



"When he opened his eyes two men stood close by."



## THE OPIUM JOINT.

BY HAROLD BINDLOSS.

*(Concluded from page 363.)*

DAWSON'S shirt stuck to his wet skin, and it was some time before he got his arms through and fastened the buttons. He thought he heard the noise again, and felt curious and a little disturbed. He laced his boots rather quickly, stooping down from his seat on a projecting board, and had nearly finished when he heard a cautious step. He started, and his heart beat as he jumped up, but his foot slipped, and next moment something struck his head. Losing his balance, he fell heavily, and for some minutes knew nothing more.

When he opened his eyes two men stood close by. He looked at them vacantly, for his head ached, and he felt dazed. The men looked rough, and Dawson did not like their faces, but their manner was not threatening. Yet somebody had crept round the stack and knocked him down.

'What's the matter, sonny?' one asked.

Dawson tried to get up, but felt too languid. The blow he had got had made him strangely dull. 'I think somebody hit me on the back of the head.'

'Guess you've been swimming too long,' the man remarked with a meaning grin. 'I allow you came from the schooner, and they wouldn't let you have a boat. You certainly look sick, and I've something in my pocket that will fix you up. Don't bother about it; take a good drink.'

He pulled out a bottle, and Dawson, without hesitating, put it to his mouth. He felt very cold as well as stupid, and the whisky, or whatever it was, might help him to get on his feet and reach his hotel. For a few moments he felt better, and then the strange dulness got worse, and his head sank back. He could not rouse himself, and his eyes shut.

The men picked him up, and carried him across the track to a light waggon that stood behind a pile of lumber. They threw him in upon some straw, and jumping up beside the Chinese driver, set off for the town. The side of the waggon hid Dawson from the people in the street, and nobody was very curious when the others lifted him out at a shabby house in the red-light neighbourhood. Drugged and drunken men were not uncommon there, although they were oftener thrust out of the houses in the dark than carried in.

It was a long time before Dawson opened his eyes and wondered where he was. His clothes felt strange, as if they were not his; they were rough and salt-stained, like a sailor's. He puzzled about it for a few minutes, and then tried to examine the room.

It was lighted by one or two small lamps that burned with a dim yellow flame. Streaks of smoke drifted about and there was a curious smell; Dawson thought he had smelt something like it at a drug store. At one end of the room he noted some curtains of dirty embroidered silk, and a strange big image stood in a shadowy gap. This, however, did not interest him much, and he feebly turned his head. Somehow he thought the room was underground, and he remarked that there were mats all round the walls, except at the curtained end. For the most part, the mats were occupied by men who lay in languid attitudes.

Then Dawson began to see a light. He was in a dope house or opium joint, and he tried to think how he had got there. The back of his head hurt most, and

this gave him a clue. It looked as if he had been sand-bagged by somebody who crept round the lumber pile while he was dressing, and when he began to recover, the men, who had perhaps been afraid of killing him if they struck hard, had given him a drink. The liquor, of course, was drugged.

Dawson, however, could not see why they had brought him to the opium joint. His watch had gone; but if they had wanted to rob him, they could have done so while he lay beside the lumber. The thing was puzzling; but his brain was dull, and he gave it up. Then the image caught his eyes again. It seemed to be beautifully made, although the gap between the curtains was rather dark. The figure was lifelike, except that the eyes were closed, and the face had a strange calm.

Dawson's mind began to wander. He meant to keep awake, but the drug was powerful. In fact, he felt as if he had a horrible nightmare; he wanted to cry out and crawl away from something that threatened him, and could not move. Still he would not yield to the numbing drowsiness, and after a time forced himself to think. Something did threaten him, and presently he got a clue to the puzzle. It was not for nothing somebody had dressed him in old sailor's clothes. He had been 'shanghaied'—kidnapped.

By-and-by he looked about again. The men no longer smoked; they lay as if they were dead. It was obvious that when the crimps came for him nobody would help, and he saw why he had been brought to the opium joint.

He started, for he thought the image had opened its eyes. The thing was ridiculous, and when he looked again the narrow Oriental eyes were shut. The smoke made him cough again, and to his keen relief he found he could move his arm. He could move his leg, too, although he could not get up; it looked as if the drug were losing its power. Still it obviously would not let him go, for when he glanced back at the image the narrow eyes were open, and one of the yellow hands that had been folded on its breast was raised, as if in warning. The hand dropped back and the eyes shut, and Dawson lay still on the mat.

After a time he moved his head, and feebly raised himself with one arm. It was a wonderful relief to find he could do so; but he waited, trying to gather force for the effort to get up. Then he gazed at the image, and his heart beat fast. He was not dreaming now, and the Buddha *had* moved. Although the thing looked impossible, it was getting down from its stand. It stood still for a moment, like a man who was badly cramped, and then slowly crossed the floor with noiseless steps. It was a man, and now the strange calm look had gone; Dawson thought he ought to know the inscrutable Oriental face. Then, as a yellow hand went up, in a warning gesture, to its lips, he knew he did know. Ah Lee was coming towards him.

Next moment Ah Lee gave Dawson his hand, and the lad got up. He felt weak and shaky, but he could walk, and he followed the Chinaman silently until they reached the curtains. Ah Lee gave him something to drink in a little brass cup, and after a minute or two Dawson felt steadier. Then Ah Lee touched him, and smiled as he indicated an image of the Buddha lying behind the curtains. The trick was obvious; Ah Lee had moved the image and got into its place; but Dawson wondered how he had been able to keep still so long. He thought no white man could have done so; the Chinese were strange people.



This, however, was not important. Dawson wanted to get away before the men who had drugged him came, and when he signed that he was ready, Ah Lee went down a dark passage. Dawson thought it ran beneath a street, because in one place he touched a big pipe; but he could not remember much, and concentrated on following his guide. By-and-by they came to some steps, and Dawson had trouble to get up; then Ah Lee pulled a door back, and the lad thrilled as he found himself in the open air. He was weak and dizzy, but the cool wind that touched his face was bracing. He thought he had never breathed an air so sweet.

Then he saw that two other Chinamen, carrying baskets on a pole, stood close by. They looked like laundry boys, but crossed the street at a sign from Ah Lee. The latter indicated its end before he joined the others, and Dawson set off while they kept level with him on the other side. He thought he understood. It was better that anybody they might meet should imagine he had nothing to do with the Chinamen, but they would guard him if it was needful. He waited at the corner, and let the party go on in front down two or three dark streets. By-and-by they came to a wide thoroughfare, lighted by big electric lamps, and Ah Lee, stopping, signed Dawson to go forward.

He turned and had vanished in the gloom when Dawson looked round; but the lad knew where he was, and not long afterwards reached the hotel. A porter let him in, and making an effort to get upstairs he went to Mr. Winthrop's room. Jake sprang up as he came in, but Dawson sat down in the nearest chair.

After a few moments he told his story, and Mr. Winthrop remarked: 'You did a lucky thing when you pulled Ah Lee out of the water, and I think he has earned twenty dollars. Though he generally covers his tracks, Jake knew where to find him.'

Dawson's sleep was disturbed by ugly dreams; but when he woke his head did not ache so much, and he got up. While he dressed he went to the open window. The hotel stood on a hill, and looking down across the roofs he saw the American schooner move towards the Narrows behind a tug. Her tall white fore and main sails were hoisted, and men were busily occupied about the mizzen and jigger masts. The wind blew fresh off the land, the tug would soon let her go, and in an hour or two she would be driving down the strait, heading for open sea. Dawson resumed his dressing, and felt thankful he was not on board.

## FRUITS FROM ACROSS THE SEAS.

### V.—THE COCOA-NUT PALM.

IN this article I propose to tell you of a palm which provides us with many very useful things as well as a delicious nut. I refer to the Cocoa-nut Palm.

This palm (*Cocos nucifera* is its proper name) is undoubtedly one of the most useful trees known, for it provides nearly everything which man requires on this earth! Let us just think upon this wonderful tree's many uses. From its leaves baskets are made by means of plaiting or weaving the long strips of which the leaves are formed. Houses of small size can be (and in the home of the cocoa-nut frequently are) thatched with the dry leaves, and very good thatch it makes. With the wood the houses are built, and many household utensils are made with it too. From

the shell of the good old cocoa-nut itself cups, bowls, and so on, are made. The rough outer cover of the shell, composed of fibrous threads, is soaked for long periods, and then these threads are separated by beating; these are twisted into a rough form of rope, and nets are made with it, and also the familiar mats we use at our front doors. You may recollect also a rough sort of matting we use made of rough string—that is, 'cocoa-nut matting' made from the same material. The rough ropes and cables made from this fibre (called in commerce Coir) are of great value on board ships, because the getting constantly soaked with sea water strengthens it, whereas ordinary rope is rotted. When these ropes are being made, there is always a certain amount of loose short fibre which is not of any use in this manufacture; this is what we call 'cocoa-nut fibre,' and we buy it to spread over our beds of bulbs in the winter to protect them from the cold.

Then we come to the nut itself. The great kernel contains a wonderful proportion of fat. This is used in the making of candles and soap, and it also enters largely into the manufacture of margarine. For use in this way, the kernels are dried and the oil extracted later; in this state it carries its native name of Copra, and is very valuable. Of course the nuts, in various stages of development, are used as food, and the end buds of the young palm are sometimes gathered and used as a vegetable known as Palm Cabbage.

Then, again, when the flowers are in bud in an outer sheath, the natives sometimes pierce this sheath, and from it runs out a juice which, after keeping for some hours, forms a refreshing drink called 'Toddy.' A wine, called Palm Wine, is made from this wonderful tree, and this, when allowed to ferment for a long time, produces a form of vinegar. A kind of sugar, too (called 'Jaggery'), is a product of the cocoa-nut palm.

Now let us consider the tree itself. It grows to a considerable height—fifty feet or higher. Its leaves are pinnate—that is, divided into what are termed pinnules. The whole leaves are often as long as twenty feet. Fig. 1 is a single leaf on a small scale.

The tree has a long straight stem, covered with ring-like scars of old leaves. At the top is a crown of spreading leaves, from among which spring the sheaths of flowers, later developing great clusters of nuts (fig. 2). A tree does not produce nuts till it is at least seven years old, but from that time it generally carries about eighty nuts each year. There are four or five crops each year under good circumstances. Seven years seems a long time to wait for results, and much money has to be spent on plantations during that time, but the value of the products is so great that the cocoa-nut is well worth growing. It has a particular liking for growing on the sea coast just above high-water level; it likes a salt, sandy soil. It is very hardy, for storms, rain, or dry weather seem to have but little effect on it, and so the grower has little anxiety of that kind.

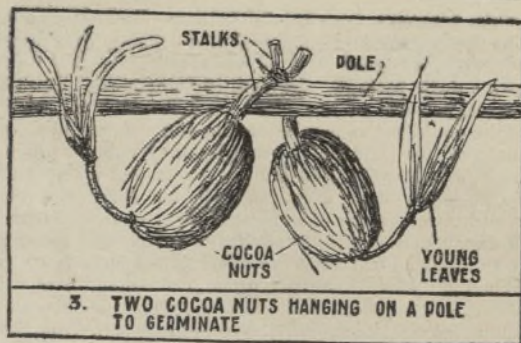
By the way, I have been taking it for granted that you know that a cocoa-nut, as we know it in our shops, has lost its outer covering, the fibre of which I have spoken from which the ropes and mats are made. Sometimes we see a few in their original state, but not often. If you have never seen it in its overcoat, look out for it; it is quite worth seeing. It will make you understand the ropes and mats better to see the fibre on the nut.

The name *cocos* really means 'monkey,' and came from a Portuguese word. It is not known exactly



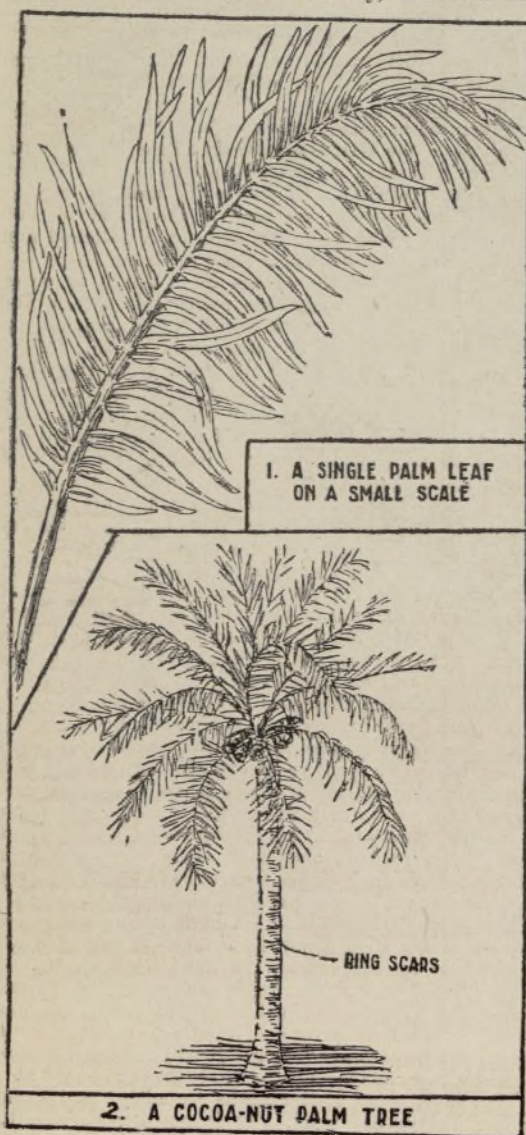
where the original home of the cocoa-nut was, but it grows profusely and best around the islands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and so it is believed that the tree started existence in those parts.

The methods of starting plantations of cocoa-nuts are rather interesting. The cocoa-nut itself, you must realise, is a *seed*, and from it the new plant is developed. Cocoa-nuts are tied together in pairs by their stalks and hung over poles or along the tops of fences. Here they hang till they begin to grow, as shown in fig. 3. You see the 'nut,' as we know it, is really a store of food for the tiny plant which develops from it. The 'nut' thus is able 'on its own' to supply all the requirements of the plant for quite a long time. When the plant has got about as far as you see in my sketch, it is planted out in a nursery, and there they



live in rows until they are big enough to transplant further. I saw a photograph the other day of a nursery where there were hundreds of young plants just planted out, and a fence on which were hanging hundreds more which would join their brethren when they had grown enough.

E. M. BARLOW.



#### MOLLIE AND THE BULL.

MOLLIE had just arrived at the very bottom of the very biggest of Farmer Hodge's fields, which was a steep one, all up the side of a hill. The little girl had been told that mushrooms grew there, and she had never picked a real, live mushroom in her life, which was why she went out before breakfast, without telling anybody anything about it.

It was a great pity, because if she had spoken to the farmer or his wife, or Mother, or Nurse, this very dreadful adventure would probably never have happened to her at all.

There were only a very few mushrooms here and there, but Mollie was busy picking them right down by the hedge, when suddenly she heard a noise not very far away. It was the most frightening noise you can possibly imagine—a sort of bellowing roar, like a dreadful wild beast. Mollie jumped up and turned round, and there, quite close to her, was a huge black bull.

He stood bellowing and pawing at the ground with his hoofs and moving his enormous head up and down; and his wicked little eyes looked almost red as they glared at poor Mollie.

I expect any boy or girl who reads this would have done just the same as Mollie, whatever they may think to themselves. She dropped her little basket of mushrooms and began to run up the field as fast as she possibly could.

But the gate through which she had come in was a long way away, and, what was worse, the long way was all up a steep hill. Besides, if you are ever really terribly frightened, you will find that you can't run properly; your feet feel just as though you were wearing boots with lead in them, and your heart goes pit-pat, pit-pat, just as if it was trying to choke you.

Mollie struggled on over the short, slippery turf, but she could hear that the bull was getting nearer and nearer, and she knew that she would never reach the gate in time.

Then, suddenly, she saw just in front of her a stone sticking up out of the field. It was all grey and moss-grown, and perhaps about eight feet high. Mollie ran stumbling towards it as fast as she could.





"There, right overhead, was a big aeroplane."

'Perhaps I can get up on the top,' she thought as she ran.

I don't believe she could possibly have done such a thing if she had not been so terribly frightened. Up she scrambled, digging her feet and toes into the tiniest

cracks, until she was perched on the very top of the stone, just as the bull reached the foot of it.

Then began a terrible time. Mollie clung on with all her might, but the stone was very slippery, and she kept sliding down a little and then dragging herself



up again. The bull was only just below her, and every now and then he roared and reared himself up against the stone. It was very plain that he meant to stay there until Mollie could hold on no longer.

And then, just as the poor little girl was almost in despair, a most extraordinary thing happened.

If Molly had not been so terribly frightened, she might have heard a sound which had been going on for some time—a queer, buzzing drone, like a huge cockchafer or bee.

At last this buzzing grew very loud indeed, and at the same moment Mollie saw a huge shadow thrown across the turf and across the stone to which she clung—a shadow like a great bird, with outstretched wings.

Mollie looked up, and there, right overhead, and coming closer each moment, was a big aeroplane. Next instant it glided down to the turf only a few yards away, and began to skim along on its wheels.

The bull evidently thought that this was some terrible living monster. For a few minutes he stood his ground, pawing at the turf and bellowing horribly. Then, of a sudden, he turned tail, and went galloping, galloping away down to the bottom of the field.

You can imagine how delighted Mollie was to see him go. At that very moment her hold upon the slippery rock gave way, and she slid right down into the arms of a young man who had just jumped out of his seat in the aeroplane.

'I saw what was happening when I was right up in the sky,' he said; 'so, of course I came down full speed to give Mr. Bull a fright!'

The airman carried Mollie back to the farm, and stayed to have breakfast with her and Mother. The little girl was so excited that she quite forgot how frightened she had been.

'It was like the wonderfulest fairy tale,' she said; 'just like the story of St. George and the Dragon!'

## WANDERERS IN THE WAR.

By A. A. METHLEY.

(Continued from page 371.)

THE spies had escaped, but their plans were ruined for the time being, and instead of going on to Paris, it was necessary for them to take refuge in flight. Perhaps it was small wonder that Fräulein almost shook Val when, at last, she loosed her grip of the child's mouth, and that Captain Heinz muttered curt sentences under his breath in a voice that sounded like the snarling of an angry dog.

It was dawn when, at last, the travellers arrived at their destination, which proved to be a lonely, dilapidated inn, situated far away in a wild forest. Captain Heinz got out of the car and hammered at the door with his clenched fist, but it was a long time before he could gain admittance. Val was sound asleep by that time, and the man had to carry her into the house. He laid her roughly down on an oak settle by the smouldering wood fire, and then ordered the woman who had opened the door to bring food and make coffee for himself and his sister.

### CHAPTER XVIII.

'WHERE is Val?' There was no answer to Roger's question, and for many hours the boy kept watch in

the barn beside the wounded dispatch rider, wondering what could have happened to his little sister, and whether he would ever see her again.

Jacques stole away after a time, having first set down the lantern on the ground and unpacked the basket, which proved to contain soup, milk, and eggs.

Roger, left alone, seated himself on a pile of hay, and waited, dozing sometimes for a little while, and then waking, with a jerk of recollection, to fix his eyes once more on the sick man's pale, haggard face.

At last, when the little flame of the lantern was beginning to flicker, and the cold, grey light of dawn showed through the square window, there was a movement and a low moan. Roger was on his knees in an instant, the cup of milk in his hand, and then the dispatch rider opened his eyes slowly and looked up into the young face above him with a faint smile of recognition.

'Hullo!' he whispered; 'it's you, is it? And the message—' As memory returned a keen note of anxiety sharpened his weak voice. 'Tell me, did you get it through?'

Roger nodded and pushed him gently back as he tried to wrench himself up on to one elbow.

'Yes, it's all right, quite all right,' and then the man sank down again on to the hay with a sigh of relief.

'Thank Heaven,' he murmured contentedly, but the next moment he roused himself again: 'The little girl, where is she? What has happened?'

Roger's face altered, for these questions on the lips of the wounded man—questions which he had been asking himself again and again during the long weary hours of the night's vigil—seemed to dash all his hopes to the ground.

'I don't know,' he faltered; 'I thought—tell me, didn't she come here with you?'

A puzzled expression came into the other's face.

'Did she come here? Yes, I think so, at least—wait a moment. Can you give me something to drink?—I feel a bit faint still—then I'll tell you all I remember.'

Roger raised the man's head and fed him slowly with spoonfuls of the egg and milk. After a time a little colour came back into the pale face, the voice grew stronger, and the story was told in short, disjointed sentences.

'It was in the wood. After you left. A car came along. There was a man in it and a woman. Your sister seemed to know the woman quite well.'

'She knew her?' It was now Roger's turn to be bewildered. 'What a queer thing! Are you sure?'

'Yes, the woman called her Val, and they talked together. I couldn't hear everything. Then they lifted me up—the man and the woman—and carried me to the car. I must have lost consciousness then, for I don't really remember anything else until I was brought into the inn here. The landlord seems to be an awfully good sort. He and his wife looked after me jolly well.'

Roger glanced round at the bare walls, the cobwebbed ceiling, and the rough bed. The man noticed his wandering eyes and smiled.

'That was last night,' he went on. 'This morning I was carried in here. They said the Germans were coming. Was it true?'

'Yes,' Roger told his story then, the story of the arrival of the invaders, of the meeting on the town hall steps, and of the innkeeper's mysterious message. The dispatch rider listened attentively. 'It's horrible to feel that I'm a danger to the place,' he said, 'but I suppose it can't be helped. And now about your sister; have



you any idea who that woman could have been? She was young, rather fat, and with fair hair.'

Roger knitted his brows over this description. Suzanne was fat, but she certainly was not either fair or young, and Marie Bernard had black eyes and hair.

'She seemed very much surprised to see your sister, and asked her something about a letter—I remember that—a letter that was to have been posted in England. She seemed very keen about it, and annoyed that she could not get it back at once.'

Roger's face changed, and thrusting his hand deep into his trousers pocket, he drew out a bent and grimy envelope.

'Why, it must have been Fräulein Heinz,' he exclaimed; 'what a funny thing. This is the letter. She gave it to Val, and Val asked me to take care of it. But Fräulein went back to Germany more than three weeks ago. Why on earth should she be in France again now?'

'Fräulein Heinz!' The man repeated the name in a low, troubled voice. 'A German? Then I'm afraid this may be a bad business. And the man, do you know anything about him? A tall, ugly fellow with a disagreeable face and a scar that twists up one corner of his mouth?'

'No, I don't know him,' Roger began, and then he stopped, for his memory darted backward, and he was once more standing on the hilltop beside the dead tree, while a flushed, angry man stormed and shouted at him in a loud, furious voice. That man had had a scarred face, and there had been a woman with him, a woman whom Val had said must have been like Fräulein Heinz.

'Fräulein had a brother,' Roger said. 'He was a soldier in the German army, and he had fought in ever so many duels when he was at Heidelberg.'

The boy told the whole story then: the story of the hill in the forest, the buzzing noise, and the dead tree which had wires in it. The dispatch rider's face grew more and more anxious as he listened. When he had heard everything there was a long silence.

'They must be spies,' he said, at last. 'German spies, and no doubt they had a wireless fitted up in that tree. You had better open the letter, my boy, it may tell us something.'

Roger obeyed, but he could make nothing of the rows of meaningless figures and printed letters with which the sheets of paper were covered.

'2.5.H.3.7.5,' he read out, but the other stopped him.

'In cypher,' he said. 'It's what I expected, but I'm afraid we can't make much of it at present. You'd better give it to me, I think. It may be important; and, at any rate, the address will be a clue when we get out of this, and want to track down Fräulein Heinz.'

Roger gave up the letter willingly enough; and soon after there came the sound of a cautious footstep outside the door. The innkeeper's wife, a pale, anxious-looking woman, appeared on the threshold. She was muffled in a dark cloak, under which a large basket was concealed.

'Good-day, sir,' she smiled faintly, and then busied herself with the injured man, whose wounds she dressed with swift, gentle fingers.

While she worked at this, and afterwards made the bare little room as comfortable as its scanty furnishings would permit, she talked to the dispatch rider in a low, weary voice. Then she pointed to Roger, and explained the plans she had made for his safety and for that of the wounded man himself.

The boy must spend his days in the inn, she said, or

with the other village lads; but he must not speak or let any one suspect that he was English. At night, when darkness fell, he could bring a fresh supply of food to the barn. She would try to come herself, but it might not be possible. Then she showed Roger a little door which opened from the back of the barn on to a piece of overgrown waste ground, and told him, if necessary, he could find his way through the bushes and into the village.

When the woman had gone there was a long silence, for her solemn, warning words seemed still to echo in the ears of her listeners. At last the wounded man glanced up at Roger and held out his hand: 'What's your name, old fellow?' he asked. 'Mine is Graham Evans. It seems that we're going to have a risky time together, so we'd better be friends.'

After that there came long, weary days of suspense, anxiety, and dread, days which passed so slowly and drearily that Roger began to feel as if he were living in a horrible dream, a nightmare, which had had no beginning, and which would never come to an end.

Graham Evans grew steadily better, it is true, and he and his fellow-exile became fast friends, but otherwise everything seemed gloomy and hopeless. No news of success or victory came to the village; the German commander ruled with a rod of iron; and although there was, perhaps, no actual cruelty, its inhabitants were plundered mercilessly, and forced to work hard by the ruthless conquerors.

Roger was in daily terror of doing or saying something which might endanger the village; for it was not always easy to keep up the pretence of being a Belgian peasant-boy, and often he felt that he was within an inch of discovery. Once, for instance, he risked everything by trying to protect little lame Jacques, who was being brutally thrashed by a burly soldier; and another time he aroused shouts of laughter by jumping up to open the door for the innkeeper's wife, who was going out of the kitchen with a heavily laden tray.

'The boy is foolish, half-witted, that is all, sirs.' The woman tried her best to excuse the strange behaviour of her young guest, but her eyes were full of fear; and that evening she went out to the barn and begged Evans to tell Roger to be more careful.

'If they notice him, if they ask questions, the secret will be discovered,' she whispered, glancing round into the dusky corners of the barn apprehensively, as if every shadow held a hidden enemy. 'And then what will happen to you, to my husband—to us all?'

'She's quite right. If once they find out that you're English, the game will be up,' Evans turned to Roger with a very grave face when the innkeeper's wife had gone away. 'You must be patient, Roger, and we may not have to wait much longer. It seems to me that the guns are a bit nearer to-day.'

Roger listened to the dull, booming sound that now was hardly ever silent—the sound that came from the south now, instead of from the north. If the guns were really nearer it would mean that the French army was driving the Germans back, but one could not be sure. It might only be imagination, or perhaps the wind was in the south. And how could there be any hope when the German soldiers boasted openly that their troops were at the gates of Paris, that the French and the English, too, were defeated, and that they would soon be masters of the whole of Europe.

(Continued on page 386.)





"The innkeeper's wife appeared on the threshold."