KING
OF·THE
AIR

HERBERT
STRANG

OXFORD

KING·OF THE·AIR

BY·HERBERT·STRANG

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Or, To Morocco on an Aeroplane

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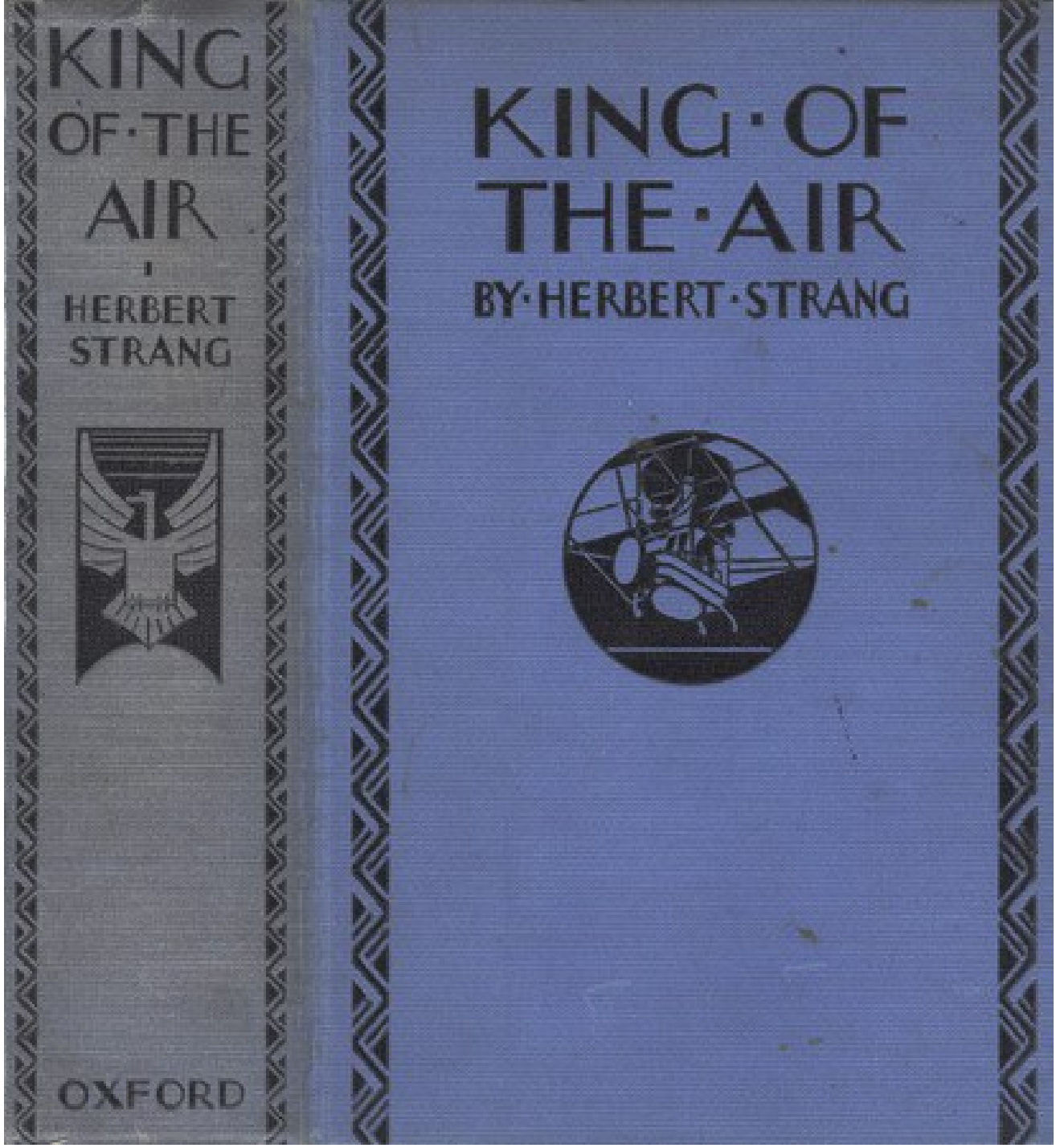

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HERBERT STRANG

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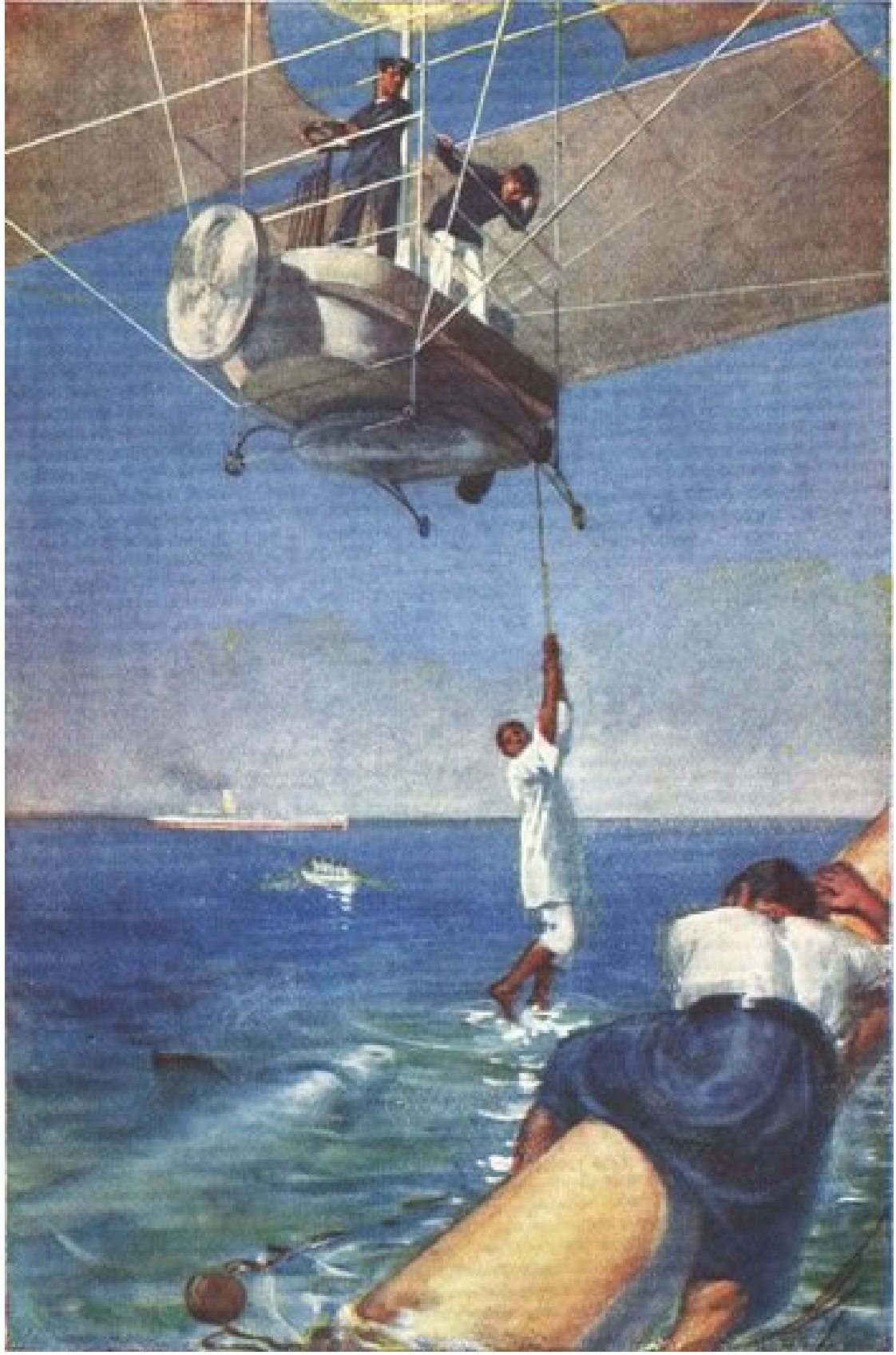

HE CLUTCHED AT THE GRAPNEL, LET GO HIS HOLD OF THE MAST, AND SWUNG CLEAR. *Frontispiece*—see page 79

KING OF THE AIR

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By

HERBERT STRANG

ILLUSTRATED IN COLOUR BY W. E. WEBSTER

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King of the Air

CHAPTER I—MR. GREATOREX IS ASTONISHED

Mr. John Greatorex was very wealthy, and very obstinate. He had made a large fortune as a manufacturer of chemicals, but disclaimed any knowledge of chemistry. He had dabbled a little in mechanics, and was convinced that he possessed an accurate practical knowledge of its applications. Consequently, when his new motor-car arrived, he saw no necessity to take a chauffeur with him on its trial spin. He was like a child with a new toy, jealous of participation.

"My dear," said Mrs. Greatorex, as she handed him his motor goggles, "are you sure you will not take Timothy? What if it breaks down?"

"My *love*," said Mr. Greatorex in his emphatic way, "I do not *want* Timothy. It will not break down. If it *does*, I flatter myself I am *competent* to make any *necessary* repairs. I shall be back at seven-thirty—in good time for dinner; and I *hope and trust* the soup will *not* be cold."

He gave a preliminary *honk! honk!* looking round with a smile that plainly said, "There! you see that *everything* is in order!" Then he steered the car accurately down the drive to the road.

His house lying in the heart of the country, Mr. Greatorex did not fear to meet milestones in the shape of policemen with stop-watches, who would take his number and afterwards confront him in court. In a minute or two the car was whirling along the road at a rate which, it is to be feared, gravely exceeded the speed limit. All went merry as a marriage-bell, and Mr. Greatorex was at the height of exhilaration and satisfaction, when, just as he was mounting the acclivity of Five Oaks Bridge, without even a click in warning, the machine came to a dead stop. Mr. Greatorex put the engine out of gear, then tried to start it by

turning the starting handle; but finding this of no avail he clapped on the brake, skipped out of the car, removed his goggles and his gloves, and set about making an examination.

On the other side of the bridge, sitting on the bank of the stream, was a boy, gazing with round eyes at a float that hung from a line attached to a long home-made rod of yew. He had heard the clatter of the motor-car as it came along the road; he was aware that the noise had suddenly ceased; but, being a lad of great concentration, he did not give a thought to what was happening out of sight at the further end of the bridge. He had come out for an afternoon's fishing; two or three fat carp lay beside him on the bank; and noticing at this moment a slight movement of the float, he was soon oblivious of everything except the fish on his hook.

Half an hour passed. Three more fish had rewarded his patience; then, satisfied with his catch, the boy rose, methodically wound up his line, and, leaving reel, rod and basket on the bank, walked up on to the bridge, to investigate the meaning of sundry strange noises he had heard, vaguely, in the intervals between the bites.

As he gained the foot of the bridge, where a motor-car stood somewhat askew across the road, he caught sight of a pair of brown boots projecting from beneath the machine. Nothing but the boots was visible; but they moved, and it was clear that they shod the feet of some living person, for there came puffs and grunts and explosive monosyllables resembling those he had sometimes heard on the golf-links near his home.

The boy leant against the parapet, stuck his hands into his pockets, and watched. By and by there was an ejaculation of peculiar vehemence; the boots moved out into the road, followed by a pair of grey-trousered legs, a soiled and rumpled motor-coat, and a very red and dirty face; the boy took especial note of a black patch in the very centre of a shiny skull.

Puffing and blowing, Mr. Greatorex crawled from under his new car,

and stood upon his feet—a rather disreputable-looking object—staring wrathfully at the offending car. He had not perceived the small spectator.

"Wish I *had* brought Timothy!" he muttered. "*Confound* the brute!"

He looked at his grimy hands, at his mud-stained clothes, up the road, down the road, and finally at the boy, who had at last made an impression on his retina.

"Hi, boy!" he said.

The boy approached with a shy smile. Mr. Greatorex scowled, conscious of his plight.

"Boy, tell me, and don't *grin*, is there a smith anywhere in this neighbourhood?"

"In the village, sure, measter."

"Where is the village?"

"About three miles away, over yonder."

"God bless me! Three miles! Well, look here, boy, I'll give you *sixpence* to run there and send the smith back—behind a horse, on a bicycle, *anyhow*—to mend this confounded machine. I'm twenty miles away from *home*, you understand, and I shall be *late* for dinner. I'll make it a *shilling* if the smith is here within an hour."

The boy looked up into the wrathful face and smiled again.

"Would 'ee like me to mend un for 'ee? 'Twould maybe save time."

Mr. Greatorex stared.

"*You* mend it! 'Pon my word!"

And then he burst into a roar of laughter which carried away his ill-humour, for Mr. Greatorex was normally a very good-tempered person.

The situation was, in truth, amusing. The boy was a little fellow under four feet high. He had a round chubby face, not free from stains. He

wore corduroy breeches much too large for him, big clumping boots, and a flannel shirt open at the neck. His blue eyes peeped up from beneath a large, soft, much-discoloured straw hat. And this little urchin had actually offered to mend a motor-car with which Mr. Greatorex, with all his knowledge of mechanism, had been struggling for half an hour in vain!

Mr. Greatorex laughed again.

"Come, cut along, youngster," he said genially. "Let me see how *fast* you can run."

"I'll mend un if you give me leave. 'Twill save time," persisted the boy.

Mr. Greatorex pulled out his watch. What a joke, he thought—this sprat of a boy offering to tackle his huge motor-car! It was only a little after five; there might still be time to fetch the smith, get the repairs made, and yet reach home by half-past seven. A little rest would not come amiss after his exertions. Why not let the youngster try his hand—for the fun of it?

"Well then, *fire* away, my young engineer. I've been at it half an hour, *confound* the thing!"

"What have 'ee done, measter?"

"Done? Everything! Examined the sparking plugs: *they're* all right. Wires from battery: *they're* all right. Battery itself, *that's* all right. Plenty of petrol in the tank. *Every*thing's all right, hang it, and yet the thing *won't* go!"

"Don't you worrit, measter. Give me a lend of your tools."

The boy's cocksureness again amused Mr. Greatorex, who seated himself on the parapet of the bridge, and mopped his perspiring face, smiling pleasantly. Though past fifty he was still young at heart, and very ready to be amused. He took out a pipe, filled and lit it, and puffed away, with an expression of serene contentment on his rubicund dirty face.

The boy flung off his hat and disappeared. Metallic sounds came from the interior of the car.

“How are you getting on, boy?” asked Mr. Greatorex after some ten minutes.

There was no answer.

Five minutes passed.

“Find it rather too *much* for you, eh?” said Mr. Greatorex, looking more amused than ever.

Still there was no answer.

“Got everything you want?” he asked again.

But the boy made no reply; only the sound of knocking and screwing continued.

Mr. Greatorex laughed aloud.

“Come,” he said, getting up and standing with legs astraddle a foot or two from the car, “you mustn’t make *too* long a *job* of it, you know.” Then he chuckled.

Five minutes afterwards the boy crawled out. Mr. Greatorex laughed again as he surveyed the grimy little fellow. A great patch of black surrounded one eye, where he had rubbed his knuckles.

“All right now, measter,” said the boy.

“What! Come, my lad, you’ve *had your* turn; now run along and fetch the smith.”

“Bean’t no need. She’ll go now.”

Mr. Greatorex looked impressed, stepped to the front of the car, and turned the handle; to his amazement the engines started. He sprang into the car, threw the engines into gear, and was still more amazed when, releasing the clutch pedal, he found that the car moved.

“Better take off the brake, measter,” said the boy.

“Why, yes, certainly,” said Mr. Greatorex, with a preoccupied air, and

the car mounted the incline, spun across the bridge, and ran easily down the road. Then Mr. Greatorex stopped it and turned round.

"Hi, boy!" he shouted. The boy picked up his hat, stuck it on his head, and approached.

"Look here, youngster," said Mr. Greatorex, "the car is all *right*!"

"Told 'ee so, measter."

Mr. Greatorex roared.

"You're a wonderful little chap. Bless my soul, how did you *do* it?"

"I'll show 'ee if you'll get out."

"No thank 'ee. I've already had half an hour at it, and I'm as black as a nigger. What was wrong?"

"A bit of grit was stuck in the petrol spray nozzle, so you couldn't get no petrol into the carburetter."

"Oh!" said Mr. Greatorex blankly. "What's your name?"

"Tom Dorrell."

"You don't happen to be manager of a motor-works, I suppose?"

"No," said the boy, unconscious of the genial sarcasm.

"Where d'you live?"

"In the village yonder," said Tom, pointing ahead.

"Oh! Ah! Look *here*, my lad, why aren't you at school?"

"Why, 'cos 'tis holidays," he replied with a grin. "Feyther didn't want me, so I came out to fish."

"Oh, indeed. And who's your father?"

"He be the smith you wanted me to fetch; but there warn't no need."

"So it appears! I say, my lad, how *old* are you?"

"Twelve, and I'm in the sixth standard."

"You are, are you? And how long have you been mending motor-cars?"

“Not so very long. I help feyther now and again; motor-cars are always breaking down, and he has mended a rare lot of ’em.”

“Ah! And how much would he have charged for mending this one?”

“About two shillings, I reckon; it wasn’t a very hard job.”

“Oh! Well, here’s two shillings for you. Don’t spend it *all* on sweets.”

“Not me,” said the boy with a grin. “I’m saving up, I am.”

“Indeed! What for?”

“Why, for heaps of things. I want a model of a four-coupled bogie tank engine, and a model of a turbine steamer, and a motor bicycle——”

“Steady, youngster. That’s rather a *large* order, isn’t it? You’ve got a fancy for mechanics, eh!”

“Mechanics! Not me! That’s what they teach in the seventh standard. I like engines, I do—machines that’ll go. I’m going to be an engineer some day—if I can; feyther says it costs a mint of money, and he hasn’t got much, and he says he don’t hold with flying too high, and I’d much better be a smith. But there’s nothing new in smith’s work: you just go on shoeing horses, and sticking fellies on wheels, and mending prams and motor-cars now and then. I want to do something new, I do.”

“Ah! What’s your father’s name?”

“Dorrell, same as mine.”

“Naturally. And what do you call your village?”

“Barton Abbas.”

“Well, Tom, here’s your two shillings. You’ve got a bank-book, I suppose.”

“Rather. I’ve got three pounds fourteen and ninepence; this makes sixteen and ninepence. I shall have another sixpence on Saturday for cleaning pa’son’s bicycle; that’ll make seventeen and threepence. Pa’son gives me sixpence a week.”

“You’re getting quite rich, you know. Well, Tom, thanks to you I *shall*

get home in time for dinner."

"I'm pretty hungry," said Tom. "I guess it's past my tea-time."

"No doubt it is. *Strawberry* jam, eh?"

"No. Mother says that's too dear. We have rhubarb and marrow, growed in the garden."

"And very good stuff, too. *By George!* I haven't had marrow jam for forty years."

"You be pretty old then: older than feyther."

"Well, d'you know, Tom, I am *several years* younger than I was two hours ago. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER II—HERR SCHWAB

One spring day, rather more than six years after the meeting of Mr. Greatorex and Tom Dorrell by Five Oaks Bridge, a shabby pony cart was jogging along the road that led from the little railway station of Midfont, through the sleepy village of the same name, to Midfont House, the rural retreat to which Mr. Greatorex betook himself from his business in the great manufacturing town of Burlingham some dozen miles away. The sole occupant of the cart was a large florid man of about forty-five, who eyed the surroundings curiously through heavy gold-rimmed spectacles, the sluggish pony he drove requiring little attention.

His costume, no less than his spectacles, was strangely out of keeping with the cart. That would have been a fit setting for a farm-hand, or a carrier, or some other wearer of fustian. But its present occupant was attired in a well-cut grey frock-coat, silk lined, a glossy silk hat, a lilac-coloured necktie in which flashed a diamond pin, and trousers of large check pattern. His hands were gloved in brown kid; between his teeth he held a long cigar.

He looked about him with intention. Unfenced fields stretched on either side of the road. Every now and again the driver would pull up, stand on the seat, and throw a searching glance around. Then, muttering under his breath words that were certainly strange to that part of the English midlands, he would drive on again, looking to right and left as before.

By and by he came to a part of the road where a long wooden fence on the right-hand side indicated an enclosure. To this the driver gave his whole attention, and when the fence was broken by a wide wooden gate, within which a carriage drive ran past a little lodge and between hedges of evergreen, he pulled up, alighted from the cart,

and, leading the pony by the nose, went to the gate and gave the bell-pull a vigorous tug. It might have been noticed that he walked a little lame.

In response to his summons a man came to the gate—a young man, thin, clean-shaven, with a slight cast in one eye. He was bareheaded, wore a red waistcoat over a flannel shirt, and brown corduroy breeches, supported by a leather belt and somewhat creased above brown leggings.

"So!" said the driver of the pony cart, as the lodgekeeper rested his arms on the second bar of the gate and looked at him. "Zis, my goot friend, is Midfont House?"

"You've got it right, guv'nor."

"So! Zen I ask, is Mr. Thomas Dorrell at home?"

"Nice day, guv'nor."

"I zank you, yes, it is not bad. Mr. Thomas Dorrell——"

"No; my name's Timothy Ball—T. B. on my collars."

"I zank you. Mr. Thomas Dorrell——"

"This 'ere place belongs to Mr. John Greatorex, Esquire, J.P., and he ain't at home, bein' engaged in trying a bad case of stealin' lamb and mint-sauce not a many miles from 'ere."

"My goot friend, I do not mind; I like it. I come not to see Mr. Greatorex, I come to see Mr. Thomas Dorrell——"

"Now, look 'ere, guv'nor, we've had chaps 'ere before with cheap watches and dear books and thingummies of all sorts, and I tell you straight, we don't encourage 'em; in fact, I've got strict orders from Mr. Greatorex, J.P., to set the dog on any such that won't take no for an answer."

"My goot friend, you mistake. Vizout doubt I carry, some days, books, editions de luxe, and vatches and ozer zinks, but to-day—no, no. Look, here is my carte——"

“And a rum-lookin’ ramshackle turn-out it is,” quoth Timothy, ignoring the piece of pasteboard and eyeing the vehicle disdainfully. “I wonder you ain’t ashamed to come out in a ‘at like that, togged up to the nines, quite a torf, and your pony as looks as if he ain’t had a currycomb on his hide for a month o’ Sundays.”

“Ah, you mistake me all ze time. Ze bony, he is not mine; I hire him to bring me to Midfont House. Here is my carte, my friend. Take it to Mr. Thomas Dorrell, viz gompliments. He do not know my name, so! But he know ze name of ze firma I rebresent, and he vill like to see me, I know zat, because he place large orders, vair large, viz our gompany; he is vat you call a gustomer, you understand.”

Timothy Ball looked doubtfully at the visitor, and at the card he offered to him.

“There’s customers, and rum customers,” he said.

“Rum!” interrupted the stranger. “If Mr. Dorrell like rum, we can subbly any quantity, in cask or bottle, at rock-bottom price.”

Timothy sniggered and rubbed his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Rum ain’t the word for it,” he said. “’Tis downright bloomin’ funny, that’s what it is. Well, guv’nor, hold hard a bit; I’ll just ’phone through to Mr. Dorrell and tell him you’re here. *’Ow* do you say your name?”

“Schwab! Hildebrand Schwab, rebresentative of ze Schlagintwert Gombany of Düsseldorf.”

“Can’t say all that; telephone won’t stand it. Wait a bit while I try Swob.”

He rang up and put his ear to the receiver.

“Are you there? That you, Mr. Dorrell?... There’s a man here ... a man ... a gentleman to see you, name Swib ... Swob! So he *said*, sir.... Travels for rum, by what I can make out——”

“No! no!” cried Schwab; but Timothy glared him into silence.

“Said you wouldn’t know him, sir, but you’re a customer of his firm....

No, sir, *not* rum.... Can't say it, sir.... Very well, sir (glancing at the card): S C H L A G I N T W.... You've got it, sir.... He didn't say, sir.... Very well, sir."

"Mr. Dorrell wants to know what you've come for."

"Vill you be so kind as permit me to speak to him myself?"

"No; your trotter might run away.... Yes, sir, one minute.... Now, out with it, Mr. Swob; Mr. Dorrell's busy."

"Zen tell him I come from Düsseldorf on behalf of my firma to pay zeir respects and gompliments to zeir valued gustomer and to zay zat ve shall be alvays most pleased to subbly anyzink vatefer zat Mr. Dorrell vants in quickest possible tempo egzept our Number Six Photographic Sensitizer vich require fortnight notice——"

"Arf a mo!... Yes, sir, but there's such a lot of it I can't get hold of it all.... No, sir, not walk; the gentleman's rather lame, sir; came in a pony cart.... Very well, sir."

"Mr. Dorrell says he'll be here in a few minutes if you'll wait."

"Vy certainly. I can get no train for two hour. I vait in ze house?"

"No, Mr. Dorrell ain't in the house. He'll come here. We always interview rum customers at the gate."

"No, no, no; not rum, my friend; and Mr. Dorrell is ze gustomer. He buy of *us*; at least, he order; Mr. Greatorex pay."

"Well, it don't matter to you, I s'pose, so long as you get your money? Mr. Greatorex's money is good enough for me, anyway. Paid for that topping cigar of yours, didn't it?"

"I have not ze honour to know Mr. Greatorex; but I have here a price list of cigars, and if——"

"Here's Mr. Dorrell."

"Vere? I see him not."

"Well, he's big enough, though he ain't as broad as he's long: that gentleman in the blue clothes comin' down the path."

“Zat Mr. Dorrell! Vy—he is a boy! Himmel!”

“Rum, ain’t it? S’pose you never *was* a boy, Mr. Swob.”

A tall loose-limbed young fellow had come into the drive from a side path, and was walking with great strides towards the gate. He was bareheaded; his black hair tumbled over a brow unusually high and broad. No other feature was noticeable except his eyes, which were large, deep blue in colour, and shot with a strange glow. He was dressed in a loose suit of what appeared to be blue alpaca, which was plentifully bestained.

By this time Timothy had opened the gate and given admittance to the visitor. Tom Dorrell came up, held out his hand, and said in quick decisive tones—

“How d’you do, Mr.——?”

“Schwab, sir—Hildebrand Schwab, rebresentative of ze firma Schlagintwert, all orders punctually eggzecuted.”

“Sorry to keep you waiting. Very busy, you know; if you had given me notice——”

“Ach! I come on ze hop, sir.”

Tom smiled.

“Well, glad to see you, anyway. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Sir, zat is vat I ask you. You give orders, first class, for our Photographic Sensitizer Preparation Number Six; but my firma zink you do not know, perhaps, zat zey do many ozer zinks beside Photographic Sensitizer Preparation Number Six. Vy, zere is nozink vat ve do not do, nozink at all. Ve can supply anyzink—soft goots, musical boxes, hair oil——”

“I know, I know,” said Tom. “I have your price list.”

“But not ze new vun—revise and correck carte,” returned Schwab, pulling from his pocket a bulky volume in red paper cover. “Viz gompliments!”

“Thanks! Now, I am very busy——”

“Shust so! Business are business! Not for ze vorld vould I stand in ze light. Only bermit me shust vun vord. Ze orders you give for Photographic Sensitizer Preparation Number Six, vy, zey are immense, colossal; and you pay on ze nail. My firma get no such orders novere, and zey are surprise, because Number Six is new zink; it is not long zat it is on ze market. Vy zen come so large orders from so little place? Zey zink zere are business to be done; zerefore am I here.”

“Well, you can’t expect the merits of the stuff to be known all at once.”

“Shust so. Zerefore I come! Schlagintwert say: ‘Mr. Dorrell use a great lot of P.S.P. No. 6; zerefore muss it be vair goot; go and see Mr. Dorrell; perhaps he be so kind to give testimonial—zat vill be goot business.’”

“Afraid I can’t do that. You see, I don’t use it in photography, and that is what you advertise it for.”

“But ve vill advertise it for anyzink you please!”

“My use of it is secret at present.”

“Zen ve vill buy ze secret! Ve are vair rich firma.”

“But it wouldn’t be a secret then.”

“Zat is true, but it vould be business. Zere vill be patent rights, perhaps; vell, ve buy zem; ve buy anyzink zat is goot business.”

“No, I haven’t taken out a patent. It is very good of you, Mr. Schwab, if at any time——”

“Ach! Vat you call any time!—zat is no time. Now, now is ze time. I am in zis country only few days. I go soon to Morocco for business. I suffer egstremely from sea-illness, but for business I go anyvere. Zink how it vould console me in ze Bay of Biscay to know zat I had done goot business for Schlagintwert—and for you, Mr. Dorrell.”

“Sorry. Really I can’t say any more, Mr. Schwab. I *must* go; look me

up again, if you like, when you get back from Morocco."

Recognizing that Tom was not to be drawn, the German swallowed his disappointment, took leave in most expansive terms, and was soon jogging back in the direction from which he had come. But finding, on arriving at the station, that he had an hour to wait for his train, he introduced himself to the station-master and tactfully led the conversation to Midfont House and its owner, Mr. Greatorex. What he learnt in the course of it was something to the following effect.

Some years before, Mr. Greatorex had discovered a taste for mechanics in the son of the village smith at Barton Abbas, twenty miles away. He had put the boy to a good school, often had him at Midfont House in the holidays, and paid his fees at the university in the neighbouring town, where the boy took honours in mechanics and engineering at a very early age. Then, about a year before this time, Mr. Greatorex had fenced in a large piece of waste ground on his estate, erected a workshop in the middle of it, and given it up entirely to young Dorrell, who was now apparently a permanent inmate of his house. What went on in the workshop the station-master did not know. The enclosure was kept strictly private; nobody outside the family was ever allowed to pass its borders. The station-master believed that young Dorrell was inventing a motor-car; it was said that Mr. Greatorex's interest in him dated from the day when the boy had repaired some trifling mishap which had befallen his car on the road.

The effect of this information on Herr Schwab was greater than the station-master ever knew. When the train came in, the German got into it; but he alighted at the next station two miles off, and trudged back over the road until he once more stood at the gate of Midfont House. It was now dark. Schwab did not this time pull the bell. He walked on past the gate for a good quarter of a mile, then halted at a large heap of stones collected for mending the road.

There were no wayfarers at this late hour; nobody saw how this big figure in the frock-coat employed himself. He filled his glossy hat with

flints from the heap, carried it to the foot of the fence, and emptied it there, returning for another hatful. After an hour's patient work a pile of stones stood some three feet high against the fence. Mopping his damp brow, dusting the inside of his hat, and replacing it on his head, Schwab mounted the pile, clambered over the fence, and dropped down somewhat heavily on the other side. Not till that moment had he given a thought to the means of getting back; and looking up at the fence, the top of which was quite beyond his reach, he uttered a low guttural exclamation of dismay. But the die was cast! Consumed by his curiosity to learn more about this mysterious workshop, in the way of business, he had come thus far, and as there was apparently no going back he decided to make his way forward.

He found himself in an extensive meadow, bordered by trees. No habitation was in sight. The moon threw a little light on the scene, and, after walking for some minutes over the grass, he perceived a long low oblong building which, as he drew nearer, he saw was built of wood, with no windows in the walls, but having fanlights in the sloping roof. There was but one door.

"Ich hoffe dass die Thur nicht verriegelt ist!" he muttered as, glancing apprehensively round, he approached to try the handle. He was not conscious of anything improper in this nocturnal enterprise: was it not all in the way of business?

He came to the door, and grasped the handle....

When he recovered consciousness he found himself on his back on the grass. In his right hand there was a feeling as if it had been burnt to the bone. With many sighs and groans he rose, sought for his hat, and, turning his back on the workshop, limped sadly towards the fence. His whole body tingled with the electric shock. Bitterly he lamented his unhappy zeal for business. What an abominable device for protecting the premises! And there was that terrible fence to be climbed, or he would have to remain all night in the field, assuredly to be discovered in the morning and suspected of felonious intent. He

remembered that Timothy Ball had spoken of his master as a magistrate, and saw himself already, frock-coat, silk hat and all, in a felon's cell.

Shaken to the core he came to the fence, and spent a weary hour in groping up and down, trying to find an outlet. At length, when he had almost given up hope, and was trying to steel his soul against the exposure of the morrow, he reached a tree whose branches overhung the fence. It was more than thirty years since, as a boy, he had climbed a tree in sport; who could have foreseen that now, a man of bulk, he would be forced to attempt the feat in the interests of business? And his right hand was so desperately painful! Luckily the trunk was gnarled and a branch hung low. He tried to heave himself up, and his hat fell off. He picked it up and shied it impatiently over the fence. Then he tried again, and felt in the extremity of despair when he heard the *oosh* of tearing silk. Alas! for his new frock-coat! But he was at least safely on the bough. He worked himself along it, dreading lest it should snap, and conscious of the inconvenience of fourteen stone. Happily he was now on the right side of the fence. He dropped, and alighted in a bed of nettles. He got up, found his hat, mechanically brushed it with his sleeve, and set it on his head.

"Ach! Ich unglücklicher!" he sighed as he set off up the road.

CHAPTER III—TOM MAKES EXPERIMENTS

The information given to Herr Schwab by the Midfont station-master was accurate up to a certain point. Mr. Greatorex had indeed constituted himself the beneficent patron of Tom Dorrell, educated him, entertained him at Midfont House, and built for him a workshop in the grounds. So far the station-master was right. But when he added that Tom was working at a new motor-car, he stated a hypothesis, not a fact.

About a year before this time, when Tom came to Midfont House to spend a month's holiday, he brought with him a small model of an aerial machine on which he had been quietly working in leisure moments. He showed it to Mr. Greatorex.

"Very pretty," said the worthy merchant, examining the toy; "but it won't *go*."

"Oh yes it will," said Tom. "See!"

They were in Mr. Greatorex's study at the time. Tom poised the model on his left hand, released a spring, and the little aeroplane, with a whizz and a hum, soared across the room, and, before it could be stopped, dashed against the glass door of a bookcase and shivered it to atoms.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Tom contritely, picking up the machine and silencing it.

"What *are* you doing, John?" said Mrs. Greatorex, opening the door. "What a terrible mess!" she added, surveying the litter on the floor.

"It shall be swept up, my dear," said Mr. Greatorex. "You can't make omelets without breaking *eggs*, my love."

Mrs. Greatorex looked a little puzzled.

“Of course not, my dear,” she said after a moment. Then with a deprecating smile she went away. Mr. Greatorex locked the door.

“Now, Tom,” he said, “just *explain*, will you? Begin at the beginning; I want to *know*, you know.”

“Well, I’ve been thinking a lot at odd times about airships and things, and reading up what they’ve been doing in France and Germany. There’s little prospect of making a really serviceable machine out of the old gas balloon; it’s far too clumsy; can’t make headway against a strong wind; but I didn’t see why something shouldn’t be done on the lines of the aeroplane. You see, it’s easy enough to set the thing going, and even to steer it, when you’ve got it up in the air; but there are three difficulties: to get it up, to let it down without smashing it to bits, and to keep it from turning somersaults. You can overcome the force of gravity by an arrangement of planes when you keep up a good speed; but if you slacken speed, down you come. And all the aeroplanes that have been invented yet can’t rise in the air at any given spot. They either have to be thrown off from some elevated position, or they have to get up a momentum along the ground, running like a motor-car. Then again, the motor machinery has been too heavy; engines haven’t been able to exert sufficient horse-power in proportion to their own weight. I’ve worked it out, and I calculate that no good can be done till you get an engine that’ll give you one horse-power to every two and a half pounds of its weight.”

“Yes. Well?”

“Well, this model is the result of no end of experiments. It goes, as you see; but besides sailing horizontally, it will lift itself. Look!”

He took up the little machine, released another spring, and the miniature airship went flying to the ceiling, where it remained until the spring ran down.

“All very well,” said Mr. Greatorex, unwilling to admit that he was impressed; “but the thing is only a *toy*. There’s all the difference in the

world between a model and the *real thing*, you know. You could never get a spring strong enough to lift a real machine. I'm not satisfied that you could even get the horizontal motion you're so cocksure of, with a machine that would carry *men*."

"No spring would do it, it is true; but I've worked out an application of the principle. It's well known that a propeller rotating at sufficient speed can be made to lift a weight into the air. Of course we couldn't set a real airship rotating bodily; no aeronaut's head would stand it if we could. But, as you saw, my model doesn't rotate itself. I've only made use of the principle—pretty successfully, don't you think?"

"Just explain to me *thoroughly*, will you? I want a little more *light* on the subject."

Tom took his model, and patiently expounded the mechanical principles on which he had worked. The upshot of this and other conversations was that Mr. Greatorex became first interested, then enthusiastic, and finally determined. He had a workshop erected on a large piece of waste ground nearly a mile and a half square on his estate, and gave Tom carte blanche to get what assistance and spend what money he pleased. Resolving to keep the matter a close secret until the experiments were concluded, he fenced in the enclosure, and gave strict orders that no one was to be admitted to it without Tom's consent. Tom himself devised a simple means of defending the workshop from prying visitors. Whenever he left it, he set going a strong electric current through the door handle, which was a more effective protection than locks and bolts.

Tom found, as soon as he came to enlarge his model into a practical working size, that none of the motors then on the market was sufficiently powerful in proportion to its weight to give him the necessary lifting force. The electric motor was out of the question, and an adaptation of the latest petrol engine as applied to motor-cars and launches seemed to offer the most likely solution. Even here, however, the march of invention had not gone far enough. The latest

petrol motor, it is true, enabled Tom to keep the machine at a constant altitude when once it was in flight; but it failed to raise it from a position of rest. Some other method must be found, and he set his wits to work to discover it.

The first condition of success was, he felt, the discovery of an explosive mixture far more powerful than that offered by petrol, and yet capable of being harnessed and controlled. He had the run of Mr. Greatorex's chemical laboratories, and the benefit of the practical advice and assistance of the heads of the experimental staff. Scores of preparations were tried, and, for one reason or another, rejected. Where sufficient power was obtained, it was almost invariably found that the mixture was not stable or uniform in its effects. Several explosive mixtures were discovered quite powerful enough for the purpose; but, as Mr. Greatorex's chief chemist pointed out, all of them were likely to blow the airship to smithereens in the event of any accident to the machinery.

It was some months after the beginning of the experiments when one of the junior chemists came to Tom with the announcement that he had discovered what he thought might be the very substance required. A German firm, Schlagintwert & Co. of Düsseldorf, had placed on the market a few months earlier a powder which, used as a solution, was highly valuable in preparing photographic plates. The exact ingredients of the powder were unknown, although by analysis it had been found to consist of nitrate compounds; but the buyer was warned by a label that it should not be exposed to great heat owing to the danger of explosion. It had occurred to the chemist to mix a little of this powder with petrol. The result was a paste which dried hard, but gave off almost infinitesimal particles of a highly explosive nature, when floating in an air chamber, though the paste itself was not explosive either under heat or shock.

Tom was delighted with the discovery, and at once proceeded to construct an engine suitable to the peculiar properties of the

composition. In building the motor he adapted the principle of the turbine to airship navigation. A powerful fan drove the current of air through a number of perforated aluminium plates covered with the paste. The resultant mixture of air and explosive particles passed into the explosion chamber, the intake being controlled by automatic valves connected with the turbine. The explosion of the mixture was brought about by a sparking plug connected with a small electric battery, the sparking being controlled by a cam on the shaft. At each explosion, the gas generated was forced at an enormous pressure through the turbine to the right of the explosion chamber, thus driving the propeller fixed on the shaft.

Tom made his fan serve a double purpose, not only to drive air through the aluminium plates, but to send a current round a jacket on the outside of the turbine and thus keep the latter cool. This was a highly necessary arrangement owing to the enormous heat generated. From the first, indeed, the difficulty of cooling the turbine was the most serious with which he had to grapple. It required months of experiment before the engine could be worked for more than two or three minutes at a time. Gradually, however, by increasing the power of the fan, and constructing the turbine casing and blades of an alloy specially adapted to resist the effects of intense heat, this difficulty was to a great extent overcome.

The airship when completed was not unlike a huge bird with wings outstretched. The body of the bird consisted of the car and engine. The wings were planes of lath strengthened with aluminium, and capable of being inclined at any desired angle by the simple movement of a switch in the car. A large rectangular plane projecting from the rear of the car acted as a rudder, principally for lateral movement, motion upwards and downwards being provided for either by the inclination of the larger planes or by the special screws actuated by the engine. The latter drove two sets of propellers: one fore and aft, giving a horizontal movement, the other below and above the car, giving a vertical movement. Either set of propellers

could be thrown out of gear when desired. Tom would have been glad to dispense with the vertical propellers if he could have done so, but he found that the whole force of his engine was necessary to raise the airship from a position of rest. He had not sufficient motive power to enable him to use such an adjustment of oblique propellers as would have ensured simultaneous horizontal and vertical movement.

Mr. Greatorex at once promoted the fortunate young chemist who had discovered the virtues of the Schlagintwert powder, and swore him to secrecy. The parts of Tom's machine were made to his order by various firms, the work being distributed so that no one firm should be in possession of the complete apparatus; and a few weeks before Herr Schwab's visit, an aeroplane capable of sustaining the weight of several men was finished, and in it Tom made daily trips about the field. He tested it so frequently that he used considerable quantities of the powder, and it was not surprising that the curiosity of Schlagintwerts was aroused by the large orders that came from one small place for an article that cost a good deal more than its weight in gold.

Tom was, however, not yet satisfied with his machine. For one thing he had found it impossible as yet to return to earth with any exactitude at a fixed spot. It was a matter of the nice adjustment of the horizontal with the vertical motion, and after repeated failures Tom comforted himself with the thought that it must be only after long practice that an engine driver could pull his locomotive up to a nicety. Obviously much more practice must be required when the task was infinitely more difficult.

Further, in spite of the jacket around the turbine, the heat generated was still too great to allow of travelling any great distance in safety, and the prospective usefulness of the aeroplane was discounted accordingly.

It was Mr. Greatorex who suggested a possible way out of the

difficulty.

“Why not have two engines instead of one?” he said. “If one breaks down—why, there’s the other.”

“It means more weight,” said Tom ruefully, “and therefore less speed and less carrying capacity.”

“Well, there’s no *hurry*, is there? And as for carrying capacity—*I* don’t intend to tempt the fates, or run the risk of a smash-up like—who was it? Icarus? Thought so.”

Tom adopted the suggestion. He replaced his first engine by two somewhat smaller, so that if one became overheated there was the other in reserve. The lifting capacity and the speed of the airship were consequently diminished, but scarcely so much as Tom expected.

So far the experiments had been carried on with perfect secrecy. The enclosure was surrounded by trees, and Tom was always careful not to drive his machine above the level of their tops. But one day, a few months after Schwab’s visit, he was careering round, to the mingled admiration and terror of Timothy Ball watching him from the ground, when he was startled by an exclamation that certainly did not spring from the lips of that worthy. Timothy was a good quarter-mile away; the voice appeared to come from a spot almost vertically below the aeroplane.

“By George! Look there, Mops!”

Tom took a hurried peep over. There, below him, in a gap between the trees just beyond the inner fence, stood a tall young fellow in tennis flannels, with light blue cap and tie.

“What is it, Pops?” answered a silvery voice; and a second figure joined the first—a girl in white.

“Why, look! Hanged if it isn’t an aeroplane, going like one o’clock, too.”

“Oh, how dreadful!” cried the girl, looking up. “I am sure it will fall, and

there will be a horrid accident. Oh, do come away, Raymond!”

“Not I! This is hot stuff, Mopsy. By Jove, the fellow can steer the thing. He’s making for that shanty over there—and coming down like a lark. I say, Mops, give me a leg-up; I want to have a nearer squint at the machine.”

“But, Raymond, it’s no business of yours—it’s—it’s trespassing!”

“Trespassing be hanged! We’re next-door neighbours. Come, give me a shove up.”

He clutched the top of the fence; his sister, still feebly expostulating, gave him a most workmanlike hoist, and in a few seconds he disappeared on the other side. The girl waited a little; then turned and walked away.

Her brother meanwhile was hastening across the field towards the workshop, near which the aeroplane had by this time alighted. Halfway he was met by Timothy Ball, who touched his cap and said—

“Beg pardon, sir, but these are private grounds and you’re a trespasser.”

“That’s all right. My name’s Oliphant; we’re neighbours of yours, you know.”

“Now, that’s a good un. Hold hard, sir”—as the intruder made to walk round him—“my orders is to allow no one on the premises! Your name’s Oliphant, you said? Well, you can’t be a neighbour, ’cos the only neighbour I knows of is Lord Langside.”

“He’s my father.”

“But—Oliphant——”

“Exactly! Now, come along, my good fellow—I want to see your master.”

“He don’t want to see you, though. No you don’t; keep off, sir; my orders is to allow no one on the premises.”

Then began a little game of dodging, Timothy stepping in front of the

intruder and stretching his arms like a cattle driver. In half a minute Raymond Oliphant gave it up.

“Really, this is too absurd,” he said good-temperedly. “I say, I’ll give you my word to stay here while you go and tell your master that I’d like to introduce myself to him.”

“Then you’ll stay a long time, ‘cos master’s in town and won’t be home till seven o’clock.”

“Well then, the driver of that aeroplane, whoever he is. Ah! here he comes, thank goodness!”

Tom was hastening across the field. He wore his usual working suit of blue alpaca; face and hands were much begrimed.

“Your watch-dog here won’t let me pass,” said Oliphant with a smile as Tom came up. “I told him I was a neighbour, but he thinks I’m a bad lot. We’ve only just come to the place; my father has taken it, you know; he’s coming down for shooting as soon as Parliament’s up. I saw your aeroplane skylarking round, and couldn’t resist the temptation to come over for a nearer look. You don’t mind?”

“Well—no.” Tom’s tone was dubious.

“Oh, if you’d rather not, of course!”

“No, I don’t mind really. But Mr. Greatorex is rather particular about keeping the matter quiet——”

“I’ll be mum as the dead, I assure you. I don’t know anything about machinery; it isn’t in our line at Eton; you needn’t be afraid of my giving the secret away.”

“It isn’t that, exactly. I’m not afraid of your discovering the secret of the machine; but it’s rather important that the fact of its existence shouldn’t leak out just yet.”

“Well, you’ll have to make friends with my sister then. She has seen it too. It’s lucky Mother is in town, or the secret would be out by this time.”

They were walking now side by side to the shed.

“You’re not Mr. Greatorex’s son, then?”

“No; my name’s Dorrell. I’m no relation of his.”

“My name’s Raymond Oliphant. I’m just home from Eton; long holidays, you know. That’s a clinking machine of yours. Never seen anything like it before. Did Mr. Greatorex invent it? I understood he was a chemical manufacturer.”

“No. I did.”

“Really! I say—d’you mind?—how old are you?”

“Eighteen.”

“Just my age! And I’m rotting about at Eton while you——I say, you ought to make a good thing of this.”

“It’s only experimental at present. We haven’t tried a long flight.”

“Will you get the Government to take it up? I’ll put in a word with the pater, you know.”

“That’s altogether premature,” said Tom with a smile.

“Why, it seemed to me to go all right. Will it take two?”

“Two of our weight, I think. Would you like to try?”

“Rather! And I say, just keep out of sight from our grounds, will you? If Margaret were to catch sight of me she’d have a fit or something. By Jove! it won’t be so slow here as I feared.”

Oliphant spent a quarter of an hour in the air, and when he descended was overflowing with enthusiasm.

“It’s simply ripping, Mr. Dorrell,” he cried. “I may come again, mayn’t I?”

“Certainly,” said Tom, adding with a smile: “On one condition.”

“Trust me, I won’t say a word. And I’ll shut Margaret’s mouth too—if I can. Look here, it seems to me you’d be the best man for that job. I’ll bring Margaret to-morrow—may I?—and when she knows you’re the

inventor, and you impress on her that your life's at stake or something, she'll be more likely to hold her tongue than if *I* jaw. Good-bye."

Tom thought it necessary to inform Mr. Greatorex, in the drawing-room before dinner, of what had happened.

"Hm!" he grunted. "Eton boy, is he? Got any *sense*?"

"I didn't examine him," said Tom with a laugh. "I thought him quite a decent fellow. He was very good-tempered with Tim, who was a trifle taken aback when he learnt that he had ordered off the son of the Prime Minister."

"And a precious Prime Minister he *is*! Mark my words, Tom, the Country's going to the dogs. To the *dogs*! We're dropping *behind*, Tom, and Langside hasn't the grit to prevent it."

"Mr. Oliphant suggested that a word to his father might induce him to buy the aeroplane for the Country."

"God bless my soul, you mustn't *dream* of it! Langside will be turned out at the next election; John Brooks will go in, and he's the man to steer this old country through. No, no! and if young Oliphant blabs a word of it to his father, I'll—I'll——Yes, my love"—as Mrs. Greatorex entered—"we were talking about our new neighbour, Lord Langside. It appears that his son and daughter have come down."

"Oh, John, do you think I should call?"

"On *no account*, my dear. I *hate* Langside's politics, and we'll *have nothing to do with them*. Now, Tom, give Mrs. Greatorex your arm."

CHAPTER IV—A PRISONER IN ZEMMUR

A few mornings after the meeting with Raymond Oliphant, Tom, coming down to breakfast, found Mr. Greatorex in a state of high excitability, with the *Times* outspread before him.

"What did I say, Tom!" he shouted. "Didn't I *tell* you the Country was going to the dogs! What do you think of *this*, now?"

He read out a short paragraph—

> "Information has just reached the Foreign Office that Sir Mark Ingleton, who recently left London on a diplomatic mission to Morocco, has been captured by tribesmen and carried off to the hills. Strong pressure is being brought to bear on the Sultan to take steps against the offenders; but if, as is feared, Sir Mark Ingleton's captor is the notorious rebel whose headquarters are at Zemmur, there is little hope of the Sultan in his present state of impotence being able to make his authority felt."

"That's what has happened to a servant of the British Crown under Langside's administration;" said Mr. Greatorex hotly. "Strong *pressure*, indeed! It wants a fleet, an expedition, a few quick-firers and Long Toms."

"But wouldn't that make a blaze?" said Tom quietly. "In the present state of affairs it might give rise to no end of complications in Europe, too."

"Don't tell *me*!" cried Mr. Greatorex, banging his fist on the paper. "We're sinking into a state of jelly-fish; any one can poke us and smack us and we simply *go in*. This'll smash the Government: that's one good thing; and we'll see what John Brooks can do when *he's* at the helm."

Later in the day Raymond Oliphant, who was now a privileged visitor to the shed, adverted to the subject.

"Thank your stars you are not Prime Minister, Dorrell," he said. "The pater came down for the week-end, and he's nearly off his chump, poor old chap! He knew about this kidnapping three days ago, before it got into the papers, and he went back to town this morning prepared for squalls in the House."

"Can't he do anything?"

"He says not. One of the Opposition rags was screaming about an expedition on Saturday, but of course that can't be risked. And it might fail after all—just as the Gordon expedition did. That Moorish brigand might kill Ingleton if hard pressed."

"But what would he gain by that? He's playing for a ransom, I suppose."

"No, there's more in it than that. We've already offered an enormous ransom through the Sultan; but the rebel wants to get certain concessions out of the Sultan, and thinks he'll manage it by getting the Sultan into hot water with us. I say, what a pity your aeroplane isn't fit for the job. What a grand idea it would be to snap up the prisoner under the very noses of his captors! I suppose it *isn't* up to it, eh?"

Tom shook his head.

"I couldn't trust it to go so far. You see, here the workshop is at hand, and if anything goes wrong it can be easily repaired. It would be rather a poor lookout if the thing came to grief in the Bay of Biscay, say, and I came souse into the sea."

"It *would* be rather rotten. Well, let's have a spin now."

The two mounted the car, and spent an hour in wheeling about the enclosure. Tom ventured to set the motors at a higher speed than he had before tried, and put the aeroplane through a score of evolutions, which demonstrated that he had it perfectly under control. Oliphant in his enthusiasm returned again to the matter of the captured envoy.

“I say, is it quite out of the question, d’you think?”

“Afraid so. Perhaps in a few months——”

“That’s no good,” interrupted his companion. “The occasion will be passed. Ingleton will be either released or dead, and, in any case, there’ll be such a terrific agitation against the pater that he’ll be forced to resign. He wouldn’t mind personally; but there’s the Country, you see. Can’t you risk it?”

“I might if only myself were concerned; but there’s Mr. Greatorex to reckon with. The whole thing’s only experimental. I’m sure he wouldn’t hear of it.”

“Politics is a rotten game! Wish we were back in the times before Whigs and Tories were invented.”

“And unpopular ministers lost their heads!—Now I’m going to let her down. See how near she falls to the perpendicular.”

He dropped a hammer out of the car, stopped the horizontal motion and started the vertical, adjusted the planes, and descended gently to the ground.

“That’s better,” he cried, when he had measured the distance between the aeroplane and the hammer; “it’s only a dozen yards. We’re getting on. Really, I wish I could try your suggestion.”

“Shall I mention it to the pater?” said Oliphant eagerly.

“Not on any account,” said Tom aghast. “Even if I could do it, he of all men must not know.”

“I don’t see why.”

“Supposing I tried it and came a cropper, there’d be a double outcry against him; the first for not rescuing Sir Mark Ingleton, the second for allowing a crack-brained engineer to make a fool of himself and a corpse in the bargain. No, give it up; I don’t see any help for it.”

But when left to himself Tom could not keep his thoughts from Oliphant’s suggestion. The adventurous idea captivated his

imagination; he began to consider it in earnest; he spent several hours of the afternoon in further experimenting with the aeroplane, and after dinner, when Mr. Greatorex and he went out into the grounds for their customary stroll and cigarettes, he broached the subject, in a casual way, and in much the same terms as Oliphant had used.

"Pity we couldn't take a trip to Morocco and get Ingleton away," he said cautiously.

"Eh! Pull Langside's chestnuts out of the fire! He was a fool to send the man to Morocco. I wouldn't if I could, and of *course* it's impossible."

"I'm not sure of that. And it isn't a party matter, really."

"Not party! It's *all* party."

"Sir Mark Ingleton is an agent of the Crown, sir, and the Crown is above party. I think in these matters we might sink our differences."

"Yes, and sink our aeroplane, and *drown* ourselves, and serve us *right*."

But opposition was only a stimulus to Tom. He began to argue the matter strenuously. Mr. Greatorex, to do him justice, was no bigot. His politics were at bottom a particularly intense form of patriotism; and when Tom showed him that there were at any rate possibilities in the suggestion, he gradually changed his view, forgot his reluctance to help a political opponent, and became indeed quite enthusiastic.

"By *George*, Tom!" he exclaimed; "what a grand send-off it would be to your invention if the first use of it were the rescue of this unfortunate diplomatist! And what a magnificent thing for the Country! Come and let's talk it out over a cup of coffee. Not a *word* before Mrs. Greatorex, mind."

"Well, John, are you pleased with your toy?" said that good lady when they re-entered the house.

“Quite, my dear, *quite*.”

“It will be quite a feature of our garden party. But I hope Tom will make sure that it is absolutely safe before he takes anybody up at half a crown a ride. I shall be glad of the half-crowns for my Nursing Association, but I should never forgive you if any one was hurt.”

“Why, my dear, the half-crowns would go to pay the *nurses*.”

Mr. Greatorex and Tom had a long talk in the study that night. Up to the present the longest journey the aeroplane had taken without descending was, as Tom estimated, about forty miles. Then something had always occurred to make a descent necessary. The principal stumbling-block had been the overheating of the motors. But Tom suggested that if he were content with a speed of about twenty-five miles an hour, a greater distance might be covered without this risk.

The practical question was, could the machine be brought so near the place of the envoy’s captivity as to make a dash upon it practicable? From the latest report, in the evening paper, it appeared that the prisoner was held in a mountain fastness some eighty miles from the Atlantic seaboard. Tom got out a map and pointed out the spot. It did not seem impossible to reach it by means of the airship from some convenient place on the coast.

“D’you know what occurs to me?” said Tom. “You were talking of a yachting cruise in the *Dandy Dinmont* in September. Why not make it a little earlier? I could then go in the airship and you in the yacht; and we could make that a kind of floating base, taking in it all materials necessary for repairs.”

“But you couldn’t repair the thing without letting it down on the deck.”

“I could do that, I think. To-day I came down within a few feet of the spot I aimed at, and I could let the machine down on deck if the yacht were not rolling or pitching too much.”

“But *hang* it all, Tom, the deck *wasn’t made* for such a purpose.”

“No; but it wouldn’t take long to rig up a temporary wooden platform and framework over the after-part of the vessel to serve as a landing-stage.”

“You appear to have thought it all out,” said Mr. Greatorex. “D’you want to rush me off my *feet*?”

“Not a bit,” replied Tom smiling. “You’ll be safe on deck.”

“Well, how long will it take to get everything ready?”

“A week.”

“Very well. I’ll write off to Bodgers to-night to trim the yacht. The rest I leave to you. And mind, not a *word* to a soul.”

“I think I shall have to tell Oliphant. In fact, it was he who put it into my head.”

“That’s a nuisance! Well, we’ll have him to dinner to-morrow. I want to take stock of him. Not a *word* till I have sized him up.”

Oliphant came to dinner with his sister and was approved. Mrs. Greatorex afterwards pronounced him to be “quite a nice boy.” Mr. Greatorex used different terms.

“He’s no *fool*, and don’t *talk* too much,” he said.

The three had a very animated discussion as they walked in the cool of the evening. Mr. Greatorex was very emphatic on the point of secrecy.

“We don’t want any newspaper fellow to get wind of the airship until we’ve *proved* it,” he said. “A pretty fool I should look if they gassed about it for a column or two and then the whole thing went *pop* like a paper balloon. And that Morocco fellow will have plenty of spies, of course; *I* know their Eastern ways; and if he got a hint of what we’re up to, he’d be on his guard and then there’d be fizzle.”

“How many passengers will the machine carry?” asked Oliphant.

“Three or four light-weights, I should think,” Tom replied.

“You’ll have room for me, then?”

“Good heavens, no!” cried Mr. Greatorex. “Couldn’t *hear* of it!”

“But it was my idea, you know, Mr. Greatorex. I was only longing for something to fill these holidays.”

“Absurd! Preposterous! You’re under age; you couldn’t go without your father’s permission; you couldn’t ask that without giving the whole thing away: and I couldn’t be responsible for you.”

“Well, I tell you what it is, Mr. Greatorex. You invite me to go a cruise in your yacht. The mater’s got a notion that my lungs are weak, and was saying only the other day that a sea trip would do me good. I’d see some of the fun, then.”

“*There* you are, Mr. Oliphant! *Fun! I* regard it as most *serious*, I assure you. Now, in *my* young days——”

“I bet you liked fun as well as any of us, Mr. Greatorex,” said Oliphant quickly. “If the truth were known, I dare say you really beat us all.”

Mr. Greatorex’s eyes twinkled.

“Well, now I come to think of it, I *was* a wild young rip. So they all said. I remember—— But come now, I mustn’t tell you *that*. *Never* do! Your father would never let you go; he doesn’t know me and doesn’t want to, and I’m doing my level best to kick him out at the next election.”

“And he’ll probably be jolly glad if you succeed! Mayn’t I come, Mr. Greatorex?”

“Sorry to disoblige you, Mr. Oliphant, but it would *never do*. No. In fact, I think we’ll give it up altogether. Too risky! We’ll give it *up*, Tom.”

Oliphant went home in a very bad temper.

“Mrs. Greatorex is a dear old thing,” said his sister.

“And Mr. Greatorex is an old rotter,” retorted Raymond in a tone of disgust.

Margaret Oliphant obtained very unsatisfactory answers to the questions to which this remark gave rise, and concluded that in some way Raymond had not hit it with his host.

Mr. Greatorex would doubtless have been much surprised had he seen the letter which Lord Langside wrote to his son a few days later.

“My dear Ray,” wrote the Prime Minister,—

> “Are you conspiring against me, like Absalom? Mr. Greatorex can’t do me much harm on a yacht. He won’t see a newspaper for a month! Hope you’ll enjoy yourself.
>
> “Your affectionate
> “Dad.”

Oliphant showed this letter to no one. But the day he received it, he went a long and tedious journey by train across country to the little port of Horleston. He reached home very late, but in much better spirits than might have been expected after such a tiresome experience of slow trains.

CHAPTER V—OFF THE BARBARY COAST

The week was filled with the bustle of preparation. The airship was divided into sections, the motors and the framework taken to pieces, and the whole packed into large light crates and conveyed to the coast on country carts, their arrival at Horleston being so timed that everything could be put on board very early in the morning. Besides the crew, the company consisted only of Mr. Greatorex, Tom Dorrell, and Timothy Ball.

Before the vessel put off, a custom house officer came aboard, and showed himself somewhat inquisitive as to the meaning of the strange platform newly rigged on the after deck, and as to the nature of the bulky packages. Mr. Greatorex explained that they contained a cooling apparatus which he was taking out to Morocco on behalf of an acquaintance, adding that by all accounts the country was pretty hot in all respects. With this explanation the officer had to be content. Clearly the parts of the airship did not come within the description of explosives, firearms or other articles on which he might exercise his powers of detention. Still, being by training suspicious, he was evidently by no means satisfied, and left the yacht somewhat unwillingly.

Steam was already up and the officer had barely left the vessel before she put to sea.

“Just as well to be clear away before he gets his second wind,” said Mr. Greatorex with a chuckle. In his spotless white ducks and blue cap he was enjoying himself already. “Did that uncommonly well, didn’t I, Tom?” he said. “What could be more useful than cooling apparatus when there’s a chance of getting into very hot water, eh?”

He took a run over the vessel as soon as she had made an offing. His yacht was a hobby, and whenever he went for a cruise he liked to

examine her in the company of his officers, with whom, as with the crew, whom he knew individually, he was very popular. In the course of his inspection he came to the engine room.

“How do, Mr. Mumford!” he said genially to the engineer. “All in good order, eh?”

“Tip-top, sir. This is the neatest bit of machinery I’ve ever had to do with.”

“Glad to hear that. I *say*, is that a new stoker I see there? What’s become of Byles?”

“His mother is very ill, sir, and he had to cry off at the last moment. I was very lucky to get a man to fill the place.”

“Ha! Looks rather *young*, doesn’t he? Overgrown, perhaps. Any *good*?”

“Can’t tell yet, sir. I’ll let you know later on. He shapes very well. He’s a fine well-made young fellow; very willing, too. Byles said he’d go bail for him to any amount.”

“That’s all right. What’s his name?”

“M’Cracken, sir; Scotch, by the name. Would you like to speak to him, sir?”

“Just a word. Like to *know* the men, you know. Gives ’em a personal interest in their job, I always think.”

The engineer called up the new stoker, a tall young fellow in the flannel shirt open at the neck, the loose reach-me-down, and the black-lead coated trousers affected by his kind. His face and arms were begrimed with black grease, and his mouth received an extra smudge as he drew the back of his hand across it, apparently in sheepish confusion.

“You’re a new man, M’Cracken,” said the merchant pleasantly. “Hope you’ll get on well. Mr. Mumford won’t *over-work* you, I can answer for that. Have you been long at this job?”

“No that lang, sir; just a wee while,” the stoker replied in a somewhat husky voice.

“Exactly. Ah! well! Good morning.”

“Good mornin’, sir.”

And Mr. Greatorex went on deck, satisfied that he had established excellent relations with the newest hand.

The first part of the voyage was rather stormy. The yacht, by no means a large vessel, shipped one or two fairly heavy seas, to the no small alarm of Tom, who was anxious lest the crates containing his machine should be washed overboard or otherwise injured. But halfway through the Bay the weather moderated, and by the time the yacht reached the latitude of Lisbon both wind and sea were calm enough, he thought, for his first experiment. It had been decided that the dusk of the evening would be the best time for the attempt, for it was just as necessary on sea as on land to avoid observation. If the airship were descried from the deck of a homeward-bound vessel, the fact, and the name of the yacht, might be marconigraphed to England, and then, as Mr. Greatorex said, all Fleet Street would be in a buzz.

Early one morning the crates were broken open. It took the best part of the day to piece the machine together, and Tom went over it bit by bit several times to assure himself that everything was in order. The airship was so placed that it could take flight over the stern of the yacht. When dusk was falling, the vessel’s engines were reversed, Tom arranging that as soon as the airship rose from the deck the yacht should be sent full speed ahead, to make sure that the apparatus cleared the vessel and ran no risk of fouling the funnel.

Mr. Greatorex had shown some nervousness as the critical moment approached. He insisted on lowering a boat in case the airship came to grief and Tom were thrown into the sea. Timothy Ball, too, looked on with a most woful countenance as the final preparations were made. He had unslung a life belt, ready to slip into it and fling himself

overboard if the airship broke down.

“I feel sure in my inside it won’t work,” he said anxiously to Tom, as he stepped to the car. “It’ll be worse than suicide, sir.”

“Why worse, Tim?” asked Mr. Greatorex.

“‘Cos we’re lookin’ on, sir,” said Tim solemnly, and felt much hurt by the burst of laughter with which his explanation was received.

But his anxiety was a vain expenditure of energy. With the vertical screws at full speed, and the horizontal screws half speed, the machine rose like a huge bird from the deck, with a noise like the clattering of hundreds of bats and the humming of innumerable bees. At the height of sixty feet or so Tom stopped the vertical screws, and turned the full power of his engines on to the horizontal propellers, giving to the planes just sufficient inclination to counteract the force of gravity.

“Capital!” exclaimed Mr. Greatorex, as he watched the easy flight. “First-rate! There’s a *fortune* in that, skipper,” he said to Captain Bodgers at his side.

“Maybe,” said the Captain reflectively. He was a man of few words.

“Rather stay on deck, eh?”

“Well, you can swim in water, sir.”

“Exactly. But how far is the fellow going? It’s getting dark, and he’ll be out of sight directly. By the way, Bodgers, there’s no law about showing lamps on an airship. But there will be—there *will* be. Ah! here he comes—at a spanking pace, too. He’ll overtake us in no time, going dead slow as we are.”

In less than a minute the airship had come within a little distance astern of the yacht.

“Hallo!” came a voice from the air.

“Are you there?” answered Mr. Greatorex, from force of habit at the telephone.

“Who are you?” came the response. “I say, Mr. Greatorex, pick up that boat and go full speed ahead. She’s going beautifully; the oiling she’s had has done her no end of good.”

“All right. Aren’t you coming *down*? It’s getting *dark*; I can hardly *see* you.”

“Not just yet. She goes smoother than the yacht, and it’s beautifully fresh up here. I can tell your whereabouts by your lights.”

“All right. *Don’t get lost!*”

Tom laughed. He laughed again when, from his elevated position, he saw that though the boat had been hoisted on board, four men had been told off to stand by the davits in order to lower it again at the first sign of mishap.

The yacht was sent full speed ahead. She could easily do her eighteen knots, but was no match in speed for the airship, which circled round and round her.

“She beats us hollow,” said Mr. Mumford to M’Cracken, as they watched the flight from the foot of the companion.

“Ou ay, sir. Yon’s a grand invention. It’s wonderful.”

After about an hour Tom called down that he was going to descend.

“He’d much better stay up now he’s there,” said Timothy, gloomily. “He’ll smash himself or us—I know he will.”

Tom knew that to descend was a delicate operation, to be performed with all caution. As his control over the airship was to a great extent proportionate to its speed, he shouted instructions to keep the yacht going under full steam. Coming up astern, he so adjusted his own speed as to overtake the yacht very slowly. When the airship was level with the stern, two men on board caught a cable hanging loose from the car. Then Tom gradually reduced the speed of the horizontal propellers, and started the vertical screws at half speed, keeping one hand all the time on the lever that adjusted the angles of the planes. He handled his appliances so dexterously that the airship, guided by

the rope, sank steadily and accurately to the deck. Buffers of india rubber were slipped under her bottom to break the slight jar that must be inevitable when she touched the platform. Then Tom stepped out.

"Capital!" cried Mr. Greatorex, slapping him on the back. "This is going to turn out *all right*, my boy. What does it *feel* like, being up there?"

"Like a fish out of water, I should think," said Tom, laughing. "But I thought what a helpless thing a man-of-war would be if she had to tackle an airship. I could choose my own altitude, and drop explosives on her deck and blow her to smithereens, and there's no gun that I know of that could make an effective reply. They'd have to invent a rocket apparatus for shying melinite shells aloft."

"Well, let's hope that it'll never come to that. Ours is a *cooling* apparatus—don't you forget it!"

Tom was so well pleased with his first sea trial that day had scarcely dawned before he was again aloft. This time he took Timothy with him. He needed some assistance in attending to the mechanism, and now that a first ascent had been made without mishap, the man was no longer so nervous about it.

The airship had not been up more than half an hour, however, when Tom signalled to the yacht that he saw a vessel on the horizon.

"Come down *at once*!" roared Mr. Greatorex through a megaphone.

Tom descended, somewhat unwillingly. Nothing would have pleased him better than to steer directly for the vessel, and see what effect was produced on board by the sight of this strange bird of passage hovering above the tops. But clearly Mr. Greatorex was right, and Tom lowered the machine deftly to the deck. As the ship was heading straight for the yacht, the aeroplane was covered with tarpaulin.

The vessel turned out to be a cruiser flying the French colours. The captain spoke the yacht, and asked whether anything had been seen from its deck of an extraordinary object that appeared to have been

moving through the air.

“Answer him, Tom. I’m no good at French.”

“We did see something, monsieur le capitaine,” he said, “Do you know whether Monsieur Santos-Dumont is trying his thirty-third airship?”

“I am not aware, monsieur. It may be. I saw the object very indistinctly. It suddenly disappeared.”

“Ah! I was always afraid that Monsieur Santos-Dumont would meet his death. You French, monsieur, are such adventurous spirits! When you reach Brest perhaps you will inquire whether he has recently made an ascent.”

“I will certainly do so, monsieur.”

The vessels were now out of speaking distance. Tom explained to Mr. Greatorex what he had said.

“Bravo! What with my cooling apparatus and your cool cheek I think we are keeping our secret pretty well, Tom.”

In order to escape further observation from passing vessels Mr. Greatorex had the yacht’s course set considerably westward of the usual track. It was consequently another couple of days before she came into the latitude of Rabat, the port for which she was making. Her head was turned eastward in the direction of the coast of Morocco, and, there being no vessels in sight, Tom again made an ascent, Timothy accompanying him.

The coastline gradually came into view. From an altitude of more than a hundred feet Tom saw, between him and the coast, a number of rocky islets. Here and there the varying tints of the water indicated shoals of sunken rocks.

“Know the coast?” he called down to Captain Bodgers.

“Ay, ay, sir,” said the captain.

“There are no end of shoals.”

“Know ’em all, sir; have a care you don’t strike one.”

Captain Bodgers laughed uproariously at his little joke, and Tom, circling round the yacht, set the aeroplane at full speed towards the coast. He was a considerable distance ahead when Timothy suddenly called his attention to an object projecting above the sea-level, close to one of the rocky islets that dotted the intervening space. It might have escaped their attention altogether but for a certain movement Tim fancied he discerned in it. As they drew nearer, they discovered that what Tim had thought to be a single object was in reality two, which appeared to be the broken-off stumps of two masts. Taking his field-glasses in one hand—the other always grasping the steering wheel—Tom lifted them to his eyes, got the focus, and made out that the objects were not stumps after all, but the tops of masts, and that two figures were clinging to them, one to each.

Tom had no doubt that the airship was approaching the scene of a wreck, and that the two men were in distress and danger. Steering immediately for the yacht, he came within hailing distance and through his megaphone announced his discovery.

“We’ll go to the rescue, *of course*,” shouted Mr. Greatorex in reply.

The wreck was as yet invisible from the deck, but it was arranged that the yacht should stand in as close as possible, and then send a boat to bring off the survivors. Meanwhile Tom, setting his engine at full speed, dashed on in the direction of the submerged vessel.

He noticed that even during the few seconds in which he had been in communication with the yacht the situation had changed. One of the masts was now tenantless. Presumably its occupant had been washed off or through fatigue had dropped into the sea. But as the airship drew rapidly nearer, it was noticed that the figure on the other mast was bending low as if to raise something from the water. Then a head and shoulders appeared above the surface. Clearly the man Tom had supposed to be lost was trying to make his way to the mast

to which his companion clung.

The airship was now less than half a mile distant, and from the altitude to which they had risen—some three hundred feet above the surface—the occupants could see every detail in the strange drama that was being enacted beneath them. Assisted by the figure above, the swimmer was gradually making his way on to the mast, when suddenly a black fin appeared above the surface a few yards off. With a convulsive movement, the lowermost man had just succeeded in swinging himself a foot or two up the mast when the gaping jaws of a shark passed immediately beneath him. Tom shuddered involuntarily. The man had escaped by a few inches at the most.

In a second the shark turned and glided beneath the clinging figure. The terror-stricken wretch clutched wildly at the man above him, and began to haul himself up hand over hand, clinging to his companion's body. But the latter, unable to bear the double weight on the smooth mast, slipped slowly downwards. He was the slighter of the two, and no match, apparently, for the man who had usurped his place.

"What a beast!" ejaculated Tom, wondering at this strange want of fellow-feeling in a man who was evidently older and stronger than his companion in distress. Slowing down, he fixed his eyes on the extraordinary spectacle. The position was now reversed. The younger and slighter man was very manifestly the under dog. With every attempt on his part to swarm up the mast the man above him kicked savagely, while the shark circled below. The fact that the second mast had become untenable seemed to indicate that the tide was rising. Neither of the men, their whole attention fixed on the sea beneath, had noticed the airship that was now hovering just above their heads.

When, however, Tom gradually allowed the airship to sink towards the sea, the shark seemed to take fright, just as smaller fish are scared by signs of movement in the air above. It left the immediate neighbourhood of the mast, and its black fin could be seen

describing a much larger circle some two or three hundred yards away. Clearly it had not given up hope. When the shark moved away and the strain of terror was relaxed, the two men became suddenly aware of the presence of the airship. The topmost man was almost as much scared by the sight of the airship as he had been by the presence of the shark. Tom had already noticed that both of the men were dark skinned. The larger and stronger—the brute, as Tom mentally called him—appeared to be middle-aged; the other was a stripling.

Tom was struck by the difference in their demeanour when they caught sight of the airship; neither he nor Timothy was at present visible to them. The elder man was aghast with fright, his eyes dilated, his mouth gaped between black moustache and beard. The younger, however, seemed to pull himself together as with renewed hope. Tom fancied that he heard a cry from his lips.

Looking round, Tom saw that the yacht had now hove to, and the boat was leaving her side. But his attention was again called to the wreck by a piercing shriek. The shark, regaining confidence, had made another dash at the mast. This time it seemed to come within an inch of the terrified youth; indeed, from the cry that had reached his ears, Tom thought that the poor wretch had actually been seized. But next moment he saw that the shark had again drawn off, scared, possibly, by the cry.

There was now less of the masts above the surface. The tide was evidently rising, and with its rise the shark would have another opportunity of coming within snapping distance. Tom felt that it would not again fail. It would be at least ten minutes before the boat reached the spot; by that time the hapless lad would probably have fallen a victim. Tom had noticed that when the shark was all but upon him, and he made a convulsive movement upwards, he was met by a storm of kicks from the man above, threatening to dislodge him completely from the mast and hurl him into the very jaws of the

monster.

In a moment Tom made up his mind. He ordered Timothy to let down from the car a light grapnel carried for use in emergencies, and also for raising anything that might be needed, without having to bring the airship to rest on the ground. Then he allowed the machine to sink gently until the grapnel dangled within reach of the man at the top. Tom had no intention of helping him first; by his conduct he deserved to be left to drown or to make a meal for the shark. But the man seemed indeed quite incapable of movement, except when scared to frenzy by the efforts of the youth below to regain the position from which he had been forced. He made no attempt to clutch the grapnel dangling at his very hand. Tom let the machine fall lower, until the grapnel came within reach of the younger man. He showed no such hesitation. Looking along the cable, he saw Timothy gazing down at him from the car. The sight of a human face gave him confidence. He clutched at the grapnel, let go his hold of the mast, and swung clear, Timothy attempting to steady the rope.

His sudden movement threatened a catastrophe. The airship was now only about sixty feet above the sea, and before Tom, his attention partly engaged by the efforts of the boy, could increase the speed of the ascensional screw, the light vessel was pulled swiftly downwards. For a moment he felt that it must inevitably be dragged into the water. The young fellow below, still clutching desperately at the grapnel, had actually begun to sink beneath the surface. But as soon as his weight was supported by the water, the ascensional screw, now set by Tom whirling at full speed, checked the downward movement, and in another couple of seconds the airship began to rise, dragging the youth upwards.

In his excitement Tom had momentarily forgotten the shark. That persistent creature, however, having overcome its fear of the monster of the air, made a dash for the youth as he entered the sea. The poor wretch had the narrowest escape of all when the shark passed just

beneath him, as, whirling round on the grapnel, he was swung clear of the water.

Now that he was safe from the cruel jaws, the lad showed himself to be possessed of no little agility. Hand over hand he swarmed up the cable until he reached the lower rail of the car, which he clutched, and by Timothy's aid he clambered over. Meanwhile Tom had steered the airship towards the approaching boat.

"Give way with a will, men!" he shouted. "There's no time to be lost. We've got one; the other man will be nabbed by a shark if you aren't there pretty soon. I can see the brute's fin above the water just by the mast."

The men spurted. As the boat approached the submerged vessel, the shark took fright and glided swiftly away. In another half-minute the man was taken from his precarious perch, and lifted, in a state of complete collapse, into the boat.

CHAPTER VI—SALATHIEL BEN EZRA

"Bismillah!" ejaculated the young Moor when he stood in the car.

"Just saved your bacon, if that's what you mean," said Timothy. "And a nice sloppy mess you're making! I s'pose *I'll* have to clean up."

Timothy scowled and growled, but that was only his way. Tom knew well enough that Timothy would clean up with great cheerfulness.

"We'll get back to the yacht," he said, "and find some dry things for him there."

The airship was now so well under control that Tom had no difficulty in letting her down safely on deck, though the yacht was at anchor.

"Uncommonly well done!" exclaimed Mr. Greatorex as Tom stepped out of the car.

"Yes; I thought she came down pretty neatly," said Tom.

"Didn't mean *that*, you egoist. I meant you saved this young fellow uncommonly well; saw it *all* through my binocular. Dangerous things, sharks. Who *is* the boy?"

"I haven't asked him yet. I thought we might give him a dry change and then see if we can make out anything. He probably can't speak English."

"Very well. Bodgers, find some toggery and take him into the cabin. Who's the *other* fellow?"

"We shall find out presently. Shall we go into the cabin? I'd like to put a few questions before the other man comes aboard."

They found that Captain Bodgers had rigged up the boy in a sailor's suit much too large for him.

"Capital!" cried Mr. Greatorex. "*Much* more respectable! Can you speak English, boy?"

“Me speak English little bit, and Spanish little bit,” replied the boy with a frank smile.

“That’s capital! Not the *Spanish*, you know; but the English.”

“I tank very much for the gentleman’s goodness——”

“Yes, yes, *that’s* all right. But come now, how did you get into that pretty pickle?”

The boy looked puzzled.

“Tell us how the ship came to be wrecked,” said Tom, translating.

“Aiyeh! She caught in fog last night, struck rock. Quick it was all over; no one live, only me and Salathiel ben Ezra.”

“That is your friend’s name, is it? A Jew?”

“Yes, excellency, a Jew. A dog of a Jew!”

“And you are not a Jew? What is your name?”

“Abdul, most merciful—Abdul ben Cassim, of Ain Afroo in Zemmur.”

“Zemmur!” ejaculated Mr. Greatorex. “Isn’t that the neighbourhood where Ingleton is said to be?”

“Yes,” replied Tom. “We may find the lad useful. Tell us, Abdul, how you came to be at sea with a Jew.”

Abdul explained that, some five or six years before, his father, a well-to-do saddlemaker of Ain Afroo, had contrived to quarrel with the sheikh of his district, refusing, in fact, to pay the sheikh a very extortionate levy. It was, Abdul admitted, a foolish thing to do, for soon afterwards the saddlemaker died mysteriously. His family took instant flight with what possessions they could get together, and found refuge in Casa Blanca, where the boy had a distant relative, the owner of a small coasting vessel. Since that time he had been engaged in trading up and down the coast, and in his journeyings had picked up a smattering of English and Spanish.

The small capital which the family had brought with them had been considerably increased by profitable investments in trading ventures

of the lad's kinsman. A share in the business was owned by Salathiel ben Ezra, the Jew who was now being brought from the wreck in the yacht's boat. It was very unlucky; Abdul could not but think that the wreck must have been caused by an evil spell cast on the boat by the Jew; for Salathiel had never voyaged on the vessel before. The loss of the ship meant the loss of almost the whole of his family's little fortune, and Abdul feared they would be placed in the power of Salathiel, who already had some claim on them which Abdul himself did not understand. But everything happened by the will of Allah; it was written, and what is written must be.

Abdul's story was hardly finished when the Jew was hauled on board. He appeared to have quite regained his self-possession during the short passage of the boat. He made a deep obeisance when Mr. Greatorex met him on deck.

"I pay a thousand dutiful civilities," he said in a low smooth voice. "The honourable sir overwhelms me with kindness in saving me and my humble companion from the jaws of the monster, and my thanks are even as the sand of the shore. May I beg the little loan of a dry garment or two?"

"Take Mr. Salathiel below, Captain Bodgers," said Mr. Greatorex, "and see what you can do for him."

With a deep salaam and a fawning smile the Jew departed.

"Um!" grunted Mr. Greatorex. "Don't like his *looks*, Tom."

"He's not prepossessing, certainly; a little too glib, don't you think?"

"A *rascal*, Tom; mark my words."

"I wouldn't go so far as that. But we may get something out of this, Mr. Greatorex. This young Moor comes from the very country where Ingleton is said to be. Don't you think we may profit by that?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, instead of making for Rabat, as we intended, why not find some quieter harbour where we shall not be such public characters,

and get the youngster to act as guide into the hills? No doubt he bears a grudge against the sheikh who disposed of his father. If he has anything of the usual oriental thirst for revenge he will be very willing to help us."

"Well, sound him; go at it *cautiously*, you know; *tact*—that's the thing."

Meanwhile Salathiel ben Ezra had been clothed by Captain Bodgers in blue serge trousers, a nankeen waistcoat, and an oilskin, the only other garment available. The Jew cut a strange figure in this unfamiliar attire. He was short, fat, thick-necked; the lower part of his face was hidden by dense black moustache and beard; his eyes were unequal in size and different in colour, and had a trick of roaming all around as he talked.

"This is very elegant yacht," he said to Captain Bodgers as the garments were laid before him. The captain, always a silent man, made no reply. "That is most marvellous creature, the thing that flies in the air," the Jew continued; "I have never seen anything like it. It is without doubt a new sport—the English love sport. They spend much money in sport. And where is the yacht bound for, good captain?"

"Goin' a cruise," said the captain shortly.

"Without doubt. And perhaps the kind governor will permit to call at a port—at Rabat, say; for I am not a man of the sea, and I have business there."

"Better ask him."

"I will do so. I will say also how I fill myself with wonder of the thing that flies. I myself am a sport!"

Salathiel not merely expressed his wonderment to Mr. Greatorex, but displayed a very active curiosity as to the construction of the machine and the choice of those waters for the practice of the new sport. Mr. Greatorex gave him no satisfaction, and was indeed somewhat curt in his replies to the man's leading questions; but Salathiel smiled at each rebuff, thereby confirming Mr. Greatorex's conviction that he

was a rascal.

The yacht lay to for several hours, getting under way again in the afternoon. It was very hot; everybody was more or less sleepy, and Tom thought it a good time to sound the Moor as to his willingness to assist in the expedition. They had a long conversation in the cabin, the result of which was entirely satisfactory to Tom. Abdul's one object in life was to wreak vengeance on the sheikh for the wrongs his family had suffered, and it was to be a thorough vengeance. He would not be satisfied merely with the death of his enemy; that might have been achieved already. But he was determined to ruin the sheikh's family, just as his own had been ruined. He had hoped to save enough money in course of time to gather about him a band of trusty Riffians who would raid the oppressor's stronghold. The loss of the vessel had swept away the savings of five years; but he was resolved to begin again and even if fifty years were to pass before he was in a position to accomplish his aim, he would never relinquish it. The sheikh himself might die before then; in that case the weight of the avenging hand would fall on his descendants.

When Tom reported to Mr. Greatorex the result of this conversation the worthy merchant was shocked.

"Terrible, terrible!" he said. "Most unchristian! The Moors are no better than *heathen*, Tom."

"Well, we don't know what it's like. I don't think you would be very sweetly disposed towards any one who had served you as he has been served."

"Me! I'd bring an *action* against the villain, you may be sure of that."

"I don't suppose they have actions at law in Morocco. But it's quite clear that he will be willing to help us."

"True. I'll go down with you, and we'll come to an understanding with him."

At this second interview Tom explained to Abdul the object he had in

view, and invited his assistance, Mr. Greatorex promising that if he would guide Tom to the spot where the British diplomatist was held captive he should be rewarded with a sum equal to what he had lost through the wreck. Further, if Sir Mark Ingleton should actually be got away safely, the sum should be doubled. Abdul jumped at the offer, and listened respectfully enough when Mr. Greatorex went on to say that he hoped the money would not be put to bad uses.

"Everything happens by the will of Allah," he said; "what is to be, must be."

It was dusk when the little party broke up. Nobody noticed a figure wriggle away from a ventilating grating over the skylight of the cabin. Salathiel ben Ezra had watched these conferences between the Moor and the Christians with much curiosity and suspicion, and without attracting the attention of any one on deck he had contrived to steal to a spot where he overheard a considerable part of the conversation.

Before he turned in, Tom had a long talk with Mr. Greatorex, which took an unexpected trend. The two were alone in the cabin. Tom was in the highest spirits, for the greatest difficulty he had foreseen—the difficulty of finding his way about the hill village when he should arrive at it—seemed to have been removed now that he had secured a guide in Abdul.

"You see, it's just about there," he said, putting his finger down on the map he had unrolled and spread on the table. "It is barely a hundred miles inland, and without putting any strain on the engines I can do it comfortably in four hours. Of course, we must arrive after dark; so to-morrow night I think we'll make a start—Timothy and I and the Moor."

Then it was that the unexpected happened. Mr. Greatorex had been staring gravely at the map. Suddenly he brought his fist down on it with a bang.

"Look here, Tom," he said, "we'll *drop* it."

Tom was taken too much aback for words.

“Yes, we’ll drop it. I won’t *allow* it. Suppose anything goes wrong with the machine, where *are* you? tell me that! In those hills—wild country, wild men—*fanatics*, you know: hate all Christians, no sense of law and order, won’t pay their taxes, don’t care tuppence for their rulers—oh! I’ve *read* all about ’em, you know, and ‘pon my soul I don’t know what I was thinking of to come out here at all. We’ve had a pleasant run, we’ve tested the airship; it’ll *do*, Tom: but now we’ll go *back*, my boy, to our land of peace and settled government.”

“But what about Sir Mark Ingleton?”

“Hang Ingleton! Ingleton never invented anything! If those Moors get hold of you, England loses an inventor and I lose my man. No, no; we mustn’t meddle with state affairs.”

And then Tom spent an hour in patiently combatting Mr. Greatorex’s objections, and in the end had for his meagre reward the indecisive remark—

“Well, we’ll see, Tom, we’ll *see*.”

Next morning Mr. Greatorex made no allusion to this conversation, but was observed in close colloquy with Captain Bodgers. The result of this removed the weight from Tom’s mind. The yacht coasted up and down, the captain scanning the desolate shore narrowly through his glass. At last he found what he had been searching for, and steered the yacht into a snug little bay. The country was well wooded, the trees coming down almost to the edge of the narrow sandy beach.

“Can’t better this, sir,” said the captain. “The anchorage is none too good, and if a storm comes up we may have to put out to sea; but it’s a quiet place, as you see; can’t do no better.”

“Very well. Now, Tom, I’m going to risk it. There’s the *Country* to consider, you see. But you’ll make me a promise not to run into danger; I know you won’t run away from it!”

“With all my heart,” replied Tom. “We’ll start to-night.”

He spent the hours of daylight in making preparations. The machine was overhauled; provisions and arms were stowed in the car; and Tom eagerly awaited the moment for setting forth on his adventure.

In the afternoon, while the preparations were still in progress, a crowd of natives appeared on the cliffs south of the bay—wild-looking men clad in djellabas and kaftans and yellow shoes, and all armed with long guns. They made no attempt to open communication with the yacht, but encamped on the cliff as though to keep an eye on her movements.

Some little time afterwards, a small native craft was observed entering the cove. Her appearance was hailed with shouts from the cliff, where there were signs of excitement among the throng of spectators.

“Barbary pirates, eh, Bodgers!” said Mr. Greatorex, taking a look at the felucca through his glass.

“Maybe, sir; they’ve plied that trade hereabouts for hundreds of years.”

“They’re making for the yacht.”

“Yes. We’ll serve out arms, sir; it’s as well to be on the safe side.”

“Tom, cover up the airship. I don’t suppose they’ll know what it is, but, as Bodgers says, it’s as well to be on the safe side.”

As the vessel drew near, it was seen that she carried some thirty fierce-looking fellows, tall and finely made. One of them hailed the yacht. Mr. Greatorex called Abdul to his side and bade him interpret.

“Say they want to come on ship, sir—see the captain—do trade for guns and powder.”

“What do you say, Bodgers? Shall we let a few of them come aboard?”

“I would, sir. A few won’t do no harm, and if we can make friends of

them, so much the better."

Accordingly, half a dozen Moors were allowed to mount to the yacht's deck. They appeared to be much disappointed when Mr. Greatorex politely explained through Abdul that he had no commercial object; his ostensible purpose, to see the country, scarcely satisfied them. But they recovered their spirits when he offered to show them over the vessel; and afterwards when, at the suggestion of Captain Bodgers, who knew something of the Moorish habits, they were each given a cup of weak tea and unlimited sugar, they smacked their lips and declared themselves well pleased with their reception.

While they were still sipping their tea, squatting on the deck, Salathiel ben Ezra, who had hitherto kept in the background, came to Mr. Greatorex and begged the favour of a few minutes' conversation.

"I ask you, excellency, to be so kind, as let me go with the men, when they leave this ship. I have business on land; and thank you for your kindness, and take leave respectfully."

"Hm! Moors *friends* of yours, eh?"

"No, no; the Moors do not love the men of my nation; they oppress us; they call us dogs and sons of swine."

"Well then, you'd better stay aboard, you know. You wouldn't be *safe* among them in a wild spot like this. We can land you at Rabat in a day or two; you'll be safer in a port."

"Ah, excellency, but I do not love the sea. It has wrecked my vessel; I have much fear of the sharks. I am not at ease until I set foot again on dry land."

Mr. Greatorex was perplexed. He had no reasonable excuse for detaining the Jew: yet, remembering that the man had seen the airship at work, he recognized that it would be in the highest degree impolitic to allow him to go ashore and spread the news. He beckoned Tom forward and told him of the Jew's request. Tom instantly grasped the situation.

“Mr. Salathiel forgets,” he said, “that we have a claim for salvage on his effects. (Whether we have such a claim legally I don’t know,” he said to Mr. Greatorex afterwards, “but it was the first thing that came into my head.”)

“That is most true,” said the Jew, with a smile; “but alas! I lost everything in the wreck; and have only my clothes, and they——”

He shrugged expressively.

“Sorry for you,” said Tom. “Still, it would not be fair to your companion Abdul to leave him to meet our claim alone.”

“But he can come with me,” said Salathiel eagerly. “He will be with his countrymen.”

“You were not so anxious for his company when I first saw you,” replied Tom drily. “No, Mr. Salathiel; it will be better for you both to come with us to Rabat: there we can lay this little matter of salvage before the authorities.”

The Jew heaved a sigh as of weariness, and acquiesced with a smile. Neither Tom nor Mr. Greatorex was aware that while the Moors were being shown over the vessel, Salathiel had had a few moments’ conversation with one of them. The only man on board who had observed this—and he had not given a second thought to it—was M’Cracken, the new stoker.

The Moors left the yacht; the felucca sailed away; not shorewards, as Tom had expected, but out to sea. The crowd on the cliff dispersed and disappeared, and Tom’s final preparations were made unobserved.

Night fell, and the little bay, hemmed in by the surrounding cliffs, was enveloped in pitchy darkness. Ten o’clock had been fixed as the time for the ascent of the airship, and up to the last moment Tom employed himself in seeing that all was right. Mr. Greatorex was fidgety, asking the same questions, repeating the same warnings, over and over again, until Tom began to fear that even now he would

change his mind and prohibit the expedition. His excitement infected every member of the crew. The men had eyes only for the wonderful machine and for the figures that moved to and fro about it in the light of the yacht's electric lamps. Even the men of the watch were diverted from their duties when they perceived that the lashings holding the airship to the deck were being cast loose. Thus it was that no one had observed a small craft gliding into the bay; no one had noticed that a rope hung over the side of the yacht from the main deck forward; no one was on the look-out when a dusky form clambered silently up and helped to lower Salathiel ben Ezra into the boat riding alongside.

But it happened that Timothy Ball, going forward at that moment to fetch his reefer, which he had left in the fore cabin, noticed what was afoot just as he reached the companion way. With a shout he dashed forward to lay hands on the intruder. But, quick as thought, the Moor whipped out a knife and struck at Timothy; and when the sailors came running to the spot they found the poor fellow groaning on the deck, and caught a glimpse of a felucca speeding away into the gloom.

CHAPTER VII—THE HILLS OF ZEMMUR

For the moment the airship was forgotten. The whole ship's company flocked to the foredeck and formed a group around the prostrate form of Timothy Ball. Tom was already on his knees beside the man, putting in practice the principles of first aid, and receiving unexpected assistance from M'Cracken, who showed remarkable adeptness.

"How did it *happen*?" cried Mr. Greatorex, supposing that his man's plight was due to some accident.

"The Jew!" said Timothy, faintly.

"The villain! Bring him *here*, some one."

"He ain't here, sir; went over the side. It wasn't him that stabbed me; it was a Moor that came up out of a boat and helped the Jew to get away. Never mind me, sir; I'm all right."

Mr. Greatorex fumed.

"This puts a *stop* to it, Tom. It's a villainous business, and we'll go straight back home."

Tom made no reply. He was completing the adjustment of a tourniquet.

"And we've no doctor on board!" Mr. Greatorex went on. "We'll run back to Gibraltar and get assistance. Can't let the poor fellow bleed to *death*, you know."

"He'll no bleed to death," said M'Cracken huskily. "It's just a wee flesh wound. He'll be a' richt in a twa-three days."

"Glad to hear it."

"The question is, who shall I take with me now?" said Tom, rising to his feet and ignoring Mr. Greatorex's expressed determination to go home. "The sooner I'm off the better, for that rascally Jew will tell all he

knows about the airship, and the Moors will be on their guard."

"But we're going *home*, Tom."

"Surely you won't let our enterprise be ruined by a rogue!" replied Tom. "There's all the more reason for going on with it."

"Gad, you're right," cried Mr. Greatorex, veering round again. "We'll do it in the *teeth* of them. But you'll want some one with you in place of Tim. If I were twenty years younger I'd go myself. You want a man who knows *something* about engines. Can't spare *you*, Mumford, I'm afraid."

"No, sir," replied the engineer, "and I'm rather heavy. But there's young M'Cracken; he's a light weight; an uncommonly handy fellow too, and judging from some remarks of his when we've been watching the airship, he knows something about 'em; seems to have read a good deal. I can do without him for a day or two, especially if we lie at anchor here."

"Ah! Yes! Where *is* he? He was here a few seconds ago."

M'Cracken was haled from below. He appeared even more grimy than ever.

"Look here, M'Cracken," said Mr. Greatorex. "Mr. Dorrell wants some one to *help* him, and Mr. Mumford suggests you: speaks *well* of you, you know. You've never been on an airship, of course; but all you've to do is to keep *calm*, and do *exactly* as you are told. You're not *afraid*—no *nerves*, oh?"

"No, sir."

"You're very hoarse still. It will do you *good*, you know, to be away from that furnace for a day or two. Well, you'd better get a wash."

"No time for that," said Tom quickly. "It's past ten o'clock, and we ought to have started long ago."

"Very well. You're not going *visiting*, to be sure. Well, M'Cracken, go and put on your reefer; the night's cold, and will be colder."

"Ay, ay, sir," returned M'Cracken, and dived with alacrity below. He was back in less than a minute. Then Tom entered the car of the airship, followed by Abdul and the stoker. With one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the lever controlling the engines, he called to the men to cast loose the ropes securing the car to the deck. Then he started the ascensional screw, and with a whirr like that of a gigantic humming-top the airship rose slowly from the yacht's deck.

"Good-bye, Tom," shouted Mr. Greatorex. "Be *careful*, my boy; run no risks."

"Good-bye! Good-bye!"

"This is ripping," said the stoker, as the machine rose higher and higher into the air.

Tom started so violently that he unconsciously jerked back the lever and stopped the motion of the machine.

"Pull that lever, quick!" he called.

"Done it already," said the stoker, with his hand on the lever that adjusted the planes. "Lucky I've been up before, Dorrell."

"Good heavens, you're—yes, you're Oliphant. Whew! won't the old man be in a tantrum. How in the world did you disguise yourself?"

"Sammy Byles' clothes, a little lampblack, and my native brogue do make a difference, don't they! I'm afraid Mr. Greatorex *will* be a trifle fizzy; but that won't matter, afterwards."

"I'm not sure I oughtn't to go back and drop you."

"Nonsense. I'm in for it now, and when you come to think of it you couldn't have a better man. Bar Timothy, nobody knows so much about the machine as I do; and I warrant I'm a better hand in a scrimmage, whether with fists or revolvers. I've brought my Colt."

It was some time before Tom recovered from his surprise; but for the moment his attention was occupied by the airship. At last he said—

“Well, Oliphant, I’m glad enough to have you with me. I hope we shall come through all right.”

While speaking, he had stopped the ascensional screws and set the horizontal going. A small aneroid hung just above his head, lit by a carefully screened electric lamp. The reading indicated that the airship had risen to a height of five hundred metres. Maintaining the ascent solely by the inclination of the planes, Tom brought the whole force of the engines to bear on the horizontal screws, and the machine glided onwards at a speed of some twenty miles an hour, gradually rising as she went. Then, at the altitude of a thousand metres, when Tom judged that he was high enough to clear the tops of the hills that fringed the coast, Oliphant reduced the angle of the planes so that it was just sufficient to maintain a constant height at the increased speed of twenty-five miles.

“By Jove, this *is* ripping!” cried Oliphant again.

It was a bright starlit night, without a breath of wind. At this altitude the air was crisp and keen, producing a sense of exhilaration in the occupants of the car. Even Abdul, who had quaked inwardly and clutched the rail when the machine rose to such a giddy height, had now lost his tremors, and looked around him with wonderment and delight. The ship was soaring over the land, which lay outstretched like a vast black floor three-quarters of a mile beneath. Behind, the lights of the yacht could be faintly distinguished; before, there was not a glimmer over the whole country. The airship crossed a peak or two, then sailed over a rolling plain; by and by more hills loomed black in front. The aneroid, an extremely delicate instrument, now indicated that the machine was slowly sinking. Oliphant again adjusted the planes; the airship passed clear of the hills, and Tom steered as directly as he could guess for the spot he had marked on his map.

When the voyage had lasted for about an hour the rising moon threw more light on the scene, lending a weird beauty to the variegated landscape—bare rugged hills alternating with wooded slopes and

dark valleys. But it was impossible, at the height at which they were sailing, to distinguish any landmarks; Abdul knew the country thoroughly, but was quite at a loss in this unfamiliar situation. He had told Tom that the fastness where the diplomatist was probably held captive stood on the top of an extremely steep hill, and explained that the most convenient spot from which to approach it was a small tableland about a sixth of a day's journey from it. This was Tom's objective; but as it was impossible to make sure of reaching it unless Abdul could obtain some guidance from prominent natural features, Tom more than once allowed the airship to sink almost to the ground, so that the Moor might scan the country.

On one of these occasions, about four hours after they had left the yacht, Abdul said that he recognized a hill stream whose source was within a short distance of the sheikh's stronghold. From the directions he was now able to give, Tom managed to steer fairly straight for the tableland, and after once more descending so that Abdul might assure himself that he had not been mistaken, he finally brought the airship to rest at the desired spot. It was past three o'clock in the morning; the sky was already lightening with what Abdul called subhi kázib—the false dawn which often in these latitudes illumines the sky an hour or so before the real dawn. The three adventurers were all very tired, and on Abdul explaining that the tableland was but rarely visited, and that so far as he knew there were no wild beasts in the neighbourhood, Tom thought that they might all safely take a few hours' sleep before considering the next move. The tableland was not entirely flat; it had many depressions, and jagged rocks stood up on all sides around the comparatively clear space on which the airship rested. Only one hill, and that apparently four or five miles distant, stood higher, and even the hawk-like vision of the mountaineers was not likely to discover the airship from so remote a spot.

The real dawn—subhi sadik—was some little while past when the Moor awoke, first of the three. He had just completed his morning devotions and ablutions at a little spring when the others roused

themselves. Among the contents of the car were a spirit lamp, a tin of condensed milk, and materials for making tea; and while they ate their breakfast Tom discussed with Oliphant the programme for the day.

"The first thing is to find out exactly where Ingleton is imprisoned," said Tom, "and what chance there is of getting into communication with him. That's a job for Abdul; obviously we can't help him; we can't do better than lie snug here while he goes and gets what information he can."

"A pretty dangerous job for him if he's caught, isn't it?"

"Well, it's a good many years since he left these parts, and he must have altered. I doubt whether he'll be recognized. Luckily the hills are covered with mist, too; if he starts soon he'll be able to get a good way before he's likely to run across any of his countrymen."

"Or lose himself?"

"No, master," said Abdul, "I don't not lose myself. I go all right."

"The sooner the better, then," said Tom. "We'll wait for you here."

The Moor, who had resumed his native dress, at once girt his djellab about him and prepared to descend the hillside. Tom and Oliphant watched him breathlessly until the mist hid him from view. He went over the brow of the hill and began to clamber down its steep side with the agility and sure-footedness of a mountain goat. When he was out of sight the others returned to their half-finished breakfast, ready to endure with what patience they might the long waiting until the Moor should have completed his errand.

"What if he doesn't come back?" said Oliphant.

"We shall have to risk it ourselves. I'm certainly not going back without making the attempt now that we have come so far. It's pretty cold up here; I shall be glad when the sun sucks up this mist."

When the mist at last cleared away, a magnificent view spread out before the two watchers on the hill-top. They themselves were

perched on the top of a practically bare rock, but a hundred feet below them the hill side was covered with forest, broken, however, with huge patches of rocky ground, on which apparently not even the hardiest tree could find a lodgment. For miles around, the country showed a succession of tree-clad hills, with here and there a waterfall, and here and there a bare summit, not, however, truncated like the hill on which they had landed. Far away to the north-west they could descry, through their field-glasses, a considerable walled village perched on the shoulder of a hill, with one or two large buildings, one presumably a mosque, and a second evidently the stronghold of the sheikh. This no doubt was the place in which they were interested. It lay in the direction generally indicated by the Moor, although when he started it was hidden by the mists.

The hours dragged all too slowly by. They talked over the situation, occasionally getting up to stretch their limbs, but not venturing to move about much, lest they should be seen by any chance shepherd or hunter. On the plain below they caught sight of animals moving, and longed to take a shot at them—now a gazelle, now a wild hog. But to fire a shot was out of the question, and they had to content themselves with exchanging reminiscences of sport at home.

Darkness fell again. Abdul had not returned. Each spent a restless night, and rose with the dawn, eagerly scanning the country, as soon as the mist was dispersed, for a sign of their emissary, but in vain.

“I hope he hasn’t been collared,” said Tom.

“Or turned traitor!”

“He wouldn’t do that, I’m sure. I like the fellow. Of course you read a lot about oriental duplicity, but I don’t believe Abdul is a rogue. Anyway, we should have time to get away in the airship before any one could molest us here, and he knows that. For the life of me I don’t know what we can do if he *has* been collared. We can’t do a thing until we know where Ingleton is; we certainly can’t go inquiring ourselves. All we can do is to go back to the yacht and try and pick up

some English-speaking native who can tell us what we want to know, and that means loss of time."

"And more than that; it would mean that I'd have to turn into M'Cracken again, and I don't believe I could keep up the disguise any longer. I say, what's that moving down there?"

They seized their field-glasses and turned them towards a patch moving along the outskirts of a wood some miles away.

"Moors, by Jove!" exclaimed Oliphant. "And mounted. And coming this way. It looks as though Abdul had betrayed us, after all."

"Don't be in a hurry. They're making no attempt to mask their approach. I don't believe they're coming here at all. No; see, they are wheeling off to the right, in the direction of the hill village yonder. We needn't worry ourselves. But I'm getting sick of this, and it'll be serious soon. I only brought three days' grub in the car, and I'm afraid we ate more than we ought yesterday. That's the worst of having nothing to do."

"It's so plaguy hot, too, when the sun's up. For two pins I'd go down and have a shot at something in the woods. No doubt it's cooler down there, and there's no fun in lying about up here to frizzle."

"There'd certainly be no fun in being pitched into a Moorish dungeon. By all accounts they're rather horrible. I think I'd rather frizzle here than stew there. In any case, even supposing the Moors didn't find out who was firing, the shots would put them on their guard and perhaps spoil our game. I say, Oliphant, reel off some of your stories."

But even Oliphant's stories in the Doric palled, and by and by Tom got up and said that he was going for a stroll. He was away for nearly an hour, and Oliphant began to feel uneasy at his prolonged absence. Oliphant dared not call, for fear of being overheard by an enemy; nor did he care to explore. But he was making up his mind to follow Tom down the steep path when the wanderer at last returned.

"Rather interesting spot, this," he said. "Round the corner below there

I came upon some caves."

"I wondered what had become of you. Did you get lost?"

"No. The odd thing is that these caves are up about twenty feet from a ridge of rock, and can't be got at without a ladder. I tried to mount, but the wall is almost flat."

"I'll go and have a look. How do you get there?"

"Down the hill a little way, turn to the right, go along the ridge, and look up. The caves are about halfway between the ridge and the top of the hill."

Oliphant followed these directions, and by and by returned, with his trousers cut in several places.

"I tried to climb up," he explained, "but couldn't manage it. I think it could be done, though, with practice."

"Which we haven't time for."

The discovery of the caves had occupied some little time, and furnished material for speculation and talk that helped to relieve the tedium of waiting. But their patience had well nigh given out when night once more descended and still Abdul had not returned. The two were eating their supper in moody silence when they heard suddenly the sound of a stone rattling down the hillside. They seized their revolvers and sprang up, waiting for another sound. Clearly some one, man or animal, was climbing the hill. All was again silent; then, from some point beyond them, came the sound of a high-pitched voice.

"It's Abdul. Thank goodness!" cried Oliphant, with a laugh. "Come on, you laggard, and give an account of yourself."

"You have been a long time, Abdul," said Tom, as that young Moor came through the darkness.

"True, master; but it is with us a saying, 'Every delay is good.'"

"Well, come and have something to eat. You're pretty tired and

hungry, no doubt. Then you can tell us what you have done."

But Abdul declined the food offered him, and producing a wallet from beneath his djellab, displayed a heap of dates. He related that he had made his way safely into the village, but as he went through the street towards the house of Hamet Ali—a friend on whose discretion he could rely—he fancied from the manner of an old water-carrier that the man had recognized him. He contrived to slip away among a company of muleteers that happened to be passing, and reached his friend's house unmolested; but shortly afterwards he learnt from this friend that the water-carrier had mentioned his suspicions, and that inquiries were being diligently made for him through the village. Every exit was watched; and his friend was in some anxiety lest an emissary of the sheikh should come and search the house. Hamet, however, was an old enemy of the sheikh, though, with true oriental dissimulation, he had hitherto managed to hide the fact. He agreed to give Abdul shelter so long as it was safe to do so, but impressed upon him that he must not venture to show himself out of doors.

He then inquired what had brought Abdul to the village, and the boy thought it advisable to confide in him, taking care to heighten the mystery of the wonderful ship that sailed through the air, and to promise, on the Englishmen's behalf, liberal bakshish to Hamet if he lent all possible assistance to the enterprise. He wished his friend to send a messenger to Tom, but this Hamet refused to do, for the results to himself, if the messenger were followed and caught, might be disastrous.

On the morning of the same day, when Hamet returned from his usual visit to the sôk, he reported that a camel-driver had arrived, bearing a message from a Jew of Rabat, Salathiel ben Ezra by name, who proposed to come in person to see the sheikh, and had sent a swift rider in advance to request a safe-conduct. The Jews are tolerated, scorned, made to do menial work, in the ports; in remote districts of Morocco they carry their lives in their hands. But the message

conveyed to the sheikh had been such that Salathiel's request was granted, and a dozen men had been sent on horseback towards the coast as an escort. Hearing this, Abdul decided that at all costs he must return to his employer. Under cover of the night he had contrived to slip away from the village, and had come back by a circuitous route so as to make sure of not being intercepted.

"But what of the prisoner?" asked Tom. "Did you learn anything of him?"

"Yes, master. He is in the sheikh's kasbah."

"What is kasbah?"

"Strong place, master; thick walls; a very bad prison."

"We are on the right track, Oliphant," said Tom.

"It looks bad, though. Ingleton will be pretty well guarded, you may be sure; and I don't for the life of me see how we can break into a strong place and get him out."

"Unless we bribe his jailers. Could we get him away with bakshish, Abdul?"

"No, master. The sheikh would cut hands and feet off, put eyes out, and more."

"Evidently we've got our work cut out, Oliphant. And you may depend upon it our friend Salathiel has somehow found out our errand and is coming to warn the sheikh. I remember now that I saw him talking to one of the Moors who came aboard the yacht."

"That explains it."

"How long will it take him to get here, Abdul?"

"Two three days, master."

"We must be beforehand with him, then. Are you prepared for short rations, Oliphant? Our grub won't last more than another day."

"Plenty dates and figs in woods, master," said Abdul.

"We shan't starve, then. Let's have a good sleep, Oliphant. We shall

want all our strength for this job."

"We shall indeed. Poor old pater! Wouldn't he have the blues if he knew where I am!"

CHAPTER VIII—THE SWORDSMITH OF AIN AFROO

The approaching advent of the Jew had introduced a new element of danger into the enterprise. If he should reach the village before Ingleton was released, clearly the game was up. Instead of getting a good sleep, Tom lay awake, talking over the situation with Oliphant. He got Abdul to describe the kasbah, but the description was so vague—the Moor when he lived in the village having taken the stronghold for granted—that he felt incapable of making any plans without seeing the place for himself. When he made this suggestion Oliphant scouted it.

"For one thing," he said, "it's too dangerous; for another, where do I come in?"

"Of course I should have to take Abdul—or rather he would have to take me; and however dangerous it would be for two, it would be still more dangerous for three. If you'll stay and keep an eye on the airship, I'll take advantage of the moonlight and go and have a look round. Your turn will come, you may be sure of that. If I don't come back, you know how to set the machine going. Scoot back to the yacht, and get Mr. Greatorex to make straight for Tangier."

"There'll be a pretty row about this before we've done with it! All right!—if you *will* go. But I say, they'll spot you for a foreigner if any one catches sight of you—in those clothes."

"Yes; I forgot that. I wish I'd provided myself with a rig-out in the Moorish style."

Here Abdul produced from the folds of his djellab a small bundle, which, being unrolled, proved to be a long grey garment with a pair of yellow shoes wrapped in it.

“You’re a brick, Abdul!” cried Tom. “You guessed I’d want something of this sort, eh?”

“Yes, master. I could only get one.”

“So you’re out of it for the present, anyhow, Oliphant. Well, good-bye. If we’re lucky we’ll be back by the morning; if not—you know what to do.”

Five minutes later Tom, swathed in the djellab, disappeared over the brow of the hill with Abdul. He carried his revolver; the Moor had only a knife. In his unfamiliar garment Tom found it by no means easy to make the descent down the rough precipitous path; but Abdul went first, picking the easiest course, and both arrived safely at the bottom.

Then they began their march to the village. It was a toilsome journey, and Tom found the Moorish slippers a very inconvenient footgear. A long tramp, and another steep climb, brought them to the wall of the village, which was built on the slope of the hill. The gates had been shut at sunset, Abdul explained: that was the Moorish fashion. Tom perceived that the wall was utterly dilapidated: in that respect Ain Afroo was typically Moorish. In many parts the parapet had fallen to pieces, and, for any protection it afforded, the wall might as well not have been there. It gave easy foothold to a climber, and Tom indulged a hope that the kasbah might prove to be in equally bad preservation.

From what Abdul had told him, Tom guessed that the stronghold lay at the upper extremity of the village, about eighty or ninety yards from the wall. The Moor’s knowledge of the place enabled him to lead Tom to a spot where it would clearly be an easy matter to climb the battlements. Secure in their remoteness, and in the fact that no hostile force could come within many miles of the village without being instantly announced, the inhabitants kept only a perfunctory watch. A few men, Abdul said, were regularly on guard at the north-east and south-west corners; but no attempt was made to watch the

walls in general. Knowing the state of the defences, this fact gave Tom some amusement. With walls so ruinous the gates were the last places at which unauthorized ingress or egress would be made. The whole place was still sleeping, and would sleep until the muezzin from the mosque gave the call to prayer. Abdul declared it was quite safe to enter the village so far as its human inhabitants were concerned, though there was a risk that some pariah dog might be wakeful. Taking his courage in both hands, Tom climbed up the wall after Abdul, and descended on the other side; then, keeping in the black shadows cast by the moon, the two made their way through round archways and narrow alleys to the outer wall of the kasbah.

The village was very silent. It might almost have been an abode of the dead. Only the screech of night-birds beyond the walls broke the stillness. Tom held his breath—and his nose, for sanitary authorities are unknown in Morocco, and heaps of refuse here and there spoke forcibly in the night air. The two intruders crept stealthily round the walls of the kasbah, against which small shops and outbuildings that Abdul called *inzella* were built, except before the principal entrance—a large gateway through which two or three men could ride abreast. In front of this gateway was a wide, open square, with low shops under a colonnade on the other side.

The gateway was shut. It had massive iron doors. Stealing to the further side of it, Abdul touched Tom's arm, and pointed to a small dark window, unglazed, scarcely more than a slit in the wall, some twenty-five feet above their heads, and a yard or two back from the parapet, which, as the Moor had already explained, extended right round the kasbah, enclosing a kind of terrace. It was the window of the guest-chamber, and there, Abdul had suggested, the captured envoy was confined.

The entrance to the guest-chamber would be from the terrace within the parapet. The floor above was occupied by the sheikh and his family; the floor below was devoted to the servants and the guard.

Even as Tom looked, a figure passed slowly along the terrace, and the moonlight glinted on a steel musket barrel. It was clear that the guest-chamber was carefully guarded—a proof, it seemed, that Abdul's suggestion was correct. Drawing Tom out of earshot, Abdul said that special orders must have been given, or the sentry would certainly not tramp up and down at this hour of night. Tom learnt afterwards that the Moorish soldier's idea of sentry-go is a long nap in the nearest doorway.

"Is there no entrance to the guest-chamber from within?" asked Tom.

Abdul confessed that he did not know. He had never set foot within the walls. But he had once taken refuge for the night, on one of his journeys through the country, in a ruined kasbah of somewhat similar appearance, and there a door led from the guest-chamber into a small vestibule, which gave access to the upper floor and the roof above.

Flitting silently across the square, Tom and the Moor took post under the shadow of the colonnade on the farther side, which ran at right angles to the wall of the kasbah. Within it was a row of shops, now shut and barred. There, leaning against one of the stout columns, within the black darkness of the Moorish arch, Tom scanned the kasbah, looming white in the moonlight, and meditated.

To get into communication with the prisoner seemed absolutely hopeless. No one could force an entrance into the sheikh's strong place. Was it possible to gain the assistance of some one within? Might not Hamet Ali, Abdul's friend, act as intermediary between Tom and some servant of the sheikh's? The cynical saying, "Every man has his price," was literal truth in Morocco: such was the impression Tom had gained from his reading. But he knew enough of oriental ways to be sure that the fixing of the price would be a long and tedious affair. If the Moor were asked to name it, he would suggest a sum far in excess of what he would ultimately accept; while however large a sum were offered, it would prove only the starting

place for long haggling. Indeed, the larger the bribe, the more likely it would be to excite the cupidity of the agent, and to encourage him to stand out for yet higher terms.

In spite of the difficulties, Tom would have been inclined to attempt this means if it had not involved serious delay, and still more serious risk to both Abdul and himself. Hamet Ali lived on the far side of the town. Abdul would have to make his way there, waken his friend, explain the circumstances, overcome a probable reluctance to meddle, fix a price with Hamet Ali, and another for the sheikh's servant. Every move would be attended with danger. A Moor's house is a castle in miniature. Any attempt to rouse the inmates at this dead hour of night would necessitate so much noise and clatter as to disturb the neighbourhood. The night was wearing on, and before Abdul could, with reasonable regard to secrecy, obtain access to his friend's house, daylight might be upon them. The Moors are early risers, and even if all went well, and Tom and the others stole forth from the village before dawn, they would almost certainly be seen and ridden down as they crossed the wide rocky spaces that surrounded the place. But the most serious consideration of all was that of time: it would not be possible to get into treaty with any one inside the kasbah before Salathiel ben Ezra appeared on the scene. Then the enterprise was doomed to failure.

Tom was anxiously discussing with himself the pros and cons when Abdul plucked him by the arm.

"Day is near, master," he whispered. "We must go by the way we came."

Tom was reluctant to own himself beaten; but there was clearly no hope for it. Gathering his djellab about him, and pulling the hood over his head, he followed Abdul with quick, noiseless footsteps across the square.

Ahmed Hûk, apprentice to Hamadi ben Ibn, the swordsmith of Ain Afroo, had spent a restless night. His head throbbed; he could not sleep; he wished he had not smoked so much hashish when his work was done for the day. The air of the little shop was close and oppressive; and after hours of wakefulness, turning from side to side in the vain effort to find sleep, Ahmed got up and quietly unbarred the little wicket in the door, careful not to disturb his master, who was snoring loudly within a few feet of him. Perhaps a little fresh air from the outside would cool his heated brow.

He had not stood more than a few minutes at the wicket, and was already thinking of returning to his charpoy, when he noticed, in the moonlight on the other side of the square, two figures turn the corner by the kasbah opposite, coming from the direction of the village wall. They at once disappeared into the shadow thrown by the great wall of the building, but something in their movements aroused the curiosity of Ahmed. Why were two wayfarers abroad at so late an hour? The matter was not his concern; still, he would remain at the wicket a little longer, to see if the two night-walkers reappeared.

His view was somewhat broken by the rows of pillars supporting the colonnade in front of the shops of which his master's establishment was one; but through the interval between two of them he did at last see the two forms moving with rather suspicious quickness across the illumined square, and, what was more interesting to him, they were seemingly coming in his direction. Were they thieves, he wondered? He could hardly believe it, for the village was small; they could scarcely escape detection; and the sheikh's ingenuity in punishments was notorious even in Morocco, where torture is a fine art.

With instinctive caution Ahmed closed the wicket, leaving only a slit just wide enough for him to peep through. In a few moments he heard the slight rustle of the strangers' garments, and saw their dark forms clearly outlined against the moonlight. They had come under the

colonnade and halted within two or three yards of him, behind one of the pillars. They whispered a little together, then were silent for a space, then whispered again: and now Ahmed was interested indeed, for, low as their tones were, he overheard a word or two, and they made him jump; they were certainly not in the Moorish tongue. His master's business had taken him more than once to Dár al Beida, and he had heard such words used by the N'zrani—the unbelievers who were suffered to pollute the city by their presence. How came it that here, in Ain Afroo, a village where no unbeliever ever set foot save a dog of a Jew now and then (though truly there were one or two infidel wretches now safely confined in the kasbah)—how came it that two men, good Moors and followers of the Prophet, to all appearance, were speaking in the tongue of the infidel? It was perplexing, to say the least, and undoubtedly worthy of the attention of Hamadi his master.

Leaving the wicket, Ahmed silently groped his way to the charpoy on which the swordsmith was sleeping, and gently awakened him. In a low whisper he conveyed the news of his discovery. Hamadi at once rose, and, trusting to the pitch darkness of the colonnade, opened the wicket fully, and listened with all his ears.

Tom and Abdul had no sooner crossed the square than the bolts of the shop door opposite which they had been standing were softly drawn back, and Hamadi, followed by his apprentice, glided barefoot after them. Each bore a sword—good weapons, as Hamadi, who had made them, well knew. Hamadi saw a vision of great prosperity and high favour with the sheikh. He would follow up the strangers, if strangers they indeed were, to the house where they harboured. There he would leave Ahmed to keep watch, while he himself sped to the kasbah and told what he had seen. Without doubt the sheikh would reward him handsomely.

By the time Hamadi and his boy had left the shelter of the colonnade, the strangers had turned the corner of the far side of the square; but the pursuers ran quickly across the open space and gained the corner while their quarry was still in sight.

Tom and his companion, picking their way with all caution through the dark, uneven, dirty passages that led from the kasbah to the outer wall, went out slowly. Every now and again they stumbled over a loose cobble or a heap of refuse; then there was a little noise that might betray their presence to any one who happened to be within a few yards of them. At such times Abdul would throw a hurried glance back; well he knew what their fate would be if they were captured.

Suddenly he edged a little closer to Tom and whispered—

“Men follow us!”

By this time they were almost within reach of the wall. Tom was alive to the danger in which the pursuit had placed them. Descending the wall, they would have to grope for foothold. Before they could get clear, the pursuers would have come up behind, and might either topple down upon them loose boulders from the wall, or, if they bore firearms, have them at their mercy. The two hurried their steps.

“They are close behind—two men!” whispered Abdul.

Tom glanced to each side along the wall. There was no convenient place in which they might take refuge with any prospect of eluding their pursuers. They were now hasting along at a half run beneath a long wall that possibly enclosed some gardens of houses backing on the ramparts. Here and there this wall was broken by a doorway; but the gates, when Tom tested them by a push, were always closed. Abdul was making for the spot at which they had entered the village; it was the nearest, indeed the only practicable, place of descent. But to descend, with the pursuers upon them, would be dangerous, perhaps fatal. To leave this place of exit, and move farther along the ramparts or back into the village, would be almost equally dangerous and would lose precious time. The only other course open to them

was to tackle the problem of disposing of the pursuers. Tom nervously fingered his revolver; but a shot would rouse the whole village and multiply the pursuers perhaps fiftyfold.

While Tom was feverishly attempting to hit on some means of dealing with the two men, these, unaware that they had been seen, were already reckoning up the profits of a successful coup. As soon as Hamadi the swordsmith saw that the men in front were making for the ramparts, he guessed at once that they were intruders from the outside, and he also guessed the point at which the exit was to be made. This was not the first time that the place had been used as a means of getting in and out of the village by night. More than once it had happened that the villagers, at feud with neighbouring mountaineers, had crept out at night to settle their scores, returning safely within the walls before daybreak. The fact that the gates were closed and no one could pass during the night was prima facie evidence of their innocence. It was even said that the sheikh had settled accounts with a hostile neighbour in the same way. The swordsmith therefore was quite justified in shaping his course on the assumption that the two men in front of him would climb down the ruined part of the wall, and he would be in ample time to deal with them when they were clinging precariously to the face of the stonework.

The only fault in his calculation was that he did not reckon with the sharp eyes of Tom's companion. Thus it was that, passing incautiously one of the recessed doorways leading on to the gardens, he suddenly saw a thousand brilliant lights flash before his eyes, his sword flew from his grasp, and he reeled dizzily to the ground. Tom's muscles were hardened by much exercise in engineering workshops, and Hamadi, though a big man and strong, as befitted one of his trade, was not prepared for so surprising an attack. Before he could recover his wits Tom was upon him, pressing the cold barrel of his revolver to his ear. The man, although dizzy, had still enough intelligence left to know what this meant, and he lay quite still while

Tom pondered how he could at the same time secure his vanquished foe and lend assistance to his companion, who was now hotly engaged with the apprentice. Abdul, however, needed no help. Before Tom had time to decide upon his own course, the young Moor, taking full advantage of the darkness that neutralized the effect of his enemy's longer weapon, dodged in beneath the latter's guard, and got home a shrewd thrust in the forearm. Ahmed, yelling lustily, dropped his sword, spun round, and set off down the ramparts at full speed before Abdul could repeat his stroke.

HIS SWORD FLEW FROM HIS GRASP, AND
HE REELED DIZZILY TO THE GROUND.

Tom breathed more freely. He had at any rate, he thought, gained a few minutes. The yells of the Moor were not likely to bring help

immediately. While a shot would undoubtedly have raised the guard at the kasbah, and brought a party in hot haste to the spot, the cries of a man yelling would probably only cause a certain sleepy curiosity. A Moor never puts himself to unnecessary trouble, and it would certainly not be worth while to pay much attention to a brawl between men who had smoked too much hashish. But there was still need for haste, so with Abdul's assistance Tom trussed up the fallen swordsmith with workmanlike bonds made of his own garments, and in another minute was beginning the descent of the wall.

They were only halfway down when they heard an uproar in the village. The apprentice had lost no time in gathering a band to continue the pursuit. Yet Tom could not hurry his flight, for a false step would mean at least a broken arm, and in all probability a broken neck. With Abdul close behind he picked his way down the broken masonry, the shouts growing ever nearer and more menacing. At last they reached the bottom. Then, Abdul leading the way, they hurried along the foot of the wall. They durst not yet leave its shelter, for the moon, though now sinking in the sky, still threw sufficient light to betray them if they attempted to cross the open space towards the hillside.

Crouching low as they went, they heard the pursuers halt at the place where they had descended. But now they had reached a welcome patch of stunted bush which promised needful cover. Plunging into this, still keeping low so that their heads should not show above the scrub, they strode away at right angles to the wall. Abdul's knowledge of the country served him well. Descending the hill, they were soon out of danger. Then up and down little eminences, over brooks, through patches of wood, they pressed on, always bearing slightly to the right until they struck the true course. Almost in a bee-line, they made for the hill where Oliphant was anxiously awaiting them, and arrived there just after dawn, tired out, and not a little disappointed with the barren result of their night's work.

CHAPTER IX—A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

“Thank Heaven you are back!” said Oliphant when Tom appeared over the brow of the hill. “I don’t think I ever spent a more miserable night.”

“Anything happened?”

“No. It wouldn’t have been so bad if anything had. If I’d had something to do—somebody to fight, or something!”

“Well, you could have gone to sleep.”

“So I did, and woke in a fright. I dreamt that wretched Jew fellow was coming at me with outstretched hands, and his fingernails were like some horrid bird’s claws, and he grew bigger and bigger as he came until he seemed as huge as a mountain. But what luck did you have?”

“None, or next to none. The kasbah’s as strong as Newgate. And the worst of it is, we were spotted and followed, had to truss up one fellow; another alarmed the village. We escaped just by the skin of our teeth.”

He related in detail the incidents of the night.

“It looks as if we’ll have to back out after all,” said Oliphant gloomily when the story was finished.

“I’ll be hanged if we will. I’ve been thinking it over, and talking it over with Abdul, on the way back. The only chance, it seems to me, is to face all the risks and make a dash for it.”

“What do you mean?”

“Come down in the airship on the terraced roof of the kasbah under cover of night, and trust to luck to find our way to the prisoners’ quarters.”

“But that would be confoundedly risky, especially after you have once

given the alarm in the village."

"I admit that's a nuisance, but it's perhaps not so bad as you think. You see, the Moors know nothing—I hope they don't, at any rate—about the airship, and they won't look for intruders from the sky. The botheration is that we've lost a lot of time, and our chance is utterly dished if the Jew gets in first. Abdul says he can't be more than a day's march from the place now. That's about thirty miles, as near as I can make out. Luckily it's very rough country, so that he can't come fast. He's probably starting this very morning for his last stage; it's possible that we've already lost our chance, for he's sure to hurry, and if he gets the ear of the sheikh before nightfall, they'll be on the watch for us."

"But even without the Jew I don't see how your scheme's possible. There are sure to be extra guards at the wall, and if the night were as bright as this they couldn't help seeing the machine, and we couldn't alight without their knowledge."

"Yes; but you must allow for their ignorance and superstition. If they do see the airship swooping down on them they'll be scared out of their wits; they'll think it some monstrous evil bird straight from Gehenna——"

"Which is down below, not up aloft."

"They won't be in a state to draw distinctions of that sort. Abdul assures me that these ignorant mountaineers—he was one himself once, but travel has widened his mind!—will be in such a state of terror that they'll be for a time pretty well paralysed: and time's all we want."

"Well, he ought to know his countrymen. But there's the Jew: suppose he *does* get there first?"

"We've got to prevent him."

"What!"

"As I say, we must go and intercept him."

“But he won’t come alone.”

“Of course not. Abdul says he will come on horseback with a band of armed and mounted men. He wouldn’t trust himself in this country without an escort. But that’s where the airship comes in. I rather fancy that if we swoop down from the sky among a lot of Moors they’ll think more of their own safety than of the Jew’s.”

“Still, we couldn’t prevent them from going on to the village.”

“I think we could.”

“What! shoot ’em down?”

“No. I don’t want to hurt a hair of their heads if I can help it. I think we can manage to chase them back along the way they came, and do something to frighten them into the bargain. Do you know how to make throw-downs?”

“Never heard of ’em. What are they?”

“I forgot; you Eton fellows never use such things, I suppose. Well, I’ll make some, and you’ll confess they’re excellent little harmless bombs. Then we’ll be off.”

Carefully opening two or three cartridge cases, he extracted the powder, and screwing it up with some tiny pebbles in tissue paper from his pocket-book, he manufactured a dozen or so of the little bombs. Then he inspected the machinery of the airship, thoroughly oiled the parts, and went aboard with Oliphant and Abdul. He allowed the machine to rise only a few feet from the top of the hill, so as to avoid if possible observation from the village; then he set off in a south-easterly direction, keeping the hill between him and the kasbah. Fetching a long circuit, he gradually bore south-west, then slightly north, until, in the course of about three-quarters of an hour, he struck the narrow winding track which would be followed by parties travelling between the village and the coast.

From their elevated position they could trace the path for a considerable distance through the country, but as yet they had seen

no sign of a party approaching the village. In broad daylight the airship must have been sighted by many people over whose heads it had passed; but from what Abdul had said it was unlikely that any one would have the least idea of the real nature of the apparition. They would regard it as a supernatural creature, and if within the next few hours a rumour of its appearance should be carried to the sheikh of Ain Afroo he would probably be none the wiser from any description that might be attempted.

It was now little more than nine o'clock in the morning, and the Jew could scarcely have passed. Tom therefore headed the airship westward, keeping it at a low speed so that he might carefully scan the country and not let the Jew and his party escape him. He knew that, unless accident signally befriended him, the airship must be seen by them long before they came into sight. Although the country was spread out like a map, the machine in the open sky must be a much more conspicuous object to people below than they would be to observers above. Salathiel would, of course, recognize the airship; but Tom hoped that before the man could explain clearly to his escort what it was, the immediate object of the aerial flight would have been achieved.

The morning wore away, and Tom began to feel anxious. To keep the airship so long in motion involved the expenditure of a large amount of his propulsive paste, and he had brought only as much of it as would last the voyage to and from the hill fortress, with a little margin for accidents. Yet he did not care to bring the machine to rest, for he might then miss the party of which he was in search. Moreover, all the provisions were gone except a few biscuits and some tea. With no food for themselves and no fuel for the machine their plight would be desperate. Tom spoke of his anxieties to Oliphant, and they were still talking somewhat disconsolately, when Abdul, who had never ceased to keep a sharp lookout, suddenly cried "Horses!" and pointed to sundry small specks ahead.

Tom instantly started up and looked through his binocular in the direction of the Moor's forefinger.

"There are about a score, I fancy," he said, handing the glass to Oliphant. "Can you spot the Jew?"

"No, they are too much mixed up. I shouldn't know him again, either."

"We shall know him very soon, though. Abdul told me that Jews in this country mostly wear blue clothes and black skullcaps. We'll make straight for them."

The engines had lately been reduced to something less than half speed. Realizing that every second was now of value, Tom put them at full speed, steering the vessel direct for the party of horsemen, who had just emerged from a clump of timber. At the same time Oliphant altered the inclination of the planes, so that the airship began to drop rapidly earthwards. Thus it swooped down upon the party like a huge falcon. To manipulate the engines, the steering gear, and the lever affecting the planes, kept the hands of Tom and his friend pretty fully occupied; but Abdul was to make himself useful, and Tom instructed him to take a handful of the little bombs, in readiness to use them when the moment came. Tom hoped that the mere appearance of the sky monster would startle the horses and put the cavalcade to fright. As an additional means of scaring them he relied on the throwdowns.

The airship had come within about two miles of the horsemen when it was seen that they had halted. No doubt the strange apparition had been observed, and Salathiel ben Ezra was doing his best to explain its nature. They remained stationary until the distance of the airship from them was less than a mile: then two of them wheeled suddenly in their tracks and set off in a mad gallop westward. The others, however, held their ground; either they had stronger nerves, or the Jew had managed to convince them that the strange object was not an instrument of the Evil One, but simply a new invention of the accursed people who had invented warships and alarm clocks.

Tom had just distinguished the figure of Salathiel, on a mule in the

midst of the party, when there came a slight puff of smoke from the centre of the group, followed by a second and a third. Oliphant laughed.

“They’re firing at us,” he exclaimed, “which argues a pretty state of fright.”

“All very much in our favour. Look, there are three more of them off as hard as they can go.”

“But there are still ten or a dozen of them. If they have nerve enough to hold their fire till we come within range they may do us some damage—if their guns are any good.”

“There’s not much doubt about that. They get hold of good rifles somehow. But we’re in for it now. A bullet or two in the machinery would bring us to the ground; we must simply take our chance.”

The airship was now approaching the party at the speed of a fast train. Moment by moment others of the horsemen detached themselves from the group and galloped after their comrades, and Tom gave a cry when he saw that the Jew was among the fugitives. Still several remained.

“It won’t do to allow them to get between us and the kasbah,” said Tom. “We must drive the whole lot of them back towards the coast.”

The airship was now only some three hundred feet above the ground. Suddenly Tom shut off the horizontal propellers and brought the vertical engines into play. The airship swept onward at the same level by virtue of its momentum. The horses of the Moors began to rear and plunge. They had probably heard the whirr of the machinery, for not being long-sighted beasts it was possible that they had not yet seen the vessel above them.

“By George! aren’t they magnificent horsemen!” said Oliphant, as he saw the Moors striving to hold their terrified animals in. One or two puffs, followed immediately by the reports of the rifles, came from the group; but with their horses rearing and plunging beneath them it was

not surprising that the Moors missed the airship, though it now offered a considerable mark. It was immediately above them.

“Now, Abdul!” said Tom.

The Moor flung one of the little bombs earthward with all his force. It exploded at the very feet of one of the horses, which, frenzied with fear, took the bit between its teeth and bolted. Abdul threw half a dozen more, one after another, laughing with glee at the astonishing effect of the little bombs. There was no holding the horses any longer, and the whole party dashed away at a mad gallop along the road they had come.

It was not Tom’s object to overtake them yet awhile. He put the horizontal engines at half speed, and the airship began to follow the fugitives like a sheepdog at the heels of a frantic flock. The little group which had stood to the last were evidently the best mounted of the party, for they gradually closed in upon those who had started earlier. Tom could not forbear chuckling as he came upon the rotund black-capped figure of Salathiel ben Ezra striving to urge his steady-going mule to a brisker pace.

“Is it safe to leave him behind?” asked Oliphant, as the Jew was outstripped and passed.

“Oh yes! We’ll come back for him presently. We could easily catch him up. If the mule is like most of his kind he won’t hurry himself.”

The airship sped on after the rest of the party. Mile after mile was covered: the horses showed signs of fatigue, but one or two that were dropping behind were galvanized into further desperate efforts by the dreaded whirr of the propellers just in their rear.

The chase had continued for about half an hour when Abdul suddenly noticed that the number of the fugitives was one less than it had been when the flight began. None of the three occupants of the airship had seen a rider diverge from the track: to do so would indeed have been difficult, for it ran through uneven and rocky ground which offered little

footway for a horse. Yet it was clear that one of the Moors had at some point or other left his comrades and ridden off to right or left.

“Never mind,” said Tom. “If he tries to get to the village, I’ve no doubt we can overtake him. His horse will be no match for us.”

“Don’t you think we’ve chased them far enough!” asked Oliphant. “We’re using up a great deal of your paste.”

“Yes. I think we’ve pretty well disposed of them now. We’ll swing round and go back for Master Salathiel.”

“What are you going to do with him—not bring him up here?”

“Not a bit of it. We don’t want him—not for long, at least. I’ve got an idea. But we must get hold of him first.”

Bringing the airship about in a wide circle, Tom steered it back along the track in search of the Jew.

“The donkey!” cried Oliphant, as presently the man came in sight, making desperate efforts to gain the village. “He might have hidden himself among the rocks or the trees, and given us no end of trouble.”

“I don’t know. He has chosen probably the lesser of two evils. He’d have a bad time of it if he were found alone by any wandering Moors; his best chance was certainly to try to get to the village and tell the sheikh all he knows.”

The Jew could be seen every now and again glancing anxiously back along the track. When he caught side of the airship returning, and realized that he was bound to be overtaken, he pulled up his mule, tumbled off the saddle, and dived into the cover of some rocks, hoping no doubt that they would afford him concealment.

“Too late!” said Tom with a chuckle. “He might escape us if we were on his level, but he forgets we can look right down upon him.”

“It’s like a field-mouse trying to escape from a hawk,” said Oliphant.

“Rather worse, for a field-mouse has its colour to help it, while Salathiel’s blue coat makes him a little too conspicuous.”

For a few moments the Jew, indeed, disappeared from view; but Tom steered the airship exactly above the spot where he was last seen, and there was Salathiel crouching in a cleft much too narrow for him.

There was no convenient landing-place among the rocks where the airship could be brought safely to rest, and the Jew, apparently recognizing this, did not attempt to stir from his position. But the vessel came to rest in the air, hovering like a monstrous humming-bird above the trembling man, no more than twenty feet from the ground.

“How shall we get at him?” asked Oliphant.

“We can leave that to Abdul, I think,” replied Tom. “He is used to ship-board, and he has been on the end of our rope before.”

Abdul understood what was required of him. Letting down the rope with the grapnel at the end, he swarmed nimbly down, armed only with his knife. The two in the car smiled to see what ensued. Salathiel was unarmed. He broke forth in a torrent of mingled threats and entreaties as the Moor approached him, then lay on his back and tried to repel the lad with his feet. But Abdul got behind him, and by discreet employment of the point of his knife at length persuaded the Jew into the open.

Then Tom let the airship gently down. When it stood upon terra firma, he and Oliphant leapt out of the car, bundled Salathiel into it, and in another minute were soaring through the air towards their former resting-place on the hill. With Salathiel’s added weight the airship travelled somewhat slowly, and for some time, when a breeze rose from the eastward, it had considerable difficulty in making headway at all. But at last the flat-topped hill was opened up on the horizon, Tom estimating that the return journey had taken more than twice as long as the outward trip in the morning.

CHAPTER X—THE KASBAH

Instead of alighting on the former spot on the top of the hill, Tom this time let the airship down at the foot.

“We haven’t darkness to cover us this time,” he said, “and we don’t want to be spied from the village.”

“What are you going to do with our fat friend?” asked Oliphant.

“Well, I thought of taking him some miles into the wilder parts of the hills and leaving him; but I don’t want to use any more of our fuel than I can help. Besides, I don’t want to have the fellow murdered, though his Moor friend might have done for poor Timothy. What do you say to giving him a lodging in one of the caves?”

“But how in the world could we get him up there?”

“Abdul says it can be done. I forgot to tell you that on our way to Ain Afroo that night I told Abdul of our discovery, and he said he knew the caves well, and had often climbed into them. The tradition of the country is that they were actually cut in the rocks ages ago as a refuge when the people were pressed by their enemies.”

“Well, it’s a capital idea if it can be managed. The Jew would be out of harm’s way, at any rate.”

“Yes. And if we succeed in releasing Ingleton, we can come back for him, perhaps, and take him into Rabat or Casa Blanca, and make him disgorge some of Abdul’s property, which I’ve no doubt he has appropriated.”

“But won’t he starve? We can’t spare him any food.”

“A day’s fasting won’t hurt him. We’re on uncommonly short rations ourselves, and there’s no reason why he should fare better than we.”

“But can we get him up? He’s a big fellow,”

“We’ll do our best with Abdul’s help. One of the caves is more easy to get at than the others, Abdul says.”

“By Jove, we’ve forgotten that fellow who got away!”

“Hang it, so we have. It can’t be helped. We clearly can’t catch him now without showing ourselves to the people of Ain Afroo. Perhaps he didn’t make for the village after all. We must dispose of Salathiel, at any rate.”

Tom and Oliphant had been talking apart, while Abdul kept watch over the Jew. The former now went up to the man.

“Mr. Salathiel,” he said. “I don’t exactly know what your game is, but we think it’s advisable you should have a little rest after your arduous work with the mule. There’s a very comfortable cave some eighty feet above your head. The way to it is rather steep, but with our assistance you can mount there, and remain in perfect safety until we can fetch you and restore you to your friends.”

“I protest you treat me badly,” said Salathiel, his mien expressing mingled fear and indignation. “I am a peaceable merchant, and was on my way to treat with the sheikh of Ain Afroo for a supply of carpets from Rabat, when——”

“Still, you must be fatigued,” said Tom. “We also have business with the sheikh, and I fear that until ours is completed yours must wait. Ours is a prior engagement, Mr. Salathiel. Now if you will please climb the hillside. The first steps are easy; we will help you when you find further ascent difficult.”

For some moments the Jew tried entreaty, cajolery, even bribery—in vain. With a very bad grace he began to clamber up the rocks, reaching at length a ledge some twenty-five feet below the cave. The hill was here almost perpendicular, and when Salathiel looked at the wall of rock above him he pleaded again with great volubility to be allowed to go his way. But Abdul was already swarming up with a rope between his teeth. The Englishmen watched him with

admiration. Sticking fingers and toes into the slightest crevice, taking advantage of every little irregularity in the surface, he accomplished what had seemed from below an impossible feat. When he reached the cave, he tied one end of the rope to a spur of rock at the entrance, and let down the other to Oliphant, who by its assistance managed to follow. Salathiel for a time absolutely refused to mount; but when Tom pointed out that in the cave he would at least be safe, while no one could answer for what might happen if he wandered about the country alone, he at length allowed the rope to be wound about him, and was hauled up by the two above. He was supplied with a pot of water from the hill stream and a half-dozen biscuits, then Oliphant descended, followed by Abdul with the rope.

"I don't think he'll attempt the descent," said Tom. "It requires more nerve than I fancy he's got."

"It doesn't matter much if he does, does it? He won't try it while we are hereabout. He'll hardly try it in the dark when we are gone; and if he does, and gets safely to the bottom, he'll take so long finding his way to the village that we shall have done our business there—if we're going to do it at all."

"Still, I think we'll make sure. There are one or two bits of rock sticking out that give a slight foothold; Abdul may as well knock them off. He won't want them himself when we come back to release the Jew."

"Suppose we don't come back!"

"You mean, suppose we come to grief ourselves! Well, he'll be able to signal for help from the mouth of the cave to-morrow; some of his cronies are sure to wonder what's become of him and be prowling about. It won't matter to us then, for we shall have either succeeded or failed."

"Suppose we can't come back, and nobody sees his signals!"

"That's his lookout! Didn't we rescue him from the shark, which would

have snapped him up when the tide rose another few inches? How has he repaid us? By trying to do for us. And it isn't as if he were a Moor, serving his country. He hasn't an ounce of patriotism in his composition. He's simply on the make. He wanted to get a good haul out of the sheikh for giving us away, and upon my word, considering all things, I think he gets off pretty easily. If he'd treated Moors as he has treated us, he'd be dying a particularly slow death by this time. I don't think we need distress ourselves about Salathiel ben Ezra."

Leaving the Jew to his solitary reflections, the two made their way back to the airship and began to overhaul the machinery. Meanwhile Abdul had gone to the summit of the hill to bring down one or two things which had been left there. He returned with the news that he had seen in the far distance a single horseman slowly climbing the steep hill-path to the village.

"That's our man, depend upon it," said Oliphant. "He'll give us away, Dorrell, as sure as fate."

"What can't be cured must be endured. We could catch him, I dare say; but we haven't any too much fodder for the engine, and we should certainly be seen. He must tell the sheikh all he knows, and, upon my word, I should like to hear his account of us. It would probably be very funny."

"But it will put the sheikh on his guard."

"My dear fellow, you haven't enough faith in the terrors of the unknown, or the misknown. The Moor's story will be such a mass of exaggeration, ignorance, and superstition, that they'll be in a state of jumps, and dread the apparition ten times more even than if it came upon them without preparation."

"Then why go to the trouble of preventing the Jew from getting into the village?"

"Just because he *knows* the thing, you see, and would stick to the bare truth. His story would lay more stress on the object of our visit;

the Moor's will be mainly about the airship. Really, he may help us in the end."

They spent the afternoon in a thorough cleaning of the engines. Once or twice Salathiel showed himself at the mouth of the cave, and Tom fancied he saw him attempt to signal with his hands. But when Oliphant made a movement towards his carbine, the Jew retreated hastily into the interior and appeared no more.

At last all was ready for the voyage. But several hours must yet pass before the ascent could be made. Tom had decided that it would be unwise to arrive at the kasbah until the Moors were either in their first sleep, or, if on their guard, were somewhat tired and nervous with watching. Learning this, Abdul, who had been making observations during the afternoon, left the two Englishmen and was not seen for a time. When he returned, he carried a couple of hares, explaining that he had snared them in the wood that lay half a mile beyond their resting-place. He produced also from the folds of his garment a number of figs and dates which he had plucked from the trees.

"Here's a tuck-in!" cried Tom. "I'm as hungry as a hunter. Oatmeal biscuits are all very well, but they're a trifle too chippy for my taste. I suppose you, as a Scotsman, think 'em quite succulent, Oliphant?"

"Do I, by George? You Englishmen make a good many mistakes about us Scots, and that's one of them. Besides, I'm only Scotch when I want a stoker's place—or when I let off some of my stories on the fellows in Booker's. I was rather had once, though. When I first went to Tabor's as a little chap, on my first day I dropped my cap somewhere, and asked one of the masters if he'd seen it. I'd just come from our village school up north—a whim of the governor's, you know—and I suppose I'd a touch of the brogue, for when I said, 'Please, sir, have you seen my cap?' he said quite pat, 'Are *you* MacFarlane?' And he called me MacFarlane until I left."

Abdul had chosen a sheltered hollow, and built a rough canopy of branches and leaves. Beneath this he kindled a fire, and cooked one

of the hares The table appointments were not exactly those that either of the lads was accustomed to, but, as Oliphant remarked, they were in a primitive country, and it was not unfitting that they should resort to the manners of their ancestors. Both confessed that they had never enjoyed a meal so much as this, and felt all the more ready for the adventures of the night.

The moon was shedding a cold radiance around, in strange contrast with the hot and sultry air, when the airship with its three passengers rose from the foot of the hill and started on its voyage for the kasbah of Ain Afroo. To lessen the chances of premature discovery, Tom ascended to a considerable altitude, with the intention of dropping obliquely upon the kasbah. He was thus able to dispense in great part with the action of the propellers as the airship drew near to its destination, which was very desirable, seeing that they made a loud whirring which must otherwise have attracted attention. But by ascending to a height of nearly 3,000 feet, and then adjusting the planes so that the airship fell at a sharp angle, he could make use of the force of gravity to carry him in the right direction without employing the horizontal screws. Finding, however, when half the distance had been covered, that the airship was coming too near the ground, he set the vertical screws in motion rose a few hundred feet, and again dropped obliquely towards his objective.

The whole country was bathed in the moon's pale light, and lay in perfect silence save for the faint barking of dogs here and there. The three adventurers said never a word; neither Tom nor Oliphant was in a mood for talking now that the real business of the expedition was so near at hand. It was not until the airship was hovering exactly over the flat roof of the kasbah that they knew, from shouts below, that the strange visitant had been observed. But some moments must elapse, presumably, before the alarm could penetrate to the sheikh's apartments; and, aware that everything depended on his coolness and caution, Tom brought the airship to rest with as much deliberation as if he were landing from a practice voyage.

A shot from a musket struck one of the planes.

“The sentry on the terrace has caught sight of us,” said Tom, as he was stepping out of the car. “Let us hope that after having done his duty he’ll be sufficiently scared to bolt for the town, instead of coming up to warn the sheikh.”

The programme had been settled before they started. Oliphant was to remain in charge of the airship, while Tom and the Moor attempted to get into the house and release the prisoner.

“Remain in the car,” said Tom, “and have everything ready to ascend at a moment’s notice.”

“Wish you good luck, old fellow,” returned Oliphant. “You’ve got your revolver?”

“Yes. *Au revoir!*”

He glanced anxiously round for the opening that led from the roof into the house. In the ordinary way it would not be closed; indeed, during the summer months, except when rain threatened, such openings were seldom covered. Unless the fugitive had the gift of second sight, it was improbable that he would ever have imagined that the airship would descend on the very roof of the sheikh’s own dwelling. Thus the inmates would have no reason to guard against intrusion from above. Things might have been different in a populous town, where access could be had from one roof to another. But the kasbah stood quite solitary, and the nearest buildings were inaccessible.

The opening, in point of fact, lay within a few feet of the spot upon which the airship had descended.

Carrying an electric torch in one hand and his revolver in the other, Tom stepped gingerly down the staircase, followed by the Moor, who held his knife ready for instant use. They came across a small vestibule, lit at the far end by the moonlight streaming through a narrow aperture in the wall. To the right and left was a door; one led no doubt to the sheikh’s harem, the other probably to the apartments

of the male members of the family; but Abdul was unable to say which was which. There were no bolts on the outside of these doors, which were fast shut, but each had a very large keyhole.

Inasmuch as the entry to this part of the house was no doubt barred beneath by a door on the staircase, it was quite possible that the inhabitants felt themselves secure enough to dispense with locking these doors. Certainly a Moor will never take any trouble if he can avoid it.

Choosing the right-hand door, Tom gently turned the handle; the door opened to his push, and, inserting his hand, he discovered, as he had ventured to hope, a heavy key in the lock. He silently withdrew it, closed the door, and turned the key on the outside; Abdul at the same time, taking the cue, did the same with the other door on the left. Both locks squeaked somewhat, and Tom thought he heard voices within. Without waiting, however, to assure himself on this point—feeling that he had the inmates secure, at least for a time—he pushed on down the stairway, followed by Abdul, and they came, as they had expected, upon a strong door bolted on their side. Tom gently slid the bolts, opened the door, and found himself in a small vestibule. On the far side of this was another door, which the Moor thought was the inner door of the guest-chamber. This Tom expected would be locked on the outside, but when he flashed his torch at it he saw that the bolts were not shot. He turned the handle of the door, which opened outwards. No doubt, he thought, the Moors considered their prisoner quite safe without the necessity of locking him in from this side. Access to the lower quarters being barred, they would not object to his going up to the roof, perhaps, for fresh air. The other door to the right of the guest-chamber leading on to the terrace was securely locked, as Abdul proved by pushing it gently so as to avoid noise.

Tom tiptoed through the door, and cautiously lowering his torch in order to avoid flashing it on any window openings on the far side,

swept it round the room. He gave a start of keen disappointment when he found that the place was untenanted. It bore traces of recent occupation, but the occupant, whoever he was, had been removed. There were a couple of bright oriental rugs on the floor, a dish such as the Moors are accustomed to serve sweetmeats on, and one or two other native articles; but on one of the rugs lay a well-browned brier pipe, which was clearly of European origin, and indeed Tom was conscious of the familiar odour of tobacco—a very different smell from that made by the kief or hashish smoked by the Moors. And, strangest contrast of all, a somewhat tattered newspaper, and a bulky volume in a red paper cover, showed that the sheikh's prisoner had certainly inhabited this room, and had found some means of lightening his captivity.

Tom took in these details in a moment. Anxious to further his errand, he did not pause to look at the contents of the room minutely, but hurried across to a door on the farther side, leading, he suspected, to the terrace. This was bolted, but from the inside.

He halted in perplexity. What had become of the prisoner?

"Have they taken him to the upper apartments?" he asked Abdul in a whisper.

"No, master," replied the lad. "No Moor would think of it."

"Do you think he has been released? But no: that is unlikely. Salathiel would certainly not have come so far in that case, would he?"

"No. The mouse does not put his head in the jaws of the lion."

"And the smell of tobacco is quite fresh. I believe the prisoner has only lately been removed. Where would they take him if they feared an attempt at rescue?"

With a significant look Abdul pointed downwards.

"The dungeons, eh? Where are they?"

"Under the ground, master."

"Well, we must get down there if we can. Do you know the way?"

The Moor hesitated. He knew too well the fate of unhappy people who had offended the sheikh, and upon whom the sheikh exercised the power of life and death. Once, in Tangier, he had accompanied a friend to such a dungeon, where his friend's father was confined for denying that he possessed hidden treasure. The man's eyes had been put out, one of his hands had been cut off, and he had languished for years in this loathsome place, where he would have starved but for the food brought him daily by his son, and handed to him through a grating. Abdul had no wish to see the inside of the kasbah's dungeon.

But his hesitation was only momentary. Tom was clearly determined to pursue his object, and the Moor reflected that, whatever he did, he was in parlous danger. Besides, did not everything happen by the will of Allah? If it was decreed that he should die, he would die; if he was doomed to a living death in prison, nothing that he could do would avert his fate. So, with a Moor's habitual fatalism, he told his employer all he knew.

There was doubtless one entrance to the dungeon from the patio beneath, where the jailer occupied a room near the great gateway. But there must also be an entrance from within the house. Below the vestibule in which they then stood was probably another vestibule, dividing the rooms of the servants' apartments. Whether there was any communication between the two vestibules he did not know; perhaps it was from the terrace outside. In all probability the inner entrance to the dungeon was from the vestibule below.

This gave Tom pause. So far he had been unmolested; indeed, it was only a couple of minutes since he had left the roof. But the thought of having to pass the servants' apartments was decidedly unpleasant. The sentry's shot must have been heard; he wondered why the servants had not already come up to warn or to take orders from the sheikh. Luckily the sheikh himself and all his family were securely locked in their apartments. The menials might at any rate be

expected to prove less formidable.

There was no time to be lost. It suddenly occurred to Tom that the floor of the vestibule might have a kind of trapdoor. He pulled aside one of the rugs that covered the stones; there was indeed a trapdoor, not secured in any way. Down he went on hands and knees. Releasing the button of the electric torch so that the room was in darkness, he lifted the door half an inch, and guessed from the absence of light that the vestibule below was unoccupied. He cautiously raised the covering still farther and listened. There was no sound. He set his foot on a ladder beneath, and, moving so slowly and gently as to make not so much as a rustle, he went down step by step, pausing once or twice to strain his ears. Still there was no sound. When he reached the floor he ventured to flash a light around him. He saw he was in a stone-flagged chamber of equal size with the vestibule above. In the middle of the floor was a circular stone slab with an iron ring on it, and a thick iron bolt was shut into a socket. There was one door to the room, and, hurrying to it, Tom found that it was fastened on the outside.

So far all was well. He softly summoned Abdul to descend. Then, drawing back the bolt and lifting the slab, he discovered a large opening leading to a spiral stone stairway.

Again he hesitated. What lay below? The disappointment of finding the guest-chamber empty, the prolongation of the search, were beginning to tell upon him. But, crushing down his nervous excitement, he extinguished his torch again, and groped his way round and round until he came once more to level ground. All was still as death. A flash of the torch showed him that he was in a large vaulted corridor, paved with brick. Somewhere in this, he doubted not, was the door into the dungeons.

In order to secure his line of retreat in case of emergency, he felt it was absolutely necessary first to secure the other entrance, wherever it might be, that was ordinarily used by the jailer. He soon discovered

it by the aid of his torch. Here, as he feared, the bolts were on the outside, and the door was securely fastened. Was it possible to barricade the door from the inside? The whole place was empty with the exception of a number of manacles and like effects, and a long hammer, which Abdul said, in a whisper, was used by the Moorish jailers in fastening the chains round their victims' ankles. But there was nothing that promised to be of service as a barricade.

At any moment the jailer, if he had not taken panic from the discharge of the sentry's musket, might enter to assure himself of the security of his prisoners. Could anything be done to delay him? For Tom felt that it was not only a question of the jailer, but of others who would no doubt hasten to his assistance.

Flashing his torch round, Tom noticed that the flooring had been worn and chipped away, no doubt in the process of manacling, and scattered about there was a large quantity of loose particles of brick. An idea struck him. He collected a big handful of these fragments and pushed them into the keyhole. Then, leaving Abdul to complete the work, which would, he hoped, cause the lock to stick, he hastened down the vaulted passage.

CHAPTER XI—PRISON BREAKERS

Tom found himself in a long broad alley-way, flanked by arches. There was no sign of the dungeons, apparently no means of exit. The air was damp and heavy, and the first indication that he was approaching the neighbourhood of the dungeons was afforded by his nose. Coming at length to a narrow flight of steps leading downwards, the fact that he was nearing the object of his quest was borne in upon his sense with ever-increasing pungency.

"Surely," he thought, "the sheikh is not such a beast as to herd Ingleton with the ordinary criminals!"

Another alley-way, apparently underneath the one from which he had come, was disclosed by his electric torch when he reached the bottom of the staircase; but in this case there were doors at his right, and in the thickness of the wall, Moorish fashion, little peep-holes, through which no doubt the warder could spy upon the movements of the captives within.

Which was the door leading to the place of the envoy's confinement? Tom wondered. Was he indeed imprisoned here at all? Tom gave no thought to the predicament in which Abdul and he would be placed if it should prove that they had gone astray; his whole mind was centred on the plight of the English prisoner and the terrible misfortune it would be if he were elsewhere, and deep within him burned a fierce indignation that any countryman of his should be even within hailing distance of so noisome a place as this kasbah dungeon.

So anxious was he to know whether he was on the right track that, scarcely giving a thought to possible consequences, he lifted up his voice and shouted the name of the man for whom he was seeking. The loud tones went rolling beneath the arches, answered by a hundred echoes. But there was a nearer and more material answer.

By the light of his torch, which he kept constantly in use, Tom saw a big, bearded, spectacled face appear at the aperture nearest to him on the right.

"Ach! Gott in Himmel! Vas zat English voice?"

Tom himself was in shadow, but his light fell full on the face of the speaker, and with a gasp of amazement he recognized Herr Hildebrand Schwab, the representative of the Schlagintwerts, who had called on him at Midfont months before and showed such a consuming curiosity to know the use to which he put the Photographic Sensitizer Preparation Number Six. And with a sudden flash of recollection he remembered that Schwab had spoken of proceeding to Morocco on business. Coming out from beneath the arch in which he stood, and holding his torch before him, he approached the aperture. His appearance was hailed by a groan. Schwab did not recognize him in his Moorish dress. Deeply he groaned again, muttering—

"Ach, Ich Unglücklicher!"

His face, utterly woebegone in expression, was just disappearing within the cell when Tom, almost frantic with despair at the thought that the white prisoner was not the man he had come to seek after all, shouted again—

"Ingleton! Sir Mark Ingleton! Are you there?"

Schwab's face reappeared instantly. It was aglow with excitement and hope.

"Gott sei Dank! Ingleton! You zay Ingleton! Zough ze dress be Mohr, ze voice is English. You are indeed English? Answer me for ze love of ze heavens!"

"Yes, I am English," cried Tom impatiently; "I want Sir Mark Ingleton."

"He is here, vizin, inside, viz me, Hildebrand Schwab. Let me out double-quick; I stifle, I suffocate, I do not breaze. Gott sei dank!"

"He is there? Where is he? Tell him I want to speak to him—an

Englishman."

"He sleep sound, he is indispose; but I am ze vorst. I am here ze longest. Open ze door, please, be good enough, have ze kindness ——"

Without more ado, Tom drew back the bolts with a bang and pulled at the door. It was locked. Schwab groaned again; but Tom, handing his torch to Abdul, who was pale with apprehension, called to Schwab to stand away from the door, and blew the lock in with a shot from his revolver. He flung open the door, and burst into the cell. The shot had awakened the envoy, who looked up in a dazed fashion, and asked, in the low voice of a man thoroughly tired, what the disturbance was about.

"God be praise, we are save! Do not notice ze dress; it is nozink; ze man is English. Ach! it is no good; ze door is open, but ve are in chains. Ach! Zum Teufel! It is kaput—all up!"

Tom pushed past him impatiently.

"Quick, Abdul," he said, "the hammer!"

Hastening to Sir Mark, who had risen from the floor, with half a dozen sturdy blows Tom snapped the chains that fixed his ankle bands to staples in the wall, then performed the like service for Schwab. He made no attempt to release their ankles from the fetters: there was no time for this, and he feared also to do them an injury. The sounds had caused commotion in the further dungeon, where the sheikh's other prisoners were confined. Chains were clanking, men were shouting, the uproar was so great that it must reach the ears of the jailer if he were anywhere in the neighbourhood, and though he was shut off from the vaults, he might burst the locks and bring a host of armed men to the rescue.

"We have no time to lose," said Tom. "Come with me."

"But, pardon me——" said Sir Mark.

"I can't explain now," Tom interrupted. "Come along; it is all right, only

we must get away at once."

"At vunce, Sir Ingleton," said Schwab. "You hear zat! For ze sake of anyzink, be a man!"

"My good sir——" began Sir Mark: but Tom again cut him short.

"Can you walk?" he asked, noticing that the Englishman tottered as he stood.

"With assistance, perhaps."

At once Tom caught him by an arm, bidding Abdul take the other. Supporting him, they led him along the passage, up the stairway to the upper corridor, Schwab panting and ejaculating behind them. Even before they reached the corridor they heard a tremendous battering at the door whose lock had been filled with fragments of brick.

It was so stout a barrier that Tom had no fear that it would be broken down by anything short of a battering ram, and it was not likely that the Moors had at hand an instrument ready for this purpose. His confidence was, however, soon shaken, for, before the party, encumbered with the enfeebled envoy, had begun to ascend the winding stairway leading from the arched corridor to the vestibule above, there was the sound of a very heavy body striking the door, followed by an ominous creak. Leaving the others to precede him, Tom stationed himself on the narrow stair, the hammer in one hand, his revolver in the other. He was determined not to use the revolver except in the last extremity, but he had no such compunctions about using the hammer.

Suddenly in the midst of the crashing blows upon the door there was the report of a rifle. The Moors were adopting his own device of blowing in the lock. The door gave way, and by the flash of his torch, Tom saw a crowd of swarthy Riffians swarming through the opening. The door at the foot of the winding stair leading to the corridor was somewhat ruinous; it was apparently seldom used, the sheikh

depending for his security upon the heavy trapdoor above. Tom, however, succeeded in pulling it to before the Moors were upon him, and shot the single crazy bolt that still held. Then he darted up the stairs after the rest. They were just lifting the envoy through the trap. Schwab was waiting his turn, and when he heard Tom rushing up, he sprang through the opening with extraordinary agility. The trapdoor was let down and bolted; they hastened up the stairway to the upper vestibule adjoining the guest-chamber, thence up to the sheikh's quarters on the floor above, bolting every door behind them.

Even through the thick walls of the kasbah they had heard sounds of great excitement in the town. Evidently the whole place was now alive. And there was danger to be anticipated within, for as they groped their way up the last flight of stairs leading to the roof, their steps momentarily guided by the flashes of Tom's torches, the sounds of a tremendous battering near at hand struck upon their ears. Evidently the sheikh himself was now trying to make his way out. They hastened their steps as much as Sir Mark's enfeebled state permitted; Tom indeed was in such desperate anxiety, for pursuit could not be long delayed, that he forced the pace in a way that drew a protest from the Englishman—even in this extremity a diplomatist.

They came to the last flight of stairs leading to the roof.

"Is that you, Dorrell?" came the voice of Oliphant from above. Nervously restless, first on account of Tom's long absence, and then at the violent sounds within and without the building, he had left the airship and stationed himself with his revolver at the top of the staircase leading to the roof, to cover Tom's retreat if he proved to be hard pressed.

"All well!" shouted Tom in reply.

In another minute all four emerged upon the roof, and Oliphant gave a whistle of amazement and consternation when he saw an unexpected addition to the party.

"Two of them?" he ejaculated.

“Yes; the sheikh had a German gentleman—”

“Hildebrand Schwab, representative of ze excellent firma of Schlagintwert and——”

“Hang it, we can’t stop for introductions now,” said Tom. “Abdul, run down to the door of the sheikh’s room and persuade him that he risks his life if he comes out. We shall want a minute or two to get ready.”

The Moor obeyed, not without a look of nervousness. At first he could scarcely make his voice heard above the uproar within the sheikh’s room; but succeeding at last, he began a conversation which might have shocked and would certainly have amused Tom if he could have understood it.

“Is the most excellent lord the sheikh within?” shouted Abdul at the top of his voice.

The noise ceased.

“Certainly he is, thou misbegotten son of a pig!” said the frenzied sheikh. “Open this door, or by the beard of the Prophet I will flay thee alive, thou rat.”

“Peace, O sheikh! Dost thou value thy life so little, foolish one?” Abdul was gaining courage; his enemy was on the other side of the door. “Peace, thou kaffir; I spit upon thee. Dost thou think to pass through till it be the good pleasure of those who have captured thy kasbah to permit thee? Know it is I, Abdul ben Cassim, and verily I and the good men with me will cut thee in pieces, first plucking out one by one the hairs of thy beard, if thou showest thy pig’s snout beyond this door.”

This seemed to stagger the sheikh, for his next words were uttered in a milder tone.

“What is thy purpose, O Abdul?”

“Know, thou dog of a dog, that a great sultan, the King of England, hath sent his most trusty wazeer to wrest from thee his servant, whom thou didst treacherously seize and shut in thy stinking dungeon. There

now lies at this very door a monstrous bomb which will go off—Allah is great!—the instant this door is opened. Dost thou believe, dog? Verily thou wilt be shattered into as many pieces as there are lies in thy heart if thou dost but move the door the tenth part of an inch. But the King of England is merciful; he will not do you or your folk harm: he knows other ways of avenging the injury his servant has suffered at thy hands. Verily thou art in bad case, thou two-faced dog. Before the growing of a fingernail thou wilt be haled to Marrakesh, and then thou wilt suffer the pangs of Tophet."

And Abdul went on to revile the sheikh in terms that cannot be rendered in our modest English. His inventiveness was very creditable to his presence of mind, for though the noise in the sheikh's apartments had ceased, the uproar below was growing moment by moment in intensity. The great gate had been thrown open, the patio was thronged with fierce Moors enraged at the indignity put upon their chief, and it was scarcely possible that the doors below, stout as they were, could long withstand the furious blows with which they were assailed.

Meanwhile Tom had assured himself that his machinery was in order. Sir Mark had already entered the car. Tom was beside him, ready to start the propellers; Schwab was ensconced in the corner furthest from danger.

"Call Abdul, Oliphant," said Tom.

Oliphant went to the head of the stairs and called; Abdul came bounding up, and in half a minute all five were packed into the car. It was a very tight fit, and Tom felt a tremor of apprehension as he pressed the lever. The vertical propellers answered instantly to his touch, but they beat the air ineffectually: the airship absolutely refused to rise.

"It won't lift us!" he said, aghast. "We're too heavy. Some one must be left behind."

"I'll stay," said Oliphant at once. "Take the others to the hill and come

back for me. I can manage for half an hour or so with my revolver."

"Not a bit of it. I want your help with the machinery. What on earth can we do?"

"Leave Abdul?"

"Can't hear of it: he couldn't defend himself long, and he'd be frightfully tortured if they got him. We can't all get away at once, that's certain; and, as we certainly can't leave Sir Mark, we must leave the one we didn't reckon on. Herr Schwab——"

"No. I refuse. I vill not stay. I am here."

"I'm afraid you must. We shan't be long. I'll drop the others a mile or two away, and come back for you at once."

"Never in ze vorld. I protest. I am Jarman sobjeck: is not ze life of Jarman sobjeck of more vorth zan ze life of a Mohr? Our Kaiser, who is in Berlin——"

"We can't stop to argue it. They won't kill you, at any rate; they know enough of your Kaiser perhaps to refrain from that: whereas they'd kill the Moor to a certainty. We can't all lose our lives for you. In short, you must get out, and be quick about it, or, by Jove! we'll have to throw you out."

"It is terrible; it is unkind. I cannot stay alone; no longer am I as I vas; I lose pounds in ze prison. I am not made for zis. Some vun muss remain viz me; I care not who: some vun to give me courage."

Here Abdul stepped into the breach and volunteered to stay with the German.

"I have it!" cried Oliphant. "The trapdoor that covers the opening is at the other end of the roof, by the parapet there. We can shut that down and bolt it. And, by George! the stones of the parapet are pretty loose. Abdul and Mr. Schwab can pile some of them on the trap; we'll leave them our revolvers, and with a little pluck they can keep the blackguards at bay until we get back."

"That's it. You'll be as safe as the Bank of England, Mr. Schwab.

Quick! Out with you! Here's my revolver!"

"Ach! I am man of peace; vunce I vas var gorresbondent, and——"

"For goodness' sake get out, man. Don't you see you're endangering the whole lot of us, yourself included. Oliphant, we shall have to fling him out."

But at this threat Schwab rose and stepped on to the roof, his face a very picture of woe. Oliphant assisted Abdul to place the trapdoor over the opening, and of course made the discovery that the bolts were on the inside.

"But the stones will do," said Oliphant. "Buck up, Mr. Schwab; you're not absolutely helpless, are you?"

"It is true, I have carried stones, but zey vere small," said Schwab lugubriously, remembering the means by which he had mounted the fence at Midfont in pursuit of business. Leaving him to it, Oliphant got back into the car. Tom pressed the lever, and the airship, relieved of near two hundredweight of German subject and the lesser bulk of the Moor, soared into the air. Tom's last view, as the vessel rose clear of the kasbah, was Schwab limping across the roof under the burden of a large stone from the coping.

"A most singular proceeding!" murmured Sir Mark, as the airship whirred over the hills. "I wonder how I stand—diplomatically considered. The vessel goes with consummate ease. There is positively no roll—nothing to cause seasickness."

Tom laughed. The matter-of-fact at this moment was very refreshing.

"I hope you will redeem your promise to rescue Mr. Schwab," the envoy continued. "He has been a great joy to me in my captivity."

"Oh yes, we'll get him. We shall drop you in a few minutes. You will not mind being left for a little while?"

"Not at all, not at all. I find the air and the motion most invigorating. I have lately been very conscious of the inconvenience of having a nose."

Tom did not know, though Oliphant suspected, that Sir Mark's cool manner was adopted intentionally—to ease the strain on their nerves. A man is not trained to diplomacy for nothing. He kept up a quiet flow of nothings until the hill was reached.

"A very airy situation," he remarked, as he was set down on the hill-top.

"Yes. You'll find it cold," said Tom. "Here's my coat."

"Thanks. Having escaped asphyxia, it would certainly be a pity to contract pneumonia. You look quite comfortable yourself: the Moorish djellab is a very warm garment, I should think."

He put on Tom's reefer, which had lain in a corner of the car. Then Tom sent the airship aloft again, and hurried back to the kasbah.

CHAPTER XII—A HITCH

Short as the time seemed, it was in reality nearly an hour before the airship once more rested on the roof of the kasbah. While it was still hovering above, Tom manœuvring for a landing, there came the muffled sound of shots and the rending of wood.

“They’ve broken in,” cried Oliphant.

The Moors had indeed burst through the lower doors, released the infuriated sheikh, and, finding themselves unable to lift the trapdoor, were firing upwards through it. Schwab, who had been sitting on the pile of stones which he and Abdul had heaped on the covering, to reinforce their weight with his own, slipped off with amazing alacrity just as the airship came to rest.

“Gott sei Dank!” he exclaimed, as Tom joined him.

"TOM, SEIZING A BIG STONE, THREW IT WITH ALL HIS FORCE INTO THE BLACK ROOM BENEATH."

He needed no invitation to hurry into the car. As soon as Abdul was

aboard Tom started the engines. To his consternation the airship again refused to rise.

“Good heavens! what a weight you must be!” he exclaimed.

“Colossal! But I lose pounds in ze——”

“Oh, shut up!” cried Oliphant impatiently. “We can’t make another journey, Dorrell. The cover won’t support the stones much longer with those ruffians smashing the wood as they’re doing.”

He had scarcely spoken when the woodwork gave way, the stones crashed down the staircase, and there were cries of pain and alarm from the men beneath. But it was impossible to suppose that they were all hurt, and the passage was now clear for the rest. Something must be done at once to gain a little time until the problem of removing Schwab’s colossal weight could be solved.

Stopping his engines, which were working furiously, but with no effect, Tom, followed by Oliphant and the Moor, jumped from the car and hurried towards the opening. They were greeted by a musket shot; but Tom, seizing a big stone, threw it with all his force into the black room beneath. There were more cries from below, repeated when Oliphant and the Moor followed suit, each with missiles of the same character. Then there was silence for a time. The Moors were apparently nonplussed.

“You can find your way to the hill if I land you below?” asked Tom of Abdul.

“Yes, master.”

“Hold the roof, Oliphant. I won’t be ten minutes. Don’t shoot ’em unless you’re very hard pressed.”

Tom and the Moor sprang into the car, the airship again ascended, and came down about a quarter of a mile from the village walls. There was nobody in sight; without doubt the whole population of the place was congregated about the kasbah. Once more Tom ascended, alighting on the roof just as Oliphant, using the wooden

shaft of Abdul's hammer, was driving back one man, more venturesome than the rest, who had attempted to make his way up. There was no time to carry more stones from the coping to serve as missiles, so Tom and Oliphant at last fired their revolvers, two shots each, taking care, however, to avoid the opening. Tom hoped that the sound of the shots would give pause to the men below, most of whom must have hitherto been unaware that the intruders carried firearms.

Immediately after they had fired, the two made a dash for the car, scrambled aboard, and set the engines in motion.

"Gott sei Dank!" cried Schwab again, as the airship rose steadily above the roof.

As if they had known by some intuition what was happening, the Moors at this moment made a rush, and before the airship had sailed a hundred yards from the kasbah, figures appeared on the roof. A moment afterwards one or two shots were fired, but they were without effect; the airship sailed on, pursued by yells of baffled rage.

In order to draw away pursuit from his real direction, Tom headed the airship north-east, and it was not until he was well out of sight of the kasbah that he put the helm up and steered straight for the hill-top.

"We've come out of this uncommonly well," said Oliphant. "I was on thorns all the time you and Abdul were absent."

"We're not out of it yet," rejoined Tom. "The fuel's nearly done. These comings and goings have used a terrible lot of the paste, and I doubt whether there's enough to make one journey to the yacht—let alone two. I didn't reckon on another passenger besides Ingleton."

"Who is this freak? You seem to know him?" Oliphant spoke quietly: Herr Schwab was lying against the rail of the car only a few feet away.

"Met him once. His name's Schwab; he's an agent for the company I get my powder from. Haven't had time yet to ask him how he got into this mess. I say, it looks as if a storm is coming up."

“Yes, the wind’s rising, and the clouds are scudding along at a great pace. How will she behave in a storm?”

“Don’t know, and don’t want to know just now. We should be in a pretty hobble if the machine were to get smashed up altogether.”

While Tom and Oliphant were thus talking in low tones, Herr Schwab was deeply ruminating. He had been struck, on the roof of the kasbah, by something familiar in the speech of this Englishman who was masquerading as a Moor, but in the agitation of the moment he could not sift his recollections. Now, however, safe in the car of an aeroplane, sailing with almost imperceptible motion through the air, he was taking the opportunity to search his memory. Just as the airship arrived above the hill-top where Sir Mark Ingleton was waiting, and Tom was preparing to descend, he was startled by a loud exclamation from the German.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

“Nozink, nozink at all. I know you vat you are. Mr. Thomas Dorrell! And ze Photographic Sensitizer Preparation Number Six. I know all about him; jawohl! Zere are business for Schlagintwert: I do not mind ze captivities now: business are business.”

Oliphant looked inquiringly at Tom; but the moment was not propitious for explanations. Tom’s whole attention was engaged by the machinery. The airship alighted without mishap, and Tom as he stepped out of the car was greeted by Sir Mark Ingleton.

“I have a new conception of the music of the spheres,” he said. “Your approach was heralded by an immense humming, which, I take it, will discount the usefulness of the airship in time of war.”

“Zat vill be chance for Schlagintwert,” interposed Schwab: “to invent somezink vat stop ze row.”

“Precisely,” said Sir Mark, with a faint smile.

“How do you feel now, sir?” asked Tom.

“Greatly invigorated by the fresh air. I am glad of your coat. May I

know to whom I am indebted for this surprising change in my fortunes?"

"My name's Dorrell," said Tom. "I happened to be rather lucky in getting my airship to go just when it could be made useful."

"Viz Schlagintwert's Photographic Sensitizer Preparation Number Six," added Schwab.

"This is Mr. Oliphant, Lord Langside's son," Tom went on.

"Indeed!" With fine courtesy Sir Mark perfectly concealed his amazement. Oliphant still wore his stoker's clothes, and the black smudges on his face had given him a striking resemblance to a coal-heaver. "I am grateful to the Prime Minister for this novel and adventurous expedition," added the envoy.

"My father knows nothing about it, sir," said Oliphant. "We were afraid he wouldn't allow it if we told him."

"I see. Nothing succeeds like success. Did you come all the way from England in this admirable machine?"

"No, sir. We were brought out on Mr. Greatorex's yacht, which is now waiting for us at the shore."

"That is good news, for in truth, seeing the limited carrying capacity of your airship, I had wondered how we were all to get away."

"That's our difficulty, sir. Our fuel is almost gone, and I'm very much afraid there isn't enough left to make even one journey back to the yacht. There's plenty on board, if we *can* manage to reach it."

"In that case perhaps you and Mr. Oliphant had better return without us. If you reach the yacht safely, you can come back and fetch us; if you do not—well, things will be no worse than they were."

"I don't care about doing that, sir. We came out to rescue you. I think you had better come with us. Our fuel may last out; the sooner you are safe aboard the yacht the better; and if we only get within sight of her it will be all right, for Mr. Greatorex will certainly send a boat's crew to fetch us off."

“Had you not better take Mr. Schwab first? He has been in captivity longer than I.”

“And I have vair important business,” said Schwab eagerly.

“I think my arrangement is best, sir. You see, your position is a matter of state importance—international importance, I might say; all Europe is more or less interested in your fate, whereas——”

“Ach!” interrupted Schwab, “zey insult me, ze Mohrs; me, a Jarman sobjeck; zerefore zey insult also our Kaiser, who is in Berlin. Zat is important.”

“With all respect to your Kaiser, Mr. Schwab,” said Tom, “we are three to one here, and I think the interests of the majority must prevail.”

“But ze population of Jarmany is grosser zan ze population of Great Britain. Ve grow vair fast.”

“Therefore your Kaiser can spare one individual better than our King. We must settle it so, Mr. Schwab. We’ll take Sir Mark to the yacht and then come back for you—as we have already done.”

“But if you forget—vere am I zen? Mr. Greatorex is business man, perhaps he vant to make haste for home. Besides, you try to keep ze secret of ze Photographic Sensitizer Preparation Number Six. I discover ze secret. You vant to keep me out, so zat I shall not take out patent for Schlagintwert. Zat is business!”

“You may take my word for it that we’ll come back for you,” said Tom patiently. Oliphant was fuming: Sir Mark Ingleton was quietly enjoying the situation. “And here’s Abdul.” The young Moor at this moment came over the brow of the hill. “Perhaps he will stay and keep you company.”

“I have enough gombany of ze Mohrs,” said Schwab dismally. “Give notice, I shall have big claim for damage. Ze loss of business is colossal.”

“You’ll make it up when you put your Photographic Sensitizer

Preparation Number Six on the market under a new name. Abdul, you will stay with Mr. Schwab until we get back?"

Abdul agreed at once. In the event of a party coming from Ain Afroo to capture him he could retreat to the caves, which were so difficult of access that he might hope to defy attack for a time, even if his hiding-place were discovered. The chief difficulty would be food and water; but he could slip down into the woods before daybreak and gather a quantity of fruit; perhaps also snare one or two wild animals; and if Tom would leave behind the now almost empty canister in which he kept the fuel for the engines, he could fill that with water from the hill springs.

Schwab's countenance, as he heard these arrangements discussed, was that of a man very ill at ease. But he had apparently come to the conclusion that further protest would be unavailing, and he held his peace, summing up in his mind, possibly, the amount of his future claim for damages. Tom handed Abdul his revolver, for use in the last resort; then followed Oliphant and the envoy into the car.

"You keep your vord!" cried Schwab, as the airship rose into the now overclouded sky.

Tom set the engines at half speed, partly to husband his fuel, partly because, moon and stars being now obscured, he felt the same kind of reluctance to go fast that a driver would feel in going through a dark country lane. It was a little before three in the morning. He hoped to reach the yacht about dawn, though, having in the darkness no means of guiding his course, he foresaw the possibility of going out of the way. But a strong wind had blown up from the east, and with this at his back he knew that he must in due time reach the sea. Rain began to fall, at first in large scattered drops, finally in a steady downpour, and when the grey dawn at last broke through the sky, all three occupants of the car were thoroughly drenched and miserable.

Tom had anxiously watched his fuel supply. When the rain ceased and the sky became clearer, and he caught sight of the sea afar off,

he saw that there was not the smallest chance of reaching the shore.

“How far is it, do you think?” asked Oliphant.

“More than ten miles, I fancy. I’ve scraped up the last ounces of paste; we shall be lucky if it carries us another five miles.”

“And what then?”

“Goodness knows! I don’t know what part of the shore we are heading for. We may be miles north or south of the yacht for all I can tell.”

“Will they see us on board?”

“Don’t think so. You see, the yacht, when we left her, was moored pretty close inshore, and, unless she runs out a good way, the cliffs will intercept the view. By Jove! we haven’t come far wrong, though. You see those two islands? I noticed them from the deck. They’re a few miles south of where we lay to. Here goes the last of the fuel, Oliphant; we can’t keep up more than five minutes. The only thing to be done is to let her down at a suitable spot, and then gain the shore on foot, and attract the attention of some one on board. No doubt they’re keeping a pretty keen lookout.”

They were now passing over a considerable stretch of wooded country. But as Tom was looking about for a place convenient for landing, he saw to his consternation that they were within sight of a village of some size. The airship was no more than six hundred feet from the ground: Tom had not dared to keep it at any greater altitude, and he could scarcely hope that it had escaped observation. To descend at once was absolutely imperative: yet a descent in full sight of the village would certainly bring unwelcome and hostile visitors. In order to stave off, even for a time, the inevitable, he selected a spot that seemed to be about a couple of miles from the village—a large clearing in the midst of the wood, about halfway up a gently rising hill. There he dropped gently to earth.

The airship had scarcely come to rest before he saw, from the village

below, a party of horsemen issuing at full speed from the gate. Tom counted more than a dozen men, and within a minute these were followed by another dozen.

"We're in for it now," he said. "They'll be on us in a few minutes."

"We can't fight 'em with only one revolver and a carbine," said Oliphant ruefully. "They'll collar us and hold us to ransom—perhaps we'll all find ourselves before long in the kasbah of Ain Afroo."

"May I make a suggestion?" said Sir Mark Ingleton. "The airship has failed us; we are, it appears, about to be surrounded by horsemen who are doubtless well armed; flight is therefore impossible. It is equally impossible, as Mr. Oliphant says, to fight. Before now, in similar circumstances, diplomacy has been of some avail; and it is but right that I, in whose behalf you gentlemen have been brought to your present plight, should exercise my poor abilities in disentangling the knot."

"What do you propose, sir?" asked Tom, inwardly remarking that diplomacy seemed to make a man tolerably long-winded.

"It is that Mr. Oliphant and myself should go forth to meet these children of nature, waving a white handkerchief as if to welcome them. I will explain to them, in terms they will comprehend, and with a sufficient regard for the truth, what our situation is. They will doubtless convey us to their village, whether they believe me or not. In the meantime you, Mr. Dorrell, will have hidden yourself in a tree—no difficult feat to a man of your years; and when you see a fitting opportunity, you will steal your way to the shore, rejoin your friends on the yacht, and take such steps as may suggest themselves in consultation with them to effect our release."

"A capital idea!" said Tom.

"But can we do it? Can you speak to the Moors in their own tongue?" asked Oliphant.

"My dear fellow, your father selected me for this mission precisely on

account of my knowledge of Arabic," said Sir Mark. "If these Riffians do not understand me, it will be because my speech is so much purer than theirs."

"Well, good luck to you!" cried Tom. "I'm off before they see me."

And donning his djellab, which he had spread on the ground to dry, he disappeared among the trees.

CHAPTER XIII—DIPLOMACY

Before the band of horsemen had approached the edge of the little plateau where the airship lay, the two men stepped forward through the trees at its lower edge and waved to the oncomers with every sign of welcome.

“I hope none of them will recognize me,” said Sir Mark in a low tone to Oliphant. “Probably few in this wild district have ever been in Tangier, where my features are tolerably well known; and having been for some time unable to shave—these followers of the Prophet are forbidden the use of the razor, and Mr. Schwab does not carry one—I look perhaps a little unlike myself.”

The horsemen came up at a gallop, bringing their horses to a halt when it seemed to Oliphant that he and his companion must be trampled to the ground.

“Peace be with you!” said Sir Mark in Arabic, making a slight inclination.

“And with thee, peace!” returned the leader of the party, looking not a little surprised at this orthodox salutation from a N’zrani.

“In the name of the most Merciful!” Sir Mark continued. “Thou dost behold us in sore straits, O Son of the Mountain. We are brothers under our skin, thou and I, and I crave thy help.”

“Bismillah! I am thy host, and all that I have is thine.”

“Thou sayest well. Behold this strange monster that lieth on the ground beyond us. It was made by a countryman of mine, to simulate the flying of birds in the air—a most wondrous thing, and worthy to be seen by his Shereefian Majesty the Sultan himself. I was indeed on my way to visit the Sultan, but was prevented by a most untoward happening. (That is strictly true, though the fact is somewhat post-

dated," he added in an aside.) "Even a bird tires with overmuch flying; and, as thou seest, this thing that imitates the flying of a bird tires also, so much so, indeed, that we saw that its wings would not carry us the full extent of our journey, and we were on our way back to the coast in order to repair its strength, when it failed us utterly. Wherefore, friend, we ask thee to lend us the assistance of some sturdy men from your village to carry our poor bird to Casa Blanca, or to any ship that may chance to be off your shore. (They may have seen the yacht.) For this service we will reward them liberally."

"Bismillah!" ejaculated the Moor. Oliphant, watching his face during Sir Mark's address, had caught a fleeting expression of perplexity and disappointment. Expecting to make an out-and-out capture, he was no doubt somewhat nonplussed at this request for assistance. But he had the Moor's ready adaptability to circumstances. His speech gave no sign of his thoughts.

"Bismillah!" he repeated. "We are all in God's hands. Let my brother give thanks to Allah the most Merciful that he came to a man so friendly disposed as Salaam son of Absalaam. It shall be even as thou wishest, Sidi. But first thou and thy son must come to my village, for your bird yonder is too heavy to be carried without much preparation. It will need the shoulders of a great number of men. But while the men are making ready, enter my house, all too unworthy to shelter you: yet we will comfort you with food, and do all that is in our power to please our guests."

"We thank thee, O Salaam, for thy proffered hospitality, which we will accept, knowing that all things will be provided for our comfort."

"So be it, Sidi. But within the walls of my village, when I first looked heavenwards and saw this strange flying thing, did I not see three men borne along in it, and one of them in djellab something like my own?"

Sir Mark smiled and, pointing to a part of the apparatus that was coloured grey, said—

“No doubt in the distance my brother mistook that for a person. We are two, as thou seest.”

The Moor still looked somewhat mistrustfully around. Then, with an appearance of being convinced, he dismounted, and ordered his followers to dismount also, asking his guest to choose whichever of the horses he pleased for himself and his son. At this imputation of kinship, Sir Mark elevated his eyebrows; the young man was certainly a disreputable-looking object. Thinking it policy to accept the offer, Sir Mark mounted the head-man’s own steed, Oliphant following his example with the horse of one of his party. Then, bidding a score of the men lift the airship on their shoulders, the head-man and the rest remounted, and led the way to the village. Both Sir Mark and Oliphant were glad that the distance was not great, for the high Moorish saddles were a sore trial to their unaccustomed limbs. The envoy, at any rate, was under no delusion as to the nature of the hospitality promised. From the manner in which the tribesmen escorted the two Englishmen to the village, there could be little doubt that they were prisoners.

From his perch in the tree Tom noticed that although the majority of the horsemen accompanied his friends towards the walls, four or five detached themselves from the party and returned to the plantation, which they proceeded to search pretty thoroughly. He made himself as small as he could among the foliage when they passed beneath him, but they did not look up; apparently it did not occur to them that any one should have mounted into a tree. When they had finished their fruitless search, they went, not in the direction their fellow-villagers had taken, but towards the coast. Tom saw them spread out as they rode from the plantation, and watched them until they were mere specks in the distance. Then, when they were, he supposed, perfectly satisfied that the suspected third member of the English party could not have escaped them, they wheeled round and returned one by one again passing not far from his hiding-place. Clearly, if they were so suspicious, it would be expedient for him to remain for

some time in the tree—an unpleasant prospect, for he was becoming very stiff and cramped, and suffering rather severely from hunger and thirst.

It was some hours before he ventured to slip to the ground. Even then he did not dare to leave the shelter of the wood, knowing that in the open he would inevitably be observed. But he stretched his limbs and found a few blackberries, which somewhat appeased his hunger. Every now and then he again climbed the tree to find out whether any one was approaching, or whether a watch was still being kept. Late in the afternoon he descried, on the further side of the village, a horseman approaching from the direction of the hills. He came at full gallop, and rode straight into the village, disappearing there from Tom's view.

"Hope to goodness he isn't a messenger from the sheikh!" thought Tom.

At last, when the sun had set, and the sky was darkening, he deemed it safe to leave his hiding-place. If the yacht had remained where he had last seen her—and it was scarcely likely that Mr. Greatorex would shift his anchorage—he conjectured that a five mile walk would bring him to the nearest point of the shore. Fortunately it was a beautiful night, clear and starlit, though the moon had not yet risen. Taking his bearings very carefully by the stars, in anticipation of a return journey, he started, going very slowly and cautiously, watching every shadow lest it should indicate the presence of a Moor. Ignorant of their language, he knew well that he had no chance whatever of slipping past if he were once accosted. In such a case he could trust only to his lightness of foot. But nothing happened to cause him uneasiness, and after trudging along for nearly two hours he was beyond measure delighted to see what was evidently a masthead light some distance out at sea. No native craft would show a light; he could hardly doubt that the *Dandy Dinmont* and his friends were before him.

He was quickening his step in the pleasure of this discovery, when

suddenly, without warning, he found himself at the edge of an encampment lying in a slight hollow at the summit of the cliffs. He started back, but it was too late. A Moor, swathed in his hooded djellab, came out of the darkness and spoke to him. Tom saw that it might be fatal to run now; he walked on, hoping that he might pass without replying. But the Moor spoke again, more sharply, in a more questioning tone. Tom, whose head was covered with the hood, mumbled something beneath his breath; but his unpractised tongue could not achieve the hard guttural accent of the Moorish speech, and the sentinel took a hasty step towards him.

There was now nothing for it but to take to his heels. Disguise was no longer possible, and, to free his limbs, he cast the djellab from him, and dashed at full speed across the grass to the edge of the cliff. The slope was steep, but he scarcely gave a thought to the risks he ran. Scrambling over, he lay down and rolled from top to bottom, with many a gash and bruise from sharp edges of the rock.

Loud shouts pursued him. The camp was aroused. Picking himself up, feeling breathless and dazed, he sped across the sandy stretch of beach and sent a sounding hail in the direction of the yacht; perchance his voice might carry above the rustle of the surf and the cries of his pursuers. He heard men scurrying down a path in the cliff somewhere behind him; then their footsteps on the light shingle that lay above the sand. Even if his cry had been heard on the yacht, it was impossible that a boat should reach him before he was overtaken. There was only one way to safety. He plunged into the surf, and struck out towards the vessel. A shot followed him, but he cared nothing for that; in the darkness it would puzzle an expert marksman to hit him, when nothing of him could be seen but a head bobbing up and down. Not till he had swum well out of the reach of his pursuers, who had not followed him into the sea, did the thought of sharks cross his mind. Then he trod water for a little, and, making a bell of his hands, sent another prolonged cry across the water.

Is that an answering hail? He shouts once more; yes, a cry comes back to him: “Ahoy-o!” But at the same moment he hears also the sound of paddles, to his right, apparently from a bend of the shore. The Moors have not given him up, then. Again he presses on, putting all his force into a strong side-stroke. Now another sound falls upon his ear; the welcome sound of oars plied sturdily in rowlocks. The yacht’s boat is coming to meet him. But the pursuers are the nearer—will his friends arrive in time? His long exertions since he left the yacht, his want of food and sleep, have robbed him of his strength. His pace becomes slower and slower. The pursuers’ boat is coming up behind, while yet the beat of oars before him sounds terribly distant. But he is still swimming; every yard he makes is a yard added to the speed of the friendly boat. He struggled on; and the Moors were still some distance behind when, gasping and spent, he was helped by Timothy and another into his ark of safety.

But the boat did not head at once for the yacht.

“Give way, men!” cried Captain Bodgers himself, at the tiller.

He pointed the nose of the boat straight for the Moors’ light craft. Eight sturdy British sailors pulled with a will. There was a crash, a cry, and a dozen Moors were in the water, struggling to right their capsized boat.

“That’s all right. Now we’ll get back, my men,” said Captain Bodgers, and some few minutes thereafter Tom was assisted up the side of the yacht, and into the arms of Mr. Greatorex.

“God bless my soul, what has happened?” said the worthy merchant.

“We’ve got him—Ingleton,” murmured Tom faintly. “He’s with Oliphant, captured again. Schwab’s in the cave with Abdul.”

“He’s light-headed, poor fellow!” said Mr. Greatorex. “Here, some one, blankets, and brandy—look *alive* now.”

Tom was soon stripped, dried, swathed in warm blankets, and dosed with brandy till his blood tingled. Mr. Greatorex fussed round him,

waiving his proffered explanations until he was thoroughly recovered. Then Tom gave him an account of all that had happened since he left the yacht, Mr. Greatorex breaking in every now and then with "Dear, dear!" "You don't *say* so!" "The villains!" "What a *mercy*!" and such like exclamations. Early in the narrative he interrupted with a question:

"You say Oliphant! Who's Oliphant? Am I on my *head* or my *heels*?"

"Oh, I forgot you didn't know," said Tom with a smile. "Your new stoker was Oliphant in disguise. You see, Byles, your late stoker, had to remain at home and attend to his sick mother."

"No more sick than I am!" declared Mr. Greatorex. "Don't believe he *had* a mother! M'Cracken, indeed! I'll M'Cracken him! I hope his father will get him well *thrashed* when he goes back to school."

"He's rather big for that, don't you think?"

"The bigger the better! I never *heard* of such a thing! The impudence of it! And taking us all *in* so! What things are coming to I don't know. No obedience, no respect for age—pretending to be Scotch, too ——"

"Well, he is Scotch, you know."

"Don't tell *me*! He's only Scotch when it suits him. There are others like him in the Lords. He was never Scotch in *my* house—where he shall never show his face again, *never*!"

Tom was not deceived by this explosion of wrath. He knew very well that Mr. Greatorex was only relieving the tension of his feelings, and working off his nervous excitability on the most convenient object. "Les absents ont toujours tort," he remembered. Mr. Greatorex presently calmed down, and heard the rest of the story in comparative quietude.

"And what are we to *do*?" he said at the close. "Swob doesn't matter; we're not bound to lift a finger for *him*; but we can't leave Ingleton and

M'C—— and Oliphant in the hands of those wretches. They'll break up our machine, too, and play the very deuce with *my property*. What are we to *do*?"

What Tom answered is shown by subsequent events. Two or three hours after his return to the yacht, when he had had a thorough rest and a good meal, a well-armed party, consisting of the whole ship's company except the cook and one seaman, left the yacht, on which all lights had been extinguished, and rowed with muffled oars to a sheltered cove on the south side of the bay—that furthest removed from the Arab encampment. Mr. Greatorex had insisted on joining the party. In vain Tom pointed out that a hard march was before them, suggesting delicately that Mr. Greatorex was not so light as he once was. The merchant puffed the objection away. They disembarked in dead silence, and, leaving two of their number to take the boat back to the yacht, made their way cautiously up the cliff.

Led by Tom, the party, ten in all, struck off in the direction of the village. Thanks to the light of the moon, which now lay a little above the horizon, Tom was able to make a fairly straight course for the plantation in which he had hidden during the previous day. Once or twice he strayed from the proper track, and ultimately found that he was nearly a mile from his objective; but this was not bad, considering that there was no beaten road, and they had to tramp across rough country. When he reached the plantation he was no longer in doubt as to the true direction; during his long stay among the trees he had had time to take his bearings pretty thoroughly.

Mr. Greatorex was blown by the time they came to the clearing in which the airship had descended, and Tom begged him to remain hidden in the plantation while the rest went on to the village.

"Pff!" panted the perspiring old gentleman. "Never gave up *anything* yet; on you go!"

But a slight halt was made while Tom completed arrangements for his night raid. The village was walled; the gates would no doubt be

shut, as at Ain Afroo; the wall must be scaled. Captain Bodgers selected the biggest men to give their more active comrades a "leg-up." These latter were provided with ropes, by which they might haul up the others when they had themselves gained a footing on the wall. Tom impressed on them all the necessity of maintaining dead silence. He estimated that the village contained about a hundred fighting men, and if the approach of the raiders were discovered in time for the walls to be manned, the chance of a successful coup would be small indeed.

All carried firearms except Mr. Greatorex. He had a knobbed stick, capable of dealing a very damaging blow.

"There's bound to be a *fight*, I suppose?" he had said when Tom was discussing his plans on the yacht. "I don't like *that*, you know. I'd punch a man's nose and knock him down without scruple, of course; but that needn't *kill* him, you know. Besides, how do I *stand*? This is uncommonly like a piratical raid—like Jameson's, and he might have been *hanged*. However!"

Tom assured him that no blood should be shed if it could possibly be avoided; but he had small hopes that the night would end without a fight, and a very brisk one.

The party set off for the village, stealing along under what cover was afforded by bushes and inequalities in the ground. When about three hundred yards from the wall all such protection ceased; the ground was level and apparently open. Tom's heart was in his mouth lest their footsteps should be heard as they crossed this. He dared not set them at a run, for the soil all around was stony, and the sound of near a dozen men rushing at speed could not fail to be heard in the village. So he kept up the same stealthy approach, and his caution was justified, for level as the space had appeared at a distance, it proved to have patches of loose stones, and some yards of boggy land, through which ran a narrow and evil-smelling creek; to rush would have ended in disaster.

They arrived beneath the wall without having heard any alarm raised within. In a trice the men began to clamber up. It was made of mud and rubble, and was not in so ruinous a condition as the wall of Ain Afroo. The first man reached the top. Immediately there was a shout and the sound of hurrying feet, and Tom sprang up to the sailor's side in time to see a Moor in long djellab dashing from the nearest house towards the wall. Suddenly he halted, and fired. The young sailor winced as the bullet struck him; but he was not badly hurt, and letting down his rope, calmly proceeded to haul up one of his comrades. After firing, the Moor made a rush along the wall. Tom grappled with him; both fell, dropping their weapons, and Tom felt in an instant that he was no match for the sinewy figure that had him in his arms. The Moor forced him down; his hands were already at Tom's throat, when Timothy Ball, who had accompanied the party in spite of his half-healed wound, threw himself upon the enemy from behind, dragged him backwards, and left him half-strangled, but yet alive.

When Tom rose dizzily to his feet, all his party were within the wall. One or two shouts were heard from the village, but apparently the Moors were not yet quite awake to what was happening. Tom pulled himself together, and led the way straight for the kasbah, which, from his lofty perch in the tree during the day, he had seen slightly to the right of the place at which the entry into the village had been made. When they dashed up to the main gate, this was being opened to give exit to a couple of men who were apparently about to inquire into the cause of the slight commotion and the rifle shot that had been heard. The two were instantly bowled over by the onrush of British seamen, the party swarmed through into the kasbah, the gate was shut, and they came face to face with the head-man.

"What have you—got to—*say* for yourself?"

The Moor had naturally nothing to say for himself. He saw himself confronted by an elderly whiskered foreigner, in a yachting cap and blue serge suit, brandishing a formidable stick. Mr. Greatorex was in

a passion. The exertions of the march, the pains of being hauled up a wall, not without bumps, the scamper at the rear of his men into the Moor's kasbah, had deprived him equally of breath and of self-control. Determined not to be left ignominiously out of the hurly-burly, he forced himself to the front, and thrust his stick under the very nose of the Moor—who stood a foot above him—calling him to account in the spluttering sentence recorded above.

For a few moments there was a deadlock, and Tom felt the need of an interpreter. Eventually he persuaded Mr. Greatorex to give way, and managed to make the Moor understand that if he valued his life he must at once bring out the Firangi whom he had recently introduced to his house. Finding himself shut off by the gate of his own kasbah from the support of his men, the Moor recognized that he had no choice but to comply, and at a command from him one of his servants brought Sir Mark Ingleton and Oliphant from the upper floor into the patio, looking none the worse for their brief incarceration.

"*Delighted* to see you," said Mr. Greatorex, stepping forward and wringing the diplomatist's hand; Oliphant he studiously ignored.

"Mr. Greatorex, I presume," returned Sir Mark. "I hope to make your better acquaintance, sir. Meanwhile, if I may be allowed——"

His quick eye had taken in the situation at a glance.

"Peace be with thee!" he said in Arabic, turning with a bland smile to the scowling Moor, "You perceive, O Salaam, that my friends also, being alarmed at my absence, have availed themselves of your generous hospitality. They are distressed at the unceremonious manner of their entry, but you will assuredly deign to pardon it, for have you not professed yourself my devoted servant? You will be the first to forgive an intrusion due solely to the too great zeal of my friends."

The Moor, chagrined and bewildered, had no option but to acquiesce in this polite fiction, though it is to be feared his reply lacked something of the diplomatist's ease and suavity.

“But we are a large company,” Sir Mark went on, “and should be loth to trespass on your hospitality. You will be relieved, I am sure, if we betake ourselves to the vessel that awaits us off your coast. You will, of course, honour us by giving us your company so far. Indeed, if you will do us the favour to accompany us on board our vessel, we shall endeavour to return in some slight measure the gracious hospitality that has been vouchsafed to myself and—my son. If you add to your favours by assisting us in the march—by showing us the easiest road and defending us from the perils that may beset us, such as are known to you, O Salaam—you may be assured that we shall show our gratitude in very tangible form. There are, as you know, even in Morocco, evil counsellors, men of violence, some who would even dare to lift their hands against the Sultan himself. If there be any such in this village, which truly I am loth to believe, I advise you, as brother advises brother, to exhort them to mildness of demeanour. These friends of mine who now enjoy your hospitality are men of war; they have arms, you perceive, in the use of which they are well skilled; and since, in our progress to the shore, you will of course occupy the place of honour at my right hand, in all likelihood you would suffer hurt if there are among your followers any men of Belial whose hearts incline towards bloodshed; that would be a great grief to us. And now, O Salaam, as the night draws towards dawn, it will be well if you perform your morning ablutions and devotions and prepare to lead us forth. Bismillah!”

Sir Mark, as he laughingly informed Mr. Greatorex afterwards, had purposely made his address somewhat lengthy, so as to give Salaam plenty of time to regain his self-possession and to weigh the pros and cons. The upshot was that, shortly after dawn, the whole party, with Salaam son of Absalaam in their midst, set off towards the coast, the airship being carried on the shoulders of a troop of the villagers who had been promised liberal bakshish in return for their services.

On arriving at the shore, Captain Bodgers signalled to his men on the yacht to send a boat, and with it a fresh supply of fuel for the airship, which had been deposited just above high-water mark. While this was being done, Mr. Greatorex emptied his pockets of small coin, to redeem the promise to the carriers, and Sir Mark kept up an even flow of amicable talk, apparently quite oblivious of the throng of Arabs who had observed the proceedings from their encampment on the cliff, and by and by came down to the shore and stood around, listening with looks of amazement to this fluent Nazarene who discoursed so pleasantly of things intimate to them.

The men soon arrived with a large tin of the fuel-paste. It was placed in the car; Tom made an inspection of the machinery to assure himself that it had suffered no hurt while in the charge of Salaam; then Oliphant joined him. A few moments later, with a mighty whirring sound, the airship rose gallantly into the air, to the great wonderment of the Moors. While they were intently watching the manœuvres of the airship, filling the air with their cries of “Mashallah!” Sir Mark and the rest of the party embarked and pulled out into the bay, two of the men sitting in the stern of the boat with their faces to the shore and their rifles held conspicuously ready. Salaam indulged in a burst of fury at the manner in which he had been outwitted. His followers gathered around him and held excited consultation, some being apparently inclined to fire on the departing boat, others to pursue the airship. But they had made up their minds to neither course by the time the party reached the yacht; and when Captain Bodgers trained on them the two brass guns she carried, they hurriedly broke up and disappeared over the cliffs.

“You were just in time, Mr. Greatorex,” said Sir Mark Ingleton as they sat together in the boat. “A messenger came in from the sheikh yesterday afternoon, and I shrewdly suspect that arrangements had been made to transfer us to our old quarters in the kasbah. I say ‘our old quarters,’ forgetting that Mr. Oliphant——”

“Oliphant!” interrupted Mr. Greatorex. “*There* now! What do you think of *this*, Sir Mark?”

And he proceeded to delight his guest with a vigorous indictment of M’Cracken, and Byles, and Byles’ sick mother, and Lord Langside for having sent an English gentleman on a mission to such an abominable country, and for having such an outrageously impudent son.

CHAPTER XIV—THE TROGLODYTES

Meanwhile, how had things been faring with Herr Hildebrand Schwab, the unlucky representative of the Schlagintwert Company of Düsseldorf and the partner of Sir Mark's captivity?

When Abdul pointed out the cave in which it was advisable that they should take shelter, and the means of access to it, Schwab groaned deeply, and declared that nothing on earth should induce a German subject of his weight to attempt so perilous a climb. But on reflection he came to look upon it as the lesser of two evils, and with much travailing of spirit and discomfiture of body he allowed himself to be assisted up the incline so long as progress on foot was possible, and then to be hoisted at the end of the rope. Abdul's strength alone would not have sufficed to haul so great a mass into safety; but Salathiel ben Ezra, who was by this time thoroughly weary of solitude, and had come to the end of his stock of provisions, lent willing help, with a view, as it proved, of turning the situation to account.

He used every means of persuasion and cajolery which his ingenuity could devise to persuade Abdul to release him. One of his propositions was that they should convey the German to the sheikh of Ain Afroo and claim a sufficient reward. Abdul ridiculed the idea. Both he and the Jew would get short shrift from the sheikh now that the more valuable of his captives was snatched from his grasp. Salathiel then proposed that they should try to gain the nearest town where they might find Europeans, and tell a moving story of the sufferings and perils they had endured in rescuing the German from the hands of his captors. But to this, as to his other suggestions, Abdul turned a deaf ear.

They were a strangely assorted trio. Schwab only half trusted the Moor; the Moor despised Schwab; both disliked the Jew. It was not

long before Schwab declared that he was hungry, and illustrated the privations he had already suffered by exhibiting the unwonted gap between his waistcoat and his person: “And I have ze straps of my vaistcoat drawn *so* tight!” he added. Salathiel’s scanty stock of provisions having been exhausted, Abdul descended to forage, and returned with a supply of dates and olives, and the tin filled with water at the spring.

“Ach! My pipe! It is in ze room vere first I vas laid up. Mein Gott! And ze list of Schlagintwert; ze last edition, revise and enlarge. Ze Moors zey vill now order vizout me, and I lose colossal sum in commission!”

All this was Greek to Abdul, but a little more comprehensible to the Jew, with whom, however, Schwab refused to discuss business. He preferred to ply Abdul diligently with questions about the airship: where it came from; how it was driven; what was the composition of the fuel.

“Already is it partly known to me,” he said. “It contain large quantity Photographic Sensitizer Preparation Number Six. But zat is not all. I know it! Vy? Because my Jarman intellex tell me so. But vizout doubt I discover it; zen zere shall be business for Schlagintwert. You do not know vat ze ozer zink is?”

Abdul shook his head.

“Zen you vas never made for business. Vun cannot learn it; it is born. So vas I born!”

He discoursed on business and other things, despising his audience for their want of appreciation; then fell to bemoaning his fate. Thus the hours passed away.

At last the monotony of the situation was broken. Abdul, like a good Mohammedan, was engaged in his devotions when the Jew, at the mouth of the cave, caught sight of a party of Moors far below, and signalled to them before he could be prevented. Springing up, Abdul was on the point of killing him with his knife when Schwab hastily

interposed.

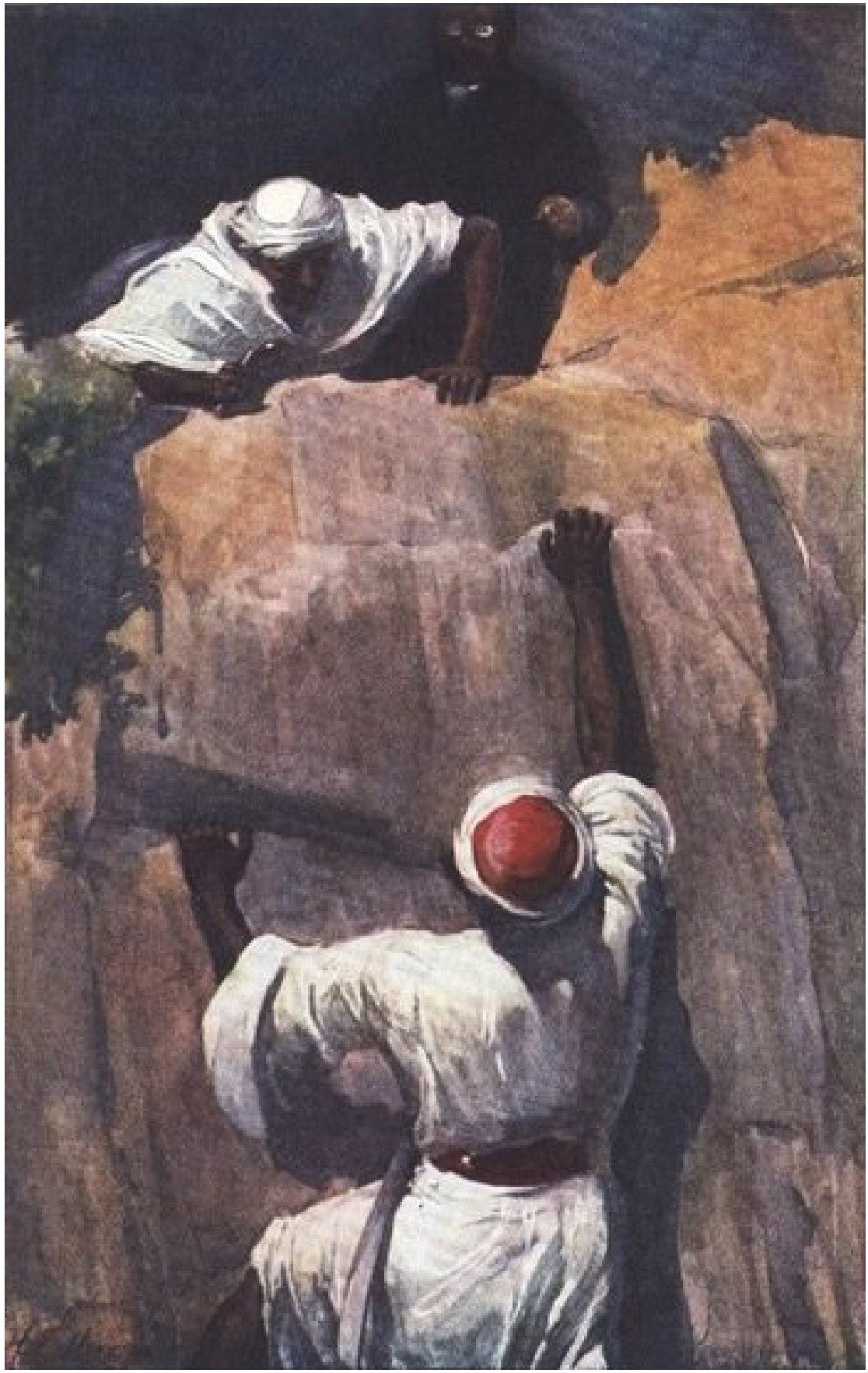
“No, I vill not have it,” he said. “You kill him; zen am I accomplice; and vat is zat for a kind of business, I say?”

But he did not decline to assist Abdul to truss up the Jew and render him incapable of further mischief. No more than Abdul himself did he wish to attract visitors.

The mischief, however, was already done. The Moors, a search party despatched by the sheikh, had observed the Jew’s signals, and at once spurred their horses across the country until they reached the foot of the precipitous ascent. They dismounted: one of them began to climb up. For a time Abdul watched his progress; then, when he thought the man had mounted far enough, he threatened to hurl him from the face of the cliff if he advanced another step upwards. It was so obviously in Abdul’s power to make good his threat that the Moor hesitated; then, in response to an encouraging shout from below, he again began to climb. He may have reflected that his comrades could afford to shout; they were not clinging like a fly to the face of an almost perpendicular wall of rock; but he may have reflected also that great would be his praise and reward if he succeeded in bringing to account the insolent strangers who had done such despite to his sheikh. No doubt also he reckoned on support from the member of the party who had signalled.

Up he came, slowly feeling his way. Abdul bent over the brink, and, just as the man ascended within reach, smartly rapped his knuckles with the butt of Tom’s revolver. At the same moment a shot from below struck the rock within an inch of his head. Abdul at once darted back within the shelter of the cave; but the climber, taught by the sharp blow he had received, ventured no farther, and shortly afterwards began to descend. When he reached the party below, it was clear that he met with a reprimand from the leader for his want of courage; but he sullenly refused to make another attempt, and seemed by his gesticulations to invite each of his comrades in turn to

take his place. But nobody came forward, and after an excited discussion—portions of which were in tones so loud that Abdul was able to interpret to Schwab, nervously eager to learn what was to be done—a messenger was sent off in the direction of Ain Afroo, while the five or six who remained settled down to keep watch at the foot of the precipice.



"ABDUL BENT OVER THE BRINK AND SMARTLY RAPPED HIS KNUCKLES WITH THE BUTT OF TOM'S REVOLVER."

Rather more than an hour passed. Schwab became more and more anxious. At last a much larger party rode down at a gallop, among them the sheikh himself. Raising his voice when he came below the cave, he called on the occupants to surrender, threatening them with the most fearful tortures if they persisted in defying him. It was evident from the terms he used that he was under the impression that his escaped prisoners and their rescuers were all in the cave together, and thus that he had them fairly trapped. Abdul made the most of this mistake. He warned the sheikh against braving the power of the white man. He had already had one example of it; the Firangi had shown him more mercy than he deserved; the second example would entail dire consequences on himself and his village. But this reply only fanned the flames of the sheikh's wrath; he was not to be intimidated by words: and, hurling more threats, he began to consult with his followers as to some means of enforcing his summons.

It was clearly a hazardous if not indeed an impossible task to approach the cave from below. One man in the cave, so long as he kept himself out of range of rifle fire, could hold any number at bay. How much more, then, would it be disastrous to make the attempt against, as the sheikh supposed, five or six well-armed men? But, as Abdul well knew, it was just possible to gain the plateau above the cave, from which access to it could be obtained, by climbers acting in concert on the eastern face of the hill. That this longer but easier ascent would be known to the enemy there was no doubt, for Abdul had just recognized, among the horsemen who had accompanied the sheikh, a young man who had been his companion in former days, and with whom as a boy he had actually performed the feat.

Anxiously he watched the colloquy below. Behind, Schwab was imploring him to explain what the sheikh had said. It turned out as he had feared. His former companion with a few others left the sheikh and disappeared; the rest made themselves comfortable within a few yards of the foot of the hill. Abdul had little doubt that he would soon have to reckon with an attack from above; not an easy matter, in truth,

but far more likely to succeed than any attempt from below.

There was a long interval. Under stress of fear and hunger, Schwab was nearly demented. He walked about the cave, with his hands pressed hard upon the neighbourhood of the lowest button of his waistcoat, uttering guttural groans, making lugubrious appeals to the Homeland, and to a lady whom he called at one time Mrs. Bottle, at another “mein briddy Chain,” and ever and anon anathematizing Thomas Dorrell, “vat do nozink for me—for me, vat do so much for him viz Photographic Sensitizer Preparation Number Six.” Abdul paid no heed to the German’s fumings and frettings, nor to the entreaties of Salathiel ben Ezra, who, stretched on his back, tied hand and foot, added to his prayers the most lavish promises if the Moor would only release him and help him to return to his own place.

At last, Abdul, squatting silent and watchful just within the opening of the cave, saw a pair of legs dangling in front of him. Some of the enemy had, as he had foreseen, made their way to the top of the hill, and were about to attempt to reach the cave from above. It was a foolhardy proceeding, for they could only come singly, and the occupants of the cave could easily dispose of them. Indeed, Abdul surmised that the sheikh was trying an experiment, sending one of his men to draw the badger. However that may have been, the application of the point of Abdul’s knife to the calf of one of the dangling legs caused the owner of them to draw them hastily up and to swarm up the rope to which he was clinging, as a spider runs up his filmy thread when threatened by an enemy.

Apparently the sheikh was satisfied that a direct assault, whether from above or below, was hopeless, for thenceforth the cave party were left in peace. But it was peace only externally. Even Abdul himself, who had hitherto preserved extraordinary composure, now showed signs of perturbation. What was the enemy doing? He dared not attempt to see, for he knew that if he showed his head it would be the target for a dozen bullets. Did the sheikh intend to starve them

out? Their food was all gone; the tin of water was almost empty; it was impossible to get a fresh supply of either. Voices were heard from below; once Abdul heard an answering call from above; it appeared indeed as if the sheikh had resolved on an investment, knowing that sooner or later the occupants of the cave must yield or die.

The day passed. Schwab fell into a sleep of exhaustion. Abdul remained sleepless, wondering why the Englishman had not reappeared with the airship, as he had said he would do. Had some mishap befallen him? Surely he had not wilfully deserted them! This Abdul refused to believe. When morning broke he ventured to go to the mouth of the cave and look out. The Moors were still below; apparently they had camped all night on the ground. They caught sight of Abdul, and mockingly invited him to share their cous-cousoo. He made no reply, and again withdrew into the shadow.

Schwab was by this time a wreck. He lay silent. From the back of the cave came piteous moans from Salathiel, begging to be relieved of his bonds. But Abdul was obdurate; he had enough to do to keep watch on the enemy in front, without having to reckon with the Jew besides, for he knew that Salathiel would stick at no treachery.

Impassive as Abdul appeared, he was in reality on the verge of despair. The time was fast approaching when he must choose between starvation and surrender. The choice did not trouble him; he would never surrender to the sheikh of Ain Afroo. What troubled him was the thought that his old enemy would once more triumph; that the vengeance on which he had set his whole mind for years was to be snatched from him.

He was bitterly thinking on these things when Schwab rose feebly to his feet.

“I can no more,” he said; “I go to yield myself. I muss have somezink to eat. Still am I Jarman sobjeck; zey vill respeck our Kaiser who is in Berlin.”

Abdul expostulated, striving in his imperfect English to warn the German of the risk he ran. He knew the sheikh; he was a terrible enemy; he would care nothing who or what his prisoner was. Who in Europe would be any the wiser if in this remote mountainous region a man were slowly done to death in the dungeons of a kasbah? But Schwab would not listen; he craved for food; “Let us eat, for to-morrow we die,” exactly expresses his state of mind. He moved towards the entrance to the cave, shaking off, with a sudden access of rage, Abdul’s detaining hand. The Moor followed him, and stood behind him when Schwab, at the brink of the precipice, waved his hand and shouted—

“I give myself opp. But you muss come and fetch me.”

But before the echo of his voice had died away, Abdul suddenly pulled him back by main force into the cave.

“See! see!” he cried.

“Tausend Teufel! Vat shall I see?” returned Schwab.

At the point where Abdul now stood the country immediately beneath the cave was invisible, and both the men were screened from the Moors. But the sky was open, and far away in the clear blue to the north-west Abdul had descried a speck which moment by moment was growing larger.

“Vat shall I see?” repeated Schwab, vainly looking in the direction of Abdul’s stretched forefinger.

“The flying ship!” cried Abdul. “It comes!”

“You say zat! Lemme see, lemme see, lemme see!”

He roofed his eyes with his hands, and peered into the distance.

“Ach! zey veep!” he said, rubbing away the tears that had gathered. “It is for vant of food, nozink else.”

He looked again.

“Boy, you are right!” he exclaimed, “truly it is ze airship. Zey come for

me! Ach! you dirty Moors, now you may go choke! I vizdraw vat I said about give myself opp. I vas not myself; I vas—I vas—anozer man. Ach, boy, so am I indeed hungry!”

The two watched the airship drawing nearer. For a moment Abdul wondered whether it would come into any danger from the rifles of the Moors either below or on the hilltop above. But remembering how clearly everything on the ground could be seen from the car of the airship, he was reassured, guessing that Tom would descry the besiegers in plenty of time to avoid their shots.

To gain the hilltop the airship had approached at a considerable altitude, but was now dropping. About half a mile from the cave it suddenly made an upward sweep, and Abdul knew that the enemy had been seen. Before it sailed out of sight over the hill, Abdul plucked off his djellab, and waved it in the mouth of the cave. The signal provoked two or three shots from those of the Moors below whose attention was not engrossed by the machine, which some of them had seen before and of which all had heard most marvellous accounts. Abdul was unhurt, and his signal was answered by a shot from the car of the airship, which then passed out of sight.

“Famos! Zey know ve are still alive! Mein Gott! truly mein hunger is colossal.”

Tom had in point of fact discovered the enemy at the moment when Abdul noticed the change in the direction of the airship. The discovery was by no means a welcome one.

“I didn’t reckon on their hiding-place being found out,” he said to Oliphant. “It makes things rather awkward.”

“They must be in a pretty bad state in the cave if the Moors have been here long.”

“And we can’t get at them; we daren’t go too near, for at close quarters the Moors would riddle the planes with their shot and very likely smash the engines. And we certainly can’t let the airship down

and go for them. The worst of it is, they know pretty well by this time what the airship really is, and we couldn't throw them into a panic as we did before."

"Confound this German!" said Oliphant. "I shouldn't mind if we could have a really good scrimmage and some fun for our money, but there's nothing in it."

"There's Abdul, you see," replied Tom. "We'll have to think it out. They're in the cave, safe enough, and can evidently hold on there. Let us make for that hill yonder, and think the matter out."

As the airship crossed the hill of the cave, Tom steering for the loftier hill some five miles to the east, a dozen Moors sprang to their saddles and set off in pursuit. But the ground was very rough; they had to follow a tortuous route; and when, a few minutes later, the airship reached the hill, Tom calculated that he had probably half-an-hour to spare before the horsemen would arrive.

"We'd better ground, and economize fuel," he said. "'Pon my word, Oliphant, it seems as if this is going to be as tough a job as it was at the kasbah."

Choosing a fairly open space almost at the top of the hill, Tom brought the machine to earth. Then, while Oliphant watched for signs of the pursuing horsemen, Tom stretched himself on his back, with his hands under his head and his cap tilted over his eyes, and settled down to a good hard think.

"Don't go to sleep," said Oliphant.

Tom replied with a grunt.

CHAPTER XV—VIEW HALLOO!

Oliphant sat with his knees up, looking at his friend, thinking what a cool hand he was. No one could have guessed from Tom's easy attitude that he was thinking out a problem on which lives depended. As the minutes passed, even Oliphant was deceived.

"Not asleep, Dorrell?"

Tom grunted, but did not stir. Another minute or two, then he suddenly jumped up.

"Well, I think I've got it," he said, and he chuckled.

"What is it?"

"Come along. I'll explain as we go."

The two mounted the car; Tom started the ascensional screws; and the airship rose slowly from the hill. When they had left the ground some three hundred feet beneath them they saw, a mile or more distant, the body of horsemen who had set off in pursuit from the Moors' encampment. The airship was headed in the direction from which they had come, and when they saw it they halted, and waited until it had soared past them; then, having no doubt that it was returning to the hill with the intention of again attempting to rescue the blockaded men, they wheeled round, and galloped in pursuit.

The airship was going at only a moderate speed, so that the horsemen were able to keep pace with it. Tom chuckled again, and Oliphant, to whom he had by this time imparted his notion, seemed to find great amusement in the sight.

"The beggars little imagine they're playing our game," he said.

"No, indeed. I wonder what they really are thinking. Probably they fancy something has gone wrong with our works and we can't go any

faster."

"D'you think they've got wind of our former breakdown?"

"It's not unlikely. News travels very fast in these countries that haven't got the telegraph!"

When they arrived at the hill of the caves, there appeared to be no change in the situation. A small group of four or five men were squatting on the summit; more than a score were congregated below. All eyes were directed upwards as the airship again came into view, and the men laughed, recognizing how fruitless would be any renewed attempt to rescue the prisoners. They all carried rifles, and evidently intended to use them when the vessel came within range. But it passed too high above their heads, still going very slowly, and, so far from descending towards the cave, sailed on towards the sea. It crossed one of the adjacent hills, then sank a little, so that it was only visible then to the few men who kept watch above.

But a minute or two afterwards the occupants of the car, looking round, saw that these men were on their feet, gesticulating with great excitement.

"They've taken the bait!" cried Oliphant, laughing outright.

The men had noticed that the airship, instead of continuing its north-westerly course, had suddenly taken a turn to the left, and was making at tremendous speed straight for the village of Ain Afroo. Rising higher into the air, so that he could get a view over the shoulder of the hill, Tom saw that the whole body of horsemen, now joined by the sheikh and his party, were riding at a mad gallop for the village. By this time the airship was a mile ahead of them, and the two Englishmen laughed heartily as they watched the frantic efforts of the Moors to reduce the gap. They were left hopelessly behind, and were still more than a mile from the walls when the airship, hovering directly over the roof of the kasbah, began very slowly to drop earthwards as if a descent were going to be made on the spot where it had formerly rested.

The descent took a considerable time. Who was there to tell the frenzied horsemen that the accursed Firangi was playing with them? They urged their foaming steeds up the hill at a furious rate, making light of all obstacles, and extorting a tribute of admiration from the Englishmen for horses and riders alike. They clattered into the village, dashed through the street, pulled the horses up on their haunches at the door of the kasbah, flung themselves from the saddles, and poured into the patio and up the stairs.

The sheikh himself, by far the best mounted of the troop, was the first to arrive; and within a few seconds he sprang out of the opening on the roof, followed closely by several members of his household. But what was this? The airship, instead of resting on the flagged roof, was hundreds of feet above them, and, horror of horrors! sailing with terrific speed back towards the hill of the caves. For a few moments the Moors stood gazing in bewilderment, being joined by more men from below. Then, with hearty Moslem curses, they rushed back to the opening, toppling over one another, stumbling down the stairs in their haste. Down into the patio, out of the gate, on to their horses' backs once more, and off they set, pell-mell after the airship.

But the horses were badly blown. There were four miles of heavy country to cover. And by the time they were again clear of the walls the airship was halfway to the hill.

Tom and his friend were hugely delighted with the success of their simple bit of strategy. They could see the horsemen like ants in the distance beneath, urging their poor panting horses to the utmost of their capacity.

"We ought to have plenty of time to get them away," said Tom.

"Yes, but hang it all! we've clean forgotten that we can't lift both Schwab and the Moor."

"Great Scott!" Tom ejaculated, in consternation. But in a moment his face cleared. "We'll manage that," he said cheerfully. But then he

received another shock. He saw that the four or five men who had held their watch on the plateau were still there: they had not followed the rest. Their horses could be seen tethered in the grove beneath, and the men were gathered in a knot, watching the rapid approach of the machine, which probably they had expected to see no more.

"There's only one thing for it," said Tom. "We must go slap at them, and trust to luck. If they shoot, they may do so before we are within range, and at this speed they may easily miss us. They are sure to be a bit nervous, too."

Tom had already begun the descent, obliquely upon the hill. When the airship was, as nearly as he could calculate, on a level with the summit, he again put the engines to their utmost speed, and dashed straight at the little group. There were three or four reports almost simultaneously, and above the whirr of the screws Tom thought he heard a sound of rending, as if one of the planes had been struck by a bullet. The vessel, indeed, dipped slightly, and for a moment he feared that it would be dashed against the face of the hill. But he jerked up the lever controlling the planes, the airship rose the few feet necessary to clear the summit, and once more sped on its course.

By this time, however, the group on the hilltop had taken fright. They could not know that if the airship dashed into them, they would be as formidable to it as it could be to them. Even if they had known this, they would probably not have been willing to sell their lives, even though in doing so they should break up the machine and hurl its occupants to destruction. With one consent they broke and fled.

Tom instantly reversed the engines, and the airship glided slowly to rest on the plateau. But the path by which the fugitives were attempting to make good their flight was only wide enough to accommodate one man at a time, and that with difficulty. Only three of the men had begun to descend when Tom sprang out of the car. The other two, fearing to be attacked from behind, turned instinctively to meet the supposed danger. Then, seeing that they had only two men

to deal with, and feeling no doubt that they would be completely at the mercy of these men when once they had begun the descent, they hesitated for a second at the brink.

If they had used this second to draw their formidable knives, Tom's adventure might have ended there and then, for in his eagerness he had forgotten to snatch up his revolver. But their halt was due rather to nervousness than to courage, and Tom was never lacking in promptitude at the critical moment. He dashed straight at them. One of them swung round at once and slithered down the path. The other, somewhat more mettlesome, made a grab at his knife. But he had only half drawn it from his belt when Tom's fist shot out and tumbled him headlong after his comrade. The result would have been amusing if Tom had had time to observe it. From top to bottom of that rocky declivity there was an avalanche of Moors. The impetus with which the topmost man had been shot over the edge sent him smack into the man next below. The two then rolled, or rather pitched, on top of those who had preceded them, and were making their way quickly yet laboriously down the steep tracks, and it is to be feared that there were bruised and broken limbs at the bottom.

But Tom had neither eyes nor ears for the discomfiture of his enemies. There was still much to be done before he could be sure that his friends and his airship were out of harm's way. One of his friends was already taking things into his own hands. At the first hint of what was happening Abdul had left the mouth of the cave, and was now swarming up the perilous face of the hillside. Breathless he came over the brink, on the opposite side from that where the Moors had disappeared, almost before Tom could turn round.

"All well below?" asked Tom.

"Yes, master."

"Can you bring up the big man?"

"With a rope, master."

“Quick, then: we have no time to spare.”

“And the Hudi, master?”

“What of him?”

“He made them come. We tied him, feet and hands.”

“Untie him, but leave him. He can make them come again!”

A rope was quickly unshipped from the car and strongly looped. Abdul descended, the rope being held by both Oliphant and Tom above, who, doubtful whether their strength would stand the strain of the ponderous German’s weight, hitched it round a rocky prominence at the brink of the hill. But fear lent Schwab extraordinary agility—as once before in the enclosure of Midfont House. With the rope looped about him, he hauled himself up by it, assisting his progress with his feet against the hill. He was in a bath of perspiration, his fat face was pale as death, when he reached the top and sank exhausted at Tom’s feet. Oliphant and Tom together hoisted him into the car, and by the time he was settled, Abdul had cut the Jew’s bonds and again clambered up, pursued by entreaties, wild threats, execrations, from the luckless Salathiel ben Ezra.

Glancing in the direction of Ain Afroo, Tom rejoiced to see that he had still about ten minutes to spare before the pursuing horsemen could arrive at the spot. He knew from experience that with Schwab as a passenger the ascensional screws did not exert sufficient power to lift three other men; but when Oliphant had reminded him of this, a way out of the difficulty suggested itself. If once the airship could be raised from the ground and the horizontal screws set in motion, it was likely that, with the speed thus obtained, they might suffice (the planes being inclined at the proper angle) to overcome the downward pull of gravity.

Tom rapidly explained to Abdul the plan he had formed. Then, entering the car in which Schwab and Oliphant already were, he set the ascensional screws in motion. The vessel slowly rose. Meanwhile

Abdul had looped about his body the rope by which Schwab had been hauled up, the upper end of which had again been securely attached to the car. When the airship had risen a few feet from the hill-top, Tom set the horizontal engines at full speed, and the vessel sailed beyond the plateau, Abdul dangling from it at the end of the rope, as he had done once before when rescued from the shark. He showed no fear; in the loop he was perfectly safe, for even if the vessel sank with his weight, it would be so slowly that he would run no risk of being brought too violently into contact with the ground.

As Tom had expected, the vessel did not sink. But, the horizontal screws being partly engaged in counteracting the force of gravity, the speed of the airship was reduced to only five or six miles an hour, and at that rate it was evident that the fuel would not hold out until they reached the coast. A second breakdown must be averted at all costs; it was unlikely that they would be able to escape the clutches of predatory Moors a second time. No doubt the story of what had happened before had spread for many miles through the country, and short shrift would be given to the aeronauts if again they were brought to earth.

There was now only a minute or two to spare before the sheikh would arrive. Whatever could be done must be done at once. Glancing down, Tom saw below him the horses belonging to the men who had just been tumbled from the plateau. The men themselves were lying at the foot of the hill, not dead, as Tom was glad to see—the rugged declivity had broken their fall—but evidently completely disabled. Without hesitation Tom reduced the speed of the engines and descended, shouting to Abdul, who at the end of the rope would of course reach the ground first, to secure two of the best horses, and follow as fast as he could in the track of the airship.

Owing to the delay that had occurred, Abdul had only just leapt into the saddle when the horsemen came into sight scarcely half a mile away. The sheikh was far ahead of his men, and the pace even of his

splendid Arab showed that there was little fear of Abdul being overtaken. The young Moor set off at a gallop, a second horse at his side. There was a shout behind him; the sheikh called upon his followers to spur their flagging steeds: clearly he intended gamely to continue the pursuit.

But the fugitives were now well away. Tom accommodated the speed of the airship to the pace of the horses below, keeping at a height of no more than a hundred feet from the ground so as to be able to drop down and stand by Abdul in case of need. For a few minutes it seemed as though the lad was to be close pressed, in spite of the hard galloping the horses of the pursuers had already done. But gradually they dropped farther and farther behind; Abdul's horses were fresh; he himself was a light weight; and Tom began to breathe more freely.

Another danger, however, occurred to him. The country was at present wild and desolate, with no signs of habitation. But as he neared the coast, he would undoubtedly pass scattered villages and towns, and it was possible that Abdul might be checked at one of these. He therefore felt it desirable to rise to a greater height, so that he might obtain a more extensive outlook over the country and indicate to Abdul a course which would prevent him from running into danger.

He soon saw that his precaution was justified. The pursuers were still sticking doggedly to the trail, and Tom noticed that from time to time they were joined by fresh horsemen from the hamlets through which they passed. He could not distinguish figures in the distance, but he had no doubt that the sheikh had already obtained a fresh horse, and was among a group which had far outstripped the rest of the troop and was gradually diminishing the distance between them and their quarry. Abdul was riding gallantly on, changing from horse to horse with admirable dexterity; but it was clear that the pursuers, with many opportunities of obtaining remounts, must in course of time run him

down. The airship would always indicate the direction in which they should ride.

Again Tom had to devise a means of overcoming a new difficulty. The chase had now lasted some hours, and the matter was becoming urgent. By good luck, the sight of a high conical hill, well wooded, somewhat to the right of the course they had been following, suggested a plan. Lowering the airship to within easy speaking distance of the Moor—a manœuvre which caused some uneasiness to his horses, tired as they were—Tom directed him to make for this hill, and remain in hiding among the trees until rejoined. At the moment he thought of making all speed to the yacht, dropping Schwab, replenishing his can of fuel, and returning for Abdul. But a little consideration caused him to change his mind. It might prove a very difficult matter to find the hill again when returning. It must be, he guessed, at least sixty miles from the sea, and he could not remember the landmarks exactly enough to be able to retrace his course.

In rapid consultation with Oliphant he decided on another plan. Altering the course of the airship several points to the southward, and keeping a sharp lookout upon the pursuers, he found that they were still following him as a guide. No longer having to consider the powers of endurance of Abdul's horses, he quickened the speed of the airship, and saw in a little while that this had had its effect, several of the horsemen beginning to straggle, though they all continued in the same direction. Having thus taken the enemy some five or six miles out of their course, he suddenly swung round and made off at full speed towards the hill where he had left Abdul, of which he had been careful not to lose sight.

"They are a game lot," remarked Oliphant, as the horsemen again followed the track. They were soon left mere specks on the horizon, and at last dropped entirely out of sight. Approaching the hill from another side, some time elapsed before the airship was seen by

Abdul from his concealment in the wood. Then he again mounted; his horses had profited by the short rest: and the fugitives, having gained several miles by Tom's manœuvre, were able to take matters comparatively easy until late in the afternoon.

CHAPTER XVI—ICARUS

Meanwhile Schwab had awoke to the facts of existence, and the manner in which he announced his awakening was characteristic.

“Himmel! how I am hungry!”

“Hullo, Mr. Schwab! Feel better?” said Tom, throwing a hasty glance at the German lying against the rail.

“Vorse! vorse! Tousand times vorse!”

Oliphant laughed at his hollow tones.

“It is nozink for to laugh,” returned Schwab with a flicker of animation. “I am vizout food, I know not how many hours. It is not viz me custom to go so long vizout food; it give me rude pain—zere!”

He laid his hand on the lowest button of his waistcoat.

“No longer am I as I vas. Vunce I swell, not too moch, but all ober; now, I fade, I shrink, I have to get ze tailor to take me in.”

“Awful, for a business man,” said Oliphant—“to be taken in, you know.”

“So! But it muss be done. Ach! I am hungry as a—as a—as a——”

“Hunter!” suggested Oliphant.

“No; hungry as a rhinoceros. I could eat—I could eat—I could eat a ——”

“Whale!”

“No; I could eat a steak, underdone, from ze grill, viz chip bodadoes, gabbage viz vinegar, and Voosder sauce, viz a long glass—ach! two long glasses, of lager from München. Ach! ze zought of it make my mous cry.”

“For goodness’ sake, Oliphant, give him some grub and shut his

mouth," cried Tom.

"Shut my mous? How zen can I eat? For ze sake of anyzink give me somezink to eat; zen my mous vill shut and open of itself; vun needs not to zink ven one eats."

Bubbling with amusement, Oliphant handed the German some biscuits from the stock they had brought with them. But his mirth evaporated when he caught sight of Tom's face. He had wondered a little at the tetchy tone in which Tom had last addressed him, and from his anxious expression he could not but guess that something was seriously wrong.

"What's the matter, Dorrell?"

"The engines—don't you smell 'em?"

"I do," replied Oliphant, sniffing. "What's it mean?"

"It means that the turbine casing is becoming overheated. I altered the inlet valve so as to let more of the explosive mixture into the turbine—and this is the result."

"What can we do?"

"Simply reduce speed and hope that we can weather through."

"Any idea how much farther we have to go?"

"About fifty miles, I should think. We must have done forty at least. I shut off one of the engines just now, but the second one can't keep us afloat. I wish Schwab would fade and shrink into nothing."

Schwab had heard nothing of this. He was otherwise occupied. But noting now the anxious looks of his two companions he said, with his mouth full—"Do I eat too many?"

Tom was too much concerned to reply, but Oliphant laughed again.

"We can't go on," said Tom. "I shall have to drop her somewhere and see if I can put matters right. We were five or six miles ahead of the Moors when I caught sight of them last, and we've a few minutes' grace at any rate. They won't know exactly where we are."

Choosing a secluded spot, he descended and brought the airship to rest. Abdul had halted; Tom explained to him the cause of his descent, and set him to keep watch on the enemy while he examined the machinery. The Moor looked thoroughly done up, and it struck Oliphant that he was even more in need of food than Schwab, so he gave him the remainder of the stock of biscuits—not a large quantity now. As for Schwab, he had fallen asleep.

It took Tom but a few minutes to adjust the valve, but he knew that the result of this adjustment must be a serious reduction of speed. He was greatly perturbed. It was clearly impossible for Abdul to ride much farther: the horses were in a terrible state of exhaustion. They were cropping the scanty herbage at the side of the track—poor refreshment after the fatigue they had undergone.

"The Moors' horses must be equally played out, that's one comfort," said Tom;—"at least, those that have pursued us all the way, if any have. That's doubtful: the Moors have probably drawn on every village they have come through."

"I say, did you hear that?" asked Oliphant.

It was a shout—apparently from a spur of forest some distance to the right of the line which they had expected the enemy to take.

"They're spreading out! Who'd have thought they'd have kept it up so long?"

"Well, you see, they know that one of us is on horseback: that means that the machine won't carry us all; and in the nature of things they can overtake a rider."

"I can see nothing for it but that Abdul must push on alone," said Tom. "We can manage to get along slowly, and as long as the machine can keep us afloat at all they can't catch us. But if they catch sight of Abdul he's bound to be run down. Abdul, you must go on by yourself. Get to the coast if you can, and swim out to the yacht—can you swim?"

“Yes, master.”

“Swim to the yacht, then, and tell Mr. Greatorex what has happened. He’ll do all he can to help us if we can only get near enough.”

Abdul showed some reluctance to leave the others in difficulties, but he obeyed. He mounted the less exhausted of the horses and set off.

“He’ll have a chance,” remarked Tom, as he disappeared. “When the Moors see us in the air again they will suppose that Abdul is keeping pace with us as before.”

“It’s nearly six o’clock; it’ll be dark soon.”

“Yes, that gives him another chance—if they don’t sight him.”

At this moment he observed a score of horsemen emerging at a rapid pace from the forest whence the shout had come. They were about half a mile away. Catching sight of the airship, they gave utterance to loud cries of triumph, and somewhat changed their direction. Tom at once caused the airship to rise, and by the time the Moors arrived at the spot where it had rested it was high above their heads and out of harm’s way.

The Moors immediately began to scour the neighbourhood for signs of Abdul. Tom steered slightly to the left of the direction in which the lad had gone, in order still further to delude the pursuers. Not long afterwards a much larger band of riders galloped up from the direction in which the airship had come, and when they joined the former party, it was seen that they numbered at least sixty in all.

“We’re rousing the whole country,” said Tom with a return to his wonted cheerful manner. “If it goes on like this there’ll be thousands by the time we reach the coast.”

“Shall we reach it, d’you think?”

“I can’t tell. The engines are good for a few miles; how many I don’t know.”

“Vere am I?” said Schwab, awaking. “Ach! I remember. Do ve soon arrive at ze yacht?”

“We probably shan’t arrive at all,” replied Tom. “One of the engines is failing.”

“But it muss not—it muss not! Surely ze Photographic Sensitizer Preparation Number Six vill not fail? Schlagintwert’s preparations never fail; zat is ze foundation of zair business.”

“No; the preparation is all right; it’s the engine.”

“Ach! it should have been made in Jarmany! But, tell me true, Mr. Dorrell, are ve in danger?”

“The truth is, Mr. Schwab, that I can’t guarantee the machine for another ten miles.”

“Ach! Vat vill I become? Vat vill Schlagintwert’s become! Vy did you bring me in zis bad-made airship from my captivity? If you zere had left me, our Kaiser who is in Berlin vould have sent a telegram to ze Sultan of Marokko, and zen ve should see somezink. Zere had I at least enough to eat.”

“Confound it!” cried Tom, thoroughly exasperated. “We came to fetch Sir Mark Ingleton, not you. But for you we should have been halfway home to England by this time; and but for your weight, we shouldn’t have been in this pretty mess at all.”

Schwab’s jaw fell. This was an aspect of the matter that had not occurred to him. Lifting his waistcoat, and looking down, he said slowly—

“Truly I vish I had not eaten so much biscuit!”

It was now getting dark. Tom steered towards a bit of rough country to the north, again some points out of his course, his object being to worry the pursuers as much as possible and to draw them away from the line of Abdul’s flight. With great satisfaction he saw them follow. After scattering over a wide area in search of the fugitive whose disappearance had so much puzzled them, they had again formed a compact body, and pursued the airship in the belief that their quarry must still be within touch of it. In a few more minutes they were

obliterated by the darkness; but the sky was starry, and while on the ground they were invisible from above, it was probable that the airship was still visible to them.

Tom had noticed for some time past that the wind, which had been slight and for the most part in his favour during the day, was shifting, and blowing with greater force. In the circumstances the airship was making very little headway, and Tom's anxieties were further increased when his sense of smell apprised him that the engines were again becoming overheated. Even if the airship were out of sight, the pursuers would probably still hear the whirring of the propellers, and it was advisable, both for the sake of cooling the machinery and of depriving the enemy of a clue, that the airship should once more be brought to the ground. But it was with some trepidation that Tom allowed it to sink. He chose a spot just beyond a stretch of woodland from which it was scarcely possible that the vessel could have been seen. He could only hope that the sound had not been heard.

"I vish——" began Schwab, as they came to rest.

"Shut up!" said Tom in a vehement whisper. "Everything depends on our keeping perfect silence now."

In a few minutes the horsemen could be heard approaching. They dashed past the trees behind which the airship stood, and Tom's heart beat fast as he realized how very near the danger was. But the riders did not pause, and the sound of the horses' hoofs gradually faded away.

"We'd better lie snug for a time," said Tom. "Perhaps the wind will moderate. I'm afraid the exertion of overcoming it would do for the engines altogether."

While Oliphant held the electric torch, carefully shaded, Tom again overhauled the engines.

"The valve is sticking," he said in a whisper. "There is some grit

between the stem and the sleeve. It must have got in at our last stop. I shall have to take off the cover and file the stem smooth."

This was an operation of some difficulty; but as it turned out there was time to spare, for as the night wore on the force of the wind rather increased than diminished. Schwab bemoaned the lack of a pipe and beer; the others were so tired and famished that they were not provoked to either merriment or anger by his complaints. He by and by again fell asleep. Tom and Oliphant kept watch and watch throughout the night. When Tom awoke from an uneasy nap shortly before dawn, he was relieved to find that the wind had dropped, though its direction was still unfavourable. At daybreak a start was made, and for a short time the valve worked satisfactorily, thanks to the large amount of oil used to counteract the overheating. Then, however, the oil began again to give off an unmistakable odour. The airship was brought to ground, and Tom found that the injured stem had become bent. With infinite care, to avoid breaking it altogether, Tom straightened it with a small hammer, and again filed it smooth.

Once more the airship resumed its flight. Fortunately there was no sign of the pursuers, and Tom hoped that Abdul had managed to evade their clutches.

The country was very wild and deserted, and Tom purposely steered some miles out of what he thought was the true course, in order to avoid the cultivated district that lay in the direct line to the yacht. Suddenly, however, skirting the shoulder of a hill, he came into full view of a village, with the sea a few miles beyond.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Oliphant, "we may do it yet."

"Surely that's the very village you were taken to with Ingleton," said Tom, scanning the place through his binocular. "Have a look."

"By George! I believe you're right. There's a whole host of Moors round it, too. They've sighted us. They're off!"

Taking the glass from him, Tom saw a body of at least a hundred and

fifty men galloping off in a direction which would bring them between him and the coast.

“Smother them!” he cried. “I wouldn’t mind if we hadn’t to drop so often to cool.”

“Can’t we make one good dash for it? We’ve only eight or nine miles to go, have we?”

“My dear fellow, we can’t do five miles at a stretch—unless we drop Mr. Schwab.”

“Donnerwetter!” cried the German, starting up in fright. “Vat you say? Vould you do zat? Vould you desert? Vould you leave me, a Jarman sobjeck, to be tore in piece by tousand vile Mohrs, ven ze sea, ze sea vat sails ze Jarman fleet, is so near, so near? But yes—I know it! I alvays say so. Never trust an Englishman—egzept in business!”

Tom treated this outburst with silent contempt.

“I can’t go at a higher speed than fifteen miles an hour,” he said to Oliphant. “We’re perhaps a mile nearer the sea than the Moors, but they can equal our pace for a short distance, and I know we’ll have to come down before we get to the sea. If we do, we’ll be collared.”

“Risk a dash! It seems our only chance.”

Tom hesitated for a few moments. Then he said, setting his teeth—

“All right. It’s the only thing to do.”

He put both engines at full speed, and Schwab shouted with delight when he saw that the airship was gradually drawing away from the galloping Moors. But in ten minutes all three were aware of the ominous smell. Was it possible to reach the yacht, now clearly in view? Tom, alert to catch the slightest indication of failure on the part of the engines, hoped, doubted, hoped again, but was resolved to hold on to the last.

Another five minutes passed.

Then all were startled by a strange grinding sound in the defective

engine.

“What is it?” asked Oliphant.

“It’s all up,” said Tom quietly. “The heat has loosened the turbine blades, and they are smashing to pieces.” Even as he spoke sheets of flame shot from the exhaust pipe, accompanied by a series of deafening reports.

Tom at once reduced speed, shouting to Oliphant to adjust the planes for descent.

“Zink! Zink vat you do!” cried Schwab, now almost frantic. “Zey vill have us! Ze Mohrs vill cut our zroats! Vy—vy—vy——”

Tom paid no heed; Oliphant muttered under his breath. They were sinking towards a ravine through which a watercourse ran to the sea. The engine, its parts grinding and tearing with a hideous scrunching sound, was shooting out flames, to the accompaniment of detonations like those of a Maxim gun. Another minute or two would witness a cataclysm; but Tom thought that if the farther side of the ravine could be reached, they might gain a little grace. The enemy would have some difficulty in crossing at speed.

The engines were failing; the airship was falling more and more rapidly.

“Can’t screw the planes any further!” cried Tom.

Oliphant wrenched at the lever; Tom put the whole force of the second engine upon the ascensional screws; and the rapidity of descent was somewhat checked. The ravine was directly beneath; Tom succeeded in giving the vessel a last forward motion; then it came with a violent bump to the ground, just on the further edge.

“Out! Quick!” cried Tom to Schwab, who was bemoaning the shock he had suffered.

When all three stood safe on the ground, Tom caught hold of the rails of the car.

“I made it; I’ll break it; *they* shan’t,” he said, and he toppled the airship

over into the gulf, where it was smashed to atoms.

Then, with Oliphant at his side, and Schwab labouring behind, with piteous entreaties that they would not desert him, he dashed towards the cliff, a mile away, beyond which was the sea.

CHAPTER XVII—COMPLIMENTS AND THANKS

While yet in the air, Tom had seen a boat putting off from the yacht. The vessel itself was no longer visible, concealed by the intervening cliff; but the top of its mast, with Mr. Greatorex's ensign flying, could just be seen. Towards this Tom led the way at full speed. To go very fast was impossible over the rough ground, but moderate as the pace was it soon began to tell upon Schwab, who plunged heavily along, tripping over tussocks of coarse grass that grew here and there on the sandy soil. Fierce pants could be heard by the two running side by side in front of him, though, in spite of his breathlessness, he managed to give utterance every now and again to agonizing entreaties that the others would not desert him. Moved by these, and remembering the German's game leg, the others waited for him, and catching each an arm, hurried him along between them.

Terror lent him strength and speed when the foremost of the pursuers, arriving at the brink of the ravine, which at that point they were unable to cross, began to fire upon the fugitives. Bullets whistled past, alarmingly near, and Tom and Oliphant instinctively released Schwab's arms and moved apart, so as to present a smaller target to the enemy. Meanwhile some of the Moors had galloped up the bank of the ravine in search of a crossing. Glancing round, Tom was concerned to see that these horsemen had disappeared; presumably they had found a suitable crossing-place, and would soon again be on his tracks. In a few moments they reappeared on the nearer bank, and set off at a gallop.

The Englishmen were now about a quarter of a mile from the shore, Schwab having dropped nearly a hundred yards behind, with another quarter-mile between him and the horsemen. There could be little

doubt that the fugitives would be overtaken before they reached the edge of the cliff. Even if they contrived to scramble down they might be snapped up under the eyes of the yacht's crew, should not the boat have arrived. And what of the Moors who a day or two ago, when Tom left the place, had been encamped in the hollow of the cliff? Were they still there?

The question was answered almost as it occurred. Tom suddenly noticed a horseman making towards him from the left, followed closely by a dozen others. It was with a gasp of amazement that he recognized in the foremost rider no other than Abdul. He came up at a breakneck pace, sprang from his horse, and joined himself to the fugitives. Immediately afterwards the Moors were upon the little party. Leaping from their horses while still in full career, they threw themselves upon the four, and though Tom and Oliphant each with a blow from his fist felled a man, and Schwab threatened the vengeance of the Kaiser, they were overwhelmed and flung to the ground.

The Moors shouted with exultation, their cries being answered jubilantly by the horsemen coming up from the ravine. They were beginning to bind their captives; but before a single knot could be tied there came other shouts from the direction of the sea.

"At them, men; bowl 'em over!"

Surely this was the voice of Mr. Greatorex! A lusty British cheer answered him. With a great effort Tom threw off the Moor who was pinning him down, and sprang to his feet in time to see a dozen sturdy seamen rushing from the edge of the cliff. The Moors turned at bay, but nothing could withstand the charge of the British tars, wielding their clubbed rifles like flails. In a few seconds half of the Moors were on the ground with more or less broken heads; the rest were in full flight.

But the other troop of horsemen was now not more than a few hundred yards distant. At a word from Captain Bodgers the sailors

flung themselves face downwards, ready to deal with the second band.

“Aim at the horses!” cried Mr. Greatorex, as he came panting up in the rear of his men, and flopped down beside them.

A scattered volley brought half a dozen of the advancing horsemen to the dust. The rest, unable, owing to the rugged uneven ground, to see with what force they had to contend, reined up and hesitated. Another volley caused them to draw off to some little distance, where they formed a group and began to discuss how to retrieve this unexpected check.

“Now for the boat, my lads!” cried Mr. Greatorex.

Up sprang the men, and the whole body made a dash down the cliff. Before the Moors had agreed upon their course, the fugitives were half-way down. Seeing now by how few men they had been checked, the Moors came after them at full speed. But by the time they reached the edge of the cliff and dismounted the fugitives were at the bottom.

At that moment there was a report and a puff of smoke out at sea, and a shot, purposely aimed high, flew over the cliff, and fell a little to the rear of the Moors. That was the finishing stroke. Their horses stampeded and dashed straight for the ravine, the riders in wild pursuit behind them. Three minutes afterwards Mr. Greatorex had his whole party in the boat, and the sailors, with a final rousing cheer, pulled for the yacht.

Tom saw everything in a mist as he went aboard. Worn out with the exertions and excitements of the past few days, he was only vaguely conscious of being fussed over, and treated, as he said afterwards, more or less as a baby. He was put to bed, slept heavily for several hours, and awoke with a most exigent hunger. The yacht was in motion. He rose, bathed, put on some clean things, and, feeling himself again, thankfully obeyed Mr. Greatorex’s hearty call to dinner.

Around the well-spread table he found the rest of the party already

seated. At the head was Mr. Greatorex, with Sir Mark Ingleton at his right; at the foot, Captain Bodgers with Herr Schwab. The German had tucked his napkin between his shirt and his waistcoat, and was gazing with ecstatic anticipation through his glasses at the covered entrée dishes just brought in by Timothy.

Tom was taken aback, and not a little moved, when Sir Mark Ingleton rose from his seat, and, grasping his hand, said—

"Thank you, Mr. Dorrell. I have heard the whole story from Mr. Greatorex and your Moorish follower. It is not for me to speak of the public service you have rendered; personally, I owe you more than I can say, and I shall never forget it."

"So!" chimed in Schwab, rising stiffly from his chair. His left hand gripped his fork; his right enveloped Tom's. "I zank you, for myself personaliter, and for ze Kaiser, for Schlagintwert, and for Business. Fill my glass, if you please," he added to Timothy, whose smile instantly changed to a frown—"I vish to cry 'Hoch!' No, no, not too full, for ze ship moves, and ze champagne vould slop over."

Schwab's intervention came in the nick of time to relieve Tom's embarrassment.

"Come, Tom, my *dear* fellow," cried Mr. Greatorex, "*sit* down. We were only waiting for you."

"Where's Oliphant?" asked Tom.

"Hm! *M'Cracken* is at the furnace," replied Mr. Greatorex.

"I say! That's rough luck!" said Tom.

"It is by his own wish. I did violence to my sense of what is *right* and *proper*, and invited him to a place at our board. He showed, I must say, a commendable sense of his *duty* in the matter. 'I'm M'Cracken and your stoker, sir,' he said, 'till we get back to England.'"

"May I suggest," said Sir Mark Ingleton, "that a sense of the unfitness of his attire also weighed with him?"

“We can soon alter that,” said Tom. “He’s about my build; I’ll go and rig him out in one of my suits.”

“Ve shall not vait to begin?” said Schwab anxiously, holding knife and fork upright on the table.

“Mr. Oliphant will doubtless pardon us,” replied Sir Mark blandly.

In a quarter of an hour Tom returned with Oliphant in white ducks and blue serge.

“Still is zere somezink left,” said Schwab. “I feel moch better, zough I vish ze table vould not move. Do not fill your glass quite full, sir; it vould slop over, and zat vould be pity.”

“Where’s Abdul?” asked Tom, as he sat down.

“With the men, forward,” said Mr. Greatorex.

“That’s all right. I’m jolly glad he got off safely.”

“A most intelligent youth,” said Sir Mark. “It appears that he rode straight into the village of Salaam son of Absalaam with an urgent demand for assistance from the sheikh of Ain Afroo. He was leading a party of Moors in that direction when unluckily a genuine messenger from the sheikh arrived. Abdul wheeled about and galloped for the shore, with the rest at his heels, as you saw.”

“Shust in time,” said Schwab. “Vun moment after, and I am no more.”

“I haven’t heard your story yet, sir,” said Tom to the envoy.

“Story, bless you, I have none to tell. I was on my way to Marrakesh, where the Sultan was at the time, and was indiscreet enough one evening to leave my camp for a stroll with only one attendant. I was snapped up, enveloped in a djellab, and conveyed on horseback—to my great discomfort—to the sheikh’s kasbah. There I had the good fortune to meet Mr. Schwab, whose conversation, together with a Schlagintwert price list and a copy of the *Daily Mail*, helped to lighten the tedium of my captivity.”

“I zank you, Sir Ingleton,” said Schwab. “Alvays do I vish to be useful.

Utile et dulce. You vill not forget vat I say about extra-special discount to ze nobility and gentry? And I hear viz surprise, sir," he added to Oliphant, "zat you are son of a lord. Viz gompliments!"

He handed Oliphant a card from his case.

"Much obliged," said Oliphant, kicking Tom under the table. "How did they get hold of *you*?"

"Vy, I tell you. I come to Rabat to buy great lot of carpets for Schlagintwert. Zere I hear zat ze Sultan is at Marrakesh, and I zink I shall visit him. I egzpect big order for alarm clocks and bianola. Zat vill be good business. Ach! vat know ze Mohrs of business? Zey seize me; zey care nozink ven I say I am Jarman sobjeck; zey understand nozink ven I speak of our Kaiser who is in Berlin; and so am I shut opp. I smoke all my tobacco; zere is no more. I read ze *Daily Mail*, and zink ven I gontemblate ze advertisement vat colossal business is literature in England. I read Schlagintwert's price list, and make notes for new edition; alas! zat muss all be done again. Zen I do nozink but zink profound, until Sir Ingleton come and ve study ze list togezer."

"An experience I shall always cherish, believe me, Mr. Schwab," said Sir Mark.

"I zank you, sir. Ze pleasure vas mutual; ze profit shall be Schlagintwert's."

"But how was it you were put in the dungeons?" asked Tom.

"Vy, I tell you. Vun day come ze sheikh viz his men. Zink I, now has arrive ze Kaiser's telegram. But no; zey carry us down to ze deps, and zere are ve shut opp vorse zan before!"

"That was when they got the message from Salathiel ben Ezra, no doubt," said Tom,"—the Jew you found in the cave, Mr. Schwab."

"Ven I vas so hungry!"

"I wonder what has become of him?" said Oliphant. "It's to him I owe the keenest sport I've ever had."

“The less said about that the *better*, M’C—I beg your pardon—Mr. Oliphant. The man was a *villain*. I *said* so, Tom. Timothy will have a *scar* for the rest of his days. And but for the Jew we shouldn’t have lost our airship. Not that that matters. We’ve *proved* it, you know; we’ll build a larger one now.”

“And Schlagintwerts shall buy it cost price!”

“No, sir, Schlagintwerts shall *not* buy it,” said Mr. Greatorex, frowning severely on the German. “We will offer it to the Government. I shall invite Colonel Capper to examine it, and Lord Langside, I trust, will show himself sufficiently sensible of his obligation to us to make no difficulties about the *price*.”

“Vell, Schlagintwert shall have colossal order for Photographic Sensitizer Preparation Number Six—at least until ze var come.”

“*What* war?”

“Vy, ze var ven ze Kaiser shall zink it is time to teach ze vorld zat——”

“Stay, Mr. Schwab,” interrupted Sir Mark, “we must not be indiscreet. As a diplomatist it is my duty to avert war; as a business man you, I am sure, would deplore it.”

“So. Zat is shust vat I alvays say: zat is vat I go to say ven you interrup me; ven ze Kaiser shall zink it is time to teach ze vorld zat Business are Business!”

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