

SATURDAY

JUNE 5

TEN CENTS

ALL-STORY WEEKLY



The
Thirty-nine
Steps
A War Mystery
by John Buchan

Cinder-Eve
by Fred Jackson

Frank Hastings

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The Thirty-nine Steps

by John Buchan

Author of "Prester John."

CHAPTER I.

The Man Who Died.



RETURNED from the city about three o'clock on that May afternoon pretty well disgusted with life. I had been three months in the old country and was fed-up with it. If any one had told me a year ago that I would have been feeling like that, I should have called him a liar; but there was the fact.

The weather made me liverish; the talk of the ordinary Englishman made me sick; I couldn't get enough exercise, and the amusements of London seemed as flat as soda-water that has been standing in the sun. "Richard Hannay," I kept telling myself, "you have got into the wrong ditch, my friend, and you had better climb out."

It made me bite my lips to think of all the plans I had been building up those last years in Buluwayo. I had got my pile—not one of the big ones, but good enough for me; and I had figured out all kinds of ways of enjoying myself.

My father had brought me out from Scotland at the age of six, and I had never been home since; so England was a sort of "Arabian Nights" to me, and I counted on stopping there

for the rest of my days. But from the first I was disappointed with it.

In about a week I was tired of seeing sights, and in less than a month I had had enough of restaurants and theaters and race meetings. I had no real pal to go about with, which probably explains things. Plenty of people invited me to their houses, but they didn't seem much interested in me. They would ask me a question or two about South Africa and then get on to their own affairs. A lot of Imperialist ladies asked me to tea to meet school-masters from New Zealand and editors from Vancouver, and that was the dismalest business of all.

Here was I, thirty-seven years old, sound in wind and limb, with enough money to have a good time, yawning my head off all day. I had just about settled to clear out and get back to the veld, for I was the best-bored man in the United Kingdom.

That afternoon I had been worrying my brokers about investments to give my mind something to work on, and on my way home I turned into my club—rather a pot-house, which took in Colonial members. I had a long drink and read the evening papers. They were full of the row in the Near East, and there was an article about Karolidis, the Greek premier.

I rather fancied the chap.

From all accounts he seemed the one big man in the show, and he played a straight game, too, which was more than could be said for most of them. I gathered that they hated him pretty blackly in Berlin and Vienna, but that we were going to stick to him, and one paper said that he was the only barrier between Europe and Armageddon.

I remember wondering if I could get a job in those parts. It struck me that Albania was the sort of place that might keep a man from yawning.

About six o'clock I went home, dressed, dined at the Café Royal, and turned into a music-hall. It was a silly show, all capering women and monkey-faced men, and I did not stay long. The night was fine and clear as I walked back to the flat I had hired near Portland Place. The crowd surged past me on the pavements, all busy and chattering, and I envied the people for having something to do.

These shop-girls and clerks and dandies and policemen had some interest in life that kept them going.

I gave half a crown to a beggar because I saw him yawn; he was a fellow sufferer. At Oxford Circus I looked up into the spring sky and I made a vow. I would give the old country another day to fit me into something; if nothing happened I would take the next boat for the Cape.

My flat was the first floor in a new block behind Langham Place.

There was a common staircase with a porter and a liftman at the entrance, but there was no restaurant or anything of that sort, and each flat was quite shut off from the others. I hate servants on the premises, so I had a fellow to look after me who came in by the day.

He arrived before eight o'clock every morning and used to depart at seven, for I never dined at home.

I was just fitting my key into the door when I noticed a man at my elbow. I had not seen him approach, and the sudden appearance made me start. He was a slim man with a short,

brown beard and small, gimlety, blue eyes.

I recognized him as the occupant of a flat on the top floor, with whom I had passed the time of day on the stairs.

"Can I speak to you?" he said. "May I come in for a minute?" He was steadying his voice with an effort, and his hand was pawing my arm.

I got my door open and motioned him in. No sooner was he over the threshold than he made a dash for my back room where I used to smoke and write my letters. Then he bolted back.

"Is the door locked?" he asked feverishly, and he fastened the chain with his own hand.

"I'm very sorry," he said humbly. "It's a mighty liberty, but you looked the kind of man who would understand. I've had you in my mind all this week when things got troublesome. Say, will you do me a good turn?"

"I'll listen to you," I said; "that's all I'll promise." I was getting worried by the antics of this nervous little chap.

There was a tray of drinks on a table beside him, from which he filled himself a stiff whisky and soda. He drank it off in three gulps, and cracked the glass as he set it down.

"Pardon," he said; "I'm a bit rattled to-night. You see, I happen at this moment to be dead."

I sat down in an armchair and lit my pipe.

"What does it feel like?" I asked. I was pretty certain that I had to deal with a madman.

A smile flickered over his drawn face. "I'm not mad—yet. Say, Mr. Hannay, I've been watching you, and I reckon you're a cool customer. I reckon, too, you're an honest man and not afraid of playing a bold hand. I'm going to confide in you. I need help worse than any man ever needed it, and I want to know if I can count you in?"

"Get on with your yarn," I said, "and then I'll tell you."

He seemed to brace himself for a great effort, and then started on the queerest rigmarole. I didn't get hold of it at first, and I had to stop and ask him questions. But here is the gist of it:

He was an American, from Kentucky, and after college, being pretty well off, he had started out to see the world. He wrote a bit, and acted as war correspondent for a Chicago paper, and spent a year or two in southeastern Europe. I gathered that he was a fine linguist, and had got to know pretty well the society of those parts. He spoke familiarly of many names that I remembered to have seen in the newspapers.

He had played about with politics, he told me—at first for the interest of them, and then because he couldn't help himself. I read him as a sharp, restless fellow, who always wanted to get down to the roots of things. He got a little farther down than he wanted.

I am giving you what he told me as well as I could make it out. Away behind all the governments and the armies there was a big subterranean movement going on, engineered by very dangerous people. He had come on it by accident; it fascinated him; he went further, and then got caught.

I gathered that most of the people in it were the sort of educated anarchists that make revolutions, but that besides them there were financiers who were playing for money.

A clever man can make big profits on a falling market; and it suited the plans of both classes to set Europe by the ears. He told me some queer things that explained a lot that had puzzled me—things that happened in the Balkan War; how one state suddenly came out on top; why alliances were made and broken; why certain men disappeared, and where the sinews of war came from.

The aim of the whole conspiracy was to get Russia and Germany at loggerheads.

When I asked why, he said that the anarchist lot thought it would give them their chance. Everything would be in the melting-pot, and they looked to see a new world emerge. The capitalists would rake in the shekels and make fortunes by buying up wreckage.

Capital, he said, had no conscience and no fatherland; besides, the Jew was behind it, and the Jew hated Russia worse than hell.

"Do you wonder?" he cried. "For three hundred years they have been persecuted, and this is the return match for the pogroms. The Jew is everywhere, but you have to go far down the back stairs to find him.

"Take any big Teutonic business concern. If you have dealings with it the first man you meet is Prince von Something, an elegant young man who talks Eaton-and-Harrow English. But he cuts no ice. If your business is big, you get behind him and find a prognathous Westphalian with a retreating brow and the manners of a hog.

"He is the German business man that gives your English papers the shakes. But if you're on the biggest kind of a job and are bound to get to the real boss, ten to one you are brought up against a little, white-faced Jew in a bath-chair, with an eye like a rattlesnake. Yes, sir, he is the man who is ruling the world just now, and he has his knife in the empire of the Czar because his father was flogged in some one-horse location on the Volga."

I could not help saying that his Jew anarchists seemed to have got left behind a little.

"Yes and no," he said. "They won up to a point, but they struck a bigger thing than money, a thing that couldn't be bought—the old elemental fighting instincts of man. If you're going to be killed you invent some kind of flag and country to fight for, and if you survive, you get to love the thing. These foolish devils of soldiers have found something they care for, and that has upset the pretty plan laid

in Berlin and Vienna. But my friends haven't played their last card by a long sight. They've got the aces up their sleeves, and unless I can keep alive for a month, they are going to play it, and win."

"But I thought you were dead." I put in.

"Death is the door of life," he smiled. "I'm coming to that, but I've got to put you wise to a lot of things first. If you read your newspaper, I guess you know the name of Constantine Karolides?"

I sat up at that, for I had been reading about him that very afternoon.

"He is the man that has wrecked all their games. He is the one big brain in the whole show, and he happens also to be an honest man. Therefore he has been marked down these twelve months past. I found that out—not that it was difficult, for any fool could guess as much. But I found out the way they were going to get him, and that knowledge was deadly. That's why I have had to de cease."

He had another drink and I mixed it for him myself, for I was getting interested in the beggar.

"They can't get him in his own land, for he has a bodyguard of Epirotes that would skin their grandmothers. But on the fifteenth day of June he is coming to this city. The British Foreign Office has taken to having international tea-parties, and the biggest of them is due on that date. Now, Karolides is reckoned the principal guest, and if my friends have their way, he will never return to his admiring countrymen."

"That's simple enough, anyhow," I said. "You can warn him and keep him at home."

"And play their game?" he asked sharply. "If he does not come they win, for he's the only man that can straighten out the tangle. And if his government is warned he won't come, for he does not know how big the stakes will be on June 15."

"What about the British govern-

ment?" I said. "They're not going to let their guests be murdered. Tip them the wink, and they'll take extra precautions."

"No good. They might stuff your city with plain-clothes detectives and double the police, and Constantine would still be a doomed man. My friends are not playing this game for fun. They want a big occasion for the taking off, with the eyes of all Europe on it. He'll be murdered by an Austrian, and there'll be plenty of evidence to show the connivance of the big folk in Vienna and Berlin. It will all be an infernal lie, of course; but the case will look black enough to the world.

"I'm not talking hot air, my friend.

"I happen to know every detail of the hellish contrivance, and I can tell you it will be the most finished piece of blackguardism since the Borgias. But it's not going to come off if there's a certain man who knows the wheels of the business alive right here in London on the 15th day of June. And that man is going to be your servant, Franklin P. Scudder."

I was getting to like the little chap. His jaw had shut like a rat-trap, and there was the fire of battle in his gimlet eyes. If he was spinning me a yarn he could act up to it.

"Where did you find out this story?" I asked.

"I got the first hint in an inn on the Achensee in Tyrol. That set me inquiring, and I collected my other clues in a fur-shop in the Galician quarter of Buda, in a Strangers' Club in Vienna, and in a little book-shop off the Racknitzstrasse in Leipsic. I completed my evidence ten days ago in Paris.

"I can't tell you the details now, for it's something of a tale. When I was quite sure in my own mind I judged it my business to disappear, and I reached this city by a mighty queer circuit. I left Paris a dandified French-American, and I sailed from Hamburg a Jew diamond merchant.

"In Norway I was an English student of Ibsen, collecting materials for lectures; but when I left Bergen I was a moving-picture man with special squee films. And I came here from Leith with a lot of pulpwood preparations in my pocket to put before the London newspapers. Till yesterday I thought I had muddied my trail some, and was feeling pretty happy. Then—"

The recollection seemed to upset him, and he gulped down some whisky.

"—then I saw a man standing in the street outside this block. I used to stay close in my room all day, and only slip out after dark for an hour or two. I watched him for a bit from my window, and I thought I recognized him. He came in and spoke to the porter. When I came back from my walk last night I found a card in my letter-box. It bore the name of the man I want least to meet on God's earth."

I think that the look in my companion's eyes, the sheer naked fright on his face, completed my conviction of his honesty. My own voice sharpened a bit as I asked him what he did next.

"I realized that I was bottled as sure as a pickled herring, and that there was only one way out. I had to die. If my pursuers knew I was dead they would go to sleep again."

"How did you manage it?"

"I told the man that valets me that I was feeling pretty bad, and I got myself up to look like death. That wasn't difficult, for I'm no slouch at disguises. Then I got a corpse—you can always get a body in London if you know where to go for it. I fetched it back in a trunk on the top of a four-wheeler, and I had to be assisted upstairs to my room.

"You see, I had to pile up some evidence for the inquest. I went to bed and got my man to mix me a sleeping-draft, and then told him to clear out. He wanted to fetch a doc-

tor, but I swore some and said I couldn't abide leeches. When I was left alone I started in to fake up that corpse.

"He was my size, and I judged had perished from too much alcohol—so I put some spirits handy about the place. The jaw was the weak point in the likeness, so I blew it away with a revolver. I dare say there will be somebody to-morrow to swear to having heard a shot; but there are no neighbors on my floor, and I guessed I could risk that.

"So I left the body in bed dressed up in my pajamas, with a revolver lying on the bed-clothes and a considerable mess around. Then I got into a suit of clothes I had kept waiting for emergencies. I didn't dare to shave for fear of leaving tracks; and, besides, it wasn't any kind of use my trying to get into the streets.

"I had had you in my mind all day, and there seemed nothing to do but to make an appeal to you. I watched from my window till I saw you come home, and then slipped down the stairs to meet you. There, sir, I guess you know about as much as me of this business."

He sat blinking like an owl, fluttering with nerves and yet desperately determined.

By this time I was pretty well convinced that he was going straight with me. It was the wildest sort of narrative; but I had heard in my time many steep tales which had turned out to be true, and I had made a practise of judging the man rather than the story.

If he had wanted to get a location in my flat and then cut my throat he would have pitched a milder yarn.

"Hand me your key," I said, "and I'll take a look at the corpse. Excuse my caution, but I'm bound to verify a bit if I can."

He shook his head mournfully. "I reckoned you'd ask for that, but I haven't got it. It's on my chain on the dressing-table. I had to leave it behind, for I couldn't leave any clues

to breed suspicions. The gentry who are after me are pretty bright-eyed citizens. You'll have to take me on trust for the night, and to-morrow you'll get proof of the corpse business right enough."

I thought for an instant or two.

"Right! I'll trust you for the night. I'll lock you into this room and keep the key. Just one word, Mr. Scudder; I believe you're straight, but if so be you are not I should warn you that I'm a handy man with a gun."

"Sure!" he said, jumping up with some briskness. "I haven't the privilege of your name, sir; but let me tell you that you're a white man. I'll thank you to lend me a razor."

I took him into my bedroom and turned him loose.

In half an hour's time a figure came out that I scarcely recognized. Only his gimlety, hungry eyes were the same. He was shaved clean, his hair was parted in the middle, and he had cut his eyebrows.

Further: He carried himself as if he had been drilled, and was the very model—even to the brown complexion—of some British officer who had had a long spell in India. He had a monocle, too, which he stuck in his eye, and every trace of the American had gone out of his speech.

"My hat! Mr. Scudder—" I stammered.

"Not Mr. Scudder," he corrected; "Captain Theophilus Digby, of the Seventh Goorkhas, presently home on leave. I'll thank you to remember that, sir."

I made him up a bed in my smoking-room and sought my own couch, more cheerful than I had been for the past month. Things did happen occasionally even in this God-forsaken metropolis!

I woke next morning to hear my man, Paddock, making the deuce of a row at the smoking-room door.

Paddock was a fellow I had done a good turn to out on the Selakwi, and

I had inspanned him as my servant as soon as I got to England. He had about as much gift of the gab as a hippopotamus, and was not a great hand at valeting; but I knew I could count on his loyalty.

"Stop that row, Paddock," I said. "There's a friend of mine, Captain—Captain—" (I couldn't remember the name) "dossing down in there. Get breakfast for two, and then come and speak to me."

I told Paddock a fine story about how my friend was a great swell, with his nerves pretty bad from overwork, who wanted absolute rest and stillness. Nobody had got to know he was here, or he would be besieged by communications from the India office and the prime minister, and his cure would be ruined.

I am bound to say Scudder played up splendidly when he came to breakfast.

He fixed Paddock with his eyeglass, just like a British officer; asked him about the Boer War, and slung out at me a lot of stuff about imaginary pals of whom I had never heard. Paddock couldn't learn to call me "sir," but he "sirred" Scudder as if his life depended on it.

I left him with the newspaper and a box of cigars, and went down to the city till luncheon. When I got back the porter had an important face.

"Nawsty business 'ere this mornin', sir. Gent in No. 15 been and shot 'isself. They've just took 'im to the mortuary. The police are up there now."

I ascended to No. 15 and found a couple of bobbies and an inspector busy making an examination. I asked a few idiotic questions, and they soon kicked me out. Then I found the man that had valeted Scudder, and pumped him; but I could see he suspected nothing.

He was a whining fellow with a churchyard face, and half a crown went far to console him.

I attended the inquest next day. A

partner of some publishing firm gave evidence that the deceased had brought him wood-pulp propositions, and had been, he believed, an agent of an American business. The jury found it a case of suicide while of unsound mind, and the few effects were handed over to the American consul to deal with.

I gave Scudder a full account of the affair, and it interested him greatly. He said he wished he could have attended the inquest, for he reckoned it would be about as spicy as to read one's own obituary notice.

The first two days he stayed with me in that back room he was very peaceful. He read and smoked a bit, and made a heap of jottings in a notebook; and every night we had a game of chess, at which he beat me hollow.

I think he was nursing his nerves back to health, for he had had a pretty trying time.

But on the third day I could see he was beginning to get restless. He fixed up a list of the days till June 15 and ticked each off with a red pencil, and made remarks in shorthand against them. I would find him sunk in a brown study, with his sharp eyes abstracted, and after these spells of meditation he was apt to be very despondent.

Then I could see that he began to get edgy again. He listened for little noises, and was always asking me if Paddock could be trusted. Once or twice he got very peevish and apologized for it. I didn't blame him.

I made every allowance, for he had taken on a fairly stiff job.

It was not the safety of his own skin that troubled him, but the success of the scheme he had planned. That little man was clean pluck all through, without a soft spot in him. One night he was very solemn.

"Say, Hannay," he said, "I judge I should let you a bit deeper into this business. I should hate to go out without leaving somebody else to put up a fight."

And he began to tell me in detail what I had only heard from him vaguely.

I did not give him very close attention. The fact is I was more interested in his own adventures than in his high politics. I reckoned that Karolides and his affairs were not my business, leaving all that to him.

So a lot that he said slipped clean out of my memory. I remember that he was very clear that the danger to Karolides would not begin till he had got to London, and would come from the very highest quarters, where there would be no thought of suspicion. He mentioned the name of a woman—Julia Czechenyi—as having something to do with the danger.

She would be the decoy, I gathered, to get Karolides out of the care of his guards. He talked, too, about a Black Stone and a man that lisped in his speech, and he described very particularly somebody that he never referred to without a shudder—an old man with a young voice who could hood his eyes like a hawk.

He spoke a good deal about death, too. He was mortally anxious about winning through with his job, but he didn't care a rush for his life.

"I reckon it's like going to sleep when you are pretty well tired out and waking to find a summer day with the scent of hay coming in at the window. I used to thank God for such mornings 'way back in the blue-grass country, and I guess I'll thank Him when I wake up on the other side of Jordan."

Next day he was much more cheerful, and read the life of Stonewall Jackson much of the time. I went out to dinner with a mining engineer I had got to see on business, and came back about half past ten, in time for our game of chess before turning in.

I had a cigar in my mouth, I remember, as I pushed open the smoking-room door. The lights were not lit, which struck me as odd. I wondered if Scudder had turned in.

I snapped the switch, but there was nobody there. Then I saw something in the far corner which made me drop my cigar and fall into a cold sweat.

My guest was lying sprawled on his back. There was a long knife through his heart, which skewered him to the floor.

CHAPTER II.

The Milkman Starts on His Travels.

I SAT down in an armchair and felt very sick. That lasted for maybe five minutes, and was succeeded by a fit of the horrors. The poor, staring, white face on the floor was more than I could bear, and I managed to get a table-cloth and cover it. Then I staggered to a cupboard, found the brandy, and swallowed several mouthfuls.

I had seen men die violently before; indeed, I had killed a few myself in the Matabele War. But this cold-blooded indoor business was different. Still I managed to pull myself together.

I looked at my watch, and saw that it was half past ten. An idea seized me, and I went over the flat with a small-tooth comb. There was nobody there, nor any trace of anybody, but I shuttered and bolted all the windows and put the chain on the door.

By this time my wits were coming back to me and I could think again. It took me about an hour to figure the thing out, and I did not hurry; for, unless the murderer came back, I had till about six o'clock in the morning for my cogitations.

I was in the soup—that was pretty clear. Any shadow of a doubt I might have had about the truth of Scudder's tale was now gone. The proof of it was lying under the table-cloth. The men who knew that he knew what he knew had found him, and had taken the best way to make certain of his silence.

Yes; but he had been in my rooms

four days, and his enemies must have reckoned that he had confided in me. So I would be the next to go. It might be that very night, or next day, or the day after, but my number was up all right.

Then suddenly I thought of another probability. Supposing I went out now and called in the police, or went to bed and let Paddock find the body and call them in the morning. What kind of a story was I to tell about Scudder?

I had lied to Paddock about him, and the whole thing looked desperately fishy. If I made a clean breast of it and told the police anything he had told me, they would simply laugh at me. The odds were a thousand to one that I would be charged with the murder, and the circumstantial evidence was strong enough to hang me.

Few people knew me in England; I had no real pal who could come forward and swear to my character. Perhaps that was what those secret enemies were playing for. They were clever enough for anything, and an English prison was as good a way of getting rid of me till after June 15 as a knife in my chest.

Besides, if I told the whole story, and by any miracle was believed, I would be playing their game. Karolides would stay at home, which was what they wanted. Somehow or other the sight of Scudder's dead face had made me a firm believer in his scheme.

He was gone, but he had taken me into his confidence, and I was pretty well bound to carry on his work. You may think this ridiculous for a man in danger of his life, but that was the way I looked at it.

I am an ordinary sort of fellow, not braver than other people, but I hate to see a good man downed; and that long knife would not be the end of Scudder if I could play the game in his place.

It took me an hour or two to think this out, and by that time I had come to a decision. I must vanish somehow and keep vanished till the end of the second week of June.

Then I must somehow find a way to get in touch with the government people and tell them what Scudder had told me.

I wished to Heaven he had told me more, and that I had listened more carefully to the little he had told me, I knew nothing but the barest facts. There was a big risk that, even if I weathered the other dangers, I would not be believed in the end. I must take my chance of that and hope that something might happen which would confirm my tale in the eyes of the government.

My first job was to keep going for the next three weeks. It was now the 24th day of May, and that meant twenty days of hiding before I could venture to approach the powers that be. I reckoned that two sets of people would be looking for me—Scudder's enemies to put me out of existence, and the police, who would want me for Scudder's murder.

It was going to be a giddy hunt, and it was queer how the prospect comforted me. I had been slack so long that almost any chance of activity was welcome. When I had to sit alone with that corpse and wait on Fortune I was no better than a crushed worm, but if my neck's safety was to hang on my own wits I was prepared to be cheerful about it.

The next thought was whether Scudder had any papers about him to give me a better clue to the business. I drew back the table-cloth and searched his pockets. I had no longer any shrinking from the body. The face was wonderfully calm for a man who had been struck down in a moment.

There was nothing in the breast-pocket, and only a few loose coins and a cigar-holder in the waistcoat. The trousers held a little penknife and some silver, and the side-pocket of his jacket contained an old crocodile-skin cigar-case.

There was no sign of the little black book in which I had seen him making

notes. That had, no doubt, been taken by his murderer.

But as I looked up from my task I saw that some drawers had been pulled out in the writing-table. Scudder would never have left them in that state, for he was the tidiest of mortals. Some one must have been searching for something—perhaps for the notebook.

I went round the flat and found that everything had been ransacked—the inside of books, drawers, cupboards, boxes, even the pockets of the clothes in my wardrobe and the sideboard in the dining-room. There was no trace of the book.

Most likely the enemy had found it, but they had not found it on Scudder's body.

Then I got out an atlas and looked at a big map of the British Isles. My notion was to get off to some wild district, where my veldcraft would be of some use to me, for I would be like a trapped rat in a city. I considered that Scotland would be best, for my people were Scotch, and I could pass anywhere as an ordinary Scotsman. I had half an idea at first to be a German tourist, for my father had had German partners and I had been brought up to speak the tongue pretty fluently, not to mention having put in three years prospecting for copper in German Damara-land.

But I calculated that it would be less conspicuous to be a Scot, and less in a line with what the police might know of my past. I fixed on Galloway as the best place to go to. It was the nearest wild part of Scotland, so far as I could figure it out, and from the look of the map was not overthick with population.

A search in Bradshaw informed me that a train left St. Pancras at seven-ten, which would land me at Galloway Station in the late afternoon. That was well enough, but a more important matter was how I was to make my way to the station; for I was pretty certain that Scudder's friends would

be watching outside. This puzzled me for a bit; then I had an inspiration on which I went to bed and slept for two troubled hours.

I got up at four and opened my bedroom shutters. The faint light of a fine summer morning was flooding the skies, and the sparrows had begun to chatter. I had a great revulsion of feeling and felt a God-forgotten fool.

My inclination was to let things slide, and trust to the British police taking a reasonable view of my case. But as I reviewed the situation I could find no arguments to bring against my decision of the previous night; so, with a wry mouth, I resolved to go on with my plan. I was not feeling in any particular funk, only disinclined to go looking for trouble, if you understand me.

I hunted out a well-used tweed suit, a pair of strong-nailed boots, and a flannel shirt with a collar. Into my pockets I stuffed a spare shirt, a cloth cap, some handkerchiefs, and a tooth-brush. I had drawn a good sum in gold from the bank two days before, in case Scudder should want money, and I took fifty pounds of it in sovereigns in a belt which I had brought back from Rhodesia. That was about all I wanted. Then I had a bath and cut my mustache, which was long and drooping, into a short stubbly fringe.

Now came the next step. Paddock used to arrive punctually at seven-thirty and let himself in with a latch-key. But about twenty minutes to seven, as I knew from bitter experience, the milkman turned up with a great clatter of cans, and deposited my share outside my door.

I had seen that milkman sometimes when I had gone out for an early ride. He was a young man about my own height, with a scrubby mustache, dressed in a white overall. On him I staked all my chances.

I went into the darkened smoking-room, where the rays of morning light were beginning to creep through the shutters. There I breakfasted off a

whisky-and-soda and some biscuits from the cupboard. By this time it was getting on to six o'clock.

I put a pipe in my pocket and filled my pouch from the tobacco jar on the table by the fireplace. As I poked into the tobacco my fingers touched something hard, and I drew out Scudder's little black note-book.

That seemed to me a good omen. I lifted the cloth from the body, and was amazed at the peace and dignity of the dead face. "Good-by, old chap," I said; "I am going to do my best for you. Wish me well wherever you are."

Then I hung about in the hall, waiting for the milkman. That was the worst part of the business, for I was fairly choking to get out of doors. Six-thirty passed, then six-forty, but still he did not come.

The fool had chosen this day of all days to be late.

At one minute after the quarter to seven I heard the rattle of the cans outside. I opened the front door, and there was my man, singling out my can from a bunch he carried and whistling through his teeth. He jumped a bit at the sight of me.

"Come in here a moment," I said; "I want a word with you." And I led him into the dining-room.

"I reckon you're a bit of a sportsman," I said, "and I want you to do me a service. Lend me your cap and overall for ten minutes, and here's a sovereign for you."

His eyes opened at the sight of the gold, and he grinned broadly. "What's the game?" he asked.

"A bet," I said. "I haven't time to explain, but to win it I've got to be a milkman for the next ten minutes. All you've got to do is to stay here till I come back. You'll be a bit late, but nobody will complain, and you'll have that quid for yourself."

"Right-oh!" he said cheerily. "I ain't the man to spoil a bit of sport. Here's the rig, guv'nor."

I stuck on his flat, blue hat and his

white overall, picked up the cans, banged my door, and went whistling down-stairs. The porter at the foot told me to shut my jaw, which sounded as if my make-up was adequate.

At first I thought there was nobody in the street. Then I caught sight of a policeman a hundred yards down, and a loafer shuffling past on the other side. Some impulse made me raise my eyes to the house opposite, and there at a first-floor window was a face.

As the loafer passed he looked up, and I fancied a signal was exchanged.

I crossed the street, whistling gaily and imitating the jaunty swing of the milkman. Then I took the first side street and turned up a left-hand turning which led past a lot of vacant ground. There was no one in the little street, so I dropped the milk-cans inside the hoarding, and sent the hat and overall after them.

I had only just put on my cloth cap when a postman came round the corner. I gave him good morning, and he answered me unsuspectingly. Just then the clock of a neighboring church struck the hour of seven.

There was not a moment to spare.

As soon as I got to Euston Road I took to my heels and ran. The clock at Euston Station showed five minutes past the hour. At St. Pancras I had no time to take a ticket, let alone that I had not settled upon my destination. A porter told me the platform, and as I entered it I saw the train already in motion.

Two station officials blocked the way, but I dodged them and clambered into the last carriage.

Three minutes later, as we were roaring through the northern tunnels, an irate guard interviewed me. He wrote out for me a ticket to Newtown Stewart, a name which had suddenly come back to my memory, and he conducted me from the first-class compartment where I had ensconced myself to a third-class smoker, occupied by a sailor and a stout woman with a child.

He went off grumbling; and as I mopped my brow I observed to my companions in my broadest Scotch that it was a sore job catching trains. I had already entered upon my part.

"The impudence o' that gyaird," said the lady bitterly. "He needit a Scotch tongue to pit him in his place. He was complainin' o' this wean no haein' a ticket and her no fower till August twelvemonth, and he was objectin' to this gentleman spittin'."

The sailor cheerfully agreed, and I started my new life in an atmosphere of protest against authority. I reminded myself that a week ago I had been finding the world dull.

CHAPTER III.

The Literary Innkeeper's Adventure.

I HAD a solemn time traveling north that day.

It was fine May weather, with the hawthorn flowering on every hedge; and I asked myself why, when I was still a free man, I had stayed on in London and not got the good of this heavenly country. I didn't dare face the restaurant car, but I got a luncheon basket at Leeds, and shared it with the fat woman.

Also I got the morning's papers, with news about starters for the Derby and the beginning of the cricket season, and some paragraphs about how Balkan affairs were settling down and a British squadron was going to Kiel.

When I had done with them I got out Scudder's little black note-book and studied it. It was pretty well filled with jottings, chiefly figures, though now and then a name was printed in. For example, I found the words "Hofgaard," "Luneville," and "Avocado" pretty often, and especially the word "Pavia."

Now I was certain that Scudder never did anything without a reason, and I was pretty sure that there was a cipher in all this. That is a subject which has always interested me, and

I did a bit at it myself once as intelligence officer at Delagoa Bay during the Boer War.

I have always had a head for things like chess and puzzles, and I used to reckon myself pretty good at finding out ciphers.

This one looked like the numerical kind where sets of figures correspond to the letters of the alphabet, but any fairly shrewd man can find the clue to that sort after an hour or two's work, and I didn't think Scudder would have been content with anything so easy. So I fastened on the printed words, for you can make a pretty good numerical cipher if you have a key-word which gives you the sequence of the letters.

I tried for hours, but none of the words answered.

Then I fell asleep, and woke at Dumfries just in time to bundle out and get into the slow Galloway train. There was a man on the platform whose looks I didn't like, but he never glanced at me; and when I caught sight of myself in the mirror of an automatic machine, I didn't wonder.

With my brown face, my old tweeds and my slouch I was the very model of one of the hill farmers who were crowding into the third-class carriages.

I traveled with half a dozen in an atmosphere of shag and clay pipes. They had come from the weekly market, and their mouths were full of prices. I heard accounts of how the lambing had gone up the Cairn and the Deuch and a dozen other mysterious waters.

Above half the men had lunched heavily and were highly flavored with whisky, but they let me alone. We rumbled slowly into a land of little wooded glens and then to a great, wide moorland place, gleaming with lochs, with high, blue hills showing northward.

About five o'clock the carriages had emptied and I was left alone, as I had hoped. I got out at the next station,

a little place whose name I scarcely noted, set in the heart of a bog. It reminded me of one of those forgotten little stations in the Karros.

An old station-master was digging in his garden, and with his spade over his shoulder sauntered to the train, took charge of a parcel, and went back to his potatoes. A child of ten received my ticket, and I emerged on a white road that straggled over the brown moss.

It was a gorgeous spring evening, with every hill showing as clear as a cut amethyst.

The air had the queer rooty smell of bogs, but it was as fresh as mid-ocean, and it had the strangest effect on my spirit. I actually felt light-hearted. I might have been a boy out for spring-holiday tramp, instead of a man of thirty-seven, very much wanted by the police.

I felt just as I used to feel when I was starting for a big trek on a frosty morning on the high veld.

If you believe me, I swung along that road whistling. There was no plan of campaign in my head, only just to go on and on in this blessed honest-smelling hill country, for every mile put me in better humor with myself.

In a roadside planting I cut a walking stick of hazel, and presently struck off the highway up a by-path which followed the glen of a brawling stream.

I reckoned that I was still far ahead of any pursuit, and for that night might please myself. It was some hours since I had tasted food, and I was getting very hungry when I came to a herd's cottage set in a nook beside a waterfall. A brown-faced woman was standing by the door, and greeted me with the kindly shyness of moorland places.

When I asked for a night's lodging she said I was welcome to the "bed in the loft," and very soon she set before me a hearty meal of ham and eggs, scones, and thick sweet milk. At the darkening her man came in from

the hills, a lean giant who in one step covered as much ground as three paces of ordinary mortals.

They asked no questions, for they had the perfect breeding of all dwellers in the wilds; but I could see they set me down as some kind of dealer, and I took a little trouble to confirm their view.

I spoke a lot about cattle, of which my host knew little, and I picked up from him a good deal about the local Galloway markets, which I tucked away in my memory for future use. At ten I was nodding in my chair, and the bed in the loft received a weary man, who never opened his eyes till five o'clock set the little homestead a going once more.

They refused any payment, and by six I had breakfasted and was striding southward again.

My notion was to return to the railway line a station or two farther on than the place where I had alighted yesterday, and to double back. I reckoned that was the safest way, for the police would naturally assume that I was always making farther from London in the direction of some western port.

I thought I had still a good bit of a start, for, as I reasoned, it would take some hours to fix the blame on me and several more to identify the fellow who got on board the train at St. Pancras.

It was the same jolly clear spring weather, and I simply could not contrive to feel careworn. Indeed, I was in better spirits than I had been for months. Over a long ridge of moorland I took my road, skirting the side of a high hill which the herd had called Cairnsmore of Fleet.

Nesting curlews and plovers were crying everywhere, and the links of green pasture by the streams were dotted with young lambs. All the slackness of the past months was slipping from my bones, and I stepped out like a four-year-old. By and by I came to a swell of moorland which dipped

to the vale of a little river, and a mile away in the heather I saw the smoke of a train.

The station, when I reached it, proved to be ideal for my purpose. The moor surged up around it and left room only for the single line, the slender siding, a waiting-room, an office, the station-master's cottage, and a tiny yard of gooseberries and sweet william.

There seemed no road to it from anywhere, and to increase the desolation the waves of a loch lapped on their gray granite beach, half a mile away. I waited in the deep heather till I saw the smoke of an east-going train on the horizon. Then I approached the tiny booking-office and took a ticket for Dumfries.

The only occupants of the carriage were an old shepherd and his dog—a wall-eyed brute that I mistrusted. The man was asleep, and on the cushions beside him was that morning's *Scotsman*. Eagerly I seized on it, for I fancied it would tell me something.

There were two columns about the Portland Place murder, as it was called. My man Paddock had given the alarm and had the milkman arrested. Poor devil, it looked as if the latter had earned his sovereign hardly; but for me he had been cheap at the price, for he seemed to have occupied the police the better part of the day.

In the stop-press news I found a further instalment of the story.

The milkman had been released, I read, and the true criminal, about whose identity the police were reticent, was believed to have got away from London by one of the northern lines. There was a short note about me as the owner of the flat.

I guessed the police had stuck that in, as a clumsy contrivance to persuade me that I was unsuspected.

There was nothing else in the paper; nothing about foreign politics or Karolides or the things that had interested Scudder. I laid it down, and found that we were approaching the station at which I had got out yesterday. The

potato-digging station-master had been gingered up into some activity, for the west-going train was waiting to let us pass, and from it had descended three men, who were asking him questions.

I supposed that they were the local police who had been stirred up by Scotland Yard and had traced me as far as this one-horse siding.

Sitting well back in the shadow, I watched them carefully. One of them had a book and took down notes. The old potato-digger seemed to have turned peevish, but the child who had collected my ticket was talking volubly. All the party looked out across the moor where the white road departed. I hoped they were going to take up my tracks there.

As we moved away from that station my companion woke up. He fixed me with a wondering glance, kicked his dog viciously, and inquired where he was. Clearly he was very drunk.

"That's what comes o' bein' a teetotaler," he observed in bitter tones.

I expressed my surprise that in him I should have met a blue-ribbon stalwart.

"Aye, but I'm a strong teetotaler," he said pugnaciously. "I took the pledge last Martimmass, and I havena touched a drop o' whisky sinsyne. No even at Hogmanay, though I was sair tempted."

He swung his heels up on the seat and burrowed a frowsy head into the cushions.

"And that's a' I get," he moaned. "A heid hetter than hell fire and twae een lookin' different ways for Sunday."

"What did it?" I asked.

"A drink they ca' brandy. Bein' a teetotaler, I keepit off the whisky, but I was nip-nippin' a' day yestereen at this brandy, and I doubt I'll no be weel for a fortnicht."

His voice died away into a stutter, and sleep once more laid its heavy hand on him.

My plan had been to get out at some station down the line, but the train suddenly gave me a better chance, for it came to a standstill at the end of a culvert which spanned a brawling porter-colored river. I looked out, and saw that every carriage window was closed and no human figure appeared in the landscape.

So I opened the door and dropped quickly into the tangle of hazels which edged the line.

It would have been all right but for that infernal dog. Under the impression that I was decamping with its master's belongings, it started to bark and all but got me by the trousers. This woke up the herd who stood bawling at the carriage door in the belief that I had committed suicide.

I crawled through the thicket, reached the edge of the stream, and in cover of the bushes put a hundred yards or so behind me.

Then from my shelter I peered back, and saw the guard had several passengers gathered round the open carriage door and staring in my direction. I could not have made a more public departure if I had left with a bugler and a brass band.

Happily the drunken herd provided a diversion. He and his dog, which was attached by a rope to his waist, suddenly cascaded out of the carriage, landed on their heads on the track, and rolled some way down the bank toward the water. In the rescue which followed, the dog bit somebody, for I could hear the sound of hard swearing.

Presently they had forgotten me; and when after a quarter of a mile's crawl I ventured to look back, the train had started again and was vanishing in the cutting.

I was in a wide semicircle of moorland, with the brown river as radius and the high hills forming the northern circumference. There was not a sign or sound of a human being; only the plashing water and the interminable crying of curlews. Yet, oddly

enough, for the first time I felt the terror of the hunted on me.

It was not the police that I thought of, but the other folk, who knew that I knew Scudder's secret and dared not let me live. I was certain that they would pursue me with a keenness and vigilance unknown to the British law, and that once their grip closed on me I should find no mercy.

I looked back, but there was nothing in the landscape.

The sun glinted on the metals of the line and the wet stones in the stream, and you could not have found a more peaceful sight in the world. Nevertheless, I started to run. Crouching low in the runnels of the bog, I ran till the sweat blinded my eyes. The mood did not leave me till I had reached the rim of mountain and flung myself, panting, on a ridge high above the young waters of the brown river.

From my vantage ground I could scan the whole moor right away to the railway line, and to the south of it, where green fields took the place of heather. I have eyes like a hawk, but I could see nothing moving in the whole countryside.

Then I looked east beyond the ridge and saw a new kind of landscape—shallow green valleys with plentiful fir plantations and the faint lines of dust which spoke of highroads.

Last of all I looked into the blue May sky, and there I saw that which set my pulses racing. Low down in the south a monoplane was climbing into the heavens. I was as certain as if I had been told that that aeroplane was looking for me, and that it did not belong to the police. For an hour or two I watched it from a pit of heather.

It flew low along the hilltops, and then in narrow circles back over the valley up which I had come. Then it seemed to change its mind, rose to a great height, and flew away back to the south.

I did not like this espionage from the air, and I began to think less well

of the countryside I had chosen for a refuge. These heather hills were no sort of cover if my enemies were in the sky. I must find a different kind of sanctuary.

I looked with more satisfaction to the green country beyond the ridge, for there I should find woods and stone houses.

About six in the evening I came out of the moorland to a white ribbon of road which wound up the narrow vale of a lowland stream. As I followed it, fields gave place to banks, the glen became a plateau, and presently I had reached a kind of pass, where a solitary house smoked in the twilight.

The road swung over a bridge, and leaning on the parapet was a man.

He was smoking a long clay pipe and studying the water with spectacled eyes. In his left hand was a small book, with a finger marking the place. Slowly he repeated—

“As when a Gryphen through the wilderness
With winged step, o'er hill and moory dale
Pursues the Arimaspiān—”

He jumped round as my step rung on the keystone, and I saw a pleasant, sunburnt, boyish face.

“Good evening to you,” he said gravely. “It's a fine night for the road.”

“The smell of wood smoke and of some savory roast floated to me from the house. “Is that place an inn?” I asked.

“At your service,” he said politely; “I am the landlord, sir, and I hope you will stay the night, for to tell you the truth I have had no company for a week.”

I pulled myself up on the parapet of the bridge and filled my pipe. I began to detect an ally.

“You're young to be an innkeeper,” I said.

“My father died a year ago and left me the business. I live there with my grandmother. It's a slow job for

a young man, and it wasn't my choice of profession."

"Which was?"

He actually blushed. "I want to write books," he said.

"And what better chance could you ask?" I cried. "Man, I've often thought that an innkeeper would make the best story-teller in the world."

"Not now," he said eagerly. "Maybe in the old days when you had pilgrims and ballad-makers and highwaymen and mail-coaches on the road; but not now. Nothing comes here but motor-cars full of fat women, who stop for lunch, and a fisherman or two in the spring and the shooting tenants in August. There is not much material to be got out of that. I want to see life, to travel the world, and write things like Kipling and Conrad. But the most I've done yet is to get some verses printed in *Chambers's Journal*."

I looked at the inn, standing golden in the sunset against the wine-red hills.

"I've knocked a bit about the world, and I wouldn't despise such a hermitage. D'you think that adventure is found only in the tropics or among gentry in red shirts? Maybe you're rubbing shoulders with it at this moment."

"That's what Kipling says," he said, his eyes lightening, and he quoted some verse about "Romance bringing up the nine-fifteen."

"Here's a true tale for you then," I cried, "and a month hence you can make a novel out of it."

Sitting on the bridge in the soft May gloaming, I pitched him a lovely yarn. It was true in essentials, too, though I altered the minor details. I made out that I was a mining magnate from Kimberley, who had had a lot of trouble with I. D. B.* and had

shown up a gang. They had pursued me across the ocean and had killed my best friend, and were now on my track.

I told the story well, though I say it who shouldn't.

I pictured a flight across the Kalahari to German Africa, the crackling, parching days, the wonderful blue-velvet nights. I described an attack on my life on the voyage home, and I made a really horrid affair of the Portland Place murder.

"You're looking for adventure!" I cried; "well, you've found it here. The devils are after me, and the police are after them. It's a race that I mean to win."

"By God," he whispered, drawing his breath in sharply, "it is all pure Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle!"

"You believe me," I said gratefully.

"Of course I do," and he held out his hand. "I believe everything out of the common. The only thing to distrust is the normal."

He was very young, but he was the man for my money.

"I think they're off my track for the moment, but I must lie close for a couple of days. Can you take me in?"

He caught my elbow in his eagerness and drew me toward the house. "You can lie as snug here as if you were in a mouse-hole. I'll see that nobody blabs, either. And you'll give me some more material about your adventures?"

As I entered the inn porch I heard from far off the beat of an engine. There silhouetted against the dusky west was my friend, the monoplane.

He gave me a room at the back of the house with a fine outlook over the

* This refers to the Illicit Diamond Buyers of South Africa. As explained by Dr. George Frederick Kunz in an address before the National Geographic Society (1903): "The diamond mining companies of South Africa have unusual power under the laws of the colony so that no one is permitted to buy or sell diamonds unless authorized rough diamond buyers. Any one in whose possession uncut stones are found is brought to immediate punishment and the penalty is unusually severe for innocent or guilty buyers or guilty dealers. The detective system is remarkable. People in all walks of life belong to this special force. Had it not been for the importance of the diamond mines under Cecil Rhodes and his stringent laws, it would have been impossible to mine diamonds with profit."

plateau, and he made me free of his own room, which was stacked with cheap editions of his favorite authors. I never saw the grandmother, so I guessed she was bedridden.

An old woman called Margit brought me my meals, and the innkeeper was around me at all hours.

I wanted some time to myself, so I invented a job for him. He had a motorcycle, and I sent him off next morning for the daily paper, which usually arrived with the post in the late afternoon. I told him to keep his eyes skinned and make note of any strange figure he saw, keeping a special, sharp lookout for motors and aeroplanes.

Then I sat down in real earnest to Scudder's note-book.

He came back at midday with the *Scotsman*. There was nothing in it except some further evidence of Paddock and the milkman, and a repetition of yesterday's statement that the murderer had gone north. But there was a long article, reprinted from the *Times*, about Karolides and the state of affairs in the Balkans, though there was no mention of any visit to England. I got rid of the innkeeper for the afternoon, for I was getting very warm in my search for the cipher.

As I told you, it was a numerical cipher, and by an elaborate system of experiments I had pretty well discovered what were the nulls and stops. The trouble was the key-word, and when I thought of the odd million words he might have used I felt pretty hopeless. But about three o'clock I had a sudden inspiration.

The name Julia Czechenyi flashed across my memory. Scudder had said it was the key to the Karolides business, and it occurred to me to try it on his cipher.

It worked. The five letters of "Julia" gave me the position of the vowels. A was J, the tenth letter of the alphabet, and so represented by X in the cipher. "Czechenji" gave me the numerals for the principal conson-

ants. I scribbled that scheme on a bit of paper and sat down to read Scudder's pages.

In half an hour I was reading with a whitish face and fingers that drummed on the table. I glanced out of the window and saw a big touring-car coming up the glen toward the inn. It drew up at the door and there was the sound of people alighting. There seemed to be two of them, men in acquascutum and tweed caps.

Ten minutes later the innkeeper slipped into the room, his eyes bright with excitement.

"There's two chaps below looking for you," he whispered. "They're in the dining-room having whiskys and sodas. They asked about you and said they had hoped to meet you here. Oh! and they described you jolly well, down to your boots and shirt. I told them you had been here last night and had gone off on a motorcycle this morning, and one of the chaps swore like a navvy." I made him tell me what they looked like.

One was a dark-eyed, thin fellow with bushy eyebrows, the other was always smiling and lisped in his talk. Neither was any kind of foreigner; on this my young friend was positive.

I took a bit of paper and wrote these words in German as if they were part of a letter:

Black Stone. Scudder had got on to this, but he could not act for a fortnight. I doubt if I can do any good now, especially as Karolides is uncertain about his plans. But if Mr. T. advises I will do the best I . . .

I manufactured it rather neatly, so that it looked like a loose page of a private letter.

"Take this down and say it was found in my bedroom and ask them to return it to me if they overtake me."

Three minutes later I heard the car begin to move, and peeping from behind the curtain, caught sight of the two figures. One was slim, the other was sleek; that was the most I could make of my reconnaissance.

The innkeeper appeared in great excitement. "Your paper woke them up," he said gleefully. "The dark fellow went as white as death and cursed like blazes, and the fat one whistled and looked ugly. They paid for their drinks with half a sovereign and wouldn't wait for change."

"Now I'll tell you what I want you to do," I said. "Get on your bicycle and go off to Newton Stewart to the chief constable. Describe the two men, and say you suspect them of having had something to do with the London murder. You can invent reasons. The two will come back, never fear. Not to-night, for they'll follow me forty miles along the road, but first thing to-morrow morning. Tell the police to be here bright and early."

He set off like a docile child, while I worked at Scudder's notes.

When he came back we dined together and in common decency I had to let him pump me. I gave him a lot of stuff about lion hunts and the Matabele War, thinking all the while what tame businesses these were compared to this I was now engaged in. When he went to bed I sat up and finished Scudder.

I smoked in a chair till daylight for I couldn't sleep.

About eight next morning I witnessed the arrival of two constables and a sergeant. They put their car in a coach-house under the innkeeper's instructions and entered the house. Twenty minutes later I saw from my window a second car come across the plateau from the opposite direction.

It did not come up to the inn, but stopped two hundred yards off in the shelter of a patch of wood. I noticed that its occupants carefully reversed it before leaving it. A minute or two later I heard their steps on the gravel outside the window.

My plan had been to lie hid in my bedroom, and see what happened. I had a notion that if I could bring the police and my other more dangerous pursuers together, something might

work out of it to my advantage. But now I had a better idea.

I scribbled a line of thanks to my host, opened the window and dropped quietly into a gooseberry bush.

Unobserved I crossed the dike, crawled down the side of a tributary burn, and won the highroad on the far side of the patch of trees. There stood the car, very spick and span in the morning sunlight, but with the dust on her which told of a long journey I started her, jumped into the chauffeur's seat, and stole gently out on to the plateau.

Almost at once the road dipped so that I lost sight of the inn, but the wind seemed to bring me the sound of angry voices.

CHAPTER IV.

The Radical Candidate's Adventure.

YOU may picture me driving that forty-horse-power car for all she was worth over the crisp moor roads on that shining May morning, glancing back at first over my shoulder and looking anxiously to the next turning; then driving with a vague eye, just wide enough awake to keep on the highway.

For I was thinking desperately of what I had found in Scudder's notebook.

The little man had told me a pack of lies. All his yarns about the Balkans and the Foreign Office conference were eye-wash and so was Karolides. And yet not quite, as you shall hear.

I had staked everything on my belief in his story and had been let down; here was his book telling me a different tale; and instead of being once-bit-twice-shy, I believed it absolutely. Why? I don't know.

It rang desperately true; and the first yarn, if you understand me, had been in a queer way true also in spirit. The fifteenth day of June was going to be a day of destiny, a bigger des-

tiny than the killing of a man. It was so big that I didn't blame Scudder for keeping me out of the game, and wanting to play a lone hand.

That, I was pretty clear, was his intention.

He had told me something which sounded big enough, but the real thing was so immortally big that he, the man who had found it out, wanted it all for himself. I didn't blame him. It was risks after all that he was chiefly greedy about.

The whole story was in the notes—with gaps, you understand, which he would have filled up from his memory.

He stuck down his authorities too, and had an odd trick of giving them all a numerical value and then striking a balance, which stood for the reliability of each stage in the yarn. The three names he had printed were authorities, and there was a man, Ducrosne, who got five out of a possible five, and another fellow Ammersfoort, who got three.

The bare bones of the tale were all that was in the book—these, and one queer phrase which occurred half a dozen times inside brackets, "Thirty-nine steps" was the phrase, and at its last time of use it ran, "Thirty-nine steps I counted them; high tide 10:17 P.M."

I could make nothing of that.

The first thing I learned was that it was no question of preventing a war. That was coming, as sure as Christmas; had been arranged, said Scudder, ever since February, 1912. Karolides was going to be the occasion.

He was booked all right and was going to hand in his checks on June 15, two weeks and four days from that May morning. I gathered from Scudder's notes that nothing on earth could prevent that. His talk of Epitrote guards that would skin their own grandmothers was all nonsense.

The second thing was that this war was going to come as a mighty sur-

prise to Britain. Karolides's death would set the Balkans by the ears, and then Vienna would chip in with an ultimatum. Russia wouldn't like that, and there would be high words.

But Berlin would play the peacemaker and pour oil on the waters, till suddenly she would find a good cause for a quarrel, pick it up, and in five hours let fly at us. That was the idea, and a pretty good one too.

Honey and fair speeches and then a stroke in the dark. While we were talking about the good will and good intentions of Germany, our coast would be silently ringed with mines, and submarines would be waiting for every battleship.

But all this depended upon the third thing which was due to happen on June 15. I would never have grasped this, if I hadn't once happened to meet a French staff officer, coming back from West Africa, who had told me a lot of things.

One was that in spite of all the nonsense talked in Parliament there was a real working alliance between France and Britain, and that the two General Staffs met every now and then and made plans for joint action in time of war. Well, in June, M. Royer, the French minister of marine, was coming over from Paris, and he was going to get nothing less than a statement of the disposition of the British home fleet on mobilization.

At least I gathered it was something like that; anyhow, it was something uncommonly important. But on the 15th day of June there were to be others in London—others at whom I could only guess. Scudder was content to call them collectively the Black Stone.

They represented not our allies, but our deadly foes, and the information, destined for France, was to be diverted to their pockets. And it was to be used, remember—used a week or two later, with great guns and swift torpedoes, suddenly in the darkness of a summer night.

This was the story I had been deciphering in a back room of a country inn, overlooking a cabbage garden. This was the story that hummed in my brain, as I swung in the big touring-car from glen to glen.

My first impulse had been to write a letter to the Prime Minister, but a little reflection convinced me that that would be useless. Who would believe my tale?

I must show a sign, some token in proof, and Heaven knew what that could be.

Above all I must keep going myself, ready to act when things got riper, and that was going to be no light job with the police of the British Isles in full cry after me, and the watchers of the Black Stone running silently and swiftly on my trail.

I had no very clear purpose in my journey, but I steered east by the sun, for I remembered from the map that if I went north I would come into a region of coal-pits and industrial towns. Presently I was down from the moorlands and traversing the broad haugh of a river.

For miles I ran alongside a park wall, and in a break of the trees I saw a great castle.

I swung through little old thatched streams, and past gardens blazing with hawthorn and yellow laburnum.

The land was so deep in peace that I could scarcely believe that somewhere behind me were those who sought my life; ay, and that in a month's time, unless I had the almightiest of luck, these round, country faces would be pinched and staring, and men would be lying dead in English fields.

About midday I entered a long, straggling village and had a mind to stop and eat. Half-way down was the post-office, and on the steps of it stood the post-mistress and a policeman hard at work conning a telegram.

When they saw me they wakened up, and the policeman advanced with raised hand and cried on me to stop.

I nearly was fool enough to obey. Then it flashed upon me that the wire had to do with me, that my friends at the inn had come to an understanding and were united in desiring to see more of me, and that it had been easy enough for them to wire the description of me and the car to thirty villages through which I might pass.

I released the brakes just in time. As it was the policeman made a claw at the hood and only dropped off when he got my left in his eye.

I saw that main roads were no place for me, and turned into the by-ways. It wasn't an easy job without a map, for there was the risk of getting onto a farm road and ending in a duck-pond or a stable-yard, and I couldn't afford that kind of delay.

I began to see what an ass I had been to steal the car.

The big green brute would be the safest kind of clue to me over the breadth of Scotland. If I left it and took to my feet, it would be discovered in an hour or two and I would get no start in the race.

The immediate thing to do was to get to the lonliest roads. These I soon found when I struck up a tributary of the big river, and got into a glen with steep hills all about me, and a corkscrew road at the end which climbed over a pass.

Here I met nobody, but it was taking me too far north, so I slued east along a bad track and finally struck a big double-line railway. Away below me I saw another broadish valley, and it occurred to me that if I crossed it I might find some remote hostelry to pass the night.

The evening was now drawing in, and I was furiously hungry, for I had eaten nothing since breakfast except a couple of buns I had bought from a baker's cart.

Just then I heard a noise in the sky, and lo and behold there was that infernal aeroplane, flying low, about a dozen miles to the south and rapidly coming toward me.

I had the sense to remember that on a bare moor I was at the aeroplane's mercy, and that my only chance was to get to the leafy cover of the valley.

Down the hill I went like blue lightning, screwing my head round whenever I dared, to watch that damned flying machine. Soon I was on a road between hedges, and dipping to the deep-cut glen of a stream.

Then came a bit of thick wood where I slackened speed.

Suddenly on my left I heard the hoot of another car and realized to my horror that I was almost upon a couple of gate-posts through which a private road debouched on the highway. My horn gave an agonized roar, but it was too late.

I clapped on my brakes, but my impetus was too great, and there before me a car was sliding athwart my course. In a second there would have been the deuce of a wreck. I did the only thing possible, and ran slap into the hedge on the right trusting to find something soft beyond.

But there I was mistaken.

My car slithered through the hedge like butter and then gave a sickening plunge forward. I saw what was coming, leaped on the seat and would have jumped out. But a stout branch of hawthorn got me in the chest, lifted me up and held me, while a ton or two of expensive metal slipped below me, bucked and pitched, and then dropped with an almighty smash fifty feet to the bed of the stream.

I subsided first on the hedge, and then very gently on a bower of nettles. As I scrambled to my feet a hand took me by the arm, and a sympathetic and badly scared voice asked me if I were hurt.

I found myself looking at a tall, young man in goggles and a leather ulster who kept on blessing his soul and whinnying apologies. For myself, once I got my wind back, I was rather glad than otherwise.

This was one way of getting rid of the car.

"My blame, sir," I answered him. "It's lucky that I did not add homicide to my follies. That's the end of my Scotch motor tour, but it might have been the end of my life."

He plucked out a watch and studied it.

"You're the right sort of fellow," he said. "I can spare a quarter of an hour, and my house is two minutes off. I'll see you clothed and fed and snug in bed. Where's your kit, by the way? Is it in the burn along with the car?"

"It's in my pocket," I said, brandishing a tooth-brush. "I'm a colonial and travel light."

"A colonial," he cried. "By Gad, you're the very man I've been praying for. Are you by any blessed chance a Free Trader?"

"I am," said I, without the foggiest notion of what he meant.

He patted my shoulder and hurried me into his car. Three minutes later we drew up before a comfortable-looking shooting-box set among pine trees, and he ushered me in-doors. He took me first to a bedroom and flung half a dozen of his suits before me, for my own had been pretty well reduced to rags.

I selected a loose blue serge, which differed most conspicuously from my own garments, and borrowed a linen collar.

Then he haled me to the dining-room, where the remnants of a meal stood on the table, and announced that I had just five minutes to feed. "You can take a snack in your pocket, and we'll have supper when we get back. I've got to be at the Masonic Hall at eight o'clock or my agent will comb my hair."

I had a cup of coffee and some cold ham, while he yarned away on the hearth-rug.

"You find me in the deuce of a mess, Mr. —; by the by you haven't told me your name. Twisden? Any relation of old Tommy Twisden of the Sixtieth? No. Well, you see I'm

Liberal candidate for this part of the world, and I had a meeting on to-night at Brattleburn—that's my chief town, and an infernal Tory stronghold.

"I had got the Colonial ex-Premier fellow, Crumpleton, coming to speak for me to-night, and had the thing tremendously billed and the whole place ground-baited. This afternoon I got a wire from the ruffian saying he has got influenza at Blackpool, and here am I left to do the whole thing myself. I had meant to speak for ten minutes and must now go on for forty, and, though I've been racking my brains for three hours to think of something, I simply cannot last the course.

"Now you've got to be a good chap and help me. You're a Free Trader and can tell our people what a wash-out Protection is in the Colonies. All you fellows have the gift of the gab—I wish to Heavens I had it. I'll be for evermore in your debt."

I had very few notions about free trade one way or the other, but I saw no other chance to get what I wanted.

My young gentleman was far too absorbed in his own difficulties to think how odd it was to ask a stranger who had just missed death by an ace and had lost a one-thousand-guinea car to address a meeting for him on the spur of the moment. But my necessities did not allow me to contemplate oddnesses or to pick and choose my supports.

"All right," I said. "I'm not much good as a speaker, but I'll tell them a bit about Australia."

At my words the cares of the ages slipped from his shoulders and he was rapturous in his thanks. He lent me a big driving coat—and never troubled to ask why I had started in a motor tour without possessing an ulster—and as we shuffled down the dusty roads poured into my ears the simple facts of his history.

He was an orphan and his uncle had brought him up. I've forgotten

the uncle's name, but he was in the Cabinet and you can read his speeches in the papers.

He had gone round the world after leaving Cambridge, and then, being short of a job, his uncle had advised politics. I gathered that he had no preference in parties. "Good chaps in both," he said cheerfully, "and plenty of blighters, too. I'm Liberal, because my family have always been Whigs."

But if he was lukewarm politically he had strong views on other things. He found out I knew a bit about horses, and jawed away about the Derby entries; and he was full of plans for improving his shooting. Altogether, a very clean, decent, callow young man.

As we passed through a little town two policemen signalled us to stop, and flashed their lanterns on us. "Beg pardon, Sir Harry," said one. "We've got instructions to look out for a car and the description's no unlike yours."

"Right-o," said my host, while I thanked Providence for the devious ways I had been brought to safety.

After that we spoke no more, for my host's mind began to labor heavily with his coming speech. His lips kept muttering, his eye wandered, and I began to prepare myself for a second catastrophe. I tried to think of something to say myself, but my mind was dry as a stone.

The next thing I knew we had drawn up outside a door in a street and were being welcomed by some noisy gentlemen in rosettes.

The hall had about five hundred in it, women mostly, a lot of bald heads, and a dozen or two young men.

The chairman, a weasely minister with a reddish nose, lamented Crumpleton's absence, soliloquized on his influenza, and gaze me a certificate as a "trusted leader of Australian thought." There were two policemen at the door and I hoped they took note of this testimonial.

Then Sir Harry started.

I never heard anything like it. He didn't begin to know how to talk. He had about a bushel of notes from which he read, and when he let go of them he fell into one prolonged stutter.

Every now and then he remembered a phrase he had learned by heart, straightened his back, and gave it off like Henry Irving, and the next moment he was bent double and crooning over his papers. It was the most appalling rot, too.

He talked about the "German menace," and said it was all a Tory invention to cheat the poor of their rights and keep back the great flood of social reform, but that "organized labor" realized this and laughed the Tories to scorn. He was all for reducing our navy as a proof of our good faith, and then sending Germany an ultimatum demanding that she should do the same.

He said that but for the Tories, Germany and Britain would be fellow workers in peace and reform. I thought of the little black book in my pocket!

Yet in a queer way I liked the speech. You could see the niceness of the chap shining out behind the nonsense with which he had been spoon-fed. Also it took a load off my mind. I mightn't be much of an orator, but I was a thousand per cent better than Sir Harry. I didn't get on so badly when it came to my turn. I simply told them all I could remember about Australia, praying there should be no Australian there—all about its labor party and emigration and universal service.

I doubt if I remembered to mention free trade, but I said there were no Tories in Australia, only Labor and Liberals. That fetched a cheer, and I woke them up a bit when I started in to tell them the kind of glorious business I thought could be made out of the Empire if we really put our backs into it.

Altogether I fancy I was rather a success. The minister didn't like me though, and when he proposed a vote of thanks spoke of Sir Harry's speech as "statesmanlike," and mine as having the "eloquence of an official emigration agent."

When we were in the car again my host was in wild spirits at having got his job over. "A ripping speech, Twisden," he said. "Now, you're coming home with me. I'm all alone, and if you'll stop a day or two I'll show you some very decent fishing."

We had a hot supper—and I wanted it pretty badly—and then drank grog in a big, cheery smoking-room with a crackling wood fire. I thought the time had come for me to put my cards on the table. I saw by this man's eye that he was the kind you can trust.

"Listen, Sir Harry," I said. "I've something pretty important to say to you. You're a good fellow and I'm going to be frank. Where on earth did you get that poisonous rubbish you talked to-night?"

His face fell. "Was it as bad as that?" he asked ruefully. "It did sound rather thin. I got most of it out of the *Liberal Magazine* and pamphlets that agent chap of mine keeps sending me. But you surely don't think Germany would ever go to war with us?"

"Ask that question in six weeks and it won't need an answer," I said. "If you'll give me your attention for half an hour I am going to tell you a story."

I can see yet that bright room with the deers' heads and the old prints on the walls, Sir Harry standing restlessly on the stone curb of the hearth, and myself lying back in an arm-chair speaking. I seemed to be another person, standing aside and listening to my own voice, and judging carefully the reliability of my tale.

It was the first time I had ever told any one the exact truth, so far as I understood it, and it did me no end

of good, for it straightened out the thing in my own mind.

I blinked no detail. He heard all about Scudder and the milkman and the note-book, and my doings in Galloway. Presently he got very excited and walked up and down the hearth-rug.

"So you see," I concluded, "you have got here in your house the man that is wanted for the Portland Place murder. Your duty is to send your car for the police and give me up. I don't think I'll get very far. There'll be an accident and I'll have a knife in my ribs an hour or so after arrest. Nevertheless it's your duty, as a law-abiding citizen. Perhaps in a month's time you'll be sorry, but you have no cause to think of that."

He was looking at me with bright, steady eyes. "What was your job in Rhodesia, Mr. Hannay?" he asked.

"Mining engineer," I said. "I've made my pile cleanly and I've had a good time in the making of it."

"Not a profession that weakens the nerves, is it?"

I laughed. "Oh, as to that, my nerves are good enough." I took down a hunting knife from a stand on the wall, and did the old Mashona trick of tossing it and catching it in my lips. That wants a pretty steady heart.

He watched me with a smile. "I don't want proofs. I may be an ass on the platform, but I can size up a man. You're no murderer and you're no fool, and I believe you are speaking the truth. I'm going to back you up. Now, what can I do?"

"First, I want you to write a letter to your uncle. I've got to get in touch with the government people some time before the 15th of June."

He pulled his mustache.

"That won't help you. This is Foreign Office business, and my uncle would have nothing to do with it. Besides you'd never convince him. No, I'll go one better. I'll write to the permanent secretary at the For-

eign Office. He's my godfather and one of the best going. What do you want?"

He sat down at a table and wrote to my dictation. The gist of it was that if a man called Twisden (I thought I had better stick to that name), turned up before June 15 he was to treat him kindly. He said Twisden would prove his *bona fides* by passing the word "Black Stone" and whistling "Annie Laurie."

"Good," said Sir Harry. "That's the proper style. By the way you'll find my godfather—his name's Sir Walter Bullivant—down at his country cottage for Whitsuntide. It's close to Artinswell-on-the-Kennet. That's done. Now, what's the next thing?"

"You're about my height. Lend me the oldest tweed suit you've got. Anything will do, so long as the color is the opposite of the clothes I destroyed this afternoon. Then show me a map of the neighborhood and explain to me the lie of the land. Lastly, if the police come asking about me, just show them the car in the glen. If the other lot turn up tell them I caught the south express after your meeting."

He did, or promised to do, all these things.

I shaved off the remnants of my mustache, and got inside an ancient suit of what I believe is called heather mixture. The map gave me some notion of my whereabouts and told me the two things I wanted to know—where the main railway to the south could be joined and what were the wildest districts near at hand.

At two o'clock he wakened me from my slumber in the smoking-room armchair and led me blinking into the dark, starry night. An old bicycle was found in a tool-shed and handed over to me.

"First turn to the right up by the long fir-wood," he enjoined. "By daybreak you'll be well into the hills. Then I should pitch the machine into

a bog and take to the moors on foot. You can put in a week among the shepherds, and be as safe as if you were in New Guinea."

I pedaled diligently up steep roads of hill gravel till the skies grew pale with morning. As the mists cleared before the sun I found myself in a wide green world with glens falling on every side and a faraway blue horizon. Here at any rate I could get early news of my enemies.

CHAPTER V.

The Spectacled Roadman's Adventure.

I SAT down on the very crest of the pass and took stock of my position.

Behind me was the road climbing through a long cleft in the hills which was the upper glen of some notable river. In front was a flat space of maybe a mile all pitted with bog-holes and rough with tussocks, and then beyond it the road fell steeply down another glen to a plain whose blue dimness melted into the distance.

To left and right were round-shouldered, green hills as smooth as pancakes; but to the south—that is the left hand—there was a glimpse of high heathery mountains, which I remembered from the map as the big knot of hill which I had chosen for my sanctuary.

I was on the central boss of a huge upland country, and could see everything moving for miles. In the meadows below the road, half a mile back, a cottage smoked, but it was the only sign of human life. Otherwise there was only the calling of plovers and the tinkling of little streams.

It was now about seven o'clock, and as I waited I heard once again the ominous beat in the air. Then I realized that my vantage ground might be in reality a trap. There was no cover for a tomtit in those bald green places.

I sat quite still and hopeless while the beat grew louder.

Then I saw an aeroplane coming up from the east. It was flying high, but as I looked it dropped several hundred feet and began to circle round the knot of hill in narrowing circles, just as a hawk wheels before it pounces. Now it was flying very low, and now the watchman on board caught sight of me.

I could see one of the two occupants examining me through glasses. Suddenly it began to rise in swift whorls, and the next I knew it was speeding eastward again till it became a speck in the blue morning.

That made me do some savage thinking. My enemies had located me, and the next thing would be a cordon round me. I didn't know what force they could command, but I was certain it would be sufficient. The aeroplane had seen my bicycle, and would conclude that I would try to escape by the road.

In that case there might be a chance on the moors to the right or left. I wheeled the machine a hundred yards from the highway, and plunged it into a moss-hole where it sank among pondweed and water-buttercups. Then I climbed to a knoll which gave me a view of the two valleys. Nothing was stirring on the long white ribbon that threaded them.

I have said there was not cover in the whole place to hide a rat. As the day advanced it was flooded with soft fresh light till it had the fragrant sunniness of the South African veld. At other times I should have liked the place, but now it seemed to suffocate me. The free moorlands were prison walls, and the keen hill-air was the breath of a dungeon.

I tossed a coin—heads right, tails left—and it fell heads, so I turned to the north. In a little I came to the brow of the ridge which was the containing wall of the pass.

I saw the highroad for maybe ten miles, and far down it something that was moving and which I took to be a motor-car. Beyond the ridge I looked

on a rolling green moor, which fell away into wooded glens. Now my life on the veld has given me the eyes of a kite, and I can see things for which most men need a telescope.

Away down the slope, a couple of miles away, men were advancing like a row of beaters at a shoot.

I dropped out of sight behind the skyline. That way was shut to me, and I must try the bigger hills to the south beyond the highway. The car I had noticed was getting nearer, but it was still a long road off, with some very steep gradients before it. I ran hard, crouching low except in the hollows, and as I ran I kept scanning the brow of hill before me.

Was it imagination, or did I see figures—one, two, perhaps more—moving in a glen beyond the stream?

If you are hemmed in on all sides in a patch of land—there is only one chance of escape. You must stay in the patch, and let your enemies search it and not find you. That was good sense, but how on earth was I to escape notice in that table-cloth of a place?

I would have buried myself to the neck in mud and lain below water or climbed the tallest tree. But there was not a stick of wood, the bog-holes were little puddles, the stream was a slender trickle. There was nothing but short heather and bare hill bent and the white highway.

Then in a tiny bight of road, beside a heap of stones, I found the Roadman.

He had just arrived, and was wearily flinging down his hammer. He stared at me with fishy eyes, yawning.

"Confoond the day I ever left the herdin'!" he said as if to the world at large. "There I was my ain maister. Now I'm a slave to the government—tethered to the roadside, wi' sair een, and a back like a suckle."

He took up the hammer, struck a stone, dropped the implement with an oath, and put both hands to his ears. "Mercy on me! My heid's burstin'!" he cried.

He was a wild figure, about my own size, but much bent, with a week's beard on his chin and a pair of big horn spectacles.

"I canna dae't," he cried again. "The surveyor maun just report me. I'm for my bed."

I asked him what was the trouble, though indeed that was clear enough.

"The trouble is that I'm no sober. Last nicht my dochter, Merran, was waddit, and they danced till fower in the byre. Me and some ither chieis sat down to the drinkin'—and here I am. Peety that I ever lookit on the wine when it was red!"

I agreed with him about bed.

"It's easy speakin'," he moaned. "But I get a post-caird yestereen sayin' that the new road surveyor would be round the day. He'll come and he'll no find me, or else he'll find me fou, and either way I'm a done man. I'll awa back to my bed and say I'm no weel, but I doot that'll no help me, for they ken my kind o' no-weelness."

Then I had an inspiration. "Does the new surveyor know you?" I asked.

"No him. He's just been a week at the job. He rins about in a wee motor-car, and wad speir the inside oot o' a wheel."

"Where's your house?" I asked, and was directed by a wavering finger to the cottage by the stream.

"Well, back to your bed," I said, "and sleep in peace. I'll take on your job for a bit and see the surveyor."

He stared at me blankly; then, as the notion dawned on his fuddled brain, his face broke into the vacant drunkard's smile.

"You're the billy," he cried. "It'll be easy enuch managed. I've finished that bing o' stanes, so you needen chap ony mair this forenoon. Just take the barry and wheel enuch metal frae yon quarry ddon the road to make anither bing the morn."

"My name's Alexander Trummle, and I've been seven year at the trade, and twenty afore that herdin' on Leithen Water. My freends ca' me

Ecky, and whiles Specky, for I wear glasses, bein' weak i' the sight. Just you speak the surveyor fair and ca' him sir—and he'll be fell pleased. I'll be back or midday."

I borrowed his spectacles and filthy old hat; stripped off coat, waistcoat, and collar and gave him them to carry home; borrowed, too, the foul stump of a clay pipe as an extra property.

He indicated my simple tasks, and without more ado set off at an amble bedward. Bed may have been his chief object, but I think there was also something left in the foot of a bottle. I prayed that he might be safe under cover before my friends arrived on the scene.

Then I set to work to dress for the part.

I opened the collar of my shirt—it was a vulgar blue and white check such as plowmen wear—and revealed a neck as brown as any tinker's. I rolled up my sleeves and there was a forearm which might have been a blacksmith's—sunburnt and rough with old scars. I got my boots and trouser-legs all white from the dust of the road, and hitched up my trousers, tying them with string below the knee.

Then I set to work on my face. With a handful of dust I made a water-mark round my neck—the place where Mr. Trunmle's Sunday ablutions might be expected to stop. I rubbed a good deal of dirt also into the sunburn of my cheeks. A roadman's eyes would, no doubt, be a little inflamed, so I contrived to get some dust in both of mine, and by dint of vigorous rubbing produced a bleary effect.

The sandwiches Sir Harry had given me had gone off with my coat; but the roadman's lunch, tied up in a red handkerchief, was at my disposal.

I ate with great relish several of the thick slabs of scone and cheese and drank a little of the cold tea. In the handkerchief was a local paper tied with string and addressed to Mr. Turnbull—obviously meant to solace

his midday leisure. I did up the bundle again, and put the paper conspicuously beside it.

My boots did not satisfy me, but by dint of kicking among the stone I reduced them to the granitelike surface which characterizes a roadman's foot-gear. Then I bit and scraped my finger-nails till the edges were all cracked and uneven. The men I was matched against would miss no detail.

I broke one of the bootlaces and retied it in a clumsy knot and loosed the other so that my thick gray socks bulged over the uppers. Still no sign of anything on the road. The motor I had observed half an hour ago must have gone home.

My toilet complete, I took up the barrow and began my journeys to and from the quarry a hundred yards off. I remember an old scout in Rhodesia who had done many queer things in his day—once telling me that the secret of playing a part was to think yourself into it. You could never keep it up, he said, unless you could manage to convince yourself that you were *it*.

So I shut off all other thoughts and switched them on the road-mending.

I thought of the little white cottage as my home, I recalled the years I had spent herding on Leithen Water. I made my mind dwell lovingly on sleep in a box-bed and a bottle of cheap whisky. Still nothing appeared on that long white road.

Now and then a sheep wandered off the heather to stare at me. A heron flopped down to a pool in the stream and started to fish, taking no more notice of me than if I had been a milestone. On I went trundling my loads of stone, with the heavy step of the professional.

Soon I grew warm and the dust on my face changed into solid and abiding grit. I was already counting the hours till evening should put a limit to Mr. Turnbull's monotonous toil.

Suddenly a crisp voice spoke from the road, and, looking up, I saw a little

Ford two-seater and a round-faced young man in a bowler hat.

"Are you Alexander Turnbull?" he asked. "I am the new county road surveyor. You live at Blackhopefoot, and have charge of the section from Laidlawbyres to the Riggs? Good! A fair bit of road, Turnbull, and not badly engineered. A little soft about a mile off, and the edges want cleaning. See you look after that. Good morning. You'll know me the next time you see me."

Clearly my get-up was good enough for the dreaded surveyor.

I went on with my work, and as the morning grew toward noon I was cheered by a little traffic. A baker's van breasted the hill and sold me a bag of ginger biscuits, which I stowed in my trouser-pockets against emergencies. Then a herd passed with sheep, and disturbed me somewhat by asking loudly, "What had become o' Specky?"

"In bed wi' the colic," I replied, and the herd passed on.

Just about midday a big car stole down the hill, glided past and drew up a hundred yards beyond. Its three occupants descended, as if to stretch their legs, and sauntered toward me.

Two of the men I had seen before from the window of the Galloway Inn—one lean, sharp and dark; the other comfortable and smiling. The third had the look of a countryman—a vet, perhaps, or a small farmer. He was dressed in ill-cut knickerbockers, and the eye in his head was as bright and wary as a hen's.

"Morning," said the last. "That's a fine, easy job o' yours."

I had not looked up on their approach, and now, when accosted, I slowly and painfully straightened my back, after the manner of roadmen; spat vigorously, after the manner of the low Scot, and regarded them steadily before replying. I confronted three pairs of eyes that missed nothing.

"There's waur jobs and there's better," I said sententiously. "I wad

rather hae yours, sittin' a' day on your hinderlands on thae cushions. It's you and your muckle cawrs that wreck my roads! If we a' had oor richts, you sud be made to mend what ye break!"

The bright-eyed man was looking at the newspaper lying beside Turnbull's bundle.

"I see you get your papers in good time," he said.

I glanced at it casually. "Aye, in good time. Seein' that that paper cam out last Setterday, I'm just fower days late."

He picked it up, glanced at the superscription, and laid it down again. One of the others had been looking at my boots, and a word in German called the speaker's attention to them.

"You've a fine taste in boots," he said. "Those were never made by a country shoemaker."

"They were not," I said readily. "They were made in London. I got them frae the gentleman that was here last year for the shootin'. What was his name now?" And I scratched a forgetful head.

Again the sleek one spoke in German. "Let us get on," he said. "This fellow is all right."

They asked one last question:

"Did you see any one pass early this morning? He might be on a bicycle or he might be on foot."

I very nearly fell into the trap, and told a story of a bicyclist hurrying past in the gray dawn. But I had the sense to see my danger. I pretended to consider very deeply.

"I wasna up very early," I said. "Ye see my dochter was merrit last night, and we kept it up late. I opened the house-door about seven—and there was naebody on the road then. Since I cam up here there has been just the baker and the Ruchill herd, besides you gentlemen."

One of them gave me a cigar, which I smelled gingerly, and stuck in Turnbull's bundle. They got into their car and were out of sight in three minutes.

My heart leaped with an enormous

relief, but I went on wheeling my stones. It was as well, for ten minutes later the car returned—one of the occupants waving a hand to me. These gentry left nothing to chance.

I finished Turnbull's bread and cheese, and pretty soon I had finished the stones. The next step was what puzzled me.

I could not keep up this road-making business for long. A merciful Providence had kept Mr. Turnbull indoors, but if he appeared on the scene there would be trouble. I had a notion that the cordon was still tight round the glen, and that if I walked in any direction I should meet with questioners.

But get out I must. No man's nerve could stand more than a day of being spied on.

I stayed at my post till about five o'clock. By that time I had resolved to go down to Turnbull's cottage at nightfall and take my chance of getting over the hills in the darkness. But suddenly a new car came up the road and slowed down to stop a short distance from me. A fresh wind had risen—and the occupant wanted to light a cigarette.

It was a touring-car, with the tonneau full of an assortment of baggage. One man sat in it, and by an amazing chance I knew him. His name was Launcelot Brown, and he was an offense to creation. He was a sort of blood stockbroker who did his business by toadying to eldest sons and rich young peers and foolish old ladies.

"Lancie" was a familiar figure. I understood, at balls and polo-weeks and country houses. He was an adroit scandalmonger, and would crawl a mile on his belly to anything that had a title or a million. I had a business introduction to his firm when I came to London, and he was good enough to ask me to dinner at his club.

There he showed off at a great rate, and pattered about his duchesses till the snobbery of the creature turned me sick. I asked a man afterward why

nobody kicked him, and was told that Englishmen revered the weaker sex.

Anyhow, there he was now, nattily dressed, in a fine new car, obviously on his way to visit some of his fine friends. A sudden daftness took me, and in a second I had jumped into the tonneau and had him by the shoulder.

"Hello, Brown!" I sang out. "Well met, my lad!"

He got a horrid fright. His chin dropped as he stared at me. "Who the devil are you?" he gasped.

"My name's Hannay," I said, "from Rhodesia, you remember?"

"Good God—the murderer!" he choked.

"Just so. And there'll be a second murder, my dear, if you don't do as I bid you. Give me that coat of yours. That cap, too."

He did as he was bid, for he was blind with terror. Over my dirty trousers and vulgar shirt I put on his smart driving-coat, which buttoned high at the top, and thereby hid the deficiencies of my collar.

I stuck the cap on my head, and added his gloves to my get-up. The dusty roadman in a minute was transformed into one of the neatest motorists in Scotland. On Mr. Launcelot Brown's head I clapped Turnbull's unspeakable hat, and told him to keep it there.

Then with some difficulty I turned the car. My plan was to go back the road he had come, for the watchers, having seen it before, would let it pass unremarked.

"Now, my child," I said, "sit quite still and be a good boy. I mean you no harm. I'm only borrowing your car for an hour or two. But if you play me any tricks—and, above all, if you open your mouth—as sure as there's a God above me, I'll wring your neck! *Saves?*"

I enjoyed that evening's ride. We ran eight miles down the valley, through a village or two, and I could not help noticing several strange-looking folk lounging by the roadside.

These were the watchers who would have had much to say to me if I had come in other garb or company. As it was, they looked incuriously on. One touched his cap in salute, and I responded graciously.

As the dark fell I turned up a side glen which, as I remembered from the map, led into an unfrequented corner of the hills. Soon the villages were left behind, then the farms, and then even the wayside cottages. Presently we came to a lonely moor where the night was blackening the sunset gleam in the bog-pools. Here we stopped, and I obligingly reversed the car and restored to Mr. Launcelot Brown his belongings.

"A thousand thanks," I said. "There's more use in you than I thought. Now be off and find the police."

As I sat on the hillside watching the tail-light dwindle, I reflected on the various kinds of crime I had now sampled. Contrary to general belief, I was not a murderer, but I had become an unholy liar, a shameless impostor, and a highwayman with a marked taste for expensive motor-cars.

CHAPTER VI.

The Bald Archeologist's Adventure.

I SPENT the night on a shelf of the hillside, in the lee of a boulder where the heather grew long and soft. It was a cold business, for I had neither coat nor waistcoat. Those were in Mr. Turnbull's keeping, as was Scudder's little book, my watch, and—worst of all—my pipe and tobacco-pouch. Only my money accompanied me in my belt, and about half a pound of ginger biscuits in my trouser-pocket.

I supped off half those biscuits, and by worming myself deep into the heather got some kind of warmth.

My spirits had risen, and I was beginning to enjoy this crazy game of hide and seek. So far, I had been miraculously lucky. The milkman, the

literary innkeeper, Sir Harry, the roadman, and the idiotic Lencie, were all pieces of undeserved good fortune.

Somehow the first success gave me a feeling that I was going to pull the thing through.

My chief trouble was that I was desperately hungry. I lay and tortured myself—for the ginger biscuits merely emphasized the aching void—with the memory of all the good food I had thought so little of in London. There were Paddock's crisp sausages and fragrant shavings of bacon, and shapelessly poached eggs—how often I had turned up my nose at them!

There were the cutlets they did at the club, and a particular ham that stood on the cold table, for which my soul lusted. My thoughts hovered over all varieties of mortal edibles, and finally settled on a porter-house steak and a quart of bitter with a Welsh rabbit to follow. In longing hopelessly for these dainties I fell asleep.

I woke very cold and stiff about an hour after dawn.

It took me a little while to remember where I was, for I had been very weary and had slept heavily. I saw first the pale blue sky through a net of heather, then a big shoulder of hill, and then my own boots placed neatly in a blackberry-bush.

I raised myself on my arms and looked down into the valley, and that one look set me lacing up my boots in mad haste. For there were men below, not more than a quarter of a mile off, spaced out on the hillside like a fan, and beating the heather. Lencie had not been slow in looking for his revenge.

I crawled out of my shelf into the cover of a boulder, and from it gained a shallow trench which slanted up the mountain face. This led me presently into the narrow gully of a burn, by way of which I scrambled to the top of the ridge. From there I looked back and saw that I was still undiscovered. My pursuers were patiently quartering the hillside and moving upward.

Keeping behind the skyline, I ran for maybe half a mile till I judged I was above the uppermost end of the glen. Then I showed myself, and was instantly noted by one of the flankers who passed the word to the others.

I heard cries coming up from below, and saw that the line of search had changed its direction.

I pretended to retreat over the skyline, but instead went back the way I had come, and in twenty minutes was behind the ridge overlooking my sleeping place. From that view-point I had the satisfaction of seeing the pursuit streaming up the hill at the top of the glen on a hopelessly false scent.

I had before me a choice of routes, and I chose a ridge which made an angle with the one I was on, and so would soon put a deep glen between me and my enemies. The exercise had warmed my blood, and I was beginning to enjoy myself amazingly. As I went I breakfasted on the dusty remnants of the ginger biscuits.

I knew very little about the country, and I hadn't a notion what I was going to do. I trusted to the strength of my legs, but I knew well enough that those behind me would be familiar with the lie of the land, and that my ignorance would be a heavy handicap.

I saw in front of me a sea of hills, rising very high toward the south, but northward breaking down into broad ridges which separated wide and shallow dales. The ridge I had chosen seemed to sink after a mile or two to a moor which lay like a pocket in the uplands.

That seemed as good a direction to take as any other.

My stratagem had given me a fair start—call it twenty minutes—and I had the width of a glen behind me before I saw the first heads of the pursuers. The police had evidently called in local talent to their aid, and the men I could see had the appearance of herds or gamekeepers.

They hallooed at the sight of me, and I waved my hand. Two dived

into the glen and began to climb my ridge, while the others kept their own side of the hill. I felt as if I were taking part in a schoolboy game of hare and hounds.

But very soon it began to seem less of a game. Those fellows behind were hefty men on their native heath. Looking back I saw that only three were following direct, and I guessed that the others had fetched a circuit to cut me off.

My lack of local knowledge might very well be my undoing, and I resolved to get out of this tangle of glens to the pocket of moor I had seen from the tops. I must so increase my distance as to get clear away from them, and I believed I could do this if I could find the right ground for it. If there had been cover I would have tried a bit of stalking, but on these bare slopes you could see a fly a mile off.

My hope must be in the length of my legs and the soundness of my wind, but I needed easier ground for that, for I was not bred a mountaineer. How I longed for a good Africander pony!

I put on a great spurt and got off my ridge and down into the moor before any figures appeared on the skyline behind me. I crossed a burn and came out on a high-road which made a pass between two glens.

All in front of me was a big field of heather sloping up to a crest which was crowned with an odd feather of trees.

In the dike by the roadside was a gate, from which a grass-grown track led over the first wave of the moor. I jumped the dike and followed it, and after a few hundred yards—as soon as it was out of sight of the highway—the grass stopped and it became a very respectable road which was evidently kept with some care.

Clearly it ran to a house, and I began to think of doing the same. Hitherto my luck had held, and it might be that my best chance would be found in this remote dwelling. Anyhow, there

were trees there — and that meant cover.

I did not follow the road, but the burnside which flanked it on the right, where the bracken grew deep and the high banks made a tolerable screen. It was well I did so, for no sooner had I gained the hollow than, looking back, I saw the pursuit topping the ridge from which I had descended.

After that I did not look back—I had no time. I ran up the burnside, crawling over the open places, and for a large part wading in the shallow stream. I found a deserted cottage with a row of fantom peat stacks and an overgrown garden.

Then I was among young hay, and very soon had come to the edge of a plantation of windblown firs. From there I saw the chimneys of the house smoke a few hundred yards to my left.

I forsook the burnside, crossed another dike, and almost before I knew was on a rough lawn. A glance back told me that I was well out of sight of the pursuit, which had not yet passed the first lift of the moor.

The lawn was a very rough place, cut with a scythe instead of a mower, and planted with beds of scrubby rhododendrons. A brace of black game, which are not usually garden birds, rose at my approach. The house before me was the ordinary moorland farm, with a more pretentious white-washed wing added. Attached to this wing was a glass veranda, and through the glass I saw the face of an elderly gentleman meekly watching me.

I stalked over the border of coarse hill gravel and entered the open veranda door.

Within was a pleasant room, glass on one side, and on the other a mass of books. More books showed in an inner room. On the floor, instead of tables, stood cases such as you see in a museum, filled with coins and queer stone implements. There was a knee-hole desk in the middle, and seated at it, with some papers and open volumes before him, was the benevolent old

gentleman. His face was round and shiny, like Mr. Pickwick's, big glasses stuck on the end of his nose, and the top of his head was as bright and bare as a glass bottle.

He never moved when I entered, but raised his placid eyebrows and waited on me to speak.

It was not an easy job, with about five minutes to spare, to tell a stranger who I was and what I wanted, and to win his aid. I did not attempt it. There was something about the eye of the man before me—something so keen and knowledgeable, that I could not find a word. I simply stared at him and stammered.

"You seem in a hurry, my friend," he said slowly.

I nodded toward the glass. It gave a prospect across the moor through a gap in the plantation, and revealed certain figures half a mile off straggling through the heather.

"Ah, I see," he said, and took up a pair of field-glasses, through which he patiently scrutinized the figures.

"A fugitive from justice, eh? Well, we'll go into the matter at our leisure. Meantime, I object to my privacy being broken in upon by the clumsy rural policemen. Go into my study and you will see two doors facing you. Take the one on the left and close it behind you. You will be perfectly safe."

And this extraordinary man took up his pen again.

I did as I was bid, and found myself in a little dark chamber which smelled of chemicals and was lit only by a tiny window high up in the wall. The door had swung behind me with a click like the door of a safe. Once again I had found an unexpected sanctuary.

All the same I was not comfortable. There was something about the old gentleman which puzzled and rather terrified me. He had been too easy and ready, almost as if he had expected me. And his eyes had been horribly intelligent.

No sound came to me in that dark place.

For all I knew the police might be searching the house, and if they did, they would want to know what was behind this door. I tried to possess my soul in patience and to forget how hungry I was. Then I took a more cheerful view.

The old gentleman could scarcely refuse me a meal, and I fell to reconstructing my breakfast. Bacon and eggs would content me, but I wanted the better part of a fitch of bacon and half a hundred eggs. And then, while my mouth was watering in anticipation, there was a click and the door stood open.

I emerged into the sunlight to find the master of the house sitting in a deep armchair in the room he called his study, and regarding me with curious eyes.

"Have they gone?" I asked.

"They have gone. I convinced them that you had crossed the hill. I do not choose that the police should come between me and one whom I am delighted to honor. This is a lucky morning for you, Richard Hannay."

As he spoke his eyelids seemed to tremble and to fall a little over his keen gray eyes. In a flash the phrase of Scudder's came back to me when he had described the man he most dreaded in the world. He had said that he "could hood his eyes like a hawk."

Then I saw that I had walked straight into the enemy's headquarters. My first impulse was to throttle the old ruffian and make for the open air. He seemed to anticipate my intention, for he smiled gently and nodded to the door behind me. I turned and saw two men servants who had me covered with pistols.

He knew my name, but he had never seen me before. And as the reflection darted across my mind, I saw a slender chance.

"I don't know what you mean," I said roughly. "And who are you call-

ing Richard Hannay? My name's Ainslie."

"So?" he said, still smiling. "But, of course, you have others. We won't quarrel about a name."

I was pulling myself together now, and I reflected that my garb, lacking coat and waistcoat and collar, would, at any rate, not betray me. I put on my surliest face and shrugged my shoulders.

"I suppose you're going to give me up, after all, and I call it a dirty trick. I wish I had never seen that cursed motor-car! Here's the money and be damned to you!" And I flung four sovereigns on the table.

He opened his eyes a little. "Oh, no, I shall not give you up. My friends and I will have a little private settlement with you, that is all. You know a little too much, Mr. Hannay. You are a clever actor, but not quite clever enough."

He spoke with assurance, but I could see the dawning of some doubt in his mind.

"For God's sake stop jawing!" I cried. "Everything's against me. I haven't had a bit of luck since I came on shore at Leith. What's the harm in a poor devil with an empty stomach picking up some money he finds in a bust-up motor-car? That's all I done, and for that I've been chivvied for two days by those blasted bobbies over those blasted hills. I tell you, I'm fair sick of it. You can do what you like, old boy! Ned Ainslie's got no fight left in him."

I could see that the doubt was gaining.

"Will you oblige me with the story of your recent doings?" he asked.

"I can't, gov'nor," I said in a real beggar's whine. "I've not had a bite to eat for two days. Give me a mouthful of food, and then you'll hear God's truth!"

I must have showed my hunger in my face, for he signaled to one of the men in the doorway. A bit of cold pie was brought and a glass of beer, and

I wolfed them down like a pig—or rather like Ned Ainslie, for I was keeping up my character.

In the middle of my meal he spoke suddenly to me in German, but I turned on him a face as blank as a stone wall.

Then I told him my story—how I had come off an Archangel ship at Leith a week ago, and was making my way overland to my brother at Wigton. I had run short of cash—I hinted vaguely at a spree—and I was pretty well on my uppers when I had come on a hole, in a hedge, and, looking through, had seen a big motor-car lying in the burn.

I had poked about to see what had happened, and had found three sovereigns lying on the seat and one on the floor. There was nobody there, or any sign of an owner, so I had pocketed the cash. But somehow the law had got after me. When I had tried to change a sovereign in a baker's shop the woman had cried on the police, and a little later, when I was washing my face in a burn, I had been nearly gripped, and had only got away by leaving my coat and waistcoat behind me.

"They can have the money back," I cried, "for a fat lot of good it's done me. Those perishers are all down on a poor man. Now, if it had been you, guv'nor, that had found the quids, nobody would have troubled you."

"You're a good liar, Hannay," he said.

I flew into a rage. "Stop fooling. I tell you my name's Ainslie, and I never heard of any one called Hannay in my born days! I'd sooner have the police than you with your Hannays and your monkey-faced pistol tricks! No, guv'nor, I don't mean that. I'm much obliged to you for the grub. I'll thank you to let me go now—the coast's clear."

It was evident he was badly puzzled. You see he had never seen me, and my appearance must have altered consid-

erably from my photographs—if he had got one of them. I was pretty smart and well dressed in London, and now I was a regular tramp.

"I do not propose to let you go. If you are what you say you are, you will soon have a chance of clearing yourself. If you are what I believe you are, I do not think you will see the light much longer."

He rang a bell and a third servant appeared from the veranda.

"I want the Lanchester in five minutes," he said. "There will be three to luncheon."

Then he looked steadily at me, and that was the hardest ordeal of all. There was something weird and devilish in those eyes—cold, malignant, unearthly, and most hellishly clever. They fascinated me like the bright eyes of a snake.

I had a strong impulse to throw myself on his mercy and offer to join his side, and if you consider the way I felt about the whole thing you will see that that impulse must have been purely physical—the weakness of a brain mesmerized and mastered by a stronger spirit.

But I managed to stick it out—and even to grin. "You'll know me next time, guv'nor," I said.

"Karl!" he said in German to one of the men in the doorway. "You will put this fellow in the store-room till I return, and you will be answerable to me for his keeping."

I was marched out of the room with a pistol at each ear.

The storeroom was a damp chamber in what had been the old farmhouse. There was no carpet on the uneven floor and nothing to sit down on but a school form. It was black as pitch, for the windows were heavily shuttered.

I made out by groping that the walls were lined with boxes and barrels and sacks of some heavy stuff. The whole place smelled of mold and disuse. My jailers turned the key in the door, and

I could hear them shifting their feet as they stood on guard outside.

I sat down in the chilly darkness in a very miserable frame of mind. The old boy had gone off in a motor to collect the two ruffians who had interviewed me yesterday. Now, they had seen me as the roadman, and they would remember me, for I was in the same rig.

What was a roadman doing twenty miles from his beat, pursued by the police? A question or two would put them in the track. Probably they had seen the real Turnbull, probably Lancie too; most likely they could link me up with Sir Harry, and then the whole thing would be crystal clear.

What chance had I in this moorland house with three desperadoes and their armed servants? I began to think wistfully of the police, now plodding over the hills after my wraith. They at any rate were fellow countrymen and honest men, and their tender mercies would be kinder than these ghoulish aliens.

But they wouldn't have listened to me. That old devil with his eyelids had not taken long to get rid of them. I thought he probably had some kind of graft with the constabulary. Most likely he had letters from Cabinet Ministers saying he was to be given every facility for plotting against Britain.

That's the sort of owlsh way we run our politics in the old country.

The three would be back for lunch, so I hadn't more than a couple of hours to wait. It was simply waiting or destruction, for I could see no way out of this mess. I wished that I had Scudder's courage, for I am free to confess I didn't feel great fortitude.

The only thing that kept me going was that I was pretty furious. It made me boil with rage to think of those three spies getting the pull on me like this. I hoped that at any rate I might be able to twist one of their necks before they downed me.

The more I thought of it the angrier I grew, and I had to get up and move about the room. I tried the shutters but they were the kind that lock with a key and I couldn't move them.

From the outside came the faint clucking of hens in the warm sun. Then I groped among the sacks and boxes. I couldn't open the latter, and the sacks seemed to be full of things like dog-biscuits that smelled of cinnamon. But as I circumnavigated the room I found a handle in the wall which seemed worth investigating.

It was the door of a wall cupboard—what they call a "press" in Scotland—and it was locked.

I shook it and it seemed rather flimsy. For want of something better to do I put out my strength on that door, getting some purchase on the handle by looping my braces round it. Presently the thing gave with a crash which I thought would bring in my warders to inquire.

I waited for a bit and then started to explore the cupboard shelves.

There was a multitude of queer things there. I found an odd vesta in my trouser pocket and struck a light. It went out in a second, but it showed me one thing. There was a little stock of electric torches on one shelf. I picked up one and found it was in working order.

With the torch to help me I investigated further. There were bottles and cases of queer smelling stuffs, chemicals no doubt for experiments, and there were coils of fine copper wire and hanks and hanks of a thin oiled silk.

Then away at the back of a shelf I found a stout brown cardboard box, and inside it a wooden case. I managed to wrench it open, and within lay half a dozen little gray bricks, each about a couple of inches square.

I look up one and found that it crumbled easily in my hand. Then I smelled it and put my tongue to it. After that I sat down to think. I hadn't been a mining engineer for

nothing, and I knew lentonite when I saw it.

With one of these bricks I could blow the house to smithereens. I had used the stuff in Rhodesia and knew its power. But the trouble was that my knowledge wasn't exact.

I had forgotten the proper charge and the right way of firing it, or rather I knew that it needed an electric spark, but I wasn't sure about the timing. I had only a vague notion to add to its power, for though I had used it I had not handled it with my own fingers.

But it was a chance, the only possible chance.

It was a mighty risk, but against it was an absolute black certainty. If I used it the odds were, as I reckoned, about five to one in favor of my blowing myself into the treetops; but if I didn't I should very likely be occupying a six-foot hole in the garden by the evening.

That was the way I had to look at it. The prospect was pretty dark either way, but anyhow there was a chance, both for myself and for my country.

The remembrance of little Scudder decided me. It was about the best moment of my life, for I'm no good at these cold-blooded resolutions. Still I managed to rake up the pluck to set my teeth and choke back

the horrid doubts that flooded in on me.

I simply shut off my mind and pretended I was doing an experiment as simple as Guy Fawkes's fireworks.

I pulled a couple of the electric torches to pieces, and with their small batteries and coils of wire constructed an elementary fuse. Then I took a quarter of a lentonite brick, and buried it near the door, below one of the sacks, in a crack of the floor, linking up my fuse to it. For all I knew half those boxes might be dynamite.

If the cupboard held such deadly explosives, why not the boxes?

In that case there would be a glorious skyward journey for me and the German servant, and about an acre or two of the surrounding country. There was also the risk that the detonation might set off the other bricks in the cupboard, for I had forgotten most that I knew about lentonite.

But it didn't do to begin thinking about the possibilities. The odds were horrible, but I had to take them.

I ensconced myself just below the sill of the window. Then I waited for a moment or two. There was dead silence—only a shuffle of heavy boots in the passage, and the peaceful cluck of hens from the warm out-of-doors.

I commended my soul to my Maker and touched off the fuse.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.