



“Grappled with their antagonists.”

THE TRAP-BREAKERS.

BY HAROLD BINDLOSS.

(Concluded from page 343.)

THE three sat down and waited, looking out anxiously across the angry water. It was blowing fresh, and the sea was getting up. If the surf got much heavier, it would prevent the trap-breakers reaching the nets and make it risky for them to land; but the boats could not be far off, and Winthrop tried to calculate when Wheeler would arrive. He certainly could not reach the beach before the wreckers. At length, a dark object swung up on top of a sea. Another appeared behind, and then another, until Winthrop counted four. 'Two short!' he said to Ah Lee. 'Where do you think they have gone?'

Ah Lee shrugged. 'No savvy.'

One of the boats was then awkwardly towing another that had some oars broken and her side smashed when the sloop rolled down on her, but Winthrop did not learn this until afterwards. In the meantime, the boats he watched came on, and presently stopped a short distance from the trap. The big posts now rose indistinctly from the foam that surged about the nets, for the tide was falling. Still, it was hardly likely that the wreckers could see the rope, and Gardner chuckled when the splash of oars indicated that the boats were moving again.

'I guess the boys will get a surprise,' he said, and then jumped up. 'The first's got over! They're going for the net!'

'Sea threw her across without touching,' Winthrop replied, and seized Gardner's arm. 'Hold on! Watch the next!'

A boat swung up on a white-topped roller, and then sank and stopped while a cloud of spray leaped up. Shouts came out of the darkness and oars splashed, but the boat did not move, and Winthrop imagined her keel was jammed against the wire. While she ground against it, the broken combers would wash on board, and he thought the men were already baling hard. A dark figure bent to and fro, as if busy throwing out the water. The boats behind backed off, and the splash of oars indicated that their crews were holding them head to sea.

'They have found out the rope,' he said. 'In a few minutes they'll begin to look for the end, or try to land and cut it here—' He stopped, and added: 'The first boat's coming now!'

Gardner called his men, and they ran along the beach, stumbling across the weedy boulders! The boat that had crossed the wire was close by, rising and falling as she drove shorewards through the surf. When Gardner shouted, ordering the men on board to keep off, they stopped rowing for a moment and then began again. The dark bow tilted up out of the boiling foam as a roller swept her on.

'Stand by, all!' roared Gardner. 'They've not got to land!'

Next moment he and the others plunged into the surf and a roller broke about their waists. One went down, and was washed back upon the stones; the rest scrambled clear as the boat rowed in on the next sea's crest. There was a crash as she struck the beach, and then a short, confused fight began. As the wreckers dropped their oars the boat swung broadside-on, and Gardner's men used their fists and clubs.

She filled and rolled over in the streaming backwash, throwing out her crew, who tried to dodge the blows, and grappled with their antagonists. They were in and out of the water as the rollers surged up and down the beach, and one group fell in a struggling heap and vanished amidst the backwash. Nobody altogether knew what happened, but in a few minutes three or four of the wreckers had run off along the beach, and Gardner's men had three prisoners. All were wet and bruised, and some were bleeding.

'We have made good so far,' Gardner remarked when they pulled up the boat. 'Looks as if the other fellows are pulling for the buoy, and it's lucky I made the rope fast with a big shackle. They certainly won't get it loose unless they've brought a spike.'

Winthrop doubted if they could unscrew the shackle with a spike. The rope did not run all round the trap, but it guarded the lee side, which was to some extent sheltered. Now the sea had got up, the other was swept by white combers that threatened to swamp the boats. If the men rowed round the end of the rope, he thought they would be thrown against the nets. Yet it was obvious that they meant to try.

'They're not very bright,' he said. 'It would have been a better plan to land at this end of the rope and wreck the traps from the shore.'

'I reckon they'll see that presently,' Gardner replied. 'In the meanwhile they're losing time, and Wheeler may come along before the thing strikes them.'

He and Winthrop sat down behind a rock that cut off the wind and watched the boats. The wreckers were obviously determined, because they pulled against the sea, and, after a struggle, stopped where Winthrop imagined the buoy that held the rope was moored. One could hardly see the boats in the spray, and when a comber rolled up they vanished in the dark. It would be nearly impossible to work at the shackle, and the steel wire would be hard to cut. After a time, the wreckers seemed to give it up, for the cluster of boats drew out into a straggling row.

'They're going to land,' said Gardner. 'They won't be long finding our end of the rope, and then I don't know if they'll wipe us off the beach or not. Anyhow, I'm stopping till I drop.'

He called his men, and, gripping their clubs, they went down to the water's edge. It was nervous work, watching the boats pull ashore. If the wreckers were able to land, the party would be outnumbered, and Winthrop doubted if the landing could be prevented. Besides, some of the fellows might carry pistols.

'Ugly things may happen if anybody pulls a knife or gun,' he said.

'That's so,' Gardner agreed. 'My gun stops in my pocket as long as I can keep it there, and, so far as I know, the boys have no knives. Guess they'll make good firing rocks and with their clubs.'

Winthrop wondered. Two to one was long odds, but a volley of big stones might disable some of the wreckers while they tried to land, and he waited as coolly as he could while the boats reeled shorewards before the combers that were getting bigger fast. In another minute or two they would reach the beach and the struggle would begin.

To his surprise, they stopped and one pulled round. Somebody shouted, and his voice reached the men on shore, although they could not hear what he said. Then the others turned and pulled after the first. In a few

minutes they had vanished, and there was nothing but the dark rollers and flying spray.

'They've had enough, or Wheeler's coming,' Gardner said, and then pausing, shouted, 'Here he is!'

A slanted mast and funnel loomed out of the dark, a whistle screamed, and then the steamer, carrying no lights, melted from sight.

'He's gone after the boats,' said Winthrop. 'They can't get away. Well, I'm glad it's over without another fight.'

'So am I,' Gardner owned. 'I allow it's quite likely we couldn't have stood them off. The sea and those boys of yours beat them. Say, they're smart kids! I was surely foolish when I thought they'd quit.'

Winthrop smiled and said nothing. He was satisfied the trouble had ended, and knew the boys' mettle. They were not quitters. Next day he had further grounds for satisfaction when he heard Wheeler's remarks about their exploit.

A YEAR IN A GARDEN.

X.—OCTOBER.

ON October the 1st young spiders appeared, breaking their egg-shells, and making their way out of their strong silken cradle. They were exactly like grown-up spiders, except that they were very tiny. They were so small, Billy got a magnifying-glass to examine them. At first their bodies seemed too big and heavy for their legs, and some of them toppled over before they walked away.

The caterpillar families had increased in number and size, but gradually they were all undergoing their transformation for their winter sleep, and as they spun themselves up on the walls and roofs, or buried themselves in the soft moss and earth, there was less feeding for Billy to attend to. At last there were only two of the thick, dirty green ones and a very late small green one that needed any food, and soon the green one took its last stroll all over the walls and glass door, and came to rest in a corner. A tiny speck of light-coloured silk attached its tail to the wall, and for a few days it remained motionless, waiting for the change that was inevitable. Finally, it made the seventh of the grey chrysalids that would turn into small garden white butterflies next spring, when perhaps it would serve as part of a sparrow's breakfast. All the large garden white caterpillars had long ago spun themselves up into neat prickly chrysalids, covered with little black dots. Babe had watched them anxiously as they cast their skins for the last time; for a while they seemed so intensely uncomfortable; they were so soft and helpless in their new pale-green sheaths without either legs or head. One of the buff ermines had wedged itself down between the door and the box containing the moss and earth, and Billy had to be very careful when he changed the cabbage-leaves not to disturb it; the other had made its cocoon up in a corner, and hung there, the shiny dark case quite visible through the thin cocoon made of silk and hair.

At the end of the month, the friend who sent the children the buff ermine caterpillars sent them another small tin box containing, this time, prizes that made Billy wild with joy. There were in the box, resting on cotton-wool, and wrapped up in soft tissue paper, two big, dull-looking chrysalids, about an inch long, of the poplar hawk moth; two soft little cocoons made of leaf mould of White Ermine Moths; two small chry-

salids of the Brindled Beauty; and two much larger ones of the Buff Tip. The instructions were: Roll each pair at once on to perfectly clean dry moss; place in boxes where the insects will have plenty of space when they emerge in spring; and never touch the chrysalids with the fingers unless absolutely necessary.

UNPOPULAR YELLOW.

YELLOW has never been a favourite in European countries; it was called the traitor's colour, and in Spain the executioner always wore it, as a symbol of the treason he was commanded to punish. In France, during the Middle Ages, the doors of the houses of traitors were daubed with yellow, while, in some countries, the Jews were forced to wear the despised tint, and were held guilty of betraying Christ to His death. On the other hand, in China yellow is the royal colour and deeply revered. The Emperor wears it, and his relations are allowed the honour of putting on a yellow girdle. S. B.

TRUANT AND THE SOCKS.

THIS is a true story of a retriever belonging to a keeper. The dog, whose name was Truant, was a very great favourite with his master, to whom he was devoted. As he was a shooting dog, he was never allowed inside his master's cottage, but when he was not helping his master he was chained up. Some dogs are made very fierce by being chained up, but Truant was so good-tempered and so much petted by his master that he never became fierce, and always let his master's children play with him, even when he was tied up.

One day, Truant's master went away on business for his master, and left Truant, as he thought, chained up safely by his kennel. It was a wet day, and the children were not allowed to play out-of-doors, so poor Truant felt horribly lonely, and tried hard to get free. His master, in putting on the dog's collar, had slipped the tooth of the buckle into a different hole from the usual one, and made the collar bigger than usual; and Truant, after some wriggling, managed to slip his head out, and made for the cottage, hoping to find his master. The door was open, and he went in, but no master was there! He sniffed round, and smelt that there was something belonging to his master in the room. After hunting about, he discovered a pair of socks belonging to the keeper on a chair. 'Hullo,' thought Truant, 'here's something of master's. Shouldn't wonder if it had been stolen. Anyway, I'll keep it safe for him.' And he seized the socks in his mouth, and carried them off down the garden, where he dug a hole, and buried them quite safely.

The keeper's wife was upstairs, and saw Truant hurrying down the garden with the socks. She rushed out just in time to see him bury them. 'You naughty dog,' she said. 'What have you done? That's not a bone you've found, it's your master's socks.' Truant wagged his tail, and thought to himself, 'What a stupid woman. I know exactly what those are, and I am keeping them safe for master.' The keeper's wife tried to dig the socks up, but Truant growled at her, and would not let her go near the place, so she went back into the cottage, leaving Truant on guard over the place where the socks were. He stayed there till his master came home, and then, just as his wife was telling the



"The dog dug a hole and buried them."

keeper all about the socks, and what happened to them, Truant came rushing up. 'Hullo, old boy, what have you done with my socks?' said the keeper. 'Come and see,' barked Truant. He led the way down the garden, dug up the socks with his front paws, and gave them to his master.

A SOLDIER'S HOPE.

BESIDE the streams of Babylon,
A British soldier lay,
And dreamed of kings and empires gone,
Wars of a long-past day.



There stood before him in his dream
A warrior strong and straight:
'Stranger,' he said, 'this is the stream
Where run the years of fate.

'Here Pharaoh fought Assyria's king;
Here Persia met the Greek;
Here Cyrus lies; here, poets sing,
The wise should Eden seek.

'What want you in this ancient plain?
What gold, what tyranny?'
'I seek,' the soldier cried, 'no gain!
I fight to make men free!'

E. SHORT.

WANDERERS IN THE WAR.

By A. A. METHLEY.

(Continued from page 339.)

IT was quite dark by now, a beautiful night with the August moon overhead and hundreds of tiny stars agleam in the clear sky. Not a sound was to be heard except the purring throb of the great motor and an occasional cry of some bird or animal from the dark forest that bordered the road on either side. The two Frenchmen smoked in silence, and Roger, sitting motionless between them, watched eagerly for some opportunity to escape.

At first the plan seemed hopeless, for one cannot slip unnoticed from a car that is going at the rate of thirty or forty miles an hour, but, after a while, fortune turned in the boy's favour.

The motor slowed down, stopped, could not be started again, and both the chauffeur and Durand got out to see what was the matter, while the elder officer fumed and grumbled at the delay.

He too got out of the car at last to join in the examination and discussion, and Roger, realising that his chance had come, crept swiftly and silently out of the car, hid behind it for a moment, and then darted away along the road, his footsteps making no sound on the soft, sandy surface.

When he had gone about a hundred yards, he pushed his way noiselessly into the bushes and laid himself down on the ground, keeping absolutely still so that no rustle or breaking twig should betray his whereabouts.

For a few minutes nothing happened, and then the sound of the motor engine was heard again. An angry exclamation followed, in the voice of the grey-haired officer, and the boy knew that his escape had been discovered.

He almost held his breath then, as he crouched among the brambles, for the chauffeur came back along the road, and with him was Captain Durand, who carried one of the lamps from the car, and flashed it from side to side, peering eagerly into the undergrowth as he did so.

'Hullo! Are you there?' Roger felt horribly cruel and ungrateful, for there was a note of real anxiety in the young officer's voice as he called the truant again and again. But it would not do to be weak and foolish now. There was Val and the promise to his father to be considered, so he pressed his lips firmly together, and in a few minutes the search came to an end. The elder man strode down the road, there was a short discussion, an angry command, and then the soldiers returned to the car and resumed their interrupted journey. When the sound of the engine had quite died away, Roger came out of his hiding-place and started to walk northward through the silent, fragrant August night.

On and on he went, kilometre after kilometre, mile after mile, until he wondered whether the forest

through which he was trudging would ever come to an end. The villages had seemed to be closely strung together along the road, like the beads on a necklace, as the great car tore through them, but now the distances were interminable, and there was no sign of life or of civilisation. The boy was footsore, hungry, and very tired, and he could not help thinking with longing of the cosy little cottage where he and Val had spent last night, and of the meal which they had eaten by the crackling wood fire.

Even the alarm about the wolf, that had been real and terrible enough at the time, seemed merely amusing and absurd when looked back upon from the gloom of the dark, lonely forest, and with the picture in his mind of Bob's bright, friendly eyes and round, tangled head.

At last he decided that he could walk no further, so he dragged the electric torch from his pocket—he had clung to that and to the bowie-knife through all his adventures—and looked round for some place where he might pass the night. He found a narrow path before long, which led into a small abandoned quarry; and there he settled himself into a little hollow which was guarded on one side by a great block of rough stone. Very soon, in spite of his hunger and his loneliness, the boy was sound asleep and dreaming of wolves, motor-bicycles, shouting Uhlans, and endless lines of soldiers, who marched along a road that seemed to stretch from horizon to horizon.

'It's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go;
It's a long way to Tipperary to the sweetest girl I know.'

The words, sung in a husky young voice and with a strong cockney accent, broke into Roger's slumbers. He moved, sat up, opened his eyes and rubbed them with clenched, grimy hands.

The sight at which he peered from behind his sheltering rock was fully as unexpected as the sound which had first aroused him.

It was still quite dark, there in the deep, disused quarry, but a large fire of brushwood had been kindled, and the flames leaped and flickered, throwing a ruddy light on to the rough blocks of stone, the encircling cliffs, with their overhanging trees, and on the figures of six men who were grouped round the blaze.

It was these six figures that riveted the gaze of Roger's round, wondering eyes, for surely they were the most extraordinary and grotesque ragamuffins that he had ever seen in his life. And to make the whole thing more amazing, one of them was singing an English song, there in the gloom and silence of a French forest.

The men were all alike grimy, unshaved, and dressed in dusty khaki uniforms—at least, the garments might once have been uniforms, although now, ragged, stained, creased, and lacking buttons and badges, they preserved very little of their original character.

Breeches had been cut above the knee into the semblance of running-shorts; puttees were being used as belts, bandages, or foot-wrappings. One man wore a tweed cap, two were bare-headed, a third had a knitted muffler wound-turban fashion round his head, and many odd scraps of string had been pressed into service to take the place of missing buttons, buckles, or boot-laces.

Two of the men were stretched on the ground, so

sound asleep that they almost might have been dead; one was employed in winding strips of torn handkerchief round a wounded hand, and a third sat motionless by the fire, his head resting on his hands, in an attitude that spoke of utter weariness. The singer, who was a dark-haired haggard boy of about nineteen, was stirring something in a battered tin over the fire

'It's a long, long way to Tipperary—
And we sha'n't never get there—I don't think!'

The roystering plaintive chorus, with its improvised last line, came to an end as the boy lifted his cooking-pot off the fire; and then Roger, convinced by this time that he really was awake, crept out from his hiding-place, and stood in the middle of the strange group.

'Hullo! What's up now? Where did you hop from?'

There was something in the men's faces that made Roger feel as if he were in the presence of war as it really was.

'Parly vous Frongsay? Mercy! Bon jour! That's all the French I know,' the speaker went on. 'Here, Jock, you're somethin' of a scholar, come and do a bit of "Parly vous" to this little bloke who's jumped up out of nowhere.'

The man who had been bandaging his hand got up stiffly and came forward. It could be seen now that he was wearing a ragged tartan kilt.

'I'm English—my name's Roger Mervyn.'

There was a moment's silence, while the Scotchman had stared at the speaker with bright, hollow, blue eyes, which, peering out from beneath a tangle of red hair, were rather reminiscent of Bob the sheep-dog, and then all the men crowded round Roger, greeting him eagerly, shaking his hand, offering him food, and inviting him to sit down in front of the blazing fire.

'To think of running up against an English kid in a hole like this; it do make things seem a bit more home-like.' It was as if the young Londoner put the thoughts of all his comrades into words. Even the two sleepers were awakened to join in the welcome.

Roger's bewilderment and uneasiness increased every moment.

'But who are you? I don't understand. Where do you come from?' he asked, and one of the men repeated his words with a short laugh.

'Who are we? What do you think? Did you take us for a herd of scarecrows? Well, it wouldn't be much wonder if you did. We're soldiers, my son—let me tell you that. Privates in his Majesty's army, and a mixed bag as ever any one did come across. Jock, there, he's a Highlander, and the other five of us belongs to four different regiments; and we comes from Mons, if you know where that is. I didn't till a week ago, but I ain't likely to forget it in a hurry. No, I don't think.'

'But how? Why? What has happened?'

And then a fair-haired man—the one who had been sitting by the fire—took up the tale. 'Yes, Mons, that's where we come from, and we've been fighting the Germans; but perhaps you doesn't know as there's a war on, young man? We stood up to it we did, up there at Mons, and now we're retirin' with the enemy at our heels.'

'And the six of us being all wounded men, more or less, haven't been able to retire quite quick enough,'

put in another, 'and we stand a jolly good chance of being taken prisoners, unless we manages to catch up with some of our pals to-morrow. In the meantime, I'm going to have supper, or breakfast—whichever you like to call it. Alf, hand over some of that stew of yours.'

The dark-haired boy began to distribute the contents of his cook-pot into various tin cups and pannikins, Roger being given a share with the rest.

'We did a little bit of foraging as we come along,' the cook explained. 'This here's a rabbit as I knocked over the head with my rifle-butt; and Bill, he's been searching the country too, and digging onions in a trampled-up field. Fine time we're having, and it's ten to one we gets to "gay Paree" before we've done.'

The men laughed and joked as they gathered round the fire for the nondescript meal, but there was something unnatural in their merriment, and their eyes were bright and strained as if they had seen terrible things which could not be forgotten.

At last the tall Scotchman, who seemed to be the leader of the band of stragglers, got up, stretched himself, and began to strap a heavy pack on to his shoulders. 'Come on, boys,' he said. 'It's getting light, and we must be on the march before sunrise.'

Roger watched the preparations for departure with a very heavy heart. The retirement of the French army from the frontier had been terrible enough, but that the English should also be retreating seemed well-nigh impossible; and he felt as if everything—the old beliefs, the old landmarks, even the old life itself—were being ruthlessly swept away. It was only yesterday that he had first known that British troops were actually fighting in France; and now, here were these weary men, the vagrants, apparently, of a retreating army. He did not know how soon that retreat was to turn into attack—at the Marne.

Alf noticed the boy's troubled face, and patted his shoulder kindly. 'Cheer up, Sonnie,' he said. 'There ain't nothing to growse about. We ain't beaten, and, what's more, we ain't going to be. And now you'd better come along of us. This won't be a healthy country to be left behind in, I can tell you.'

'No, I can't come; I have to go the other way,' was the answer; and although the other men joined with Alf in pressing Roger to accompany them, he shook his head, and would not listen to arguments or persuasion. 'I can't come; I'm awfully sorry, but I can't,' he repeated.

And then Jock, growing impatient at the delay, bade his comrades leave the boy alone. 'If he won't come, he won't,' he said; 'and there's no need for us to interfere. He will come across some of our officers soon, most likely, and they'll settle the business and pack him off home to England. Now then, my lads, we must be off. Shoulder arms, quick march!'

'Quick march!' The words seemed almost a jest indeed as the six wounded men limped painfully away in the dim grey light of early dawn. Alf turned round before he had gone far and waved his hand. 'Are we down-hearted? No!' he shouted; and then he trudged away singing. It was very still there in the forest, and Roger could hear the words of the song clearly:

'It's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go.'

(Continued on page 354.)



"The most extraordinary ragamuffins he had ever seen in his life."