for he loves us police as much as a cat does rain. He's been kicking up a

song recently about us stopping his taxis ; says he's losing trade as passengers object to our routine search. But I suppose the chance of making use of you for nothing to deliver his customer's car was too good to lose."

" Probably."

Jackson grinned at Donald over the top of the case he was lifting from the back seat. " If you're taking her over the border I ought to make you turn out your pockets, strip the car cushions, and put you through the hoop, as they say."

" I don't mind what you do as long as you don't scratch the new paint. For goodness sake be careful with that case."

Jackson lifted it clear and laid it on the ground. " I was only joking, you ass ; blokes like you and me ain't got the brains for smuggling ! If we had we shouldn't be in this job, waiting for promotion we're never likely to see." He glanced at the setting sun. " Well, if you're going you'd better push on, for there's not much daylight left. When'll you be back ?"

" If I can catch a passing car coming this way I'll return here to sleep ; otherwise I'll see you to-morrow probably. So-long !" Donald entered the car again, slipped the gears through to top, and entered on the last six miles of his journey.

Donald drove onwards over the narrow road. Behind him the sun dropped below the horizon, tinting the western sky with crimson ; and among the ranks of trees on either side of the track gathered the first shadows of the coming night. Depressing his foot on the accelerator, he quickened his pace ; if possible he wanted to reach his destination before full dark descended, for it would be easier to find the abode of the car's owner if he had not to search for it under the guidance of the headlights.

Donald rounded a curve, and saw a dark and rounded object in the middle of the road. Thinking it was a boulder, he turned the steering-wheel to avoid it ; but as he was close upon it the object moved, turning across his bows. At the same time its outline grew larger, and serrated instead of smooth. Too late, he saw it was one of the common dusk-prowlers of the bush, a porcupine. He

stamped on the brakes and wrenched at the steering; there was a bump under the front wheel, and as he brought the car to a standstill he heard a long sigh of escaping air as the off front tyre sank punctured and flattened in the dust.

"Curse the thing. And a new tyre too!" Donald pushed open the door with a jerk and climbed out. "Well, there's no help for it; I shall have to face the owner and explain. Let's have a look at the damage."

Half a dozen of the stoutest quills, pulled from the porcupine, which now lay dead in the dust behind the car, were standing like darts in the deflated tyre, the needle-sharp points of no less than three of them having penetrated clean through the stout cover and tyre. With another muttered exclamation Donald turned to detach the spare wheel and rout out the jack and tools.

He placed the jack in position, and paused for a moment to take stock of the task before him—so different from that of the old Ford which he was continually repairing. The polished disc over the hub must come off first, to expose the cavity in which lurked the bolts that held the wheel to the drum. He removed the chromium plate from the hub, picked up the brace, and felt with the end of it for the first of the trio of nuts.

III

It was full dark long before Donald had replaced the tools and taken his place once more in the driving seat. His face bore a thoughtful expression, and, after starting the engine, he paused for another minute before engaging the gears. His mind turned to the garage proprietor who had handed him the car. "Benson will curse that porcupine," he muttered. "It was by the merest chance that a thing like that should happen. I've half a mind to run back to Jackson's camp. No, I won't, I'll push on—there'll be a telephone at Vila Tamua, and I can get through from there to Farquhar to tell him to call on Benson and be quick about it."

Donald drove on, the headlights making a tunnel of radiance and silhouetting the roadside trees white against

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the farther blackness. Presently he saw some distant gleams of yellow light, windows of buildings on the edge of the little township. "I'll go first to the police post," he said aloud; "they'll be able to tell me where the cove hangs out who owns this bus."

Donald drew up outside the Portuguese police station. Lifting an amorphous bundle from the seat beside him, he tucked it under his arm, and entered. The three Portuguese police looked up as the door opened, and three sallow faces bore an expression of surprise as the lamplight fell on a uniform that seldom entered their territory except on a matter of urgency. Laying down the greasy cards with which they had been playing, they rose to their feet.

Donald threw the bundle on to the table. "There's something for you to amuse yourselves with," he remarked genially, "and in the meanwhile, have you a telephone? Ah, there it is!" Waving to the interrogative corporal to keep calm, he crossed to the instrument.

"And that's that," he commented presently, putting down the receiver and turning again to the astonished Portuguese. "Do you understand English?" he went on to the corporal. "You do? That's good. I want you to come with me to deliver a nice new car to a distinguished citizen of yours."

"But what-a you mean. Who are you, and where you-a come from, eh? And these?" He pointed a quivering finger at Donald's bundle, which now lay open on the table. "How you got-a those?"

"You'll know the whole thing in a brace o' shakes. Meanwhile, I want you to come with me, and bring one of your mates, too, to deliver a car at the home of Señor —or is it Herr?—Klonstein, of the Multiple Provision Stores. Meanwhile this other chap had better stay here to look after that stuff on the table."

Donald bundled the two still voluble Portuguese into the car, and guided by them, reached a fine private house standing back from the road. The door was opened by a smart native servant, who showed them in.



THE PORTUGUESE POLICE HAD HIM BEFORE HE COULD DRAW THE REVOLVER HIDDEN IN HIS CLOTHES.

" Excuse this late call," Donald began to the portly figure in whites that rose from the depths of an easy-chair. " I've brought down a new car belonging to you, and these gentlemen "—he indicated the police—" kindly came with me to show me the way to your house."

" Ach, I understand." The startled look faded from the merchant's heavy face. " When I saw these members of our—er—respected police force, I almost thought"—he laughed ponderously—" that something serious was the matter. So you have brought my car ? That is good ; I have wanted him. It is outside, yes ?"

" Waiting for you," Donald replied. " But there is one thing I must tell you. I'm afraid I had a puncture on the way down."

" A puncture ? With a new car and new tyre ?" The man's face showed far more anxiety than the mishap warranted.

" Yes. Which meant I had to change a wheel. And, of course," he went on in a casual voice, though his body was ready for instant action, " of course I couldn't get the nuts unscrewed till I'd moved that wad of bogus notes under the hub cap. And in putting back the tools I found those wrapped carelessly in dirty paper at the bottom of the toolbox. And then there was another lot——"

The Portuguese police had him before he could draw the revolver hidden in his clothes ; and a moment later Klonstein was on his back with one sitting on his chest while the other secured his hands.

Donald, his job completed, passed out into the darkness. He paused beside the waiting car.

" Neat idea of Benson's," he remarked to its shining resplendence, " to use me as a catspaw, knowing you'd never be searched if I drove you. Benson's been disliking us police recently—now I know why—and probably he'll be disliking Farquhar even more at the present moment."

THE AMATEUR AIR DETECTIVE



By AIR COMMODORE L. E. O. CHARLTON, C.B., G.M.G., D.S.O.

I

ROBERT HILTON sat at a table in the refreshment-room of the municipal aerodrome, talking to his particular crony Ned Wyatt. The two had just flown in from Nunstead near the Border, where the Hilton family lived, and where there was a private flying-field, in Robert's Anzani-Buzzard. Ned had been week-ending at Nunstead, a very usual habit with him, and now was getting back to his work as a motor salesman. They were about the same age, just under twenty, and had been intimate friends from early childhood. In his spare time Ned was an enthusiastic Territorial in an Anti-Aircraft Division, and regarded No. 3 Section, of which he was in temporary command, as a fond father regards his only child. Robert, during term time, was supposed to be studying forestry and agricultural science at Oxford, but a rich father and the secure knowledge that he would inherit wealth in due course took the edge, it is to be feared, off his appetite for learning. His hobby was flying. He had taken all the needful certificates, and was as good an amateur pilot as any to be found.

"Well, I'll be getting along then," said Robert. "I guess they'll have about filled me up by now, and I promised to be back by lunch."

"Right oh, Bob," replied Ned, "and you're sure it'll be O.K. about my bringing out the section next Saturday for a little practice? They're all as keen as mustard."

"Certain sure!" Robert asserted with emphasis. "As a matter of fact, we'll have the place to our two selves, you and I. The parents are going to London for a wedding. You want me to fly for you at night, I suppose?"

"If you will, and if the weather's decent," his friend replied. "I've told the searchlight crew you will, and there's no holding them back."

Just then a man in flying kit came into the eating-room, which was otherwise empty, nodded casually in their direction and took a seat. He was an ill-favoured specimen to look at, with a hard expression, and he was a total stranger to both. On the way out they encountered the manager.

"Your Buzzard's ready, Mr. Hilton," he announced.

"Thanks, Halford," Robert said; and then, caught with a sudden idea, "Who's the sinister-looking josser that just went inside?" he asked.

"There is a funny look about him, as you say," the manager made answer. "Name's Lightfoot according to what he wrote. His first visit to my knowing. Flies an autogiro single seater; one of the sort that goes up straight. That's her, over there by yours. Well, pleasant trip, Mr. Hilton, and mind the mist doesn't come up on you."

"I'll watch that," Robert replied. "Coming over to see me off, Ned?"

They studied the stranger machine as they neared the apron, both regarding it with interest. "Must be rather fun to fly," said Robert. "I believe they can be unbelievably twisted about in the air."

"I'll say they can," Ned replied. "We caught one in the rays a little time ago, one night when the section was practising over by Crag End House. It was all-black, too, like this fellow, and did the pilot squirm and wriggle to get out of the light!"

"Crag End?" repeated Robert inquiringly. "Wasn't

it there they had the thieves in not so long ago ? Furs and jewellery and that sort of thing."

"It was the same night," stated Ned. "A couple of chaps from the R.A.F. station were doing target for us, and every one was so keen on seeing the show that the house was left empty. Well, in you get, Bob. I must be getting along or there'll be a vacancy in my firm. Be seeing you next Saturday and bringing the whole bag of tricks along."

Robert's engine was already turning over, and within two minutes of the last spoken word he was taxi-ing for his take off. The friends exchanged a final wave. The Buzzard quickly took the air and headed due north. Ned Wyatt turned away to make for where his car was standing. On the way he encountered the owner of the autogiro, who hesitated as if about to speak, and then, thinking better of it, pursued his way. "A curious cuss," thought Ned, and found it hard to refrain from looking back.

Robert Hilton, steadying his climb at 3,000 feet, cruised along at 75 m.p.h., thoroughly enjoying the panorama that lay below. As soon as he was over the moorland district proper he forsook the more direct route in order to identify to his satisfaction the sparsely scattered hill farms by reference to his map. But for them there were no signs of human habitation for miles and miles around. Sheep alone, and those only of hardy breed, could take a living from the wastes of heather, and, requiring as they did six acres for the sustenance of each, they were difficult to see except when bunched. It was a desolation to the view of any one unacquainted with the moorland mode of life, in such contrast to the midlands and the south that even Robert could sometimes hardly credit it that he was flying over his native land.

Soon he was over more familiar country, though all of it he knew. A dark, low-lying line of crag, the Meslings, gave him an exact bearing, for on the farther side of it was Hilton property almost as far as a landsman's eye could see, and eight miles beyond lay Nunstead Hall, his home, nestling at the foot of a slope with a trickle of a river in the foreground.

He marked, as usual, the dark opening of a disused coal shaft, abandoned eighty years ago, which showed up like some gigantic burrow at the foot of the Meslings, and wondered once again why it also had not been boarded up as had the many other forsaken workings of that district when it had no longer paid to transport coal on pony-back to Scotland.

Gliding in over the newly planted fir belt, Robert made his usual excellent three-point landing in the Calf Close, as the miniature flying-field was called, handed over his Buzzard to the waiting mechanic, and went on up to the house. Just as his feet were about to scrunch the gravel of the drive a moving object in the distance caught his eye, and he stood to gaze.

" That's funny," he said to himself. " What on earth's the fellow doing over this way ? Low down, too !" The object was unmistakably an aircraft, though too far off for the engine note to be audible. Far as it was, however, Robert, with the trained eye of an airman, knew it even against the background of dark fell as an autogiro, and concluded, on the law of chance, that it must surely be the one which was filling up beside his own machine about an hour and a half ago.

Two days later, on the Wednesday, there came a despairing note from Ned. " The plan has gone all cock-eye," he wrote. " The Major will only let me bring the searchlight. Apparently the training fund is low and he must cut down on expenses. So I shan't have with me the gun, sound-locator, etc. One thing is, there'll only be five of us now, me included, so that we won't be eating your family out of house and home. By the by, you remember that nasty bit of work who sat down near us at the aerodrome last Monday ? Well, there's some fuss about his registration or licence or whatever the thing is. Seems he's not wanted exactly, but they do want to check up on him. Due for a fine, I suppose, or something of that kind. You can expect us easily by tea time. Until then——"

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II

On that night, though the news did not get round till the afternoon of the next day, Deershaw Castle, a great barrack of a house belonging to the Lord Lieutenant of the county, was broken into, and valuables to the value of £20,000, including a Raphael painting cut out of its frame, were removed without trace. The family, it appeared, had been attending a ball at a distance, while the whole staff, indoor and out, had been battling for most of the night with a fire that had attacked the hay ricks of the home farm and threatened the byres in which the Jersey milking herd was kept. There was no accounting for the outbreak, but previous to the alarm, the bailiff and his wife were prepared to swear they had been awakened by the noise of a powerful engine, which seemed, though this they could not swear to, to come from overhead. The castle was about twenty miles across the moorland from Nunstead, and what made Robert ponder deeply was just this. There had been of late some sheep worrying on Pundershaw, one of the Hilton's farms about half way, and, for the first time, on Wednesday night a watch had been kept. The shepherd on duty, so it leaked out in inconsequential fashion, had distinctly heard and dimly descried an aeroplane passing overhead about two hours before dawn. Robert, however, kept this item to himself, for the theory which was forming in his brain seemed so fantastic that he hesitated to risk making himself a laughing stock until, at any rate, he had surer ground to go on. He had, in fact, connected the autogiro with this and the former robbery. He did decide to tell Ned, and 'phoned him about it on Friday afternoon.

"Doesn't it seem so to you?" he asked, after telling him his grounds for suspicion. "You caught an autogiro in your light on the night of the first robbery. The farm bailiff heard something of the sort on the night of this one, and the shepherd says he heard and saw one. Shepherds don't invent. They are wise and guileless, leading the solitary life they do. Then I myself saw one near here on the Monday, and lastly, you say there's something irregular

about the chap we saw. In my opinion, though there's absolutely no proof of any sort, a gang is located in the district, and in some way they're using aviation for their misdeeds. A new development in crime ?"

Ned had been properly impressed. " You don't get bees in your bonnet, Bob," he said, " and I've known you to have hunches. But there's nothing you or I can do, is there ?"

" I might scout around in the Buzzard and toothcomb the district for suspicious signs," Robert answered.

" That's a good idea !" Ned promptly replied, " But wait at least until I fetch in on Saturday, and I'll do observer for you. It'll be a chance for an exciting flip if nothing else."

So it was arranged, and Robert, with an intuition strong within him, waited impatiently for the next day.

Saturday dawned bright and clear, and when Robert's curtains were drawn to let in the orange sunlight of late October, he knew that he would have to fly that morning or " bust." A happy thought struck him as he vigorously towelled himself after a tepid bath. Why not fly over to Deershaw and look up Betty Conyers and hear at first hand all about the robbery? Directly he got downstairs he 'phoned.

" That you Betty ? Sorry about your bad luck and all that. Was thinking of taking a flip in that direction and getting you to tell me all about it. All right ? Fine ! Then expect me about eleven. No, mustn't stay to lunch. Have got Ned Wyatt coming over with a gang of searchlight territorials, and he'd eat me if I wasn't here. So long."

He flew at about 1,500 feet on an absolutely straight course, and did the 20 miles in exactly half an hour from take-off to landing. Betty met him on the improvised landing field, and took him at once to the scene of the fire.

" Any theory yet of how it started ?" he asked as they began walking round the charred group of stacks. " By Jove ! It was a narrow shave for the byre, and a narrower for your prize herd of milkers !"

" Here's Mr. Paterson, the bailiff," Betty said in reply. " You ask him. He's got a wonderful theory."

" It's like this, Mr. Hilton," the bailiff began, only too

anxious to voice his opinion. "It's my belief it was done by air attack. I'm certain that what the wife and I heard was an aeroplane, and there's been enough about these incendiary bombs in the papers of late. There's no other way of accounting for it. That hay was properly stacked and couldn't've caught fire by itself. And who was about to touch it off at that hour? Tell me that!"

"Do you mean it was done to assist the robbery?" asked Robert, highly interested at this confirmation of what he thought himself.

"I do and all," vociferated Mr. Paterson, "though his Lordship put me down as crazy when I told him. He thinks it was done by some of these here communists, same as has been happening down south."

"H'm," said Robert, and then made the rough old countryman happy by entirely agreeing with him. "What is more," he added, "I'll get the Chief Constable on the 'phone from Nunstead when I get back and tell him what you and I have independently arrived at. After that it's up to him."

Declining to go up to the castle on the score of haste, Robert hurried back to the landing-field and set off for home. He flew low this time, at about 300 feet, intending to wave a greeting to little Molly Dod, the only child of the old shepherd who lived a solitary existence at Milkhope Law, and who was a great favourite of his. He often dropped her sweets.

The greeting duly came off, and then Robert deviated somewhat, thinking he might as well fly up the Tarret burn and see what the heather looked like on Cushat Edge after the autumn burning. Sheep in ones and twos were feeding in the usual scattered fashion, and, as always, took not the slightest notice of the aeroplane passing immediately overhead. And yet, as Robert knew, it wanted very little on the ground to make them bunch and scamper, and rush blindly about in their sheepish, silly way.

There was an old mine-working somewhere near, he knew. As children, he and Ned had once ventured the ten miles out from Nunstead on their Shetland ponies, and had explored the roomy entrance to the shaft in spite of the

ancient boarding which had closed it long ago. He would look out for it and then make a bee-line home.

There it was, and the grazing must be quite good nearby, for there were more than a few Cheviot ewes feeding in the vicinity, some at the burnside and others on the rocky slope. Now that was mysterious ! Why had they done that ? Why should these act differently from the many hundred others he had just flown over ? What had scared them ?

For, quite contrary to rule, there was suddenly a panic in the ranks, and the woolly idiots were behaving exactly as if they were being rounded up by a collie. Pondering on the incident, Robert turned for home and handed over the Buzzard about a quarter of an hour later. " Give the engine a bit of a trueing, Harris," he said to his mechanic. " I'm nightflying her later on and want her at the top of her form."

He went on to the house. " Where's my father ?" he asked of the butler, only to learn that both parents had taken an earlier train to town. " Then I'll have to beard old Turnbull on my own," he said to himself, going to the 'phone, and asking for the Chief Constable's number.

" Is that you, Sir Richard? This is Robert Hilton, speaking from Nunstead. Very well, thank you. And Lady Turnbull ? Good." He then proceeded to pour, rather incoherently, into the ear at the other end of the line his theory, corroborated by the Deershaw bailiff, of the recent robberies. " It may be far-fetched, but I'm certain I'm on the right line ! Of course there's no proof ! What's that, Sir Richard ? The county police don't work on hunches ? Yes, that's all. Sorry for taking up your time, but I felt I had to speak."

" The old fool," he muttered to himself, realizing that the high official merely thought him interfering and, perhaps, a bit above himself. " Anyhow, I've done all I can."

Ned and his territorials turned up just as the light was going. First of all they fixed up their contraption on the far edge of the flying-ground, and then trooped up to the house for tea. The housekeeper took charge of the sergeant and three men, while Ned was regaled by Robert. They discussed a plan of operations.

"Could you go up to 10,000 this time, Bob?" asked Ned, and "Why not?" Robert replied.

"That's fine, and we'll only hope the weather does not thicken. At first, when we get you in the ray (if we do, that is), will you hold a straight course until we let you go? I've brought a new hand who hasn't done it before. After that you can squirm and wriggle as much as you like, but don't come lower until we finally signal you in. Who's going to see about your flare path?"

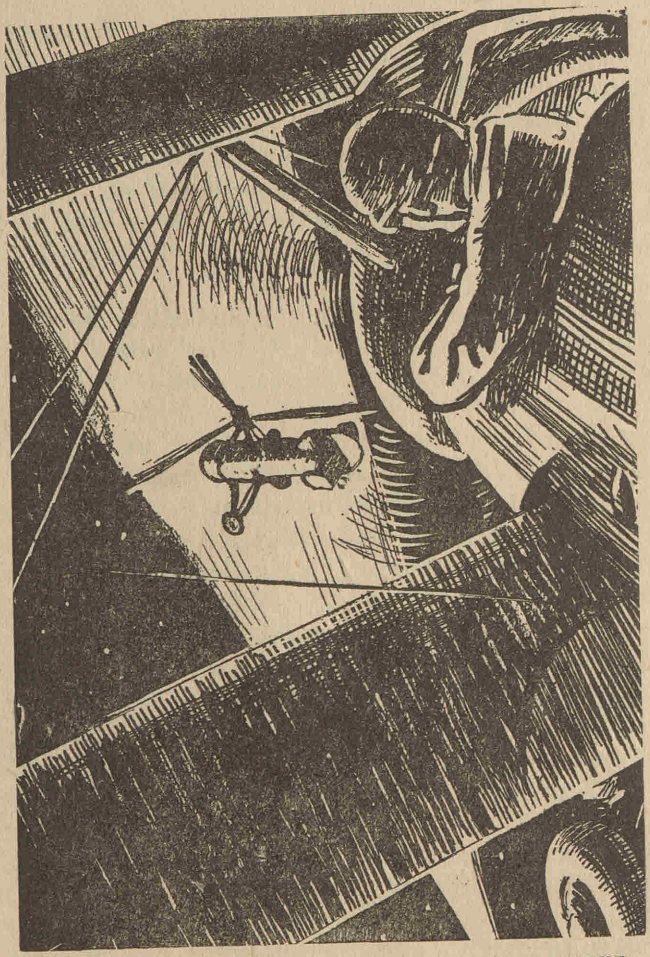
"Harris and our car-washer. They know all about it."

"Good! Then I suggest we wait till ten o'clock for the moon and then start in. Hope you've got a real, nice dinner for me."

As luck would have it, the weather clouded over when the moon came up. The sky did not become overcast precisely, but there was enough murk about to hamper the searchlight operations and to make the flying, in consequence, largely a waste of effort. It was disappointing but had to be borne, and so every one went back to the house, except the newest hand who was charged with the responsibility of reporting on the weather each half-hour. It was not until past midnight that the welcome "all clear" came. The sky had cleared miraculously, the moon was climbing high, and the rear-guard of the fleecy flock of clouds was disappearing eastwards out to sea.

Saying that he would get his height well away from Nunstead, and then come back over it at 10,000 feet, Robert had his engine started for him, warmed up for two minutes, tried her out for revs, waved the chocks away, gave a cheery good-bye signal to his friend, and opened up. Circling once for safety's sake, he set a due west course and almost immediately flew out of sight.

The night really had turned fine, the Buzzard was flying true and trim, and Robert, not excited but exhilarated, turned his thoughts to the record-breaking flight round the globe which he had planned to make next year. He sang aloud as was his custom when alone, though he could not hear his voice. In eighteen minutes he was up at the agreed height and turned for home. Flying fast, in another eight minutes he saw the winking 20,000 candle-power



HE SAW THAT IT WAS HOLDING SOMETHING IN THE NIGHT SKY.

light that he had established on the tower at Nunstead for just such a purpose as this, and as he spotted it he saw, at the same time, Ned's searchlight ray suddenly break out, waver, and then stand still.

"Probably just trying it out," he thought, and then, "Cripes! jiminy! and what ho!" he mentally ejaculated as he saw that it was holding something in the night sky. A little nearer and he saw, what he already half expected to see, that it was illuminating an autogiro at about half the height at which he was himself.

"We'll hear about another robbery to-morrow now," he thought, "and that'll be one in the eye for old Turnbull." And then, "By Jove, I'll have a shot," he continued to himself, and flew as near as he could judge at right angles to the

beam in the hope of being able to cut off and follow the stranger aircraft before it got beyond searchlight range. Unfortunately he was just too late, the power of the beam failing before he got near enough to pick the autogiro up. He flew on for a bit, however, in what he judged must be the wake of the other machine, having come down to 5,000 feet in order to be on the same level. One thing he did notice which set him thinking. Below, a brightish light was showing steadily, and although he could not accurately place it, it might easily be near the slope of Cushat Edge where he had been flying earlier in the day when the sheep took sudden alarm.

Disappointed, though by no means disconsolate, for he thought his theory was strengthened, he climbed again, and soon was dancing in and out of Ned's searchlight according to the arranged programme. "Must give old Ned a run for his money," he had decided, "and anyway there's nothing to be done till morning."

III

Neither of them had more than four hours' sleep that night, chiefly because they stayed up talking long after the practice was over. Robert, also, was now in an excited frame of mind, which always made him wakeful. They had decided overnight to get into the air at dawn and make a thorough reconnaissance of Cushat Edge where, Robert felt convinced and Ned agreed, there was something mighty fishy going on.

Despite the early hour and semi-darkness, Harris had things ready for them when the two young men arrived at the flying-field. "She's full up, sir, oil and petrol," he said. "I've had her running and you needn't bother to warm her up. How long might you be going to be, if I might ask?"

"Oh, an hour at most, Harris," replied Robert.

"Then I'll go and have some breakfast as soon as I see you on your way, sir."

The light was improving rapidly, though the day was none too fine. "Doesn't matter," said Robert, holding up a hand to feel for rain, "I don't intend to fly above a couple of hundred feet. Lower still in places."

They set off, not making straight for the spot they were bound for, but flying wide of it at first so as to approach it from the rear, so to speak. This manœuvre had been planned overnight, Robert having an idea that if there was anything to see, there would be less suspicion on the ground if they came in from an unexpected quarter, concealed at first by the hill of Kidland to the west of Cushat Edge.

All went well. About five miles west of the old mine-working Robert came quite low down, slightly to Ned's alarm, signalled to his passenger that they had arrived, and began to fly about a hundred feet above the Tarret burn along the eastern slope of Cushat Edge in which the shaft was situated. But he didn't complete that run. Instead, he beat it back for home at top speed, much to Ned's bewilderment, and had no sooner put the wheels down than he fell forward in a dead faint.

Terribly distressed, Ned did all he could in the absence of any help, and soon saw what had caused his friend's collapse. He had been shot through the calf of the right leg, and blood was all about the cockpit floor. More than that, several punctures in the fuselage showed that a tommy-gun, or something of the sort, had been used. Robert was got out somehow, and a handkerchief bandage was skilfully applied. By that time Harris could be seen approaching from the house and, "Run back and get my car!" Ned shouted as soon as the mechanic was within earshot.

Robert came to in the interval and quickly gave a coherent account of the happening. "An ass I am to conk like that!" were his first words. And then, "It's mighty lucky they got me with the first burst," he continued. "Otherwise we might have piled up before I could size things up and both gone to glory. The dirty skunks! I caught a glint of metal out of the corner of my eye and saw a movement. Some sixth sense warned me what might be coming, and I was actually ruddering to get out of it when they got me. Ah, good! Here's your car. First thing is to ring up the police, and after that you can ring a doctor."

News that something in the nature of a tragedy had happened was already circulating, and the servants were



"AN ASS I AM TO CONK LIKE THAT!" WERE HIS FIRST WORDS.

gathered on the doorstep when the car drove up. "Shout to someone to get the Chief Constable, Consett 347," Robert whispered faintly to his friend. "I'll talk to him myself." But there was no need!

The butler appeared at that very instant to announce that Sir Richard Turnbull was on the 'phone and wanted Mr. Robert Hilton. Robert limped inside, supported by the butler and Ned, insisting on answering himself. "A

spot of brandy," he said, " and I'll be as right as a trivet."

Grasping the instrument, " Yes, Sir Richard," he spoke into it, " did you say there'd been another burglary ? Over at Heatop !" loudly repeating this last for the benefit of Ned, at whom he winked. " How did I know ? Oh, just another hunch. Any evidence this time of an aeroplane near about ? There was ! Well, now Sir Richard, just listen patiently to this," and he recounted what had happened less than an hour ago, subsequently remembering to add the overnight appearance of the autogiro.

The Chief Constable then had a long turn of speech, intermixed with many " excellents " and " goods " from Robert as the talk went on. " I must say the old boy's limber when he does get a move on," Robert exclaimed, banging down the receiver. " The R.A.F. are going to put reliefs of double-engined aircraft over that part of the moor, and keep it under observation, while police in cars will get as near as possible from four directions and then close in on foot. Wish we could be there too, Ned. And now I think I'll just lie down awhile. I'm beginning to feel a bit queasy again. Jenkins," to the butler, " just 'phone through for Doctor Hurst, will you."

Complete success attended the efforts of the Chief Constable. Just after the arrival overhead of the Service aircraft, those in it saw an autogiro below trying to make a getaway, so they came down and, by making rings round it, shepherded it back to earth. At mid-day the relief machine arrived and took up the patrol. An hour later it reported by wireless that the autogiro was burning on the ground, and that three men were footing it by sheep-track in a due northerly direction. At 1.50 p.m. precisely they walked right into the posse coming south and surrendered without resistance. Questioned on the spot, they admitted their guilt and guided the police to the disused coal shaft. It had been adapted as a hanger for the autogiro, as and when required, and the ancient battens which shut the entrance had been cunningly refashioned to work as double doors. Inside were found the proceeds of the last three robberies intact, together with provisions and drink and bed furniture for the use of the two confederates whose duty it was to keep watch

and guard until an opportunity arose for disposing of the loot. The prisoners were new to the world of crime, stating at the subsequent trial that they had no other outside partners, and were on the point of removing the stolen property and clearing out for good the very day that they were caught.

It was ten days later that Robert, advanced in convalescence though still on crutches, was visited again by Ned. "Tired of being a hero, Bob?" the latter asked after they had talked a little time together.

"What about you? You're just as much a blooming hero yourself, at least the papers tell me so."

"One thing's got me badly guessing," Ned observed, after a slight pause. "We're not in America where gangsters flourish, and robbery with murder is almost unknown in this country, isn't it? And yet there isn't a shadow of doubt they did try to get us. They may have done it because they thought we knew too much. But, that being the case, why not just clear out with the loot and call it a day? What's the answer?"

"It's been puzzling me too," Robert replied. "At first I thought the one who fired might have got excited and lost his head. Or he might've been a gunman even and just obeyed his instincts. But now I think it was a deliberate attempt to do us in, and the way I figure it out there wouldn't have been much risk attached. You see, if they had brought us down we should have been bound to smash to atoms going at that speed close to the ground, and with all those boulders about. Also we should almost certainly have caught fire on the ground. That is what usually happens. But if not, nothing would have been easier than for them to set fire to the crash. Then it would have looked exactly like an ordinary flying accident and *nobody could have told the difference* when people came to search the charred remains. It would have been the perfect murder at last, absolutely undetectable, and they could then have made their getaway in complete safety, very possibly after robbing our house as a final effort. Does that make sense? It seems so to me."

After that, and a quiet nod of understanding from Ned, neither of them spoke for quite a while. The picture conjured up by Robert, no doubt the real solution, was one to think about in silence.