stealthily across to the bulwark. With some difficulty, I climbed up and got astride the rail; but I suppose that, being hampered by the cask, I must have made some slight noise, for, just as I was getting my other leg over, some idiot of a seaman saw me and began to bleat aloud. Instantly, of course, every imbecile on deck started to his feet and a universal howl arose. There was no time for nice manœuvres. I dropped the cask into the sea, and, catching my heels on the top side moulding, took a header and struck out under water towards the ship's stern, round which I had noticed the tide stream swirling strongly. When I came up, I was just abreast of the rudder; and the first thing of which I was sensible was a rapid succession of pistol-shots, mingled with a vocal hubbub such as one might have expected to hear at the foot of the Tower of Babel on Saturday afternoon when the hands were being paid off. I clung to the rudder for a few moments to get a

good deep breath, and watched the cask—which was apparently the mark of the not very expert shooters—as it gyrated in the eddy and slowly drifted out of range. Then I dived below again and struck out in the same direction, keeping under the surface as long as my breath would hold out.

When I came up again the ship was about twenty yards away and receding rapidly as I was borne along on the tide. The marksmen were still popping away briskly, and, by the instantaneous flashes and the glimmer of the anchor light, I could make out a huddle of heads at the bulwark rail, all apparently staring at the cask, by which I judged that no one had yet succeeded in hitting it. I also got a glimpse of a party of men up on the booms clearing away the raffle from the boat; and then, as a further precaution, I quietly sank below the surface for another half-minute.

On my third emergence the ship had faded to a large, dark shape relieved by the yellow

spark of the anchor light. Occasional flashes accompanied by sharp reports still burst out sporadically, but their diminishing frequency suggested that ammunition was running short. The excited babbling of many voices and a loud clatter suggested that strenuous efforts were being made to get the boat ready for launching, and hinted to me that any attempt on my part to recover the cask would be unwise; that it would, in fact, be desirable to get as far from it as possible. Accordingly, taking my direction from the ship's anchor light, I struck out across the tide, paddling very gently, however, to avoid unnecessary fatigue.

Gradually the ship faded away into the darkness until her position could be made out only by the glimmer of her anchor light. The pistol-shots ceased and the clamour from her deck grew faint with the distance. I ceased from all effort beyond what was necessary barely to keep my head above the

surface and let myself just drift on the tide. I was, so far, not at all fatigued. The water was comparatively warm and the slight ripple on the surface was not enough to cause any difficulty.

Still, it was not quite what I had bargained for. I had intended to float quietly, hanging on to the cask until daylight came and someone saw me. Now I must keep afloat by my own efforts until I was picked up or found something to support me. And realising this with sudden anxiety—for hitherto I had been entirely occupied in getting away from the ship—I turned my attention to the floating light that I had seen from the deck. From my low position, with my eyes but a few inches from the surface of the water, I had at first lost sight of it entirely, but now I began to catch an occasional glimpse of it over my low horizon; and I was rather dismayed to notice that it did not seem appreciably nearer. Apparently it was a

good deal farther off than I had thought.

The time slipped away; it seemed to me that hours passed. And still I drifted on, encompassed by an illimitable dark void, with the inky ripples playing about my chin. An awesome silence was over the dark sea, a silence that seemed the more intense for the lonesome sounds that disturbed it at long intervals; the hoot of some distant steamer's whistle, or the melancholy scream of a gull. The light of the gas-buoy was now continuously visible, winking monotonously every few seconds, but still it looked little nearer than before. And now a new anxiety arose. Was I approaching the buoy in a direct line? If not, I should be swept past it by the tide, and then—but I refused to think of this contingency. Keeping my face steadily towards the light I maintained a slow and easy breast-stroke. I could do no more in the absence of a second light to give the direction of my movement.

Quite suddenly, as it seemed, the light loomed up big and bright. I could see the lantern distinctly. I could even see the shutter. And, as I stopped paddling for a moment, I could see something less agreeable. The light seemed to be passing across to my left. In a few moments more I should be swept past it and my last hope would be gone; and as I realised this, I realised, too, that I was growing numb and weak. Setting my teeth, I turned on my side and struck out with all my remaining strength towards the space to the left of the buoy.

The lantern towered above me. The great black shape rushed out of the darkness, looking weird and gigantic. It closed in nearer and nearer—and then began to sweep across in front of me. With a gasp of despair, I gave a final stroke, and, as the great shadowy form swept past, I clutched at it frantically and my fingers closed on a handful of slippery seaweed.

The common bladder-wrack (*Fucus vesiculosus*) is not a handsome plant, but to me it is, and will ever be, more precious than the Rose of Sharon or the Lily of the Valley; for its crackling, leathery fronds stood between me and a watery grave. As I grasped that slimy handful, the tide swung me round and bumped me against the buoy and my free hand clutched a barnacle-encrusted iron bar. That bar, I found, was the bottom rung of a rough ladder, fitted for the convenience of the Trinity House men when they are recharging the buoy or attending to the lantern; and, having made this discovery, I reached for the next rung and thankfully hauled myself up, dripping and shivering, to the shoulder of the buoy.

It was bitterly cold—at least, it seemed so, though the breeze that blew on my drenched clothing was really warm. But I was safe; unless the *Anna's* boat should come so far and hit this particular spot,

which was infinitely unlikely. So I sat, with chattering teeth, physically wretched though secure and cheerful, on the flat shoulder of the buoy, with my feet on the ladder, holding on by the cage that supported the lantern; on which cage I was able to make out the mystical inscription: "East Spaniard."

I had resigned myself to the idea of hanging on until daylight should enable me to signal to some passing vessel. Without hope or expectation of release I clung to the iron cage, growing colder and colder, and listened to the wash of the ripples against the buoy and the monotonous click of the shutter in the lantern above me; these, and the occasional scream of a gull being the only sounds that broke the dreary silence, until I had been on the buoy for what seemed like several hours. Then my ear caught some new sounds, thin and faint at first, but gradually increasing in distinctness as if their source was approaching; the unmis-

takable sound of oars working in wide tholes, with long pauses filled by heavy splashes, bumpings and the murmur of voices, as yet afar off. I listened intently. Though wildly improbable, it was not actually impossible that this might be the *Anna's* boat still searching for a cask and a fugitive; and if it should be, I might have to get into the water again to dodge behind the buoy.

The sounds approached very gradually, with short spells of rowing and long intervals of bumping, splashing and the mumble of undistinguishable talk. But suddenly the silence of the sea was broken by a fine brassy voice lifting itself up in song :

"Oh ! I love to think of the day when I was
young,
Tiddley um ! "

My heart leapt. Sweeter to me than a siren's song—and much more to the purpose —were those homely words, bellowed out in

a voice like that of an adolescent calf. Gathering my strength for a mighty shout, I let off a feeble, quavering croak.

"Boat ahoy!"

The caroller stopped short—on the word "Tiddley"—and exclaimed:

"J'ear that, Joe?"

"Ay," replied a second voice. "That was someone a-hailing, that was."

I croaked again; my chattering teeth giving a fine tremolo effect.

"Hallo!" roared the first man. "Who are you?"

"I'm overboard," I squawked; "hanging on the gas-buoy."

"Right-O, mate," was the cheering rejoinder. "Hang on a bit longer until I gets my anchor up."

There was a brief pause, a splash and a rumble, and then I heard the oars plied with a will. The sounds rapidly grew louder, and presently the light of the buoy's lantern fell on a boat, urged forward by two men in

yellow oilskins who stood up at their oars facing towards me. As she swept alongside, the forward rower helped me to scramble off the buoy—for I was stiff with the cold—and then pushed clear.

"Where are you from, mate?" he asked.

I replied, as well as my chattering jaws would let me, "Ca-cac-anterbury."

"Lor!" was the astonished comment of my rescuer.

"What's he say, Tom?" asked the other man.

"Says he dropped overboard from Canterbury."

"My eye!" exclaimed the other. "He must have had some way on him."

Not wishing to mislead my friends, I attempted to explain, but failed miserably, for my teeth were rattling like castanets. Then the hospitable Tom peeled off his long oilskin coat, and having hustled me into it, clapped his sou'wester on my head and tied the flaps over my ears.

"It's lucky for you as we happened to come down on the night tide," he remarked as we paddled back to the fishing-ground—my friends were whelkers—" 'tain't often as we do. We likes the daylight for to pick up our floats. Feelin' a bit warmer ? "

I was feeling much warmer and somewhat like a pudding in its cloth, for the oilskin was practically air-tight and "kept in all the juices," as the cooks say. And as I revived I gave my friends a full and true account of my adventures, to which they listened open-mouthed in the intervals of hauling up and re-baiting the whelk-pots. Very soon a faint glow in the eastern sky heralded the dawn and brightened by degrees until the calm sea was enveloped in a primrose-coloured haze, out of which slowly emerged the shadowy form of the barquentine, about three miles distant. Tom was the first to observe her, and pointed her out with gleeful derision.

"There's the old Rooshian basket, Joe.

D'ye see? Why, blow me, if they ain't been and sat her on the Pan Sand! Haw! Haw!" (The joy of the angels over the repentant sinner is feeble compared with that of the local expert over the blundering stranger.) "Seems to be puttin' off a boat, too."

They were; and I watched that boat with some anxiety, wondering how many more whelk-pots remained to be dealt with. At first a mere speck, she crept steadily towards us on the flowing tide until I was able to make out details; the rag of sail, like a charwoman's apron, the two strenuous rowers and three men in the stern. These latter interested me especially. They did not look like sailors; and when a gleam of sunlight reflected from the face of one of them, revealed a pair of spectacles, I had no doubt that I was looking on Herr von Bommel.

"Last pot, Tom," said Joe, hauling it into the boat and picking out the misguided

whelks. "Them Rooshians seem to be a-hailin' of us."

I had already noticed the fact. Herr von Bommel was standing up waving a handkerchief and over the sea came a sound like the voice of an asthmatic merman.

The last pot was baited and sunk; the anchor was hove up and the tiller shipped; and then the great brown lug slid up the mast. The *Anna's* boat was now hardly a couple of hundred yards distant and her crew and passengers were bellowing in concert. Three foreign gentlemen wanted a passage to Whitsable, and wanted it badly, But the fishermen took no notice; and when Tom grasped the tiller and Joe hauled in the sheet, the big lug filled and the water began to tinkle past the run. The *Annas* raised a final, despairing howl and the rowers strained at their oars. But our boat, though she hailed from Whitstable, was an East-country craft, deep, beamy and double-ended; and when an East-coast "Crabber"

fills her enormous sail, you can take off your hat to anything astern, except, perhaps, a Deal galley-punt. When I climbed up the steep beach by Whitstable Pier and peeled off the oilskin coat before making a run for the station, the *Anna's* boat was but a grey spot far out on the sea.

Some three hours later I sat by the coffee-room window of the Falstaff Inn looking out lazily through the wire blind. A hot bath, a dry suit and a colossal breakfast had induced a placid and contemplative frame of mind which inclined me indolently to observe the world without. And as I looked, three men crawled wearily along the opposite side of the street, having apparently come from the station. Opposite the inn, they paused, and the middle one, who wore spectacles, produced a scrap of paper from his pocket, over which they all pored with knitted brows. Then, as with one accord, they all yawned prodigiously; the spectacled one pocketed the paper and,

slowly and languidly, they all went their way.

By which signs I gathered that the " secret code " of the Harp and Cross was still undeciphered.

IT is my firm and unalterable conviction that Izaak Walton was an impostor. I am thinking, at the moment, of his observations on the Fordidge trout, a mythical fish, "near the bigness of a salmon," which is said to inhabit the River Stour in Kent. Very ingenious and abstruse are old Izaak's explanations of the suspicious fact that none of these leviathans of the deep have ever been "caught with an angle"; but I can give a much simpler one. There is no such fish. That was the conclusion that I reached after a couple of evening's angling from the boat belonging to the Royal George Inn, where I was now lodging; having had but a single bite all the time, and even then only hauled up a fat-headed

gudgeon who grinned in my face and then dropped off the hook and swam away. Fordidge trout, indeed! "I don't believe there's no such a person"—to borrow Mrs. Gamp's immortal phrase.

Not that it really mattered to me. If it had, I suppose I should not have baited my hook with three-quarters of a yard of garden worm. But the old tub of a boat was restful, and secure, too. I couldn't very well get pounced on unawares so long as I was moored in mid-stream; and that was a consideration after what I had gone through. So I sat in the boat, ostensibly to fish, but actually to meditate.

I had plenty to meditate about. The material had been accumulating since I came to Canterbury a little over a week ago. In that short time I had been arrested by an English detective and liberated; arrested again by the Russian Secret Police, and had escaped. And now, to my certain knowledge, the Russian Police were still lurking

in the neighbourhood, and the British detective had developed the companionable qualities of Mary's little lamb. Wherever I went, that detective was sure to go. I was continually meeting him ; and what made it worse was the offensive fiction that he kept up of not observing me.

Sergeant Burbler's proceedings were a puzzle to me. Did he still believe that I was connected with the gang of foreign criminals who had sheltered in the old manor house ? It seemed impossible. But there was another explanation of his adhesiveness. The sergeant and I both believed that somewhere in that old manor house was concealed the treasure deposited three centuries ago by Simon Glynn ; and each of us suspected the other of having some private information on the subject. Could it be Simon Glynn's hoard to which I was indebted for so much of the sergeant's society ? It was impossible to say. And here I raised my eyes—and beheld

the sergeant himself, angling from the bank.

He was at his old game, pretending not to see me. Which was ridiculous; for there I was a most visible reality. But I wasn't going to have any more of this nonsense. I watched him stick a lump of cheese on his hook—in the hope, perhaps, that the Fordidge trout favoured the purin-free diet—and when he had made his cast, I addressed him by name. Then he pretended that he didn't know me. Now I am no advocate for laxity in regard to etiquette; but when two men have rolled round a room together, have dusted the floor with one another, have prodded one another in the abdomen and pulled out handfuls of one another's hair, I say that for either of them to pretend that they are not acquainted is mere paltry snobbery. I wasn't going to have it. But, as he seemed to have got a bite, I waited to renew my attack.

I saw his line tighten. I watched him strike, and then begin to wind in his winch

as if he were playing a little barrel-organ. I saw him reach out stealthily for his landing-net and crane over the bank, and still I kept a discreet silence. It was only when I had seen him disengage a water-logged boot from his hook and rebait that I ventured to reopen conversation.

"I'm getting quite used to being arrested now," I remarked.

"Oh," said Burbler. "Who's been arresting you ?"

"The Russian Police have had another go at me," I replied.

"Oh," said Burbler. "Why did they let you go ?"

"They didn't. I let myself go."

That excited his curiosity so far that he asked for particulars. I lashed the rudder over so as to give the boat a cast inshore and proceeded to give him a detailed account of those astonishing events that culminated in my escape from the Russian timber-ship. He was profoundly interested in my adventures ;

there was no doubt of that. So much so that when I had finished my story I ventured to ask him a question or two about himself.

"You don't suppose that that gang of crooks is still in this neighbourhood, do you?"

"Have I ever said I did?" was his Scottesque reply.

"No: but as you are remaining in the neighbourhood yourself, I thought that, perhaps—well, that you might have some object in doing so."

"Sounds reasonable," he admitted, dryly. Then, after a brief pause, he remarked: "You seem to be putting in a bit of time in the neighbourhood yourself."

"Yes," I answered. "I have to superintend some repairs of Elham Manor House."

"You're taking your time about it," said he.

"Oh, I haven't begun. I'm waiting to consult with our new tenant and he hasn't

turned up yet. I can't write to him because I don't know where he is staying. He's an American—Mr. Jezreel P. Damper—and these rich Americans are rather erratic in their movements."

"What sort of repairs are you going to do?" Burbler asked carelessly.

Now, here I seemed to see an opportunity for pumping the taciturn detective as to his object in shadowing me in this singular manner. Accordingly, I replied, putting some slight tension on the actual facts:

"The repairs will probably involve some structural alterations. It's an old house, you know, and it may need to be modernised a little."

He took the bait with avidity—unlike the Fordidge trout. His sour visage brightened with an ingratiating smile as he exclaimed enthusiastically:

"How very interesting! Excuse my curiosity, but old buildings are rather a hobby of

mine. Have you decided on any particular structural alterations ? ”

“ No,” I replied, cramming the bait into his gizzard with both hands, so to speak; “ I have hardly looked at the house yet.”

“ Really ! ” he exclaimed. “ Really ! Might I just step into your boat ? More convenient for conversation, you know.” And when I had edged inshore and let him scramble on board with his neglected tackle, he continued : “ So you haven’t really looked over the house yet ? I wonder at that. Don’t you think it would be wise to make a thorough inspection so as to be ready for your tenant when he arrives ? ”

As a matter of fact I had thought so. But since my two encounters with the Russian Secret Police, I had been rather shy of Elham Manor. I knew that they were watching it and that they had once obtained access to it ; and the lonely old house was an awkward place in which to be caught by gentry of that kind. I explained this to the sergeant—

omitting to mention, however, that I had taken to carrying a revolver since my last adventure. Again he rose joyously like a hungry perch.

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Cobb"—the rascal let my name drop inadvertently. "It would be most unwise of you to venture into the house alone. But if you want to look over it, I shall be delighted to accompany you: and, as I always carry a regulation revolver, you will be perfectly safe. What do you say?"

I didn't quite know what to say. I wanted to look over the house but I didn't particularly want Burbler; but still less did I want to be haled off to some Russian gaol. In the end I accepted Burbler's offer, resolving to keep an eye on him in case he had any private information about Simon Glynn's treasure.

"When would you like me to come with you?" he asked briskly.

"Any time you like," said I.

"Well, why not now? There are several hours of daylight left."

He tried to disguise his eagerness and failed miserably. Obviously he was, as Mr. Bumble would have said, "on broken bottles" with anxiety to start.

"Don't you want to have a try for the other boot?" I asked callously.

He cast a baleful glance at his last catch, which lay stranded on the bank, and, without reply other than a sour smile, proceeded to heave up our little hairpin of an anchor. A few minutes later we landed at the stairs belonging to the Royal George and passed unmolested through the garden and tap-room out into the road.

As we trudged along together many thoughts passed through my mind. Obviously the sergeant was hot on the scent of Simon Glynn's hoard and proposed to use me as a cat's-paw to hook it out of its hiding-place. But the question was, how much did he know? Had he some information about it that I had not?

If so, I must watch him closely. As to my own knowledge on the subject, it was summed up in a passage in Boteler's "Manor Houses of Kent," which I had looked up at the Public Library in Canterbury. It read thus :

"In 1734, during some repairs, an aumbry was discovered behind the panelling of the dining-room and in this was found a curious silver mirror, probably Glynn's own handiwork, the frame of which bore this strange inscription :

"A harp and a Cross and good redd golde
Beneath ye cross with ye harp full nigh,
Ankores three atte ye foot of a tree
And a Maid from ye sea on high.
Take itt. 'Tis thine. Others have stepped
over. Simon Glynn, 1683."

"The meaning of this inscription has never been ascertained. The gate-posts of Elham

Manor House bear a harp and a cross respectively, and above the porch is a statue of a young Puritan lady, presumably Mistress Glynn. Hence it has been inferred that the lines refer to a treasure buried under the gate-post which bears the cross; but repeated excavations have failed to discover any such treasure.

"Simon Glynn is said to have had a mania for secret hiding-places. Tradition speaks of several in the manor house—in one of which Axell, the regicide, is said to have lain concealed for some time—but their position (if they ever existed) has been forgotten. Perhaps Glynn's hoard is still lying in some forgotten, secret strong-room."

Thus the learned Boteler. He hadn't very much to tell excepting that the treasure was still "untrove." But one thing was clear to me: the people who had dug under the gate-post were fools. If the meaning of the dog-gerel had been as simple as that, Simon might as well have laid his treasure in the road for

the first passing imbecile to pick up. There was some deeper meaning in that crude jingle and it must be my business to fathom it—unless Burbler had done so already.

These reflections brought us to the gates of the manor house; and here the sergeant halted to gaze reflectively at the traces of the "repeated excavations" and at the statue in its niche above the porch.

"I wonder who she was," he said, nodding at the statue. "Do you think she looks like an Englishwoman?"

It was a transparent question. He was clearly thinking of "a Maid from the sea on high." But, as it was not my business to enlighten him, I expressed ambiguous doubts, and we passed up the flagged path to the main door, into which I inserted the key.

For some time we rambled rather aimlessly through the rooms, waking the echoes with our footfalls on the massive oak floors. It was an eerie place, full of odd corners, little

flights of stairs and great built-in cupboards. No two rooms seemed to be on the same level. It was a step or two up or down every time. And every room appeared to be set at an angle to its fellow; a wasteful arrangement as regards space, but an excellent one for a builder whose hobby happened to be secret hiding-places.

I watched Burbler narrowly—and found him watching me. But all the same, his eye travelled inquisitively towards each cupboard or closet that we passed.

"Don't you think this old panelling is rather a mistake?" said he, rapping at it with his knuckles. "Makes the place so dark, you know."

"It does," I agreed. "Perhaps I may have some of it down and plaster the walls if our tenant agrees." This, I regret to say, was a sheer falsehood. Nothing would have induced me to mutilate the fine old house. But the tarradiddle served its purpose, for Burbler exclaimed excitedly:

"Shall you really? I hope you will allow me to be present when it is done. I am so very much interested in old buildings. And besides," he added, as a brilliant afterthought, "it is quite possible that there may be some of the stolen property hidden here. That St. Petersburg-Chicago gang used this house for some time, you know."

"You don't suppose they are hanging about here still, do you?" I asked.

Burbler looked about him—we were in the large drawing-room at the time—and listened as if apprehensive of eavesdroppers. Then he replied:

"I don't personally. But they haven't turned up anywhere else; and my orders are to keep a watch on this house until they are run to earth or seen somewhere else. So, of course, I ought to be present when any structural alterations are made here, in case they have secreted the booty here. And, between you and me, Mr. Cobb, it wouldn't be a bad plan, if you thought of doing away

with that panelling, for us to take some of it down ourselves, and avoid the inconvenience of inquisitive workmen. What do you say?"

I said I would think the matter over; and at that he was content to leave it for the present. But from that moment he developed a tendency to lag behind or stray away on various pretences: and whenever he did so, there came from adjoining rooms sundry mysterious tappings, as if some gigantic woodpecker had got loose in the house. But nothing of special interest occurred until we entered a large room at the back of the building, distinguished by peculiarly fine woodwork. It was a rather uncanny room, in spite of its beauty, for its panelling was carved throughout in high relief with very realistic grotesque figures, which seemed to start out from the walls in a manner that was really quite disturbing. And more alarming still was the broad, carved oak frieze that surmounted the walls below the heavy cornice,

of which the chief ornament was a row of life-size masks, each one different from the others, and all, apparently, grotesque portraits of actual persons. The aspect of those masks was most diabolical. They grinned, they scowled, they sneered, and some of them stuck out their tongues ; and their eyes—represented by deep-sunk holes—seemed to leer down on us with positively devilish malice. I wouldn't have lived in that room for a thousand a year.

But this was not all. A further attraction in that ghostly apartment was a large armoire or cupboard of sepulchral aspect, built into the wall. I opened one of the folding doors and looked in ; and then I shut it again rather quickly and turned away with as careless and uninterested a manner as I could assume at such short notice. For I had observed that it was fitted with massive, fixed shelves. Now everybody who knows anything about secret chambers is familiar with the cupboard with the sliding shelf that conceals a movable

panel. Of course I couldn't tell whether any of these shelves would slide out; but they looked uncommonly likely, and I thought I should prefer to try when I was alone. So I turned away and endeavoured to distract the sergeant's attention from the cupboard.

But, bless you! he didn't want any distracting. Not he! The one plain and palpable fact was that Sergeant Burbler hadn't noticed the cupboard at all. He stared at the walls and the ceiling and the floor, but the cupboard had totally escaped his observation. He never looked at it—after the first glance.

We sauntered through a doorway into an adjoining room; a smallish chamber with no outlet save by the door by which we had entered, unless there was some concealed door in the panelling. Here we remained for a minute or two rapping at the wainscot and examining the window-seat, and then Burbler strolled back into the other room "to have

another look at those quaint figures on the walls." I continued my investigations, which presently brought me to the disproportionately large open fireplace, the brick back of which I proceeded to test by a series of interrogatory thumps. It all sounded solid enough, but when I had delivered an extra heavy thump on the left-hand side, to my astonishment the brick-work itself began to move. A square patch, cleverly concealed by the joints between the bricks, swung round slightly on its centre, being evidently balanced on a pivot. I hastily closed it by pushing at the opposite end and then stole towards the door, with the intention of luring the sergeant to some distant part of the house and then returning alone to investigate. But Burbler was beforehand with me. As I approached the door it closed softly and a bolt was shot on the outside. The perfidious detective had bolted me in.

It was a quaint situation. With a self-satisfied grin I gave a thump or two on the

door for the sake of appearances and then stole on tiptoe back to the fireplace. A hearty shove at the left side of the chimney back sent the panel of brick-work swinging on its pivot and disclosed a dark opening. Before entering I cautiously examined the mechanism, which was simple enough. The false brick-work was fixed to massive oak planks which revolved, as I have said, on pivots. There was no secret spring, but there was a strong bolt on the inside with which a fugitive could fix the panel immovably, and a handle with which to pull it open from within. Massive as it was, it moved quite easily and without a sound, which seemed strange, considering the long years of disuse—until one examined the pivot and found it smooth and bright and anointed with oil that was certainly not two and a half centuries old.

I stepped into the opening and shut the panel, fixing it with the bolt and reflecting gleefully on the surprise that Burbler would

get when he came to let me out of the room. Striking a wax match, I saw a tiny brick staircase, not more than two feet wide, apparently built in the thickness of the wall, and began to ascend it with extreme caution —for one has to beware of "mouse-trap staircases" in these old hiding holes. At the top was a passage or gallery of the same width, and on the right hand a small door. The latter I pushed open and entered a small chamber, about five feet by ten, well lighted from above by a false chimney, up which I peered, and caught the eye of a starling who was perched on top. The little room was furnished with an antique folding table, a fixed bench and a fine oaken chair—which must have been built in the room, since it was too large to come up the stairs, and which would have electrified Wardour Street. And that was all—excepting two blatantly modern cabin trunks.

At those two trunks I stared open-mouthed; and especially at the smaller of the two. For

I had seen it before. It was, in fact, the identical trunk that I had seen when I first visited the old manor house. I knew what it contained. It was crammed with the costly booty of those rascals, the St. Petersburg-Chicago gang. Diamonds, rubies, emeralds and golden baubles—a bushel or so of them—were here before me. They were mine for the mere taking! What an opportunity for a dishonest man! But I am not a dishonest man. And, incidentally, the trunk was now secured with a massive padlock.

When I had tested the weight of the two trunks, and found the smaller one considerably the heavier, I came out of the room and proceeded to explore the gallery. It was not quite dark. On the right-hand wall were a number of little circles of light; and as I stole silently along the brick floor, I was able to trace these patches of light to their source, which was a series of little round holes in the left-hand wall. A single glance

at these told me what they were. They were the eye-holes of those appalling masks in the large room, and their purpose was obviously to enable a fugitive to watch and listen to the talk of pursuers or traitors in the room below.

I applied my eye to one of the holes and found that it commanded quite a large circular area ; and at the centre of the circle was Detective-Sergeant Burbler. He had noticed the cupboard at last. In fact he had both the doors wide open and was tugging frantically at the shelves.

But he didn't seem to have had much luck. He had, apparently, begun at the bottom and tried them all in turn ; and none of them had budged a hair's-breadth. I watched him with a pitying smile. He had now come to the top shelf but one, and, as it was a little above his reach, he had to stand on a lower shelf to get hold of it. He tried it first quite gently, then more vigorously, and, as it still refused to move, he planted one foot against

an upper shelf and tugged with might and main. And then it did move ; and so did he. He shot away like a spring-jack and came down on his back with a bang that shook the house and the detached shelf clutched triumphantly in his paws.

He got up, stroking himself delicately and soliloquising not at all delicately. And at that moment a quick footfall was heard approaching from an adjacent room. Burbler snatched up the shelf and made frenzied efforts to replace it. But if it had been difficult to get it out, it was impossible to get it back. It certainly entered its grooves—just enough to prevent the doors from shutting ; and there it stuck, refusing to move either way. And there it still was when a stranger entered the room and swam into the magic circle of my field of vision.

A stern and wrathful-looking man was the new-comer, with a red face and a very large chin, and his manner was not more conciliatory than his appearance.

"What the deuce is the meaning of this, sir?" he demanded in a rasping voice and with a distinct American accent. "Who are you? and what are you doing in this house?"

I have never seen a man look such an unutterable fool as Burbler did at that moment. But he pulled himself together a little and retorted:

"I might ask the same question. Who are *you?* and what are *you* doing here?"

"You might," said the stranger. "I can quite believe it of you. But I'll tell you who I am. I am the tenant of this house and my name is Damper, if you want to know; Jezreel P. Damper."

"Oh," said Burbler; "I've heard Mr. Cobb speak of you."

"Have you?" replied Damper. "Well, who are you, anyway?"

"I'm a police-officer, sir," said Burbler, with an abortive attempt to be impressive. "I have instructions to watch this house, as

certain suspicious characters are known to have harboured in it."

"Were you 'instructed' to destroy the landlord's fixtures?" asked Damper, glaring at the displaced shelf.

Burbler began a windy explanation with certain references to stolen property, but Damper cut him short.

"Is Mr. Cobb in the house?" he asked.

"He was here a minute ago," replied Burbler. "He went into the next room. Perhaps he's there still." It did seem rather likely under the circumstances; but when the sergeant had slipped back the rusty bolt and looked into the room he evidently got a severe shock, for he came back looking very blank and puzzled.

"He seems to have gone away," he mumbled, "but I expect he'll be back presently."

"Now see here," said Damper. "That door was bolted and there isn't any other.

I guess you've been dreaming about Mr. Cobb."

"I assure you, sir," protested Burbler, "that he was here a minute ago; and I have his full authority to search the premises thoroughly."

Of course, that was a bare-faced untruth, and I couldn't allow it to pass. Lifting up my voice, I shouted:

"Nothing of the kind, sergeant. I gave you no authority whatever."

My word! but that gave Burbler a start! He jumped like a cat that has sat down on an exploding cracker, and tried to look in all directions at once. But if Burbler was startled, Mr. Damper was positively petrified; and, to be sure, it is a little disturbing to an incoming tenant to hear voices issuing apparently from the walls or ceiling.

"Would you mind stepping this way, Mr. Cobb," said the sergeant, after looking into the cupboard and up the chimney. I thought it about time to make my appearance on the

scene, and accordingly retraced my steps along the passage, down the stairs and out through the concealed entrance, and finally shattered the sergeant's nerves by emerging from the room which he had just seen to be empty.

Of course, Burbler had to be told about the box of "swag," so I gave him the information forthwith; on which he dived jubilantly into the smaller room. But Mr. Damper was much less pleased. He followed us with a distinctly worried expression and finally remarked:

"This is extremely disagreeable for me, Mr. Cobb. The presence of this stolen property in the house naturally suggests that the thieves themselves are not far off and that they have access to the premises."

"Oh, you needn't be uneasy, sir," said Burbler. "We shall soon clear the rascals out of this. Now, Mr. Cobb, if you please."

I pushed the square of brick-work open, and entering, preceded the sergeant up the stairs

to the secret chamber. He pounced gleefully on the smaller trunk and proceeded to drag it away down the stairs, haughtily refusing my proffered assistance. I saw him struggle out with it through the opening, I heard him dump it down on the floor, and then he returned for the larger trunk.

"Hadn't I better lend you a hand?" said I.

"Be good enough, sir, not to interfere," he replied stiffly. "This is official business."

I watched him lumber out with the trunk and heard him clatter down the stairs, which were now quite dark, owing, as I supposed to his having pulled the panel to as he returned. When he reached the bottom, there was a long pause, filled in with a sound of fumbling and low-toned profane soliloquy. At length he called out, with a sudden return to civility:

"Just step down here, Mr. Cobb. You know how this thing goes better than I do."

I skipped down the narrow stairs with alacrity and a little uneasiness.

"It's quite simple," I said. "You just catch hold of this handle and pull."

"That's what I've been doing," growled Burbler.

I seized the handle and pulled at it vigorously; but the false door was as immovable as the Great Pyramid. Apparently some secret catch had released itself. I lit a wax match and examined the back of the panel, but without finding anything that could explain the phenomenon, while Burbler shouted to Mr. Damper to give a good shove from the outside.

"Are you there, Mr. Damper?" roared Burbler.

Apparently he was not, or was unable to hear us, for we heard no reply. Then we both scampered up the stairs in a mighty twitter—for it was really an exceedingly awkward situation—and made for the gallery, where each of us glued his eye to one of the

peep-holes preparatory to calling out. And then—Oh! what a sight was there, my countrymen! Mr. Jezreel P. Damper was certainly in full view, and no longer stern-faced and worried, but bland and smiling. But there were two other gentlemen also; one of whom—who looked, as to his hair, like a professional pianist—was at that very moment hoisting the precious cabin-trunk on to his shoulder with the other man's aid.

"Hi! there!" shouted Burbler. "What are you doing with that trunk?"

Mr. Damper looked up with a gracious smile. "That you, Burbey?" he asked. "Sorry I can't see your face. Let me introduce you to my two friends, Polopsky and Schneider. Turn round, Polly, and let the gentlemen see your beautiful hair."

"You infernal scoundrel" shrieked Burbler. "I suppose you are Jacob Mifflin?"

"You've hit it, sonny. You have indeed. Right in the middle. Clever boy!" and Mr. Damper—or Mifflin—made a show,

in pantomime, of patting Burbler on the head.

"You're not going to leave us locked up here to starve, are you?" demanded the sergeant.

"Well," replied Mifflin, "we just hate leaving you behind, sonny, but I guess we haven't enough accommodation to take you with us. But you'll be happy enough. You've got furnished apartments and board—there's a week's provisions in that trunk—and we shall send on the keys of the house with a little note to Mr. Cobb's agent in Canterbury."

"When?" I shouted.

"Quite soon, Mr. Cobb. Perhaps we may send them to-night. We don't wish to inconvenience you. Oh, and there's another little matter, Mr Cobb. I inferred from the interesting conversation that I happened to overhear just now in the big drawing-room that you and the sergeant are looking around for some antique curios. Well, you'll find

some exceedingly remarkable ones in that very room, which we are leaving behind for want of transport facilities. The right-hand column under the arch there is a concealed door. It isn't fastened. Give a good pull at the left corner and it will come open. The contents of the hiding-place are yours for the taking. And now I must really tear myself away. Ta-ta, dear friends!"

He took off his hat with a flourish and made us an elaborate bow; and then he moved away out of our circle of vision and we heard his footsteps gradually die away in the distance.

"Well," said Burbler, unglueing his eye at length, "this is a pretty mess that you've got us into!"

I was too disgusted to reply. Here I was, sealed up in this infernal hiding-hole, my very life dependent on the doubtful good-will of a band of ruffians. And why? Simply because this inquisitive booby of a policeman must go poking his nose into places where he had no business. It was abominable.

The sergeant and I crept out of the gallery, and our first proceeding was to fetch up the provision trunk. It was secured only with spring catches, and when we had unfastened these we found an ample supply of food and drink, including a gallon can of beer and another of water, all neatly packed in compartments. Apparently the gang had intended to remain in residence here for some time longer and had been compelled to migrate only by Burbler's ridiculous prowlings and his absurd suggestions—overheard by them—of structural alterations. We inaugurated our tenancy by a good meal, and, as the light was now failing, we lit one of the candles that we had found in the trunk and fell to discussing our unsatisfactory situation.

"If those scoundrels don't take any measures to get us released," said I, "we shall have to make some effort to break out or else climb up the chimney."

Burbler held the candle aloft and peered up the smooth-sided shaft.

"No," he said, shaking his head; "there's nothing to hold on by. But Mifflin will keep his word, or else why should he have told us of that stuff in the hiding-hole? I wonder what it is, by the way. Can't be of much value, or they wouldn't have left it behind."

I agreed that this was self-evident, and we returned to the question of a possible escape but without reaching any conclusion, though we talked far into the night. Finally we blew out the candle and settled ourselves for the night, Burbler on the fixed bench and I in the arm-chair.

It was about ten o'clock on the following morning when the sergeant and I, sitting disconsolately in our prison, were thrilled by a hollow "boom" that sounded infinitely distant.

"By gum!" exclaimed Burbler, "that was the front door!"

He sprang up and made for the gallery like a rabbit scuttling for its burrow, and I followed.

Very soon the heavenly sound of a pair of creaky boots was borne to our ears and then a tremulous voice called out: "Mr. Cobb! Are you here?"

"Yes!" I howled. "I'm here!"

As a guide to my exact locality, I must admit that this was not particularly lucid. But the boots continued to approach, and at length there appeared in my circle of vision a very nervous-looking young man, who stared about him apprehensively as he walked.

"Where are you, sir?" he asked.

"Here!" roared Burbler; on which the young man started violently and began to turn round like a joint of meat on a roasting-jack, staring at the walls as he turned.

"Would you go into the next room," said I, "and see if there is anything against the back of the fireplace?"

"Yessir!" he replied; and away he went like a man in a dream. But he was back

in a few moments with a simple and encouraging report.

"There's a thick walking-stick, sir, jammed under the chimney-breast. Shall I remove it, sir?"

"If you please," I answered, and Burbler and I made our way back along the gallery and down the little staircase. As we reached the bottom, I grasped the handle and gave a tentative pull. Oh, joy! Oh, unutterable relief! It yielded at once, and the panel of brick-work swung readily open. Our imprisonment was at an end. As I stepped out, I saw through the open doorway that estimable young man addressing himself to the ceiling of the next room.

"I've removed the stick, sir."

"Thank you," said I; on which he spun round with a smothered cry. But he recovered himself sufficiently to advance to meet us and hold out a bunch of keys and a note.

"Mr. Damper's keys, sir, and a note for you. Can I do anything more for you?"

"No, thank you," I replied; and as he bustled away I opened the note, which Burbler undisguisedly read over my shoulder. It was unsigned and read as follows:

"I have kept my word, you see, like a burglar and a gentleman. Tell Burbey he needn't trouble about us; we're clean away. And don't forget those curios. It's the right-hand column that opens."

"I wonder what the stuff is," said Burbler. "We may as well go and see, as we're here. Don't-cher think so?"

I did, though, to speak the truth, my enthusiasm in respect of hiding-holes was not quite what it had been; and accordingly we made our way to the drawing-room as it was now called. There was no difficulty in finding the "column"; which was not a column at all but a Corinthian pilaster of carved oak; one of a pair that supported an elliptical arch against the end wall. Follow-

ing Mifflin's directions, Burbler seized the left-hand corner and gave a sharp pull, whereupon the whole shaft between the capital and the plinth opened, forming a tall, narrow door, and disclosing an extremely narrow flight of steps.

Burbler was extraordinarily polite. He not only held the door open for me to enter first, but he actually remained outside to keep guard, as I observed on looking back from the top of the stairs. But here I had something fresh to think about, for I had come up against a solid wooden partition, and it seemed to me that vague sounds of movement and muffled voices proceeded from somewhere near at hand. I opened a small but massive door, and immediately the sounds became quite distinct; so much so that I had some thoughts of turning back and summoning the sergeant.

But pride and curiosity impelled me to advance. Passing through the doorway I traversed a short, narrow passage which

brought me to another partition, in which was a square trap or door secured by a bolt. I drew back the bolt, and, pulling open the trap, which was very thick and heavy, looked into a small brick chamber, which, like my late prison, was lighted by a false chimney.

The little dungeon-like chamber contained three men ; and I may say that we looked at one another with mutual astonishment. For the three prisoners were the Russian Police Agents who had kidnapped me but a short time since and who had, doubtless, believed me to be at the bottom of the sea. They looked wretched enough now, for they were all handcuffed and loosely linked together with a chain, which had been passed round a beam that crossed the cell and secured with a padlock. A sack of ship's biscuit and a couple of buckets of water had kept them from starvation but had not induced hilarious spirits.

We stared at one another in silence for a moment or two ; then I ventured to ask :

"How came you to be shut in here, Herr von Bommel?"

The German's eyes flashed behind his spectacles and he exclaimed:

"Ach! It vos zat villain Mifflin, bot I shall catch him! He shall bay for zis. Ja! I shall catch him yet" (he didn't look much like it at the moment). "And you vill let us out, sir? You vill not bear a crutch for our liddle mistague?"

"Certainly, I will let you out," said I, "only you mustn't make any more mistakes, you know."

The keys of the padlock and the handcuffs hung on a nail just out of the prisoner's reach. I unlocked the padlock, and, promising to unfasten the handcuffs downstairs, took the precaution to slip out through the trap and hurry down in advance. The three prisoners soon followed; and when I had released their hands, they departed, in deep dejection and in company with Sergeant Burbler, to report the escape of the gang.

I have never seen them since—the foreign gentlemen, I mean. As to Detective-Sergeant Burbler—but that is another story, and must be reserved for another occasion.

THOUGH I do not myself profess to be a religious man, I am a strong advocate of religion in others. It generates in them agreeable and softening conventions, it accustoms them to a dignified form of music and introduces them to an almost extinct variety of speech known as the English Language; it has even been said to influence their morals; and it does undoubtedly cause them to erect certain admirable buildings and to furnish them with organs, choirs, and other desirable æsthetic adjuncts.

Thus reflecting, I opened the lychgate of Bouldersby Churchyard and entered. I have a strong liking for churchyards. They are quiet and restful places where one can

meditate with satisfaction on the superior advantages of being alive. But I had a more particular object in this visit. I wanted to have a look at old Simon Glynn's monument in the church; and, especially, I wanted to escape from the incessant "shadowing" of Detective-Sergeant Burbler.

That officer haunted me like a familiar—a much too familiar—spirit. I couldn't get a moment to myself. And it was not affection that made him cling to me. Not at all. It was a mere, sordid desire to spy on my actions. Even now, I had only given the beggar the slip by popping behind a haystack, and he might run me to earth at any moment. I strolled up the path in the shadow of the bordering limes. The birds sang above, and from the church came, faint and muffled, the voice of a solitary chorister rehearsing a solo. I couldn't make out either the tune or the words, but I accepted the sound as an appropriate touch of local colour, like the house-leeks on the porch or the lichen on the tomb-

stones. The south door of the church was open, and, as I reached it, the sound swelled suddenly into a familiar melody and I distinguished the words :

" It stopped—short—never to go again
When the—old—man—died."

I was profoundly shocked. " Decently and in order," says the church service, and I agree most emphatically. Secular songs should not be bawled in a place of worship. Of course the singer was referring to " My Grandfather's Clock." I knew the song well, and had no patience with the mawkish, sentimental doggerel—for, after all, a drop of oil applied with a feather to the rusty bearings would have set the old rattletrap ticking again, grandfather or no grandfather. So I strode into the church frowning my disapproval.

But the frown was thrown away. The singer was but a journeyman painter, en-

gaged in disfiguring the woodwork and carolling from mere habit. He meant no harm and was as unconscious of any impropriety as if he had been painting the outside of the bathroom window-frame, while the ablutionist within hustled behind a towel. His innocence disarmed my indignation ; and, besides, at the moment of my entry I got a most effectual counter-irritant ; for the first object that met my eye was that fellow Burbler, staring like an idiot at a wall-tablet. I was fairly taken aback. Could he have guessed that I was coming here ? or had he come to grind a little private axe of his own ? I should soon know, if I kept my eye on him.

"How do, Mr. Cobb ?" he said genially. "Having a look round ? Fine old place. I was just examining this very interesting tablet."

I looked at the tablet over his shoulder. It was of no interest whatever. It merely located the carcase of a certain Major-General Mulliger-Torney, H.E.I.C., late of Elham

Manor, and told a number of palpable untruths about him. "A gallant officer, and an exemplary Christian, he served with distinction in the Great Mutiny, slaying upwards of two hundred mutineers with his own hand. 'Blessed are the Peacemakers.'"

"What about it?" I asked.

"Don't you see? He lived at Elham Manor."

This was too thin. Obviously the sergeant was trying to distract my attention from something else. I glanced round and saw that something else on a wall hard by, a fine canopied monument with painted stone effigies and a tablet beneath, on which I could make out the name "Simon Glynn." I strolled over to examine it and stood awhile gazing at it in silence. There is something very impressive in the naïve dignity of the mural monuments of this period; a simplicity of intention which is in no wise impaired by the elaborate and sumptuous workmanship. For some time the mere beauty and anti-

quarian interest of this quaintly splendid memorial engrossed my attention. Then, suddenly, I started. Now I understood why the sergeant had tried to divert my attention, and why he was now watching me like a cat. There was something more in this monument than met the eye at the first glance. Even the inscription contained arresting matter where it referred to "Margery y^e^ onely daughter of Andreas Ozanne of y^e^ Iland of Gurnseye Esquire"; for surely Mistress Margery Ozanne of Guernsey might fairly be described as a "Maid from the Sea."

But much more startling were the ornamental accessories of this curious monument. On either side of the surmounting finial reclined a winged figure, of which the one on the right held a harp, while the other grasped a great cross-hilted sword. Between the figures was a shield quartered with what were presumably the arms of Glynn and his wife: the one device bearing three anchors or on a field gules and the other a scallop-shell argent

on a field azure, while below the shield was the motto : " God with us."

It was certainly what Dick Swiveller would have called a "staggerer." I repeated to myself the quaint doggerel that I had copied from Simon Glynn's mirror.

Well, there were all the mystic signs ; the harp and the cross and the " ankores three " ; and as for the " Maid from the Sea " there was Mistress Margery herself. There was only one difficulty. The " ankores three " were not at the foot of a tree, unless the great yew outside could be considered as fulfilling the condition. In all other respects the agreement was complete.

Was it possible that Glynn could have buried his treasure in the vault where his wife lay ? It seemed incredible. And yet a man who could bequeath his fortune to any chance stranger who might have the wit to find it, might be capable of any eccentricity. But at this point, my reflections—and the painter's lyrical out-

pourings—were interrupted by a raucous voice.

"Now young man; don't you know no better than to make that there noise in a sacred hedifice?"

"Why, there ain't no harm in a-singin', is there?" protested the caroller.

"No 'arm!" exclaimed the other, whom I judged—correctly—to be the sexton. "No 'arm in a-bellerin' rye-bald songs in a place of worship? Where might you 'ave been brought up?"

"Git out," said the painter. And the hopeless irrelevancy of the rejoinder left the sexton speechless—until he perceived us; when he advanced sedately as one who scents a possible sixpence.

"Re-markable old figgers, them, sir," he said, addressing himself to me as the obvious social superior. "Wunnerful old, too: seven or eight hundred year old, so I've heerd say."

"*In*deed," said Burbler, looking daggers at

me for being there—but I wasn't sensitive just then. "Most interesting. And I suppose that in those days they used to bury people in the church; under the very pavement that we're standing on?"

"No doubt they did, sir," replied the sexton; "but not them two. They are buried in the undercroft, they are. Would you like to see the place?"

It was useless to deny that we should, so we followed the sexton out of the church and round the exterior until we came to a small doorway which had once been closed by an iron gate, but was now unguarded. Entering after our guide, we descended a flight of moss-grown steps and finally reached a small crypt under the chancel. There wasn't much to see. A simple groined roof carried on four dwarf pillars; walls of unadorned masonry and a plain flagged floor. That was all; excepting that, against one wall, a square stone set in the pavement exhibited the inscription:

Margery Glynn 1662
Simon Glynn 1692

Burbler struck a wax match—for the only light that entered the crypt was that which came down the stairway—and looked long and thoughtfully at the stone. I guessed what he was thinking by the direction of my own thoughts. He was considering the difficulties of raising that stone and the tools necessary for the job : and he was wondering what there was beneath the slab. By its shape it appeared to be the cover of the entrance to a vault, and, if this were so, the difficulties would not be great. If, on the other hand, it covered a grave, there would be trouble. Digging up a grave was a rather bigger undertaking—if you will pardon the unintentional *double-entendre*—than either of us reckoned on.

The sergeant dropped the match and looked at his watch—in the dark.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I mustn't

stay loitering here, fascinating as these antiquities are. I shall lose my train."

"Your train!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. I've got to run up to Chatham. Nuisance, isn't it?"

I wasn't so sure of that, but, of course, I agreed that it was; and when we had each contributed a practically unearned increment to the sexton's income, we ascended the steps and made our way out through the churchyard.

"Awful nuisance," repeated Burbler. "I shall probably be detained in Chatham for two or three days. Most annoying! Just as I was enjoying me holiday, too!"

"I thought you were down here on business."

"So I was. But my business is finished. Another officer has taken over the case"—and no wonder, thought I—"so I am having a little rest; taking a week or two's leave. They might have left me in peace."

Now here I was seized by an absurd and

reprehensible impulse to say what was not strictly true. The sergeant was going away. While unavoidably absent he might be uneasy in his mind. He might even return prematurely. It would be only humane to reassure him.

"I can sympathise with you," I prevaricated, "for I'm in the same boat myself."

The pleasure that shone from Burbler's face seemed almost to justify me.

"Not going away?" he said brightly.

"Yes. Got to go to—er—Tunbridge Wells for my firm. They may keep me there a week or so. Nuisance for me, isn't it?"

"Horrid," said Burbler. "Do you start to-day?"

Of course, I had to say "yes," and the detective immediately pounced on me.

"What time is your train?"

Now there he had me, for I had neglected to ask the time of his. In my confusion I said "four o'clock," and he chimed in gleefully:

"I know. Four-eight. Change at Tonbridge. Mine is the four-fifty from the other station. I may as well walk down with you and see you off."

Thus was I hoist with my own petard. For I had meant to see him off and then prepare at my leisure for a nocturnal exploration of the crypt. But there was no escape. I was led like a sacrificial lamb to the station and compelled, under the sergeant's scrutiny, to waste my substance on a ticket for Tunbridge Wells. Indeed, fate, in the form of Sergeant Burbler, pursued me to the very door of the compartment in which I didn't want to travel.

"Look out!" he exclaimed. "The train's off!" And whisking open a door, he gave me a persuasive hoist that deposited me on the lap of a fierce-looking, middle-aged woman.

"How dare you, sir?" demanded the lady, assisting me to rise with the aid of an extra-

ordinarily sharp elbow. "What do you mean by this conduct?"

"I beg your pardon, Madam," I gasped, retreating to the farthest corner. "It was purely an accident, I assure you. It was indeed!"

"I don't know what you mean by an accident," she rejoined bitterly; "bursting into a compartment that is plainly labelled 'Ladies only.' It is an unwarrantable intrusion!"

I glanced at the window and saw that it was even as she had said. However, it didn't matter. I was going to pop out at the next station, Chartham, in any case, and make my way back to Canterbury. I mentioned the fact in extenuation.

"Chartham indeed!" she replied scornfully. "Permit me to remark that this train does not stop until it reaches Tonbridge."

I was aghast. Here was a pretty kettle of fish! I should have to buy another useless ticket and put off my exploration until to-

morrow ; for the shops would all be shut when I got back to Canterbury, and I couldn't lift that stone with my finger-nails. Of course I could carry out my little plan just as well to-morrow night—unless Burbler should return prematurely. And here I broke out into a cold sweat ; for nothing was more likely. He had located the treasure and he knew that I had, too. He was certain to strain every nerve to get back and forestall me. It was a horrible predicament.

What made it worse was that my efforts to think out some escape from the situation were completely frustrated by my fellow-passenger ; who continued to pour out an unceasing stream of reproaches for my "unwarrantable intrusion." How she did talk, to be sure ! If some of those perpetual motion chappies could have examined that good woman's lower jaw, they might have got a valuable tip or two. The usual metaphor of the donkey's hind leg was inadequate ; she

would have talked the fifty hind legs off a centipede.

The train whizzed joyfully through station after station. It roared through Ashford and left Pluckley behind, trundled along the straight stretch towards Paddock Wood and Tonbridge. But presently it began to slow down and at length came definitely to a stop at the little wayside halt of Helgerden.

"Now, sir," said my companion, "I'll trouble you to change into another compartment."

I hesitated; for the train was only waiting for the signal to drop and might move on at any moment. But eventually I was goaded into opening the door and stepping out.

"Hi, sir! you can't get out here!" exclaimed the station-master, regardless of the fact that I had actually done so. And at this moment the train began to move. I made a dash for the nearest door, but the station-master seized me by the arm.

"You can't enter the train when in motion," he said obscurely; and before I could wriggle myself free, the guard had hopped in and the train had rumbled out of the station.

"What time is the next train to Canterbury?" I asked.

"Ten-forty," he replied, and added: "I must ask you, sir, not to use such language before my porter."

I apologised and pleaded extreme provocation, explaining that I had got into the wrong train and wished to get back quickly.

"Well, sir," he said, "there's a very good train from Ashford in about an hour's time."

"And how long will it take me to walk into Ashford?"

"If you step out, sir," he replied, "you ought to do it in an hour and three-quarters."

I turned away hastily—appropriate remarks being forbidden— and, striding wrath-

fully out of the station, walked through the village until I encountered a finger-post which bore the inscription: "Ashford 7½ miles." Along this road I set forth at a brisk pace: but before I had gone two hundred yards I found myself face to face with a most terrible temptation. Leaning against a barn was an abandoned bicycle; a tradesman's machine apparently, for on the top bar was painted the name "Robert Miker." Now, with that bicycle I could easily catch the desirable train from Ashford. Without it I must walk and my operations in the crypt would have to be postponed—perhaps for ever. The catching or losing of that train might spell the difference between gaining and losing a fortune.

I say nothing in extenuation of my conduct. Property should not be borrowed without the consent of the owner. But—there was no one about from whom to ask permission. I flung my leg over the saddle and away I went.

I have said that when I mounted there was not a soul to be seen. But before I had fairly got the wheels revolving, the entire population of the place seemed to converge on the spot to speed my departure with valedictory hoots. A shrill voice commanded me to "come off that bike" and a deeper voice hailed me to stop. Looking back, I saw (among others) a weedy youth shaking his fist in my direction and a globular-bodied rural constable coming after me at a speed that was really amazing when one considered his proportions. I had heard of the agility of the rhinoceros but I had never believed in it until I saw that rural constable. Still, he was no match for a cyclist.

When I next looked round, a light carrier's cart had appeared. It soon became less light, for the constable got in ; and then the driver plied his whip and the cart came along in my wake, clattering like the horses and chariots in Pharaoh's pursuing army. I pedalled for

all I was worth. It was too late to change my mind now. And though that cart hung on doggedly, it grew smaller and smaller in the increasing distance. The last that I saw of it was at a cross-road, down which it turned, leaving the constable a tiny, threatening spot on the white highway.

A little way past the milestone that recorded "three miles to Ashford," I came to a small inn which bore on its signboard the words "White Cow." I had now plenty of time in which to walk the rest of the way, and it seemed a wise thing to disencumber myself of my borrowed steed. Entering, I ordered a glass of beer, and, having hastily consumed it, I asked the landlord to take charge of the bicycle.

"It belongs to Mr. Miker," I explained. "I expect he will call for it by and by. Will you give it to him and tell him that I am much obliged for the loan of it?"

The landlord promised to give the message, and I then got on the road once more, stepping

out at a good round pace and congratulating myself on having made a skilful escape from a compromising situation. Soon after leaving the inn I came to a rather steep hill, at the top of which the road ran along the level for some considerable distance before again descending. I had proceeded along the level tract and was close to the brow of the hill when I became aware of the hum of a bicycle, approaching rapidly from behind. I looked quickly over my shoulder, and my heart sank. Ye Gods and little fishes! It was that confounded rural constable!

I gave one despairing glance at the town of Ashford, spread out before my yearning gaze. Another couple of miles and I had been safe. It was a pitiful thing to be shipwrecked within sight of port, but shipwrecked I apparently was. For the constable swept alongside, and dismounting lightly, laid a colossal paw on my shoulder.

"Got yer!" said he.

I turned sharply, and casting on him a disdainful glance, demanded haughtily :

" What the deuce do you mean ? "

" You know what I mean," he replied. " I charge you with stealing this bicycle."

I laughed scornfully ; though I didn't feel much like laughing, I can assure you.

" My good man," said I, " how on earth can I have stolen the bicycle when you have got it in your possession ? "

" Now don't argue with me," he retorted. " I've caught you in *flagranto delictum.* Saw yer prig it with my own eyes. You just come along back with me."

It was a desperate situation and called for desperate efforts. I thought frantically for a few seconds and then burst into a hollow laugh, pointing at the bicycle.

" Why," I exclaimed, " that's the machine that I left at the ' White Cow ' ! "

" Quite right," said the constable.

" Ha ! ha ! " I shouted. " You are actually

charging me with stealing my own bicycle on which my name is legibly painted for all the world to see. Look here ! " and I pointed to the inscription.

The constable began to look puzzled. " Your name ain't Robert Miker," said he. " This here bike belongs to young Bob Miker, the wheelwright."

" Oh, I see," said I. " You are confusing me with some other Robert Miker. How very amusing ! Most ridiculous comedy of errors ! But I'll soon prove to you that this is my bicycle. You noticed that peculiar tilt of the right pedal ? "

" No, I didn't," he replied.

" Didn't you really ? " said I, cocking up my right great toe. " I'm surprised at that. I had the pedal specially built to fit this slight deformity of my right foot."

The constable stared at the pedal and then at my foot, which certainly had a rather quaint appearance with the toe cocking up inside the boot.

"I don't see nothing peculiar about the pedal," said he.

"Let me show you," said I. "You'll see at once if I place my foot on the pedal. It twists up on the inside. You'll see it better if you stoop a little. Now."

I placed my foot on the pedal and he crouched down in the attitude of a frog preparing to spring, his mouth open and his eyes protruding with intelligent curiosity.

"Don't you see ?" I asked.

"No, I don't," he replied.

I gave his shoulder a sharp push : and, as he toppled over backwards like an overturned china mandarin, making a frantic snatch at me as he fell, I stood up on the pedal and flung my left leg over the saddle. The bicycle started forward and I urged it with all my strength. But it was a near thing. The constable picked himself up in a moment and came bouncing along the road like a gigantic football. Indeed, if it had not been

for the sharp descent he would have caught me before the machine had time to get up speed. As it was, I went over the brow of the hill and picked up speed in two or three revolutions. And then, of course, the constable was nowhere. In a few seconds I was flying down the hill at twenty or thirty miles an hour, and even when I reached the level at the bottom, I kept up the pace so far as I was able until I ran into the station approach at Ashford.

I had just time to take my ticket and book the bicycle (in the name of Miker) before the train rumbled into the station. Selecting an empty carriage, I took a corner seat by the door and, flinging my hat into the rack, wiped my brow. For the moment, I was safe. I had run the two miles in about seven minutes and the constable couldn't do it in much under half an hour. But he would get to the station before I should reach Canterbury, and he would probably telegraph my description. That was awkward. And the

train did not stop at any intermediate station. It was very awkward.

The bell rang; a smartly-dressed Hebrew gentleman in a new straw hat bustled into my compartment, and the train started. I resumed my disquieting reflections. Could a telegraphed description lead to identification? I doubted it. I wore a common tweed suit and so did most of the other men in the train. I was dark, with aquiline features; but so were plenty of other men. The only distinctive feature in my get-up was my hat—a green soft felt. That hat was the weak spot in my armour. I hadn't noticed another like it on the platform. If I had been alone I would have dropped it out of the window and risked going through the barrier hatless; but there was the Hebrew chappie opposite. He would see me drop it and might give information.

I had not solved the problem when the train ran into Canterbury. My fellow-passenger stood up and thrust his head and shoulders

out of the window. I stood up, too—and—quite automatically, as it seemed—reached the Hebrew gentleman's straw hat down from the rack and clapped it on my head. It was a loosish fit, but that didn't matter. Then my companion popped his head in and asked me :

"Do I change here for Margate ? "

Now the fact is that he should have changed, but—well, necessity knows no law.

"No," I replied. "Stay where you are," and with this I hopped out and walked quickly through the barrier. By the side of the ticket-collector I noticed a tall, burly man who seemed to eye the passengers curiously, but he was no concern of mine. I hurried through and made for the exit. But just as I was passing out, I heard a loud commotion from the neighbourhood of the barrier. I cast an instantaneous glance back and saw that tall, burly man struggling with a Hebrew gentleman in a green felt hat. And I waited to see no more.

The shops were still open when I emerged