



“ ‘You wantee find him quick?’ ”

THE OPIUM JOINT.

BY HAROLD BINDLOSS.

VANCOUVER, standing on the wide Inlet, with dark forest and snow mountains in the background, is a beautifully situated and prosperous Canadian town, but it has grown fast, and was not always as orderly as it is now. Not very long since it was frequented by runaway sailors, miners, and lumbermen, who came to squander their money, Chinamen and Japanese. Some of the Asiatics were quiet, industrious people, and some were not. At the back of the growing town there was a suburb of small wooden houses and bark shanties, where gamblers and fortune-tellers robbed their victims, and Chinese kept opium dens. The police knew all about the place; but, for the most part, left it alone. In Western towns, they are generally satisfied to mark such neighbourhoods by red lights, which warn respectable people to keep away.

All this explains how Tom Dawson had an adventure that would probably be impossible now. Soon after he and Jake Winthrop brought the patrol-boat to the rescue, when the wreckers tried to break the salmon-trap, Dawson one morning left the hotel where Mr. Winthrop was stopping, and did not come back. At the time a four-masted American schooner rode in the Inlet ready to go to sea, but waiting because her crew was short. Her captain had a bad name; there had been trouble on board last voyage, and some of the men had run away. In consequence, the Captain went to a boarding-house 'crimp,'* and promised him fifty dollars if he could find three more. The crimp said he would try, although he knew the men must be got on board before they knew where they were going, and without the knowledge of the shipping officials.

After searching the boarding-houses, and finding nobody whom he could make drunk, he sent for two of his friends who had, as it happened, taken part in the attempt to break Gardner's salmon-trap. They had escaped, but some of their accomplices, whom the patrol had caught, were making roads with a heavy shot chained to their legs. 'I want two men and a strong lad,' he said. 'There's fifty dollars to share between us if we can get them, but they've got to be on board to-morrow night.'

'Why d'you want a lad?' one asked.

'To agree with the official crew-list,' the crimp replied with a grin. 'His name is Henderson; he came from England, and his age is eighteen. He can call himself what he likes when they take him off to sea.'

The others loafed about the water-front, and pondered when they saw Dawson on the Canadian Pacific wharf.

'That's the kid who brought patrol-man Wheeler when he corralled Pete and Dave,' said one.

'It surely is,' the other agreed. 'I saw Pete yesterday shovelling dirt on to the Westminster road.'

'Well,' said the first, 'the kid's a sailor all right; he's about the age, and ought to meet the bill. Besides, it would kind of square the deal if we could ship him.'

They went off to a dirty saloon, and by-and-by made a plan. The plan worked, and when it got dark Dawson had not returned to the hotel. Mr. Winthrop felt disturbed, and at Jake's suggestion sent the bell-boy to a little Chinese shop with a note.

'Ah Lee hasn't forgotten we pulled him out of the

water, Jake remarked. 'He's a good sort, and a boss of some kind among the Chinks; in fact, I allow he's rather a big man. Besides, there's not much goes on underground they don't know about. Anyhow, we've got to find Tom, and Ah Lee will get on his track quicker than the police.'

Mr. Winthrop nodded. He was anxious about Dawson, and knew Jake meant neighbourhoods respectable people avoided when he said 'underground.' As a matter of fact, in American Pacific-coast cities, Asiatic gamblers and opium-smokers had their secret dug-outs under the streets. Ah Lee, however, did not reply, and Mr. Winthrop was getting impatient when the bell-boy said a Chinese laundry-man wanted him. As Mr. Winthrop had sent no clothes to be washed, he looked at Jake, who told the boy to bring the Chinaman to their room.

'Ah Lee doesn't advertise himself,' Jake said with a grin. 'You'll remember only two or three people saw him when he sent us for the patrol-boat. I reckon he finds it prudent to work in the dark, and anyway the Chinks like that plan.'

A minute or two afterwards Ah Lee entered. One could not tell if he was old or young, and he was dressed like a laundry-boy in a skull-cap and loose blue clothes. He carried two baskets on a pole, which he kept on his shoulder until the door was shut. His face was inscrutable when Mr. Winthrop told him about Dawson, and said he had informed the police.

'Hum!' said Ah Lee, 'pleece-man not welly good; I go lookee, pellaps find him.' He paused, and added meaningly, 'You wantee find him quick?'

'It will be worth while if you can find him,' Mr. Winthrop replied, taking out some five-dollar bills.

Ah Lee shook his head, and his manner was dignified. 'Pellaps bimeby! No wantee money now!'

Then he went out, and turned at the door, as two or three men came along the passage. 'Yen Sing washee velly good, quick, and cheap. Satisfy evely time you deal with Yen Sing.'

His footsteps died away down the passage, and Jake laughed. 'He didn't want those fellows to wonder what he was doing in our room. Ah Lee's pretty smart; you can trust him to put over an awkward job. All the same, I'm bothered about Dawson.'

In the meantime Dawson spent some hours walking about the city, and among the giant pines in the Stanley Park. Then he lunched at a dairy where you helped yourself at a fixed price, and an electric organ made a horrible noise, and in the afternoon came back to the water-front. He saw the big American schooner riding off the wharf, with tall, white cotton-canvas hoisted to dry, and the flowing curves of her dark hull reflected on the shining sea. She was a beautiful vessel, but after the story he had heard, Dawson was glad he was not going to sea in her. For a time he loafed about, and looked across the Inlet towards the snow mountains that glimmered behind the climbing forests in the North; and then strolled along the railroad track that ran beside the beach. The hotel was hot and full of flies; he would sooner be outside, and supper would not be served until six o'clock.

There was a gap between the town and the Hastings mill, where the saws had just stopped screaming, and stacks of lumber were piled by the track. On Dawson's side of the mill-wharf, a gravel beach sloped to the water, and the clear, green brine looked inviting. He had time for a swim before supper, and undressing

* A tavern or lodging house-keeper who by drugs or drink, or by force, kidnaps men to serve on merchant ships.

behind a stack of boards, he plunged in. The water was cold; a few minutes was enough, and he ran up the beach and began to dress. While he did so he heard a faint rustle behind the lumber pile, and wondered whether it was a rat. For no very obvious reason he wanted to find out, but there were rough stones and sharp bits of wood between him and the corner, and he was not ready to put on his boots.

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THE CHRISTMAS GHOST.

BARNES is an awfully clever little chap, and he's my chum, too. I always think he will have a future like Sherlock Holmes, for he's tremendously sharp at detective work. He's always quietly noticing things, and saying nothing. Then, when he's looking extra innocent, and a mystery crops up—well, he suddenly shows that he's been wide awake and taking notice all the time. He earned his name of 'Sherlock' when he first found out who was stealing the dormitory tuck, and he deserved it more than ever over the Christmas Ghost that followed.

The story of the tuck mystery had better come first. We had all brought back a tremendous lot of good stuff that term, and Matron, being in unusually jolly form in the way of good temper, said that we might have a supper in our dormitory once a week till it was finished. She used to lay the stuff out on a tray every Saturday night when she went down to prayers, and every Saturday, as soon as we got up to the dormitory half an hour later, the best of it had always disappeared! I was a bit annoyed when, on *my* night—for we gave the feast in turns—I found that most of the 'chocs' were gone, and some of the apples, also the best of the tarts; but when Trimen, whose week came next, found on *his* night, when we came upstairs to enjoy ourselves, that the thief had been at work again, I can tell you we made a fuss about it! But no one would own up, though we both urged them to, not until next day, when a small chap, Eagles by name, suddenly came up.

'I say, it was me,' he said, walking towards Trimen and me and Barnes, as we strolled round the Quad after chapel. 'I ate your tuck, I mean.' He was looking very shaky and queer, and we put it down to the hatefulness of having to own up.

'Don't do it again, then, you greedy young beggar!' said Trimen. Then, as Eagles walked away, he turned to me. 'The small chap looked too terrified for words,' said he. 'Anybody would think we were bullies.'

'Perhaps there is a bully in the case,' said Barnes in his queer voice, and that was the end—for the time, anyway, for Trimen and I forgot all about it.

But the next Saturday—if you'll believe it—the tuck disappeared again. It was Berry's turn, and when we came upstairs to enjoy his feast, the most ripping of the stuff had gone: most of his apples and some of his cakes! The whole dormitory turned on Eagles as you may imagine, and rowed him for a greedy little thief; Perkins, the oldest of us all, and not much of a favourite with any one, being the loudest in his blame. But we were *all* pretty furious about it, except perhaps Barnes. He *seemed*, at any rate, to take very little notice, though he probably must have thought the more, for I heard him saying in his sleep that night, 'The chap's evidently fond of fruit.'

We all wondered what would happen next Saturday.

Eagles had been so green with terror that we found it difficult to understand however he could go on stealing in the face of all the dormitory. He must be jolly greedy or hungry, as Trimen said to me. At the next feast we were to have Barnes's tuck, and when the Saturday came, Matron called to him. 'Barnes,' she said, 'you've a melon, I see, in your tuck-box. It's bruised, and it had better be cut up before it's eaten, or you'll all be ill to-morrow.'

'All right,' said Barnes, and that's all we heard about the matter till that evening, when we all trooped up to the dormitory, wondering whether the tuck would be gone again. Barnes was with us, looking rather excited. 'I think,' he said in his queer voice when we got upstairs, 'that we'll find rather more of the stuff than usual on this occasion,' and he made his way towards his cubicle, with all of us behind him.

There was a jolly spread on his counterpane—tarts and sweets, mince-pies and the melon. All cut up, it was, in jolly slices and ready to bite.

'One minute,' said Barnes; 'before we begin I must exonerate Eagles.'

Eagles looked terrified. He evidently didn't understand the word, and he thought he was going to be blamed again. He peered up in a frightened way at Perkins, who, I remembered, had rowed him last week more than any of us. He gave him a rough sort of push, and 'You little idiot!' he said.

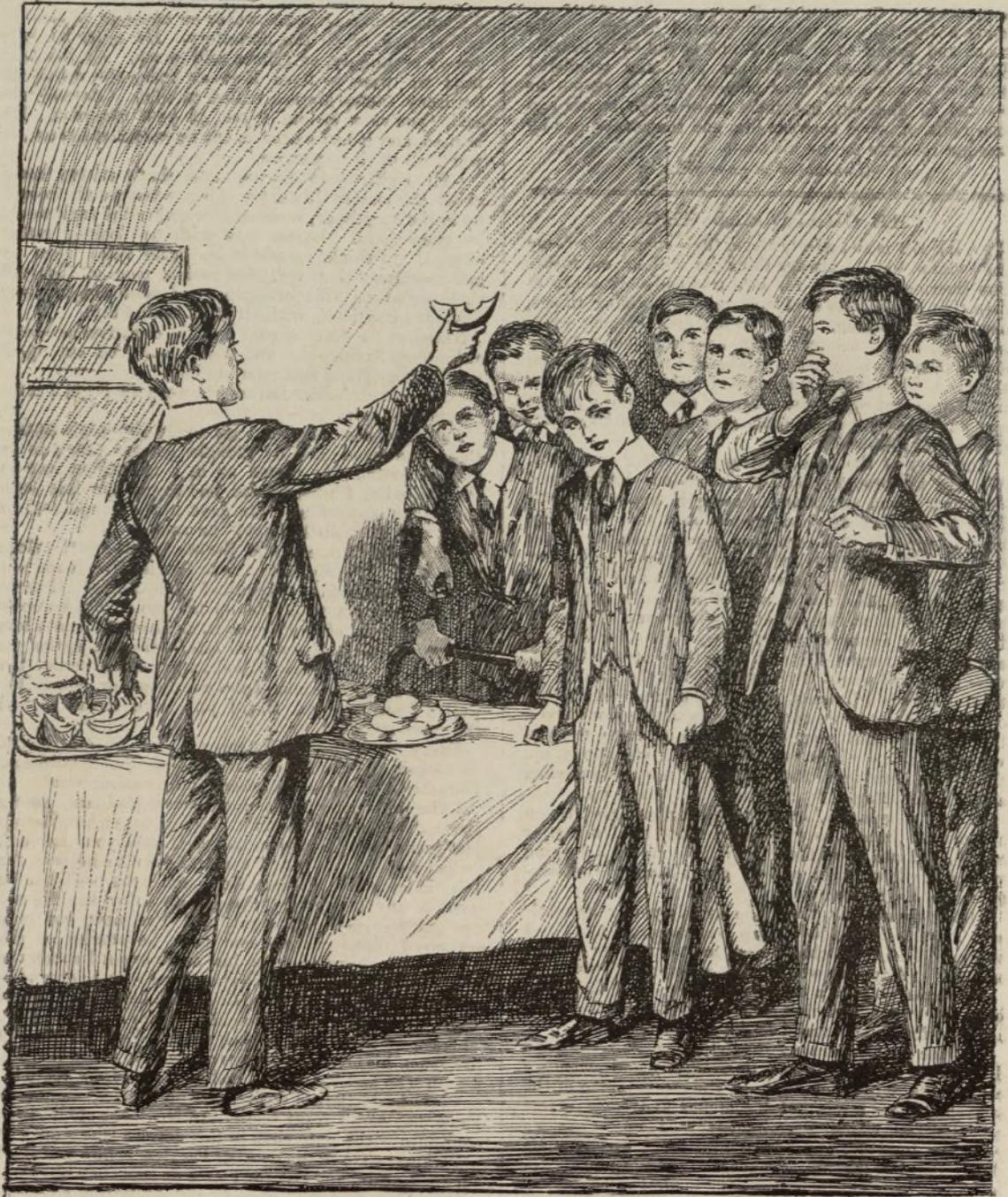
'Shut up, Perkins,' said Barnes in his usual voice; 'you're delaying my story. The fact is, I've found out by a simple method that the thief is not Eagles. I came upstairs to-night to divide up the melon by Matron's permission, and after I'd done it, and had cut it into lots of jolly slices, *all ready to bite!*'—Barnes spoke the last words very slowly—'well, then I hid under the bed. If Matron thinks I deserve lines for doing it—well, I'll write them. But, I jolly well meant to find the mystery out.'

Every one of us was listening now. As for Eagles, he looked absolutely more frightened than before, and I wondered why ever he *should* if he was innocent.

'You're a jolly sight too clever, you are, young Barnes,' began Perkins in a bullying tone; but Barnes just went on. 'I was hiding, as I told you,' he said, 'when a chap came in. I couldn't see who he was, for I could only see his feet from under the bed; but he went to my feast, and he began to enjoy it. He ate one mince-pie—I had eight, and I've now got only seven, so that's proved—and then he started on the melon. I expected that, so just as he began I shook the bed a little. That frightened him, for he threw down the melon and went—and here's the slice he left!' Barnes lifted a piece of melon and held it out for all of us to see. There were the marks of teeth all round where the chap had taken his bite, and—it was quite plain to see that the person who had bitten that melon had no front tooth!

'See?' said Barnes coolly. 'And Eagles, as we all know, has *all* his front teeth! In fact'—he stopped for a minute—'the only chap in this dormer who *hasn't* is—Perkins! Go to the dentist, Perkins, before you steal our tuck again, and put the blame on some one else!'

Well, the case was proved, and by Barnes's cleverness, as we all agreed. It was no good for Perkins to try to explain; we jolly well left him alone and gave him the cold shoulder till the end of the term. And as to Eagles, we tried to make up to him a bit, for truly he had had a hard time.

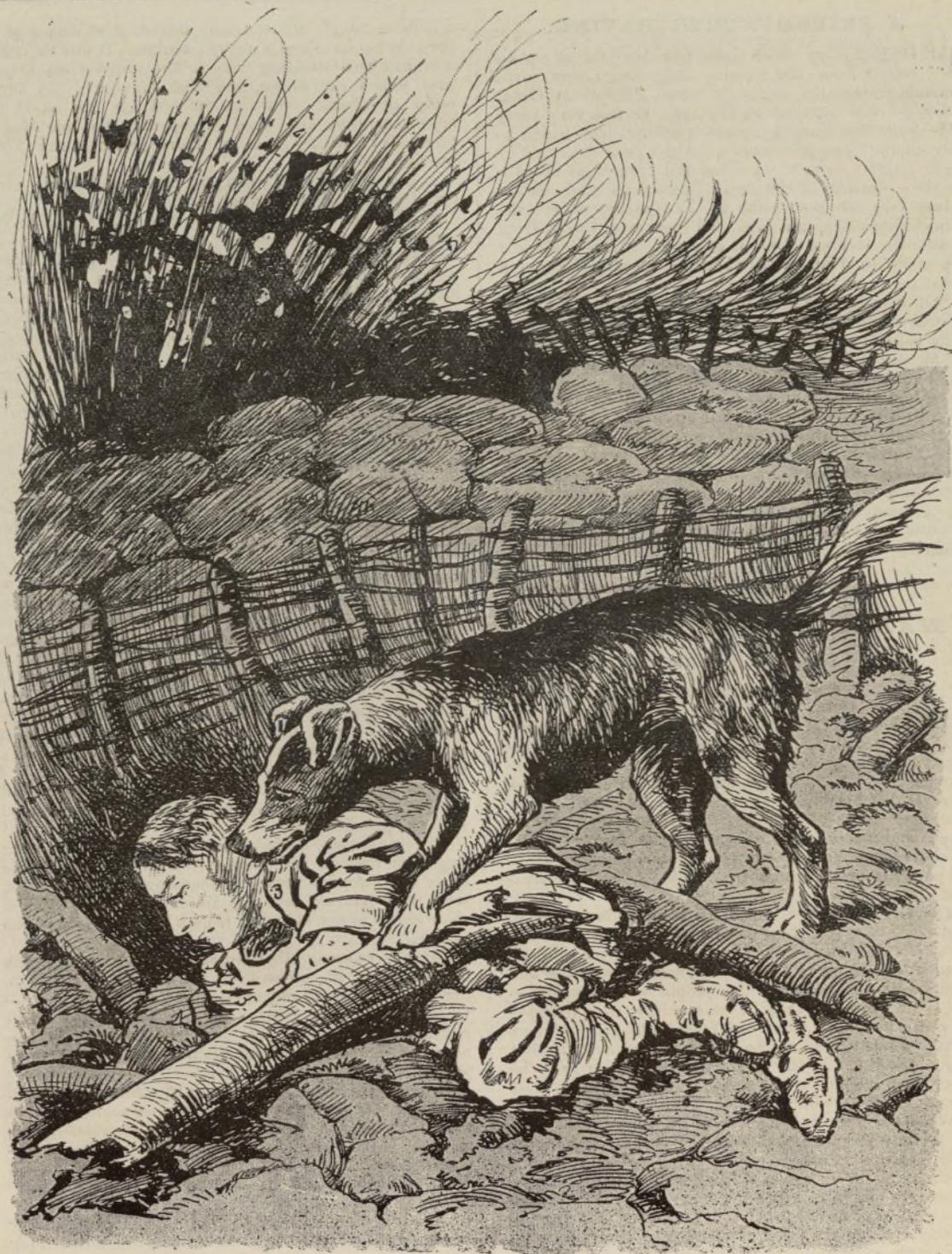


“The person who had bitten that melon had no front tooth.”

And that's what led to the Christmas Ghost; for our treatment infuriated Perkins. He had been playing bully to Eagles over the tuck, for of course it was he who had made the small chap confess, so that no one

would suspect *him*. Well, he went on playing the bully even afterwards, though *I* didn't twig it, and nobody *did*, I believe, except Barnes.

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"He felt a warm tongue licking his face."

A FRIEND WORTH HAVING.

THIS is a story which John Christie told us on his return from the Front. John had always loved animals, especially dogs. So when, during the Great War, he was sent out to Belgium, he felt very sorry indeed for the many homeless, starving dogs which he saw there. The poor creatures had been deserted by their Belgian owners, who had fled from their villages at the approach of the foe. These dogs made themselves very much at home in the trenches, where the kind-hearted British soldiers fed them with scraps from their own rations. One, a mongrel, attached himself especially to John, with whom he speedily became a great pet.

'Of friends, however humble, scorn not one,' says Wordsworth, and the humble mongrel was to prove very valuable to John Christie.

One day a German shell exploded close to the spot where John was standing. The force of the concussion flung him violently on his back, and covered him from head to foot with the ploughed-up earth. He fainted, and would probably have been suffocated had not a friend hurried to the rescue. You can guess who that friend was. When John came to himself, he heard a scratching sound, and in a few moments he felt a warm tongue licking his face. Faithful 'Jock'—as Christie had named him—had dug out the buried soldier.

E. D.

WANDERERS IN THE WAR.

By A. A. METHLEY.

(Continued from page 355.)

MEANWHILE the Mayor and his companions stood waiting, a quiet, motionless, and strangely dignified little group, and after a short delay the commander of the enemy troops, sword in hand, and followed by several of his officers, swaggered up the steps. A long conference ensued, in which demands were made, orders given and harsh threats uttered, the Mayor acting as spokesman for his fellow-villagers, and doing all in his power to protect them from injustice and ill-treatment.

The German officer issued his commands in a cold, curt voice, in which there was no trace of pity or kindness. Certain things had to be provided for the soldiers, certain large sums of money paid, and certain rules and regulations observed. If the people were obedient—and if no concealed arms or ammunition were found—all would be well. If not—the man shrugged his heavy shoulders—he would not be to blame for anything that might happen. In the meantime the Mayor and the other men would be held as hostages for the good behaviour of the place.

While the long discussion went on, Roger stood leaning against the wall, watching the strange scene with wide, fascinated eyes.

It was all so strange and bewildering, that he felt as if he were taking part in some horrible nightmare, and then suddenly a hand gripped his arm. He turned quickly, and found himself confronted by a tall, stalwart man with a brown face, white teeth, a small black moustache that was twisted into sharp points, and eyes

which, although anxious and sombre now, looked as if they should have had a merry twinkle. It was the man who had been standing next to the priest when Roger first joined the group, and who had heard the boy's eager questions. Now he touched his lips as if to enjoin caution, and then whispered the one word, 'Anglais?' with a note of interrogation in his low, hurried voice.

Roger nodded, and then the man tapped his own broad chest and murmured 'Lemaitre.'

So this was the innkeeper, the man who might know something about Val; but he could not speak English, and it was in vain that Roger tried to wrench a few words of intelligible French out of his bewildered memory. For a minute the pair stared at each other in silence, and then Lemaitre, drawing further back behind the screening figures of the men on the steps, took a note-book from his pocket and began to write hurriedly in pencil. When he had finished, he tore out the leaf, folded it and slipped it into Roger's hand. 'Jacques,' he whispered, and with a swift gesture pointed across the market-place to the inn.

Once more the boy nodded. The note was to be taken to the 'Lion d'Or,' and delivered to some one named Jacques. That much he understood, and would have hastened away at once to execute the errand if a detaining hand had not been laid on his shoulder.

'Non, non.' The innkeeper's voice was full of anxiety, and he frowned and bit his lip in the effort to think of some way in which to make his meaning clear. Then an idea came, and dragging a big silver watch out of his pocket he pointed to it as if indicating the time.

Half-past three; it was now Roger's turn to be puzzled, but the explanation was not finished yet. Monsieur Lemaitre replaced his watch, took out the pocket-book again, drew a clock face with the hands pointing to ten and then on the same page traced a crescent moon and several stars.

'Ten o'clock, to-night,' he muttered in French, and the boy, whose mind was less confused now, understood and whispered assent.

The innkeeper smiled, once more laid a warning finger on his lips and then moved aside. Roger stole away and joined a crowd of round-eyed peasant boys, who were staring at the Uhlans as they watered their horses at the big stone trough in the middle of the square.

There were many other strange and wonderful sights to be seen in the quiet French village that afternoon, for the motor-cars and cavalry had only been the advance guard of a great army, and for many hours regiments of infantry, huge guns and trains of ammunition waggons, travelling kitchens, and ambulances poured along the roads.

Hundreds of soldiers, thousands of soldiers, it seemed to Roger that there must be millions of soldiers, all in new dusty grey uniforms and with clumsy but workmanlike boots. He could not help a shudder of dismayed foreboding as he watched the seemingly endless columns of men and listened to the tramp of their marching feet.

'Are we down-hearted? No!' The brave, cheery words sounded futile and almost ridiculous when flung as a challenge against this huge, relentless force; but Roger repeated them to himself as if they had been a

magic charm, full of mysterious powers of resistance and courage.

The main body of the German troops passed through the village, their faces set, as it were, towards some distant goal, but many men remained and were billeted on the inhabitants, while the officers took up their quarters at the inn.

Roger left the market-place after a time, and wandered restlessly about, wondering whether he would be able to leave the village after the innkeeper's message had been delivered, and chafing impatiently against the delay.

He had made up his mind by this time that Val and her friends could not be here after all, for no trace of them or of the car was to be seen, and he longed to be away and once more on his journey.

None of the villagers interfered with Roger as he roamed aimlessly about the streets, and his ignorance of French did not cause surprise or comment. He was a Belgian refugee, that was what the people thought when they had leisure to notice him at all, and several of them spoke to him kindly, shrugged their shoulders when he could not answer, and gave him little presents of fruit or food. One old woman let him rest under an apple-tree in her garden, and brought him out a good meal of cheese and milk and bread. He fell asleep after that, and did not wake until it was quite dark, and the bustle and confusion in the village had died away.

The boy sat up, stretching his stiff arms and wondering, for a bewildered moment or two, where he was and what had happened. Then the church clock high overhead began to strike, and he remembered everything as he listened and counted the clear, musical chimes.

One! Two! Three! Four!—It was ten o'clock, and time for him to go to the inn and deliver the note that Monsieur Lemaitre had entrusted to his care.

He stumbled to his feet and stole out of the little garden, stepping carefully so that his thick boots might make no sound on the uneven cobble-stones.

It was a beautiful starlight night, but the narrow village street seemed very dark. The houses were closed, orders having been issued that the people were to be within doors and all lights extinguished at an early hour. Only the inn, where the officers had their headquarters, was brilliantly illuminated.

As Roger drew near he saw that tables had been brought out and that lanterns were hanging from the branches of a great chestnut-tree that grew near the door of the building. A noisy supper-party was in progress, and from inside the inn came the sounds of music and of loud, roystering voices.

Keeping carefully in the shadows, the boy crept round to the back of the house, and soon found his way into the great kitchen, where a number of women-servants and several old men were busily at work, cooking, preparing vegetables, washing piles of plates and dishes, or cleaning and polishing the high military boots and leather accoutrements of the German officers.

Roger stood just inside the open door, glancing round nervously and wondering how he could find the unknown Jacques, and then suddenly, to his great relief, he caught sight of the little cripple-boy seated in a corner near the fire, with his crutch at his side and a large black cat in his arms.

Here at least was some one whom he had seen and

spoken to before. He crossed the room to the boy's side. 'Jacques? Where is Jacques?' he asked in a whisper, and was answered with a nod and a friendly smile of recognition.

'I am Jacques, Jacques Lemaitre.' And then Roger pulled the innkeeper's note out of his pocket. The boy seized it and read it eagerly, his face growing pale and anxious, and then he thrust the crumpled paper into his pocket, and rising, with a stealthy glance round, picked up his crutch and beckoned to Roger to follow him out of the room. The latter obeyed, rather unwillingly, for he had hoped that the errand once accomplished, he would be free to go about his own business—the business of finding Val. Now, apparently, there was other work still to be done.

Outside the kitchen Roger was made to wait for a few minutes while Jacques went into a big larder and packed some food into a basket. Then he took a lantern from a shelf, lit it, and led the way out of the house and across a great paved courtyard which was surrounded by barns, sheds, and huge stacks of hay and straw. The lame boy slipped in between two of the stacks, Roger following, and, beyond, a dark, narrow passage, the entrance of which was quite hidden from the inn, brought them to a small inner yard. When this also had been crossed, Jacques stopped outside a dilapidated and apparently unused farm building. He took a large rusty key from his pocket, fitted it into the lock and pushed open the door. Roger peered over his guide's shoulder into a close, dusty interior, where the lantern-light flickered on faggots of firewood, broken and worn-out tools, torn sacks and rubbish of every description. He shivered and drew back a little, wondering whether these people at the inn were enemies instead of friends, and if he were to be kept prisoner in this dark, noisome place.

'Come!' Jacques was beckoning again, and with a quickly beating heart Roger entered the barn. As the lame boy limped ahead, swinging the lantern in his hand, grotesque shadows were flung on to the uneven stone floor and the dingy, white-washed walls. An owl or a bat rustled high up among the cobweb-hung beams, and all around could be heard the scurrying of rats.

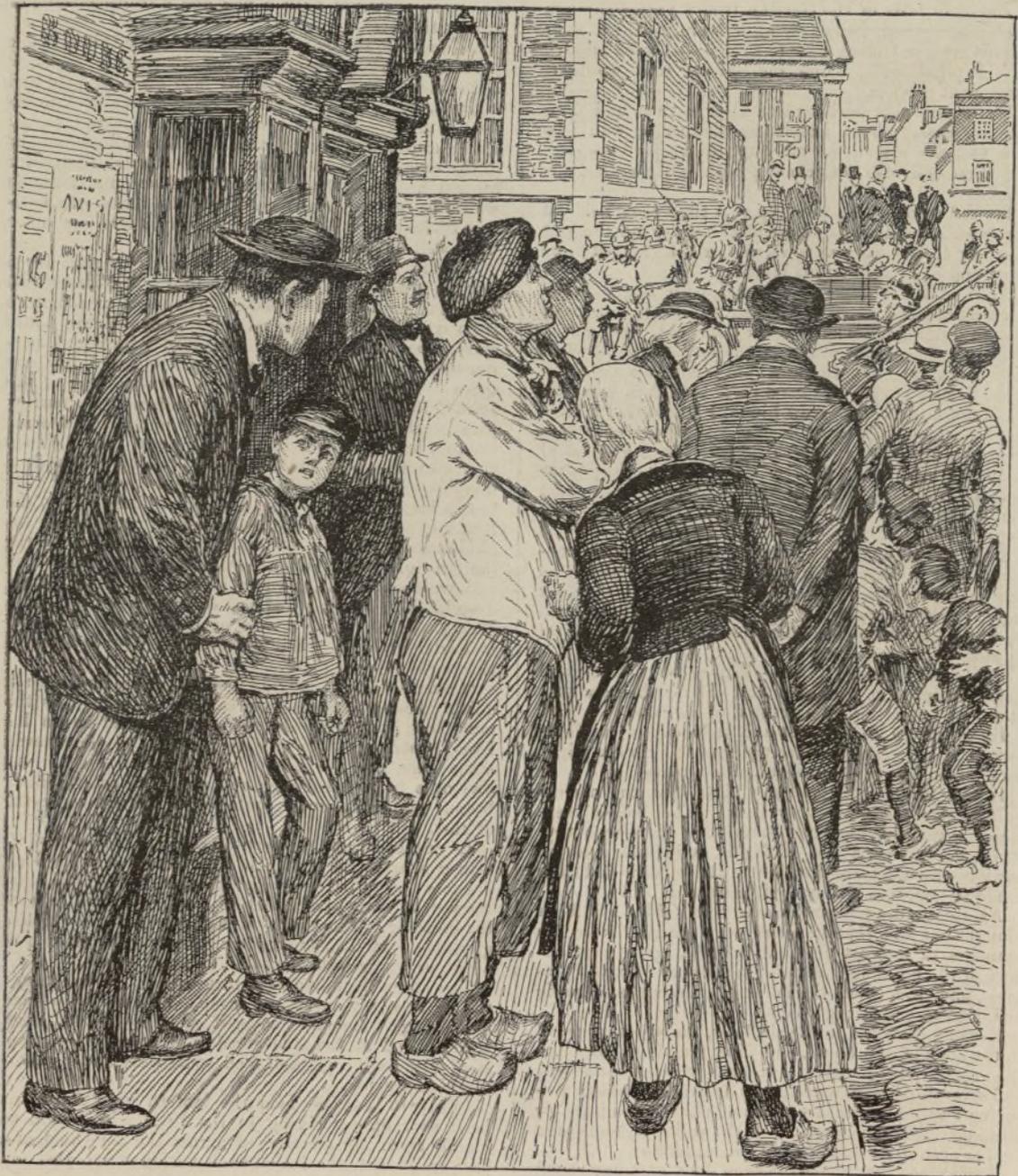
In one corner of the barn an old cart with one shaft leaned against the wall, and behind was a small door. Jacques opened this with another heavy key, and showed a room partitioned off from the main part of the building. There was a window through which a glimpse of star-lit sky could be seen, a ladder leading to a loft, and a great heap of dry, fragrant hay.

The stone floor had evidently been lately swept, and the air was very sweet and fresh. On the hay a man was lying. He was covered with a warm, clean blanket, and at his side stood a wooden three-legged stool with on it a plate of food, some wine, and a yellow earthenware jug.

'Enter!' Jacques held the lantern high above his head so that everything in the little room could be plainly seen. Roger stepped across the threshold, and then stopped short with an exclamation of mingled joy and amazement.

Then he ran forward and threw himself down on his knees at the side of the low bed. 'Where is Val?' he cried, in a voice that was low and hoarse with eagerness. 'Tell me, where is Val?'

(Continued on page 370.)



“Suddenly a hand gripped his arm.”