

Britannica, selected the one marked "Mem—Mos," and laid it on the table. Seating myself, I produced a sheet of paper and a pencil, and, opening the volume at the article "Mirror," assumed an air of eager preoccupation. Presently the door opened softly. I didn't dare to look round, but my ear gave me the information that I wanted. For Burbler's favourite boots had a peculiar soft creak, almost entirely confined to the right boot; and when I heard that creak proceeding stealthily round the room behind me I knew that the critical moment had come. If he spoke to me my plan would have failed and I should have to devise some other.

I had written large and legibly at the head of my paper the words "Experiments on metallic mirrors," and I now began to copy out chance sentences from the article in a much smaller handwriting. Meanwhile the creaky boot lingered behind me opposite the book-shelves and presently began to approach by easy stages until I was conscious of some

one standing close behind my chair. I scribbled frantically, almost perspiring with anxiety. Would he take the bait? He was certainly looking over my shoulder; he could hardly fail to make out the heading to my notes. But would he adopt the suggestion that I was offering? It was a very obvious one and he was no fool; but there was the danger that he might fail to reason as I was trying to make him reason. And then he wouldn't do what I wanted him to do.

The creak softly retreated. I heard a book returned to the shelf behind me; and then that tell-tale boot moved stealthily but rather quickly towards the entrance. A door opened and closed; and, listening intently, I could distinguish the creak moving away pretty quickly in the direction of the galleries. It really looked as if the worthy sergeant had swallowed the bait.

I didn't act precipitately. I gave him a good five minutes' start in case he should be

hampered by the presence of visitors. Then I replaced the volume, and, pocketing my notes, set forth on my third visit to the shrine of Simon Glynn. I have never been more anxious or less confident. For it was a pure gamble. I had endeavoured to convey into Burbler's mind the impression that I was about to make some experiments on Glynn's mirror; and I now had to act on the assumption that I had conveyed that impression and that Burbler would take some measures to be present at the experiments. Whereas I might have failed utterly. And to make things more disquieting, I had discovered, too late, that the article in the *Encyclopædia* actually contained a brief description of Chinese and Japanese magic mirrors. However, it couldn't be helped.

The "mirror room" was fortunately in its normal state of emptiness. I stole in with a secret and nervous air and looked round. I hardly dared to look at the sedan-chair, but yet I couldn't resist just one instantaneous

glance as I entered. And that glance yielded distinct encouragement. For the door of the chair was not completely shut. But when I had looked in last I had been careful to shut it; and that door had a snap catch which could not be opened from within. Two very significant facts. *Verbum sap.*

I stole up to the mirror, and, opening my mouth wide, breathed noisily two or three times. The polished surface clouded and the soaped inscription leaped out and grinned in my face. There was no possibility of missing it. I stared at it fatuously for a second or two; then I turned and walked quickly on tiptoe out of the room and down the corridor. But instead of turning away down the next gallery, I quietly slipped behind a large harem screen of Cairene lattice-work which stood at the end of the corridor. Through the chinks of the lattice I could command a view of part of the room, including the sedan-chair and the mirror, though quite invisible myself; and I accordingly

glued my eye to one of the chinks and watched in an agony of suspense.

Several seconds passed. And every second I grew more and yet more nervous. And then came the blessed relief. Very slowly and softly the door of the sedan-chair opened and out popped a head—Burbler's, of course. He looked round and listened for a moment, and, seeing no one in the room or corridor, forth he came like a cautious hermit-crab emerging from a whelk-shell. Shutting the door silently he stole across to the mirror and bent over it.

I stared through the lattice in positive ecstasy. There was no doubt what he was doing; his muzzle was within four inches of the mirror and his mouth gaped like that of a moribund haddock. But he didn't stay long in that position. One moment I saw him gaping at the mirror; the next he was coming down the corridor like Farmer Babbage's bull.

I gave him a few seconds' start. I heard

him stamp through two galleries and down a flight of stairs and then I took up the pursuit. When I came out into the street, he was just turning the corner, evidently making for the short cut back to the inn. Taking a different turning, I ran as hard as I could until I reached the outskirts of the town, when I slowed down into a jaunty walk. Presently Burbler came in sight, stepping out as if he was in for the one-mile handicap—as, in fact, he was—on a path which joined mine a couple of hundred yards farther on. As soon as he saw me, he broke into a furious run, and, of course, I followed suit. But I let him draw ahead so that he reached the junction first; by which I secured the advantage of keeping him in sight and seeing him knock his shins on the stile. I could even hear his comments on the circumstance—which seemed to reflect unfairly on the constructor of the stile—and note a singular alteration in his gait; but I let him maintain the lead and even increase it,

for there was no sense in fatiguing myself unnecessarily.

We both entered the inn by the back door in quick succession and we both made straight for the little blue room—Burbler's bedroom. When I arrived, the door was securely bolted on the inside and earthquaky sounds proceeded from within. It was a mercy that our landlady, Mrs. Hodger, was stone deaf and kept no assistants!

“Go away!” roared Burbler as I fumbled at the handle. “Go away! I'm busy.”

I sniggered softly. Busy he evidently was! But he would be more busy before he'd finished. For it was a small room and it contained a medium-sized bed, three large chests of drawers, a wash-stand and a massive standing cupboard, besides other trifles. What there wasn't in that room was space to swing a cat. Not, of course, that Burbler wanted to swing a cat. He only wanted to take up the floor. But a floor of massive oak plank is a bit of a handful in itself without

the contents of a pantehnicon on top of it. Burbler wasn't going to be one of the unemployed. Busy indeed!

I thumped gleefully on the door, and, under cover of the noise and Burbler's profanities from within, quietly shot the two strong bolts on the outside. Then I gave Burbler a few words in season through the keyhole, and, having listened unmoved to his obscene responses, I took myself off to attend to my own little business.

And now that the excitement of the chase—so to speak—was over, a sudden chill of fear came over me. Supposing that I had misread the riddle after all! What a frightful anticlimax that would be, after bottling up my rival so neatly, too. I ran down to the cellar almost sick with apprehension and only just had presence of mind enough to bolt myself in.

There was no doubt as to which end of the third step I must pull, for one end was embedded in the wall, while the other offered a

very handy corner to lay hold of. This corner I grasped and gave one or two vigorous pulls ; but the massive hard-wood slab, which appeared to be fixed in its place with large tree-nails, gave no sign of yielding. Then I fetched a heavy mallet from the cupboard where the tools were kept, and, laying my folded handkerchief on the corner of the step, delivered two or three sharp taps. At the first tap it became evident that the tree-nails were dummies, for the step began to separate from its frame. A few more taps brought it fairly away so that I was able to swing it round and then lift it out bodily, leaving a large oblong hole with a dark cavity beyond.

Lighting the candle-lantern, I held it inside the hole. The cavity was walled and floored with brick and seemed to extend away to the left ; and as the air, though close and earthy, did not seem to be foul, I climbed through the opening and began cautiously to creep along a narrow passage. It was quite a long passage.

I had proceeded fully fifteen yards—in the direction of the sign-post, as I suddenly realised—when I came to a short flight of brick steps, beyond which the passage opened on either side into a range of vaults, each of which was occupied by rows of casks or by racks of strange-looking, squat, short-necked bottles.

There was something rather uncanny in the aspect of these casks and bottles, full, as I suspected, of contraband liquor and now mantled with the soft, grey dust of centuries. But I had little attention to bestow on them, for now the light of the lantern fell on a much more interesting object. Near the end of the passage was a large stone baluster like the pillar of a sundial; on top of it was a square slab of stone; and on the slab, three small kegs. They were not really ankers. The opportunity for a pun had tempted old Simon to stretch the facts, but that was a small matter. I ran forward eagerly to examine the booty.

The kegs were of rather unusual finish and

strength and were fitted with thick copper hoops. All three were broached, for the heads and the spare hoops lay by their sides ; and each keg was covered by a tile, thickly coated with dust. I had those tiles off in a twinkling, and found, as I had expected, a layer of neatly arranged gold coins, each set so as to exhibit the Harp and Cross device and the motto, " God with us."

I drew a deep breath of relief. The lurking fear that some previous explorer had visited the hiding-place was now set at rest. And yet I was conscious of a slight disappointment—such is the avarice begotten of treasure-hunting. For, after all, the promised ankers had dwindled to little kegs of barely a gallon capacity. It could only be a matter of a thousand or two at the most. And yet, perhaps, it was as well ; for I could probably carry these, one at a time, to the boat (which was the means of transport that I had selected) ; whereas I could not even have moved an anker filled with gold coins. Here I lifted one

of the kegs, to test its weight ; and a most horrible shock I received. For though it was inconveniently heavy for hasty removal, it was not heavy enough for a keg of gold. I grabbed up a handful of the gold coins ; and behold ! my fist was half full of sawdust !

Horror ! Was this another of Simon's beastly jokes ?

I thrust my hand deep into the keg. No coins could I feel with my groping fingers, but plenty of sawdust ; and embedded in it a number of rough, irregularly-shaped objects, one of which I fished out and held to the lantern. And then my chagrin was changed into delirious joy. For the object was a massive thumb-ring set with a great green stone ; apparently an emerald, and worth a hatful of gold. I dived into another keg and brought up a pendant set with large, rose-cut diamonds ; and the third yielded at the first cast a beautiful miniature of an elderly man—perhaps Simon himself—with a broad, diamond-studded frame.

I waited to investigate no more. Quickly heading up the kegs, I slipped on the hoops and tapped them into place with one of the tiles. The little casks were all prepared for convenient removal, for the end hoops were fitted with strong copper rings through which were rove stout slings of raw hide ; and these, thanks to the protection from rats and vermin offered by the stone pillar, were perfectly sound and strong. I lifted the kegs down, and, finding that I could just stagger under the weight of the three, was about to make my way out, when, suddenly, I bethought me of Burbler. I should have to carry my booty out to the landing-stage, for there was no time to move the boat to a safer place ; and it was just possible that Burbler might see me from the window ; and if he did, he would certainly give chase. I should have to land somewhere, and as he could easily keep up with the boat and observe where I landed, I should have no chance of getting away, encumbered with so heavy a burden.

What was to be done ?

I thought furiously for a few moments, and then I saw the solution. I must have yet another red herring to draw across my trail if necessary. The suggestion of the plan came from a pile of empty kegs—the memorials of many a forgotten smuggling trip. The wine-bins were full of sawdust and a number of short lengths of rusty chain were stacked in a corner. I don't know what they had been used for, but I know that they came in mighty useful just now ; for it took me but a few minutes to fill up three of the empty kegs with them and to add a packing of sawdust and head them up. Then I was ready to start.

I carried the six kegs out into the cellar, and uncommonly heavy they were, especially those filled with chain. Then I carefully replaced the step and banged it home until there was no sign of its having been disturbed ; after which, having put away the mallet, I proceeded to the actual embarkation. Caution suggested that I should take up the

three dummy kegs first, as I should have to leave them unguarded in the boat while I fetched the others, and I accordingly carried them up. It was growing dusk by this time, and a cloudy evening too, but not dark enough to cover my movements from Burbler if he should chance to look out of the window. But he didn't. I got the three dummies stowed in the boat safely and returned unobserved; and loud rumblings from the Blue Room told me that my rival was still busy.

I had just brought up the second three, after blowing out the candle in the lantern, and was close to the landing-stage, when a cessation of the noises from above caused me to look up. And it was lucky that I did; for there was Burbler at the window in his shirt-sleeves, gazing at me with an expression that would have curdled a can of sterilised milk. Stock-still he stood for a couple of seconds and then vanished; and as I bolted to the landing-stage, I heard him furiously shaking the door in his efforts to get out.

I lowered the kegs into the boat, jumped in myself, cast off the painter, snatched up the sculls and pulled away frantically downstream against the weakening flood-tide. And as I moved away into the dusk, the shattering of glass and the raising of a window told me that Burbler had given up the door in favour of the easy drop down into the garden.

The gathering gloom and the mists that were rising in the water-meadows made it difficult to see if I was being pursued ; but I had no doubt that Burbler was following the boat under cover of the scattered bushes and the embankments of the dykes. I turned the situation over as I plied the sculls. The only practicable place at which to land was Grove Ferry, some miles farther down ; and Burbler knew that and would be there when I arrived. He would know that I couldn't carry that weight across-country.

But there was one place where I should lose him for a minute or two ; a place where the river made a horse-shoe bend, enclosing a

little peninsula that was cut off from the mainland by a broad and deep dyke. The dyke was impassable as I knew from experience, and the fringing willows would screen me for a few minutes. At that place, then, the next act must be played.

It took me over half an hour to get there, during which I twice caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure climbing over a dyke-gate and instantly vanishing—presumably behind a bank. At length I passed the entrance to the broad dyke. The river swept away to the right and a forest of willows rose to cut me off from any possible observation. Instantly I ran the boat on the opposite bank—with the river between me and Burbler—and, making fast to an overhanging tree, landed the three genuine kegs and carried them into a meadow. Staggering along the bank of a straight dyke (or drainage ditch), I bore my burden to the first gate ; and here I regretfully sank them to the muddy bottom in about two feet of water. Returning to the river and

carefully noting the position of the tree to which I had made fast the boat, I cast off the painter and once more took to the sculls, pulling with all my might to make up for lost time ; and as I passed the outlet of the broad dyke, I had the satisfaction of making out quite distinctly a human head in a hat which I recognised, peering over the low embankment.

It was fully half a mile lower down that I made my second landing. At that point was a ruinous hovel—once, no doubt, a shepherd's hut, but now disused. Here, I thought I would secrete the three dummies and then pull back and recover my treasure, by which time Burbler would have purloined the dummies and made off, leaving the coast clear for me to pull down to Grove Ferry.

It was a neat scheme. But it didn't come off quite as I had expected ; for I made the mistake of going ashore to reconnoitre ; and I had hardly reached the hut when I heard a

loud splash, and when I looked round, there was that confounded Burbler in the boat pulling away up-stream like clockwork. It was frightfully annoying; for now it was I who was on the wrong side of the river. Moreover Burbler would discover the fraud prematurely and then I should have him shadowing me again and preventing me from recovering my treasure.

But this would never do. Those kegs might be discovered at daybreak by some shepherd or herdsman. Somehow I must recover them to-night and hide them more securely; and with this resolution, I faced about and headed up-stream with the intention of making for Fordwich Bridge.

I set off at a leisurely pace, keeping by the river until I was cut off from it by the big dyke, which I followed to the spot where it joined the river. And here I got a great surprise; for as I came out on the riverside path, I perceived a man a little distance ahead hurrying in the same direction. Now as no

one had passed me, this man must have come from the river. With a sudden suspicion, I broke into a run and overtook him. And my suspicion was correct. It was Burbler. He thought I should return to the inn, and he meant to be there when I arrived.

“Hallo, Mr. Cobb!” he exclaimed. “You taking an evening walk, too!”

“Now, look here, Burbler,” said I. “What have you done with those kegs?”

“Kegs?” he exclaimed vacantly. “What kegs?”

“The three kegs or ankers, with Glynn’s treasure in them.”

“You don’t mean to say you found the treasure,” he cried with a miserable pretence of surprise.

“You know I did,” said I; “and you’ve filched it.”

“I assure you, Mr. Cobb,” he protested, “that I know nothing about it.”

Now it is useless to argue with a liar. I tried a new tack.

“ Well,” I said, “ someone has filched it. So there’s the whole thing gone. Every stiver. That is, unless I should have happened to take the wrong kegs.”

“ The wrong kegs ! ” he gasped. “ Why—how could you ? ”

“ Why, you see, that old fool Glynn must needs give you nine ankers to choose from instead of simply hiding the three. I took the three heaviest but I had no time to see what was in them. They may be the wrong ones. I hope they are.”

“ So do I,” said Burbler. And then he was silent and very thoughtful.

“ Now listen,” I said, after a pause. “ I’m going to make you an offer. Will you share the treasure with me wherever it is ? ”

“ I tell you I haven’t got it,” he replied doggedly ; and I washed my hands of him. I had given him a handsome chance and would have been fool enough to stand by my promise. Now he shouldn’t have any.

“ Will you share with me,” I said “ if I tell you where the hiding-place is ? ”

He shook his head and repeated that “ he hadn’t got it.”

“ Think it over,” I urged. “ I’ll just walk on slowly and leave you to consider my offer. Don’t refuse off-hand. You can overtake me and give me your decision.”

With this I strolled on and left him. I knew what he would do, for neither the boat nor the dummies could be far away. But they must have been nearer than I thought, for I had not gone above a half a mile when I heard him running to overtake me and panting heavily. I halted, and as he came up I asked :

“ Well ? What is your decision ? ”

“ Phoo ! ” he gasped. “ I’ve—phoo !—thought it over—Mr. Cobb—and it seems—ha—only fair to—ha—let you have your half. Don’t wanter be greedy.”

“ Where are the kegs ? ” I asked.

“ In the boat. Boat’s in the dyke.”

We turned back together and presently Burbler asked :

“ Er—where did you say you found the stuff ? ”

I shook my head. “ Wait till we’ve had a look at the kegs,” I replied.

A few minutes more brought us to the dyke, and there was the boat, snugly stowed out of sight under a clump of bush-willows. Burbler hauled it out by the sunken painter and displayed the three kegs—all wet from recent submersion. We both got into the boat and Burbler took the sculls, leaving me to examine the kegs—all of which had been broached and hastily reheaded.

“ Before you open them,” said Burbler, “ tell me where you found them.”

“ In the cellar,” I replied. “ Pull out the middle step and you’ll find a secret passage. But I’ll show you when we get back.”

Burbler pulled a few strokes and then awkwardly ran into the bank. He stood up as if to push off, but instead, leaped ashore

with both sculls in his hands and, giving the bow of the boat a shove with his foot that sent her out into mid-stream, threw the sculls away and ran off as hard as he could go towards the inn.

I laughed joyously as he disappeared into the darkness. A few minutes paddling with my open hand brought the boat to the opposite bank, where I landed and towed her down to the tree to which I had secured her before and now again made fast. But I didn't need her after all. For just as I had hauled up my three kegs from the dyke, I heard the sound of wheels on a hidden by-road that crossed the marshes hard by. It turned out to be the rural carrier's cart, returning to Canterbury for the night, with ample accommodation for one passenger and three small kegs. Less than an hour later I sat alone and at peace in a first-class carriage bound for Charing Cross; and on the hat-rack above reposed the "ankores three" with their contents of "goode redd golde."

I live at Elham Manor nowadays, of which house I own the freehold. The Royal George is also my property, subject to Mrs. Hodger's tenancy. At the inn resides, as a permanent boarder, a pensioner of mine; a retired police-officer, who spends most of his time in the unsuccessful pursuit of the Fordidge trout. His name, by the way, is Burbler.

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