
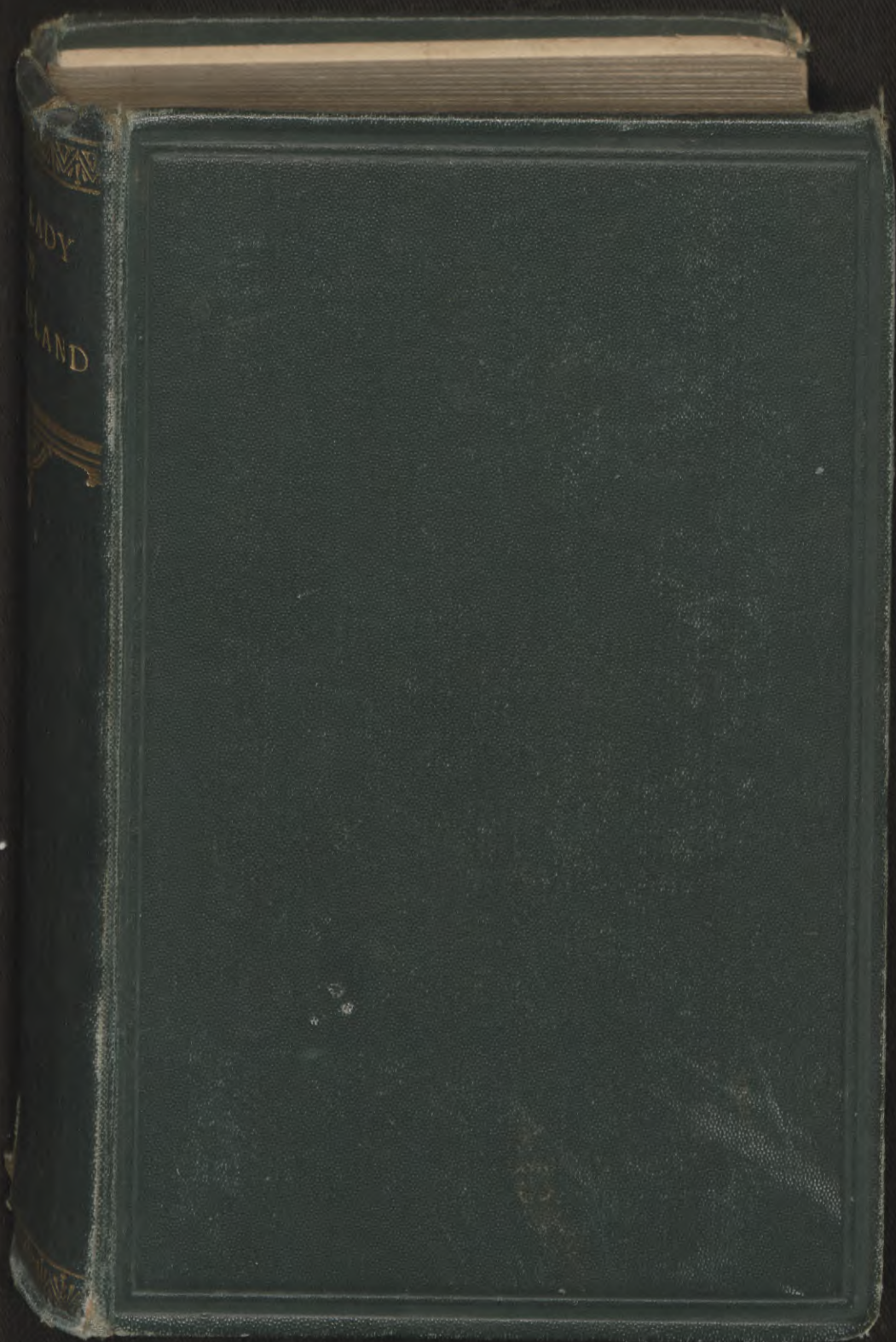


THE LADY
OF
THE ISLAND





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The Lady of
the Island .

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JOHN LONG, LONDON

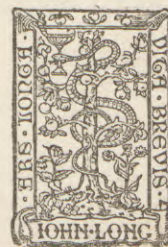
The Lady of the Island

By

Guy Boothby

Author of "Dr Nikola," etc., etc.

With Twelve Illustrations by A. T. SMITH

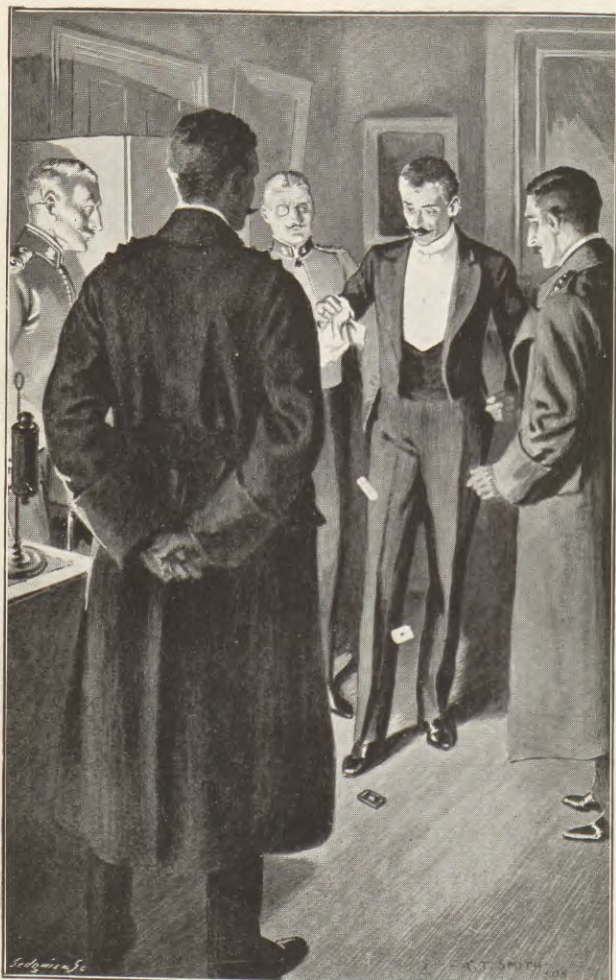


London

John Long

13 and 14 Norris Street, Haymarket

1904



TWO OR THREE CARDS WHICH FLUTTERED AIRILY DOWN TO
THE FLOOR

The Lady of the Island

Frontispiece

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The Lady of the Island

As old Bob Tuckett, trader and owner of the schooner *Dancing Girl*, used to say, sawing the air with his hands and speaking in his curiously deep bass voice, "There are islands and islands in this 'ere blooming Pacific; some where they'd make a barbecue of you as soon as look at you; others where you'd be as safe as in your own home; some where you'd think there be nothing anyways out of the common; and others again, that didn't seem to have anything to show for themselves, but where you'd come across things that would fairly make your eyebrows curl. It's a strange world, gentlemen, and there's few of us can say we know it as it should be known."

He might well say that, and I flatter myself that the story I am about to tell you now will go some little way towards proving the truth of his assertion. Since I had the honour of making the acquaintance of the principal person connected with it, I have

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been permitted an opportunity of verifying a tale which, at first sight, would appear to be almost unbelievable. But truth is proverbially stranger than fiction; and, for my part, I have seen and heard enough in my roving about the world to be able to credit anything. And with this preamble, let me get to business.

You must understand that what I am going to tell you took place some twenty years ago, long before certain parts of the Western Pacific had become as well known as they are to-day. In fact, those who did visit them were generally traders from the Fijis and Australia, after *bêche-de-mer*, sandalwood, etc., and, later on, hunting up labour for the Queensland sugar plantations—black-birding, as it was usually termed. Now, however, the islands, from the Ladrões—shall we say?—to New Zealand, are regularly patrolled by men-of-war, though perhaps less is known of the Carolines and Solomons than should be, considering what they are and the possibilities they present.

It was drawing near the close of the monsoon season when I left Yap—or, as it used to be called, Guap—Island for a trading station, belonging to the firm that employed me, on the other side of the Caroline group.

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Towards the end of the wet season strong south-west gales as often as not set in, and dodging in and out the islands is by no means as easy a business as some people might imagine. However, though folk warned me to be careful, seeing the state of the weather when I was leaving, I had no fear. I knew my craft as a driver knows a favourite horse; and, what was more, having a big shipment of copra aboard, I was anxious to reach my destination and hand it over without any more delay than was absolutely necessary.

Before midday I was heartily wishing I had listened to the advice I had received. By nightfall I could have kicked myself for my folly in leaving Tomil Bay. By midnight matters were about as bad as they could be.

By the time eight bells struck for the first watch next morning matters were growing desperate, and we were scudding almost under bare poles for all we were worth. Seas broke over her continually, and it was well-nigh as much as one's life was worth to remain on deck. Early in the morning watch our whale-boat was smashed to atoms, and an hour or so later my new topmast, that I had set up only a week before, went

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by the board. Why she did not part amidships herself will always remain a mystery to me, so constant and terrific was the strain upon her. By breakfast time next morning there was—so it struck me—a slight improvement, which looked as if, after all, the gale might be blowing itself out. In those seas these bursts die away almost as quickly as they spring up, and no man can tell what a few hours may bring forth. I must ask you to imagine my feelings as I regarded her. My foremast was a wreck, a portion of my starboard bulwarks was gone, while what remained of my brand-new whale-boat, of which I had been so proud, was only fit for firewood. It was enough to make a man sit down and cry his eyes out. But even had I wanted to, I had not time for such diversion, for we were far from being out of the wood yet. My hope that matters were settling down was not destined, however, to be realised as soon as I expected. All through that day and until the afternoon of the day following we were driven along by a wind which, if it were not as strong as before, was at least quite strong enough to make me anxious. Then, with a suddenness that was as extraordinary as its springing up had been, the gale died down, leaving us rolling

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in the swell of a heavy sea. In all my experience of the islands, extending over a good number of years, I do not know that I had ever met with anything resembling it.

At noon I had to endeavour to find out our position—a business which, owing to the heavy rolling of the schooner, was a matter of considerable difficulty. However, this important item was at last decided with no little astonishment to myself.

“This is a nice business,” said I to my mate, as we bent together over the chart on the house table. “I knew we’d been carried clean out of our course, but I didn’t reckon for all this. What’s worse, look at the condition we’re in. It’s enough to make a man turn to and kick himself.”

Young Gordon was a free-spoken fellow, and he proved it now. Though I could not find it in my heart to blame him, I did not like his tone.

“Let’s thank our stars we’re where we are instead of being in Davy Jones’s locker,” said he. “I can tell you that more than once I made up my mind we were booked there. You’d better have spent another few days in Yap, as you were advised; we’d have had our topmast then.”

I looked at him with a bit of a spark in

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my eye, I make no doubt, but he did not flinch. I knew I was to blame, and, as I had put his life at stake—well, it would not have been exactly fair to have fallen out with him for speaking his mind. However, discipline is discipline, especially aboard ship, so I gave him to understand straight out that he had better do his work and mind his own business. After that I went back to the deck, feeling angry with myself and with the Clerk of the Weather in particular.

Later in the afternoon the sea commenced to fall perceptibly, until there was scarcely enough wind to swell the canvas. The sun had come out warm, and when I came on deck to stand my watch, I found the crew busily engaged drying their wet clothes. They had had a fair dusting of it, poor beggars, and were making the most of the warmth, as all Kanakas will.

Having located my position I was now trying to make up my mind where I should put in for an overhaul. I rather fancied there was a bit of a strain forrard, as we were making a few drops more water than I thought we ought to do. Having decided on an island I set the course, and then sat myself down to wait for the necessary wind to carry us the way we should go. It did

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not seem, however, as if we should ever find it. As the sun died down the heat became almost insufferable; the pitch fairly melted in the seams, while there was scarcely a piece of iron or brass upon which you could lay your hand. We were certainly being driven from one extreme to the other.

Next day, however, a nice breeze sprang up, enabling us to make a fair amount of progress.

"If only this will hold," I said to my mate, "we ought to pick up the island within the next thirty-six hours. Is the water gaining on us at all?"

"Not enough to be alarmed about," he replied. "But I'd like to find out where it's coming in."

He gave me the carpenter's report, which was in a measure reassuring, but which only confirmed my opinion that there was something wrong somewhere, and that that something might very probably grow worse. However, I flattered myself that, if this wind only continued, we should very soon be able to set matters right. This was exactly what *did* happen, though not quite as I expected. I have already said that I was not familiar with the islands of that portion of the group, and I certainly could

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not have been, for at daybreak next morning I was awakened by the mate with the information that there was land to be seen ahead.

"Land be hanged!" I cried. "The chart says nothing about any island hereabouts. How does it bear?"

"Two points on the weather bow," was his reply. "We're picking it up fast."

On hearing this I tumbled out of my bunk, while he returned to the deck. When I had hustled on my things I joined him there, to discover the faint outline of an island upon the horizon. From what we could see of it as we drew nearer it was of fair size, at a rough estimate perhaps ten miles in length. It was hilly, and, when I brought the glasses to bear on it, seemed to be well clothed with trees. I went into the house once more and again overhauled the chart, but it told me nothing. I thought I might be out of my reckoning with regard to my position, but this was certainly not the case. I accordingly returned to the deck to find that we were now some five or six miles distant from it, and that it was already possible to see the surf breaking on the reef. I cannot say when I have seen a prettier picture than I had before me then—the blue sea, the white

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surf on the reef, and the dark green island for a background. As we drew closer in the smell of the land came off to us, and, after all we had been through during the last few days, I can tell you it was like the breath of Heaven. Later on I sent the mate up into the cross-trees to keep his eye on the reef, and it was not long before he hailed me to say that he had discovered the entrance.

I joined him, and from that elevation was able to form a very fair idea of what the island was like. So far as I could judge it seemed admirably adapted to our purpose; the lagoon was as smooth as a millpond, while there was a beach of dazzling white sand on the further side. Sending the mate down to the wheel, I remained where I was in order to con her through. Half an hour later we were inside and at anchor. Whether I was pleased to be there or not I must leave you to guess.

That night we ran her gently ashore on the soft sand, and next morning set to work to examine her as soon as it was light. As it turned out, there was not very much to worry about; a plank had started forrard, and to return it to its place, and to caulk the same afterwards, was not likely to be either a long or a difficult job. When it was

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finished, nothing would remain but to warp her off as soon as the tide should serve, and then to sea again.

And now I am brought to the narration of the strangest part of my story—that part to which I referred at the commencement of my yarn.

As there was nothing for me to do until the tide should rise sufficiently to float the schooner, I told the mate to put the hands on to rub her down underneath, for she had not been into dock for a long time, and, in consequence, was fairly foul. Then, procuring a rifle from my cabin, and filling my pockets with cartridges, I set off for a stroll, hoping that it might fall to my luck to obtain a pig, many of which beasts I knew ran wild in these islands. It was a beautiful morning—a trifle hot in the scrub, but nothing like what we had had to put up with during the last few days at sea. The vegetation was something to see and wonder at, while the silence was such as to make you almost afraid of the sound of your own footsteps. So far, not a sign of a pig had I seen, nor, indeed, of any sort of game. There were plenty of birds, it is true; but, knowing the limitations of my skill with a rifle, I was not prepared to waste cartridges

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in the attempt to secure them, while I was also doubtful whether they would be worth the trouble of taking back, even had I been able to bring them down.

When I had reached the summit of the hill, I was able to satisfy myself as to the size of the island. As I have already said, it was about ten miles in length; and from my elevated position I could now see that its width was scarcely three. In fact, it was nothing more than a long strip of land, with one peculiarity—namely, that it had evidently once formed part of a larger island, which I could only suppose had by some volcanic disturbance been split up into several parts. Straight before me, and surrounding a little inland sea—for it was larger than a lagoon—were at least a dozen smaller islands, each connected, and all clothed with palm-trees. The water was of an exquisite blue and as smooth as a looking-glass. If I had thought the lagoon in which the schooner lay made a charming picture, this was ten times more beautiful. I resolved to inspect it more closely, and, with this intention, descended the hill. I was by this time quite convinced in my own mind that I was the first white man to set foot upon the island—that is to say, unless one of the old navigators, Drake,

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Dampier, Cook, or some other had been there before me. Imbued with the feelings of a pioneer, I strode along, keeping all the time a sharp look-out on every side for a pig. I had almost given up hope of obtaining one, when, to my surprise, I saw a splendid specimen of the breed quietly feeding in an open spot some fifty yards or so ahead of me. Down I immediately dropped upon one knee behind a bush, through the branches of which I was able to obtain a good view of him. I fired, and when the smoke had cleared off, peered through the leaves to see what the result of my shot had been. I looked, and looked, and looked again; and then rubbed my eyes to see whether I were awake or dreaming. You will be able to understand my astonishment, no doubt, when I tell you that in the place where that pig should have dropped stood a tall woman—apparently an Englishwoman—dressed altogether in white, and, what was more, in the European fashion. I know the old saying to the effect that it is possible for a man to be so astonished that he may be knocked down with a feather. In my case, however, I fancy I might have been knocked down—shall we say?—with a cobweb. I had so completely made up my mind that the island

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was uninhabited, that I should as soon have expected to find myself in Trafalgar Square as to have met a woman like this. When I looked at her again, she was walking towards the spot where I was still kneeling. I accordingly rose and advanced to meet her, my discharged rifle lying in the hollow of my left arm. As I drew closer to her, I realised that I was looking upon the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my life, but one upon whose countenance the finger of despair had been indelibly impressed. Never before had I seen so sweet or so sad a face.

"Sir," she said in English, "let me tell you that I do not permit the shooting of any of the beasts upon this island."

It is beyond my power to describe to you the way in which she said this.

"I deeply regret, madam, that I should have offended," I answered, in my best manner. "I had no idea that the island was inhabited, and still less that an English lady lived here. I can scarcely believe it now."

"I am not English," she replied, still with the same grave courtesy and sadness. "If it interests you to know it, I am an American."

She paused, and I fancied was about to

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leave me. My curiosity, however, was so great that I sought to detain her.

"Will you think me impertinent," I said, "if I ask how long you have lived upon this island?"

"For five years," she answered, as sadly as before; and then added, "Five years that might be five eternities."

Had I dared I would have asked her if she were alone, but my courage failed me. She was plainly not the sort of woman to tolerate curiosity. In place of that question, therefore, I substituted another, remarking that I had been unable to find the island upon the chart.

"I had hoped that its position would remain unknown," was her reply. "Now I fear I shall no longer be free from intruders."

This was so obviously a thrust at me that I could not repress a smile.

"You need not fear that I will betray your island," I said; "that is, supposing you really wish it to remain a secret."

"I am more desirous that it should not become known than you can imagine," she replied. "If you knew all, you would understand how dear that wish is to me."

I felt that I would have given a great

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deal to know her secret, but I did not ask her to throw any light upon the subject. When, however, she said she thought I must be hot and tired after my walk, and offered me refreshment at her dwelling, you may be sure I did not hesitate to accept. Perhaps, I told myself, I may learn something there.

"Let me show you the way, then," she said.

With that she led me along the glade in which I had fired at the pig, and thence by a narrow path down a gentle slope towards the water. We walked in silence for some minutes, until I found courage to ask her whether she did not find her life very lonely in such an out-of-the-world spot.

"My life is all loneliness," she answered. "It would be impossible it could be otherwise."

Every moment the mystery was deepening, and with each my curiosity was growing greater. Then we turned the corner of the path, and came face to face with her house. If I had been surprised at finding the island, at discovering the inland sea, and at meeting her, my astonishment was in no way diminished now. I have seen a good many trading stations in my time, some of them a

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great deal too good for the men who live in them, and, as everybody knows, there are by no means bad residences in Beretania Street, Honolulu; but I always look back on this as the prettiest I have seen. It was built of coral and some sort of polished wood. It was not the material, however, so much as the style of architecture that was so unusual. To attempt to describe it would be for me a work of impossibility. But I can well remember the impression it made upon me. Before it, and running down to the beach, was a garden as unique as the house itself. It was evident that the greatest possible care, amounting to what could only have been a labour of love, was continually expended upon it. There was another peculiarity about it. In the centre, and standing in a little grove of palms, was what at first glance looked like a temple, or, may be, a white stone summer-house. Later I discovered that it was a tomb—or perhaps I should say a mausoleum—which, as in the case of the house, was constructed of coral.

My hostess opened a little gate and conducted me up the path towards the house. The verandah was a fine one, neatly railed with polished wood, and wide

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enough to permit of half a dozen folk walking abreast upon it. Creepers of every hue twined luxuriantly upon it, giving a coolness that was more than refreshing after the close heat of the scrub. In this verandah were several chairs and native mats, and in one of the former my hostess invited me to seat myself while refreshment was being prepared for me. I thanked her, and, choosing a chair near the steps, in order that I might command a view of the water below, awaited her return. She was absent for upwards of a quarter of an hour, at the end of which time she returned to inform me that luncheon (how strangely the word sounded in my ears!) awaited me in the dining-room. I accordingly followed her into the house, and from the hall—which was decorated as I had never seen another in the South Seas—to a dining-room which might well have been an apartment in an English mansion. There I found the table spread with a white cloth, silver, and glass, just as I had been accustomed to see it in my own home as a boy; and I cannot tell you what recollections it called up. Of what the meal consisted I have no remembrance now. All I recall is that it included several kinds of fish and a salad, the

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component parts of which were to me quite unknown.

As soon as I had seated myself at the table, my hostess begged me to excuse her, and left the room. I made a hearty meal, fairly revelling in my surroundings. How different it all was to our meals aboard the schooner, with the coffee-stained tablecloth, the chipped crockery, and the Kanaka steward hovering around, doing next to nothing, and yet upsetting everything! When I had finished I returned to the verandah, and waited to see what would happen next. I had not been there very long before I was joined by my hostess, whereupon I took the liberty of paying her a compliment on the beauty of her garden. It did not rouse her, however. She seemed incapable of emotion; her beautiful face had but one expression, and that, as I have already said, was one of despair. To say that I was sorry for her would be to put the matter too mildly. Until an hour before I had never set eyes on her, and yet now I felt that I would do all in my power to help her. Being fairly familiar with the United States, and thinking it would please her, I began to talk to her about that country. She stopped me, however.

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"Please do not speak of it," she said. "You can have no idea what it means to me."

This time I could not control my curiosity, and before I had time to check myself I had blurted out, "Why?"

She looked at me steadily for a few moments, and then, rising from her seat, signed to me to follow her into the garden. I did so, and together we made our way down the path toward the tomb, or mausoleum, to which I have already referred.

It was admirably constructed, and kept with the most scrupulous care. Inscription there was none, so that I was unable to tell whose resting-place it was. I was not to remain in ignorance very long, however.

"Ever since we met," began my companion, "I have noticed a look of wonderment upon your face. You were surprised to see me; you did not expect to find the house, and now you are at a loss to understand the meaning of this tomb. Believe me when I say that this is the key to everything. Would you care to hear the story?"

"I need scarcely say that I should, but I have no desire that you should suffer in the telling."

She shook her head.

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"Wait till you have heard me out," she said.

I did not know what reply to make to this, so I held my tongue, like a prudent man.

She led me to a seat in the shadow of the palms, and then, with her eyes fixed upon the tomb we had just left, began her story.

"As I told you this morning, I am an American. My mother was a Cuban; my father—but there, it doesn't matter what State he hailed from. I was their only child, wayward and headstrong from my babyhood, spoiled by all who knew me, and thoughtless of everything save my own pleasure. When I was nearly twenty-one I met a man—a Spaniard—with whom my father had had some business dealings. They had quarrelled; and when he proposed to me, and I vowed that I would marry him, despite all opposition—for I had inherited a large fortune from my mother, and was, therefore, independent—I thought my father would have killed me in his rage. As a matter of fact, he never really recovered from the shock, and, what is worse, I do not think he ever forgave me. As soon as we were married we left the States for Cuba, where a large portion of my fortune was

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sunk in a tobacco plantation owned by my husband. By the time I had been a few months on the island, I discovered the fatal mistake I had made. The man I had chosen was a profligate, a bully, and a gambler. Before I had been married to him a year, I had learnt to hate him as I had never thought it possible I could hate anyone. If he but touched my hand, my whole being rose in revolt against him. He knew this, and found pleasure in tormenting me. Day by day matters grew worse, until I felt that I must do something to end it. Then there appeared upon the scene a third person—a young Englishman, who had but lately arrived in the island. He and my husband had met on several occasions, and as we were in want of an overseer at the time, it was suggested that he should join us in that capacity, which, being without employment, he gladly consented to do. I am convinced that, from the first, he understood how strained was the relationship between my husband and myself, though he never allowed me to believe that he noticed anything. One day, however, he told me something that I had known for a long time, and from that moment it became impossible for him to remain with us. He accordingly left, and

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took up his quarters in the city of Santiago. God knows it was not my fault, and I pitied him from the bottom of my heart.

“That my husband knew, or guessed, something of what had taken place, I felt quite certain. For his manner towards me changed altogether, and instead of being openly brutal, as before, he became suddenly sneeringly polite. This continued for upwards of a month, and might have lasted longer but for an event which has resulted in my being here to tell you the story to-day. The young Englishman came to the house to bid me ‘good-bye’—he was going home. His father had died, and it appeared that he had succeeded to a title that was one of the oldest among all those historic names. He thanked me for my kindness, and, I fear, would have said more, but that I checked him. My husband came in while he was with me, and, regardless of his presence, used expressions that would have lashed any woman into a fury. Heaven knows it was not premeditated; but months of ill-treatment had brought me to such a condition that I could bear no more. Without counting the cost of what I was doing, I pulled open a drawer in the writing-table and seized a revolver, which I knew was

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A MINUTE LATER HE WAS STRETCHED DEAD AT MY FEET

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kept there. A minute later he was stretched dead at my feet. For the time being I must have been mad, for I have no recollection of anything that happened from the moment I saw him lying before me until I came to my senses nearly a week later. Then I was informed that the man, whom I am now only too proud to say that I loved, had been arrested on his own confession for the crime I had committed, and that within a week's time he was to suffer the extreme penalty of the law for the same. To save me he was willing to yield his life. You see, I am telling all this in bald language. It is the only way. To save him it was necessary that I should confess myself guilty. God help me! I was a coward at first, but, as you will see, I grew braver later.

“My husband had possessed many relatives and numerous so-called friends, for he had been prodigal with my money. These latter now realised that a profitable source of income was being taken away from them. They had always hated the Englishman, and their hatred was made all the keener by the act which he confessed to having committed. At any cost to myself I knew that I must save him, and that without delay. I prayed to God to give me strength

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to carry it through. Late as it was, and though scarcely able to stand, I determined to go to the judge that night and confess everything. This, however, I was not destined to do, for at the moment that I was about to give the order for my carriage, my faithful old servant, Domingo, abandoning for once his usual stateliness, burst into the room with the terrifying intelligence that the mob, hounded on, as I suppose, by the friends and relatives to whom I referred just now, had broken into the gaol, seized the prisoner, and were carrying him off to hang him in a valley some three miles distant from my home. Though years have passed since then, I can feel the agony of that moment now. I can recall the fact that I seized Domingo by the shoulders, and, glaring at him like a madwoman, I have no doubt, demanded of him whether he was quite certain of the truth of his story. The poor old fellow answered that he was sure of it, and implored me to calm myself. In a whirlwind of terror and rage I shook him off, and bade him saddle me a horse at once. Once more he protested, pointing out to me the state of my health—that I was not strong enough even to sit in a saddle. Ah! but he little knew the power that was sustaining me.

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My despair had given me the strength of the strongest man. He saw that it was useless to argue with me, and, with a groan, went out to do my bidding. While he was absent I went to the drawer where was the fatal revolver with which I had shot my husband. I thrust it into the bosom of my dress and then ran out in search of the horse. Once more Domingo would have pleaded with me, but again I shook him off, and, mounting, dashed off on my errand, which was truly one of life and death.

“Fortunately, I was as familiar with the track that led from the plantation to the valley in question as I was with the interior of my own house, and, what was more, I was mounted on a horse as sure-footed as a cat. All the time one question was ringing in my brain, ‘Should I be in time?’ What I was going to do when I got there I never paused to think. My only desire was to save him, or, at least, to die with him. On — onwards sped the horse; my hat was swept off by a tree branch, and my hair streamed behind me in the hot night air.

“At last, after what seemed like an eternity, I saw the glow of lights and could hear the hoarse roar of a crowd. Another

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hundred yards and I was near enough to obtain a full view of the scene."

As she said this she put up her hands as if to shut the memory of it out. I might have counted twenty slowly before she resumed her story.

"There must have been at least five hundred people present, many of whom carried torches. He, my lover, the man who was dying, as he thought, to save me, was standing, his hands bound behind him, beneath a large tree. Even at that awful moment his courage had not failed him, and he stood and faced them with all the pride of his race. I was close to them before they became aware of my presence. Then a wild shout went up as the glare of the torches revealed my identity. I must have looked more like a madwoman than anything else, for those nearest to me fell back a pace or two. Had they not, I should have ridden them down in my anxiety to reach his side. He saw me, and uttered a cry of amazement and horror. To slip the fatal noose from around his neck was the work of an instant. Then I did a thing which I cannot understand now, and can scarcely credit when I think of it. Bending forward in my saddle, and exerting a strength

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which only God could have given me, I seized him with both hands, and dragged him up before me. The horse, frightened by the torches and my action, plunged wildly, and then, with a loud snort and a scramble of hoofs, dashed away into the darkness before the crowd had time to recover from its astonishment. As we disappeared several rifle shots rang out, but I paid no heed to them; my desire was to get beyond reach of pursuit as soon as possible. How I held him up during that fierce ride I cannot tell you, but at last, when I was compelled to allow the weary horse to come to a standstill, he slipped to the ground, staggered for a moment, and then fell prone. In a moment I was by his side, loosening his bonds and calling upon him by name. At last he regained his senses, and again I implored him to speak to me. He, however, only pointed to his throat, and when I looked closer I saw that a dark stream was trickling down his neck.

"My story is drawing to a close; there remains little more to be told. With the help of my friends we lay in hiding for upwards of a month. Then, with the same kind assistance, a schooner was purchased, a way was found for us to board her one

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dark night, and in her we set sail, ostensibly for Europe, in reality for the Southern Seas. Murderess though I was, he married me, and from that moment I devoted my whole life to him. Eventually, after many wanderings, we found this island, built this house, and settled down with the intention of never again returning to civilisation. The schooner we presented to our captain, in return for certain services which he was to render us. A good friend he has proved."

"And your husband's wound? Was it serious?"

She turned her face away from me as she replied,—

"From the moment that the bullet pierced his throat he never spoke again."

There was a pause which I did not like to break. Then she continued,—

"He lies there, in the tomb that we built together. I shall lie by his side when my time comes. I pray night and day that it may not be long."

Whether that time *has* come or not I have never heard. For her sake, poor soul, I trust it has.

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FROM seven o'clock in the evening until half past, that is to say for the half-hour preceding dinner, the Grand Hall of the Hôtel Occidental, throughout the season, is practically a lounge, and is crowded with the most fashionable folk wintering in Cairo. The evening I am anxious to describe was certainly no exception to the rule. At the foot of the fine marble staircase—the pride of its owner—a well-known member of the French Ministry was chatting with an English Duchess whose pretty, but somewhat delicate, daughter was flirting mildly with one of the Sirdar's Bimbashis, on leave from the Soudan. On the right-hand lounge of the Hall an Italian Countess, whose antecedents were as doubtful as her diamonds, was apparently listening to a story a handsome Greek *attaché* was telling her; in reality, however, she was endeavouring to catch scraps of a conversation being carried on, a few

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feet away, between a witty Russian and an equally clever daughter of the United States. Almost every nationality was represented there, but, fortunately for our prestige, the majority were English. The scene was a brilliant one, and the sprinkling of military and diplomatic uniforms (there was a Reception at the Khedivial Palace later) lent an additional touch of colour to the picture. Taken altogether, and regarded from a political point of view, the gathering had a significance of its own.

At the end of the Hall, near the large glass doors, a handsome, elderly lady, with grey hair, was conversing with one of the leading English doctors of the place—a grey-haired, clever-looking man, who possessed the happy faculty of being able to impress everyone with whom he talked with the idea that he infinitely preferred his or her society to that of any other member of the world's population. They were discussing the question of the most suitable clothing for a Nile voyage, and as the lady's daughter, who was seated next her, had been conversant with her mother's ideas on the subject ever since their first visit to Egypt (as indeed had been the Doctor), she preferred to lie back on the divan and watch the people about her. She

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had large, dark, contemplative eyes. Like her mother she took life seriously, but in a somewhat different fashion. One who has been bracketed third in the Mathematical Tripos can scarcely be expected to bestow very much thought on the comparative merits of Jæger, as opposed to dresses of the Common or Garden flannel. From this, however, it must not be inferred that she was in any way a blue stocking, that is, of course, in the vulgar acceptation of the word. She was thorough in all she undertook, and for the reason that mathematics interested her very much the same way that Wagner, chess, and, shall we say, croquet, interest other people, she made it her hobby, and it must be confessed she certainly succeeded in it. At other times she rode, drove, played tennis and hockey, and looked upon her world with calm, observant eyes that were more disposed to find good than evil in it. Contradictions that we are, even to ourselves, it was only those who knew her intimately, and they were few and far between, who realised that, under that apparently sober, matter-of-fact personality, there existed a strong leaning towards the mysterious, or, more properly speaking, the occult. Possibly she herself would have been the first to deny this—but that I am

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right in my surmise this story will surely be sufficient proof.

Mrs Westmoreland and her daughter had left their comfortable Yorkshire home in September, and, after a little dawdling on the Continent, had reached Cairo in November—the best month to arrive, in my opinion, for then the rush has not set in, the hotel servants have not had sufficient time to become weary of their duties, and what is better still, all the best rooms have not been bespoken. It was now the middle of December, and the fashionable caravanserai, upon which they had for many years bestowed their patronage, was crowded from roof to cellar. Every day people were being turned away, and the manager's continual lament was that he had not another hundred rooms wherein to place more guests. He was a Swiss, and for that reason regarded hotel-keeping in the light of a profession.

On this particular evening Mrs Westmoreland and her daughter Cecilia had arranged to dine with Dr Forsyth—that is to say, they were to eat their meal at his table in order that they might meet a man of whom they had heard much, but whose acquaintance they had not as yet made. The individual in question was a certain Professor Con-

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stanides—reputed one of the most advanced Egyptologists, and the author of several well-known works. Mrs Westmoreland was not of an exacting nature, and so long as she dined in agreeable company did not trouble herself very much whether it was with an English earl or a distinguished foreign *savant*.

“It really does not matter, my dear,” she was wont to observe to her daughter. “So long as the cooking is good and the wine above reproach, there is absolutely nothing to choose between them. A Prime Minister and a country vicar are, after all, only men. Feed them well and they'll lie down and purr like tame cats. They don't want conversation.” From this it will be seen that Mrs Westmoreland was well acquainted with her world. Whether Miss Cecilia shared her opinions is another matter. At any rate, she had been looking forward for nearly a fortnight to meeting Constanides, who was popularly supposed to possess an extraordinary intuitive knowledge—instinct, perhaps, it should be called—concerning the localities of tombs of the Pharaohs of the Eleventh, Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties.

“I am afraid Constanides is going to be late,” said the Doctor, who had con-

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sulted his watch more than once. "I hope, in that case, as his friend and your host, you will permit me to offer you my apologies."

The Doctor at no time objected to the sound of his own voice, and on this occasion he was even less inclined to do so. Mrs Westmoreland was a widow with an ample income, and Cecilia, he felt sure, would marry ere long.

"He has still three minutes in which to put in an appearance," observed that young lady, quietly. And then she added in the same tone, "Perhaps we ought to be thankful if he comes at all."

Both Mrs Westmoreland and her friend the Doctor regarded her with mildly reproachful eyes. The former could not understand anyone refusing a dinner such as she felt sure the Doctor had arranged for them; while the latter found it impossible to imagine a man who would dare to disappoint the famous Dr Forsyth, who, having failed in Harley Street, was nevertheless coining a fortune in the Land of the Pharaohs.

"My good friend Constanides will not disappoint us, I feel sure," he said, consulting his watch for the fourth time. "Possibly I am a little fast, at anyrate I have never known him to be unpunctual. A remarkable

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—a very remarkable man is Constanides. I cannot remember ever to have met another like him. And such a scholar!"

Having thus bestowed his approval upon him the worthy Doctor pulled down his cuffs, straightened his tie, adjusted his *pince-nez* in his best professional manner, and looked round the hall as if searching for someone bold enough to contradict the assertion he had just made.

"You have, of course, read his *Mythological Egypt*," observed Miss Cecilia, demurely, speaking as if the matter were beyond doubt.

The Doctor looked a little confused.

"Ahem! Well, let me see," he stammered, trying to find a way out of the difficulty. "Well, to tell the truth, my dear young lady, I'm not quite sure that I have studied that particular work. As a matter of fact, you see, I have so little leisure at my disposal for any reading that is not intimately connected with my profession. That, of course, must necessarily come before everything else."

Miss Cecilia's mouth twitched as if she were endeavouring to keep back a smile. At the same moment the glass doors of the vestibule opened and a man entered. So

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remarkable was he that everyone turned to look at him—a fact which did not appear to disconcert him in the least.

He was tall, well shaped, and carried himself with the air of one accustomed to command. His face was oval, his eyes large and set somewhat wide apart. It was only when they were directed fairly at one that one became aware of the power they possessed. The cheek bones were a trifle high, and the forehead possibly retreated towards the jet-black hair more than is customary in Greeks. He wore neither beard nor moustache, thus enabling one to see the wide, firm mouth, the compression of the lips of which spoke for the determination of their possessor. Those who had an eye for such things noted the fact that he was faultlessly dressed, while Miss Cecilia, who had the precious gift of observation largely developed, noted that, with the exception of a single ring and a magnificent pearl stud, the latter strangely set, he wore no jewellery of any sort.

He looked about him for Dr Forsyth, and, when he had located him, hastened forward.

“My dear friend,” he said in English, which he spoke with scarcely a trace of

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foreign accent, “I must crave your pardon a thousand times if I have kept you waiting.”

“On the contrary,” replied the Doctor, effusively, “you are punctuality itself. Permit me to have the pleasure—the very great pleasure—of introducing you to my friends, Mrs Westmoreland and her daughter, Miss Cecilia, of whom you have often heard me speak.”

Professor Constanides bowed and expressed the pleasure he experienced in making their acquaintance. Though she could not have told you why, Miss Cecilia found herself undergoing very much the same sensation as she had done when she had passed up the Throne Room at her presentation. A moment later the gong sounded, and, with much rustling of skirts and fluttering of fans, a general movement was made towards the dining-room.

As host, Dr Forsyth gave his arm to Mrs Westmoreland, Constanides following with Miss Cecilia. The latter was conscious of a vague feeling of irritation; she admired the man and his work, but she wished his name had been anything rather than what it was.

(It should be here remarked that the last Constanides she had encountered had

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swindled her abominably in the matter of a turquoise brooch, and in consequence the name had been an offence to her ever since.)

Dr Forsyth's table was situated at the further end, in the window, and from it a good view of the room could be obtained. The scene was an animated one, and one of the party, at least, I fancy, will never forget it—try how she may.

During the first two or three courses the conversation was practically limited to Cecilia and Constanides; the Doctor and Mrs Westmoreland being too busy to waste time on idle chatter. Later, they became more amenable to the discipline of the table—or, in other words, they found time to pay attention to their neighbours.

Since then I have often wondered with what feelings Cecilia looks back upon that evening. In order, perhaps, to punish me for my curiosity, she has admitted to me since that she had never known, up to that time, what it was to converse with a really clever man. I submitted to the humiliation for the reason that we are, if not lovers, at least old friends, and, after all, Mrs Westmoreland's cook is one in a thousand.

From that evening forward, scarcely a

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day passed in which Constanides did not enjoy some portion of Miss Westmoreland's society. They met at the polo ground, drove in the Gezîreh, shopped in the Muski, or listened to the band, over afternoon tea, on the balcony of Shepherd's Hotel. Constanides was always unobtrusive, always picturesque and invariably interesting. What was more to the point, he never failed to command attention whenever or wherever he might appear. In the Native Quarter he was apparently better known than in the European. Cecilia noticed that there he was treated with a deference such as one would only expect to be shown to a king. She marvelled, but said nothing. Personally, I can only wonder that her mother did not caution her before it was too late. Surely she must have seen how dangerous the intimacy was likely to become. It was old Colonel Bettenham who sounded the first note of warning. In some fashion or another he was connected with the Westmorelands, and therefore had more or less right to speak his mind.

"Who the man is, I am not in a position to say," he remarked to the mother; "but if I were in your place I should be very

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careful. Cairo at this time of the year is full of adventurers."

"But, my dear Colonel," answered Mrs Westmoreland, "you surely do not mean to insinuate that the Professor is an adventurer. He was introduced to us by Dr Forsyth, and he has written so many clever books."

"Books, my dear madam, are not everything," the other replied judiciously, and with that fine impartiality which marks a man who does not read. "As a matter of fact I am bound to confess that Phipps—one of my captains—wrote a novel some years ago, but only one. The mess pointed out to him that it wasn't good form, don't you know, so he never tried the experiment again. But as for this man, Constanides, as they call him, I should certainly be more than careful."

I have been told since that this conversation worried poor Mrs Westmoreland more than she cared to admit, even to herself. To a very large extent she, like her daughter, had fallen under the spell of the Professor's fascination. Had she been asked, point blank, she would doubtless have declared that she preferred the Greek to the Englishman—though, of course, it would have

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seemed flat heresy to say so. And yet—well, doubtless you can understand what I mean without my explaining further.

I am inclined to believe that I was the first to notice that there was serious trouble brewing. I could see a strained look in the girl's eyes for which I found it difficult to account. Then the truth dawned upon me, and I am ashamed to say that I began to watch her systematically. We have few secrets from each other now, and she has told me a good deal of what happened during that extraordinary time—for extraordinary it certainly was. Perhaps none of us realised what a unique drama we were watching—one of the strangest, I am tempted to believe, that this world of ours has ever seen.

Christmas was just past and the New Year was fairly under way when the beginning of the end came. I think by that time even Mrs Westmoreland had arrived at some sort of knowledge of the case. But it was then too late to interfere. I am as sure that Cecilia was not in love with Constanides as I am of anything. She was merely fascinated by him, and to a degree that, happily for the peace of the world, is as rare as the reason for it is perplexing.

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To be precise, it was on Tuesday, January the 3rd, that the crisis came. On the evening of that day, accompanied by her daughter and escorted by Dr Forsyth, Mrs Westmoreland attended a reception at the palace of a certain Pasha, whose name I am obviously compelled to keep to myself. For the purposes of my story it is sufficient, however, that he is a man who prides himself on being up-to-date in most things, and for that and other reasons invitations to his receptions are eagerly sought after. In his drawing-room one may meet some of the most distinguished men in Europe, and on occasion it is even possible to obtain an insight into certain political intrigues that, to put it mildly, afford one an opportunity of reflecting on the instability of mundane affairs and of politics in particular.

The evening was well advanced before Constanides made his appearance. When he did, it was observed that he was more than usually quiet. Later, Cecilia permitted him to conduct her into the balcony, whence, since it was a perfect moonlight night, a fine view of the Nile could be obtained. Exactly what he said to her I have never been able to discover; I have, however, her mother's assurance that she was visibly

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agitated when she rejoined her. As a matter of fact, they returned to the hotel almost immediately, when Cecilia, pleading weariness, retired to her room.

And now this is the part of the story you will find as difficult to believe as I did. Yet I have indisputable evidence that it is true. It was nearly midnight and the large hotel was enjoying the only quiet it knows in the twenty-four hours. I have just said that Cecilia had retired, but in making that assertion I am not telling the exact truth, for though she had bade her mother "Good-night" and had gone to her room, it was not to rest. Regardless of the cold night air she had thrown open the window, and was standing looking out into the moonlit street. Of what she was thinking I do not know, nor can she remember. For my own part, however, I incline to the belief that she was in a semi-hypnotic condition and that for the time being her mind was a blank.

From this point I will let Cecilia tell the story herself.

How long I stood at the window I cannot say; it may have been only five minutes, it might have been an hour. Then, suddenly, an extraordinary thing happened. I knew

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that it was imprudent, I was aware that it was even wrong, but an overwhelming craving to go out seized me. I felt as if the house were stifling me and that if I did not get out into the cool night air, and within a few minutes, I should die. Stranger still, I felt no desire to battle with the temptation, It was as if a will infinitely stronger than my own was dominating me and that I was powerless to resist. Scarcely conscious of what I was doing I changed my dress, and then, throwing on a cloak, switched off the electric light and stepped out into the corridor. The white-robed Arab servants were lying about on the floor as is their custom; they were all asleep. On the thick carpet of the great staircase my steps made no sound. The hall was in semi-darkness and the watchman must have been absent on his rounds, for there was no one there to spy upon me. Passing through the vestibule I turned the key of the front door. Still success attended me, for the lock shot back with scarcely a sound and I found myself in the street. Even then I had no thought of the folly of this escapade. I was merely conscious of the mysterious power that was dragging me on. Without hesitation I turned to the right and hastened along

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the pavement, faster I think than I had ever walked in my life. Under the trees it was comparatively dark, but out in the roadway it was well-nigh as bright as day. Once a carriage passed me and I could hear its occupants, who were French, conversing merrily—otherwise I seemed to have the city to myself. Later I heard a *muezzin* chanting his call to prayer from the minaret of some mosque in the neighbourhood, the cry being taken up and repeated from other mosques. Then at the corner of a street I stopped as if in obedience to a command. I can recall the fact that I was trembling, but for what reason I could not tell. I say this to show that while I was incapable of returning to the hotel, or of exercising my normal will power, I still possessed the faculty of observation.

I had scarcely reached the corner referred to, which, as a matter of fact, I believe I should recognise if I saw it again, when the door of a house opened and a man emerged. It was Professor Constanides, but his appearance at such a place and at such an hour, like everything else that happened that night, did not strike me as being in any way extraordinary.

"You have obeyed me," he said by way

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of greeting. "That is well. Now let us be going—the hour is late."

As he said it there came the rattle of wheels and a carriage drove swiftly round the corner and pulled up before us. My companion helped me into it and took his place beside me. Even then, unheard-of as my action was, I had no thought of resisting.

"What does it mean?" I asked. "Oh, tell me what it means? Why am I here?"

"You will soon know," was his reply, and his voice took a tone I had never noticed in it before.

We had driven some considerable distance, in fact, I believe we had crossed the river, before either of us spoke again.

"Think," said my companion, "and tell me whether you can remember ever having driven with me before?"

"We have driven together many times lately," I replied. "Yesterday to the polo, and the day before to the Pyramids."

"Think again," he said, and as he did so he placed his hand on mine. It was as cold as ice. However, I only shook my head.

"I cannot remember," I answered, and yet I seemed to be dimly conscious of something that was too intangible to be a recol-

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lection. He uttered a little sigh and once more we were silent. The horses must have been good ones for they whirled us along at a fast pace. I did not take much interest in the route we followed, but at last something attracted my attention and I knew that we were on the road to Gizeh. A few moments later the famous Museum, once the palace of the ex-Khedive Ismail, came into view. Almost immediately the carriage pulled up in the shadow of the *Lebbek* trees and my companion begged me to alight. I did so, whereupon he said something, in what I can only suppose was Arabic, to his coachman, who whipped up his horses and drove swiftly away.

"Come," he said, in the same tone of command as before, and then led the way towards the gates of the old palace. Dominated as my will was by his I could still notice how beautiful the building looked in the moonlight. In the daytime it presents a faded and unsubstantial appearance, but now, with its Oriental tracery, it was almost fairylike. The Professor halted at the gates and unlocked them. How he had obtained the key, and by what right he admitted us, I cannot say. It suffices that, almost before I was aware of it, we had passed through

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the garden and were ascending the steps to the main entrance. The doors behind us, we entered the first room. It is only another point in this extraordinary adventure when I declare that even now I was not afraid; and yet to find oneself in such a place and at such an hour at any other time would probably have driven me beside myself with terror. The moonlight streamed in upon us, revealing the ancient monuments and the other indescribable memorials of those long-dead ages. Once more my conductor uttered his command and we went on through the second room, passed the Shekh-El-Beled and the Seated Scribe. Room after room we traversed, and to do so it seemed to me that we ascended stairs innumerable. At last we came to one in which Constanides paused. It contained numerous mummy cases and was lighted by a skylight through which the rays of the moon streamed in. We were standing before one which I remembered to have remarked on the occasion of our last visit. I could distinguish the paintings upon it distinctly. Professor Constanides, with a deftness which showed his familiarity with the work, removed the lid and revealed to me the swathed-up figure within. The face

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was uncovered and was strangely well-preserved. I gazed down on it, and as I did so a sensation that I had never known before passed over me. My body seemed to be shrinking, my blood to be turning to ice. For the first time I endeavoured to exert myself, to tear myself from the bonds that were holding me. But it was in vain. I was sinking—sinking—sinking—into I knew not what. Then the voice of the man who had brought me to the place sounded in my ears as if he were speaking from a long way off. After that a great light burst upon me, and it was as if I were walking in a dream; yet I knew it was too real, too true to life to be a mere creation of my fancy.

It was night and the heavens were studded with stars. In the distance a great army was encamped and at intervals the calls of the sentries reached me. Somehow I seemed to feel no wonderment at my position. Even my dress caused me no surprise. To my left, as I looked towards the river, was a large tent, before which armed men paced continually. I looked about me as if I expected to see someone, but there was no one to greet me.

"It is for the last time," I told myself. "Come what may, it shall be the last time!"

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Still I waited, and as I did so I could hear the night wind sighing through the rushes on the river's bank. From the tent near me—for Usirtasen, son of Amenemhait—was then fighting against the Libyans and was commanding his army in person—came the sound of revelry. The air blew cold from the desert and I shivered, for I was but thinly clad. Then I hid myself in the shadow of a great rock that was near at hand. Presently I caught the sound of a footstep, and there came into view a tall man, walking carefully, as though he had no desire that the sentries on guard before the Royal tent should become aware of his presence in the neighbourhood. As I saw him I moved from where I was standing to meet him. He was none other than Sinûhît—younger son of Amenemhait and brother of Usirtasen—who was at that moment conferring with his generals in the tent.

I can see him now as he came towards me, tall, handsome, and defiant in his bearing as a man should be. He walked with the assured step of one who has been a soldier and trained to warlike exercises from his youth up. For a moment I regretted the news I had to tell him—but only for a moment. I could hear the voice of Usir-

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tasen in the tent, and after that I had no thought for anyone else.

"Is it thou, Nofrît?" he asked as soon as he saw me.

"It is I!" I replied. "You are late, Sinûhît. You tarry too long over the wine cups."

"You wrong me, Nofrît," he answered, with all the fierceness for which he was celebrated. "I have drunk no wine this night. Had I not been kept by the Captain of the Guard I should have been here sooner. Thou art not angry with me, Nofrît?"

"Nay, that were presumption on my part, my lord," I answered. "Art thou not the King's son, Sinûhît?"

"And by the Holy Ones I swear that it were better for me if I were not," he replied. "Usirtasen, my brother, takes all and I am but the jackal that gathers up the scraps wheresoever he may find them." He paused for a moment. "However, all goes well with our plot. Let me but have time and I will yet be ruler of this land and of all the Land of Khem beside." He drew himself up to his full height and looked towards the sleeping camp. It was well known that between the brothers there was but little love, and still less trust.

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"Peace, peace," I whispered, fearing lest his words might be overheard. "You must not talk so, my lord. Should you by chance be heard you know what the punishment would be!"

He laughed a short and bitter laugh. He was well aware that Usirtasen would show him no mercy. It was not the first time he had been suspected, and he was playing a desperate game. He came a step closer to me and took my hand in his. I would have withdrawn it—but he gave me no opportunity. Never was a man more in earnest than he was then.

"Nofrît," he said, and I could feel his breath upon my cheek, "what is my answer to be? The time for talking is past; now we must act. As thou knowest, I prefer deeds to words, and to-morrow my brother Usirtasen shall learn that I am as powerful as he."

Knowing what I knew I could have laughed him to scorn for this boastful speech. The time, however, was not yet ripe, so I held my peace. He was plotting against his brother, whom I loved, and it was his desire that I should help him. That, however, I would not do.

"Listen," he said, drawing even closer to

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me, and speaking in a voice that showed me plainly how much in earnest he was, "thou knowest how much I love thee. Thou knowest that there is nought I would not do for thee or for thy sake. Be but faithful to me now and there is nothing thou shalt ask in vain of me hereafter. All is prepared, and ere the moon is gone I shall be Pharaoh and reign beside Amenemhait, my father."

"Are you so sure that your plans will not miscarry?" I asked, with what was almost a sneer at his recklessness—for recklessness it surely was to think that he could induce an army that had been admittedly successful to swerve in its allegiance to the general who had won its battles for it, and to desert in the face of the enemy. Moreover, I knew that he was wrong in believing that his father cared more for him than for Usirtasen, who had done so much for the kingdom, and who was beloved by high and low alike. But it was not in Sinûhît's nature to look upon the dark side of things. He had complete confidence in himself and in his power to bring his conspiracy against his father and brother to a successful issue. He revealed to me his plans, and, bold though they were, I could see that it was impossible that they could succeed. And in the event of his failing,

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what mercy could he hope to receive? I knew Usirtasen too well to think that he would show any. With all the eloquence I could command I implored him to abandon the attempt, or at least to delay it for a time. He seized my wrist and pulled me to him, peering fiercely into my face.

"Art playing me false?" he asked. "If it is so it were better that you should drown yourself in yonder river. Betray me and nothing shall save you—not even Pharaoh himself."

That he meant what he said I felt convinced. The man was desperate; he was staking all he had in the world upon the issue of his venture. I can say with truth that it was not my fault that we had been drawn together, and yet on this night of all others it seemed as if there were nothing left for me but to side with him or to bring about his downfall.

"Nofrît," he said, after a short pause, "is it nothing, thinkest thou, to be the wife of a Pharaoh? Is it not worth striving for, particularly when it can be so easily accomplished?"

I knew, however, that he was deluding himself with false hopes. What he had in his mind could never come to pass. I was

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like dry grass between two fires. All that was required was one small spark to bring about a conflagration in which I should be consumed.

"Harken to me, Nofrît," he continued, "You have means of learning Usirtasen's plans. Send me word to-morrow as to what is in his mind and the rest will be easy. Your reward shall be greater than you dream of."

Though I had no intention of doing what he asked, I knew that in his present humour it would be little short of madness to thwart him. I therefore temporised with him, and allowed him to suppose that I would do as he wished, and then, bidding him good-night, I sped away towards the hut where I was lodged. I had not been there many minutes when a messenger came to me from Usirtasen, summoning me to his presence. Though I could not understand what it meant I hastened to obey.

On arrival there I found him surrounded by the chief officers of his army. One glance at his face was sufficient to tell me that he was violently angry with someone, and I had the best of reasons for believing that that someone was myself. Alas! it was as I had expected. Sinûhît's plot had been

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discovered; he had been followed and watched, and my meeting with him that evening was known. I protested my innocence in vain. The evidence was too strong against me.

"Speak, girl, and tell what thou knowest," said Usirtasen, in a voice I had never heard him use before. "It is the only way by which thou canst save thyself. Look to it that thy story tallies with the tales of others!"

I trembled in every limb as I answered the questions he put to me. It was plain that he no longer trusted me, and that the favour I had once found in his eyes was gone, never to return.

"It is well," he said when I had finished my story. "And now we will see thy partner—the man who would have put me—the Pharaoh who is to be—to the sword had I not been warned in time."

He made a sign to one of the officers who stood by, whereupon the latter left the tent, to return a few moments later with Sinûhît.

"Hail, brother!" said Usirtasen, mockingly, as he leaned back in his chair and looked at him through half-shut eyes. "You tarried but a short time over the wine cup this night. I fear it pleased thee but little. Forgive me; on another occasion better shall be found for

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thee lest thou shouldst deem us lacking in our hospitality."

"There were matters that needed my attention and I could not stay," Sinûhît replied, looking his brother in the face. "Thou wouldst not have me neglect my duties."

"Nay! nay! Maybe they were matters that concerned our personal safety?" Usirtasen continued, still with the same gentleness. "Maybe you heard that there were those in our army who were not well disposed towards us? Give me their names, my brother, that due punishment may be meted out to them."

Before Sinûhît could reply, Usirtasen had sprung to his feet.

"Dog!" he cried, "darest thou prate to me of matters of importance when thou knowest thou hast been plotting against me and my father's throne. I have doubted thee these many months and now all is made clear. By the Gods, the Holy Ones, I swear that thou shalt die for this ere cock-crow."

It was at this moment that Sinûhît became aware of my presence. A little cry escaped him, and his face told me as plainly as any words could speak that he believed that I had betrayed him. He was about to speak,

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probably to denounce me, when the sound of voices reached us from outside. Usirtasen bade the guards ascertain what it meant, and presently a messenger entered the tent. He was travel-stained and weary. Advancing towards where Usirtasen was seated, he knelt before him.

"Hail, Pharaoh," he said. "I come to thee from the Palace of Titoui."

An anxious expression came over Usirtasen's face as he heard this. I also detected beads of perspiration on the brow of Sinûhît. A moment later it was known to us that Amenemhait was dead, and, therefore, Usirtasen reigned in his stead. The news was so sudden, and the consequences so vast, that it was impossible to realise quite what it meant. I looked across at Sinûhît and his eyes met mine. He seemed to be making up his mind about something. Then with lightning speed he sprang upon me; a dagger gleamed in the air; I felt as if a hot iron had been thrust into my breast, and after that I remember no more.

As I felt myself falling I seemed to wake from my dream—if dream it were—to find myself standing in the Museum by the mummy case, and with Professor Constanides by my side.

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"You have seen," he said. "You have looked back across the centuries to that day when, as Nofrît, I believed you had betrayed me, and killed you. After that I escaped from the camp and fled into Kaduma. There I died; but it was decreed that my soul should never know peace till we had met again and you had forgiven me. I have waited all these years, and see—we meet at last."

Strange to say, even then the situation did not strike me as being in any way improbable. Yet now, when I see it set down in black and white, I find myself wondering that I dare to ask anyone in their sober senses to believe it to be true. Was I in truth that same Nofrît who, four thousand years before, had been killed by Sinûhît, son of Amenemhait, because he believed that I had betrayed him? It seemed incredible, and yet, if it were a creation of my imagination, what did the dream mean? I fear it is a riddle of which I shall probably never know the answer.

My failure to reply to his question seemed to cause him pain.

"Nofrît," he said, and his voice shook with emotion, "think what your forgiveness means to me. Without it I am lost, both here and hereafter."

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His voice was low and pleading and his face in the moonlight was like that of a man who knew the uttermost depths of despair.

"Forgive—forgive," he cried again, holding out his hands to me. "If you do not, I must go back to the sufferings which have been my portion since I did the deed which wrought my ruin."

I felt myself trembling like a leaf.

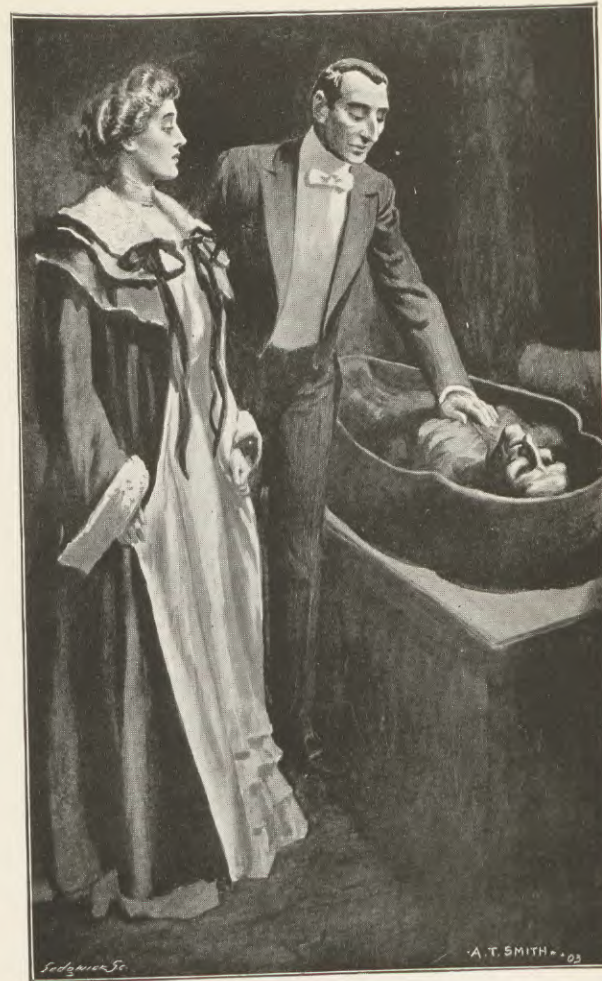
"If it is as you say, though I cannot believe it, I forgive you freely," I answered, in a voice that I scarcely recognised as my own.

For some moments he was silent, then he knelt before me and took my hand, which he raised to his lips. After that, rising, he laid his hand upon the breast of the mummy before which we were standing. Looking down at it he addressed it thus,—

"Rest, *Sinûhît*, son of *Amenemhait*—for that which was foretold for thee is now accomplished, and the punishment which was decreed is at an end. Henceforth thou mayest sleep in peace."

After that he replaced the lid of the coffin, and when this was done he turned to me.

"Let us be going," he said, and we went together through the rooms by the way we had come.



"REST, SINUHIT, SON OF AMENEMHAI"

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Together we left the building and passed through the gardens out into the road beyond. There we found the carriage waiting for us, and we took our places in it. Once more the horses sped along the silent road, carrying us swiftly back to Cairo. During the drive not a word was spoken by either of us. The only desire I had left was to get back to the hotel and lay my aching head upon my pillow. We crossed the bridge and entered the city. What the time was I had no idea, but I was conscious that the wind blew chill as if in anticipation of the dawn. At the same corner whence we had started, the coachman stopped his horses and I alighted, after which he drove away as if he had received his orders beforehand.

"Will you permit me to walk with you as far as your hotel?" said Constanides, with his customary politeness.

I tried to say something in reply, but my voice failed me. I would much rather have been alone, but as he would not allow this we set off together. At the corner of the street in which the hotel is situated we stopped.

"Here we must part," he said. Then, after a pause, he added, "And for ever.

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From this moment I shall never see your face again."

"You are leaving Cairo?" was the only thing I could say.

"Yes, I am leaving Cairo," he replied with peculiar emphasis. "My errand here is accomplished. You need have no fear that I shall ever trouble you again."

"I have no fear," I answered, though I am afraid it was only a half truth.

He looked earnestly into my face.

"Nofrît," he said, "for, say what you will, you are the Nofrît I would have made my Queen and have loved beyond all other women, never again will it be permitted you to look into the past as you did to-night. Had things been ordained otherwise we might have done great things together, but the gods willed that it should not be. Let it rest therefore. And now—farewell! To-night I go to the rest for which I have so long been seeking."

Without another word he turned and left me. Then I went on to the hotel. How it came about I cannot say, but the door was open and I passed quickly in. Once more, to my joy, I found that the watchman was absent from the hall.

Trembling lest anyone might see me, I

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sped up the stairs and along the corridor, where the servants lay sleeping just as I had left them, and so to my room. Everything was exactly as I had left it, and there was nothing to show that my absence had been suspected. Again I went to the window, and, in a feeling of extraordinary agitation, looked out. Already there were signs of dawn in the sky. I sat down and tried to think over all that had happened to me that evening, endeavouring to convince myself, in the face of indisputable evidence, that it was not real and that I had only dreamt it. Yet it would not do! At last, worn out, I retired to rest. As a rule I sleep soundly; it is scarcely, however, a matter for wonderment that I did not do so on this occasion. Hour after hour I tumbled and tossed—thinking—thinking—thinking. When I rose and looked into the glass I scarcely recognised myself. Indeed, my mother commented on my fagged appearance when we met at the breakfast table.

"My dear child, you look as if you had been up all night," she said, and little did she guess, as she nibbled her toast, that there was a considerable amount of truth in her remark.

Later she went shopping with a lady

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staying in the hotel, while I went to my room to lie down. When we met again at lunch it was easy to see that she had some news of importance to communicate.

"My dear Cecilia," she said, "I have just seen Dr Forsyth, and he has given me a terrible shock. I don't want to frighten you, my girl, but have you heard that *Professor Constanides was found dead in bed this morning?* It is a most terrible affair! He must have died during the night!"

I am not going to pretend that I had any reply ready to offer her at that moment.

A CLOSE THING

THE Standish family had owned Stapleford Farm from time immemorial. As a matter of fact there were headstones in the churchyard at the bottom of the hill, upon which inscriptions, dating back to the middle of the eighteenth century, could still be made out.

They were noted as a thrifty, hard-headed race, and old Jabez, who owned the property of which I am about to tell you, was in no respects behind them. It was not because he was mean that he saved his money, but for the simple reason that his wants were few and it gave him no pleasure to spend it. His daughter Drucilla, aged at this time exactly twenty-one, was the only one upon the place who found any interest in shopping. She was as pretty a girl as you would find in Devon, and when she visited Plymouth, which was not very often, the young bloods cast admiring glances at her as she hastened along George Street on

A Close Thing

purchasing thoughts intent. In those days—I am writing of the year when the French prisoners were located on Dartmoor—our lads had an eye for a pretty lass, whatever they may have now. Her mother had died when she was a child, and she kept house for her father, who was now a man of between sixty and seventy years of age—hard and rugged as any boulder on the moor.

On the afternoon from which I date my story he was in a decidedly bad temper. He dismounted from his horse in the stable-yard and strode across the cobbles into the house with a scowl upon his face.

“Drucilla,” he bawled, in a voice that made the old, oak-panelled hall ring again, and set Tabitha, the maid, trembling in the kitchen, “come to me, girl!”

Now Drucilla was aware that when he called her by her full name it was a very good sign that there was trouble in the wind. She knew very well what that trouble was, and as she descended the old oak stairs in obedience to the summons of her irate parent she cast about her vainly for some way out of the difficulty. She followed him into what was known as the best parlour, and then he turned and faced

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her. She had never seen him in a greater rage before.

“He’s been here again,” he began. “Don’t deny it now! And I told ’ee I wouldn’t have him upon the place. What have you got to say?”

She hung her head. As a matter of fact she could think of nothing. “He’s the Squire, father,” she murmured at last, as if that were some sort of excuse.

“And a drunken, spendthrift wastrel, if ever I set eyes on one. I’ve told ’ee times out of number that I wouldn’t have him hanging round ’ee and I won’t. I’ll break every bone in his body if I have anything more to do with him.”

Had the position not been so serious, the girl would have smiled, for young Squire Thornton, Handsome Jack as they called him, stood some three inches taller than the farmer, and had the reputation of being the strongest man in those parts.

Having said his say the farmer strode out of the room and went off to bestow a blessing of a similar description upon his factotum, Old Isaac, who had omitted to turn the cows into another pasture as he had been ordered to do.

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"Oh, why does father treat me like this?" said the girl, dropping into a chair beside the table and burying her face in her hands. "And why will he believe such wicked stories about my John? He is no worse than other men, and I know that he loves me. Yes, he loves me, whatever folk may say."

She was not wrong there; Handsome Jack *did* love her and with all his heart. He was by no means a bad fellow, but his life had been a wild one, and it was only within the last year that he had returned to the Old Manor House, at the other end of the village, from what everybody believed to have been a life of reckless debauchery in London.

The farmer's temper had not materially improved when he sat down to his supper. He ate his bread and cheese and drank his cider in moody silence. Possibly he drank a good deal more of the latter than he should have done, for when he had smoked his second pipe, he fell fast asleep in his chair. His daughter knew that he was safe now for at least an hour. So, tip-toeing stealthily from the room, she sped upstairs, drew on a cloak, and, in less time than it takes to tell, was out of the house, through the wicket, and speeding away down the dark lane that

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led in the opposite direction to the village. At last she reached a rustic bridge that spanned one of those limpid streams that seem only to be found in Devon. A voice she knew full well reached her out of the darkness.

"Drucie, is that you?" it said. "My darling, is it you?"

"Yes, John," she answered, and a moment later was in his arms.

"You were able to come then after all? I was afraid that your father would prevent you."

"He would have done so, had he known," was her reply. "You don't know how angry he is with me about you."

"That's bad hearing," he answered. "But he'll come round in time, never fear."

She said that she hoped he would, but her voice told him that she was not going to place too much reliance in it. After that they fell to talking of—but there, why should I pry into what, after all, is no concern of mine. Let it suffice that, within half an hour of her meeting him, she was back once more in the house, to make a discovery that was destined to be of the most vital importance to her happiness later on.

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As she made her way softly along the passage the sound of voices reached her. One she recognised as her father's, but the other she had never heard before, nor had she ever heard anything like it. She had scarcely time to put away her cloak before her father's voice summoned her to come down.

"Hast been asleep, lass?" he asked. "I have called thee twice."

"No, father," she answered. "But I did not hear thee."

"Then come here," he said, sinking his voice, "and keep a silent tongue in thy head."

He led the way into the room. A tall, dark man was standing at the further end. He was by no means ill-looking, but his good looks were of a wild, fierce type, and were not improved by a half-grown beard. He had once been well dressed, but now he was in rags. There was the look of a hunted animal in his eyes, and he glanced repeatedly at the door as if he feared some enemy might enter.

"This is Drucilla, my daughter," said Jabez, as if the matter were not of very much importance, but might be mentioned.

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"Mademoiselle," said the other, with a low bow, "I am honoured to make your acquaintance. I owe you and your father much!"

The farmer, however, was not in the humour to listen to compliments.

"Get supper," he said—"whatever you have. This gentleman is starving."

"Alas, I have not eaten now for two days," said the stranger, with the same foreign accent. "Yet I fear to cause mademoiselle so much labour."

When Drucilla placed it on the table once more the man needed no second bidding to fall to. Pasty, ham, cheese and cider disappeared as if by magic, while Drucilla and her father watched him. Who was he, and how did he come to be in such a plight? At last he rose, and, taking Drucilla's hand, bowed over it with the air of a court chamberlain.

That night, to the young housekeeper's amazement, he occupied the best bedroom, which was seldom used and only on occasions of the utmost importance. In the morning it was a different man who descended to breakfast. He was clean shaven, and attired in a suit of the farmer's which, though it did

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not fit him as it might have done, was not so much amiss. Thus transfigured he presented a personable appearance, but there still remained in his eyes the hunted look that Drucilla had noticed on the previous night.

"Drucilla," said her father, as he rose to go out on the farm, "this gentleman does not want to be seen by any of the volk 'bout here. Don't 'ee say anything, girl, to anybody, not even Old Isaac."

Drucilla promised that she would not, and left the room. She was beginning to think she understood who the man was, and why he was so anxious that no one should know of his presence. If she was not mistaken he was an escaped French prisoner, making for the coast. But why was her father helping him? That was what puzzled her. For he had always declared that he hated the French as he did weasels. All that day the stranger lay concealed in his room, not venturing out even for his meals. It was not until darkness had fallen that he came downstairs. Drucilla was sewing by candle-light. She rose as he entered, but he begged her not to do so.

"You show me too much courtesy, mademoiselle," he said. "I, who am only

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a poor outcast, fleeing for his life in the hope that he may reach his own beloved country."

Assuring her that he felt he could trust her, he proceeded to tell her more of himself. He was the Count de Vauney, he declared, and he had been an officer in the twenty-first of the line. With tears in his eyes he spoke of his old widowed mother and of the home he feared he might never see again. Drucilla was affected to tears while his voice shook.

"Mademoiselle will help me, I feel sure," he said, taking her hand, and looking anxiously into her face. "She will prove an angel of mercy to me."

She assured him that she would do all that lay in her power, but at the same time she wondered what her lover would say should he come to hear of it. It was the first secret she had ever kept from him.

What was detaining him Drucilla could not guess, but having once come, the Count showed no desire to take his departure. The farmer had taken a liking to him and did not press him to leave. Night after night they sat up until a late hour drinking smuggled brandy together, which came

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through to them in a mysterious fashion from Cawsand Bay, which, as all the world knows, was the home of smugglers.

One night while they were carousing Drucilla slipped out to meet her lover at the wicket gate.

Feeling that it was not likely her father would become aware of her absence, she stayed longer than usual. It was a pity that she did so, for, just as she was bidding him "good-night," a dark figure emerged from the house and came down the path towards them. As she was sheltered by her lover she did not see it, nor did he, but hearing a step upon the path he faced round. The figure was too tall for the farmer, nor was it broad enough. Seeing them the man turned swiftly away as if he feared detection.

"Who is it?" the Squire asked, but Drucilla clung to him trembling.

"It must be some friend of my father's," she answered in a voice that she scarcely recognised. "Someone come to see him on matters of the farm."

"Not come to see him at this time of night," retorted her lover. "I must find out who the fellow is."

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"No, no!" implored the girl. "I beg of you not to do so."

"But it may be a thief. And it is well known that your father keeps a lot of money in the house. I will go and see."

But she clung to him and would not let him go.

"Drucilla," he said at last, "what does all this mean? You are hiding something from me."

"I cannot tell you," was the only reply he could extract from her.

For the first time since they had known each other they parted bad friends.

For upwards of a week she saw nothing of him, though night after night she visited the wicket gate in the hope that he would come. Meanwhile the Count had said nothing of their meeting on that memorable evening, but had conducted himself with his usual calm politeness. His plans, he said, were maturing, and every day he expected to receive a message from his friends in France, who, he declared, would pick him up off the Cornish coast. But Fate is often stronger than a man's hopes, as will presently be seen. A love letter, such as a girl treasures all her life long, reached her from the Squire, im-

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ploring forgiveness and begging her to be at the trysting-place that night at eleven if she were brave enough to come.

Certainly she would be brave enough—would be brave enough for anything, provided she could see her lover again. How long that evening seemed!

Supper at an end, her father and the Count sat themselves down to their usual nightly occupation. According to custom she left them and went up to her own room, and, seating herself at the window, looked out upon the still summer night. How glad she would be when this man left them. Though she had pitied him for his misfortune, she had never trusted him. In some vague, intangible way he seemed to stand between John and herself. Evidently her father was getting merry over his cups, for the sound of a song, bawled out in the broadest Devon, came up to her. A light tenor followed, after that all was still. At ten minutes to eleven she prepared herself for her adventure, and with a wildly beating heart crept down the stairs and out into the starry night as she had so often done before. Her lover greeted her at the gate, and together they strolled down the lane to the little rustic bridge. On

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the way he pleaded for, and obtained, her forgiveness. She, on her side, was all penitence, and when she found that he forebore to ask questions her conscience smote her more than ever.

"John," she whispered, "you have not asked me again who that man is?"

"No, dear," he answered, "if you wanted me to I knew that you would tell me."

"I will tell you all," she replied; and then, nestling closer to him and sinking her voice lest there might be someone lurking near, she made him promise secrecy, and then told him everything.

He whistled a note of surprise.

"Ho! ho!" he said. "So that's it! French prisoner—and your father helping him to escape? They'll make it hot for him if they find it out. But what's he doing it for? I can't imagine him running his head into anything to save an enemy of his country."

Drucilla agreed with him. But that the old man had some very good reason they knew him well enough to be sure.

"How long is he going to stay?" said the other suspiciously.

"I cannot think. He has been with us a month already."

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Just at that moment the sound of horse hoofs higher up the road fell upon their ears, and, in order that they might not be seen, they stepped back into the deeper shadow. The sound came closer.

"John! There is something wrong," whispered Drucilla, clutching him by the arm. "That is the trot of my father's horse, Brownie. I could tell it anywhere."

"If that is so there's trouble afoot," he whispered back. "Stay where you are and leave him to me."

"No, no, I cannot let you go."

He would not listen to her, however, but bidding her remain where she was, stepped out into the road just as the horse approached the bridge. So close was he to the animal that he had seized it by the bridle almost before its rider had become aware of his presence. It was the farmer's horse, as Drucilla had said, and the man in the saddle was the Frenchman who had been their guest.

Under John's vigorous grasp the animal went back upon its haunches and the rider fell from the saddle upon the road. He was up again almost as quickly as he had fallen. Next moment there was a flash, and John felt a bullet whiz past his ear.

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"You dog, you shall pay for that," he cried, and closed with his opponent.

Then began such a hand-to-hand struggle as he had never taken part in before. Gripped like wild cats they rocked to and fro, each trying for the other's throat. How long it lasted the Squire could not tell you to this day. He was unconscious at the time, unconscious of everything save that he would be even with the man who had endeavoured to murder him. He could feel his hot breath on his cheek. Suddenly he recollected an old fall that had been shown him by a noted Devon wrestler who had been one of his father's keepers.

Executing a feint he tried it, and success rewarded him. The man fell backwards and he on top of him. The fall had loosened his right arm from the other's grip, and with his fist, as quick as lightning, he struck the other three heavy blows. The man lay like a log, just as he had fallen.

Rising to his feet, and, having made sure that the man was not shamming, he went across to Drucilla to find that she had fainted.

To procure some water from the little stream and bathe her forehead with it was

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the work of a moment. At last she opened her eyes and looked up at him.

"Oh, John, you are not hurt?" she cried.

"Not a scratch," he answered grimly. "But the other man is. Do you think you can manage to get up to the house and send some men down with lanterns?"

"I will try," she replied, and when he had helped her to her feet, she was off.

Then he mounted guard over his prostrate foe.

In something less than a quarter of an hour they had conveyed that gentleman to the house and had set a guard over him.

"John," said Drucilla, "I am afraid something terrible has happened to my father. He is asleep in the parlour and I cannot wake him."

The Squire took the situation in at once. Jabez had been drugged, and there remained nothing but to let him sleep it off.

At least two hours elapsed before he was anything like himself. When he could understand, the situation was explained to him.

"The villain!" he cried, and then, as if in terror, struggled upstairs, and staggered rather than walked to his bed, which he

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pulled away from the wall. Pressing a spring in the woodwork he disclosed a small cupboard into which he thrust his hand.

"Gone!" he shouted. "Every guinea gone! He shall hang for this!"

"Let us examine him first," said John, and led the way downstairs to the small room in which the prisoner was confined. He glared at them sullenly.

"I wish I had blown your brains out," he said to his late assailant.

"Very likely," retorted the other. "But I didn't come down here to talk about that. Where is that money?"

The other refused to reply, whereupon a search was instituted on his person, when the missing money was recovered.

Next day he was safely lodged in Exeter gaol, when a curious discovery came to light.

He was no French officer at all, but no less a person than the famous Black Dick, for whom the authorities had been searching for nearly two months past.

In due course he was properly hanged. Three months later, the farmer having given his consent, Squire Thornton and Drucilla

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Standish became man and wife, and a happier couple are not to be found in the West Country. The young man always declared that he owed his happiness to Black Dick.

TREASON BY FOOTBALL

IN the old days at the Varsity we were all agreed that John Sanderson was a man who some day would have to be reckoned with. In other words, he had a magnificent command of language when put out, a set of biceps which would not have discredited a professional athlete, a power of endurance like that of a traction-engine, and the grip of a vice. Whatever form of exercise he took up, he carried through with a will. Matters educational, however, troubled him but little. It was his father's wish that he should go to college; to college he accordingly went. He was an obedient, if a strong-willed, young man, and had his own ideas of what his after-life would be. That it would include much exercise and a super-abundant amount of energy he had practically made up his mind. If he was fonder of one thing than of another it was football. He had no particular preference for either form of the game; so long as he could play it one was as good as the other. On several

Treason by Football

occasions he played for his county, and was repeatedly honoured with the approval of the critics, both newspaper and otherwise. But after all, football could not be looked upon as his profession, and at length the time came when he had to think seriously as to what he should do for a living. His father was a clergyman with a large family to support on a not too large income, and, in consequence, there could be little or no help from that quarter. He had no desire to go into a bank or an office, while the Army, Navy and Church were equally out of the question. At last a brilliant opportunity presented itself. This was neither more nor less than a chance meeting with an old college friend, who was the possessor of a ranch in one of the South American States. The gentleman in question was then in England, purchasing stock, and as soon as he heard that Sanderson stood in need of employment, he hastened to suggest that he should return with him and accept a position as overseer on his property.

"But I don't know anything about ranching," said that young man, who yearned to accept, but felt that he ought not to do so under false pretences. "I know a sheep

Treason by Football

from a cow and a horse from a pig, but there, I'm afraid, my knowledge ceases."

"Oh, that needn't bother you," replied his friend. "You'll pick it up soon enough, and it will be awfully jolly having an Englishman on the place. We'll put in a rare old time together."

Sanderson suggested that the life must be delightful, whereupon the other replied that it would be, but for the revolutions that seemed to occur as regularly as the hot and cold seasons.

"They're always at it," he asserted; "as soon as one party gets into power the other party begin to collect arms and start fighting to drive them out. Then you never know where you are, or what's going to happen, until things have calmed down again."

"But surely somebody can be held responsible for it all," suggested Sanderson.

"Not a bit of it," the other answered. "There are such a lot of professional conspirators knocking about that part of the world that you're well-nigh powerless to bring them to book. There's a woman, for instance—what her nationality is no one seems to know, but she's the arch demon of the lot. If they could catch her, it's my

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belief they would show her scant mercy. I should say at a guess that she has had her pretty fingers in more revolutionary pies than any other half-dozen people in the continent of America. If you come out, my advice is to keep clear of all that sort of thing. The game is not worth the candle."

Later in the evening, for they had been dining together at a well-known Regent Street café, they separated—Sanderson promising to let him have his decision in the course of a week. This he did, and to the effect that it gave him great pleasure to accept the other's generous offer. They were to sail together in a fortnight's time, and their passages were booked. On the eve of leaving, however, Belfield was prevented from starting by certain business matters which had been delayed. As it seemed a pity two passages should be forfeited, it was agreed that Sanderson should go on alone, and that the other should follow by the next boat. Sanderson, on his arrival, was to please himself as to his movements—that is to say, he could either remain in the capital, which was also the seaport, or go direct to the ranch. He carried with him a number of letters of introduction, and was

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assured that, if he chose the former alternative, he would, in all probability, find himself hospitably entertained.

"That is to say, of course, provided there's no revolution going forward," laughed his friend.

Having bade his family good-bye, the young man embarked. Among the articles of his outfit, which was extensive, he numbered a cricket-bat, and, more important still, a football. Belfield had assured him that they would very soon be able to teach the native idea how to play, and then they'd have no end of fun.

The first port of call after leaving Southampton was Lisbon, where, among other passengers, they embarked a beautiful Spanish lady who appeared to be in a very poor state of health, and was taking a voyage by her doctor's orders. Her name was Etrada, the Señora Carmencita Etrada, and she was certainly the most beautiful woman Jack Sanderson had ever encountered. Before their voyage was half completed he was head over ears in love, and at times found himself wondering whether he should not throw up his appointment and continue his journey to the country for which she was

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bound, which, I should add, was some considerable distance beyond his own port of call. Prudence and conscience, however, prevailed. Nevertheless, it was vastly pleasant to sit with her on deck, watching the blue sea in the day-time and the brilliant stars at night. She spoke English fluently, a fact which she accounted for by observing that she had spent some years in England during her late husband's lifetime.

At last Sanderson reached his destination, and the good ship dropped her anchor in the harbour. By this time Master Jack was a good deal wiser concerning the Señora and her affairs than he altogether cared about. I would have given much to have been present at their interview. From what I can gather from Jack, who considers it the strangest adventure of his life, it took place in a secluded part of the deck and in the dark, on the night prior to their arrival. I have never been able to get him to tell me exactly what she said to him, but I believe she openly confessed that she was the woman against whom Belfield had warned him—the fair conspirator who had done so much to upset existing affairs in various parts of the Continent. She knew that she would not be

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allowed to land, and also that if it were known that she was on board, the ship would be closely watched to prevent anyone communicating with her. She had, however, some most important papers which it was absolutely necessary should reach the hands of a certain person and as soon as possible. There was no one else in the ship who would take them ashore for her, and, as it was not known that she was on board, no one would come out to receive them. If only Señor Sanderson would undertake the errand she would bless him till the end of her days. She was scheming in the interests of truth and justice—she would swear to that by all the saints. As this argument did not go for very much with Sanderson, she must have tried the effect of something stronger, for, at the end of the interview, which had lasted for upwards of an hour and a half, he reluctantly consented. But how was it to be managed? They would search his baggage and himself, he explained.

She gave a little musical laugh.

“You are a great athlete,” she murmured, patting him prettily on the arm. “You play the game of football. I have heard of you and your doings. Could you not teach it to

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some of the officers with whom you will dine—perhaps to-night.”

Sanderson was afraid he did not quite understand. He could not see what football had to do with getting the incriminating documents ashore. He asked for an explanation and received it. When he reached his cabin, he sat down on his settee, and summed up the situation.

“I wonder what I’ve let myself in for,” he said to himself. “It seems to me that I’m going to play the goat at the outset of my South American career.”

When he went ashore next day it was noticeable that he carried in his hand a cricket-bat and a football tied together. He himself noticed, as he went down the ladder to the tender, that certain military officers on board that craft closely scrutinised everyone who was going ashore, while soldiers in boats hovered around the ship as if they were on guard. It was evident that they were aware of the Señora’s presence on board, and were watching her movements.

At the Customs House his baggage was closely searched, while he himself had to undergo the same unpleasant ordeal.

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They had received information, so the official explained, that a certain person was endeavouring to communicate with the shore, and the officers were ordered to search everyone who landed. Fortunately this individual had once made a trip to England, and was, therefore, familiar with a football, otherwise he might have deemed it a new sort of bomb and confiscated it. As it was, however, he said he had once witnessed a match at the Crystal Palace, and then, with a laugh, added, “Ah, but you are a strange people, you English.” After which compliment he allowed him to pass out and to arrange about the conveyance of his luggage to his hotel. An hour or so later he had paid a call on the officers of the garrison at their barracks, which stood upon a large open square, surrounded on the other three sides by elegant houses standing in large gardens, and plainly the residences of the aristocracy of the city. From the detailed description with which he had been furnished, he had no difficulty in recognising that of the man into whose demesne he was to endeavour to kick the ball with its mysterious message.

He was received by the officers with acclamation when they heard that he was

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Belfield's friend. Nothing could be too much for them to do to make his stay in the city an enjoyable one. When could he dine with them? On the excuse that he was leaving next day for the ranch he accepted for that evening, and as he left the building congratulated himself on the success which had so far attended his endeavours. He hoped and trusted it would continue.

"Good luck grant that they'll let me give them a lesson in the game, and that I've not lost any of my old form at punting. It would spell ruin to have to make two shots at such a goal."

The appointed hour that evening found him at the barracks. Once more he was received with the greatest cordiality. The meal was a merry one, and every moment the fun waxed faster and more furious. The wine circled freely, and the only fault his hosts seemed to find with him was that he did not drink enough of it. He knew, however, that, while complying as far as possible with the rules of hospitality, it behoved him to keep his wits about him in view of what was to come.

Carefully guided, the conversation, translated by such as had any knowledge of

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English, turned to sport, and then Sanderson had his opportunity. He spoke of football with all the enthusiasm he could command, with such ardour, indeed, that the wine-inflamed brains of his audience took fire, and they swore one and all that they would try their hands, or their feet, at the game, the moment a ball could be procured. This was Jack's opportunity. Pretending to be carried away by their sportsmanlike behaviour, which he vowed he had never seen equalled, he revealed the fact that a ball, fresh from England, was at that moment lying on the bed in his room at the hotel. If someone could be sent to fetch it what was to prevent him from giving them a lesson at once? It was a lovely night—the moon being nearly at the full. Of course they would play, though it was nearly midnight, and an orderly should be dispatched at once for a ball. Ten minutes later he returned with it, and the noisy party, most of them sadly the worse for their potations, staggered out into the open space before the barracks. Then the game commenced, and anything funnier, Sanderson declares, he has never seen. His hosts, clad in their gorgeous uniforms, and nearly

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all wearing spurs, cannoned and tumbled over each other in their anxiety to show their prowess. The tubby colonel fell flat in the dust and remained there, swearing strange oaths, with a captain to keep him company; while two of the subordinate officers shook their fists in each other's faces, and threatened each other's lives, because they had kicked each other's shins instead of the ball. All this time Jack was steadily manœuvring the sphere up the square towards the walls of the garden in question—*then, pulling himself together for the effort, he let drive.* It soared into the air, straight and true as if it were shot from a gun. For a flash it could be seen against the moonlit sky, and then it dropped from view behind the wall.

Jack stamped his foot in apparent vexation.

"Confound it!" he cried. "I've lost my ball. I am more than sorry, Señor."

But they vowed he should not lose it—they would scale the wall and bring it back. This he would not hear of. If they would ask for it on the morrow that would do just as well.

In less than half an hour he was back at



THEN, PULLING HIMSELF TOGETHER FOR THE EFFORT, HE LET DRIVE

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his hotel, winding up his watch and thanking his stars that all had gone off so well. At the same time three individuals in the house of the garden were perusing a sheaf of documents and arranging for as pretty a little piece of trouble as any conspirators might desire.

"The clever Carmencita, to think of such a way for get them to us," said one, as he relaced the ball that had served them so well.

"No more fair conspirators for me," observed Mr Sanderson, as he got into bed. "I never want to set eyes on one again. Football is a good game, but it doesn't go well with Treason."

THE CONVICT CATCHER

RONALD ALLISTER COLQUHON, with the assistance of a vigorous constitution, had attained the mature age of eight—his sister Sheilah that of five. The lady was undoubtedly the better looking—her brother's countenance being chiefly remarkable for freckles and a nose that irreverent gutter boys confidently assured him "They could hang their hats on." Despite the fact that their father was an Inspector of Police, popularly supposed by the youth of the small backblock township, where he served, to have in his hands the powers of Life and Death, it was seldom that Ronald's conduct even remotely approached a moderately high standard for more than twenty playing hours in each week. Mrs Maloney, the Irish sergeant's wife, found repeated occasion to inform Mrs Colquhon's cook that, unless he had the good fortune to be drowned in his youth in the Creek that flowed at the bottom

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of the garden, he would assuredly meet his end at the hands of a public functionary, who shall be nameless, before he was thirty. Until the age of six his sorely-tried mother had endeavoured to assist him along the path of virtue with the back of a hair brush or an accommodating slipper, after which, finding him still incorrigible, she handed him over to his father for the adoption of sterner measures.

"My son," said the latter, when they had talked matters over together as became men of the world, "if you continue to worry your mother, and more especially if you lead your sister into any more mischief, you will hear from me, and I can promise you you won't like it. So be careful what you do."

For nearly two days after this dire threat the delinquent in question conducted himself in such an exemplary manner that those who knew nothing of the conversation that had taken place regarded the boy with suspicion, and threw out hints that there must be something radically wrong with his constitution, though, perhaps, Mrs Maloney, the lady already referred to, came nearer expressing the public sentiment when she said, "The artful little divil, he's not ill; he's just

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done something that beats all, an' he's tryin' to hide it."

Probably the only person on the place who understood and appreciated the boy's real worth was his small sister, who regarded him with the most profound admiration. She followed him everywhere when she was permitted to do so, and was in all things his loyal and obedient slave. That such loyalty should not infrequently bring trouble upon her devoted head only adds a lustre, in my opinion, to her self-sacrifice. About this time the small township which is the scene of my story was being brought somewhat prominently before the public, for the reason that its vicinity was the present hiding-place of a notorious criminal who had escaped from Markworth Gaol, while undergoing a sentence of fifteen years' penal servitude for burglary and manslaughter. He had now been upwards of a month at large, and such was the terror he inspired that few of the townfolk would venture out after dark. To Inspector Colquhon fell the unenviable lot of being called upon to run him to earth. The difficulty of the task, even with his augmented force, will become apparent when I say that the wild mountain range, at the foot

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of which the township was located, was covered with dense scrub, and was as full of caves and safe hiding-places as anything to be found in the length and breadth of Australia. Looking for him was like searching for the proverbial needle in the bundle of hay, and, in consequence, when he had been called out with his men on false alarms half a dozen times in a week, in addition to the systematic search he was already conducting, you will agree with me in supposing that his temper was not always as placid as it might have been. In those days his son and heir walked softly in his sight, but such good behaviour was too phenomenal to last.

It was one of the Inspector's strictest orders that on no account should the children visit the dense scrub, where snakes abounded, or venture near the water-hole at the bottom of the garden. In winter it was a swiftly-running stream; in summer, when the rest of the Creek was dry for miles, this particular spot remained a pool some thirty yards long by fifteen wide, and in the middle about four feet deep. Doubtless, for the reason that it was forbidden ground, it struck Ronald as being the most desirable place in all the countryside. It had

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got him into trouble more than once, but that fact appeared only to add to his liking for it.

One hot summer morning a black boy rode in from a station some twenty miles from the township with a note for the Inspector. It was from the manager, and contained the information that a man, answering to the description of the missing convict, had been seen on a spur of the range in that vicinity. Colquhoun was acquainted with the manager in question, and knew him for one who would not willingly bring him out on a false errand. He therefore took with him a couple of troopers and departed, leaving the station in charge of the big Irish sergeant, Maloney.

Ronald watched them start with the interest that he invariably displayed in his father's doings. He had long since convinced himself that when he grew up he would be just such another, ride a big grey charger, armed with a sword and revolver, and, better than all, decorate his jack boots with spurs of superlative shininess. When they had disappeared he counted his worldly wealth, and discovered that of his week's pocket money only a halfpenny remained, obviously too small an amount for the

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purchase of a certain tin sword for which his soul yearned, but for which the village store-keeper had the audacity to ask the overwhelming sum of sixpence. With a sigh he turned into the house, and, as it was holiday time, demanded of his mother in what way he should amuse himself.

"Go and play with Sheilah in the garden," said Mrs Colquhon, "and remember you are not to go to the stables or down to the Creek."

Ronald departed, and presently discovered his sister making her doll's toilet in the seclusion of the orange grove. He offered a gratuitously scathing remark concerning girls who played with dolls, which was received by his sister with supreme indifference. Finding that that did not rouse her, he suggested that he should smuggle out the meat chopper and enjoy the excitement of an execution — Belinda, for the nonce, to figure as Lady Jane Grey. Sheilah, whose education did not extend to English History, at first did not understand, but when it was properly brought home to her, she so vehemently dissented from the proposition that the would-be headsman thought fit to change the subject, and then wandered off in search of something else wherewith to amuse him-

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self. This was easier to look for than to find, but at length a brilliant idea occurred to him. He wondered that he had never thought of it before. For the convenience of watering, each orange tree was surrounded by a little embankment of earth, each of which again was connected by a channel with the next tree, so that it was possible to pour water from the tub at the top of the garden and let it trickle right through from tree to tree all over the garden—the tub itself being filled by a pipe from the windmill well. Though playing with the water was also against the rules, the temptation was more than the boy could resist; besides, as he argued, he was saving the gardener trouble, and also doing good to the trees. His conscience having been thus put to sleep for the time being, he picked up the bucket and commenced operations. He was not strong enough to lift it out when full, but even half that quantity he discovered made a very pleasant trickle. He worked at it with a will until the tub was well-nigh empty, and a slight feeling of fatigue caused him to desist. What a pity it was, he argued, that it was not deep enough for him to sail a boat in. Then another idea occurred to him, of so

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fascinating and daring a nature as to almost take his breath away. Would it be possible to carry it out? Would he have the necessary courage, and if he had, and were detected, what would the punishment be? He stood with his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets and his hat tilted over his freckled nose in order to keep the sun out of his eyes, and gave the matter the fullest consideration. In less than a minute he was convinced that this was going to be the greatest achievement of his life. Then the query—Should he or should he not tell Sheilah? He was well aware that she would not betray him; his only fear was that she might endeavour to dissuade him from the attempt. After all, human nature is only human nature, and he found, as many a man has found before, that it is difficult to keep a great idea to oneself. There is a stage when the desire for sympathy becomes irresistible, and Ronald found himself in that position now. He accordingly baled the rest of the water out of the tub, and then set off in search of his sister, whom he discovered gravely discussing the possibilities of rain falling in the near future with Ah Sin, the Chinese gardener. It may be that the feminine mind is more

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imitative than that of the male, for she was reproducing, with excellent effect, her mother's manner towards a lady friend on the previous day. Ronald led her to a secluded spot, and then told her what he had in his mind. Sheilah heard him out with eyes as big as saucers, and then inquired what he thought their father would say when he came to hear of it.

"I expect I shall get a licking with the riding-whip," replied the future Columbus, unconsciously rubbing himself as if in anticipation, and then added philosophically, "But it will be all the same, I expect, 'cos if I don't get it for that I shall catch it for emptying the tub. Besides, perhaps Dad won't know."

"Dad knows everything," replied Sheilah, who had the finest belief in her parent and all his works.

"Well, at anyrate I'm going to try it, and if you like you can come with me."

"I'm 'fraid, Ronnie—true as true. I really am."

"There's nothing to be afraid of," said her brother, stoutly. "You'll have me with you, and I'm going to be a sailor after I've been an Inspector of Police. We'll be Swiss

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Family Robinson, only I wish there was a desert island."

This lack of thoughtfulness on the part of Nature was indeed lamentable, but they had not time to brood upon it, for at that moment their mother's voice was heard summoning them to the midday meal.

Throughout the repast the children's demeanour was so staid that Mrs Colquhon's suspicions were aroused.

"What mischief have you chicks been up to this morning?" she said, looking from one to the other.

Sheilah confessed to having talked to Ah Sin and playing with her doll, while Ronald, with an eye to the future, declared that he had been helping him to water—a statement which, in its way, carried with it a considerable amount of truth.

At the conclusion of the meal Ronald and Sheilah disappeared mysteriously, and nothing further was seen of them. Had, however, an observer been strolling in the Orangery a quarter of an hour or so later, he or she might have beheld the improving spectacle of a small and very freckled boy laboriously trundling a half tub down the slope that led to a dazzling sheet of water; while a small

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girl followed him, bearing in her arms a toy sheep, a variety of dolls, and a four-legged monstrosity, which, in its toyshop days, might have borne some resemblance to a dog. The dolls were to represent the various members of the Robinson Family, while the animals were to play the parts of the brute creation that figure in the never-to-be forgotten adventure they were so industriously endeavouring to emulate. The forbidden meat chopper and a handful of rusty nails Ronald felt to be a particularly happy touch—as representing the marvellous carpenter's chest.

At length the pool was reached and the ship was launched. She floated like a duck. Sheilah, the family and the live stock, having embarked, Ronald pushed her off, and then, with a scramble—and as a result sopping understandings—followed her example. There was ample room for both of them, but it was a tricky craft to manoeuvre, as her captain soon discovered. The principal point in her favour was a remarkable capacity for turning round and round at every stroke of the paddle. Sheilah found very soon that she did not like it, and said so in determined terms. She desired to be

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put ashore without delay, and when the officer in command assured her that this was impossible, wept bitterly.

However, even spinning may, after a while, produce some result, and presently they found themselves gyrating slowly towards the deepest part—that is to say, the middle of the pool. By this time both were thoroughly tired of the voyage, and Ronald heartily wished that he had not thought of undertaking it. If only he could manage to reach the bank and roll his wretched vessel back to her accustomed place before her absence was discovered, how happy he would be. Then a dire catastrophe occurred, and in one brief moment all his hopes were blighted. By some mischance Sheilah dropped her beloved Belinda overboard, and in endeavouring to recover her, Ronald lost his paddle. What was to be done? He could not reach it, and without it, as he knew full well, it was impossible for them to proceed. The good ship, meanwhile, lay motionless upon the glassy surface of the ocean. Then Nemesis, in the shape of Sergeant Maloney, appeared upon the scene, and the children realised that all was lost. Nothing could save them now! The

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sergeant hastened to the bank and took stock of them.

“Oh, you little rascals, and is that where you are now?” he cried at last, shaking his fist at them, “and ye’re poor mother driven woild for despair of findin’ ye. Come out of it now and have the batin’ ye deserve.”

“We can’t,” wailed Ronald. “We’re stuck here. I’ve dropped the bit of wood and I can’t reach it.”

As if to prove the truth of his words he leaned over the side to make another attempt. Before the sergeant had time to realise what had happened the tub had capsized, and both children were in the water. Then he recovered his wits and dashed in to the rescue. Fortunately he was able to reach them before any real harm was done, nevertheless it was quite serious enough to give him a fright that, he declares even now, he will never forget to his dying day.

The gallant commander of that ill-fated craft and his fair passenger presented but sorry spectacles when they were carried, dripping like water dogs, to the security of the bank. Both were bellowing lustily, while the sergeant, thinking of his shining jacks and spotless breeches, was anathe-

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matizing both, under his breath, with all the fluency of his Irish tongue. When he had recovered himself a little he took up Sheilah in his arms, and holding Ronald by the hand, lest by chance he might escape and get into further mischief, he proceeded towards the house. Mrs Colquhon, with an expression of terror upon her face, met them half way, and realising that, though dripping, they were safe, first hugged them both, and then, through her tears, gave them what Maloney described to his wife afterwards, as "the proper father and mother of a ratin'."

Ten minutes later both delinquents were secure in bed, and one at least was, in the words of the poet, "bitterly thinking of the morrow." His anticipations were realised, for, on the following morning after breakfast, he had an interview with his father from which both emerged with as much dignity as was compatible with the occasion. Ronald was not aware that his mother was in the next room all the time, suffering even more than he was, while, had he been told that his male parent also suffered on his account, I am inclined to think that he would have experienced a difficulty in believing it.

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"He's a plucky little beggar," said his father to his mother afterwards, "and has the makings of a man in him. It cut me to the heart to have to thrash him, when he stood up to me and told me that it was all his fault, and that he persuaded Sheilah against her will to go in that wretched tub. God bless you, dear, the lad's got all your honesty and a share of my stupidity. I wish to goodness, however, he wasn't so frequently in mischief."

"He'll grow out of it, never fear," replied the wife. "I'm not afraid of that. Even now, I'm quite sure he'd give anything to try and make you think better of him."

Her mother's instinct was not at fault. The boy bore his father no grudge. He knew that he had deserved his punishment, and that being so, it was only fair that he should receive it. I will endeavour to show you how he tried to win his way back into his father's favour. Though many years have elapsed since it happened, the story is told of him even now.

It was on the evening of the day following the punishment above recorded that Ronald chanced to overhear a fragment of a conversation carried on between his father and

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mother. It was the latter who was speaking.

"You mustn't worry yourself so much about it, dear," she was saying. "Believe me it will all come right in the end."

"I am not so sure of that," the other replied, with what was very near a groan, for he was quite worn out by his exertions. "I've tried everywhere for him, but he always proves too much for me. And besides, Gerty, think what it will mean to me if I can lay this fellow by the heels. The Commissioner is an old man, and, I believe, talks of retiring. So far, thank goodness, I have been successful in keeping on the right side of the register with the Government. I have had plenty of experience. I hope I am a gentleman—and there's no reason, if I can catch this desperado, Rogan, and clap him back in gaol, that I should not step into the chief's shoes."

"I am sure I wish you could catch him," replied his wife, with a shudder. "I shall never rest easy until he is under lock and key again. When I think of what he might do to you—if you met—"

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of that," her husband answered; "I can take care of

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myself. But one thing is quite certain. I shall know no peace of mind until I have Michael Rogan in my hands."

Ronald had heard enough. He left the house and betook himself to his favourite retreat in the garden, where he sat himself down to think the matter out. By the time he returned to the house to go to bed he had quite made up his mind. He had heard his father distinctly declare that he would know no peace until Michael Rogan was his prisoner. He, Ronald, would therefore capture the man, and then, perhaps, his father would think well of him again. He himself would be terribly frightened, no doubt, but, under the circumstances, that was a minor consideration.

After his mother had kissed him and tucked him up for the night he lay thinking and thinking over his plan. More than once he found himself dropping off to sleep, but on each occasion managed to pinch himself back to wakefulness. At last he heard his father and mother pass his door on their way to their room. In another hour the household would be asleep, and it would then be time for him to start on his desperate enterprise. That hour was probably the

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longest his little life had known. He could hear the ticking of the clock in the dining-room next door, the scampering of a mouse in the wainscoting, and, later, the voice of a man in the road, wishing a friend good-night. At last twelve o'clock struck, and he knew that the time for action had arrived. Quietly he rose from his little bed and dressed himself by the moonlight that streamed in through the window. That important business finished, he softly opened his bedroom door and crept along the passage towards his father's office. Fortunately the door stood open, and with equal good fortune the room, like his own, was almost light. At anyrate, it was sufficiently so to enable him to find what he wanted. In the left hand top drawer of the writing-table was that terrible weapon—his father's big Colt revolver, fortunately unloaded, though the boy had no knowledge of this. With some difficulty he managed to squeeze it into his coat pocket—half afraid that it might explode while he was doing so. Then, opening another drawer on his right hand, he took from it a pair of handcuffs, into which he had often, in fun, thrust his sun-burnt little hands. These he fastened in

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the approved fashion beneath his coat, and then, so far as the office was concerned, his preparations were complete. Passing on to the larder—the door of which creaked in a fashion that he feared would raise the house—he filled his school satchel with such provender as he could discover, and passed into the back verandah in search of what every bush boy knows plays about the most important part in such an expedition as he was embarking upon—namely, a canvas water bag. By the time he had filled this, and had slung his satchel round his shoulders, he was carrying a fair weight for an eight-year-old boy. However, nothing daunted, he set off, passed out of the gate quietly, and then headed along the road—which was as light as day—towards the ranges where he had been given to understand the outlaw lay hidden. Little by little, as it approached the foothill, it became less clearly defined, until at last it faded out altogether, and was no longer even a cattle track.

Brave as the lad had proved himself so far, he found his heart beating quicker as he entered the half dark of the thick Mulga scrub and commenced the real ascent. The night wind blew mournfully through the trees

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and long grass, and, when he had been climbing for upwards of an hour, a dingoe howled dolefully half a mile or so to the right, it was only the thought of what his father would think of him when he should return with Rogan as his captive that prevented him from giving up the quest and returning home once more to receive further punishment for absenting himself. Then he hardened his heart and pushed on once more with fresh spirit. He was going to prove himself a true son of Inspector Colquhon, if he died for it.

At last, when he had been toiling on and on for hours, he felt that he could go no further. Already the stars were paling out where he could see them between the trees, and a faint, grey light was stealing across the sky. Then, wearied out, he laid himself down under the shadow of a rock, and in less time than it takes to tell was fast asleep. When he woke again he could scarcely believe his eyes. He looked about him with an air of perplexity. What did it mean? How did he get there? This was not his trim little bedroom at home. Then he remembered everything and felt a lump rising in his throat as he thought of it. A

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few not-to-be-suppressed tears trickled down his cheeks—then he pulled himself together and reminded himself that his father had often told him that men never cried. After this he breakfasted, and, girding himself afresh, continued his journey. Where he exactly expected to find Rogan he does not appear to have known himself, but he remembered having heard Maloney—who figured as an oracle—say that the man must be stowed away somewhere in the heart of the mountains. This vague place was where he intended seeking him.

All through that sweltering day he pushed on and on, climbing hillsides and descending into gullies, making his way through rocky passes, and over dry river-beds, pausing now and again to refresh himself from his wallet and his water bag. Alas, poor little man, how little he knew what was before him—how little he guessed how every bite and sip he took was bringing him nearer starvation and death by thirst—the two nightmares of the Australian bush! For that was what was surely before him unless he were found in time.

By nightfall he had drunk his last drop of water, and his food was almost gone. Next

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morning, having eaten his last crust, he left his bags, and, sorely thirsty, again began his weary march. By midday his agony was well-nigh unendurable — his tongue was beginning to swell, and he tottered as he walked. Unconsciously, but following the dreadful formula of such cases, he was wandering in a circle, and so he would continue to do until kindly Death should overtake him, and the dingoes and the crows constitute themselves his sextons.

For how long he wandered in this aimless fashion no one will ever know, but at last deliverance came to him and from a most unexpected quarter. He suddenly heard a voice calling him, and, looking in the direction whence it proceeded, discovered a man lying beneath a tree some twenty yards or so to his right.

"Coo'ee, kinchin," he cried in a gruff but not altogether unkindly voice, "come you here or you'll be pegging it afore you go much farther. This is the second time I've seen you."

Scarcely knowing what he was doing, the boy did as he was ordered, and, when he was within an arm's length of the caller, fell to the ground unconscious. The man who

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seemed unable or unwilling to move, put his hand out and picked up a water bag that lay by his side—some of the fluid contained in which he dashed into the lad's face, after which he poured some from a pannikin into his mouth. In a few minutes Ronald revived sufficiently to look up at his benefactor.

"Well, you're a nice young kinchin to be wandering about in the bush like this 'ere, I must say," the latter remarked. "A remarkable young bloke, if ever I set eyes on one. Take another swig at this pannikin. A drop of rum would do you a world of good—but we're out o' that 'ere commodity just at present. That's better, ain't it? Feel a bit more so-fash, so to speak? Good thing for you I spotted you, or you'd ha' been crows' meat by now, I reckon! Don't happen to have a bit o' baccy about you, I suppose?"

The boy, who was still unable to speak, shook his head. He had not arrived at the use of tobacco yet.

"Well, that's a pity," said the other, "but it can't be 'elped. It would have comforted me a bit like. Now you just coil yourself up in the shadder there, my joey, and take a banje (sleep). After that I'll do as the chaplain says, and interrogate yer a bit."

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The boy did as he was told without hesitation. In a very few moments he was in the fast sleep of complete exhaustion. The sun had set when he woke again, and a cool wind was blowing. He felt vastly refreshed and ravenously hungry. His companion, the man who had undoubtedly saved his life, was still seated in the same position, but his eyes were closed and he groaned as if in pain. Fancying he was asleep, Ronald sat still for fear of waking him; meanwhile he took careful stock of his companion. The following description is from another source. The man was a big fellow, considerably more than six feet in height, and with a herculean frame. His face was a hard one, with a reckless expression upon it that said something for the rascal's disposition. He wore a pair of moleskin trousers, a Crimean shirt, but no hat. This, however, the boy noticed was lying some distance away—as if it had been blown there. He found himself wondering why the other had not troubled to get it. While he was thinking of this the man himself opened his eyes and looked at him.

“Hullo, younker, and how're you findin' yerself now?” he inquired.

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Ronald, who was nothing if not polite, replied with thanks that he felt much better.

“Take another swig at the bag and then pass it alone 'ere,” said the other. “This 'ere leg o' mine's fairly put me into a fever, curse it! I knew there was no luck for me to-day when that mopoke started his row in the tree above me last night—and this is what it's come to. A nice old caper for me, and don't you make any mistake about that. I can see the grin there'll be on the Old Man's face when he gets me back among his boarders again. It'll stretch from 'ere to Sydney, if I know anything about it.”

This was all so much gibberish to the boy—so, not knowing what else to say, he inquired what the other had done to his leg.

“Broke it,” the man replied grimly. “In the old place, worse luck. My 'orse kicked me as I was unsaddling him. Then he cleared out—back to the place that I borrowed him from.”

Again Ronald was silent; then, thinking he ought to say something, he asked if the other would like his hat and went to get it. The man placed it on his head with a savage

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push and then bade him, with a roughness there was no accounting for, collect sticks to make a fire.

"You'll find a billy can and grub bag knockin' round somewhere," he said. "I reckon there'll be enough tucker for us both to-night and that's all. You can't find your way back to the township, and this leg o' mine won't let me go, so I reckon we'll have to cheat the hangman 'ere."

Every bush boy knows how to make billy tea, and Ronald was as proficient as most others in the art. As soon as it was ready he carried the pot on a stick to the man's side, and then produced the rations from the bag. Their meal consisted of half a damper, as hard as a brick and evidently some days' old, and a piece of jerked beef that might very well have been cut from one of Noah's bullocks, so tough was it. However, to the boy, starving as he was, it constituted a delicious meal. By the time he had finished his portion he was almost his former self.

"If only I 'ad some baccy," growled the man again. "I reckon I'd give all I've ever earned to smoke another pipe of black stick. Sit ye down there, joey, and let's know who

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you are, where you hail from, and what brought you out into this 'ere God-forsaken scrub." Then, with an oath of surprise, he bade the boy come nearer him. "What's that you've got in them pockets o' yourn?" he continued. "S'elp me bob, if it ain't a bloomin' shootin' iron and a pair of darbies too. Well, this beats all I ever heard tell of. Hand 'em over here, you young dog, you."

Ronald complied, whereupon the other let fly at him with a volley of curses that made the boy's blood run cold. Having done which he inquired the meaning of it all, ordering him to tell the truth and not "Try come the artful on him."

"First and foremost, as the lawyers say, what's yer name? Answer up sharp."

"Ronald Allister Colquhon."

"What?" shouted the man. "Say that again."

The other did so, trembling like a leaf, for the man's face was diabolical in its intense malignity.

"Then, if you're his son, what the — are you doing out here with them things? No lies now."

"I don't tell lies," replied the boy, sturdily.

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"Answer me back, you pup, or I'll put a bullet into you. Bah! the thing isn't loaded."

He tossed it away from him in disgust, and again demanded the reason of his presence there. Ronald saw there was no hope for it. His cherished secret must be revealed to a stranger.

"I came to look for Michael Rogan," he answered.

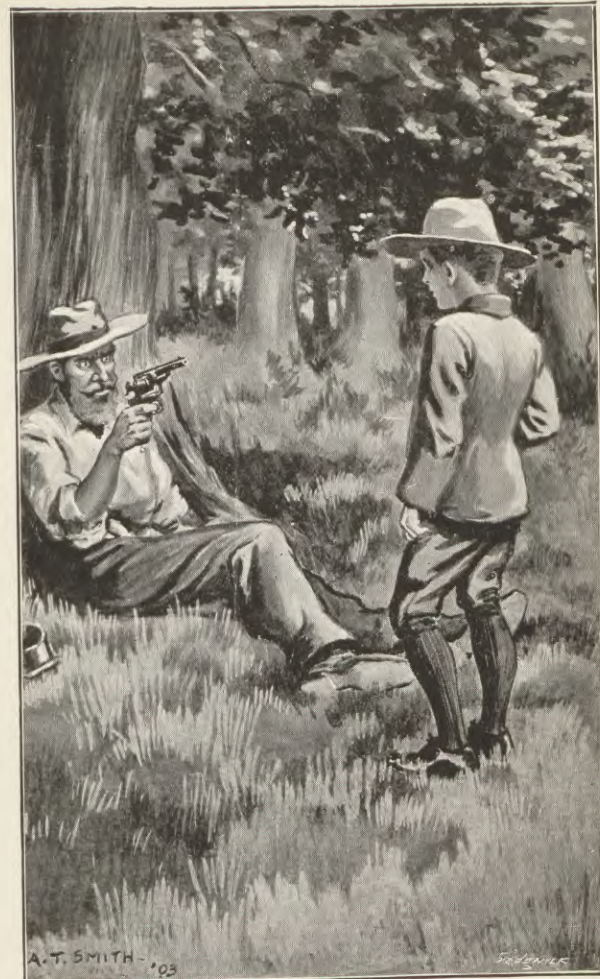
"Oh, you did, did you? An', pray, what was you goin' to do with 'im when you found 'im, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"Take him back to my father," returned the boy, and then ended with a strange burst of confidence. "Dad says it is the only thing that will make him happy. So I came out to look for him."

The man laughed like a hyena. Then his mood changed.

"There never was a joke like this," he said, after a short pause. "But one thing I will say for yer, joey, ye're a good plucked 'un, and I'd fight the man who said t'otherwise, broke leg and all."

Then, with a more friendly curse than he had yet employed, he bade the boy lie down and sleep, he himself remaining propped up



"ANSWER ME BACK, YOU PUP, OR I'LL PUT A BULLET INTO YOU"

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against the tree as before. Ronald needed no second bidding, and in a few moments was dreaming that he was at home once more, and that his strange and terrible acquaintance was helping him to search for Michael Rogan in the garden and troopers' quarters. It was broad daylight when he awoke, and a white mist covered the ground.

His companion was awake, and still seated in the same attitude.

"Well, my young Convict Nabber, here's a riddle for yer," he said, as Ronald sat up. "What about breakfast?"

"There isn't any," the boy answered sorrowfully. "We ate it all last night."

"So we did, and that's a fact. Now, unless yer can find a 'guana or somethin' else, we must bloomin' well starve. Cut out and look about yer. But don't yer go too far off the camp, or yer'll jolly well go and lose yerself again in this fog."

Ronald set off on his search, but no success followed his endeavours. Suddenly, just as the mist was clearing off and the sun coming through, a shout from his companion brought him running back to the camp.

"There's a party of some sort comin' over

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the ridge," said that gentleman. "If yer listens yer'll hear their 'orses on the stones. As like as not they're after me."

They listened and waited. There could be no doubt he was right, for they were shod horses, not brumbies (wild horses). A few moments later Ronald gave a cry of delight as he recognised his father with two troopers and Jimmy, the black tracker, coming towards them, the latter on foot.

"It's my father," he almost shouted. "He's looking for me."

He was about to run forward to greet him, but the man on the ground stopped him with an oath.

"Hold on," he said, picking up the handcuffs as he spoke. "If that's your father, clap these things on. I'm Michael Rogan, and remember I give myself up to you, not to him. Quick, now; on with 'em."

Though almost overcome by his astonishment Ronald did as he was ordered, and in a few seconds the notorious convict was safely secured by a boy of eight. By that time the Inspector was close at hand. He dismounted from his charger and ran forward to take his son in his arms.

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"Oh, Ronnie, Ronnie, my little son," he cried, "thank God we have found you."

When he had assured himself that no harm had befallen the boy he turned to the man beneath the tree. He saw that he was handcuffed, and his astonishment increased.

"Michael Rogan, by all that's wonderful!" he cried. "What on earth does this mean?"

"It means that I've broke my leg," growled the other. "An' that I'm his prisoner, not yours, Mr Inspector."

Here Ronald thought it was time for him to put in a word.

"You told mother," he said, "that you would be happy when you found him, and so I came out here to look for him. You're happy now, aren't you, dad?"

But the Inspector did not reply.

From what I have been able to ascertain, Rogan did not long survive his capture. It was found necessary to amputate his leg, and he did not recover from the operation.

Though the Commissioner retired as had been anticipated, Inspector Colquhon did not obtain the post, for a relative in England

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died and left him a considerable sum of money, whereupon he returned to the Old Country, where, I believe, he now figures as a Yorkshire squire. Ronald, who is at Oxford, has grown into a strapping young fellow. I am told he is known among his intimates as Ronald the Convict Catcher.

THE BLACK LADY OF BRIN TOR

I HAVE seen some curious sights, and have taken part in some equally curious affairs, in the course of my career, but I can safely assert that the story I am going to tell you now equals, if it does not excel, anything I have ever known. I had just returned from South America, where I had been ranching for a good number of years, and, having been more successful than the majority of men who go in for that occupation, had returned to the Old Country with the intention of making it my home for the remainder of my existence

If you are prepared to spend the money it would not seem difficult to find a house of the description you require. Yet only those who have tried it know what a serious business it can be. One will be too large, and without sufficient land, another too small and

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with more land than you care to be bothered with. My wife and I visited innumerable places, and at last were beginning to despair of ever finding what we wanted. Then, quite by chance, I happened to hear of the property with which this story is connected. It was necessary for me to visit Plymouth in order to meet a friend who was returning from Australia. The beauty of Devon is proverbial, and never better than in the autumn. After my long absence abroad it had a charm for me that I find it difficult to express in words. The dark red soil, the luxuriant hedgerows, the babbling brooks, and the vast solitude of Dartmoor appeal to me with overwhelming force. This was the county for me, if only I could find the description of place for which I had been so long and wearily searching. While I was awaiting the arrival of my friend's vessel I made it my business to call on one of the leading house agents in order to make inquiries. Alas for my hopes. He had nothing on his books that I cared even to consider. I tried another, and yet a third, but with the same result. There were houses in plenty in the town, but they were useless; there were

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others in the immediate neighbourhood, but each had some drawback. I bade the last agent "good-afternoon" and returned to my hotel, very disappointed at my ill-success. That evening my friend arrived, and, in the pleasure of welcoming him, I forgot, for the time being, my quest of a residence. I was nearer success, however, than I imagined.

On descending to the coffee-room next morning, I found a letter upon my plate. It was from the first agent upon whom I had called on the previous day. Quite by chance, he said, he had happened to hear of an estate situated in a charming little village on the edge of the moor. The house was an old and picturesque one, and the property consisted of some seventy acres. Some slight repairs would have to be effected, for the reason that the house had not been inhabited for some considerable time—the owner being abroad and unable to keep it up. In conclusion, it was stated that the estate would either be let on lease or sold outright. I carefully studied the particulars enclosed, and, as I did so, began to feel that it really looked as if I had at last discovered what I

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wanted. When my friend descended I told him the news, and invited him to remain a day longer in order to come out with me and inspect it. He consented to do so, and that afternoon we chartered a carriage and drove out.

There are reasons why I suppress the name of the village. They will, I expect, be obvious to you. Give a dog a bad name and hang him may apply as well to a property as to the canine race.

The Hall, as the place was called, was on the further side of the village, and was on the very edge of the moor. The agent had described it exactly when he declared it to be a picturesque old building. It stood on high ground, and immediately behind it rose the steep side of Brin Tor, crowned with enormous boulders that gave it a strangely wild appearance. The house itself was approached by a lengthy carriage drive, and, as I learned later, had been built in the days of the early Georges. From the first moment that I saw it I liked it. We drew up at the steps and alighted. Upon my ringing the bell the door was opened to us by an elderly party of the housekeeper persuasion,

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who soon revealed the fact that she was as deaf as a post, and not only deaf but as stupid as a mule—if a mule can be said to be stupider than anything else. I presented her with the order to view, whereupon she examined it as if it were a bank note for a thousand pounds, and she was not quite certain as to whether it was genuine. At last, however, she condescended to admit us, and we entered the large, square hall. It was paved, and I must confess did not present a very inviting appearance. The oak panelling, however, was handsome, while the grand staircase was massive and finely carved. With no very good grace the old woman threw open the door of the room which I judged to be the dining-room, thence we proceeded on our tour of investigation. The house, with the exception of the kitchen and bedroom, was quite unfurnished, and certainly stood in need of repair. It possessed, however, great possibilities, and I felt sure that, when furnished and put in proper order, it would make a charming dwelling. The old woman's husband, who was as decrepit as his wife, took charge of us when we left the house and conducted us

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to the stables, thence through the garden to the glass houses. These had evidently been allowed to go to rack and ruin for a very long time past. By the time our inspection was finished the afternoon was well advanced, and, if we desired to get back to Plymouth in time for dinner, it behoved us to start at once.

That evening I wrote a long description of what I had seen to my wife, inviting her to join me in order that I might have her opinion. Next day she arrived. She proved to be as charmed with it as I was, and by the end of the week following, matters were in excellent trim for my becoming its owner. As soon as necessary legal formalities had been complied with, my wife set off for London on furniture-buying thoughts intent, while I remained behind to hurry on the work that had to be completed before we could come into residence. At last—it was the second week in November, if my memory serves me—the furniture began to arrive. A make-shift bedroom was prepared for me, and I exchanged the hotel in Plymouth for my own abode.

For the next few days my life was not

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altogether a bed of roses. Everything had to be arranged, the servants were new, while the furnisher's men required strict supervision to prevent them from spending the greater part of their time at the village inn. However, it was all done at last, and I felt that, when my wife gave it the few finishing touches which only a woman can do, it would be as nearly perfect as a man could wish to have his home.

It was on the day that my wife arrived that the first serious circumstance occurred, which it is the purpose of this story to relate. We had finished dinner and were sitting in our drawing-room discussing affairs in general, and wondering when the butler was going to bring in the coffee.

"I told him we would have it immediately after dinner," said my wife.

I rang the bell, and almost immediately he appeared to answer it.

He looked round the room in surprise, as if he expected to find a third person present.

"We will have coffee, Simpson," said my wife. "Always let us have it as soon after dinner as possible."

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"You will excuse me, madam, but I thought you were engaged with a lady."

"I have seen no lady."

He looked at her in bewilderment. "A lady came up the hall," he said, "just as you left the dining hall, and I thought she came in here."

I looked at the man sharply; apparently he was sober.

"You must have dreamt it," I continued.

"No, sir, I did not. I saw her quite distinctly, and would know her again anywhere. She seemed in great trouble, so that is why I did not disturb you. I am very sorry, sir."

He departed to bring in the coffee. When he returned I asked him to describe the person in question more minutely. I gathered that she was tall, and had a beautiful face, but with a very sad expression. She was dressed entirely in black, and had what he called "a black lace shawl" upon her head. The man was deeply in earnest, but I could make neither head nor tail of it.

"Let us look round," I said. "I am quite certain that the hall door has not

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been opened since dinner, and if she is in the house now we shall doubtless find her."

Accompanied by my wife we set off, visited all the rooms on the ground floor, not omitting the servants' hall. My wife questioned the maids, but one and all asserted that they had not been into the hall since dinner. We next tried all the rooms upstairs with the same result. Simpson's mysterious black lady, if she had existed, was certainly not in the house. I felt more than ever convinced that the man must have fallen asleep in his pantry and have dreamt it. But we were not done with her yet. A week or so afterwards, and when we were quite settled in, one of the maids who had been down to the village declared that, on a path that led through the shrubbery to a side gate, she had met a lady who seemed in great distress. According to the girl's story she was wringing her hands. It was too dark for the maid to see her face.

"You are quite sure of what you are saying?" I asked, when Simpson brought the girl into my presence.

"I am quite sure, sir," was her reply.

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"I held the gate open for her to pass through."

"Did she speak to you?"

"Not a word, sir! She just went by me as if she did not see me."

"This is really one of the strangest things I have ever heard," I said to my wife, when we were alone together. "I wonder who the woman is, and by what right she trespasses on my grounds? If I meet her I shall put the question to her."

Christmas was now drawing near, and we had invited a large house party to spend the festive season with us. Among the number was a young fellow named Desborough, who had just got his troop in a Lancer regiment. We had placed him in a room in the bachelors' wing, which was the oldest portion of the house. He and I were the first two to reach the drawing-room before dinner.

"I say, old man," he began, "how many people have you got in the house?"

I told him.

"Yes, but who is the other one? The lady with the sorrowful countenance, and a jolly pretty one at that!"

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"There is no one else," I replied. "I have given you the names of all of them."

"Well, that's funny! For I'll swear she was no housemaid, and I've seen your wife's maid. Are you sure you are not rotting me?"

"Perfectly sure! Describe this mysterious individual to me."

"Well, I'm not much of a hand at that sort of work, but I know that she was jolly good looking, with what looked like a lace mantilla on her head, and she seemed to be in rare trouble. She was wringing her hands, and looked so sorrowfully at me that for a moment I was almost tempted to ask her what was the matter."

"Wait here a moment," I said. "I'll run upstairs and see if I can discover who this person can be."

I did so, muttering as I went that I was getting a little tired of the lady's visits to my house. But though I searched the bachelors' wing, and such other rooms as I could enter, no trace of her could I discover. I returned to the drawing-room and informed Desborough of my ill-success.

"Well, you can say what you like," he

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answered. "I saw her as plainly as I can see you now."

Thus the matter dropped for the time being.

My wife was the next to be favoured with a glimpse of her. It was Christmas Eve, and the ladies had been down to the church to decorate the edifice for next day. It was almost dark when they started to return. My wife remained behind the party for about ten minutes to discuss certain matters with the Vicar. It was snowing heavily when she left the church, and the country looked indescribably beautiful in the light of the full moon. Her version of the story is that she had just left the shrubbery and was passing along the path that ran at the foot of the terrace, when she looked up and saw a woman, dressed in black, leaning with her hands upon it, looking down upon her. She declares to this day that she was too surprised to be frightened, or to say or do anything. Then the woman walked away from her, wringing her hands as if she were in great grief. Three minutes could not have elapsed before I had been told, and was out on the terrace in pursuit. I looked

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about, but there was no sign of her, and, stranger still, there was not a footmark other than my own upon the snow. The matter was getting beyond me. I could not make head nor tail of it.

Next day, after morning service, I took the Vicar aside and asked him if he could give me any clue to the mystery. I told him the matter was getting serious. The servants declared that it was a ghost, and, in consequence, were threatening to leave me.

"Well, I will not deny," he said, "that something of this sort of thing has been village gossip for a great many years, and more than one person has laid claim to having seen it. Personally, I have never done so. The story goes that it is the spirit of a Spanish woman who was once the mistress of the house. If you will come into the church again I will show you a tablet to her memory."

I followed him and discovered the inscription in question. It described her (for reasons already stated I will not give her name) as being the wife of the owner of the house, and also set forth the fact that she had died in the year 1782.

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"There's not much to be gained from that," I said, "but the coincidence is, to say the least of it, singular."

I thanked him and rejoined my party.

That evening was devoted to the usual amusements associated with the occasion. I am afraid we were all very juvenile, and must have shocked the grave Simpson. We played dumb crambo, acted charades, and at last came to thought-reading. In my turn I went out of the room while an experiment was preparing. The hall was brilliantly lighted, and I give you my word that I had no thought of the mysterious lady at that moment. Suddenly I looked up to see her passing along the corridor at the top of the great staircase in the direction of the bachelors' quarter. Seizing a hat and coat I ran up the stairs just in time to see her turning the corner of the corridor. I set off in pursuit. She was evidently making her way to a little door that led by a flight of steps to the garden below. By the time I reached it she had disappeared; but, throwing open the door, I saw her passing swiftly along the garden path towards the shrubbery. Donning my hat and drawing

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on my coat I continued my chase. She passed out of the wicket gate and turned into the narrow lane that led towards the Tor. It was the night of full moon, and was almost as light as day. Without leaving any track upon the snow she sped on at such a rate that I had great difficulty in keeping her in sight. At last she reached the foot of the Tor and began the ascent. This was more than I had bargained for, for it must be remembered that my feet were in evening dress shoes, and that the snow was lying inches deep upon the ground. However, having come so far, I was determined to see what the end of it would be. Staggering, falling, I began the climb, the black figure speeding on ahead of me, never pausing for a moment. At last it reached the summit and stood, while perhaps I could have counted twenty, upon the topmost boulder. It made a weird picture, I can assure you. Then she raised her arms above her head and fell through the air to the rocks, nearly two hundred feet below. On my honour it was so real that I gave a great cry as I saw it. I scrambled down to see if there was any sign of her, but there was none. The

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tragedy ended with her death. I went home scarcely able to believe the evidence of my senses.

Next day I took Desborough up the Tor with me and described the scene to him. I believe he thought I had dreamt it all. We stood at the foot and looked up at it.

"By Jove, it would be a ghastly place to take a leap from," he said. "Is that a cave up there?"

He pointed half-way up the face of the cliff. There certainly *was* a cave there.

"Perhaps that is the clue to the mystery," I cried. "A man could be lowered to it from the top. As soon as the snow goes, I'll have a look at it."

A week later I took several of my men and a strong rope, and visited the Tor once more. After taking every precaution they lowered me over the cliff till I reached the narrow entrance to the cave. I managed to squeeze myself in, and then lit a candle which I had brought with me. Three steps took me into a fair-sized cavern, and showed me as strange and terrible a sight as man has ever looked upon. Stretched out upon the floor was the skeleton of a man; scattered

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around him were remains of books and what may once have been a blanket. I took up one of the books, and inside the cover found the name of the man whose wife's tablet I had seen in the village church on Christmas Day. Later on I examined it carefully. Inside was written, "I am dying of starvation. They will not let my wife bring me food. I have destroyed the papers. Farewell, my own beloved wife." Thus the mystery was solved. The poor remains were brought down from their long resting-place and decently interred. Since then the Black Lady, as the village folk call her, has not been seen. I do not pretend to account for it. I simply give you the story.

MY MYSTERIOUS BUSHMAN

HERE'S a story for you, and one which I doubt if you will believe. I have the best of reasons, however, for knowing it to be true. Judge for yourself!

He called himself Bertie Harrison—that was the name at least that he gave my storekeeper on the day that he put in an appearance on the station. He was tall—very tall and slim—six feet five at least. Many folk would have called him handsome, but, so far as I am concerned, “good looking” would have been nearer the mark. He said he wanted work, and I asked him what he could do. His reply, to the effect that he knew absolutely nothing of bush life, I am prepared to confess, rather disconcerted me.

“But, good gracious, man,” I said, “you don't surely expect me to take you on, if you have had no experience!” After which I

My Mysterious Bushman

added, with a fine touch of irony, "This is not an agricultural college!"

"Well, it's going to be one for me," he replied with equal coolness. "Give me a chance and you won't regret it. In fact, if you like, I'll pledge my word you won't. I can't say more than that, can I?"

"No, I suppose you can't," I answered. "I don't quite see, however, where the argument comes in. Can you ride?"

"Fairly well. That is to say, I have done some hunting in England. I don't pretend, however, to be very much good in the saddle, as you consider it out here."

"Have you ever milked a cow?" I asked, knowing very well what the answer would be.

"I have never tried my hand at it," he replied. "Yet I have no doubt I could, after a time."

"Know anything about sheep?"

He shook his head and smiled. That smile proved too much for me, so I bade him go to the storekeeper and have his name put on the books. At the same time I must confess to a guilty feeling as to what the owner would say (he was a noble lord

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in England) when he should come to hear of it. My anxiety will be understood when I inform you that we were at the zenith of a great drought which had already lasted six months, and, for all we know to the contrary, might extend to another six more.

Only those who have been through an Australian drought can in any way appreciate its horrors. And this was one of the worst we had experienced for many years. Week after week it was my mournful duty to have to write the owner to the effect that his property—that is to say his sheep—was disappearing by hundreds. That did not seem to affect him, however. He was evidently so occupied with his amusements that he did not even take the trouble to reply. Sometimes, when I was more than usually in the blues, and all the country was burned up, and the poor beasts were having their eyes picked out by the crows, I used to try and imagine him sitting on the terrace of his castle in England, looking out over his park with its running river and green woods and luscious grass, with the deer browsing among the bracken. Little did he know what we were going through! But that's

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neither here nor there, and I must tell my story.

Who or what Master Harrison had been we could not find out—though it was evident to the least observant that he came of good stock. Before he had been on the station a month I had begun to realise that I had got a bargain after all. In all my experience I don't think I have met such a man for work. Directly he knew what to do, nothing came amiss to him. From break of day to set of sun he kept at it, and I pledge you my word it wasn't scamped work either. Such a man at such a time was worth a fortune.

Then, with a suddenness that only those who know the bush can appreciate, everything changed. The drought broke, rain fell in torrents, grass sprang up so quickly that it is scarcely exaggeration to say that we saw it growing. With this improved state of things the stock revived, men's faces wore a more cheerful look, and all my troubles seemed to be at an end. Little did we guess that what we had been through was as nothing compared with what was to come.

Having got the station in order again,

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the locusts put in an appearance, and, having demolished the young grass, departed, to be followed by a plague of rats (this is written without exaggeration), to be more than followed by a plague of men. It was the year of the great bush strike, when armed men patrolled the country, woolsheds were burned, cattle maimed, and no one knew what the next twenty-four hours might bring forth. Within a week of the declaration of war by the union, all hands, with the exception of two overseers, the storekeeper, Bertie Harrison and a black boy, had thrown us over and taken their departure.

It was then that I realised what a treasure I had in Harrison. He came out in his true colours, was always cheery, never grumbled over the extra work, and I don't believe knew the meaning of the word "fear." For safety's sake I bade him come up to my own house. I should have explained ere this that my sister Maud kept house for me. She was just two-and-twenty, and as pretty a girl as was to be found in all Queensland. It was a lonely life, but nothing would induce her to give it up. Again and again I had tried to persuade her to go South—to

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Melbourne or Sydney, in both of which cities she had many friends. She would not hear of it, however. Until I married—which was a remote contingency—she was going to keep house for me.

Now, seeing the troublous times we were passing through, I redoubled my efforts. I pointed out to her that it was no place for a woman.

“I am not going,” she answered, shaking her head. “I should worry myself too much about you if I went away.”

And there the matter ended. Observe the sequel!

I may be able to manage a sheep station—in fact, I have proved it—but I am willing to admit, so far as understanding a woman goes, I am the greatest ignoramus in the land. I will endeavour to demonstrate the point to you.

Maud was of a naturally bright and sunny disposition. I have never known her out of temper in her life, and yet Harrison had not been living in the house a month before her nature seemed to change altogether. She grew very quiet, and, had I not known that there could be nothing to account for it, I

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should have said that she was unhappy. To Harrison she was scarcely polite, and I at last came to the conclusion that this was to be attributed to the fact that she resented his presence in the house. I found an occasion to speak to her on the subject, when, to my surprise, she flared up and told me not to be ridiculous.

“What does it matter whether he is here or not?” she said hotly. “If you think it is right, I should be the last person to disagree with you.”

She then flung herself out of the room, leaving me scarcely able to believe the evidence of my senses. I went in search of Harrison, whom I found in the store, looking the picture of despair. This was too much. I determined to give him a bit of my mind. He heard me out, and then calmly informed me that he was tired of the life, and that, as soon as the strike was over, he was going to clear out and try for employment in a town. Here was a pretty kettle of fish! There were now three miserable people on the place, and fearing that some of the others might be in the blues, I saddled a horse and rode off to the woolshed, which was upwards of a mile

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further along the creek. The two overseers were camped there in order to protect it, and, as it was nearly mid-day, I remained to dine with them. We had just finished our meal, and I was thinking about saddling up, when four men rode up. Each one led a pack-horse and carried a repeating rifle. One of them I recognised. His name was Regan, and he was one of the leaders of the strike—a powerful ruffian, who is now, I am glad to say, in safe keeping, where, for a time at least, he will give no more trouble.

“Well, Boss,” he said; “are you going to let us camp hereabouts to-night?”

“Most certainly not,” I replied. “I don’t want my woolshed burnt down as happened at Mr Harding’s the other day.”

“You’d better keep your eyes open then,” he said with a curse; “because there are folks about who might do it for you.”

“Yes; and I think I know four of them,” was my reply. “Let me catch you hanging about here and I’ll hand you over to the police.”

He gave me his opinion of the mounted police, and then they rode on along the creek bank. A quarter of an hour later, having

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warned the overseers to keep their eyes open, I followed them. It was a broiling hot day, and I did not hurry myself.

I was almost within sight of the station when it occurred to me that I should like to inspect a water-hole that was running dry about four miles farther on. I accordingly continued my ride, and in consequence did not reach home until nearly four o’clock. When I arrived Harrison was crossing from the stables to the house. There was a look of surprise upon his face when he saw me that I could not account for.

“What is the matter?” I inquired.

“I was surprised to see you alone,” he answered. “I thought Miss Maud would be with you. She rode after you about an hour ago, expecting to find you at the shed.”

“I left there three hours ago, and have been down to the Four-Mile Hole.”

Harrison looked uneasy, and I am sure that I felt so. I remembered Regan and his three companions, and had no desire that she should meet them.

“If she does not come in half an hour I shall go out and look for her.”

Half-an-hour went by and still she did not

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put in an appearance. Being too nervous to wait any longer, I started on my search. To my horror the men at the shed had seen nothing of her. I rode along the creek for some miles, crossed it, and followed it down in the opposite direction, but no sign of either Maud or of Regan could I discover. By this time it was almost dark, and I knew that ere long it would be impossible to continue the search. When I could scarcely find my way I returned to the station, hoping that she might have come back during my absence.

But, alas! this was not the case. They had seen nothing of her. Harrison greeted me in the verandah with an anxious face.

"Good Heavens! what can have become of her?" he cried. "I can never reproach myself enough for not having dissuaded her from going out."

"You are not to blame," I returned. "She probably would not have listened to you. We must wait for daylight, and then take the black boy and see if he can track her."

Not one wink of sleep did I get that night, and the first sign of day found me astir. Then taking the black boy with me I set off. With all his race's cleverness he could dis-

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tinguish her tracks across the horse paddock, and then over the plain towards the creek, but they appeared to go no further. For, though we searched diligently within a large area they were not discoverable. After that we paid another visit to the shed, where I bade the two overseers assist me in the search.

"I must run the risk of anything happening here," I told myself. "The more hands I have out, the greater the likelihood of finding her."

Spreading out at considerable distances we again crossed the creek and headed for the hills. With unwearied patience we made our way on and on in the blinding glare, climbed the stony ridges, and searched every nook and cranny we could think of. It was terrible work, but we thought nothing of that. I pictured to myself a thousand horrible fates that might have befallen her. At last, when we were all worn out, and our horses more so than we, we agreed that there was nothing for it but to turn homewards. What it cost me to come to this decision I must leave you to imagine.

We had proceeded about five miles when

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suddenly Rocca, the black boy, pointing to the ground, cried, "Look longa there—Missy's tracks!"

"Are you sure?" I almost shouted in my excitement, for I could see nothing.

He nodded his head. "Plenty sure," he answered. "Know 'um by the way mare turn 'um out hind foot."

"Then let's push on as quickly as possible," I said. "There's no time to lose."

We did so, guided by the boy, who read what was to me a blank page as easily as I should a newspaper.

Suddenly he once more pulled up his horse and closely scanned the ground. Then a puzzled expression appeared on his ugly countenance. Springing off he knelt down, and, going on his hands and knees, searched about for something.

"What do you see there?" I cried.

He looked up at me. Then pointing to the ground, said, "Old Jumbo make 'um this."

"Nonsense," I replied—and nonsense I deemed it, for Jumbo was Harrison's horse, and what would he have been doing out here. But the lad persisted in his state-

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ment. Nothing would convince him that he was wrong. Unable to make head or tail of it, we pushed on again in the wake of our sable guide. The hill was getting steeper every minute. Suddenly an idea struck me, and, turning to my companions, I cried, "I have it—the cave on the Ten-Mile Hill!"

It was plainly in that direction that the tracks were leading us, but what on earth or who could have taken her to such a place. Hastening on as best we could over the dangerous ground, we at last caught a glimpse of the place in question. It was a dismal hole, and I shuddered at the thought that Maud might have passed the night there in the society of those men. For that Regan had had a hand in it I felt almost certain.

As we got nearer I discovered that Rocca was right after all, for, to my amazement Harrison's horse was to be seen tied to a tree at a short distance from the mouth of the cave. What did it all mean? For a moment a vague distrust of the man came over me, but I dismissed it almost as quickly.

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Reaching the place I sprang from my saddle, and, throwing the reins to the boy, hastened into the cave. As I did so, the sound of voices greeted me. They were those of my sister and the man whose horse was outside. To add to my astonishment she was in his arms, her head reclining on his shoulder, while he was saying, "My own love, I thought I had lost you!"

"Well—upon my word!" I cried. "This is a nice business. You and I, Harrison, will have to have a talk about it. Maud, my dear, what does it all mean? For Heaven's sake explain it, for you have nearly driven me distracted. How do you come to be in this place—and how is it that Harrison is with you?"

"I was brought here by four men, who kept me a prisoner here all night, and who only left me a few hours ago. They tied me up, and it was Mr Harrison who came and set me free. I have had an awful night of it!"

"They did not hurt you?"

"No! they did not hurt me," was her answer; "but I thought they were going to."

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Then, turning to Harrison, I inquired how it was that he had come into the business.

"For the simple reason that a message was brought by a swagman to the station. He said he had been told by four travellers that if we looked up here we should find what we wanted. I didn't know what to do, but decided to run the risk, so came off as fast as my horse could bring me. I can only say that I am glad that I did—for your sister has promised to be my wife."

"We'll have to talk about that," I put in. "But for the present it can stand over. Do you feel equal to riding back to the station, Maud?" I went on.

"Oh, yes," she answered. "Anything to get away from here."

We went out, and when her horse had been found by Rocca, we set off on our homeward journey. Dire indeed was the news that greeted us when we got there. The miscreants who had carried my sister off had taken advantage of the absence of the men to fire the woolshed, and, in consequence, our beautiful new build-

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ing that had cost such a mint of money, and of which we had been so proud, was a mass of flame. Nothing could save it. I groaned in very bitterness of spirit.

"What on earth will the owner say?" I cried. "Lord Heroncourt will be sure to think that I didn't exercise enough care—I shall lose my billet to a certainty."

"I can safely promise you that you won't," said Harrison.

"And so can I!" chimed in Maud.

"What on earth do you both mean?" I said, puzzled by the assurance with which they spoke.

"Because I am Lord Heroncourt! I came out for a trip to Australia under the name of Harrison to avoid any chance of snobbery. I didn't want a lot of tuft-hunters to follow me about. Then I saw your sister in Melbourne, learnt who she was, and determined to come and work on my own station in order to be near her. It's done me a world of good, and I also had the satisfaction of seeing what a jolly good man I've got at the head of affairs. There's

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only one thing he can do to add to my good opinion."

"And what's that?"

"Make me his brother-in-law!"

I did!

BONES, IMPERIALIST

Never the Lotos closes, never the wild-fowl wake,
But a soul goes out on the East Wind that died for
England's sake,
Man or woman or suckling, mother or bride or maid—
Because on the bones of the English the English Flag is
stayed. RUDYARD KIPLING.

INTRODUCTION

I HAPPEN to know that he was christened John Alexander Malabone-Beverley, and I ask you to bear in mind that this fact is one of considerable importance, inasmuch as it proves conclusively that the sobriquet of Bones, by which he was known—unofficially, of course—at school, and afterwards in his regiment, was a corruption of his mother's name and nothing more. Yet Bones he was and Bones he remained from the day that he made his first appearance at — until he terminated his career at—. But as we shall come to that in due course I will not, to use

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the vulgar phrase, anticipate. At the time when I first became acquainted with him, he was a tall, somewhat gawky, boy of eleven, with a preternaturally solemn face, as freckled as a turkey's egg, and a capacity for getting into mischief and being punished for it such as I have rarely known equalled, and certainly never excelled. He was essentially an unfortunate youth. Where other boys jumped into trouble and tumbled out of it again without evil consequences to themselves poor Bones was, as I have said, detected and punished. His masters liked him, but, if the truth must be told, they rather looked down on him, for he was slow, both in speech and action, and what was perhaps worse, he was not good at games. Everyone who has had anything to do with boys will know what that means. I remember on one occasion his confessing to me, in a curious moment of unsolicited confidence, that in six years his cricket average was only eight—a confession made with such *naïveté*, and at the same time so genuine, that for the moment I scarcely knew what to make of it. That, however, was before I had arrived at a proper understanding of J. A. Malabone-

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Beverley, commonly known as Bones Junior.

Many years afterwards—how many I scarcely dare to think now—I was voyaging down the Java Sea on my way to Australia. It was a swelteringly hot night, and after dinner I found myself on deck, a little abaft the bridge, smoking a cigar with one of the most interesting men, and certainly one of the best judges of character, with whom it has been my good fortune to become acquainted. It was only when I discovered that he was an old — that I mentioned the man whose autobiography I am now attempting to write.

“Poor old Bones,” was his immediate reply, as he turned himself in his deck chair. “Of course I remember him. We were in the same house. I can see him now as if it were but yesterday. An extraordinary character. The most eccentric as well as the unluckiest beggar I ever knew. Nothing he touched or did ever prospered, and yet he was one of the kindest-hearted fellows upon this earth. I wonder what has become of him?”

I could not answer that question then, but

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I was destined to be enlightened later on. We were both silent for a few minutes.

"There's one little circumstance that remains in my memory concerning him," my companion said, when the soft-footed Chinese boy had departed, leaving the long pegs behind him. "I think it is remarkable enough to be worth repeating. Poor old Bones, as so oftens happens, though a poor enough hand at his books, was physically as strong as a lion, a first-rate gymnast and a boxer second to none. We persuaded him to go in for the Public Schools Boxing Competition at Aldershot one year, and he'd have stood a very good chance of winning, but of course he must needs develop typhoid a week before the event. However, that's not what I was going to tell you about. Shortly after his recovery he managed to scrape into the Upper Fourth, more by good luck than much learning, I am afraid. He was no sooner there, however, than he found himself at loggerheads with a fellow, who, between ourselves, was just about as unpopular as he, Bones, was the reverse. Bones was a good-natured, easy-going chap, and put up with the other's

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tyranny longer than most of us would have done, but at length the time came when he felt that something must be done to put a stop to it. The other had become so accustomed to hazing him that he could not understand when he had gone too far. One day he caught hold of a youngster in the Lower School whose father was the squire of the village of which Beverley Senior was vicar. He said some disrespectful things of the neighbourhood in general, and of Bones and his family in particular. Then, finding that he had not made the impression he intended, he proceeded to embark on that interesting means of torture which you may remember was known to us as the system of manufacturing barley sugar. He had given the youngster's arm a couple of twists, and was enjoying himself as much as was possible, when Bones made his appearance on the scene. He took in the situation at a glance.

"I say," he said, "leave that youngster alone, will you? It isn't fair, you know. I thought the prefects had stopped all that sort of thing."

He spoke so quietly that the other con-

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tinued in his course of self-deception and rose to the occasion. Two or three fellows strolled up and listened, wondering what the issue would be.

"You shouldn't try to think, Bones," the other returned. "It's a bad habit to get into. Your brain won't stand it, you know! The air of Cleavebury was not sharp enough for you as a youngster." Then turning to the boy whose wrist he still held, he continued, "Come up, you little Chaw-bacon. Tell me what they feed poor old Bones on, when he's at home. Dripping all the week and a shin bone for a luxury on Sunday, eh?"

As he said this he jerked the youngster's arm, a procedure which had the effect of eliciting a cry of pain. A second later he received such a cuff on the ear that he relaxed his hold and staggered back a pace or two. It was evident to all present that the worm-like Bones had turned at last.

"Come down behind the Fives Courts and we'll settle it," said the taller of the two. "I'll teach you to interfere in what doesn't concern you."

Bones meekly followed him, and we



NEVER, I BELIEVE, IN THE HISTORY OF SCHOOLBOY ENCOUNTERS
WAS THERE A MORE COMPLETE CRUMPLING UP

The Lady of the Island

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brought up the tail of the procession, feeling sure that the champion would annihilate his enemy in the first round. To our amazement, however, he did nothing of the kind. So far as we could see he made no attempt to fight, but let the other knock him about at his own sweet will. When all was over we went in to Calling Over, unable to make head or tail of the affair. I'm ashamed to say that, for the time being, Bones fell vastly in our estimation. But let me tell you the sequel.

On the day following the combat the victor went out with his people, who had come down for the day, and in consequence Bones was, for the time being, spared further annoyance. Next day, however, it recommenced, and with a vigour that was increased rather than diminished by the result of the fight which had already taken place. At last Bones, unable to put up with such treatment any longer, offered a remonstrance. The other laughed contemptuously. Eventually they found themselves behind the Fives Courts once more. This time, however, we were not destined to be disappointed in the result. Never, I believe,

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in the history of schoolboy encounters was there a more complete crumpling up. It was Bones in his best form—cool, collected, scientific. And I can assure you that when his adversary admitted himself beaten such a shout went up as I had never heard over a fight before.

On the way back to the house, someone asked Bones why on earth he had behaved in such a half-hearted manner in the previous struggle. It was some time, however, before we could induce him to confess. It then became apparent that he was aware that his adversary's people were coming down on the following day, and as he had both seen and spoken to the mother—a sweet-looking, soft-spoken lady—on a previous occasion, and had noticed that she was devoted to her son, he drew his own conclusions. Knowing that he could not get out of fighting, he accordingly embarked on the struggle, resolved, for her sake, to take a drubbing and refrain from leaving such marks upon her offspring that might cause her pain. If the other had not offered him battle a second time it is probable he would never have sought to recover his self-respect, and would have submitted to go

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down to posterity a schoolboy coward. It was a queer way of looking at the matter, but it was poor old Bones all over.

“Well! Here's a health to John Alexander Malabone-Beverley, wherever he may be,” I said, raising my glass to my lips.

We drank the toast in silence while the steamer ran her track through the phosphorescent water, with the dark outline of Madura Island lying like a black smudge on the southern horizon.

CHAPTER I

I CANNOT say that, in all my experience, I have seen a prettier old house than Cleavebury Vicarage. It was at once the despair of architects and the delight of archæologists. A more incongruous pile it would be impossible to conceive. One portion, the main,

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dated from the reign of the Virgin Queen ; a wing overlooking the rose garden commemorated the days of Anne ; while yet another spoke for the Hanoverian Georges and the wild days of the Regency. Incongruous it certainly was, nevertheless the effect was charming. Years had dealt gently with it, giving a touch of colour here, such as that greatest of all artists, Time, can give, toning down another and hiding blemishes with ivy, and flinging virginian creeper round buttresses and balustradings with a prodigality that at a certain season of the year made the old house look from the top of Barnborough Hill as if it were on fire. The interior was as delightful as the outside ; indeed the hall, with its majestic staircase, was one of the show places of the county. Cleavebury was a family living, and the Beverleys had held it, generation by generation, from the days of Elizabeth of glorious memory, as the memorials in the church across the road were prepared to attest. It would have seemed as extraordinary to the villagers to have had a stranger at the Vicarage as to have seen the Squire, worthy man, turning somersaults upon the

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green. Old Gaffer Bedstowe—(whose two sons, by the way, met their deaths at the storming of the Redan, and whose only daughter gave her life in a vain attempt to save her invalid mistress on a certain hellish occasion in the city of Cawnpore)—Old Gaffer Bedstowe, I say, hit the nail on the head to a nicety when he said, “ There’s yews on the hill as they *do* say was planted by William the Conqueror ; there’s oaks in Squire Percival’s park up yonder that’s been there three hundred year or more, and there’s the Beverleys, God bless ’em ! ” I wonder how much more the old fellow would have said had he known that many many generations before his own, one of his kith and kin had ridden in a Beverley’s troop on that memorable day when Charles ventured his luck and lost it on the field of Marston Moor. But though he did not know it, his admiration for the family was none the less keen. And now for a short description of the family of which my old friend Bones, of tender memory, has proved so conspicuous a member.

The Reverend Cuthbert Beverley, the present Vicar of the parish, was a clergyman of the old school, who united with his sacred

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office the business and pleasures of a country gentleman. Possessed of ample means, he did what he considered his duty by both rich and poor. That is to say, he entertained the one at his private table, and never closed either his purse or his kitchen against the other. And his wife ably seconded him in both good works.

"Beverley," old Lord Durrinford, who was a bachelor, was known to have said on one occasion, as he strolled up the carefully-kept drive towards the Vicarage, "for sixty years I've sat under the Ten Commandments in the old church, nevertheless, I don't mind telling you I break the tenth every time I enter your gates. Upon my honour I don't know which I envy you most—your wife, your children, your house, or the life you lead."

It should be explained here that the Vicar had five children—two girls and three boys. The boys resembled their mother, the girls their father. At the time that Bones, who was the youngest of the male side, left school, which was some eighteen months after the trouble recorded in my Introduction, his eldest brother, George, was serving with his

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regiment in Burmah, catching fever and Dacoits, and, though he did not know it, laying his own little stone in the mighty structure that the Empire is slowly but surely building up. Montague, the second, was a missionary on a lonely station far up the Zambesi, living, perhaps, a harder life, and fighting in his own fashion against even greater odds than his elder brother was doing.

The girls, Janet and Edith, were as yet little more than children—bright, merry daughters of the old house, who found no summer's day too long for tennis, who rode to hounds, ran with the beagles, loved a week or two in town every season, and bullied their parents as only pretty English maids of sixteen and fourteen can do. What was more, they believed in two of their brothers at least, and thought them the most perfect specimens of mankind. Of course, the dear old governor and poor freckled Bones did not count. The one, you see, happened to be their father, whom it was necessary to cosset and to pet when pocket-money ran short, while the other—well, the other was only dear old Bones, good-natured to a

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degree, but whose hair would not stay down, and whose moustache could only be likened to the fairest thistle-down.

"Well, my boy," said the Vicar one summer's evening after dinner, when the mater and the girls had passed out on to the lawn, and the head of the house had poured himself out a second glass of port and had passed the decanter to his son, "I have come to the conclusion that it is time that you had a talk about your future. You're getting a big fellow now, and must decide what your profession is going to be."

"I should like to be a soldier, sir," the other replied, "if it's all the same to you."

The father could not repress a little sigh. He had always cherished the hope that his Benjamin would have entered the Church, and in due time have succeeded to the family living as he himself had done. It was evident, however, that his hopes were not destined to be realised.

"You are quite certain?" was the reply. "You are sure your mind is made up?"

"Quite sure," answered his son, with the

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solemnity and brevity that always characterised him.

"Then the question is settled, and we need say no more about it. I feel sure you will do your best to prove a credit to us. God bless you, my dear boy!"

CHAPTER II

WHEN Sub-Lieutenant John Alexander Malabone - Beverley joined the Second Battalion of the Midlandshire Regiment, then quartered at Allahabad, he was received with much good feeling by his brother officers. The Colonel was as gracious to him, for his father's sake, as it was in his power to be to anyone; the Adjutant expressed himself as glad to see him; the Skipper of his company regarded him critically, and was kind enough to say that

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he thought he would do; while his humbler brethren, the Junior Subs, described him as "No end of a good sort, but as slow as they make 'em, don't you know!" His allowance being a liberal one, he was able to indulge himself to the top of his bent; he therefore played polo, but without conspicuous success, tried his hand at theatricals and failed dismally, was voted but little good at either tennis or racquets, and later turned the tables on his critics by defeating the boxing champion of the regiment in two rounds. From that day forward he was known as Boxing Bones.

Now, in many respects one Indian station is very like another—the same description of barracks, the same daily routine, winding up, perhaps, with a flirtation at the bandstand, and the inevitable dinner at mess, where everyone knows everyone else, his income, his good points and his weaknesses. For a time it has a charm of its own, but after a while it grows monotonous to an almost unbearable degree. Bones, however, did not find it so. He was keen on his profession, and loved every detail connected with it, from the proper burnishing of a

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Tommy's buttons to a march-past before the Commander-in-Chief. Time went on, and the regiment was transferred to another station, which, for reasons of my own, shall be nameless. This point is important, for had they remained where they were, this story would in all probability never have been written.

As I have already said, Bones was popular in the regiment. With one exception everyone liked him. That exception, however, proved the rule. He was Captain of B Company, and rejoiced in the name of Braithton. From the moment that Bones had joined he had devoted himself to annoying him in a way that could not be resented. Everyone will understand what that means, and army men in particular. There are of course variations, but the effect is in all cases the same. Fortunately for Bones, he was accustomed to that sort of thing, and for this reason was able to put up with it longer than most men.

A time, however, came when it was necessary that it should be stopped. That night is even now remembered in the regiment. Poor Bones did not show any sign

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of anger. He did not make a scene, although the provocation would perhaps have justified it. There was, however, a peculiar something in his manner that the mess had not seen before, and I think I should be justified if I were to say that they never desire to see anything of the kind again. I am quite sure that Braithton will not. From that moment he left the luckless Bones severely alone, so far as hazing was concerned.

Now the Midlandshire are generally considered a most exclusive regiment, and the honour of one is the honour of all. But they have had experience of one scandal of which no mention is ever made.

One evening, a month or so after the Braithton incident, Bones, who had been dining out, found himself drawn into a game of whist in which his partner was the senior Major, and their opponents the Adjutant and Braithton. Now, among their other little eccentricities the Midlandshire takes pride in their cards, which have on the backs the crest of the regiment, and a somewhat intricate design worked out years before by one of their number, who was of an artistic turn of mind and liked playing with trifles.

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On this occasion a pack was brought in by a servant and the game commenced. After the second rubber Braithton made an excuse and surrendered his chair to a lawyer named Mortimer, who had been dining at mess. They had played one game, and the cards had already been dealt for the second, when the other men noticed a curious expression on the Adjutant's face. A moment later he rose and threw down his hand.

"Don't you think we've had enough of this?" he said. "I'm sure you're tired of it, Mortimer, and this room's like an oven. Come into the ante-room and have a peg." Then in an undertone he continued to the astonished Bones, who, by the way, was not in uniform, and who, therefore, had available pockets, "Take up those cards and keep them in your pocket until I ask you for them."

The other did as he was requested, and dropped them into his left-hand pocket. He was at a loss to understand what it all meant.

When their guests had departed the Adjutant collected the two other men.

"This is a bad business," he said. "A very bad business. We must see the

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Colonel at once. You have got the cards, Bones?"

The other nodded.

They crossed the Barrack Square to find the Colonel preparing to retire for the night.

"This is rather late for a call," he said.

"But I suppose you have some good reason for it. Come along in here."

He led them into his own sanctum, whereupon the Adjutant carefully closed the door. The terrible story was soon told, and told almost in a whisper, as if they feared that the outside world might become cognisant of it.

"You have brought the cards, of course?" said the Colonel, when he had heard the other out.

The Adjutant made a sign to Bones to produce them, which he did, placing the pack upon the Colonel's writing table. The Chief took it up and examined it critically, card by card. Then he shook his head and his face brightened.

"I'm afraid you've discovered a mare's nest after all, Headworth," he said. "I see nothing wrong with them."

"But, my dear sir, I give you my word

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that the cards had pinpricks on them, just in the corner where you see the darkest colouring. You may be sure I should not have acted as I did had I not been certain of my facts!"

"Well, then, examine them for yourself."

The other did so, and an expression of amazement came over his face. The cards were certainly not marked in the way that he had described.

"Well, I don't know what to make of it," he said, "and I am only too thankful to find that I am wrong."

"You are not more thankful than I am," replied the Colonel. "And now, good-night."

At that moment Bones pulled his handkerchief from his pocket, and with it came two or three cards, which fluttered airily down to the floor. The other men stared at them aghast, and for a few moments there was a dead silence. Then the Colonel stooped and picked them up, and his face became as grey as his moustache. As for Bones himself, he looked from one to the other as if he were unable to understand the situation.

"Turn out your pockets, sir," said the

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Commanding Officer, grimly. The other did as he was ordered, and produced the remainder of the marked pack, for there was unhappily no mistaking the fact that the cards were marked.

A month later the Vicar of Cleavebury received a letter that sent him to his study a broken-hearted man.

"My lad, my lad," he groaned, "they may say what they like of you, but nothing will ever make me believe that you are a cheat. No! no! Never that!"

Later the *Gazette* announced that Lieutenant J. A. Malabone-Beverley of the Midlandshire Regiment had resigned his commission.

From that time he disappeared from the ken of all who had known him.

"Some day I shall find out who did it," he said to himself. "But it will be too late."

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CHAPTER III

BOTH the manager and the chief overseer of Yarrapulta station had arrived at the conclusion that the situation was undoubtedly critical. And it must be admitted that they had very good reason for so doing. Indeed, matters could scarcely have been worse with them. Australia, from the Gulf of Carpentaria to the New South Wales border, was, to all intents and purposes, in a state of civil war. Capital and Labour were pitted against each other in a deadly struggle, for which both had been long preparing. So far it would appear as though the latter had achieved the greater amount of success. It was shearing time, but it was difficult to find the men to do the work. They were occupied in patrolling the country, in many cases intimidating those who did not agree with them, setting fire to woolsheds, and generally destroying property as often as they had the opportunity. In most cases the women folk and children were sent away from the stations to places

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of safety in the large towns, while the owners and managers stayed at their posts to fight the season and the strikers as best they could.

At Yarrapulta things had gone badly indeed; the season had been a bad one; not a drop of rain had fallen for months. Owing to the difficulty of obtaining hands, the grass seed had got into the wool, and, as if to crown it all, when they did obtain the men, their fine new woolshed, equipped with all the latest improvements in the way of machinery, had been burnt to the ground just as they were prepared to commence. At such a time it was impossible to discover the perpetrator of the crime, though both manager and overseer were able to give shrewd guesses at his identity.

"I wish to goodness this fellow, Brownlow, was not coming here," said the manager, when, after their evening meal, he and his trusty ally, the chief overseer, were smoking in the verandah and looking out across the great grey plain that stretched away towards the Diamantina.

"I quite agree with you," replied his subordinate. "But I don't see what we are to do to prevent it. One thing is certain, he

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has a firm grip of the rascals, and I believe they're all afraid of him. You remember he was unanimously elected when he put up for Parliament last year."

"And I wish them joy of their representative! The strange part of it is, they say the man has the manners of a gentleman."

"So I have heard," said the overseer. "The Labour papers say he'll be Commissioner of Crown Lands in the next Ministry. In that case Heaven help the squatters and the country."

A silence fell upon the pair. Presently the manager pointed down the track. A man was riding towards the gate that opened into the fire paddock. He led a pack horse, and, from the pace at which he was travelling, it was evident that he had done a long day's journey. He walked his horse across the paddock and drew up at the verandah of the homestead.

"Mr Macdonald, I believe?" he said, in a voice that was certainly that of a cultivated man.

"That's my name," answered the manager, rising as he spoke. "I take it that you are Mr Brownlow?"

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"You are quite right. I am Brownlow, Labour Member, Union Delegate, and, I suppose you would add, squatter's enemy. I rode up to ask permission to camp here to-night and to address the men."

"In these days it is rather a singular thing to ask permission, isn't it?" returned the other. "However, you are quite welcome to do so. If you can induce them to do a little more work and to refrain from setting this house on fire as they did our woolshed, I should be obliged to you."

"I regret that you should have suffered such loss," said the other, gravely. "I will do what I can to induce them to behave as well as can be expected under the circumstances. I fear, however, you have what is commonly known as 'a rough crowd.' I wish you good-evening."

He raised his hat politely and rode off in the direction of the white tents that were scattered round the improvised woolshed.

"That's a strange fellow," the manager remarked, when the other was out of hearing. "I'd give something to know his history."

"So would I," replied the overseer.

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"What do you say if we go across to hear him talk to the men?"

An hour or so later they did so. The meeting had just commenced. As they strolled up, one of the hands, a big Irishman, was pouring forth a thundering denunciation against the tyranny and injustice of Capital as compared with the straightforwardness of Labour.

It was a strange scene. The various types of face, upon which the light of the lanterns suspended from the waggon from which the orators addressed their audience, shone with weird effect; the white tents, and over all the star-spangled sky and the edge of the full moon peering above the horizon of the plain.

The Irishman was succeeded by an individual who was, if his appearance counted for anything, colonial born. He was not an orator, and his effort was soon silenced by the jeers of the crowd, who were anxious to hear what their champion had to say to them.

Presently Brownlow stepped forward, and, placing one foot on the rim of the waggon, and resting one arm upon his knee, looked

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them over and began to speak. He reviewed their case as far as it had gone, pointed out where mistakes had been made and where improvements should be effected. He deplored the many acts of violence that had been committed, and counselled forbearance in the future. On hearing the word "forbearance" a section of his audience gave utterance to an ugly growl, but they were speedily silenced by the majority. Meanwhile, Brownlow watched them without flinching, and both the manager and overseer had time to remark what a strong face it was, and how completely he was master of himself and his followers.

Having exhausted their more immediate concerns, he passed on to the consideration of what he called his dream of the future. It was such an idea as few, if any, of them had ever thought of before. He spoke of a United Australia, of a Federation of the British Colonies in general, of a Federated Empire, helping each other, securing each other's independence, yet linked together by a bond that it would not be in the power of any enemy, however powerful, to break. When he waved his hand to them and bade

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them good-night, there was a momentary silence and then a roar of voices that told him that what he said had been appreciated. They clamoured for more, but he shook his head.

After the meeting the manager and overseer went in search of him. When they congratulated him on his speech, he laughed a little bitterly, so it seemed to them.

"Dreams, dreams," he said. "Will they ever be realised? Not in our time, I fear. It behoves us to work and lay the foundations of it. And now, if you'll excuse me, I will get to my camp. I have to reach Bingrah by to-morrow night, and, as you know, that's a good day's journey."

"Your best way would be *viâ* Heathdale," observed the overseer.

"Thank you," the other answered simply, and without another word strode away to the spot which he had chosen for his camp.

But though he spread his blankets by the fire he did not turn into them, but sat gazing into the flames until long after midnight.

Heathfield was the name of the next village to Cleavebury. Who, he asked

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himself, could have brought it to this rough land so many thousand miles away?

"I wonder if there is anyone in the old home who has a thought for me after all these years?" said Bones, the Imperialist.

And the night wind sighing across the plain answered "Who?"

CHAPTER IV

PARLIAMENT had been dissolved, and the colony was strained to a high pitch of excitement to know what the result of the next general election would be. The great strike had come to an end, mainly for the reason that the funds of the strikers were exhausted. Throughout the session Brownlow, for I must still call him by that name, had been continually to the fore, but on some questions the views that he had once held so strongly had moderated. His views on the union of the Empire had, however, in no-

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wise changed; indeed, they had grown, if anything, stronger. It was his one great subject, his one mania, and he could not understand why others did not realise the desirability and importance of it as he did. He preached it in the House and out of the House, wrote on it whenever opportunity offered, and at last had sorrowfully to admit to himself that the time was not yet ripe for such a gigantic scheme. He had no intention, however, of relaxing his efforts; he continued to do all that lay in his power to further it. In this he was warmly seconded by a man who had always believed in him, and who had been one of his chief supporters from the time when he had first taken up parliamentary life.

George Farquharson was an old colonist and an exceedingly shrewd observer of men. He was quick to realise the value of this new force in the political life of the colony, and though some time elapsed before they could have been said to see matters eye to eye, that time *did* arrive, and from that moment Brownlow had not a more ardent admirer than the cynical owner of Redborough Plains—a station situated some ten miles outside

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the little bush town for which Brownlow was Member. Farquharson was a widower with one child, a daughter, twenty-five years of age—a tall, handsome rather than pretty girl, whose admiration for her father's friend was as keen even as his own. On each occasion that he had stayed with them Brownlow had taken a great liking to her. She understood him and sympathised with him as no other woman had ever done, and, after his lonely wandering life, this could scarcely fail to be dangerous. On his side he had been aware for a long time that he loved her; there were reasons, however, known only to himself, why he could not tell her so. That it was possible for her to love him he would not have believed—he, the homeless wanderer, whose very name he had no right to bear, who was cut off from his kith and kin, and as dead to his old life as if he were a rain-washed skeleton on the plains of the Far West. Knowing this, however, and fully realising the pain it meant for him, he unhesitatingly accepted Farquharson's invitation to make the station his headquarters during his canvass of the district. His host had entered thoroughly into the spirit of the campaign,

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and was resolved to help him to keep his seat by every means in his power.

The elections were due to take place a week before Christmas, and a fortnight before that time Brownlow made his appearance at Redborough Plains, where he was received with undisguised pleasure by both his host and hostess. Under the influence of the hard work of the next fortnight, which entailed an immense amount of physical as well as mental labour, he forgot for the time the bitterness of his past. Sometimes Miss Farquharson accompanied them on their rides to the surrounding stations, but even when she did not, there was the pleasure of telling her, on his return, of the success that they had met with.

How much the winning of that election meant for Brownlow no one will ever know, though I fancy I can hazard a very fair guess. As the time drew nearer he became more and more anxious, though Farquharson continually assured him that there was no doubt as to the result.

"Bless your heart, man, you could not fail if you wanted to," said the latter. "Ask Margaret what she thinks, and you'll

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find that she agrees with me. We both believe most firmly in you, as you know."

Somewhat to the other's surprise, his companion returned no answer to this compliment.

The night before the fatal day was a hot one, for Christmas was only a week distant. After dinner Brownlow found himself strolling in the garden among the orange trees with his hostess.

He had been unusually silent throughout the meal, and she, believing it to be nervousness concerning the morrow, endeavoured to cheer him. She was unsuccessful, however. Eventually they found themselves at the slip-rails of the horse paddock. They halted there and, leaning on the rail, looked down upon the small lagoon whence came the croak of a sleepy pelican which had been disturbed by a horse coming down to drink. Almost in silence they watched the moon rise. Her magic influence may have had something to do with it, but, Heaven help him, Brownlow found the temptation more than he could bear. When they returned to the house he had told Margaret Farquharson of his love, and she had promised to be

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his wife. Her father declared it was the happiest moment of his life; but the man, who should have been happier than he, retired to rest, upbraiding himself for his folly, and believing himself to be the basest creature on God's earth.

"To-morrow," he muttered, after he had fought with himself for hours, to the accompaniment of a death watch ticking above the ceiling cloth, "when it's all over, I will tell him everything, and let him judge if I am worthy. Will even his friendship stand the test? I wonder!"

CHAPTER V

THE great day was over, and it was known everywhere that Brownlow had been again returned to represent the town. All who saw him noticed that he received the news with unusual quietness. Even his speech afterwards to his constituents, made from the balcony of the Federation Hotel, lacked

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his usual spirit, though the torchlight crowd cheered him to the echo. Neither Margaret Farquharson nor her father, who stood beside her, could understand it, but then they did not know that in his heart there was a deadly fear lest his triumph had come too late. When all was over they descended to the yard of the hotel and mounted their horses in order to ride back to the station. A brass band had taken up a position outside, and the crowd of torch-bearers were still in waiting to escort them to the limits of the town. As they rode into the street, Miss Farquharson between them, the band struck up "See the Conquering Hero comes," while the crowd cheered as if each man were prepared to burst his lungs. Brownlow was mounted on a young horse; the animal had never taken part in such a demonstration before, and deeply resented it. His rider endeavoured to soothe him, but in vain. Margaret, who was a little in advance, glanced anxiously back over her shoulder. As she looked, a man, thrust forward by the impetus of the crowd, brought his torch in close proximity to the terrified animal's nose. He reared, fought with the air for

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one brief moment, and then fell backwards, his rider beneath him. A sudden silence descended on the crowd, though the band in advance still marched on, little dreaming that their Conquering Hero was lying in the dust of the street, his back and left leg broken.

With infinite care and tenderness they bore him into the Parsonage, before which the accident had occurred, and laid him on a bed. Then Margaret, her face whiter than that of the unconscious man, was led from the room by her father, in order that the doctors might do their work. Not even when the hopeless verdict was brought to her did she break down. Her only remark was, "Take me to him."

In the street outside strong men, the roughest of the rough, were not ashamed to be seen with tears upon their cheeks, for they loved him, and he had been their champion.

By some marvellous means he lingered on, unconscious for the greater part of the time. Between ten and eleven, however, on the night of Christmas Eve it became apparent to the watchers that the end was near.

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Almost at the moment that he recovered from the drug that had been administered to him, a tall, pale-faced man, coated with dust and riding a worn-out horse, rode into the town from the east. In a breathless voice he inquired of the first man he met the latest news of the injured man, and then, having ascertained the direction, hastened on to the Parsonage.

Farquharson received him in the verandah.

"They tell me he is dying," said the stranger, his voice shaking with emotion. "I must see him. I have come from the coast by train and horse to speak to him."

"I am afraid it is impossible," Farquharson replied. "He must not be agitated."

"Good Heavens, man, you don't know what you say!" the other continued, in a broken voice. "My happiness and his peace depend upon my having an interview with him before he goes."

"Well, I'll ask the doctor," said Farquharson, who was touched by the man's earnestness. He accordingly bade the other wait and went into the house. A few moments later he returned to inquire the stranger's name.

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"Braithton," was the reply. "I was in the same regiment with him many years ago. On my arrival from England two days ago I saw his photograph in a paper, recognised him, and then read of his accident and came immediately."

Again Farquharson departed to return in a few minutes.

"The doctor says he may see you," he said. "But you must not remain long. Come with me."

He led him down the passage to a door at the further end, which he held open for the other to enter. The room was untenanted save by the dying man.

When Braithton emerged again tears were streaming down his cheeks. He left the house without a word, but, as he led his tired horse down the street, he muttered continually, "He forgave me! God help me—for I killed him!"

When Margaret and her father returned to the room they found the dying man wandering in his speech. He fancied himself at home once more, and strangely enough it was Christmas time.

George was there, home from Burmah

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with a V.C. and the D.S.O., Monty also, tanned the colour of mahogany by the African sun; and, to his surprise, Janet in nurse's uniform. He spoke to them and said how good it was to be together again.

"We're building up the Empire between us," he murmured, and tried to smile. After that there came a pause.

He did not know that George was lying in that dense jungle that is beyond Minnhla, that Monty had given his life to save a treacherous foe on the shore of Lake Nyassa, nor was he aware that Janet had perished of plague, caught while nursing in the stricken city of Bombay.

After a few moments he opened his eyes once more and looked about him. This time he was conscious of his surroundings. Margaret was holding his hand.

"Kiss me, dear," he murmured, and she stooped and kissed him. Then he died.

"God rest his soul, for he was a good man, dear," said Farquharson, as he took his daughter in his arms. "I wish we were all as good!"

That was the epitaph of Bones, Imperialist.

A STRANGE GOLDFIELD

OF course nine out of every ten intelligent persons will refuse to believe that there could be a grain of truth in the story I am now going to tell you. The tenth may have some small faith in my veracity, but what I think of his intelligence I am going to keep to myself.

In a certain portion of a certain Australian Colony, two miners, when out prospecting in what was then, as now, one of the dreariest parts of the Island Continent, chanced upon a rich find. They applied to Government for the usual reward, and in less than a month three thousand people were settled on the Field. What privations they had to go through to get there, and the miseries they had to endure when they *did* reach their journey's end, have only a remote bearing on this story, but they would make a big book.

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I should explain that between Railhead and the Field was a stretch of country some three hundred miles in extent. It was badly watered, vilely grassed, and execrably timbered. What was even worse, a considerable portion of it was made up of red sand, and everybody who has been compelled to travel over that knows what it means. Yet these enthusiastic seekers after wealth pushed on, some on horseback, some in bullock waggons, but the majority travelled on foot; the graves, and the skeletons of cattle belonging to those who had preceded them punctuating the route, and telling them what they might expect as they advanced.

That the Field did not prove a success is now a matter of history, but that same history, if you read between the lines, gives one some notion of what the life must have been like while it lasted. The water supply was entirely insufficient, provisions were bad and ruinously expensive; the men themselves were, as a rule, the roughest of the rough, while the less said about the majority of the women the better. Then typhoid stepped in and stalked like the Destroying Angel through the camp. Its inhabitants went

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down like sheep in a drought, and for the most part rose no more. Where there had been a lust of gold there was now panic, terror—every man feared that he might be the next to be attacked, and it was only the knowledge of those terrible three hundred miles that separated them from civilisation that kept many of them on the Field. The most thickly populated part was now the cemetery. Drink was the only solace, and under its influence such scenes were enacted as I dare not describe. As they heard of fresh deaths, men shook their fists at Heaven, and cursed the day when they first saw pick or shovel. Some, bolder than the rest, cleared out just as they stood; a few eventually reached civilisation, others perished in the desert. At last the Field was declared abandoned, and the dead were left to take their last long sleep, undisturbed by the clank of windlass or the blow of pick.

It would take too long to tell all the different reasons that combined to draw me out into that "most distressful country." Let it suffice that our party consisted of a young Englishman named Spicer, a wily old Australian bushman named Matthews,

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and myself. We were better off than the unfortunate miners, inasmuch as we were travelling with camels, and our outfits were as perfect as money and experience could make them. The man who travels in any other fashion in that country is neither more nor less than a madman. For a month past we had been having a fairly rough time of it, and were then on our way South, where we had reason to believe rain had fallen, and, in consequence, grass was plentiful. It was towards evening when we came out of a gully in the ranges and had our first view of the deserted camp. We had no idea of its existence, and for this reason we pulled up our animals and stared at it in complete surprise. Then we pushed on again, wondering what on earth place we had chanced upon.

"This is all right," said Spicer, with a chuckle. "We're in luck. Grog shanties and stores, a bath, and perhaps girls."

I shook my head.

"I can't make it out," I said. "What's it doing out here?"

Matthews was looking at it under his hand, and, as I knew that he had been out

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in this direction on a previous occasion, I asked his opinion.

"It beats me," he replied; "but if you ask me what I think I should say it's Gurunya, the Field that was deserted some four or five years back."

"Look here," cried Spicer, who was riding a bit on our left, "what are all these things—graves, as I'm a living man. Here, let's get out of this. There are hundreds of them, and before I know where I am old Polyphemus here will be on his nose."

What he said was correct—the ground over which we were riding was literally bestrewn with graves, some of which had rough, tumble-down head boards, others being destitute of all adornment. We turned away and moved on over safer ground in the direction of the Field itself. Such a pitiful sight I never want to see again. The tents and huts, in numerous cases, were still standing, while the claims gaped at us on every side like new-made graves. A bullock dray, weather-worn but still in excellent condition, stood in the main street outside a grog shanty whose sign-board, strange incongruity, bore the name of

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"The Killarney Hotel." Nothing would suit Spicer but that he must dismount and go in to explore. He was not long away, and when he returned it was with a face as white as a sheet of paper.

"You never saw such a place," he almost whispered. "All I want to do is to get out of it. There's a skeleton on the floor in the back room with an empty rum bottle alongside it."

He mounted, and, when his beast was on its feet once more, we went on our way. Not one of us was sorry when we had left the last claim behind us.

Half a mile or so from the Field the country begins to rise again. There is also a curious cliff away to the left, and, as it looked like being a likely place to find water, we resolved to camp there. We were within a hundred yards or so of this cliff when an exclamation from Spicer attracted my attention.

"Look!" he cried. "What's that?"

I followed the direction in which he was pointing, and, to my surprise, saw the figure of a man running as if for his life among the rocks. I have said the figure of a man, but,

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as a matter of fact, had there been baboons in the Australian bush, I should have been inclined to have taken him for one.

"This is a day of surprises," I said. "Who can the fellow be? And what makes him act like that?"

We still continued to watch him as he proceeded on his erratic course along the base of the cliff—then he suddenly disappeared.

"Let's get on to camp," I said, "and then we'll go after him and endeavour to settle matters a bit."

Having selected a place we offsaddled and prepared our camp. By this time it was nearly dark, and it was very evident that, if we wanted to discover the man we had seen, it would be wise not to postpone the search too long. We accordingly strolled off in the direction he had taken, keeping a sharp lookout for any sign of him. Our search, however, was not successful. The fellow had disappeared without leaving a trace of his whereabouts behind him, and yet we were all certain that we *had* seen him. At length we returned to our camp for supper, completely mystified. As we ate our meal we

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discussed the problem and vowed that, on the morrow, we would renew the search. Then the full moon rose over the cliff, and the plain immediately became well-nigh as bright as day. I had lit my pipe and was stretching myself out upon my blankets when something induced me to look across at a big rock, some half-dozen paces from the fire. Peering round it, and evidently taking an absorbing interest in our doings, was the most extraordinary figure I have ever beheld. Shouting something to my companions, I sprang to my feet and dashed across at him. He saw me and fled. Old as he apparently was he could run like a jack-rabbit, and, though I have the reputation of being fairly quick on my feet, I found that I had all my work cut out to catch him. Indeed, I am rather doubtful as to whether I should have done so at all had he not tripped and measured his length on the ground. Before he could get up I was on him.

"I've got you at last, my friend," I said. "Now you just come along back to the camp, and let us have a look at you."

In reply he snarled like a dog, and I believe would have bitten me had I not held

A Strange Goldfield

him off. My word, he was a creature—more animal than man, and the reek of him was worse than that of our camels. From what I could tell he must have been about sixty years of age—was below the middle height, had white eyebrows, white hair and a white beard. He was dressed partly in rags and partly in skins, and went bare-footed like a black fellow. While I was overhauling him the others came up—whereupon we escorted him back to the camp.

"What wouldn't Barnum give for him?" said Spicer. "You're a beauty, my friend, and no mistake. What's your name?"

The fellow only grunted in reply—then, seeing the pipes in our mouths, a curious change came over him, and he muttered something that resembled "Give me."

"Wants a smoke," interrupted Matthews. "Poor beggar's been without for a long time, I reckon. Well, I've got an old pipe, so he can have a draw."

He procured one from his pack saddle, filled it and handed it to the man, who snatched it greedily and began to puff away at it.

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"How long have you been out here?" I asked, when he had squatted himself down alongside the fire.

"Don't know," he answered, this time plainly enough.

"Can't you get back?" continued Matthews, who knew the nature of the country on the other side.

"Don't want to," was the other's laconic reply. "Stay here."

I heard Spicer mutter, "Mad—mad as a March hare."

We then tried to get out of him where he hailed from, but he had either forgotten or did not understand. Next we inquired how he managed to live. To this he answered readily enough, "Carnies."

Now the carny is a lizard of the iguana type, and eaten raw would be by no means an appetising dish. Then came the question that gives me my reason for telling this story. It was Spicer who put it.

"You must have a lonely time of it out here," said the latter. "How do you manage for company?"

"There is the Field," he said, "as sociable a Field as you'd find."

A Strange Goldfield

"But the Field's deserted, man," I put in. "And has been for years."

The old fellow shook his head.

"As sociable a Field as ever you saw," he repeated. "There's Sailor Dick and 'Frisco, Dick Johnson, Cockney Jim, and half a hundred of them. They're taking it out powerful rich on the Golden South, so I heard when I was down at 'The Killarney' a while back."

It was plain to us all that the old man was, as Spicer had said, as mad as a hatter. For some minutes he rambled on about the Field, talking rationally enough, I must confess—that is to say, it would have seemed rational enough if we hadn't known the true facts of the case. At last he got on to his feet, saying, "Well, I must be going—they'll be expecting me. It's my shift on with Cockney Jim."

"But you don't work at night," growled Matthews, from the other side of the fire.

"We work always," the other replied. "If you don't believe me, come and see for yourselves."

"I wouldn't go back to that place for anything," said Spicer.

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But I must confess that my curiosity had been aroused, and I determined to go, if only to see what this strange creature did when he got there. Matthews decided to accompany me, and, not wishing to be left alone, Spicer at length agreed to do the same. Without looking round, the old fellow led the way across the plain towards the Field. Of all the nocturnal excursions I have made in my life, that was certainly the most uncanny. Not once did our guide turn his head, but pushed on at a pace that gave us some trouble to keep up with him. It was only when we came to the first claim that he paused.

"Listen," he said, "and you can hear the camp at work. Then you'll believe me."

We *did* listen, and as I live we could distinctly hear the rattling of sluice boxes and cradles, the groaning of windlasses—in fact, the noise you hear on a goldfield at the busiest hour of the day. We moved a little closer, and, believe me or not, I swear to you I could see, or thought I could see, the shadowy forms of men moving about in that ghostly moonlight. Meanwhile the



"LISTEN," HE SAID, "AND YOU CAN HEAR THE CAMP AT WORK"

A Strange Goldfield

wind sighed across the plain, flapping what remained of the old tents and giving an additional touch of horror to the general desolation. I could hear Spicer's teeth chattering behind me, and, for my own part, I felt as if my blood were turning to ice.

"That's the claim, the Golden South, away to the right there," said the old man, "and if you will come along with me I'll introduce you to my mates."

But this was an honour we declined, and without hesitation. I wouldn't have gone any further among those tents for the wealth of all the Indies.

"I've had enough of this," said Spicer, and I can tell you I hardly recognised his voice. "Let's get back to camp."

By this time our guide had left us and was making his way in the direction he had indicated. We could plainly hear him addressing imaginary people as he marched along. As for ourselves, we turned about and hurried back to our camp as fast as we could go.

Once there the grog bottle was produced, and never did three men stand more in need

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of stimulants. Then we set to work to find some explanation of what we had seen, or had fancied we saw. But it was impossible. The wind might have rattled the old windlasses, but it could not be held accountable for those shadowy grey forms that had moved about among the claims.

"I give it up," said Spicer, at last. "I know that I never want to see it again. What's more, I vote that we clear out of here to-morrow morning."

We all agreed, and then retired to our blankets, but for my part I do not mind confessing I scarcely slept a wink all night. The thought that that hideous old man might be hanging about the camp would alone be sufficient for that.

Next morning, as soon as it was light, we breakfasted, but, before we broke camp, Matthews and I set off along the cliff in an attempt to discover our acquaintance of the previous evening. Though, however, we searched high and low for upwards of an hour, no success rewarded us. By mutual consent we resolved not to look for him on the Field. When we returned to Spicer we placed such tobacco and stores as we could spare under

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the shadow of the big rock, where the Mystery would be likely to see them, then mounted our camels and resumed our journey, heartily glad to be on our way once more.

Gurunya Goldfield is a place I never desire to visit again. I don't like its population.

FOR LOVE OR LUCRE

WHEN Dick Hemsworthy, the doctor of Great and Little Septon, asked pretty Molly Carew, the lawyer's daughter, to marry him, he little knew the issues that would result from that apparently harmless question. Still less did he guess that, more than a hundred and fifty years later, I should unearth the story of his love affair, and should, worse still, make capital out of it.

From what I have been able to gather from the perusal of certain diaries—the writing in which is almost illegible—and from a considerable amount of correspondence (in which it is necessary in many cases to read between the lines, either rightly or wrongly, according to one's judgment), Lawyer Carew must have been a man of violent temper, a stern husband, a hard father, and, not to put too fine a face upon it, as miserable an old hunk as ever went out of his way to save a guinea. That he should,

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therefore, have come safely off the rocks he had himself constructed, seems scarcely to be in a fit and proper order of things.

To begin with, there can be no doubt that Hemsworthy proposed to, and was accepted by, Molly, as they walked home from church on a certain June evening in the year 1748. His diary also records the fact that, later on the same evening, he "let blood for Squire Edgebathe, of the Hall," little dreaming, poor fellow, that the gentleman in question was destined to die the week following, and by so doing cause him, for a time at least, the greatest uneasiness he had ever known in all the eight-and-twenty years of his existence.

Squire Edgebathe was, with the exception of a maiden sister in London, the last of his race. At his death, therefore, the Hall was sold, and, as may be supposed, public opinion in the neighbourhood was vastly concerned as to the antecedents, and, shall we say, the possibilities, of the new owner. His name was Devereux, and it was generally understood that he had been for many years abroad in His Majesty's Colony of Virginia, where it was stated he had amassed great wealth.

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Now, it must be understood that for a couple of years prior to the death of Squire Edgebathe, the London Road, which runs through and connects Great and Little Septon, had been held in subjection by a notorious highwayman, known to fame as Hangman Jack. This unenviable sobriquet was bestowed upon him by the neighbourhood when it became known that, on a certain memorable occasion at the commencement of his career, he had stopped and robbed the very individual whose duty it was to rid the world and society of gentlemen of his peculiar vocation.

From what I have been able to discover, reading between the lines, as I have already said, I am prepared to assert that the highwayman in question was not so popular in his district as he might have been. I gather that he kept himself too much to himself, except in the way of business, of course; did not frequent or patronise any of the local houses of call, and to all intents and purposes conducted himself as a modest, retiring gentleman, practising his profession without ostentation or any undue self-advertisement. None knew his real name, where he dwelt,

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or, indeed, anything concerning him—save that he had the misfortune to be hump-backed; that he was a consummate horseman, and as fine a shot as ever put finger to trigger.

Having now introduced you to pretty Molly Carew, whose portrait, hanging in the hall of her great-great-grandson's house, proves her to have been a most charming young lady; to Lawyer Carew, her father; to Dr Dick Hemsworthy; to Squire Devereux, late of Virginia; and to Hangman Jack, the highwayman, it would perhaps be as well that I should proceed with my story with as little delay as possible.

To hark back to the beginning of things, let me again assert that Dick Hemsworthy, who, of course, should have been giving more attention to his profession than to love-making, was desirous of marrying Miss Carew. Accordingly, and I can imagine with what trepidation, he proposed, and being, as I have said, a handsome spark, was at once accepted. The young couple, however, happy though they were, had bargained without the lawyer, who, as the diary proves, was destined to make trouble for them, and at a very early

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date. He was a stern parent, was that man of parchment; a man with an eager eye for the main chance, and a particularly fine knack of getting his own way when he found himself in need of it. That he had much affection for his daughter I cannot convince myself. That he hoped and intended to marry her well, or, in other words, to profit himself through her marriage, I am as certain as a man can well be of anything. I have seen his portrait—hanging at the end of the room opposite that of his daughter—a thin, nut-cracker face, with a mouth that speaks for determination, and eyes that could be as hard as flint should their owner so desire. Indeed, as I stood before the picture, I could find no difficulty in imagining the interview that took place in the lawyer's office on the following morning. Hemsworthy pleaded with all the eloquence at his command for the hand of the girl he loved so well; she, poor motherless child, waited, trembling, in the wainscotted hall for the verdict that was to mean everything, almost life itself, to her. The lawyer, however, proved obdurate. Nothing the other could do or say would move him. With the brutality of a man who

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knows the worth of the treasure he possesses, he declined to part with her at such a price, while there might be more tempting offers waiting. It was in vain that the young man expostulated, promised, offered to settle all he possessed in the world upon the girl; the obstinate old father would not yield. What was worse, he vowed that he would hear no more of the matter, and, finally losing his temper altogether, went even so far as to forbid Hemsworthy his house, tacking on to it the threat that, should he discover him upon the premises, he would order his servants to expel him forcibly. Such behaviour could have but one result. Hemsworthy was, without doubt, a high-spirited young fellow, and, what was more, one who was but little likely to patiently endure such high-handed treatment. He invited the lawyer to inform him as to the grounds upon which he based his refusal. The old man, however, declined to answer either that question or any other. It was sufficient, he declared, that he would not permit him to become his son-in-law.

"Then listen to me," cried Hemsworthy, whose presence of mind had for the moment deserted him. "No, don't say that you won't

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hear me, for I tell you you shall. You have refused my suit, you have heaped insults upon me, but for Molly's sake I will forgive you. On one point, however, I am resolved. Come what may, she shall be my wife. She loves me and I love her. Nothing can alter that. I do not know what your ambition is, so far as she is concerned, nor do I care. But this I *do* know, she shall be no other man's wife but mine!"

"Out of my house, sir!" shouted the other in a paroxysm of fury. "If you value your life never dare to darken my doors again. Marry my girl indeed! You puppy! She should not be your wife if you were the last man on earth. I'd rather see her in her grave first!"

"Very well! Time will prove which of us is right," returned Hemsworthy, quietly, picking up his hat and preparing to leave. "As I have already told you, I love her, and it will not be my fault if I do not win her. At least I know that, happen what may, she will be true to me."

"She'll do as I tell her, or I'll know the reason why," snarled the other. "As for you, you know what to expect if you dare to

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show your face here again. Now be off with you!"

"Think it over, sir," said Dick, turning to him again in one last appeal. "Try to realise that your only child's happiness depends upon your action. Don't drive us both to despair by a hasty answer, I implore you. Remember that we love each other, as you must have surely loved at some period in your life. Your daughter is all the world to me."

The irascible old gentleman, however, remained obdurate. No argument that could be brought forward would move him. He had set his mind against the marriage, and that was sufficient. Dick realised that it was only so much waste of time to continue the discussion. He accordingly left the room and prepared to return to his own abode, in order to arrange some scheme which should help him towards the attainment of his desire. This, however, as he very soon discovered, was destined to prove somewhat more difficult than he had anticipated. The old lawyer, backed by a couple of family servants, kept poor Molly a strict prisoner. She might air herself in the garden, which was enclosed

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by high walls, as much as she pleased, but beyond that circumscribed demesne she was on no account to go. She might weep her eyes out, beg for mercy as much as she pleased, her father was inexorable. He fortified himself and his opinions with much wine, and vowed that no sawbones should ever be son-in-law of his. As may be supposed, it was not long before the crisis came, and this, so far as I can ascertain, is how it happened.

Squire Devereux, as the neighbourhood had by this time learnt to call him, chanced to have some legal business on hand which it was necessary should be arranged without undue delay. Believing that Lawyer Carew would serve his purpose as well as any other, he, one summer morning, called upon that gentleman. The interview was eminently satisfactory to both parties, and when it was concluded the lawyer proposed that they should crack a bottle together in honour of the event. They did so; and not one, but several. From what I have been able to gather, it would appear that the fourth cork had scarcely been drawn when pretty Mistress Molly, in her perambulation of the

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garden, chanced to pass the window. As she herself describes it in a letter to a friend, written some months later, she was immediately "hailed into that odious presence!" The squire, thin, pale, cadaverous, with eyes like those of a snake, was seated in a high-backed chair beside the table. He paid her many compliments, vowed that he had never been presented to so bewitching a beauty, and left the house to all intents and purposes a man over head and ears in love. Next day he called again. The day following found him equally attentive. The lawyer was delighted. Here at last was a suitor after his own heart—rich, a hard hand at a bargain, niggardly, and a deep drinker. What mattered his daughter's opinions? If the squire were in earnest, and was prepared with his settlement—egad! he should have her, or her father would know the reason why. Needless to say the poor girl suffered agonies of terror. She hated the very sight of the squire, and, I believe, would rather have married poor Mad Peter, the village idiot, off hand, than have been united to the owner of the Hall. That he—the latter—was determined to have her for his wife is a

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fact that admits of no doubt whatsoever, as I will presently prove to you. He was a man of determination, and when he made up his mind on a subject he usually managed to accomplish it, either by fair means or foul.

That she would decline to listen to his advances never crossed his mind. And yet she did, and with such vehemence that her father threatened her with the direst penalties of his wrath should she repeat her behaviour. He declared that she should marry the squire, if he had to drag her to church on her bended knees. Needless to say, the poor girl's life at that time was very far removed from a happy one. As for Hemsworthy, he was nearly beside himself. He believed and trusted his sweetheart implicitly, but he knew the power her father had over her, and he realised that, if the old man made up his mind to force the marriage upon her, it would be well-nigh impossible for her to resist. What was worse, he could not see her or communicate with her. At last, when certain news reached his ears, he was unable to bear it any longer, so determined upon a desperate stroke.

Without any hope that good would result

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from it, he made his way to the lawyer's house and demanded an interview. Had it been possible, the old fellow would have refused to see him, but Hemsworthy was in his presence almost before he was aware of the fact.

"What does this mean?" he inquired angrily, looking up from the deed he was perusing. "I thought I forbade you to come to my house again?"

"I have come to ask if this vile story is true," returned the other, speaking as calmly as was possible under the circumstances.

"What is the story?" asked the lawyer. "I pay no heed to gossip."

"It is said that you have given your consent to a marriage between your daughter and Squire Devereux," said Dick. "Is that true?"

"Quite true. What then? What right have you to ask the question? Go away and mind your own business, young man, or you'll find 'twill be the worse for you."

"This *is* my business," retorted the other. "It concerns the happiness, not only of my life, but of your child's also. She does not love this man; she could not be happy with

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him. To link her life to his would be a cruel and inhuman action."

"Matters would, of course, be reversed if I permitted her to marry you," sneered the lawyer. Then, losing control of himself altogether, he shook his fist in the young man's face, bade him be off about his business, and vowed that he would marry his daughter to whomsoever he pleased, and that it would be the worse for anyone who should dare to come between them.

"Very good, sir," replied the young man, when the other had ceased his harangue. "I told you some weeks ago that I would marry your daughter, and I repeat it now. Rest assured of this, happen what may, Devereux shall not have her."

With that he left the house and strode along the street towards his own abode in a towering rage with the squire, the lawyer, and everyone who showed the least inclination to come between himself and the girl he loved, and whom he feared he was about to lose.

As ill-luck would have it, he was scarcely a hundred yards from his own front door, when he became aware of a man, who,

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mounted on a fine black horse, was riding slowly towards him. One glance was sufficient to tell him that this individual was no less a person than Squire Devereux, his rival, and, at that moment, the greatest enemy he had in the world. As they came nearer they looked into each other's faces, and what they saw there must have told its own tale. Squire Devereux had been drinking heavily that afternoon, and his temper was soured in consequence. One glance was enough to inform the other that he was quite prepared to pick a quarrel with anyone, and with himself in particular. Seeing his enemy before him he bade him get out of his way, raising his whip as if to emphasise the order.

Hemsworthy, however, did not alter his course. The words the old lawyer had addressed to him a few minutes before were still rankling in his mind. At the moment he desired nothing better than a chance of picking a quarrel with his foe. Seeing that he did not budge, Devereux struck him a heavy blow across the shoulders with his whip. Then, with a cry of fury, Hemsworthy sprang upon him, dragged him from his saddle, and, seizing the whip, with which

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he had himself just been struck, thrashed him with it until fatigue made him desist. Then, dropping the whip, he hurled a parting defiance at the prostrate man and strode on to his own abode. He quite realised the important bearing his treatment of the squire would have on his relationship with the Carew family, but his case appeared so hopeless that it did not seem as if anything could damage it further.

As it transpired, however, it served one good purpose, for the squire, so soundly had he been trounced, was compelled to take to his bed, which he did not leave for upwards of ten days, thus affording his rival time to make up his mind as to what course he should pursue for the betterment of his unhappy love-affair. That Devereux, as soon as he should be able to move about, would endeavour to get even with him, he had not the least doubt, but what tactics he would adopt he was quite unable to imagine. He was soon to find out, however, and it is upon that discovery that the whole interest of my story turns.

One fine September morning, just as the doctor was preparing to mount his horse,

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preparatory to riding out to a farm some few miles distant from the village, he was accosted by a tall, military-looking stranger, who requested the honour of an interview. Hemsworthy led him into the house, and once there inquired his business. It thereupon transpired that the other, whose name was O'Rourke, was an Irish captain, a friend of Squire Devereux, and the bearer of a challenge from that enraged gentleman.

"Ye've put a grievous affront upon me honourable friend," remarked the captain, puffing out his chest with importance; "and it will be himself that will be happy to oblige ye, with sword or pistol, when and where ye may please. 'Twill be a pretty affair—that's to say, if ye've any knowledge of the weapons."

Now, from what I have been able to gather from the perusal of the diaries and letters to which I have already referred, I have come to the conclusion that Hemsworthy was as plucky a young man as you would have been likely to find in all that country side; at the same time, I do not fancy that the idea of this duel appealed to him in any way. The squire was known to

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be a fine pistol shot, and, as Dick argued, it was very probable that he would be equally proficient with the sword. However, there was no way out of it. He had been challenged to mortal combat, and, unless he desired to be branded as a coward, fight he must. That Devereux would kill him if he could manage it was unfortunately a matter that admitted of little or no doubt. It would be an easy, and, moreover, a permanent way of ridding himself of a troublesome rival. The result, however, was not destined to be as satisfactory as he would probably have wished it.

The duel took place in the small, tree-shaded close behind the church; pistols were the weapons chosen, and within five minutes of his arrival on the ground, Hemsworthy was lying on his back in the damp grass with a bullet through his chest. How it was he was not killed outright will ever remain a mystery, but, though he was carried home in what was supposed to be a dying condition, and was operated upon by a rival practitioner from the neighbouring town, he eventually managed to pull through. It was a touch-and-go business, however, and there were

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times when pretty little Molly Carew deemed it extremely probable that she would never see her lover again. Fate, however, was going to prove kind after all, and, though the fact at the moment seemed incredible, he was destined to live to dance his children's children upon his knee and to know as much happiness as falls to the lot of most men.

On the day that he was permitted to leave his bed for the first time, a visitor was ushered into his presence. To his amazement, this visitor proved to be no less a person than Lawyer Carew himself. Remembering what had taken place at their last meeting, Dick received his guest with politeness, but with no appreciable warmth.

"You're not pleased to see me, Richard Hemsworthy," began the old man, when he had seated himself in the chair which had been placed for him, "and I don't wonder at it. I did you an injustice, and I've come to say I'm sorry for it. I was a blind old bat, and I deserve all I have received."

Dick stared at him in astonishment. He had not heard any news of late, and, in consequence, had no notion of what the other was referring to. However, one thing was

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self-evident, and that was the fact that the old man was extremely anxious to be friendly.

"I fear I do not quite understand," said Dick, in a tone of apology. "You must remember I have heard no news since I took to my bed."

"Egad! then you're not acquainted with the great discovery that all the country side has been buzzing about these three weeks past? Well, well! And to think that, after all that has happened between us, I should be the one to tell you. You're acquainted with Hangman Jack?"

"The highwayman? I've heard of him—who has not? Who has he robbed now?"

"That, my lad, is just the tale I am about to tell you. The evening after the day on which you were shot by Squire Devereux, the squire came riding into the village, vowing that he had been stopped and robbed by Jack on Three Mile Heath. Nothing would suit him but he must have vengeance, and at once. The rascal had robbed him of his watch, fifty pounds in gold, and, what was more, a parcel of valuable deeds that,

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unlike the other articles, could not be replaced."

"The scoundrel! But still I fail to see what the robbery has to do with me?"

"Patience, and you shall hear. Rest assured that it concerns you more vitally than you suppose—unless you no longer love my daughter?"

"Ah, you know well enough what my feelings are towards her. But proceed with your story, I beg. Since it concerns me I am all impatience to hear the end."

"Well, you must know that on the day following the robbery I have just described, the squire appeared before me at my office, and informed me that he was that morning in receipt of a communication from his assailant of the previous night, to the effect that as the deeds were of no use to him they would be returned, on payment of the sum of three hundred guineas, to any individual he might nominate, provided always that he—the squire—did not appear in person to claim them, and also that he passed his word of honour that his messenger should come alone. The place of meeting was to be the Seven Yew Copse on the London Road, and the

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hour daybreak. As you may suppose, I immediately inquired what part he desired me to play in this adventure, whereupon he informed me that he was anxious to solicit my help. The whole question eventually resolved itself into this. Being short of cash, I was to find the necessary money to redeem the deeds, and also to attend at the appointed spot at the hour named to complete the transaction, taking in return a mortgage upon his estates until repayment of the amount should be made, with interest."

"I am surprised that you trusted the fellow," said Dick.

The old gentleman's eyes twinkled. "It would have been an excellent investment," he replied, "had things turned out as I anticipated. Let me, however, proceed with my tale. Having agreed to the squire's proposal, and the necessary money being forthcoming, I, with some misgivings, I must confess, mounted my nag and repaired to the appointed spot. 'Twas a cold, cheerless dawn, a thick mist covering the downs. As I drew near to the copse where, as arranged, I was to meet the rascal, I can tell you, my lad, I found myself wishing my-

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self well away. At last the trees came into view, and a moment later a hump-backed man, wearing a vizard, which concealed more than half his face, made his appearance from the shelter and approached me. In a gruff voice he asked the reason of my presence at such a place and at such an hour. Whether it was the cold, or whether, as is more probable, it was a very genuine fear for my safety that caused it, I cannot say; 'tis certain, however, that my teeth chattered in my head as I told him my business.

“‘Here are the papers to which you refer,’ says he, holding up a roll of papers as he spoke. ‘Now where’s the money?’

“I put my hand into my pocket where was one of the bags, and was about to give it to him. At that moment, however, the sound of a horse galloping on the crisp turf of the downs reached my ears.

“‘You’ve betrayed me,’ cried the man before me, with an oath, and as he spoke he snatched a pistol from his pocket and fired full and fair at me. As you can see for yourself here is the hole in my hat made by the bullet. How it was he did not kill me, I shall never understand. Then turning, he



FOR ANSWER, THE OTHER DREW A PISTOL FROM HIS HOLSTER,
POINTED IT, AND PULLED THE TRIGGER

The Lady of the Island

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ran back to the wood to the spot where his horse was waiting. A moment later he was mounted and riding out from among the trees. By this time the sound of horse's hoofs that I had heard before was drawing closer. A minute later a tall man, and well-mounted, dashed by me, pistol in hand. He encountered Jack at the edge of the wood.

"'You're my prisoner,' he cried. 'Yield yourself, or you are a dead man.'

"For answer, the other drew a pistol from his holster, pointed it, and pulled the trigger. The bullet went wide, but not so that fired by the new-comer. When the smoke had cleared away Jack was lying on his back, dead, upon the turf, and his horse was galloping off across the downs.

"'It's a pity I didn't take him alive,' said the stranger. 'But it's better to have him this way than not at all. I've been trying to catch him these three years, but he has always managed to give me the slip. Now let us take a look under that mask. I've long wanted a glimpse of my fine gentleman's face.'

"As he spoke he knelt beside the dead man and lifted the vizard that concealed his

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features. What do you think we found there?"

Hemsworthy was unable to say.

"*The face of Squire Devereux of the Hall!*" replied the lawyer. "*He—and no other—was Hangman Jack!*"

"But what about the deeds?" asked Dick, when he had recovered from his astonishment.

"There were no deeds," replied the lawyer. "The whole thing was a carefully-laid plot to rob me. The rascal had come to the end of his tether, and intended flying the country with my money. He knew the thief-taker was after him, and this was the plan he had hit upon to obtain the sinews of war necessary for his flight."

"And Molly?"

"She shall speak for herself. I have been taught a lesson. I wanted a rich son-in-law, and came near being cheated by a rogue. I refused an honest man, and have come nearer still to being punished for my folly. As soon as you're about again, egad! we'll have a wedding, and ever afterwards we'll thank Heaven for our deliverance from that scoundrel, Hangman Jack."

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"Amen to that," said Dick. "Amen, with all my heart."

Then the old man left him and went out to find his daughter.

"Just fancy, he might have shot papa," Molly remarked, some few weeks later, *à propos* of the incident on the downs.

"That would have been sad indeed," her lover replied. "At the same time, though I have small cause to love him, I cannot help remembering that I am indebted, in a large measure, to that shot for my wife, and for the happiness I know to-day."

Which would seem to prove that from base things good may occasionally result.

A ROGUE'S SACRIFICE

I WONDER how many of the folk who read this story will realise that it is a true picture of the Australian bush, stripped of all gloss and sentiment. So much nonsense has been written on the subject that it is difficult to induce those, who have had no acquaintance with the country, to believe that life in the interior of the Great Lone Land does not consist entirely of flirting in creeper-shaded verandahs, taking gold by the bucketful out of chance-discovered mines, or chasing bushrangers at a gallop, though fern-clad valleys or over snow-covered mountain ranges. It might also be pointed out with advantage that every station owner is not necessarily a millionaire. This fact in itself is worth remembering.

There are many places in this world of ours which you would prefer to the township of Dunsterville. It is located in Northern Queensland, and lies out, all lonely, on a

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plain across which it is possible to travel for hundreds of miles in any direction over rolling downs varied only by patches of monotonous scrub. When the venerable prophet Daniel referred to the "abomination of desolation" he must have had just such another stretch of country in his mind. If he did not know Australia, of course, that is not my fault.

Charley de Pereira was a gentleman who hailed from the Southern part of India; he was also a member of that class which is officially known as undesirable. Among other things he was an ice-cream merchant, dark as to the skin, and very frail; what was more, he had a great fear of physical pain—a fact which was known and appreciated by such Europeans as had the honour of his acquaintance. He would not have minded dying in the least, because his religion stood by him there, but he did not like being kicked, while stones thrown at him as often as not left their mark. He was, as I have said, an ice-cream merchant, and, as may be supposed, gentlemen of his profession do not reap abundant harvests in up-country Queensland townships. Moreover, Charley was

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a thief, and had served several sentences for minor frauds. He had no desire therefore to become more intimately associated with the law.

At ten o'clock on one particular evening Mr de Pereira had done very fair business. He had taken four shillings and sixpence, a water melon and a great coat, though what possible use the latter could be to him, he alone could say. There were other matters in which he was vitally interested, and the burglary at the Vicarage which had taken place on the previous night was one of them. He was an artful gentleman was Mr Charles de Pereira!

It is a well-known fact that even the greatest men in this world of ours are, at times, prone to make mistakes. They may buy Consols on the wrong side of the market; they may back the favourite for the Derby, or the Oaks, and be beaten by an outsider; they may purchase Argentines when they seem a certainty, or railroads that could not be equalled as a popular investment, and everything goes wrong. Our hero, however, had no intention of making a mistake. He knew that he could not afford it.

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As I have said, Charley de Pereira went home on the evening in question feeling that he had done very good business, and that, if matters continued to progress as they were doing, he might be in a position to return to his native country and live the life of a gentleman (as he regarded it) at no very distant date. The important fact that his fellow-townsmen intended tarring and feathering him in the immediate future would, doubtless, have accelerated his departure had he known it. Fortunately, however, for his peace of mind, he did not.

On the morning following he rose early. He cooked his breakfast, ate it, got together the few small belongings he valued most, and packed them in his ice cream barrow. Then, as day was breaking, he abandoned the hut, for which he owed a fortnight's rent, and, choosing a back street, left the township, pushing his cart before him. It was his intention to reach the next settlement across the plains, if such a thing were possible. And when I say that it was a journey of little short of four hundred miles across the most desolate country imaginable, where water is scarce and shade almost unknown, some idea

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may be gathered of the magnitude of the task he was undertaking.

At last the township lay behind him, and he congratulated himself on having said good-bye to it without his flitting becoming known to the inhabitants. Half an hour later, having ascended a slight rise, he made the discovery that he was not the only person who was saying farewell to it, for, on the track ahead of him he could discern two figures, those of a man and a woman. They were proceeding in the same direction as himself, and as he drew nearer them he saw the woman was carrying a child of about a year old. The man had a swag upon his shoulder, and carried a billy can and water bag in his hand. Charley recognised them instantly, and realised with satisfaction that they would not be likely to give him any trouble. The man and woman had reputations that more than equalled his own.

Having caught them up, he accosted them and asked, though the question was by no means necessary, whither they were going. They told him, and thereupon it was agreed that, for mutual convenience, they should journey forward together. The baby and the

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man's baggage was thereupon transferred to the barrow, and for the next few hours the men took it in turns to push the load. At mid-day a halt was called, a fire was lighted and tea was boiled. The heat was stifling, for it must be remembered that it was the middle of summer; what was worse, they had but little water left, with, so far as they could see, but small chance of obtaining more for some time to come. During the afternoon they again pushed on, camping in a small *tope* of trees when night fell. Their supply of water had, by this time, decreased to less than a pint. What was worse—that is, if anything could have been worse—the woman was worn out and the two men had begun to wrangle over the difficulties of the road. Pereira argued, somewhat inconsequently, that he had had greater experience in the management of ice cream barrows; the other maintained that he had known the country a longer time, and that he was, in consequence, more familiar with the tracks. It was only the fact that the woman was with them that prevented them being at each other's throats. Charley was an Asiatic and hot-tempered to a degree; his companion had been born under

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an Australian sun, and was little behind him in impetuosity. Night fell and found the situation still more desperate. The water was almost at an end now. Worse still, the child was troublesome, and the woman was at her wits' end to know what to do with it. She lived her life then from second to second—never knowing what might happen at any moment. She hated her husband, for reasons of her own; at the same time she was well aware of Charley's reputation—and that knowledge was little likely to console her. However, Providence stood by her, and the night passed without serious trouble. At daybreak next morning they resumed their weary march with little food and less than half a pint of water in the bag. When the sun arose, the glare on the plain was well-nigh blinding; the long grey levels rose and fell as if they were set on carriage springs, while lovely mirages appeared before them continually, as if enticing them to their ruin. A bed had been arranged for the baby on the barrow, so that the woman was at least relieved of that burden. Poor soul, it was all the relief she had.

At mid-day the water bag was empty, and

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it was then that their real sufferings began. The men had trudged on hour after hour, taking it in turn to push the barrow, and during the whole of the time scarcely a word had been spoken by either of them. At last, quite worn out, they camped in some thick scrub. For the time being it was impossible for them to continue their march. Their tongues were swelling and their skins cracking for lack of moisture. Unless water could be found, and before very long, it was certain that matters would go badly with them. Had one searched Australia through at that moment, it would have been difficult, may I say impossible, to have discovered a stranger group. Charley was—well, not to mince matters—a convicted thief; the other man had served several terms of imprisonment, while the woman—but over her weaknesses let us draw a kindly veil. It is certain, however, that the only innocent member of the party was the baby, and he, poor little fellow, was not only innocent by lack of opportunity, but was on the verge of starvation also. And now we reach the most terrible part of the story—that, indeed, which one scarcely likes to dwell upon, and yet

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which is absolutely true. When the men had rested they stated their intention of setting off in search of water. The husband bade his wife remain where she was until he returned. They departed, and all through the afternoon and the night that followed, the woman waited patiently beneath the tree; the child crying for food which she was powerless to give, and herself suffering such agonies as few people, thank God! are ever called upon to know.

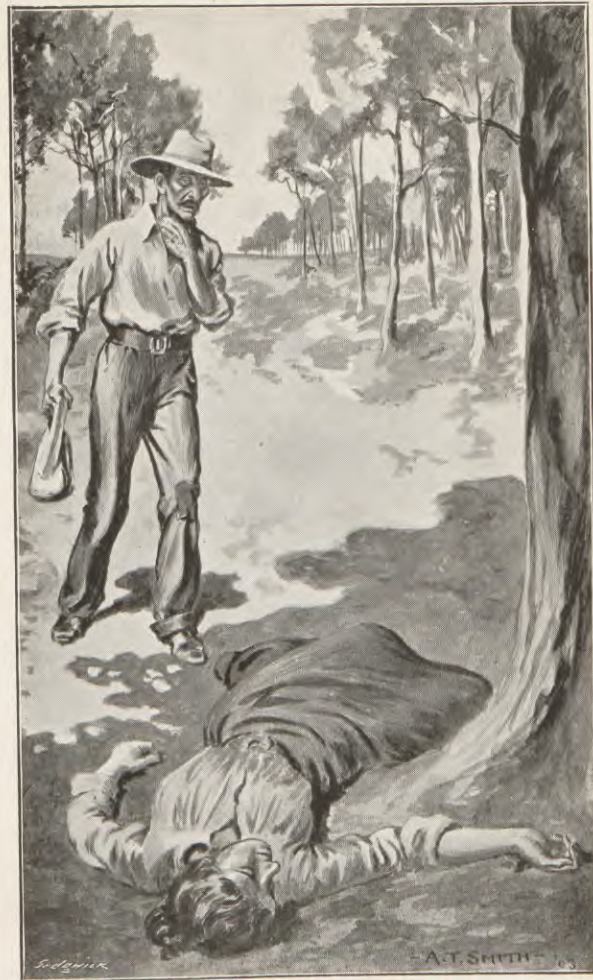
The night passed, the men did not return, and still the woman waited—waited—and waited. What had befallen them it was impossible for her to tell, she was only conscious that her child was dying, and that she herself was suffering intolerable agony. At last, when day broke, she came to the conclusion that something must be done. She therefore took up the child and prepared to set off in search of the men. But her strength was exhausted, and she found she could not carry it. What was she to do? To remain where she was was out of the question, and yet she could not take the child with her, while to leave him upon the barrow was too dangerous, since he might fall off. All that

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remained to her was to tie him to a tree, and to trust to Providence to watch over him until her return. For hours she pushed on and on, calling for help where help there was none. At last, too worn out to go further, her tongue so swollen that it could not remain in her mouth, she fell to the ground unconscious.

(I must here again assure my readers that what I am describing is *fact*, not fiction.)

When she recovered consciousness she staggered to her feet. It was nearly dusk, and the silence in the scrub was terrifying. She cried aloud to someone—she knew not who—to come to her, but, needless to say, no one came. After that she went on again, never knowing in which direction she was going. She had but two thoughts in her mind, and they were practically the same—to find the men and to save her child. At last her agony became unendurable, and once more she sank to the ground. The crows fluttered and cawed in the trees above her as if in anticipation of the feast that must soon await them; the cicalas chattered at her, and the jays made mock of her. It was here that Charles de Pereira put in an appear-



IT WAS HERE THAT CHARLES DE PEREIRA PUT IN AN APPEARANCE UPON THE SCENE

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ance on the scene, staggering along, with haggard eyes and the look of death upon his face. In his right hand he clutched his canvas water bag, and in that water bag was the best part of a pint of water—green! He had been upwards of a day finding it, and thief, rascal, reprobate though he was, he had saved it for the woman and child instead of drinking it himself. Kneeling beside her he moistened her lips with the life-giving fluid, until at last consciousness returned to her. Then he bade her drink. When she had finished, more than half the water had gone. She saw the dull, sad-coloured vegetation, the red sand, and she was conscious of the crows disputing in the branches of the tree beneath which she lay, also of a certain very miserable little Asiatic, squatting on the ground a few paces from her, looking as if his last hour had come, which, if the truth must be told, it certainly had.

“What’s the meaning of this ’ere?” she asked in a husky voice, when she had strength enough to speak. “What have you been doing, and where’s Tom?”

Charley only shook his head; he was too far gone by this time for speech. The woman

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mistook his silence for obstinacy. She did not know that her husband was lying dead, a quarter of a mile away, and that Charley had stayed by him until he had drawn his last breath.

"You're playin' some game on me," she said feebly, being unable to realise altogether how matters stood. "Why don't he come back? I'm fair done for. I can't walk, and that baby will be dead by the time I get hold of him. My God, he'll be dead before I can get back to him! What does it all mean?"

Still Pereira made no answer. He tried to speak, but the words died in his throat. He had given what, at that moment, he valued most in all the world to save the woman's life, and it was plain that she was not only ungrateful, but she thought him to blame.

Half an hour later a man chanced along the track. He rode one horse and led another. Seeing the unfortunates he dismounted and approached them. Having picked up the woman and brought her back to consciousness he turned to Charley.

"Dead," he said to himself, "dead as a door nail. It's no use worrying about him."

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Then he placed the woman on his saddle and set off again. It was perhaps as well that they did not hear the man mutter, as they rode away, "It's all right—she'll get through now! There wouldn't have been room for both of us!"

He died half an hour later!

What became of the baby cannot be told. I only know that whenever I meet a bulldog ant now, I trample upon it for reasons of my own. Possibly I am cruel. If I am I do not know that I am ashamed of the fact. The strangest part of the whole affair to me is the verdict that was passed on poor Pereira. The leading storekeeper of the township was responsible for it, and from his own view I suppose he hit it off very happily. This is what he said,—

"It's a good thing for him he died. If he'd come back we'd have finished him once and for all. I had a fresh consignment of tar up yesterday!"

I have often wondered whether the verdict was altogether just!

THE END

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