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THE "MARVEL" GRAND XMAS NUMBER.

NEWSAGENTS SHOULD ORDER IN A GOOD STOCK, AS THERE WILL BE A GREAT DEMAND FOR THEM.

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THE
PHANTOM
MOUNTAIN



Then, without warning of any kind, the bottom gave way, and, struggling with each other like wild beasts, the two men shot down into the abyss. (See page 7.)

THE "HALF PENNY MARVEL"

Complete Story, 20,000 Words Long,
EVERY WEDNESDAY.

No.
109

NEW SERIAL STORY COMMENCES NEXT WEEK.

This Journal was founded to counteract the pernicious influences of the Penny Dreadfuls.

THE PHANTOM MOUNTAIN.

A STORY OF THE EAST.

CHAPTER I.

A Terrible Catastrophe—A Gallant Rescue—Fate Weaves the Web—The Dawn of Hope—A Mysterious Theft—The Nameless Power.

"Ugh! what a night!"

The speaker shuddered as, readjusting the warm travelling rug, he pulled up the lapet of his coat and wiped away the mist from the carriage window.

"If this be a sample of your English climate, give me the East. Hot it may be, foggy never."

"I beg your pardon, sir," interposed the other occupant of the first-class smoker; "Formosa—yes, and some portions of the mainland—are subject to variations such as this."

"Ah! a traveller! May I ask to whom I am indebted for the correction?" inquired the first speaker.

"With pleasure. Gordon Haverlock—that is my name."

"And mine—"

But ere the speaker could reciprocate the carriage rocked violently, described a sharp curve, and, plunging forward, crashed over the embankment and splintered into fragments below.

Scrieks of agony and terror pierced the raw night air as men and women struggled through the wreckage, leaving behind the helpless and dying. The hoarse roar of escaping steam and the piteous cries of the wounded increased the panic.

"Volunteers to the rescue!" shouted a stalwart traveller. And immediately a dozen willing voices echoed the cry.

"Hark!" cried the leader. And a chill of fear ran through the crowd.

"The wreckage is on fire!" cried one.

"Then every man to his duty!" responded Gordon Haverlock, who, having escaped, had taken the lead.

With a loud cheer, the gallant little band dashed forward.

"Help! help!" cried a young girl imprisoned amongst the burning debris.

Haverlock saw her peril, and in an instant gained her side. Exerting the whole of his splendid strength, he prised up the heavy beam which pinioned her.

"Quick! can you move?" he cried.

"My arm; it is caught below!" she exclaimed.

"Ah!" The agonised cry was forced from her lips as, seeing the necessity of prompt action, Haverlock lifted the slender form, and, holding his burden in one arm, strove with the other to extricate the imprisoned limb.

After several fruitless attempts he succeeded, and just in the nick of time dragged his burden from the burning wreckage. The beam he had supported crashed down, scattering the debris and liberating the angry flames beneath. Up they shot, sending a ruddy glow over the scene of ruin and despair.

Still the rescue-party worked on, augmented in numbers by the country folk; and scores of willing hands extricated the injured passengers from the fiercely-burning pile.

Some, alas! were past all hope, and breathed their last in the arms of weeping friends.

A hearty cheer was raised as the last prisoner staggered to his feet.

But no! Another yet remained!

"Yonder, in the rear! Look!" exclaimed a score of voices. Lit up by the red glow, they could distinguish a half-demolished carriage, and inside a deathlike face, watching in speechless horror the angry flames leap barrier after barrier.

Haverlock uttered a cry of amazement, and rushed forward. The imprisoned man had been his fellow-traveller.

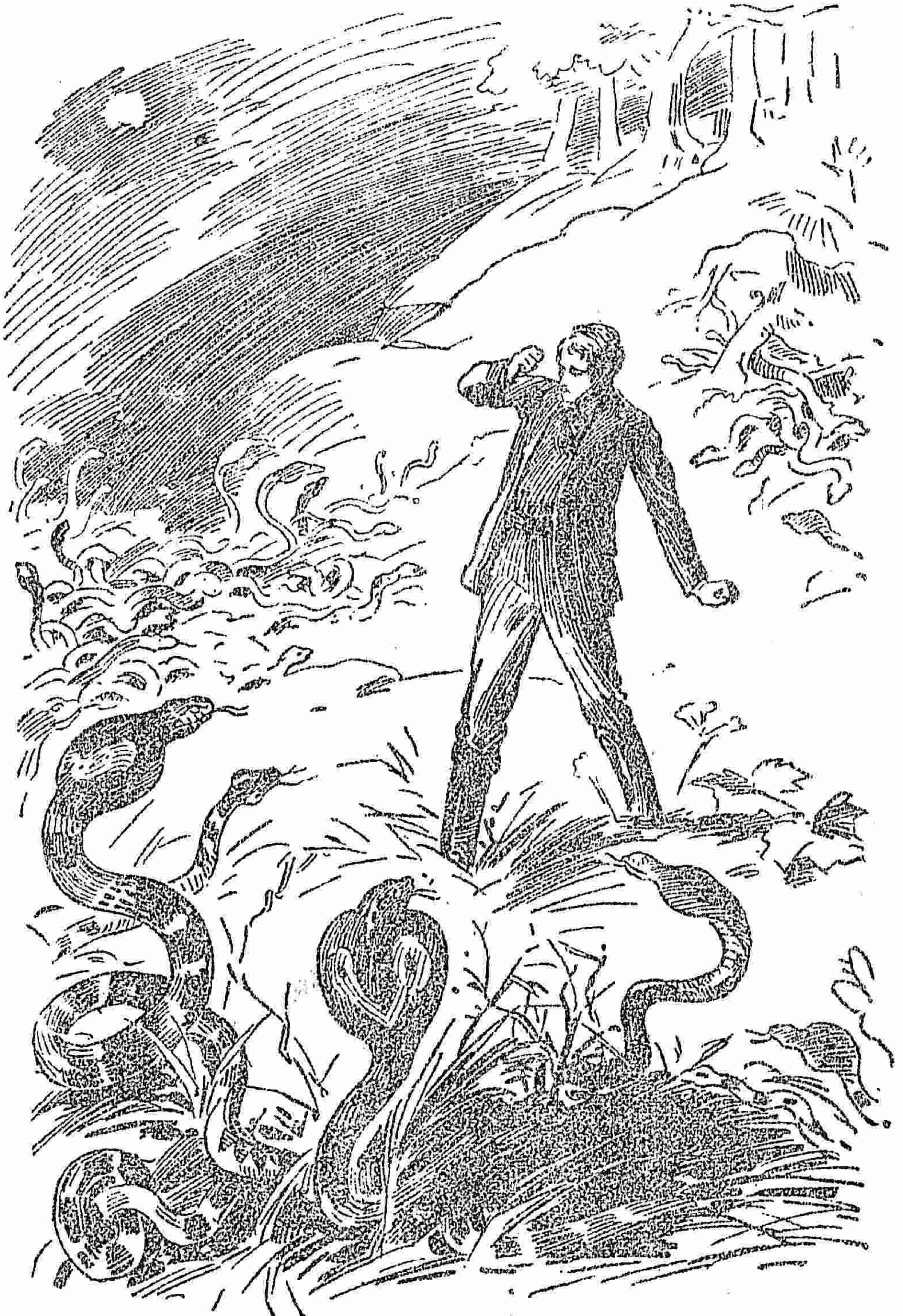
"An axe! an axe!" he cried.

Someone handed the weapon across, and in a trice he clambered over the igniting wood, and attempted to smash open the fast-closed door.

Blow after blow he struck, but still the door held firm.

The flames began to circle upward, while thick volumes of smoke filled the carriage, and hid the terrified face from view. Suddenly the upper portion of the frame gave way.

Haverlock plunged forward, caught the terrified man in



THE ANGRY HISS OF COUNTLESS REPTILES . . . THE VERY GROUND ABOUT HIM SEEMED TO MOVE AND QUIVER; WHILE ON CAME A DARK LINE NOISELESSLY OVER THE SURFACE. (See page 8.)

his arms, and essayed to return. But the flames and smoke drove him back. Thrice he repeated the attempt; then, seeing it useless, stepped back, and half carried, half dragged the horrified traveller over the scattered debris in the rear.

For some minutes he was hidden from the onlookers; then a hundred voices echoed a hearty cheer as Gordon reappeared, carrying his living burden.

"Jump!" he cried.

But the man was either too terrified or unable to do so; for, swaying to and fro, he would have fallen backward if Haverlock had not been there to catch him.

Seeing that assistance was urgently needed, two or three of the bolder spirits dashed over the burning wreckage, and carried the terrified passenger into a place of safety.

Haverlock, left to himself, skilfully eluded the devouring flames; then, taking a flying leap, he almost cleared the obstacles. But, alas! the smoke blinded him, and he alighted just within the circle of fire.

A cry of horror rose from the crowd, while several ran forward, and dragged him out.

But the fall had rendered Haverlock unconscious.

"Carry him across to the Hall!" exclaimed Dr. Bruce. "I will see to him and the poor fellow he so bravely rescued."

The doctor was not alone, for on his left arm he supported the young girl whom Haverlock had extricated from the burning wreckage.

"Is he dead, uncle?" she faltered, as the neighbours started with their unconscious burden.

"Dead? No, child; a bit knocked about, that's all."

But the doctor's optimism was more apparent than real, as, with a woman's quick intuition, his niece soon detected.

It was an anxious half-hour which succeeded their arrival at the Hall. Then the doctor explained that the young man had regained consciousness, and only needed a good night's rest to be as well as the best of them.

"But," he added quickly, "we must be away. There are others to see to. I leave our young hero and his rescued friend in the charge of my niece. Heaven be thanked that she has been spared!"

The worthy man hurried away on his errand of mercy, leaving, as he had expressed it, Haverlock and the stranger to the care of his niece.

Had he but known how Fate, in her mysterious way, was busy spinning the thread which should unite those three lives in a manner as strange as it was to be unexpected, he might have hesitated ere his burly form was lost to sight in the dense fog.

But Dr. Bruce did not concern himself just then with probabilities. His profession called him where the dying and the injured were crying for help. Still, he was surprised when, returning late that night, he found that one of his guests had declined his hospitality under the plea of urgent business elsewhere.

"Soon pulled himself together," remarked the doctor, a little nettled.

"Don't forget, uncle," responded Hilda Armitage, "the poor man may have a wife and children awaiting his arrival somewhere."

"Maybe, maybe," replied the doctor; "but I'm glad to see our gallant friend has not deserted us likewise."

"Indeed, I've had some difficulty to persuade him to remain," exclaimed Hilda archly.

"Eloquence triumphant again," laughed the doctor, adding seriously: "Sir, I owe you a debt of gratitude for the gallant manner in which you rescued my niece. Her arrival, though unexpected, is nevertheless most welcome, and, under the circumstances, most opportune. Whoever you are, or whatever you are, if ever in need of a friend, remember Wallace Bruce." And the worthy practitioner, in his excess of gratitude, almost dislocated his guest's hand.

"I hope Mr. Haverlock will accept my very grateful thanks also," cried Hilda.

A remark which Gordon Haverlock seemed hugely to appreciate.

Somehow he felt strangely drawn to these people, uncle and niece; he, Gordon Haverlock, who had travelled the world thrice over, and was, perhaps, better known in the highways and byways of Calcutta, Hong Kong, or Peking, than amid the multiple twinings of London: he who had seen life in its thousand phases, who had scorned fellowship, and laughed at any warmer feeling, and all the warm glow of sympathy and interest which his host diffused so skilfully.

In a few words he disclosed his identity, and his name was not unfamiliar to his listeners. The doctor reciprocated; and Gordon learnt that Wallace Bruce was a scientist of no mean repute; and what was somehow far more interesting to the traveller, he learnt the short history of Hilda Armitage.

He remembered long afterwards that the fair girl, though an orphan, had one staunch friend—to wit, her uncle—and in the time to come the recollection gave him comfort.

The night was far advanced when the little party retired to rest. The events of the evening helped to prolong and deepen

their slumbers, otherwise they would have heard the ominous sound of a window-catch fly back, and subsequently the stealthy movements of a midnight marauder, as, making his way from the rear of the old house, he crept inch by inch, and step by step, till, with a smothered cry of triumph, he gained the doctor's study, and, quickly fastening the door, lit the gas and made a dart for a scintillating object on the mantel-shelf encased in a small glass frame.

"The omen, the omen! At last 'tis mine, after years of search. Whom have I not slain in the hope of possessing this priceless gem, the snake-wort? English fool!" apostrophised the desperate villain; "if you did but know the virtue of this stone you would move heaven and earth to retain it. But too late! The hands of Iquorn, the rich trader of Tyka, shall wax fat on its virtues. Now can no harm assail Iquorn the Magnificent!" And, hastily darkening the room, the silent intruder crept softly through the passage, and as softly pulled the window down. Then, pulling up the lappet of his coat, as he had done once before that night, he hurried noiselessly into the dark, unwholesome night, possessed of a power such as tradition asserted excelled all other power this mundane world could boast.

CHAPTER II.

Hilda's Dream—The Theft Discovered—Consternation—The Doctor's Terror—On the Track—Too Late!

Early the following morning Gordon was astir. He met his host and Hilda Armitage in the breakfast-room, and the three sat down to a smoking repast.

"Do you know, uncle, I had a most horrible dream last night, and can't get rid of the recollection," exclaimed Hilda, as the meal was half finished. "I dreamt that you and Mr. Haverlock were fighting a lot of black giants in some strange country—great fierce creatures, who threatened every moment to overpower you. Then the earth seemed to open and swallow both of you up. It seemed so real, I can't help shuddering now."

"Well, well, little woman, you mustn't sit up late again, or you'll dream next we've been hacking each other to pieces, like a couple of Borneo dyaks," laughed the doctor. "Did Haverlock?"

But whatever remark the latter might have made was cut short by the unceremonious entrance of the housekeeper and two of her subordinates.

"What ever is the matter, Mrs. Bevis? You look as though you had seen a ghost!" cried the doctor. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Nothing wrong, sir?" exclaimed the housekeeper. "Wrong! I don't know what you call this!" And she pointed the broken glass case which for years had held the strange glittering stone the doctor so prized.

"Broken!" cried Bruce, jumping to his feet. "Whose carelessness is this?"

"I don't know, sir. We've just found it like this on the library mantel-shelf," replied the housekeeper.

"Don't know! found it like this! Where's the stone?" cried the doctor quickly.

"It's gone!"

"Great heavens! that stone gone! You must be mistaken!" In a trice he darted out of the room and examined the library fireplace.

"Gone!" he reported; then shuddered visibly. "This is a strange theft! It's worthless as a market commodity, as a thief would see. The man who took that stone is aware of its peculiar virtues!" Again Bruce shuddered, and passed his hand across his temple, while his face grew white.

"What is it, uncle dear? Is the loss very great?" asked Hilda, feeling very much frightened.

"Great! It's stupendous!" cried Bruce. "But the thief must be overtaken, or—or— Merciful heavens! what a catastrophe may happen!"

Haverlock, who had followed, heard the exclamation, and started inadvertently.

"Is the lost stone a snake-wort?" he cried.

"Yes; there is only another in existence," replied the doctor.

"Then the thief who has stolen the one intends likewise to obtain the other!" exclaimed Gordon.

The doctor's face turned grey with terror.

"Yes," he whispered hoarsely. "Their horrible affinity is a common secret in the East!"

The two men exchanged glances.

"Hilda, dear, leave us together a few minutes," said the doctor.

The girl obeyed, and the housekeeper and servants left the room.

Bruce took three quick strides, and caught his guest roughly by the arm.

"You, Haverlock, are acquainted with the history of the

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stones!" he cried. "Their occult power is established beyond doubt. Time after time I have proved it. Who, think you, is the thief—a common housebreaker or some sleek Eastern foe?"

"Undoubtedly the latter."

"Ah!"

The doctor sank into the nearest chair, faint and dizzy.

"Are you sure that stone is the snake-wort of India?"* asked Gordon.

"Absolutely certain! The scintillating fibre in the centre shone brighter than the finest diamond!" exclaimed the doctor. "Besides, I have tested its efficacy, and its virtues have been known to six generations of my family. The stone was brought from India by an ancestor, who found it in the sheesh nag's head."*

"Do you mean to tell me, Dr. Bruce, that you believe the extravagant virtues claimed for this stone?" asked Haverlock.

"Extravagant they may seem, but I have proved their existence," replied Bruce. "That stone is composed of a marvellous chemical, so sensitive to every influence that for a time its magnetic attraction concentrates the dominant influence which may surround it. In this state it can be used as a most deadly agent—that is, if the influence is evil or dangerous; or, should the influence be good, its possession intensifies the good. Armed with such a power, an unscrupulous man could do anything short of actually destroying the world."

"So Eastern tradition asserts," interposed Haverlock. "An Indian fakir once told me how his fathers, to revenge themselves upon the unbelieving infidels, devastated the world with a black plague by the agency of the snake-wort."

"That stone was the most precious heirloom of our family. It has saved scores of lives, and now some dastardly thief has taken it for his own ends. He cannot be allowed to retain it, or ruin and death may spread everywhere to satiate his evil passions. Haverlock, there's only one alternative. That man, whoever he is, must be found!"

Bruce paused, and looked appealingly towards his friend.

"The task will be a long and dangerous one if, as I foresee, the thief goes East," replied Gordon. "Are you prepared to risk hardship and peril to retain this snake-wort?"

"Anything! anything!" cried Bruce. "For the sake of common humanity that stone must be found!"

"Very well, then. The sooner we begin the search the better," said Haverlock. "I have no ties, and am at your service when you please."

"Thank you, Haverlock, a thousand times! You, who know the East so well, will be an invaluable ally. I can never repay this obligation."

"But someone else may," laughed Gordon.

Whereat Wallace Bruce wrung his newly-found friend's hand, and inwardly determined, in the event of such repayment being made, that his niece and Gordon Haverlock should want for nothing.

"Uncle, I believe that man whom you brought here last night is the thief!" exclaimed Hilda, presently. "I remember he asked several questions about the stone. It seemed to interest him strangely."

Bruce and his friend exchanged glances.

"But it was safe enough at three o'clock this morning, when we retired," said Bruce.

"The thief must have entered by the corridor-window, sir," remarked Morris, the doctor's steward. "The catch is unfastened, and the paint about the window-ledge is scratched."

"Have the police been informed?" asked Bruce.

"Yes, sir. Here they are," replied the steward, as the county inspector and two officers entered.

"My man tells me he saw a fellow loafing about your grounds last night, sir," said the inspector. "He gave chase, but the scoundrel was too smart, and got clean away. He disappeared close by the railway line. Probably he caught the 'special' this morning which the company ran for the convenience of disabled travellers."

The doctor thought it only too probable. Then he explained in detail the mysterious theft. Later in the day a telegram was handed in from Liverpool headquarters, saying that a clue had been obtained.

"He's in Liverpool, sure enough!" exclaimed Haverlock.

* There is a belief current in all parts of India and the East that a certain variety of snake, called sheesh nag, when it attains the age of one thousand years, has a precious jewel formed in its head. The jewel is said to contain a thin, crescent-like fibre, which unceasingly oscillates in the centre. Only two such stones are known to exist. One is kept inside a temple in the heart of Thibet, and the other is now in Mr. Haverlock's possession. While apart their virtues are extraordinary; but tradition asserts that should they by any chance become paired the world would be overrun by the sheesh nag—the most deadly reptile in existence.—Ed.

"We've no time to lose, and must corner him on our own account. Are you ready, doctor? I fear this may mean a long absence, Miss Armitage; that is to say, if we miss our man in Liverpool. But do not grow uneasy. You shall hear how our chase succeeds."

He pressed the little hand held out for him, and took his seat in the dogcart.

"Oh, uncle! must you go?" cried Hilda, as Bruce bade good-bye.

"Go, little one—yes! But you must look after my affairs while I'm away. Dr. Sparke will act as locum tenens. Good-bye, child. I may not be absent long." And the worthy doctor sprang into his seat, and, whipping up the horse, was soon out of sight round the bend in the avenue.

Gordon turned once, and waved a last good-bye. Little did he think how their next meeting would be brought about. The first had been strange, but the second was to be far stranger. For Fate was busy weaving that web which events were yet to reveal.

They caught their train, and steamed into Liverpool about seven o'clock the same evening.

"Too late!" cried Haverlock, as, having made inquiries, he was informed that an invalid gentleman had booked to Yokohama by a steamer which had left at two o'clock.

"That is our man!" exclaimed Haverlock, "and the man who yesterday was travelling north with me. I recognise his description. Depend on it, the snake-wort is bound once more for the East!"

CHAPTER III.

A Desperate Undertaking—A Perilous Voyage—A Marvellous Escape—An Awful Plight—The Strange Derelict—Deliverance—Mystery—The Snake-Wort—How Fate Works the End.

Bruce promptly decided their course of action. It would, he said, be useless to follow the fugitive unless they could intercept him at Yokohama. To do so meant taking the overland route, and sailing from San Francisco. Then they would gain ten clear days.

"If we're smart we shall nab him in port!" cried Gordon. "After all, our task may be comparatively easy."

But the doctor thought otherwise. And it is as well, perhaps, that he did, for he equipped himself with powder and shot, and a supply of death-dealing necessaries to last some time.

Luckily, on the morrow one of the mail-steamers left for New York. The journey was uneventful, and, in due course, they reached 'Frisco, where, by judiciously manipulating the doctor's purse-strings, they secured passage on a tramp bound for the Philippines.

The weather was all that could be desired as they steered a direct course for Honolulu, much against Haverlock's will; then, turning the helm about west by north, the skipper ran for Yokohama.

"We'll make port in about a week's time, colonel," he drawled, addressing Haverlock one morning.

"I very much doubt it," replied the latter. "We'll have as much as we can do to keep afloat by nightfall, if the glass is any indication."

"Tut, tut! this old boat's stood many a storm, and shall stand a few more, I reckon, afore she's done!" exclaimed the skipper.

But before night closed in he had occasion to remember Haverlock's warning. The heavens grew dark and threatening, and fitful gusts blowing from the south lashed the water into little hillocks. The tramp rolled ominously.

"Can't make it out! This ain't no time for typhoons!" drawled the skipper.

"Time or no time, we're in the very teeth of one!" cried Gordon. "Look!"

He pointed across the starboard port to where, in the distance, an incoming wave towered forty feet above the others.

The skipper was electrified.

"Port your helm!" he shouted. "Now, you hulking rascals, furl canvas, sharp, every man Jack of you!"

But the crew, lazy as they were, needed no second bidding. The hoarse shrieking of the wind as it tore through the rigging, and the smothered roar of the oncoming waters sufficiently attested the need for haste.

"Full speed ahead!" cried the Yankee, speaking down the tube.

The tramp answered her helm wonderfully. In a jiffy her crew furled what little canvas she had been carrying.

"Hold on for your lives!" shouted the skipper, as the immense wave towered high above the stern, and next moment broke over the deck of the "Flying Kite."

Haverlock, who had foreseen what would happen, had lashed himself to the foremast. In a moment the water surged

round the bulwarks; then, sweeping the full length of the tramp, its vast volume passed on.

For several seconds Gordon was almost choked by the surging water. Lashed as he was to the mast, its vibrations were painfully evident. Suddenly, to his unspeakable horror, he



A FLASH, A TERRIFIC REPORT, AND THE LORCHA SHOT UPWARDS, HURLING SHATTERED SPARS ON EITHER BANK, AND CASTING ITS STRUGGLING OCCUPANTS INTO THE AGITATED WATERS. (See page 11.)

felt the wood part in the middle, and a second later he was swept overboard on the crest of the gigantic wave.

A cry of dismay broke from the crew. The doctor, who was below, heard it, and, fearing something terrible had happened, he beat frantically at the fast-closed hatchway. Moments of awful suspense followed. He could hear the waters wash the deck, and feel the vessel shiver like some drowning creature, as, making a gallant attempt, she righted herself. Then the glad sound of footsteps overhead assured him that his knocking had been heard. Some minutes later the hatchway was opened, and the skipper, bending over, called hoarsely for Bruce.

"Oh! here you are!" he exclaimed, as the doctor leapt on deck. "Your mate's been washed overboard along with this mast." And he pointed to the jagged stump.

Bruce recoiled horrified.

"Is there no means of saving him?" he asked quickly. "It may not be too late. See! yonder floats the mast!"

In his excitement the doctor rushed to the bulwarks, and would have leapt after his drowning friend had not two of the crew interposed in the nick of time.

"Throw a line!" roared the skipper, though he knew it was impossible to reach Haverlock.

One of the sailors obeyed the order, as the dark mass loomed on the starboard port. The rope paid out its full length, then ran taut.

"By the stars and stripes, he's caught it!" cried the skipper. "Haul gently."

The line was half-way in; then another gigantic wave swept forward, and engulfed the doomed vessel.

She trembled from stem to stern. The water poured into the hold. A jar louder than the howling of the wind ascended upward as the boilers exploded, and the ill-fated "Flying Kite" sank slowly to the bottom.

Bruce clung despairingly to the line, and struggled hard to gain the surface. With a glad cry, he breathed freely again.

It was too dark to see, but, hauling himself along, he neared the slender haven of escape.

As he came within reach, a fresh danger threatened. The

waters whirled the wreckage fiercely round and round, and more than once the line was all but wrenched from his grasp. Still, he clung to it with the tenacity of despair, and, taking advantage of a momentary lull, worked his way to the edge of the floating spar.

Once, twice, thrice he essayed to clamber over the slippery sides, but the great waves beat him off. Suddenly his grasp was wrenched apart, and, with a cry of despair, he realised that his only hope of safety had gone.

But his cry was heard, and in an instant Haverlock's strong arm grasped the collar of his jacket. For some minutes the two men drifted side by side, one bound tightly to the shattered mast and the other kept afloat by the strength of his friend's right arm.

Then Bruce nerved himself for a final attempt. Turning completely over, he made a desperate clutch at the entangled rigging. It slipped, but, on running taut, he was overjoyed to find he could mount the spar. But his strength was nigh exhausted, and his hands benumbed by cold.

"Hold tight!" shouted Gordon.

The words infused fresh strength into the despairing man. Raising his right arm, he caught the entangled mass of ropes and struggled frantically out of the seething waters.

He was just in time. A gigantic wave lifted the spar high up, then dashed it down into the hollow and passed on.

Up and down on the crest of huge billows, then deep into the hollows, the wreckage drifted. All through the night a storm raged, lashing the waves into towering ridges, and sending tons of spray over the two helpless castaways.

Providence mercifully spared the doctor's life, for, as dawn pierced the inky blackness, he found that the action of the water had entangled him amid the ropes; and thus, like Haverlock, he was firmly lashed to the spar.

"You, Bruce!" cried the latter in astonishment, as daylight revealed his companion's identity.

"Yes; and you and I are the only survivors!" replied the doctor, explaining the loss of the "Flying Kite."

Haverlock listened in amazement.

"I fear," he added presently, "we are doomed, alas! The chill is terrible, and, helpless and entangled as we are, it would be impossible to attract the notice of a passing vessel."

Bruce shared the same opinion, though he said nothing; instead, he cautiously untangled the matted cords, and crawled along the spar to assist his companion. He gained Gordon's side, and commenced to untie the lashings. It was a difficult task, for the water had swollen the knots. Still, he persevered, tugging desperately with his teeth and hands, while, with his legs, he retained a firm grip of the mast.

In this perilous position they drifted on some minutes. Then, carried on the crest of a towering wave, the full sweep of the gale caught the wreckage, and spun it fiercely down into the hollow below.

The shock upset the doctor's balance, and, clutching desperately at Haverlock, he plunged forward, dragging his friend after him.

For several minutes the two men battled frantically with the waves. Bruce retained the rope between his teeth, and, with rare presence of mind, turned over on his back; while Gordon, guided by the line, struggled towards the spar.

It was a desperate attempt, but fortune favoured the two adventurers. Gaining the wreckage, Haverlock hauled Bruce back, and together they scrambled once more up the slippery sides of their frail craft.

"A narrow squeak!" gasped the doctor, horrified.

"Ay; but it may prove a blessing in disguise," returned Haverlock, much to his companion's surprise.

"Look!" he added quickly. "What do you make of that dark object hovering over yonder crest?"

The doctor failed to make out anything.

"It's so dark!" he exclaimed.

And, in truth, the lowering heavens cast their ominous shadow over the vast expanse of storm-tossed ocean.

Gordon strained his eyes to catch another glimpse.

"It's a derelict!" he cried hoarsely. "If we could but steer, it might be possible to board her."

In an instant a thrill of hope inspired the two castaways. They waited breathlessly till again the spar mounted on the crest of another wave. Then a cry of astonishment burst simultaneously from both men.

"By all that's wonderful, a balloon!" cried Bruce.

"She's bearing down upon us quickly," added Gordon, straining forward, he followed the movements of the strange derelict.

It was not easily distinguished in the dense gloom; and, as they dipped into the trough of the water again, the waves curtailed their vision. They waited eagerly, counting the seconds, which had never seemed so long before.

Then, almost before they knew it, the aerial monster loomed overboard, dragging her ear over the raging surface.

"Quick!" cried Haverlock, leaping to his feet; "jump!"

Bruce sprang forward as the ear struck the wreckage, and turned it over. Clambering swiftly up the sides, he grasped

the anchor and threw the line out for Gordon. The latter caught the end, and, swarming up the rope, gained the edge of the car and dropped inside.

The weight of the two men bore the car down, and for some minutes they floated in the trough of the waters.

"Throw over the ballast!" cried Haverlock, suiting the action to the word.

"We're mounting!" exclaimed the doctor presently. "Better leave what remains."

"No! Out with it! She's overweighted, and can never make headway in this gale. Quick! we're over the surface. Ah!"

Haverlock hung on to the edge for dear life, as, spinning round, the car struck the crest of a gigantic wave and partly overturned. Two sacks of ballast were washed out, and, thus lightened, the balloon sprang upwards.

Bruce had not been so fortunate. The force and concussion wrenched apart his grasp, and threw him violently against the wicker bottom, where he lay stunned and unconscious.

Working singlehanded, Haverlock lightened the balloon till, utterly exhausted, he was forced to desist.

Forward and onward, soaring upwards through the dense clouds, they rushed, whirled hither and thither, as the force of the gale either aided or retarded their ascent; thence into the impenetrable blackness of the scudding clouds, till, pierc-

ing the topmost layer, they burst into a broad gleam of sunlight.

The contrast evoked a cry of amazement from Haverlock, and for some minutes he was compelled to close his eyes, for the glare was unbearable. But the genial heat of the sun sent a warm thrill through his chilled frame, and by degrees he was able to look about and note the marvellous beauty of the scene below.

But other objects claimed his attention, and, for the first time, he noted that the balloon held an occupant besides his unconscious friend. Huddled up in one of the corners lay the body of a man dressed in the garb of the East. He was probably a Malay, for so Gordon concluded, as, bending over, he turned the unconscious form about, and gazed at the swollen face and horrible, protruding eyes.

The man had died of suffocation.

His next thought was to revive his friend, but this was no easy task, and he could only chafe his hands and gently raise his head, that the glow of the sun, might awaken the dormant faculties of the unconscious man.

Slowly, however, Bruce awoke from his stupor, and his astonishment exceeded Gordon's as he caught a glimpse of their surroundings.

"This is wonderful, marvellous!" he cried, attempting to rise, but finding his strength not equal to the occasion. Then his eyes wandered to the further corner of the car, and he caught sight of their horrible load.

"A dead body! Who can it be?"

"Some poor devil of a Malay, by his dress," replied Gordon. "His features are too distorted to indicate what nationality."

In spite of his professional instincts, Bruce recoiled. There was something hideously repulsive about the dead face, which both men felt instinctively, though neither of them knew quite how.

"There's been murder done here!" cried Wallace Bruce, as some minutes later he carefully examined the body. "Those are finger marks on the neck. And, see! here's a flesh wound!"

He laid bare the man's chest and exposed a ghastly cut in the side, just above the heart.

In drawing aside the clothes a small packet fell to the bottom of the car. It contained a little powdered opium and a large signet ring, wrought in gold, and evidently of Eastern workmanship.

"There's some mystery in this!" cried the doctor; "a mystery we must try to solve presently. For the time being we must rest; flesh and blood won't stand the strain that you and I have been put to."

It was sensible advice, but the danger lay in resting simultaneously. At any moment the balloon might descend, and their plight would be worse than before. So it was arranged that Gordon should take first watch, while Bruce slept. For six hours he kept a silent vigil amid those grand and solitary surroundings. The sun sank below the western horizon, tipping the layers of clouds purple and gold, and sending a splendid halo about the western heavens; then the stars shone forth in their myriads, sending streaks of silver light over the rippling sea of clouds, while later on, as the moon cast her pale beams over the scene, the effect was enhanced a thousandfold.

Haverlock guessed the time as best he could. When the moon attained the zenith he roused the doctor, and, lying down full length along the car, he slept till long after daybreak, rising refreshed and hungry. Greatly to his amazement, Bruce produced a bag of cooked rice.

"I found it in this locker," explained the doctor, pointing to a wicker-basket attached to the seat. "There's fruit, some papers, a quantity of powder, and two knives stowed inside."

Later, they examined the "find." The papers proved strange reading. They related to the loss of an English brig on the eastern coast of Formosa, and the attempt on the part of



SLIPPING DOWN THE GRAPPLING-LINE, HE GAINED THE STEAMER'S DECK WITH THE TERRIBLE EXPLOSIVE. (See page 6.)

"THROUGH EARTH, SEA, AND SKY." Complete Story for CHRISTMAS NUMBER next week. Commencement of "DICK DANVERS, THE YOUNG VENTRILOQUIST." Our Grand New Serial. Finish of the favourite Story, "UNDER NELSON'S FLAG."

Malay natives to seize the crew and barbarously murder them. With the single exception of Captain Hordfelt, the crew apparently perished. "I make these notes," wrote the captain, "that he who finds them may transmit the scrip to Dr. Wallace Bruce, of Teindale, England. My end, I am assured, is close at hand. For days I have been followed by two Malay rascals, who mean mischief. A secret of vital importance to Dr. Bruce is in my possession. The notes will explain." Then followed two closely-written pages of strange hieroglyphs.

Gordon read the context with increasing wonder. "This is indeed a strange coincidence!" he exclaimed. "What do you make of these figures, Bruce?"

He handed the strange document to his friend, who closely scanned the figures, and gave vent to a cry of horror.

"They refer to the snake-wort!" he said. "The secret of its whereabouts has been discovered by a Chinese scoundrel, who intends to obtain it. But how this Hordfelt could have probed the secret of these characters, and actually written them, surpasses my comprehension. Ah!" he exclaimed quickly, and his hand shook as though palsied.

"The man was some time captive in the Mi Mi Tower, in the heart of Thibet," he continued, "and there saw the counterpart. These characters were explained to him, and he was informed that a countryman retained a copy. Search has been made for the stone since my ancestor first brought it to England, and retained it as an heirloom, with a facsimile of these characters, which were given to him by an Indian fakir who happened to be present when the stone was obtained."

"The Mi Mi Tower!" interposed Haverlock. "It was there I saw the snake-wort. It is jealously guarded, and seldom shown to strangers. Ah! now I recollect! I was skillfully questioned, and asked if I had ever seen a stone resembling it. I had not, and must have convinced the rascally priests, for they let me go."

"By all that is fiendish!" exclaimed Bruce, "they have conceived a plan to unite the stones in the heart of London!"

Both men stood aghast.

"Which means—?" ventured Haverlock.

"That the peculiar nature of the chemicals of which the stones are formed will destroy every human creature which lives and breathes in that great capital!" added Bruce.

For some moment neither spoke.

"Are you really certain that the properties of these strange jewels are as deadly in connection as they are claimed to be?" asked Gordon. "It is, I know, a common tradition in the East, but then these traditions are not always reliable."

"But this one is!" returned Bruce quickly. "I have tested their qualities for myself. I know they exist!"

"Then we are on a fool's errand!" cried Haverlock. "We should be in London. And yet the man who stole the snake-wort is certainly bound for Yokohama!"

"Let us hope he may not be in league with these fiendish priests," replied Bruce. "He may be aware of the tradition, and yet not know that two such stones exist."

And such, as succeeding events proved, was the case.

Bruce carefully folded the strange manuscript, and placed it in his pocket; then, looking over the edge of the car, he was amazed to see the clouds had dispersed, and far below the shimmering ocean stretched away in one vast dark-grey patch.

"What shall we do with our ghastly cargo?" asked Gordon, pointing to the dead Malay.

"Bury him as reverently as we can," replied Bruce.

And together they lifted the stiff form and quickly dropped it over.

Lightened once more, the balloon soared further up, till ocean and sky beneath seemed blended in one faint line.

CHAPTER IV.

Land at Last—The Swift Descent—Besieged by Pirates—In the Nick of Time—A Dangerous Manœuvre—Sudden Flight—Engulphed in a Deadly Mist—The Strange Mountain—Triumph—A Dastardly Act.

Daylight again merged into darkness as the travellers drifted swiftly past. Each took his turn at keeping watch, and so the night passed on. Both Haverlock and Gordon carefully examined the balloon. A rough log had been kept, and they found it had been made in England, sold in France, and used in French Cochin China. A further discovery showed that Hordfelt had navigated the balloon from Foanhoa to Formosa, intending thence to escape northwards by way of Japan. His plans were somehow frustrated, for the last entry into the logbook spoke of two Malays accompanying him, ostensibly as guides, but really the spies of the Mi Mi priests, who, in some manner, had become aware of his intention to communicate with Wallace Bruce. The fact that his despatches

had been found in the clothes of the dead Malay confirmed the supposition that the Englishman had been murdered, and the two natives, left to themselves, had fought for the vital secret.

"Murder will out," said Bruce thoughtfully. "This is a strange and lamentable discovery. It will entirely alter our plans."

"We can do nothing till we set foot on terra firma," exclaimed Gordon. Then he added quickly, as dawn lit up the seascape, "See to the south that dark line? It's a ridge of mountains."

Bruce discovered a faint black speck on the horizon. It must have been eighty to a hundred miles west by south.

Presently they looked again. The balloon was heading straight for the dark line, which had become larger, and by midday the towering mountains and dark-grey shores of a large island rose from the ocean three thousand feet beneath.

"Open the valve!" cried the doctor.

And next moment the gas escaped with a rush, and the balloon commenced to settle down.

"Careful!" exclaimed Gordon. "We can't afford to expend much gas; there is no means of obtaining a supply."

It was difficult under the circumstances to know how to act. Bruce closed the valve, and for some minutes they remained stationary.

"Throw the grappling-rod over!" cried Haverlock.

Then, as the line spun out, the balloon again commenced to settle, at first slowly, then, gaining momentum, she dropped slantwise a thousand feet, and clearing the peak of a towering mountain, she sailed swiftly across a ridge of hills, and spinning forward, shot off the lee-shore.

A strange and unexpected sight met the travellers. Some thing like eleven hundred feet below they saw a large steamer running the gauntlet of two or three hundred lorchas. The war-junks were manned by hundreds of fierce pirates, and surrounded the doomed vessel with a cloud of dense smoke. Fire belched from every quarter, and the roar of the guns deafened Haverlock and his companion. But above that roar floated the hoarse shrieks of the defenders. Still the steamer raced madly on, cutting in half a couple of huge lorchas which impeded her progress; but as they sank others took their place. The crew, one by one, were cut down by the furious rush of boarders, who, clambering up the steamer's sides, fired volley after volley upon the gallant little band, which hurled them back.

A cry of astonishment and dismay told Gordon that the balloon had been discovered. A moment's pause enabled the steamer to forge ahead into the very midst of the pirate fleet, sending lorchas after lorchas to the bottom. Up rose the smoke from her two funnels, throwing a long dense black trail behind; and, as the last of the ruffianly boarders were hurled overboard, a hearty British cheer rose above the din and the shrieks of the drowning.

Gordon saw his opportunity, and embraced it instantly. Paying-out the grappling-rod to its fullest extent, he caught the steamer's mizzen-mast; then, throwing over the remaining ballast, the balloon strained upwards, assisting the hampers and steamer to cut through the dense mass of war-junks.

The pirates stood aghast as, one after another, their largest craft sank swiftly to the bottom, leaving a sea of struggling heads fighting for dear life on the surface. Then, finding that their prey was fast escaping their toils, they rallied once more to the fight.

One huge lorchas crossed the steamer's bows; her crew leaped forward as the vessels collided, and, rushing across the deck, the pirates met their antagonists with cries of rage and triumph. It was a gallant stand, but Gordon saw if assistance did not forthcome the Englishmen must be hacked to pieces.

"Hand me the powder!" he cried to Bruce.

Then, slipping down the grappling-line, he gained the steamer's deck with the terrible explosive.

Every moment was precious.

"Is this a passenger-boat?" he asked quickly, receiving a reply in the negative. "Then make for the stern, sharp!"

The crew fell back as, applying a fuse to the canister of powder, Haverlock hurled it into the midst of the furious pirates. Then, leaping back himself, he awaited the result. He chanced to look up at the moored balloon, and, to his amazement, he saw the figure of a man swarming up the grappling-rod. The pirates saw the catlike figure, too, and uttered a cry of rage. Some levelled their firearms. But before they could take aim, a terrific explosion rent the air, the deck was torn up, and hundreds of dead and dying creatures were hurled into the sea.

The falling debris blocked the engines, a grinding crash followed, and a moment later the helpless vessel swung round, locked firmly in the midst of the lorchas. Instantly the pirates rushed forward to the attack. Yelling hoarsely, they leaped over the bulwarks, and were met by the steady fire of the little band of Englishmen.

For some minutes they were held at bay; but, though discipline and courage retained the advantage, the enormous odds against them threatened every moment to sweep the crew overboard. Haverlock felt that the struggle was hopeless. One by one the gallant defenders fell, till only six remained to battle with fifty times their number.

Then a strange thing happened. Fighting back to back, thrusting, and guarding the strokes of their foes, the little band of six failed to see the dense grey mist steal up from the land and engulf the lorchas, one by one, till, closing round, it settled over the disabled steamer. Nor had the pirates noticed it, for, no sooner did they feel its warm embrace, than, uttering the most bloodcurdling howls of fear, they one and all threw down their arms and leapt overboard.

Haverlock gasped with amazement. He heard the shouts of the pirates as they made off, and presently the steamer began to drift leeward as the last war-junk put her helm about and steered out to sea.

The survivors cheered lustily as their enemies fled in so unaccountable a manner. They had yet to learn the cause, and as the mist deepened it became apparent. At first the vapour was pleasant; but gradually the deadly fumes of a sulphur spring was carried by its volume, and struck down two out of the six survivors. The men moved about uneasily. They were at a loss to account for this mysterious visitation. Someone cried that breakers loomed ahead. A moment after, another sailor threw up his arms, and, falling backward, gasped hard for breath. Then, through the dense mist, the surviving three could distinguish an impenetrable mass of vapour coiling over the water-surface, and slowly but surely enveloping the ship.

"Mount for your lives!" exclaimed Gordon, advancing to the mizzen-mast and springing up the grappling-line, while his two companions attempted to follow.

Up he swarmed through the dense vapour nearing the balloon, and, by the feel of the rope, aware that his companions were following. It took some minutes to gain the wicker-car, but, to his inexpressible relief, he found it hovered a few feet above the deadly vapour.

But his attention was drawn to a horrible spectacle. The man whom he had seen a few minutes before mounting the rope was struggling under the weight of Bruce. The unfortunate doctor had apparently been knocked insensible, for his antagonist was in the very act of hurling him over the edge of the car as Haverlock gained the bottom.

Springing at the cowardly villain, Gordon dealt him a furious blow, which sent him flying backward, and, striking his head against the seat, he lay for a time unconscious.

The shock almost knocked the bottom out of the car. But Haverlock's attention was immediately occupied in navigating the aerial monster, which, charged with an extra load inside and the weight of the two sailors coming up the grappling-line, dipped ominously, and in a second began to settle into the death-dealing vapour. He scarcely knew how to increase its buoyancy, and yet unless something was done at once they would one and all succumb to the deadly fumes. Suddenly he felt the extra weight below relax. The line swayed violently, then commenced to drag, a certain indication that the grappling-iron had failed to hold.

He called hoarsely for the two men to ascend quickly, and listened eagerly for some reply. But none came. The balloon took a forward turn, and slowly drifted out of the suffocating mist. Once more the clear light of day lit up the strange surroundings, and, for the first time, Gordon felt inclined to doubt the evidence of his senses.

A scene of magnificent splendour lay revealed. On the left towered a lofty snowpeaked mountain, its sides clothed in brilliant green verdure, and, as the eye wandered further down, camphor-trees and brilliant tropical plants lent their graceful foliage to the stirring breeze. But, as the valley at the extreme foot gradually unfolded, the scene changed to one of utter desolation. Wide yawning chasms, with sides coated with some dark yellow substance, and huge rugged boulders, and giant leafless trees, and here and there a mammoth image, contrasted strangely with the brilliantly adorned mountain sides.

The atmosphere was deliciously sweet and clear, and the sun seemed to shine with added intensity. Haverlock feasted his eyes on this strange oasis for some minutes. Then he felt a slight grasp on his arm, and, turning quickly, found Bruce at his side.

The latter seemed greatly agitated.

"Hist!" he cried. "Here! see! is the snake-wort!"

He flashed it in the sunlight, and its scintillating interior emitted a brilliant shaft of light.

"Our quest is accomplished!" he cried triumphantly. "The scoundrel who lies at our feet was the thief! It fell from his clothes, and I retained it. We had a desperate struggle for mastery, and, by a treacherous blow, he felled me. Never more shall it quit my possession!"

But, ere the words had been uttered, a crafty arm crept up behind, and, darting forward, wrenched apart the doctor's grasp, and hurled the stone far into the valley beneath.

Bruce and his friend gave vent to a simultaneous cry, and, turning fiercely, confronted the dark sinister features of the man who had once been the doctor's guest.

"Your triumph is short-lived, Englishmen, and the stone is irrevocably lost!" he hissed; "neither you nor any other soul shall now possess it!"

Haverlock recoiled. For the first time the man spoke the native tongue which Gordon understood. He knew that voice, and in an instant the man's identity was revealed. It was Iquorn, the Formosa chieftain, who spoke, a scoundrel whose atrocities had sent a thrill of horror through the whole length and breadth of the civilised world.

CHAPTER V.

A Struggle to the Death—Hurled into Space—The Fight in Mid-Air—Stranded—A Desperate Chase—In the Clutches of the Death Plant—The End of the Derelict—Ill Forebodings.

Taken completely aback, neither Gordon nor the doctor replied. Suddenly the latter leapt at his taunting foe. Iquorn saw the movement and dived aside; but the doctor was not to be daunted. Almost as swiftly he turned, and grappled with the chieftain. For the space of half a minute a battle of fierce intensity raged in the narrow confines of the wicker car. Then, without warning of any kind, the bottom gave way, and, hugging each other like wild beasts, the two men shot down into the abyss.

Gordon retained a desperate hold of the edge, and breathlessly watched the falling men.

Iquorn, wrenching free one arm, clutched frantically at the grappling-rod as they shot past. His fingers closed over the prong like an iron vice. But the momentum almost tore his arm from its socket as, swinging from side to side, he struggled to throw Bruce off. But the doctor clutched his foe with the tenacity of a bulldog. His immense strength, exerted to its utmost, nearly crushed the life out of the chieftain's body. Minutes passed, and still the men struggled and fought in mid-air.

Neither they nor Gordon, who trembled for his companion's safety, noticed how the balloon dived at every struggle, and finally, caught by the breeze, bore down upon an overhanging ridge.

With a sickening thud, the weight of the two men dragged the grappling-iron to earth. The concussion rendered both insensible, and half a minute later Haverlock sprang forward, and, by his agility, saved himself from a similar catastrophe.

Lightened of its load, the silken monster shot upward, trailing the grappling-iron along the mountain side. Haverlock sprang to his feet, and, racing after the line, attempted to recapture it. The race was long and tiring, but he succeeded at last in flinging the end round the trunk of a large camphor-tree. The rope ran taut, and, in another instant, cut the trunk in two. Again it trailed along, but this time hampered by the foliage, which repeatedly caught the dense undergrowth which lined the mountain side, the pursuer was enabled to keep up the chase. At length, to Haverlock's intense relief, the entangled mass held firm in the clutches of an extraordinary plant, in shape resembling a gigantic octopus. The lank, sinuous arms curled hideously round the mass of rope and foliage, and, as though endowed with savage ferocity, it perceptibly dragged the line down.

Amazed at this extraordinary phenomenon, Haverlock waited to see the end. Slowly but surely the balloon was drawn downward; inch by inch and foot by foot the vegetable wonder struggled with the aerial monster. It was a strange and awesome sight, and Gordon shuddered as he watched. At length the life-like arms coiled slowly out to retain the car, and as gradually and surely dragged it down.

Then the horrible plant entwined its branches about the mesh of ropes which bound the silken ball to the car; then, protruding other arms which had hitherto remained inactive, it quickly crushed the globe of gas within its grasp; finally, but the upper portion of the balloon remained, and Haverlock, who stood rooted to the spot, watched this also disappear.

The moving branches gradually met together, and slowly compressed their contents into an ever-diminishing space. Suddenly a loud report startled the onlooker. The silken envelope had burst, and the gas rushed out. But, though the sight had been strange before, it was stranger now. The plant's horrible arms seemed imbued with agonising vitality. They curled swiftly up, and lashed the air in a frantic movement. For several minutes these movements continued, till a thick volume of smoke ascended from the interior, and shortly the plant and its contents were enveloped in a sea of flame.

Haverlock knew what had happened. The friction had caused the gas to ignite, and thus the horrible vegetable was quickly consumed to ashes.*

He waited till the embers cooled, and cautiously approached. Not a vestige remained of the plant; the fire had burned down into the very roots. The only thing that had not been consumed was the iron grappling-rod. He recoiled, for it awoke him to a sense of his position. The only chance of escape from the island had gone, and in a manner which no man could have anticipated.

With a strange foreboding of coming trouble, he retraced his steps. But before he had covered half the distance the mantle of night swiftly descended, and Gordon realised that he was alone and had lost his bearings, while the friend whom he had grown to know so well might, perchance, be dead or dying far down on the mountain side.

CHAPTER VI.

Surrounded by Reptiles—The Snake-wort again—A Daring Ruse—Saved!—In the Clutch of the Foe—The Doctor's Plight—A Strange City—The Cell of Skulls—Midnight Watchers—Ghastly Torture—A Miraculous Escape.

The moon shone forth resplendently as the lost man wandered down the mountain side and struck the giant grey valley below.

Along the jagged edges of steep chasms Gordon sought for his lost companion. More than once he started back in terror at some imaginary cry, persuading himself that Bruce lay tortured at the bottom of some black, impenetrable pit. Far into the night he stumbled on, till his jaded limbs refused to move another step. Then, halting at the foot of a gigantic boulder, he rested wearily for support. Not a sound disturbed the stillness of the night, and the intense silence awed the wanderer.

Resting for an hour, he stumbled forward once more, and laboriously began to ascend. All at once he paused, and, listening intently, his heart beat fast at the sound which he heard. It might have been mistaken for the rustle of the foliage; but, experienced traveller as he was, Haverlock knew different. He quickened his steps, for he knew that a brood of snakes was advancing in the rear. The knowledge sent a chill of fear through his veins. Then a faint glittering object, some two hundred yards ahead, made him recoil in amazement.

He waited. The ominous rustle seemed to encircle him on all sides. Evidently a host of reptiles were advancing in a body. Then with a flash it crossed his mind that the glittering object ahead was the deadly snake-wort.

The doctor's story recurred vividly.

He stood rooted to the spot with terror. An ominous hiss issued from the right. It was taken up and re-echoed on all sides. Then, to his intense horror, the very ground about him seemed to move and quiver; while on came a dark line, gliding noiselessly over its surface.

Rushing forward, he made straight for the mark in the centre. A few paces, and he had gained it. Stooping forward, he grasped the stone, and, flashing it in the moonlight, knew that he had found once more the snake-wort.

His triumphant cry was drowned in the angry hiss of countless reptiles. He could see them now, as, converging towards him, they glided, with heads poised for striking, over the broken ground. He looked quickly round, noting their number and that portion of the line which was thickest.

Desperate, and at bay, he knew that prompt action was imperative. To any other man his plight would have seemed hopeless; but Haverlock had vast experience to assist him. He knew that where the snakes were most numerous, there lay the path of escape.

Running swiftly towards the thickest line, he nerved his energies and leapt. High over the heads of the foremost he rose, describing a semi-circle, as, landing ten feet beyond, he cleared the outer circle, and sped desperately over the rough ground.

A succession of fierce, angry hisses, followed by an agitated rustle, told Gordon that his ruse had proved effectual. But he neither stopped nor paused till, having outdistanced his deadly antagonists by several miles, he stumbled exhausted on the bank of a swiftly flowing stream. Too weak to rise, he lay through the remainder of that horrible night beside the rivulet.

The heat of the sun awakened him in time to hide the precious stone he had so strangely recovered ere a horde of fierce-looking Malays appeared on the opposite bank, and in

* The description of this wonderful and uncanny plant is written by Mr. Haverlock. The plant is a species of the upas-tree, and is indigenous to the island of Formosa. The natives style it the "Death Tree," and truly its horrible voracity well deserves the name.—ED.

a trice surrounded him. Then, as they carried him off, Gordon Haverlock, for the first time, lost hope.

But Haverlock's luck, which had become proverbial, did not altogether desert him, as subsequent events soon proved.

The natives carried their prisoner round the east side of the mountain, and, binding him securely, fastened the thongs to a rude stretcher. Four of the stoutest retained the stretcher, while the others disappeared ahead.

Judging by the position of the sun, Haverlock concluded that two hours had elapsed when he heard the tramp of many footsteps, and shortly after saw the party return, carrying Bruce in a similiar fashion. Bound, and unable to express their feelings, both men were inexpressibly relieved to find that the other still lived.

The marks of his struggle were plainly visible about the doctor. Still, considering his lamentable position, he appeared remarkably cheerful; and Haverlock, accustomed to rapid deduction, concluded rightly that Bruce had conceived a plan to aid their escape when a favourable opportunity might present itself.

Presently the disfigured and bruised visage of Iquorn loomed among the crowd. He glared vindictively at his victims, and gruffly ordered the cavalcade to move on. The men obeyed instantly, and, borne on the shoulders of four of the biggest-looking villains he had ever seen, Haverlock was carried forward. What their captor intended to do was a question which his prisoners inwardly debated, till, turning the crest of the mountain, their attention was otherwise attracted.

Low down on the slopes, which met a valley of exceeding richness, the Englishmen could see the fortified walls of a large town. They glimmered white and grey in the afternoon sun; and, as their captors followed the steep descent, the presence of people and cattle became manifest.

It struck Haverlock as being exceedingly odd that they had not discerned the buildings before. Nor could he satisfactorily account for the presence of the big mountain they were treading.

When the balloon passed over the island, he was sure the proximity of a snow peak had not been detected. Still, it must have escaped their observation, though the fact none the less greatly puzzled him.

The descent, though steep, was comparatively easy, and an hour before sundown the natives reached their city.

The captives could scarcely believe their eyes as they entered by a large stone gate, and found the buildings wore a strangely familiar aspect. They were composed of a white stone, and, though somewhat antiquated in shape and architecture, their resemblance to a European city was most striking.

One long, narrow street intersected the town, and up this the two prisoners were carried.

Crowds of women and children gathered round, and gesticulations seemed to imply that there and then they would like to tear the limbs of the strangers, and wreak a deadly vengeance on the white intruders.

But Iquorn, stern and forbidding, warned them imperatively away. He evidently wielded immense influence in this strange place, for old and young, man and woman, obeyed his orders without a murmur.

At the steps of a square one-storeyed building they halted. Their captors placed the stretchers on the ground and moved away, while the rest of the people gathered at a respectful distance. Even Iquorn seemed abashed as presently a string of white-robed figures, clothed literally from head to foot in flowing garments, filed out of the narrow door. They sang a wild, unearthly chant, as, forming into line, they completely surrounded the two prisoners.

Then the tallest of their number stepped forward, and, poising a two-edged spear aloft, let it glitter for a moment in the sunlight; then brought it, with a sharp whirl, down within an inch of Bruce's side.

One of the thongs which bound him snapped asunder. The aim was marvellous, and, much as he dreaded the repetition, he was forced to admire the wonderful precision with which his liberator manipulated the weapon.

Haverlock was served in the same manner.

Then Iquorn strode forward; and, speaking some strange jargon, evidently requested the white-robed figures to remove the prisoners inside.

This was done forthwith, and the two men were hustled into a close, dark cell. For some minutes both were too astonished to comment upon the strange sequence of events which had led up to their present position. But, finding the silence unbearable, Bruce related his story. He had not much to tell beyond the fact that, regaining consciousness, he found himself a prisoner among a band of dark-skinned ruffians. Iquorn had threatened him with dire revenge, which, apparently, he was about to take.

The doctor listened amazed at Haverlock's startling adventures, but, when the latter related the recovery of the snake-wort, he quickly silenced him.

"We are being watched!" he cried. And a shudder shook his frame.

THE DOUBLE NUMBER OF "CHIPS" COMES OUT TO-MORROW. IT WILL BE DOUBLE THE USUAL LENGTH, BUT ONLY THE SAME PRICE—1d.

Gordon looked cautiously round, and, horrified, discerned the glint of many eyes as they pierced the darkness of the cell.

He stopped abruptly, hoping the horrible eyes might withdraw; but, finding they still retained a watch, he huddled close beside the doctor.

A horrible silence reigned, and the two men felt their blood run cold as the white-garbed figures, seeming to issue from the wall, silently surrounded them.

By some miraculous means they entered the cell; then, as others following bore torches, the prisoners could not forbear a cry of terror, as they noted in what manner of place they had been put.

All around the four walls rose ledge upon ledge of ghastly, staring skulls. Through the sockets of some glinted human eyes behind. Even the ceiling had not been untouched. Crossed and recrossed were the blackened bones of men and

At a signal from one of the inibs, it was thrown open. They were driven down a broad stone hall, and entered an open courtyard in the rear.

Some rusty old cannon faced the entrance, and Bruce recognised their workmanship at once.

"Dutch!" he cried, for the moment forgetting their peril. "This must be the Miti city, which tradition asserts the Dutch built in the interior, during their occupancy of the islands, two centuries ago.

"This is said to have vanished unaccountably long ago," replied Gordon.

The courtyard was lighted with innumerable torches, which shed a ghastly yellow light over the scene of the preparations for their torture. In the centre of the courtyard stood the remains of an old flagstaff, and affixed to this at intervals, about a foot apart, were a number of shimmering knives. Beneath a layer of red-hot embers spluttered and burnt, as

other priests added fuel to the flames. Two cane stretchers had been placed beside the fire, and to these Bruce and Haverlock were led.

They were forced to lie flat, while four of their tormentors raised them aloft, and slowly poised them over the razorlike edges of the knives.

Gordon divined their purpose instantly. At a given signal the men who held them aloft would throw them upon the knives, which, cutting partly through their agonised bodies, would impale them, while by the fire beneath they would slowly roast to death.

Shivering with fear and horror, the victims waited for the signal. On three sides the courtyard was lined with a silent throng of people, hungry for the coming scene of torture and death.

Iquorn was present, and looked indifferently on; but a hard, cruel smile played about his mouth as he noted the evident terror of his human prey.

The tall priest raised aloft his arm, and for some minutes played with the spear in his hand.

At every movement the inibs who poised the victims bent ready at a moment's notice to hurl the quivering bodies over the cruel knives.

Once the priest made a feint at giving the signal, and the priests supporting Haverlock tilted him swiftly over, but in time saved him from falling.

The crowd shouted hoarsely. Presently the spear was finally raised in the air ready to descend. Instinctively the onlookers knew that the crucial moment had come, and an awed hush overspread the assembly.

Once, twice, thrice the weapon struck the air. Suddenly its

progress was arrested, and a cry of terror burst from the people.

Soaring down in their midst, a small white bird struck the ground and fluttered helplessly along.

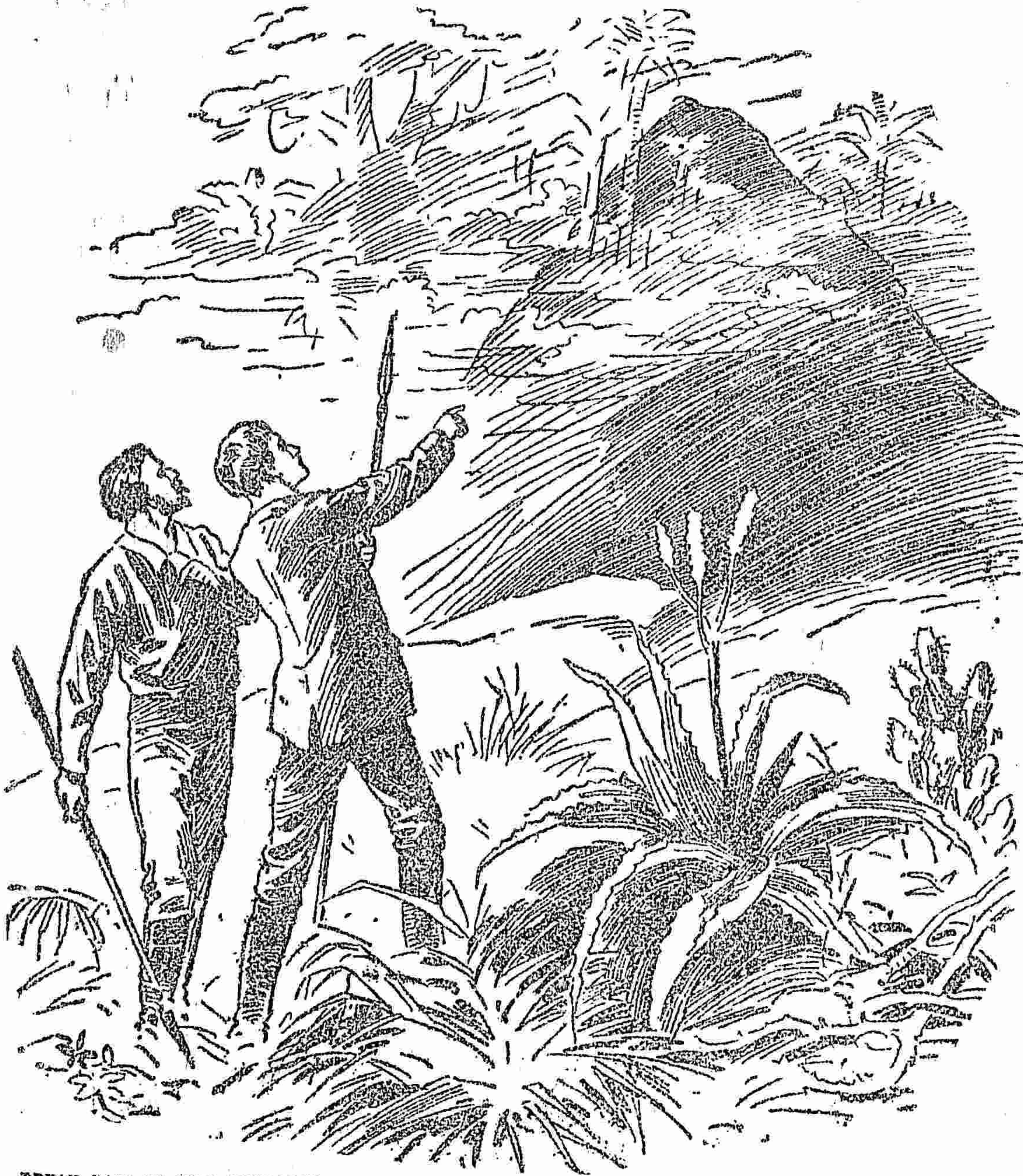
Iquorn uttered a hoarse shriek of rage, as, recoiling aghast, the officiating priest struck the stone courtyard with the haft of his spear, and the two victims were quickly released.

"The Aidak; * an omen of ill!" gasped the assembly.

Iquorn rushed forward. Contact with the outer world had dispelled much of the vulgar superstition associated with his tribe. He saw that his prisoners were likely to be released, and single-handed he attempted to hurl Bruce over the ghastly instrument of torture.

A score of hands restrained him, and, baffled once more, he was forced into the background.

* A bird of omen. If the natives meet this bird with a worm in its mouth, they consider it a propitious omen. But should it cross their path or fly from them, they look upon it as a warning not to be disregarded.—Ed.



BRUCE SAW IN THE DISTANCE THE LANDSCAPE VANISH APPARENTLY INTO THIN AIR, EXPOSING BEYOND THE STEEP SIDES OF THE MYSTERIOUS MOUNTAIN. (See page 10.)

animals. It was a ghastly charnel-house, and the silent, ghastly figures that ministered to it seemed singularly appropriate in the dull red glare of the torches. In their right hands they carried the two-edged spear, and suspended from a belt about their waists hung the skulls of numberless victims.

"The inibs* of the interior!" whispered Gordon hoarsely. "I have heard of them and their atrocious rites: how they roast and flay their victims alive; how death to them is like a meal to us. We are in the heart of Formosa. Heaven protect us!"

He had no time for further words. The savage priests surrounded them, and, driving their victims on at the point of numberless spears, drove them slowly towards the door.

* The name given by the hill tribes of Formosa to their priests. Their savage rites are too ghastly to recount. Their religion centres on two deities—a Spirit of Good and one of Evil. They practise divination, and are supposed to be wonderfully expert at fortune-telling. Their power is supreme in the land. When enemies are not forthcoming for sacrifice, their people hunt each other, like the Dyaks of Borneo.—Ed.

Haverlock sprang to his feet, and, seizing a couple of spears, he handed one to Bruce. Then, dashing across the enclosure, followed by the doctor, he gained the low wall, helped his friend up, and leapt over. A babel of yells were echoed, as priests and people followed close behind.

CHAPTER VII.

Escape—The Flight Through the Chasm—A Strange Scene—The Phantom Mountain—Recaptured—In the Hands of the Pirates.

Iquorn led the advance. He knew the fugitives would plunge into the thick growth of timber which intersected the valley and stretched half-way up the mountain side.

The bloodthirsty hillmen, equally loth that their victims should escape, gained inch by inch on the flying pair. Still, darkness greatly aided their flight.

Suddenly Gordon raised a warning note, as a black chasm loomed across their path. But too late!

Unable to stay their progress, the fugitives stumbled into the depths beneath, and, dropping swiftly, were thrown violently against a protruding ledge. They heard the yells of their pursuers, and as they grew less distinct the adventurers breathed freely again. But they dared not move, for the ledge was narrow, and their feet hung over the edge.

Gradually the darkness grew more intense, and, chilled with cold and exhausted for want of food, Haverlock and his companion waited till the dawn.

The hours seemed interminable. Imperceptibly a dense yellow vapour curled up from the depths of the abyss. The deadly sulphurous fumes almost choked the two men, as, lying face downwards, they were forced to remain inactive.

Slowly the pale streak of daylight pierced the mist, and, faintly lighting up the chasm, enabled them to take note of their surroundings.

The ledge extended some distance in, meeting the receding cliff overhead twenty or thirty yards in advance.

The doctor cautiously crept forward, and, gaining the inside, he scrambled to his feet and assisted Gordon, who found, on attempting to move, that the fall had sprained his ankle.

For an hour they groped through the gloom, ascending by the path, till they reached a wide plateau, and suddenly emerged into broad daylight.

The plain stretched away for two miles; then dipped, as further on it met the ocean.

What struck the fugitives as remarkable was the absence of any mountain ridge either before or behind them. The country was flat, and richly clothed in vivid patches of green sugar-cane. On the right rose a forest of bananas, and skirting the shore drooped a row of cinnamon trees.

Haverlock started in amazement. The ocean sparkled ahead in the morning sun, while all around waving plantations sent their gentle rustle on the breeze; but not a sign of the mysterious mountain could be seen.

"Am I dreaming or not?" he cried.

"The mountain has vanished!" exclaimed Bruce incredulously.

"Impossible! It lies on the right, and must be hidden by the mist," returned Haverlock.

But, though they both searched the horizon for signs of its snow-clad peak, they saw naught but the landscape, brilliantly clothed with variegated foliage.

The doctor eyed his companion curiously.

"Look!" suddenly cried the latter. "What make you of that?"

Following his friend's gaze, Bruce saw in the distance the western portion of the landscape vanish apparently into thin air, exposing beyond the steep sides of the mysterious mountain.

"A mirage!" continued Haverlock; "though the substantiality about those mountain sides is not to be gainsaid."

They watched the vapour slowly roll away. Then, to their dismay, a shower of glittering spears surrounded them, and, accompanied with savage yells, fifty sleek Formosans, led by Iquorn, dashed forward to the assault.

Bruce was the first to recover his presence of mind. Seizing one of the weapons, he hurled it with terrific force at Iquorn; but the wily chief dived swiftly as the spear whizzed past and buried its head deep into the breast of the next man.

A cry of rage soared up from the natives. Iquorn urged them on to fresh effort, and, dashing into the midst of a sugar plantation, they quickly lessened the distance between themselves and the two fugitives.

But Bruce and Haverlock were desperate. They knew the chase must either end in death or escape, and so prolonged it till the very last moment.

It was useless, as they soon found, and, unable to move another step, they waited back to back, prepared to meet the onslaught of their angry foes.

With a snarl and a rush, the natives gained their prey. The

fight was sharp and furious, but the odds were too heavy, and the fugitives had to succumb. Their enemies bore them away in triumph.

As the party neared the outskirts of the plantation, it halted unexpectedly, for, barring further progress, appeared a horde of Chinese cut-throats, who, levelling their firing-irons, poured a leaden volley into the ranks of the foremost.

Iquorn foamed with rage, as his party, taken by surprise, faltered, and, making but a poor resistance, turned on their heels and sought safety in flight.

The Chinese, yelling furiously, fired a second volley after their hereditary foes. Then, roughly handling their three prisoners, Bruce, Haverlock, and Iquorn were carried along to the shore.

They had fallen into the clutches of Chin Apo, the ruffianly chief of the lorchas. He recognised the three captives instantly as having been concerned in the fight on the steamer.

Grinning savagely at Iquorn, he shook his fist at that scoundrel's face, and treated the two Englishmen with as scant ceremony.

The pirate gave orders that the three prisoners should be bound together, and in a trice his barbarous intention was executed. A score of formidable-looking ruffians tore off the Englishmen's boots and cut away the skin footgear of the native. Then, manipulating a line of stout cord, they looped it about the ankles of each man; and, when this had been done, the prisoners were urged forward at a rush.

Helpless, and retarded by the rope, they stumbled and fell, and the tough line, cutting deeply into their flesh, produced the most excruciating agony.

Finally, their captors, growing tired of the sport, carried their victims to the beach, and, after rubbing a quantity of brine into the wounds, shipped them into the narrow confines of a dark, ill-smelling hold.

Once a day a supply of food was shoved through the hole-way above; and for weeks the three prisoners were left to their own resources.

Fate was gradually, though surely, drawing the net which held the destiny of these three men; and, though they had undergone much hardship and peril, at the instigation of one of their number, yet their trials had only now begun.

CHAPTER VIII.

An Eventful Chase—The Pirates' Ruse—Treachery—The Fight for the Pass—Escape—An Unseen Foe—The Strange Savages—In the Heart of the Forest.

Gordon supposed their captor would transmit them at once to the mainland, but this Chin Apo had no intention of doing. In the first place, their capture was not the outcome of chance, but the result of a well-organised plan, conceived by the Mi Mi priests in the heart of Thibet, and executed by their chief and servant the pirate chief.

Steering a south-east course for Luyan, the pirate sailed round the island, and, keeping a sharp look-out for British and French cruisers, made a northerly passage through the China Sea.

On the eleventh day, greatly to his terror, Chin Apo was sighted by a British war-vessel, and presently ordered to stand by. Knowing that acquiescence meant detection, and to show fight was out of the question, he embraced the only alternative, and promptly decided on flight.

The cruiser gave chase, and, just before nightfall, caught the lorcha up, and, having disabled her by two well-aimed shots, sent off a boatload of marines with orders to board the prize.

The sailors drew alongside, but as they prepared to board a murderous volley was poured down upon them. For several minutes the fight waxed furiously. At length, finding they were being worsted, the crew of the lorcha employed a curious device. Quickly hauling up a portion of their ill-gotten cargo, they pitched it overboard. It consisted of several hundred sacks of coconuts, and these, being split open, disgorged their contents, which floated on the surface. Simultaneously with the emptying of the last sack the pirates leapt overboard. The boatload of marines drifted off, for the sailors found it impossible to make headway through the strange flotsam. Nor were they able to mark their wily antagonists, who kept aloof amongst the disbanded cargo; and when, in obedience to a signal from the cruiser, the bluejackets pulled back, the pirates gave vent to a loud cry of triumph.

Darkness quickly overspread the scene, and, crowding the lorcha with every stitch of canvas she could carry, Chin Apo steered straight for the rockbound coast of Annam.

Haverlock and his fellow-captive heard the din of battle, and, with quickened pulses, waited for the result. Crash! One of the shots fired from the cruiser tore through the hold, and found an outlet on the larboard port. It was just above

the water-line, and, peering through, Haverlock watched the fight. He dared not expose himself, lest the marines, mistaking him for one of their antagonists, should fire. But his feelings of astonishment at the pirates' ruse gave way to despair as he watched the boat put her helm about and steer for the cruiser. Then night hid the man-of-war from view.

When daylight entered by the shot-hole next morning, the three prisoners had resolved to utilise this mode of escape. For the first time in his life, probably, Iquorn was sincere in his professions of aid. Being the slightest, it was arranged that he should first attempt the passage, and secure a large coil of rope which hung over the vessel's side just above the hole, while, owing to the lorch's peculiar build, the attempt could be made without attracting attention on deck.

At the first blush of dawn the Formosa chieftain struggled through the narrow outlet, and, reaching up, caught the coil of rope. Unloosing the end, he passed it through the aperture, and, cautiously retreating, speedily regained the hold. Shortly after the hatchway above was unfastened, and the daily allowance of food and water handed down.

The three men eagerly devoured the slender rations, and, entering into the spirit of the proposed escape, for some time debated the best means of widening the aperture. Suddenly Bruce leapt to his feet.

"We're foundering!" he cried aghast. "See! the hold fills!"

His companions needed no other incentive. They saw the water streaming in through the aperture, and, by the wash, it was easy to tell that the fore part of the hold was already partly filled.

"Throw the line out!" cried Gordon. "We've not a moment to lose!"

Iquorn paid it quickly out, attaching the end to a beam that crossed the roof. Clutching it firmly, he next attempted to follow, Haverlock aiding his passage through. Midway he turned, and, with a cry of terror, struggled back again.

Part of his clothing had been torn from his limbs, while a nasty gash marked his left leg.

"Sharks!" he cried aghast.

And even while he spoke the ominous snap of one of these monsters sounded at the aperture, while for a moment the light was obscured.

The captives shuddered. Gordon made a rush to save the rope. He grasped it, and, almost before he could realise what had happened, it parted asunder, leaving the useless portion in his hands.

"You scoundrel!" he cried, turning on Iquorn. "This rope has been cut purposely, and this is the knife which cut it!"

He made a grab at the Formosa's vest, and, before the latter could prevent him, exposed the sheathed blade of a small knife.

Iquorn gave vent to a cry of rage.

"Fool! did you think I should aid you to escape?" he roared, completely off his guard.

Next moment he had reason to wish he had been more cautious. Haverlock leapt at him, and, catching him about the waist, hurled him to the other side of the hold. The Formosa's body struck the larboard aperture, one of the loosened planks bent outward, and next instant Iquorn rolled into the shark-infested waters.

But a fate far different was eventually to befall the treacherous scoundrel. His howl of fear attracted notice above. Astonished to find one of their captives struggling in the water, the pirates lowered a boat and picked him up. Others descended the hold, and found the water surging half way up the legs of the two Europeans. Escorting them above, the crew closed the hatchway, and, knowing their vessel was sinking, ran straight for the low-lying shore ahead. They cleared the foaming breakers, grazed a line of partly-submerged reefs, and shot forward into the waters of a narrow stream.

There was a strong east wind blowing, which urged the sinking lorch forward. The pirate crammed on every stitch of sail, and, battening down the hatches, kept the prow of his vessel pointing up stream, and cutting the water till the surface grew level with the deck.

The Englishmen watched the proceedings with increasing amazement. It was strange to see the craft still plough the water while not a line of her frame was visible.

Chin Apo was evidently ill at ease. He kept a feverish outlook, alternately on each bank. Finally the water-logged war-junk drifted aimlessly with the current. About a mile ahead the banks of the stream rose perpendicularly on each side, a hundred feet sheer from the water's edge. On the west side had been erected a triangular-shaped building, while, from a flagstaff in the centre floated a tricolour of France.

"A French outpost," commented Haverlock. "They're bound to see us, and, if I mistake not, they'll stop our captor's little game."

As he spoke a white puff of smoke coiled upwards from one of the walls, and next instant a dull boom echoed along the banks. A shot struck the lorch's foremast, tearing the sail

into ribbons and sending the spar overboard. None of the crew were carried over with the wreckage.

Instantly a scene of utmost confusion reigned among the pirates. Some were bent on fighting; and others, losing heart, leapt into the water and swam towards the opposite bank.

Chin Apo, with fifty supporters, stood at the helm. He knew that, once within that steep pass, not all the French in Cochin China could prevent him reaching the fastnesses of the Moi savages beyond.

"Shoot those dogs down!" he yelled, pointing to the cowardly crew, as they strove to gain the opposite shore.

His order was promptly obeyed, and others, who had wavered before, preferred to remain with their chief and risk their lives before the French guns rather than evoke the ferocity of Chin Apo.

It was evident the pirate wished to retain his captives alive, for he moved them to a place of comparative safety at the helm.

Bruce, Haverlock, and their treacherous companion waited breathlessly for the pirate's next move. The French opened a hot fire from the fort ahead, and presently a line of soldiers advanced along the edge of the cliff, and worked deadly havoc with their Snider rifles.

Still the pirate chief was bent on running the gauntlet. He issued his orders quickly, and, in obedience, his ruffianly followers plunged into the river, and, scaling the opposite bank, commenced towing the junk towards the steep pass. As they neared the fort on the opposite side a sharp fusillade checked their advance.

The country, being open, afforded them no protection; and, fearful lest the body of his followers should be cut off, Chin Apo resolved on a desperate move. The bank on which the French were stationed slightly overhung the river. At the extreme foot a mass of fallen rocks presented a secure foothold for some distance, till the water overlapped them further on. Calling to his followers, he swam quickly to the west bank. The crew plunged into the river, intending to follow; but the soldiers, detecting the move, concentrated a seething fire into the water below. One after another the pirates threw up their hands, and sank to the bottom.

Considerably lightened, the lorch caught a gust of wind, and, striking the opposite bank, remained for some minutes stationary; then a well-aimed shot ploughed her deck and burst into a thousand fragments above the stern. The shock tore off part of the upper deck, and, straining under the force of the wind, the lorch parted from the rocks, and glided slowly towards the pass.

The pirates who had towed her so far gained the floating deck, and, opening fire at the soldiers above, covered the retreat of their companions.

The last man to land uttered a yell of triumph, and, striking forward, Chin Apo and his horde of ruffians scrambled from boulder to boulder beneath the towering cliffs. But, though they were out of range, they were not yet out of danger.

The French outposts, seeing their foes likely to escape, scaled the edge of the cliffs, and, half a mile in advance, lighted the fuse attached to a submarine mine.

It was a diabolical revenge. A flash and terrific report followed, and next moment the lorch shot upwards, hurling shattered spars on each bank, and casting its struggling occupants into the agitated waters.

Bruce and Haverlock were hurled into the river, some yards in advance of the others. Chin Apo and his band had reached that portion of the bank which met the water, and, unable to advance on foot, were compelled to swim the intervening space.

The doctor saw the advantage, and, crying to Gordon, struck out for the boulders ahead. Together the two friends landed, and, racing forward, increased the distance between them and their dismayed captors.

The chief urged his followers forward, and, plunging into the water himself, reached the narrow ledge of broken rock as the fugitives disappeared behind a huge boulder three hundred yards in advance.

"The rock shelves in. Now's our chance. Hide!" cried Haverlock.

Bruce, following the example, crept between the boulder and the cliff, and, scarcely daring to breathe, waited till the pirates passed on. Ahead the path was rough and irregular, and, half carrying, half leading Iquorn, the pirates pushed forward.

Gordon and his companion waited till nightfall; then, cautiously proceeding, followed the track of their enemies.

They knew their only chance of safety lay in gaining the upper cliff before daybreak, for Chin Apo, finding his captives had given him the slip, would assuredly return, knowing they must be in hiding somewhere along the route. For several miles they journeyed on in silence. The path widened as they advanced, but its surface became even rougher, and the darkness still further increased their difficulties.

They must have covered about six miles, when a faint sound in the rear attracted Haverlock's attention. Halting abruptly,

they both listened. The sound grew more distinct. Someone was following.

The fugitives quickened their steps.

Suddenly an arrow whizzed past them; then another. And soon the air was thick with flying weapons.

The two men ducked simultaneously.

"We're caught in a trap this time, and no mistake!" cried Bruce.

As he spoke a dark moving mass rose up in the rear, and, uttering a succession of fierce yells, dashed forward.

"Quick! the water!" gasped Haverlock.

Plunging in, the two men swam for the opposite bank. The stream, however, had widened considerably, and the darkness was intense; and for some moments neither Gordon nor the doctor imagined they were being followed. But the unknown foe had seen them, and, giving chase, gained the Englishmen's sides as they battled with the swift inland current.

A chorus of fierce yells greeted their apprehension, and, forced bodily out of the water, the two prisoners were carried far inland by their savage captors.

The savages penetrated a gigantic forest, and halted about daybreak inside a large clearing, where the trees had been removed; though, to Gordon's surprise, the top had been thickly matted with a roof of branches and climbing plants. Daylight struggled faintly through in places, but for the most part the gloom was intense.

By degrees, however, their eyes became accustomed to the blackness. The doctor pointed out at the further end a high-domed pagoda. It was built entirely of wood, and from the chinks streamed the ruddy glow of torchlight. A line of conical huts extended down the two sides of the enclosure; while across the middle trailed the dark waters of a sluggish stream. It was crossed by the trunk of a great tree, hollowed in the centre.

Gradually the surroundings grew more distinct, and the prisoners could make out the tall figures of their captors. Their limbs were enormous, and the muscles as hard as steel. They carried a quiverful of arrows on their backs, and were equipped with a bow about six feet in length. It was marvellous how they came and went, seeming to spring from the very depths of the forest.

Gordon and Bruce were flung into one of the conical huts, while a sturdy savage was left to guard the entrance.

"Our adventures have reached a climax now," commented Bruce.

A remark which, later on, his companion had reason to remember.

CHAPTER IX.

An Astounding Discovery—The Struggle in the Dark—Overpowered—How Bruce Regained his Niece—Nemesis the Avenger—Home Again.

The hours dragged slowly on as Bruce and Haverlock, not knowing what might next befall them, waited for events to shape their course. Presently a light flashed from the interior of the temple.

The savage on guard uttered a terrified yell, and crouched against the narrow entrance of the hut. Other yells followed in succession, as the light slowly revolved in the dense gloom. The savages seemed terrified, and crouched with their faces turned from the glare.

With a cry of amazement, Haverlock pointed to the man crouching before them.

He was destitute of clothing, save for a small loin-cloth, but from his body downwards hung a tail.

The doctor clutched his companion's arm.

"We're in the hands of the Moi!" he cried, aghast; "the most savage tribe in all the East!"

"What!" exclaimed Gordon. "The blind savages of Annam?"

"The same. They can distinguish clearly by the dark, but light of any kind is fatal to their sense of vision," replied Bruce; adding quickly: "Our chance of escape is greatly increased. Ugh! what an awful hole!"

He shuddered as, catching sight of the black, sluggish stream which intersected the forest clearing, the hideous eager and wide-open mouth of a huge alligator rose from the surface.

The light lingered over the waters some moments, and, as though attracted by the glare, countless scaly heads rose to the murky surface.

The two men could see that the banks had been made perpendicular by means of faggots driven in, and these,

* These mysterious people have long been known to a few travellers. Recently a French explorer carefully described them. They can see only by night. Their other peculiarity is shown in the length of the vertebral column, which takes the form of a tail, and measures from three to twelve inches.—*Ed.*

extending two feet up, prevented the loathsome reptiles from clambering over the solid ground.

It happened, as the light flashed across the water, a gigantic savage was crossing the stream. He howled with fear, and, blinded by the glare, swayed forward, and over the rude bridge. A loud splash followed, and immediately a succession of agonised yells told only too plainly that the loathsome reptiles had performed their deadly work.

Haverlock shuddered; then recoiled, and changed colour, as, looking towards the door of the pagoda, he caught sight of a body of richly-clad Chinese monks. He knew their order instantly. They were the priests of the Mi Mi Tower.

"What can they do here?" he cried, having explained their identity to Bruce.

It was a query which for the time neither could answer, though the events which followed soon enlightened them.

The foremost priest addressed the savages crouching nearest in a harsh, guttural tongue. The latter, prostrating themselves in abject terror, seemed to implore mercy, though none was shown; for next moment a party of Buddhist monks appeared at the entrance, carrying torches, and dragged one of the cringing savages forward. They advanced to the centre of the clearing, gained the bridge, and, hoisting their victim into the air, swung him to and fro for some minutes; then, at the command of the first priest, launched the shrieking wretch into the waters. The cries of terror and agony were soon stilled. Then, turning on their heels, the monks slowly retraced their steps.

There was something horribly cruel about the deliberate way in which they wreaked their vengeance.

Gordon started.

"This is the Temple of Punishment," he whispered. "His ill-fame is well known in Thibet. We have evidently been brought here to be delivered into the clutches of these dastardly priests!"

Nor was he mistaken. One of the Moi, keeping his eyes shaded from the glare of the light, addressed the priests. The latter replied shortly, and, quickly retreating, regained the pagoda and closed the entrance. Darkness again reigned. For some minutes neither Gordon nor his companion distinguished the advancing forms of a score of savages. They heard the faint rustle of their movements, and maintained the alert.

Slowly but surely the savages encompassed them, and, as they clustered about the entrance, Haverlock detected the moving figures.

"They're about to raid us!" he whispered hoarsely. "Stand by the other side, and wait till the first man enters. Throw your whole weight at him. I'll deal with the second!"

Bruce followed his friend's directions. Several minutes elapsed before the Moi attempted to enter. Then the savage who had kept guard advanced through the narrow opening. He looked cautiously round, and, perceiving Haverlock, was about to grab him; but Bruce, who could faintly distinguish the dark figure, sprang forward, and, as the Moi uttered his fierce yell, he flung him to the ground.

Confused by the shock, the savage staggered to his feet, and, grappling desperately with the first figure he encountered, he fought ferociously with one of his own tribe. The latter, in attempting to extricate himself, fell against Haverlock, and, wrenching himself free, turned on the Englishman.

Gordon made a desperate stand, and, aided by Bruce, kept his two opponents at bay for some minutes. But their united strength was unequal to the task. Besides, the savages, able to perceive their foes, possessed an advantage which their antagonists lacked. The Englishmen were quickly overpowered, and, binding them securely, the savages conveyed their victims to the pagoda.

Instantly the door was opened, and, while the Moi fell back, unable to stand the light, Haverlock and Bruce were dragged inside by a dozen fierce hands.

An amazing sight met their gaze. The temple was brilliantly lighted, and round the sides rose tier upon tier of gaudily painted images. A group of Buddhist monks grouped round an immense image of Guatama, rising from the centre. Before them, and standing on a raised platform, were several Malay women; while upon another tier stood Iquorn, the Fenian chief. Beneath, some of the Chinese pirates mingled with their monastic brethren.

Bruce was dumfounded. He could hardly credit the effect of his senses, and turned to Gordon bewildered. Haverlock was equally taken aback. His eyes were riveted on a small object reposing on the top of the image.

"The snake-wort!" he cried hoarsely.

The doctor's face assumed the pallor of death.

"There! there stands the man who possesses the snake-wort!" shrieked Iquorn, as he caught sight of Bruce. "I have never possessed it! Mercy! mercy! Deal with the snake-wort as you may! Spare an honest man!"

He shrieked piteously as a couple of monks approached him, carrying the writhing body of a gigantic sheesh-nag.

The reptile raised its head aloft to strike the shivering wretch. Its charmer had but to relinquish his hold and it would assuredly bury its fangs into the quivering flesh of its victim.

For a moment Iquorn remained speechless with terror. Then, finding his tormentors withdraw, he renewed his supplications for mercy.

"The Englishman! It is he whom you have sought!" he cried, pointing to Bruce.

The Buddhists turned on the new-comer with an angry gesture. Half a dozen of the foremost surrounded him, and, carrying him forcibly to the foot of the image, displayed on its lap the scintillating counterpart of the snake-wort.

Bruce recoiled. A moment after a piercing shriek rent the pagoda, and, darting through the circle of Malay women, Hilda Armitage sank exhausted and terrified into her uncle's arms.

"They have brought me here by stealth! They mean to kill you, and get that stone!" she cried.

Gordon, who had followed the doctor, stood alone some paces behind. To say that he was amazed at the appearance of his friend's niece poorly describes his feelings. Terror and amazement rendered him speechless.

A score of ruffianly monks rushed forward to separate uncle and niece. But Haverlock, rendered desperate by conflicting emotions, turned like a lion at bay, and, with an angry snarl, caught the foremost up, and, swinging round like a child, hurled him at his evil associates.

The man fell with a crash, bringing down two of the advancing crowd, who, in their turn, clutching at others for support, added to the confusion.

For a minute the snake-charmer hesitated; then, quitting his hold of the reptile, he joined the fray. The sheesh-nag poised its head, and hissed ominously.

Haverlock heard it, and, turning, caught Bruce by the arm, and, almost wrenching it apart, spun him swiftly round.

Hilda fell, and Bruce, stooping to assist her, missed the extended fangs by half an inch.

Like a lightning flash, Iquorn rushed past, gained the steps of the image, and, racing up, placed his hand on the broad top, and, with a triumphant shout, fingered for a moment the snake-wort.

Possessed of that he might brave any danger, and wreak a terrible vengeance on his foes.

The crowd of priests recoiled a moment in horror; then a great shout rent the pagoda, and a terrified stampede followed.

The sheesh-nag, attracted by the peculiar properties of the stone, coiled up the extended leg of the image, poised its head, and, darting forward, transfixed the wretched chieftain's hand, and in an instant swallowed the glittering stone.

Iquorn uttered one yell of fearful agony, and, rolling to the bottom of the steps, writhed in the throes of death.

The immense reptile turned and faced the audience. It struck the air viciously with its fangs, and, whether from fear or rage, emitted a loud purr. Then, gliding down the steps, it struck once more the blackened arm of its victim, and, sending its broad head high into the air, it hissed defiance at its foes.

Shrieking with terror, priests and Malays fled, flinging the burning brands behind. They spluttered for some minutes on the dry boards; then a great sheet of flame crossed the building, and, piercing the wooden walls, shot upwards, and, mingling with the forest undergrowth, sent a trail of fire from tree to tree.

Terrified at the sound of the fire and the glare of the flames, the Moi savages fled in company with the Buddhist monks; while, towards the east, by the way whence they had come, hurried Bruce and Gordon, with Hilda Armitage, who, though forsaken by her escort of women, still retained the services of a little Malay girl. It was a rough and toilsome journey, but on the second day the little party reached Hue, and from thence, after a week's delay, found a vessel, which, after being seven weeks out, landed them at Yokohama.

They reached Vancouver in due course, and, crossing the broad continent of America, sailed for home and England from Quebec.

The party had not diminished in size when, at Teindale, Gordon took Hilda's hand in his, and placed on one of the slender fingers held out to him a small circlet of gold, into

which had been set what most people supposed to be a blue diamond of exceeding lustre.

The snake-wort had been cut, and, for better or worse, Hilda Armitage joyfully accepted a portion.

CHAPTER X.

Concerning the Snake-wort Mystery—A Dastardly Device—Entrapped—Finis.

When Hilda Armitage was left in charge of the doctor's household, and her uncle, with his new-found friend, had gone, the events of the preceding days recurred so vividly as to impress her with a vague sense of alarm. Moreover, Dr. Sharpe, her uncle's locum tenens, seemed curiously anxious to



INCH BY INCH THE VEGETABLE WONDER STRUGGLED WITH THE AERIAL MONSTER. THE LANK, SINUOUS ARMS CURLED HIDEOUSLY AROUND THE MASS OF ROPES, AND SLOWLY BUT SURELY THE BALLOON WAS DRAGGED DOWNWARDS. (See page 7.)

probe the underlying secret of his fellow-practitioner's sudden departure. Not dreaming there was any harm in telling him, Hilda explained all she knew. Sharpe's eyes opened wide as he listened, and, going out one morning, he remarked to himself:

"A nice pickle I've made of it all these years! To think the stone should have been in Bruce's possession, and yet I, who am a constant visitor, have neither seen nor heard of it. This will be good news to despatch when the mail for Burmah leaves. But wait! what am I about? The stone is lost, and the owner is about the quest!"

News which he forthwith transmitted to the East. As a matter of fact, Dr. Sharpe was a European agent of the Mi Mi priests, and bound by them to report all he knew concerning the snake-wort. It happened, however, that two decoys

"THE BLUE ROOM MYSTERY." Grand original Serial Story now commencing in "COMIC CUTS," 1d. Begin at once. You will be just in time.

had already been despatched, who, finding their victim on a similar errand to themselves, acted at the instigation of their superiors, and, by a plausibly concocted story, induced Hilda to accept their credentials. Being a couple of Malay women, they professed to bring a letter from the doctor, in which he expressed a wish for Hilda to join him in Hainan.

"I caught the very next boat out," cried Hilda, "and never suspected treachery till we landed. I was a terrible coward, though my captors treated me very well. They intended keeping me till you, uncle, were able to buy my ransom with the snake-wort. We left Hainan a fortnight after I landed, and, reaching the mainland by a large junk, traversed through an immense forest. The party seemed to be well posted in your movements, and those of the wretched man whom the Chinese pirate brought in."

Then Hilda explained how the savages had captured the pirate and his band, and how, presenting them to the priests of the Temple of Punishment, they had been released, with the exception of Iquorn.

Not long ago a report went the rounds of the papers that a jewel of extraordinary brilliance had been found in a huge specimen of the sheesh-nag.

The doctor smiled.

"Ah!" remarked he, "so far from being a myth, the snake-wort is a terrible reality. Let its influence in future repay the struggle it has cost to retain."

To which Hilda and Gordon would reply that the stone had its virtues, and not the least of which had been the orthodox finale to these startling adventures.

THE END.

"UNDER NELSON'S FLAG." (TRAFALGAR.)

Lily ordered the mastiff to enter the library. Then she shut the door, and, hurrying upstairs, returned as soon as the carriage was at the door.

"If you will allow me," said Meredy, "I will ride beside the driver, so that I may direct him to the spot where the poor young fellow lies."

Lily gladly agreed to this, and Meredy mounted the box. They were now nearing the spot where Alec lay, when Meredy drew a pistol slowly from his pocket. Then, with the left hand, he struck the old man's hat from his head, and with the pistol-butt dealt him a murderous blow.

The coachman pitched from the box into the road, where he lay senseless.

Lily, who had noticed what was going on, uttered a cry for help; but none were near that lonely spot to hear her, and, as she tried to spring from the carriage, Meredy seized her wrist with a strength that bruised the flesh.

At that moment the horses started off at a rapid pace, which increased each instant, until the carriage was dashing along the road at a fearful speed. Meredy was terrified now, and he released his hold of Lily's wrist.

Before they had proceeded many hundred yards there was a fearful concussion. The carriage swayed on its wheels, then over it went, and the plunging horses, smashing the traces, galloped on.

Lily was uninjured, and she soon sprang from the carriage; but Meredy, who had also escaped with a few bruises, had already extricated himself from the overturned vehicle, and, directly Lily sprang out, he again caught hold of her wrist.

"No, no, my pretty bird!" he cried. "You do not escape me so easily. I am going to keep you captive for some time, if only to frighten your precious brother!"

"Release me, you ignoble coward!" cried Lily, struggling to free her hand from the ruffian's grasp. "My brother will chastise you for this insult. Help!" she cried once more, as he tried to drag her along the road.

But this time her cry was answered. A brave friend, and one who would die for her, was near, as a deep growl proclaimed. Carlo had escaped from the library and followed the carriage.

Lily heard the growl, but, fierce though it was, it caused her no fear. She guessed at once that it was the mastiff.

"Seize him, Carlo!" she cried. "Help, good dog!"

Carlo needed no second bidding. Uttering a howl of rage, the great mastiff sprang at Meredy, and, seizing him by the breast, shook him as though he had been a rat. The terrified wretch uttered a shriek of despair, and tried to draw his pistol; but the great dog had him at his mercy, and he showed him none.

Fearful that the mastiff would kill the shrieking wretch, Lily tried to call the dog off; but Carlo meant to have his own way this time, and Meredy knew it to his cost. Before Lily could get the dog off Meredy was bitten in a terrible manner,

and, even when he was released and struggled to his feet, Carlo stood in front of him, growling furiously.

"You had better go," said Lily.

Mad with rage and pain, the ruffian took a few steps along the road; then, drawing his pistol, he turned, and deliberately fired at Lily.

The ball did not strike her, but it whizzed so close past her face that she uttered a cry of terror. Meredy darted along the road; but he heard the panting breath of the mastiff as it leapt after him. In a very few bounds Carlo came up; then Meredy shrieked with terror and pain as the fangs fastened in his flesh. Before the dog would release his hold Meredy was so fearfully mauled that it was as much as he could do to stagger to his feet, and thus he made his way back to the tavern.

Carlo walked first one side of his mistress, then the other, and he occasionally uttered fierce growls, as though to show he was quite ready for a little more fighting.

Presently he stopped, and Lily, hearing footsteps along the road, kept close to her brave protector, who stood perfectly motionless, growling angrily. As the footsteps approached the mastiff moved slowly forward.

"Is that you, Carlo?" demanded a voice which Lily recognised as the coachman's. Then the dog uttered a joyful bark, and, when the old man came up, Lily told him what had happened.

The mastiff seemed now to quite understand what was required of him, for he walked a short distance ahead of Lily and the coachman, and presently he stopped at a clump of bushes by the side of the road.

"Steady, Carlo! It's a friend, boy! Lean on my arm, Miss Lily. Come, come! don't give way."

The old man knew that the fright which caused the catching of Lily's breath was the sight of a motionless form lying stretched on the ground beside the bushes.

Carlo stepped up to it; then, raising his head in the air, howled mournfully, and Lily sobbed outright.

"There, there, my child!" said the old man, who had nursed her when a baby. "Be brave, like you always are. Steady, miss!"

John knelt beside the prostrate form, and Lily clasped her hands until the rings she wore cut into the flesh. She recognised Alec's pallid face, and she felt as though the old coachman's next words would be her death-blow.

The old man placed his hand over Alec's heart.

"He lives, miss," he said.

Then Lily knelt beside her hero, and no mortal heard her words of thankfulness.

The pistol-ball had grazed Alec's temple and stunned him. Now he began to show signs of returning consciousness, and before many minutes had elapsed he was able to rise to his feet with John's assistance.

Lily supported him the other side, and, after much difficulty and many rests, for Alec was badly wounded, they reached the mansion, where they were met by Lady Richardson, who had returned, and the doctor for whom Lily had sent.

"Sit down, young sir," said the doctor. "A few minutes rest, then we shall be able to get you upstairs. Dear, dear! this is a bad job, but no doubt we shall soon be well. Keep perfectly quiet now. I cannot allow the slightest excitement."

When Lily told all that had happened, Alec kept his eyes fixed on her as he listened to every word.

"Now, my dear young sir," said the doctor, who watched Alec's face as it grew very stern. "I must really insist on your remaining perfectly calm. Excitement in your present wounded condition might prove fatal. What was the man like, Miss Richardson?"

"Tall and dark," replied Lily. "He was a very big man, and he had a deep scar down one cheek."

Alec sprang to his feet, and, without knowing it, drew his sword. The little doctor sprang away from him, but Lily felt no more fear than she had done when standing beside the angry mastiff.

"By Heaven, that man shall answer to me for this villainy!" cried Alec. "As sure as I am a living man I will strike him down for that deed of cowardice! Pardon me, ladies. Such deeds madden me."

"My dear young sir, pray be calm," said the doctor. "Where are you going?"

"To avenge the deed!" cried Alec.

"To go out in that wounded condition is certain death," cried the doctor. "He is the worst patient I ever had! If it were not for your ladyship I would throw up the case. He should be stopped by force!"

"I am afraid none of us are quite competent to do that," said Lady Richardson, smiling at the doctor's indignation. "Suppose you try to stop him by force of persuasion, Lily?"

Blushing slightly at her mother's words, Lily hurried into the hall, and endeavoured to restrain the young lieutenant from his purpose.

"It is impossible!" replied Alec. "What would your brother think of me? What should I think of myself?"

would risk my life to be of service to you, but I cannot grant your request. I know what my duty is to you and your mother. I shall do it. Pray don't argue. It is quite useless, and to refuse anything to you causes me deep pain."

"But where shall you go? And, if you find that man, what shall you do?"

"I shall call him out!" replied Alec firmly. "He shall meet me face to face. Farewell!"

Lily's eyes were lowered now, nor dare she raise them for fear he should read the secret she would not confess even to herself. But Alec saw her face turn white, and, guessing the cause, a feeling half of joy and half of sorrow came over him.

Then he went out into the darkness of the night to avenge the insult offered to Lily, and she, drying the tears from her pretty eyes, went to tell her mother of her want of success.

Alec thought it very unlikely that Meredy would go back to London that night, considering the lateness of the hour and the fact that he had been badly bitten by the mastiff; therefore it occurred to Alec that the ruffian would seek refuge at the tavern by the river where once before he had hidden.

It was some considerable distance to this place, but Alec determined to at once proceed there. His wound caused him much suffering, but the remembrance of Meredy's villainy urged him on.

A dense fog hung over the river when he drew near to it, and he was quite close to the tavern before he could distinguish the lights. Cautiously stepping up to the window, he glanced through.

The room was full of some of the most desperate-looking ruffians, but Meredy was not amongst them. Alec approached the door, and was about to knock to question the landlord, when he thought he heard a stealthy footstep coming towards him. For a few moments he remained listening, and presently, through the dense fog, he saw a tall form.

The man stopped when he caught sight of Alec; then he turned. It was Meredy, and he feared to face the brave young lieutenant sword to sword. So thick was the fog that Meredy had little difficulty in escaping, and, when he could no longer see his pursuer, he stopped to listen. He could hear Alec's footsteps approaching, and again the cowardly ruffian hurried on. But before he had taken a dozen steps he trod into space; then, with a cry of terror, he plunged headlong into the swift-flowing waters of the river. When he rose to the surface a sharp pain seized his legs. The sudden cold had caused a spasm of cramp which rendered him perfectly helpless, and, as the rapid current swept him out to sea, he again sank beneath the surface. Thus thrice the wretched man sank; his frantic struggles grew feebler, and soon they ceased altogether. Charles Meredy had gone to give an account of his many crimes!

Alec had heard his cries; but in the dense fog he had not known which way to go to his foe's aid, for he would not have let him die like that. At last he turned from the spot, and wearily made his way back to Lady Richardson's mansion. And now he began to feel the effects of the wound which he had treated so lightly. It was terrible to him to lie inactive when he knew that fresh glories were awaiting him. Although he received unremitting attention, he made but very slow progress, and the fear began to haunt him that he would be unable to take part in the last great struggle.

Then came the news that Nelson had returned to England, and the "Victory" was to be refitted at Portsmouth, while Harry Richardson came to spend the interval with his mother. Alec's hope returned, for he knew that he would be by his beloved commander's side now in the last great struggle, and he regained strength in a manner that surprised his doctor.

At last the day arrived when Alec and Harry received orders to join their vessel, and once more the "Victory" sailed to meet the foe. The combined fleets of the French and Spaniards were anchored in Cadiz Bay, and, fearing that they would not put out to sea if they once learnt his strength, Nelson, keeping out of sight of land, took up his position some fifty miles to the west of Cadiz.

Some anxious days and nights were passed. Then the combined fleets were sighted, and, in spite of the superiority of numbers and the size of their vessels, Nelson gave the order to bear down on them.

In breathless silence the officers and men watched their heroic commander as he passed them in his Admiral's coat, on the breast of which were the four badges of his Orders. Then a cheer arose from the officers and men, for Nelson's last signal was run aloft—that signal which will be engraved on British hearts for all time. Proudly those banners floated in the western breeze; nobly that signal was obeyed:

"ENGLAND EXPECTS EVERY MAN TO DO HIS DUTY!"

Then proudly Lord Nelson looked round at his gallant fleet. "I can do no more," he said. "We can only trust to the great Disposer of all events and to the justice of our cause. I

thank Heaven for this great opportunity of doing my duty in this my last battle!"

Alec felt a sickening fear when he heard these words, which were not the first that Nelson had uttered to the same effect. It seemed as though he foresaw his death. Making his way forward, Alec sought his old comrades, Mike and Jack, and he grasped their honest hands.

"Heaven keep you, my dear old friends!" he said. "Your kindness to me when I was but a powder-monkey will never be forgotten."

"Sure, now, it's very good to talk like that, sir!" exclaimed Mike. "We are going to beat them!"

"Nelson is on the bridge," replied Alec quietly.

"True for you! But I wish he would take those stars off his left breast, or cover them over. There will be sharpshooters aboard the foe, and they are bound to pick him off! Can't you ask him, sir?"

"I will try, Mike; but I doubt if I shall be successful. Now, farewell."

Alec's request, which was backed up by the other officers, was, however, without effect.

"I gained them in honour," said Nelson, placing his hand upon the glittering stars, "and in honour I will die with them!"

Then that awful battle began—a battle which covered Britain's sons with glory and filled their hearts with grief.

Nelson, as was his custom, had hoisted several flags aboard his vessel for fear one should be shot away, and, as the "Victory" sailed towards the foe, they opened fire. The roar of the "Victory's" guns had not yet burst forth, and, in spite of an incessant fire which raked her fore and aft, she bore down on the huge four-decker "Santissima Trinidad."

The first to fall aboard the "Victory" was the Admiral's secretary; then eight marines were struck down by a double-headed shot, and the Admiral ordered the survivors to be removed from the awful fire to which his own brave breast was exposed.

As Alec watched that heroic commander, who knew not what the word "fear" meant, he dreaded each moment that he would fall. Even as he watched, a ball struck the bracebita and shrieked past between Nelson and his captain.

So far the gunners on the "Victory" had waited for the order to open fire, and when a shot carried one of the brave fellows into eternity, another man, all undaunted, would take his place, to wait for the signal, should he be destined to hear it; and while they waited half a hundred men were mown down.

Then came the order. Port and starboard guns flashed into the thickening smoke; shot and shell shrieked through the sulphurous air.

The "Victory's" helm was ported, and she ran down on the "Redoutable," who received her with a broadside, then closed her ports lest she should be boarded. Then, from her rigging, came bright flashes, and bullets rained upon the "Victory's" decks.

Louder each moment grew the battle's roar. The crashing of timbers, the shouts of the combatants, the roll of musketry from the Frenchman's rigging, and the shrieks of the wounded, all mingling in awful uproar. The muzzles of the "Victory's" guns, as they were run out, actually touched the "Redoutable's" side, so that when they were fired, and the shots crashed their way through her timbers, the Frenchmen were compelled to dash buckets of water into the jagged holes so that the vessel might not take fire. And while the starboard guns of the "Victory" were dealing death and devastation aboard the "Redoutable," her port guns were hurling shot and shell into the "Santissima Trinidad" and the "Bucentaure."

Twice Nelson gave the order to cease firing on the "Redoutable," because, her guns now being silent, he believed she had surrendered, though she carried no flag to strike.

At this moment Alec saw a man in the "Redoutable's" mizen-top, which was not twenty yards from where Nelson stood, level his musket and deliberately fire at the Admiral. With a feeling of anguish impossible to describe, Alec saw his commander fall forward on his face; then our hero pointed with his sword to the man who had done that deed, and two midshipmen fired. One of the balls pierced the Frenchman's head and the other his breast, and he fell lifeless to the deck; but not before his work was done.

Then never before had British warriors fought more furiously. The "Redoutable" soon struck, and ship after ship followed her example.

"They have done for me at last, Hardy," said Nelson to his captain, as he fell.

"I trust not," replied Captain Hardy, motioning to some men to raise the Admiral.

"Yes," said Nelson; "my backbone is shot through."

[Conclusion of this story next week in our Christmas Number, which will contain also the commencement of our new continued story, "Dick Danvers, the Young Ventriloquist."]

Our New Serial Story will be illustrated every week by one of the best "MARVEL" Artists, and we can safely say it will be the best Serial Story that has appeared in the pages of the "MARVEL."

The Editor Speaks

Horatio is now convalescent. You remember his sad accident last week, of course? He resumed work at our office to-day, and at the present moment is employed—

"Ugh! yah! Who stuck that drawing-pin in my chair? Pimple, was that you?"

"No, boss," replies Horatio Wellington, with that childlike look and smile of innocence peculiar to him.

"Sit a little further off in future, Pimple! Who is giggling behind that door? It is Crackers (junior office-boy), laughing at other people's misfortunes. Come here, you young rascal! What is that you are eating? A carrot? No; it's a saveloy."

To punish Crackers for being merry when I unknowingly sit on pins, I lock up his saveloy; but after a quarter of an hour, as I find three stray cats and four dogs from the street smelling round the desk which contains the precious treasure, I am obliged unwillingly to restore it to Pimple's junior.

Ugh! the smell hasn't gone yet!

Very good suggestion this, isn't it?

"DEAR SIR,—I think a great deal of your paper the MARVEL. It is truly a marvel of cheapness; but what I want to say is, that if you would put a competition in your paper somewhat like this—viz., that each competitor should put his name on a slip of paper and then on the corner of the envelope he sends in, and enclose a penny stamp, and then put all the slips in a hat, and then let Pimple pick out a slip with a competitor's name, and send him a postal-order worth three-fourths of the stamps sent in, and keep the other quarter for your trouble, for I think you deserve it.—I am yours truly, G. McA."

Tremendously exciting, no doubt, a competition of this sort would be, but anything of this kind is now illegal. This is why one never sees competitions of the nature of a lottery in a paper at the present time.

Last week, I believe, we promised to give the names of those who sent the best answers to the four questions which appeared on this page a few weeks ago. Owing to the great number of answers we received, we have found it an extremely difficult matter to ferret out the real best. But the task having after many weary days been accomplished, here is the result:

1. Best short letter explaining the way in which ghosts are made to appear by means of mirrors?

On the whole, as the senders of the most excellent letters, we have decided to award one-and-sixpences to Mr. Harry Thomson, 33, Seafield Road, Dundee, whose letter contained a clever and neat diagram; and Mr. John Gittins, 51, Union Street, Wednesbury. Letters will appear later on.

Following are highly commended: Mr. H. Miller, Mr. Arthur Bowen, Mr. J. Kent, junr.

Following letter, which we received as well, gives a cheap and sensible way to make a ghost appear by means of a mirror. It is not from one of the prize-winners, as you might suppose:

"The best way to explain the way in which ghosts are made to appear in mirrors is for a person to stand in front of a mirror and cover themselves over with a sheet, and the form will then be reflected in the mirror.—Yours truly, W. H."

Laugh! Funny, isn't it?

2. Best description of an Indian (United States) costume?

In answer to this we have been favoured with several long discourses on the habits and character of the American Indian. One and-sixpences go to Mr. Alfred G. Gardner, of Red House Farm, Stoke Bishop, near Bristol; and Recruit Private James W. Scrivens, F. Co., Royal Marine Barracks, Chatham.

Mr. A. Shackleton and Mr. James Roy are highly commended for their answers to this question.

3. Short letter stating the necessary training and kit for a stoker in the Royal Navy?

One-and-sixpence to Mr. A. E. Rockett, seaman, H.M.S. "Wildfire," Gunnery School, Sheerness, whom we thank for the most complete list of necessaries.

4. Best daily diet for rabbits.

This question, to use a rather vulgar but expressive term, simply "fetched 'em." Letters came pouring in, and it was here we had most difficulty in finding the best.

One-and-sixpences are awarded to Mr. E. W. Ash, 33, Chetwynd Road, Southsea, Portsmouth; and Mr. F. J. Crane, 16, Sixth Avenue, Manor Park, Essex.

Highly commended are as follows: Mr. Alfred Taylor, F. G. Boddington, C. Palmer, W. A. Dennis, C. A. Charles, T. B. Thomson, A. Strongrist, E. Ellis, E. H. Barker, Alice Longfoot, R. W. M., P. E. Bowen.

CHRISTMAS PRIZES.

Seven-and-Sixpence, Five Half-Crowns, and Five "ANSWERS" Patent Fountain Pens.

All have a Chance. Eleven Prizes in all.

This is what you have to do. As next week's number is an exceptionally good number, having been produced at great cost, we want it to be as widely circulated as possible, and more people may become acquainted with our little holiday book.

As soon as you read this go the round of all your friends who do not take in the MARVEL, and get them to promise to buy a Christmas Number, which will be issued to the public December 11th (Wednesday), 1d., as usual.

Next Wednesday, when our Grand Christmas Number appears, go round again to your acquaintances, and see that they all have the copies they promised to buy. That being all right, just get them to sign their names on a sheet of paper, which you should carry about with you, under a declaration, such as this: "Although I am not a subscriber to the 'HALFPENNY MARVEL' Library, yet I have purchased a copy of the Christmas Number."

Forward, then, all your signatures to the Editor of the MARVEL, 24, Tudor Street, London, E.C. Envelopes should be marked in the top left-hand corner "Competition." In the competition we rely, of course, on the honour of all our readers.

A word about next week's story, which, as you probably have already observed, is written by Mr. Franklyn Wright and Professor Butler. Do you like "The Phantom Mountain" this week? Well, next week's story will beat that hollow. All readers of a scientific turn of mind should study it carefully. But to others it will be quite interesting. Does not the title, "Through Earth, Sea, and Sky," make you wonder what ever it can be about? Then "Dick Danvers, the Young Venetian," our new and original serial story, by Mr. Chad Heathcote, author of "The Scapegrace of Swishall School" and many other stories, which begins next week, you will, without doubt, like very much. Readers who have written asking for a school story will be glad to know there will be something of the school element in "Dick Danvers."

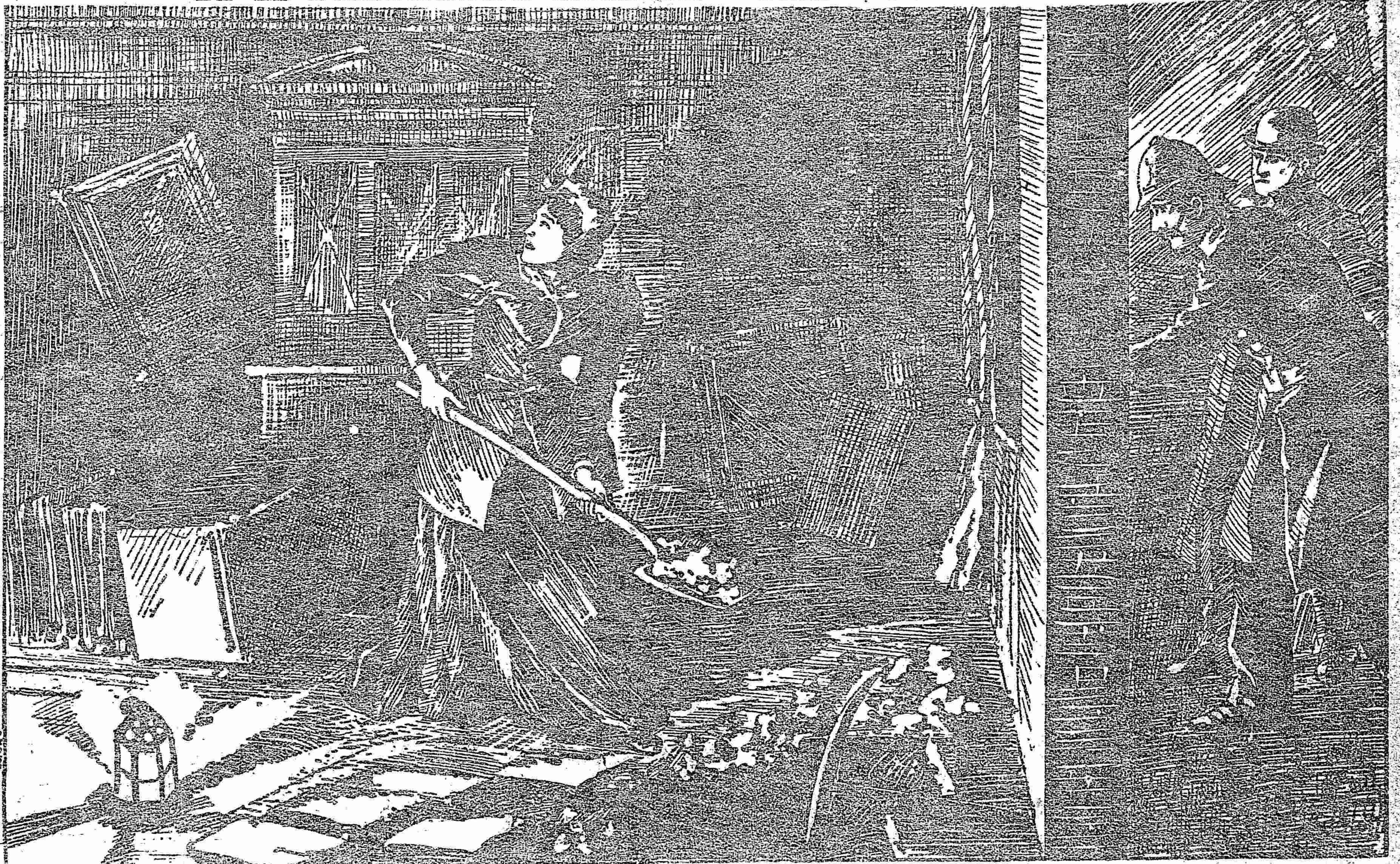
A good many readers, without doubt, will be sorry to learn that next week's MARVEL contains the finish of that good old story "Under Nelson's Flag," which has had such a long run in the MARVEL. But the author will not desert us altogether. He is now engaged upon a complete story for our paper, which will appear in due course. And now, just reminding you that the Christmas Number—the MARVEL (No. 110)—is out Wednesday, December 11th, I will close my "Speak."

NEXT WEEK. CHRISTMAS NUMBER. NEXT WEEK.
Special Story.

THROUGH EARTH, SEA, AND SKY.
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