

# The Further Adventures of Romney Pringle

## THE SILVER INGOTS.

BY CLIFFORD ASHDOWN.



THE morning was raw, the sun, when it deigned to shine, feeling chill and distant. There was no wind, and as they threaded the curves of the river the occasional funnels wrote persistent sooty lines upon the grey clouds. The park, with its avenues mere damp vistas of naked and grimy boughs, was deserted even by the sparrows, no longer finding a precarious meal at the hands of the children as yet only playing in their slums. There is little pleasure in cycling towards the end of February, and, preferring walking to the perils of side-slip in the mud, Mr. Pringle had walked from Furnival's Inn by way of the Embankment and Grosvenor Road, and now sat smoking on the terrace in front of Battersea Park.

There was a new moon, and the rubbish borne during the night on the spring tide from down stream was returning on the ebb to the lower reaches from which it had been ravished. As Mr. Pringle smoked and gazed absently at the river, now nearly at its lowest, a large "sou'-wester" caught his eye; it swam gravely with the stream, giving an occasional pirouette as it swirled every now and then into an eddy. As it floated opposite him he caught a glimpse of some white thing below it—the whole mass

seemed to quiver, as if struggling and fighting for life. Could it be a drowning man? Just there the river was solitary; not a soul was visible to help. Vaulting lightly over the low railings, Pringle sprang from the Embankment on to a bed of comparatively clean shingle, which here replaced the odorous mud-level, and reached the water side just as the "sou'-wester," in a more violent gyration, displayed in its grasp a woollen comforter.

Amused and a trifle vexed at his own credulity, Pringle turned, and, walking a yard or two along the beach, tripped and fell as his toe caught in something. Scrambling to his feet, he discovered a loop of half-inch manilla rope, the colour of which told of no long stay there. He gave it a gentle pull, without moving it in the slightest. A harder tug gave no better result; and, his curiosity now thoroughly aroused, he seized it with both hands, and, with his heels dug into the shingle, dragged out of the water just a plaited carpenter's tool-basket. The rope, in length about six feet, was rove through the handles as if for carrying over the shoulder. Surprised at its weightiness, he peeped inside. They were odd-looking things he found—no mallets or chisels, planes or turnscrews, only half a dozen dirty-looking bricks. Wondering more and more, he picked one up and examined it carefully. Towards the end was a faint suggestion as it were of a scallop-

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shell, and, turning it over, he detected another and more perfect impression of the same with a crest and monogram, the whole enclosed within an oblong ornamental border, which a closer scrutiny revealed as the handle of a spoon. On another brick he identified a projection as the partially fused end of a candlestick; and, when he scraped off some of the dirt with his knife, the unmistakable lustre of silver met his gaze. All six ingots were of very irregular outline, as if cast in a clumsy or imperfect mould.

A cold sensation about the feet made him look down. Unnoticed by him, the tide had turned, and he now stood to the ankles in water. For a moment longer he continued to crouch, while sending a cautious glance about him. In the quarter of an hour or less he had spent by the waterside only a single lighter had passed, and the man in charge had been too much occupied in making the most of the tide to spare any attention ashore. The terrace behind was quite deserted, and he was sheltered from any observation from the bridge by a projection of the Embankment, which made of the patch of shingle a miniature bay. As to the little steamboat pier, to the naked eye his movements were as indistinguishable from that as from the opposite side of the river. His privacy was complete. Straightening up, he turned his back on the water and directly faced the terrace. Right in front of him he could see a sycamore standing in the park, and, carefully noting its appearance, he scrambled up the ten feet or so of embankment wall, which at this point was much eroded and gave an easy foothold.

Once on the terrace, he walked briskly up and down to warm his frozen feet, and as he walked he tried to reason out the meaning of his discovery. Here was an innocent-looking carpenter's basket with half a dozen silver ingots of obviously illicit origin—for they had been clumsily made by the fusing together indiscriminately of various articles of plate. Roughly estimating their weight at about eight pounds apiece, then their aggregate value was something over £100—not a large sum, perhaps, but no doubt representing the proceeds of more than one burglary. They must have been sunk below low-water mark, say, about a week ago, when they would have been covered at all states of the tide; now, with the onset of the spring tides, they would be exposed twice daily for an hour. Could the owner have known of this fact?

Probably not. Pringle hardly credited him with much skill or premeditation. Such a hiding-place rather pointed to a hasty concealment of compromising articles, and the chances were all against the spot having been noted. On the whole, although it was a comparatively trifling find, Pringle decided that it was worth annexing. Nothing could be done for the present, however. By this time the rising tide had concealed even the rope; besides, he could never walk out of the park with a carpenter's basket over his shoulder, even if he were to wait about until it had dried. No; he must return for it in clothing more suited to its possession. As he walked back to Furnival's Inn, a clock striking half-past eleven suggested a new idea. By ten that night the basket would be again exposed, and it might be his last chance of securing it; the morning might see its discovery by someone else. The place was a public one, and although he had been singularly fortunate in its loneliness to-day, who could tell how many might be there to-morrow? This decided him.

About half-past ten that evening Pringle crossed the Albert Bridge to the south side, and turning short off to the left descended a flight of steps which led down to the water; the park gates had been long closed, and this was the only route available. His tall, lithe figure was clothed in a seedy, ill-fitting suit he reserved for such occasions; his tie was of a pattern unspeakable; his face and hands dirty; but although his boots were soiled and unpolished, they showed no further departure from their wonted, and even feminine, neatness. Since the morning his usually fair hair had turned black, and a small strip of whisker had grown upon his clean-shaven face, whilst the port-wine mark emblazoning his right cheek had disappeared altogether. At the foot of the steps he waited until a nearing waggon had got well upon the bridge, and then, as its thunder drowned his footsteps, he tramped over the shelving beach, and rounding the projection of the embankment found himself in the little bay once more. With his back to the water, he sidled along until opposite the sycamore, and then, facing about, he went down on his hands and knees, groping for the loop. Everything seemed as he had left it, and the basket, already loosened from its anchorage, came rattling up the pebbles as soon as he made a very moderate traction on the rope. What with the noise he made himself, slight though

it was, and his absorption in the work, Pringle never heard a gentle step approaching by the path he had himself taken; but as he hastily arranged the ingots on the beach, and was about to hold the basket up to drain, his arm was gripped by a muscular hand.

"Fishing this time of night?" inquired a refined voice in singular contrast to the rough appearance of the speaker. Then, more sharply, "Come—get up! Let's have a look at you."

Pringle rose in obedience to the upward lift upon his arm, and as the two men faced each other the stranger started, exclaiming: "So it's you, is it! I thought we should meet again some day."

"Meet again?" repeated Pringle stupidly, as for about the second or third time in his life his presence of mind deserted him.

"Don't say you've forgotten me at Wurzelford last summer! Let's see—what was your name? I ought to remember it, too—ah, yes, Courtley! Have you left the Church, Mr. Courtley? Seem rather down on your luck now. Why, Solomon in all his glory wasn't in it with you at Wurzelford! And you don't seem to need your glasses, either. Has your sight improved?"\*

Pringle remembered him before he had got half way through his string of sarcasms. He had not altered in the least; the shell might be rough, but the voice and manner of the gentleman-burglar were as Chesterfieldian as ever. Of all people in the world, he was the one whom Pringle would have least desired to see at that moment, and he prepared himself for a very bad quarter of an hour.

"It's lucky for you we haven't met before," continued the other. "If I could have got at you that night, it would have been your life or mine! Don't think I've forgiven you. I must say, though, you did it very neatly; it's something, I can tell you, to get the better of me. Why, I've never dared to breathe a word of it since; I should be a laughing-stock for the rest of my days. I, the 'Toff,' as they call me! But I can see a joke, even if it's against myself, and I've laughed several times since when I've thought of it. Fancy locking me in that room while you coolly walked off with the stuff that I'd been working for for months. And such stuff too! I think you'd have done better to act squarely with me. Those rubies don't seem to have done you

\* See "The Adventures of Romney Pringle": The Kailyard Novel.

much good. I never thought you'd do much with them at the time. It needs a man with *capital* to plant such stuff as that. But what's the game now? Who put you up to this?" He had been taking short steps up and down the beach, half soliloquising as he walked, and now he broke off abruptly and fronted Pringle.

"No one." Pringle had now recovered his self-possession. They were alone; it was man to man, and anyhow, the "Toff" did not seem to be very vindictive.

"Then how did you know it was here? You're a smart fellow, I know; but I don't think you're quite smart enough to see to the bottom of the river."

"It was quite accidental," said Pringle frankly. "It was this way." And he sketched the doings of the morning.

"Upon my word," exclaimed the "Toff," "you and I seem fated to cross one another's paths. But I'll be kinder than you deserve. This stuff"—he kicked the ingots—"is the result of a 'wedge-hunt,' as we call it. Nervous chap, bringing it up the river, got an idea that he was being shadowed—dropped it from a steamer three days ago—wasn't certain of his bearings when he had done it. That comes of losing one's head. Now, if it hadn't been for you, I might never have found it, although it looks as if I was right in calculating the tides and so on. As you seem in rather hard case, I'll see you're not a loser over the night's work so long as you make yourself useful."

Pringle assented cheerfully; he was curious to see the end of it all. While the other was speaking he had decided to fall in with his humour. Indeed, unless he fled in cowardly retreat, there was nothing else to be done. The "Toff," as he knew, was wiry, but, although in good form himself, Pringle's arm throbbed and tingled where it had been gripped. They were equally matched so far as strength went, unless the "Toff" still carried a revolver. Besides, the ingots were not worth disputing over. Had they been gold, now——!

"Well, just lend a hand then." And, the "Toff" producing some cotton-waste, they commenced to pack the ingots back into the basket. "Look here," the "Toff" continued as they worked; "why don't you join me? You want someone to advise you, I should say. Whatever your game was at Wurzelford, you don't seem to have made much at it, nor out of me, either—ah!" The subject was evidently a sore one, and the "Toff's" face hardened and he clenched

his hands at the memories it aroused. "Yes," he went on, "you seem a man of some resource, and if only you'd join me, what with that and my experience—why, we'd make our pile and retire in a couple of years! And what a life it is! Talk of adventure and excitement and all that—what is there to equal it? Canting idiots talk of staking one's liberty. Liberty, indeed! Why, what higher stake can one play for?—except one's life, and I've done that before now. I've played for a whole week at Monte Carlo, and believe I broke the bank (I couldn't tell for certain—they don't let you know, and *never close till eleven*, in spite of all people think and talk to the contrary); I've played poker with some of the 'cutest American players; I've gambled on the Turf; I've gambled on the Stock Exchange; I've run Kanakas to Queensland; I've smuggled diamonds; I've hunted big game all over the world; I've helped to get up a revolution in Ecuador, and nearly (ha! ha! ha!) got myself made President; I've— Hang it, what haven't I done? And I tell you there's nothing in all I've gone through to equal the excitement of the life I'm leading now. Then, too, we're educated men. I'm Rugby and John's, and that's where I score over most I have to work with; they sicken me with their dirty, boozy lives. They have a bit of luck, then they're drunk for a month, and have to start again without a penny, and the rats running all over them. Now, we two— Gently! Don't take it by the handles. Wait a second. D'you hear anything?"

A cab trotted over the wooden-paved bridge, then silence again. The "Toff" wound one end of the rope round and round his wrist, and motioned Pringle to do the same; then, with a sign to tread warily, he started to make the circuit of the prom-

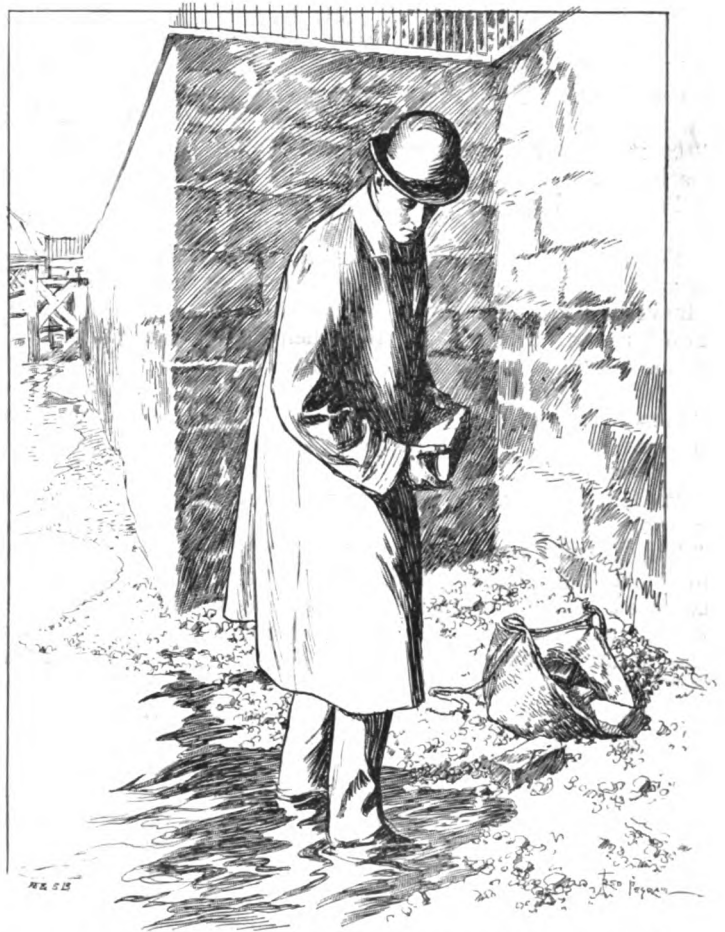
ontory, the basket swaying between them as they kept step. Pringle, with an amused sense of the other's patronising airs, followed submissively behind him up the shelving beach. By the wooden steps the "Toff" paused.

"Under here," he directed; and they stuffed the basket under the bottom step.

"Now," he murmured in Pringle's ear, "you go up to the road, and if you see no one about walk a little way down, as if you'd come off the bridge, and stamp your feet like this." He stamped once or twice, as if to restore the circulation in his feet, but with a rhythmical cadence in the movement.

"Yes; what then?"

"There ought to be a trap waiting down



"A COLD SENSATION ABOUT THE FEET MADE HIM LOOK DOWN"  
(p. 509).

the first turning on the opposite side of the road. If it doesn't come up, count twenty and stamp again."

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"And then?"

"If nothing happens, come back and tell me."

When he stood at the top of the stairs Pringle felt much inclined, instead of turning to the left, to go the other way and cross the bridge, leaving the "Toff" to secure the ingots as best he could. Later on he had cause to regret that he had not done so; but for the moment love of adventure prevailed, and, walking down the gradient from the bridge, he gave the signal. There was no one in sight, but the action was such a natural one on a damp and foggy night that had the street been ever so crowded it would have passed unnoticed. Pringle counted twenty, and repeated the signal. By this time he had reached the corner, and looking down the side street, he distinctly saw the twin lights of a carriage advancing at a trot. He turned back and reached the stairs as a rubber-tyred miniature brougham pulled up beside him.

"Is it there?" whispered the "Toff" impatiently.

"There's a brougham stopping. I don't know——"

"Yes, yes; that's it. Lend a hand, now; we mustn't keep it waiting about."

Marvelling at the style in which the "Toff" appeared to work, Pringle helped to lug the basket up, and between them they bundled it into the carriage.

"Now," said the "Toff," fumbling in his waistcoat pocket, "what do you say about my proposal?"

"Well, really, I should like to think over it a little," replied Pringle evasively.

"Oh, I can't wait here all night while you're making up your mind. If you don't recognise a good thing when you see it, you're not the man for me. It's not everyone I should make the offer to."

"Then I think I had better say 'No.'"

"Please yourself, and sink a little lower than you are." The "Toff" appeared nettled at Pringle's refusal. He ceased to grope in his waistcoat, and drawing a leather purse from his trouser pocket, took something from it. "That's for your trouble," said he shortly; and the next minute was bowling swiftly over the bridge.

Pringle, who had mechanically extended his hand, found by the glimmer of a lamp that the "Toff" had appraised his services at the sum of seven shillings, and was moved to throw the coins into the river. As he hesitated over the fate of the florin and two half-crowns in his palm, a policeman

approached and glanced suspiciously at him. His hand closed on the money, and he passed on to the bridge. He felt hot and grimy with his exertions; also his boots were damp, and the night wind began to grow chilly. Half way across he broke into a run, the elastic structure swaying perceptibly beneath his feet. Over on the other side the lights of a public-house pierced the mist, and he struck into the roadway towards it.

"Outside—on the right!" said a voice, as he opened the door of the saloon bar. For the time he had forgotten the shabbiness of his dress, enhanced as it was by the many things it had suffered in the course of the night's work, and with an unwonted diffidence he sought the public bar. There, with a steaming glass in hand, he strove to dry his boots at a gas-stove in one corner, but he still felt cold and miserable when, about half-past eleven, he rose to go.

"'Ere—what's this?" The barman had inserted the proffered coin in a *trier*, and giving it a deft jerk, now flung it, bent nearly double, across the counter.

"I beg your pardon," Pringle apologised, as he produced another. "I had no idea it was bad."

The barman threw the second coin upon the counter. It rang clearly, but doubled in the *trier* like so much putty.

"Bad!" chorused the onlookers.

"Fetch a constable, Ted!" was the solo of the landlord, who had come round from the other side of the bar.

For the second time that evening Pringle's nerve took flight. A horrible idea seized him—a crevasse seemed to open at his feet. Had the "Toff" played some treachery upon him? And as the door swung after the potman, he made a break for liberty. But the barman was quick as he, and with a cat-like spring over the counter, he held Pringle before he had got half across the threshold, several customers officiously aiding.

"I'm going to prosecute this man," announced the landlord; adding, for the benefit of the audience generally, "I've taken six bad half-crowns this week."

"Swine! Sarve 'im right! Oughter be shot!" were the virtuous comments on this statement.

As resistance was clearly useless, Pringle submitted to his arrest, and was presently accompanied to the police-station by an escort of most of the loafers in the bar.



"'THERE Y'ARE!' HE EXCLAIMED, POUNCING ON A BRIGHT HALF-CROWN."

"What's your name?" asked the night-inspector, as he took the charge.

Pringle hesitated. He realised that appearances were hopelessly against him. Attired as he was, to give his real name and address would only serve to increase suspicion, while a domiciliary visit to Furnival's Inn on the part of the police was to be avoided at all costs; the fiction of his literary agency, as spurious as the coins which had landed him in his present plight, would be the very least discovery to reward them.

"Now, then, what is it?" demanded the inspector impatiently.

"Augustus Stammers," Pringle blurted, on the spur of the moment.

"Ah! I thought you were a stammerer," was the facetious remark of the publican.

The inspector frowned his disapproval.

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"Address?" he queried. Pringle again hesitated. "No fixed?" the inspector suggested.

"No fixed," agreed Pringle; and having replied to subsequent inquiries that his age was forty and his occupation a carpenter, he was ordered to turn out his pockets. Obediently he emptied his belongings on the desk, and as his money was displayed the landlord uttered a triumphant shout.

"There y'are!" he exclaimed, pouncing on a bright half-crown. "That makes three of 'em!"

This incriminatory evidence, together with a knife, being appropriated, Pringle was led away down some steps, through a courtyard, and then into a long whitewashed passage flanked by doors on either side. Pushing one open, "In you go," said his conductor;

and Pringle having walked in, the door was shut and locked behind him. Though lighted by a gas jet in the passage which shone through a small window above the door, the cell was rather dim, and it was some little while before his eyes, accustomed to the gloom, could properly take in his surroundings. It was a box of a place, about fourteen feet by six, with a kind of wooden bench fixed across the far end, and on this he sat down and somewhat despondently began to think.

It was impossible for Pringle to doubt that he was the victim of the "Toff's" machinations. He remembered how the latter's manner had changed when he positively refused the offer of partnership; how the "Toff" had ceased searching in his vest, and had drawn the purse from his trouser pocket. He supposed at the time that the "Toff," nettled at his refusal, had substituted silver for gold, and had thought it strange that he should keep his gold loose and his silver in a purse. It all stood out clear and lucid enough now. "Snide" money, as he knew, must always be treated with gentleness and care, and, lest it should lose the bloom of youth, some artists in the line are even accustomed to wrap each piece separately in tissue paper. The "Toff" evidently kept his "snide" in a purse, and, feeling piqued, had seized the opportunity of vindictively settling a score. Pringle cursed his folly in not having foreseen such a possibility. What malicious fate was it that curbed his first impulse to sink the "Toff's" generosity in the river? With all his experience of the devious ways of his fellow-men, after all his fishing in troubled waters, to be tricked like this—to be caught like vermin in a trap! Well might the "Toff" sneer at him as an amateur! And most galling of all was the reflection that he was absolutely guiltless of any criminal intent. But it was useless to protest his innocence; a long term of imprisonment was the least he could expect. It was certainly the tightest place in which he had ever found himself.

Pringle was, fortunately, in no mood for sleep. He had soon received unmistakable evidence of the presence of the third of Pharaoh's plagues, and sought safety in constant motion. Besides, there were other obstacles to repose. From down the passage echoed the screams and occasional song of a drunken woman, as hysteria alternated with pleasurable ideas in her alcoholic brain: nearer, two men, who were appar-

ently charged together, kept up an interchange of abuse from distant cells, each blaming the other for the miscarriage of their affairs; right opposite, the thunderous snoring of a drunken man filled the gaps when either the woman slumbered or the rhetoric of the disputants failed. Lastly, at regular intervals, a constable opened a trap in the cell doors to ascertain by personal observation and inquiry the continued existence of the inmates.

As time passed the cells overflowed, and every few minutes Pringle heard the tramp of feet and the renewed unlocking and sorting out as fresh guests were admitted to the hospitality of the State. After a time the cell opposite was opened, and the voice of the snorer arose. He objected to a companion, as it seemed, and threatened unimaginable things were one forced upon him. He was too drunk to be reasoned with, so a moment after Pringle's door was flung open, and at the decision, "This un'll do," his solitude was at an end. It was a dishevelled, dirty creature who entered; also his clothes were torn rawly as from a recent struggle. He slouched in with his hands in his pockets, and with a side glance at Pringle, flung himself down on the bench. Presently he expectorated as a preliminary to conversation, and with a jerk of the head towards the opposite cell, "I'd rawther doss wiv' im than wiv' a wet umbreller! What yer in for, guv'nor?"

"I'm charged with passing bad money," replied Pringle affably.

"Anyone wiv' yer?"

"No."

"'Ow many'd yer got on yer?"

"They found three."

A long whistle.

"That's all three stretch for yer! Why didn't yer work the pitch 'long o' someone else? Yer ought ter 'ave 'ad a pal outside to 'old the snide, while you goes in wiv' only one on yer. See?"

Pringle humbly acknowledged the error, and his companion, taking pity on his greenness in the lower walks of criminality, then proceeded to give him several hints, the following of which, he assured Pringle, would be "slap-up clawss!" Later on he grew confidential, told how his present "pinching" was due to "collerin' a red jerry from a ole reeler," and presently, pleading fatigue, he laid him down on the bench and was soon snoring enviably. But his slumbers were fitful, for, although but little inconvenienced by the smaller

inhabitants of the cell, having acquired a habit of allowing for them without waking, he was periodically roused by the gaoler's inspection. On many of these occasions he would sit up and regale Pringle for a time with such further scraps of autobiography as he appeared to pride himself on—always excepting his present misfortune, which, after his preliminary burst of confidence, he seemed anxious to ignore as a discreditable incident, being "pinched over a reeler." In this entertaining manner they passed the night until eight o'clock, when Pringle authorised the expenditure of some of his capital on a breakfast of eggs and bacon and muddy coffee from "outside," his less affluent companion having to content himself with the bare official meal.

Soon after breakfast a voice from a near cell rose in earnest colloquy. "Hasn't my bail come yet, gaoler?" "I tell yer 'e's wired 'e'll come soon's 'es 'ad 'is breakfast." "But I've got a most important engagement at nine! Can't you let me out before he comes?" "Don't talk tommy-rot! You've got to go up to the court at ten. If yer bail comes, out yer'll go; if it doesn't, yer'll have to go on to Westminster." "Must I go in the van? Can't I have a cab—I'm only charged with being excited!" "Yer'll 'ave to go just like everybody else." *Bang!* went the trap in the door, and as the footsteps died up the passage Pringle's companion chanted:—

But the pore chap doesn't know, yer know—  
'E 'asn't bin in London long!

About an hour later the cells were emptied, and the prisoners were marched down to the courtyard and packed away in the police-van to be driven the short intervening distance to Westminster Police Court. There was no lack of company here. On arrival the van-riders were turned into a basement room already half full, and well lighted by an amply barred window which, frosted as were its panes, allowed the sun freely to penetrate as if to brighten the over-gloomy thoughts of those within. Punctually at ten the name of the first prisoner was called. It was the hysterical lady of the police cells, who disappeared amid loudly expressed wishes of "Good-luck!" The wait was a tedious one, and as the crowd dwindled, Pringle's habitual stoicism enabled him to draw a farcical parallel between his fellows and a dungeonful of aristocrats awaiting the tumbril during the Reign of Terror. The noisy converse

around him consisted chiefly of speculations as to the chances of each one being either remanded, "fullied," or summarily convicted. Pringle had no inclination to join therein; besides, his over-night companion had long ago decided, with judicial precision, that he would be either "fullied"—that is, fully committed for trial—or else remanded for inquiries, but that the chances were in favour of the latter.

The room was half empty when Pringle's summons came, but the call for "Stammers" at first brought no response. He had quite forgotten his *alias* (not at all an unusual thing, by the way, with those who acquire such a luxury), and it was not until the gaoler repeated the name and everyone looked questioningly at his neighbour that Pringle remembered his ownership and passed out, acknowledging with a wave of the hand the chorus of "Good-luck" prescribed by the etiquette of the place. Up a flight of steps, and along a narrow passage to a door, where he was halted for a season. A subdued hum of voices could be heard within. Suddenly the door opened. "Three months, blimey, the 'ole image! Jus' cos my 'usband 'it me!" And as a red-faced matron, with a bandaged head, flounced past him on her way downstairs, Pringle stepped into the iron-railed pen she had just vacated. In front of him was a space of some yards occupied by three or four desked seats, and on the bench beyond sat a benevolent-looking old gentleman with a bald head, whom Pringle greeted with a respectful bow.

The barman was at once called; he had little to say, and said it promptly.

"Any questions?" Pringle declined the clerk's invitation, and the police evidence, officially concise, followed.

"Any questions?" No, again.

"Is anything known of him?" inquired the old gentleman.

An inspector rose from the well in front of the bench, and said:

"There have been a number of cases in the neighbourhood lately, sir, and I should be glad of a remand to see if he can be identified."

"Very well. Remanded for a week." And so, after a breathless hearing of about two and three-quarter minutes by the clock, Pringle found himself standing outside the court again.

"'Ow long 'ave yer got?" Instead of going along the passage, Pringle had been turned into a room which stood handy at



the foot of the steps, where he was greeted by a number of (by this time) old acquaintances.

"I'm remanded for a week."

"Same 'ere," observed his cell-fellow of the night before. "I'll see yer, mos' likely, at the show."

"Any bloke for the 'Ville?" inquired a large, red-faced gentleman, with a pimple of a nose which he accentuated by shaving clean.

"Yus; I've got six months," said one.

"Garn!" contemptuously replied the face.

"Yer'll go to the Scrubbs."

"Garn yerself!" retorted the other; and as the discussion at once became warm and general Pringle sat down in a far corner, where the disjointed shreds of talk fused into an odd patchwork. "'E says you're charged with a vurry terrible thing, says 'e (hor! hor! hor!). I tell yer, ef yer wants the strite tip—Don't you flurry yer fat, now—So, says I, then yer can swear to my character—They used to call it cocoa-castle, strite they did—"

"Answer your names, now!" The gaoler was holding the door open. Beside him stood a sergeant with a sheaf of blue papers, from which he called the names, and as each man answered he was arranged in order along the passage. It was a welcome relief. Pringle began to feel faint, having eaten nothing since the morning, and, what with the coarse hilarity and the stuffy atmosphere by which he had been environed so many hours, his head ached distractingly.

"Forward now—keep your places!" The procession tramped into an open yard, where a police van stood waiting. With much clattering of bars, jingling of keys, and banging of doors, the men, to the number of a dozen or so, were packed into the little sentry-boxes which ran round the inside of the van, its complement being furnished by four or five ladies, brought from another part of the establishment. This done, the sergeant, closing the door after him, gave the word to start, and the heavy van,

lumbering out of the yard, rolled down the street like a ship in a gale.

"Gim'me a light," said a voice close to the little trap in Pringle's cell door. Looking out, he found he was addressed by a youth in the opposite box, who extended a cigarette across the corridor.

"Sorry. I haven't got one," Pringle apologised.

"'Ere y'are," came from the box on Pringle's right, and a smouldering stump was handed to the youth, who proceeded to light another from it.

"'Ave a whiff, guv'nor?" courteously offered the invisible owner. An obscene paw, holding the returned fag, appeared at the aperture.

"No, thanks," declined Pringle hastily.

"Las' chance for a week," urged the man, with genuine altruism.

"I don't smoke," protested Pringle to spare his feelings, adding, as the van turned off the road and came to a stand, "Is this the House of Detention?"

"No; this is the 'Ville."

The van rumbled under an archway, and then, after more banging, jingling, and clattering, half a dozen men were extracted from the boxes and deposited in the yard.

"Good-bye, Bill! Keep up yer sperrits!" screamed a soprano from the inmost recesses of the van.

"Come and meet us at the fortnight," growled a deepest bass from the courtyard.

A calling of names, the tramp of feet, then silence for a while, only broken by the champing of harness. Presently, a brisk order, and, rumbling through the arch again, they were surrounded by the noise of traffic. But it was not for long; a few minutes, seconds even, and they halted once more, while heavy doors groaned apart. Then, clattering through a portico full of echoes, and describing a giddy curve, the van abruptly stopped as an iron gate crashed dismally in the rear.

"'Ere we are, guv'nor!" remarked the altruist.

