FIRST FOOTBALL WINNERS WILL BE ANNOUNCED NEXT WEEK!

THE ROVER

No. 1372—OCT. 13th, 1951. EVERY THURSDAY. PRICE 3d

CRAYFORD COUNTY SECONDARY (KENT)

THE CONVENT OF OUR LADY OF PROVIDENCE (HANTS)

NICOLSON INSTITUTE (STORNOWAY)

HINDLEY AND ABRAM GRAMMAR (LANCS)

SLOANE GRAMMAR (CHELSEA)

WEST BRIDGFORD BECKET GRAMMAR (NOTTS)

BATH TECHNICAL SCHOOL

THERE ARE NO PRIZES TO BE WON FOR SAVING UP THE SCHOOL BADGES SHOWN HERE, BUT FOOTBALLS ARE AWARDED FOR SAVING UP THE "FAMOUS FOOTBALLERS" INSIDE THIS PAPER.

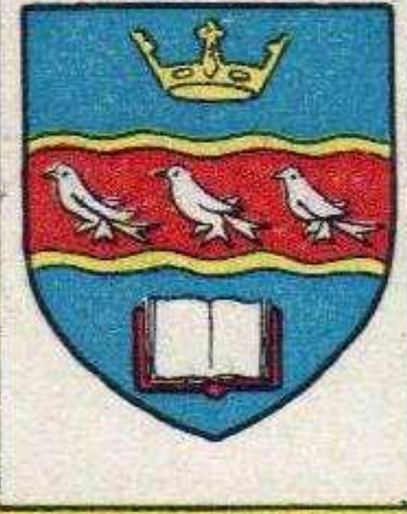
SEVEN SISTERS SENIOR SECONDARY (GLAMORGAN)

ST PAUL'S HIGH SCHOOL (DAR-ES-SALAAM, BRITISH EAST AFRICA)

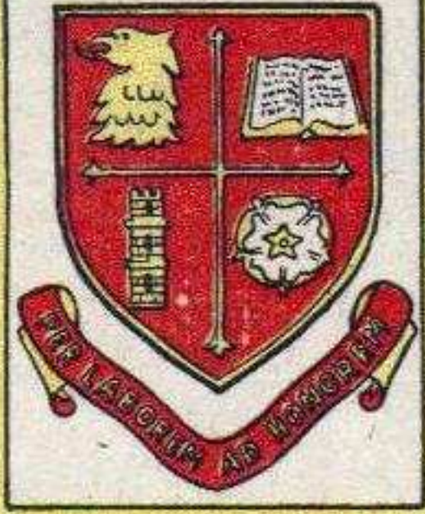
WOODLANDS ROAD COUNTY SECONDARY SCHOOL (GILLINGHAM)

DANEMARK CENTRAL SCHOOL (WINCHESTER)

BOGNOR REGIS COUNTY SECONDARY



MALTBY GRAMMAR (YORKS)



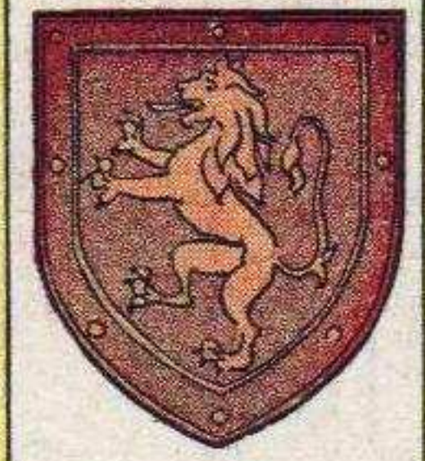
ST ALOYSIUS COLLEGE (GLASGOW)

ROSSET COLLEGE (HARROGATE)

FIRTH PARK GRAMMAR (SHEFFIELD)

BALLYMENA ACADEMY

SALTASH COUNTY GRAMMAR (CORNWALL)



ROCHDALE MUNICIPAL DAY TECHNICAL SCHOOL

READERS' CORNER

PICTURE GUNS OFFERED EACH WEEK

Send your entries on a postcard to:—"Readers' Corner," "The Rover," 12 Fetter Lane, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4. Entries must be the reader's own work. Write the names of your two favourite "Rover" stories on your card.

SOL FAH, SO GOOD!

A musician with spots before his eyes,
With whom I deeply sympathise,
Once tried to turn the spots to music;
If you heard the noise, it would make you, too, sick.

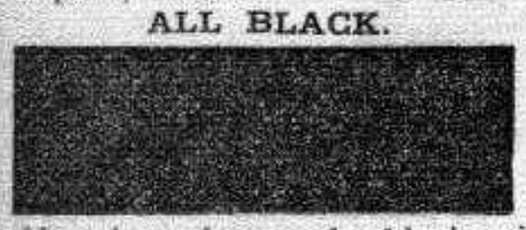
—R. Walker, 52 Lonsdale Rd., Oxford.

ODD FENCE,

A most unusual "fence" has been erected in front of a house on the main road between Amersham and Chalford, Buckinghamshire. It consists of twelve old wagon wheels, of various sizes. In addition, the owner of the house has used another wheel as the frame for one of his windows.

—W. Paddock, 28 Hamble Rd., Gosport, Hants.

ALL BLACK.



Here is a picture of a black spiv selling black puddings on the black market at Blackburn on Black Friday. Outlook—very black.

—Brian Jacques, 152 Orwell Rd., Liverpool, 4, Kirkdale.

HEE-HAW! HEE-HAW!

When the donkey saw the zebra,
He began to twitch his tail,
"Well, I never!" was the comment.
"There's a mule that's been in jail."

—P. Story, 33 Broadcoombe Ave., South Croydon, Surrey.

SMASHING DRIVES.

In 1928, Oxford University golfers hit golf balls from Brasenose Quadrangle over the Bodleian Library. The danger to precious windows in the ancient buildings was recognised and the feat was never attempted again.

—David G. Allt, 7 Harcourt Est., Kibworth, Nr. Leicester.

CUT UP!

Little squaw,
Circular saw,
Face too near,
Minus—ear.

—Derek Rogerson, 65 South Meadow Lane, Preston, Lancs.

AN OLD CUSTOM.

In Anstruther, Fife, it is regarded as good luck to give a biscuit to any fishing craft about to put to sea.

—Robert Farrell, 99a Dalsalloch, Auchinleck, Ayrshire.

LOST VILLAGE.

In Cumberland, there is a village with one row of houses. It is surrounded by hills and very hard to see. No wonder it is called Seldom Seen. My grandfather did all the woodwork in the houses.

—J. S. Cowen, 1 Norfolk Rd., Castle Town, Penrith.

KNOCK-OUT!

A young man of scanty physique
Thought at boxing his fortune to seek,
His opponent's first punch
Landed right on his lunch,
And it doubled him up for a wique!

—Joseph Currie, 30 Polwarth Cres., Edinburgh, 11.

MISSING STAR.

In Texas, it is said that the most beautiful star in the sky is missing. That is because "Pecos Bill" (legendary hero of Texas) lassoed it for the flag of his country—and that is why Texas is called the "Land of the Lone Star."

Pecos Bill was supposed to have been bred by a pack of coyotes. This hero could also lasso clouds and speak to any cow in the world in its own language.

—Derek Gee, 335 Sydenham Rd., Sydenham, London, S.E.26.

SOME JUMPS!

The kangaroo is the star leaper in the animal world. He can jump 70 feet without effort and has been known to clear a 15-foot fence.

The springbok, a member of the antelope family, is another clever jumper. He will leap 12 feet into the air with the greatest of ease.

—D. Tuck, 161 Oxlow Lane, Dagenham, Essex.

OLD CUSTOM.

On the island of Marken, Holland, boys wear long hair and are dressed like girls until the age of five years.

A white band on the bodice and flowered skirt indicates that the child is a boy.

—B. Morrison, 23 Kingsburn Dr., Bankhead, Rutherglen.

SAFE AS THE——

The vaults in which Britain's gold is kept in the Bank of England, in London, are sixty feet below the surface of the street. They can be flooded to protect them against fire.

They have reinforced concrete walls two feet thick, protected on the interior with armour-plating and massive steel doors weighing many tons.

—Gavin Creyke, Dudley House, 20 Rufford Ave., Yeadon, Nr. Leeds.

NOT SO "NUTTY."

In Siam, and other hot countries, you can see monkeys being led about like dogs in this country. The reason for this is that their masters get them to go up the trees and knock the coconuts down.

—Peter Ketchin, Kirbester, The Loan, Loanhead, Midlothian.

FOOTBALL FACT!

The derisive call "keep it on the island," so often heard at a soccer match, originated at Godmanchester (an ancient Huntingdon borough). The local ground was situated on a small islet in the middle of the Great Ouse and the ball was often booted into the water. Hence the advice to "keep it on the island."

—G. A. Stait, 7 Inner Circle, Taunton.

SOME MEMORY.

The wearer of the Sacred Robe of Tibet has reason to feel very proud.

It consists of 108 colours and is worn only by those who have read the 108 volumes of the Tibetan Scriptures, 108 times, and memorised every word.

—M. K. Bitten, 7 Spring Lane, Canterbury, Kent.

S'FACT!

If lead
Is fed
To guys
They dies.

—Robert Cockburn, 184 Pilton Ave., Edinburgh, 5.

LONDON CALLING!

The name "Piccadilly" is derived from a piccadill. A piccadill was the ruff worn round the neck in the time of Queen Elizabeth (about 1600). The only shop of reasonable size in the street at that time was that of a tailor, who made ruffs for the court.

—J. Chamberlin, 18 Falmouth Gdns., Ilford, Essex.

PLENTY ROOM.

There was a young man named Horatius,
Who was heard to exclaim "Goodness gracious!
My fat Uncle Pat
Has been wearing my hat,
And now it's uncomfortably spacious."

—Miss C. Burford, 8 Furze St., Chiswick, W.4.

TRUE STORIES OF THE MOUNTIES (No. 8) Almighty Voice At Bay.

Sergeant Colbrook was given the job of arresting Almighty Voice, an Indian chief, who had slain a steer belonging to a rancher. The sergeant approached the tepee, and told the chief to surrender.

Almighty Voice refused and threatened the Mountie with death if he took another step forward. Colbrook advanced, Almighty Voice fired, and the Mountie fell to the ground, dead!

Captain Allan and a company of men were put on the trail of Almighty Voice. At last they cornered the Indian chief in a copse of bushes and brushwood. They surrounded the area.

Captain Allan walked up the trail on his own. Suddenly the bushes parted and Almighty Voice appeared. He ordered the Captain to hand over his cartridge belt, but Allan refused.

Firing then broke out and Almighty Voice was wounded in the ankle. He crawled into the brush. Three Mounties, under cover of darkness, volunteered to crawl forward and try to get the Indians. They never returned.

Under a flag of truce, Almighty Voice came out and addressed Captain Allan. He declared that he and his men were hungry. They wanted half an hour for food and drink. Then they would fight—to a finish!

Captain Allan refused the request. The Indians returned to the brush and the battle began again. Late that night two six-pound guns were brought up and poured a withering fire over the area held by Almighty Voice.

The guns ceased firing. An unearthly silence fell over the area. No gunfire came from the Indians. The Mounties cautiously crawled forward. Almighty Voice was dead. Another law-breaker had paid the full penalty.

With tracer shells streaking past them, Billy the Kid struggles with the Nazi pilot for control of the helicopter !

THE STRUGGLE IN SPACE.

THE ground flares formed a ring in a courtyard. The helicopter, a Landgraf H-2, descended towards them like a moth attracted by a light.

Round about were the hills and forests of South-West Germany. From this region an organisation of fanatical German pilots were continuing the war on their own account, though World War Two was over.

Billy the Kid, a flying-officer from Squadron X, was the passenger in the helicopter. He wore a German cap and tunic and his idea was to discover the headquarters of the Nazi gang.

The pilot was Lieutenant Norkel, a Nazi who had accepted him as being Captain Gratz, the German officer Billy the Kid had locked in a farmhouse cellar.

Norkel had been doing some chattering over the radio, but the din of the motor had prevented Billy the Kid from hearing what he said. The conversation had, however, been heard at Wunsdorf aerodrome where Squadron X was based.

The Nazis had tipped Norkel off that he had a Britisher aboard and had diverted the helicopter to Landing Point Seven "where a reception will be arranged for him."

Squadron X, equipped with Tempests, had been rushed to Wunsdorf to cope with the new Nazi menace.

Billy the Kid stared down. In the glare he saw walls and turrets.

"It's about time we went the other way," decided Billy the Kid. "I can find this dump again. No doubt the Nazis will throw a party for me, but I'm not staying."

The lanyard which was coiled round his wrist tightened as he gave a tug. The butt of his service revolver was hard in his hand. He thrust the muzzle into Norkel's ribs.

Billy the Kid could speak German and he spoke it now.

"Take her up, Von Dustpan," he shouted in the pilot's ear.

Norkel was startled, both by finding the gun in his ribs and by being addressed as "Von Dustpan."

"Quick," snapped Billy the Kid, and increased the pressure on his pistol.

Norkel's eyes had a baffled glare. He pulled at the pitch-control lever. The note of the rotors changed. The descent was arrested. The helicopter hovered, then started to climb.

A searchlight swept up, flickered and fixed on the machine. Norkel was quick in twisting the control wheel. As the helicopter tilted, Billy the Kid was flung violently sideways.

The Nazi reared from his seat and hurled himself on the Britisher. He got a grip on Billy the Kid's gun wrist and started to bend it back.

The helicopter returned to an even keel. As it hovered, it swayed from the violent movements of the fighting men.

Billy the Kid let his gun go. He flung his other arm over the back of the Nazi's neck and got his hand under his chin. He jerked and Norkel grunted and panted. Maybe he thought his neck was going to be snapped. He straightened his legs with a thrust and his weight, flung backwards, smacked Billy the Kid into the door.

The latch snapped and the door flew open. In a tangle of limbs, punching, clawing, using their knees and elbows, Billy the Kid and Norkel fought with tigerish fury with a nasty drop of four or five hundred feet awaiting them if they slid out of the doorway.

On the top of one of the towers, gazing up at the swaying helicopter, stood a German officer in the uniform of a colonel. A pilot's wings were on his tunic. The German Air Force Cross glinted among his decorations.

His face looked as if it had been carved out of granite. Over his left eye was a deep scar. The eyeball had a hazy film across it and the monocle he wore was evidently to aid his sight.

The three men manning a Mauser light ack-ack gun stood rigidly to attention in his presence.

In the glare of the searchlight the writhing bodies in the doorway could be seen. A leg dangled out and was convulsively drawn up.

It seemed from the amused curl of his lip that the Colonel was enjoying the spectacle.

On the steps leading to the tower sounded the clatter of heavy boots. A corporal rose into view. He clicked his heels and jerked up his hand in salute.

"Yes, what is it?" asked the Colonel.

"It is a report from the radar unit, Herr Colonel," exclaimed the corporal. "Three aircraft have taken off from Wunsdorf and are flying in this direction."

"A reconnaissance flight, eh!" snarled the Colonel. "All flares will be immediately extinguished."

He turned towards the gun-crew.

"Shoot down the helicopter," he said harshly.

BILLY THE KID—MOTORIST.

BILLY THE KID rammed his foot against the side of the door. He used it as a lever. He pushed and threw Norkel off him. He flung himself on top of the Nazi.

Out of the corner of his eye he had a glimpse of red lights rising towards the helicopter, lights that seemed to move slowly at first and then streak past the plane. Tracer shells!

He pinned the sweating Norkel down with his knee. He drew back his fist and crashed it down at the German's jaw.

With a grunt, Norkel sank back. Billy the Kid hit him with his other fist and the German passed out.

Grabbing hold of the senseless man's tunic, Billy the Kid tugged him away from the door. He stumbled to the pilot's seat and dropped into it.

Billy the Kid moved the pitch control lever and put the machine into forward flight. Shells burst nearby and the helicopter lurched. From somewhere came a nasty crunching sound. The helicopter tilted and then swung back on to an even keel. Then he realised that it was dropping.

The searchlight went out. With the rotors grinding and creaking, the helicopter continued its descent. It was not a break-neck drop, but he could not check the fall.

He heard the rending and smashing of timber. The end of a branch poked itself into the cabin. With a terrific jolt, the helicopter stopped.

Billy the Kid pulled himself off the instrument panel, crawled to the door and peered down.

"Well, what d'you know?" he muttered. "We're stuck in the top of a tree."

He was just able to see that the machine was jammed in the fork of a great oak. He wriggled out and got astride a branch. He started to work his way down. Except that he nearly got an unseen twig in one eye, it was not too difficult.

He rested for a few minutes at the foot of the tree before setting out through the forest.

Billy the Kid zig-zagged through the trees till he reached a glade, then he looked at the stars. The course he had taken in astro-navigation was coming in useful. The stars gave him his direction.

Walking had never been a popular pastime with Billy the Kid, but it was the only way to get out of the forest and he made a start.

"Oh, my poor feet," became Billy the Kid's slogan as he plodded on grimly.

He permitted himself only brief rests. He dared not drop off to sleep. It was a safe bet that the Nazis would be out looking for him at the crack of dawn.

The dawn slowly filled the forest with a dim, grey light. He kept going, but he was very tired.

The trees thinned out into a large clearing. Munching at the grass of a sloping field was a small herd of black and white cattle.

The clearing contained a straggle of buildings forming a mountain village. A road went winding downwards into a narrow wooded pass.

Billy the Kid stayed among the trees and followed the edge

of the clearing in a downward direction. The peasants were early risers. He could see figures moving about among the cottages. Smoke curled up from the chimneys.

He was well down the slope where the trees again closed in on the road when he heard the sound of a motor.

From the side of a tree he saw a military vehicle, the German version of the jeep, emerge from the pass and raise the dust as it came lurching up the road towards the village. It contained three soldiers.

The jeep passed close by him, raced into the village and stopped. He could see peasants clustering round it. The soldiers could be seen pointing towards the forest and gesticulating. Billy the Kid had no doubt that he was the subject of the conversation.

The jeep would have to come back as the road ended in the village. It was this knowledge, plus the fact that he did not want to walk any further if he could help it, that put an idea into his head.

With the object of getting as far down the road as he could, he moved quickly, keeping just inside the trees. When he had got about a quarter of a mile from the village, he heard the vehicle re-starting.

Then he broke cover. He stumbled out from the trees into the road. He jerked his head round as if unaware until that moment that the jeep was coming. He ran on across the road with every sign of panic and dashed into the forest.

What he did then was to crouch behind a bush at the edge of the road. The jeep roared down the hill and skidded to a stop. The driver switched off the engine and jumped out to follow his comrades, who had swung off before the vehicle halted.

The Germans rushed past the bush and into the forest.

Billy the Kid crawled round the bush and dived for the jeep. He released the handbrake and let the vehicle roll. It had moved fifty yards before he switched on the motor.

THE "RAT'S" PLAN.

THE Big Fellow, commander of Squadron X, stood near the administration block at Wunsdorf aerodrome and watched an Auster come in and land. Down from the small aircraft climbed the stocky figure of the Laird, who held the rank of Squadron-Leader. He saw his C.O. and hurried towards him.

"I've spotted Billy the Kid's Tempest," he said. "It's in a field halfway up a mountain above the railway. How he put it down in one piece beats me."

"We're piecing things together bit by bit," muttered the Big Fellow. "His Tempest must have been damaged after he shot down the German that rocketed that train, though how the helicopter comes into it, I can't guess."

"He'll turn up," said the Laird. "He has an aptitude for getting out of hot water."

The Big Fellow uttered a chuckle.

"Another thing, Laird," he said. "I've received a signal from Group that we're to have some unexpected help in fighting this bunch. You'll have heard of Max Muller, the German pilot ?"

"Didn't he command that Messerschmitt wing flying from the Calais area during the Battle of Britain ?" exclaimed the Laird.

The Big Fellow nodded.

"He led them well, too," he said. "He was a fine pilot.

"Group are going to send him along here to help in any way he can. He has definite knowledge of some of the secret aerodromes the Nazis constructed in South-West Germany and Austria and which, it seems, the pirates are using."

"He'll be a useful chap to have about," was the Laird's comment.

"Well, I'll go and break the news to Maintenance that they've got to fetch a seven-ton fighter down the side of a mountain."

As the Laird was walking away, a big Army car came into the 'drome.

The Big Fellow went to welcome Brigadier Barham and Major Harrap. The Brigadier was in command of the troops in the South Western area.

They went into the Big Fellow's office with its wall maps.

"I understand you've already shot down two of the Nazi jets," said Barham, who was a young man for his rank. "It's a good start."

"Yes, but we were lucky both times," replied the Big Fellow candidly. "Both were chance interceptions. Surprise helped. We can't bank on having such opportunities again. We shall need to organise to cope with the Germans and that's why I'm asking for your help."

"You can certainly have it," promised the Brigadier.

"Let me state the problem," said the Big Fellow. "We're trying to cope with jet aircraft of great speed. It's impossible for us, as you'll realise, to keep constant patrols of Tempests in the air. What we must have, therefore, is prompt notice when the jets are operating and I want to re-introduce the 'Rats' procedure used with considerable success during the latter stages of the war."

"I'm in the dark about the 'Rats'" chuckled the Brigadier. "I finished the war in Burma."

"This was the system," the Big Fellow answered. "Two flights of Tempests were kept at Immediate Alert, with the pilots seated in the machines and ready to scramble. As soon as a jet was sighted, the pilots received the order 'Scramble, rat. Scramble rat,' and three red rockets were fired as a signal to clear the circuit. The Tempests then went off to get across the jet's track as it returned to base."

"Where do we come into this ?" asked the Major.

"I want you to set up observation posts in key positions," said the Big Fellow. "You'll need two men on watch in each post at a time. They'll be in direct touch with my control room either by phone or radio."

"We'll do it," replied the Brigadier, and turned towards the wall map. "We'll find some post positions straight away."

"It will be a regular spider's web by the time we've finished," promised Major Harrap.

On their departure, the Big Fellow reached up and pulled down the cover, rather like a blind, over the map.

He was moving to his desk when the Laird appeared in the doorway.

"Billy the Kid has come back—in a German jeep," he said. "His chief complaint is that he's hungry."

"He'll have to wait," snapped the Big Fellow. "Let's have him in."

Billy the Kid, his hair ruffled, and grime on his face, made his entry.

"So you've been having fun and games," said the Big Fellow, eyeing the German tunic.

Billy the Kid grinned.

"I got in a squirt at a Volksjaeger that was shooting up a train," he said. "A truck blew up and I got caught in the blast. I had to crash-land in a field. When I strolled into the farmhouse, I found myself squinting down a Nazi gun barrel. He had a radio operator with him. After I had coaxed 'em down into the cellar, having borrowed the gentleman's cap and tunic, I had a ride in the helicopter sent to fetch him back to base. I think I must have been rumbled, for soon after we had passed over the Reizenberg Gorge, the pilot changed course for a castle."

"Landing Point Seven," the Big Fellow cut in. "We heard the radio signals."

"Can you locate the castle ?" the Laird demanded.

"I think so," said Billy the Kid. "I watched the compass. The pilot flew on a course of two hundred and twenty-five degrees after passing over the Reizenberg Falls."

The Laird stepped towards the wall map. His hand reached for the cord to pull up the cover.

"Not that map !" exclaimed the Big Fellow. "Use the small one."

The Laird turned to the map behind the desk. Billy the Kid resumed his narrative.

"I thought it was about time to get out and had a spot of bother with the pilot," he said. "The referee had just given the decision in my favour when some spiteful types started shooting and we finished up in a tree. I thought I'd have to walk all the way home, but managed to borrow a jeep."

The Laird kept his finger on the map.

"The only place it could be is the Rudenbergen Schloss," he exclaimed.

COLONEL MAX MULLER.

AT ten thousand feet, the Big Fellow led the six Tempests over the mountains.

Radio silence was kept. Squadron X never announced its coming.

Over the green, dark valleys and the rugged peaks flew the formation.

The Big Fellow changed course and the planes wheeled in close formation. They started to lose height.

The Big Fellow saw there was activity on the road zig-zagging down from the castle. A dozen vehicles had come out of the archway and were crawling down the descent.

It was clear that, failing to catch Billy the Kid, the Nazi gang was evacuating Point Seven.

The wing planes peeled away. The Big Fellow put his nose down. Like a vast hawk, the Tempest swooped into the valley. The vehicles, lorries led by an armoured car, leapt into his sights and he fired. With a whoosh, the rockets streaked from the tubes and their lethal warheads lanced into the convoy and exploded. The Big Fellow pulled the stick back and the Tempest stood on its tail and zoomed.

As he levelled out and came round, he saw one of the Tempests blazing its rockets down into the courtyard. Within a few moments, smoke filled the valley and rose like a fog bank round the castle.

A wary look-out for jets was kept on the homeward run, but no Messerschmitts or Volksjaegers were sighted.

Half an hour later, the Big Fellow was at work in his office. An orderly opened the door and stepped into the room.

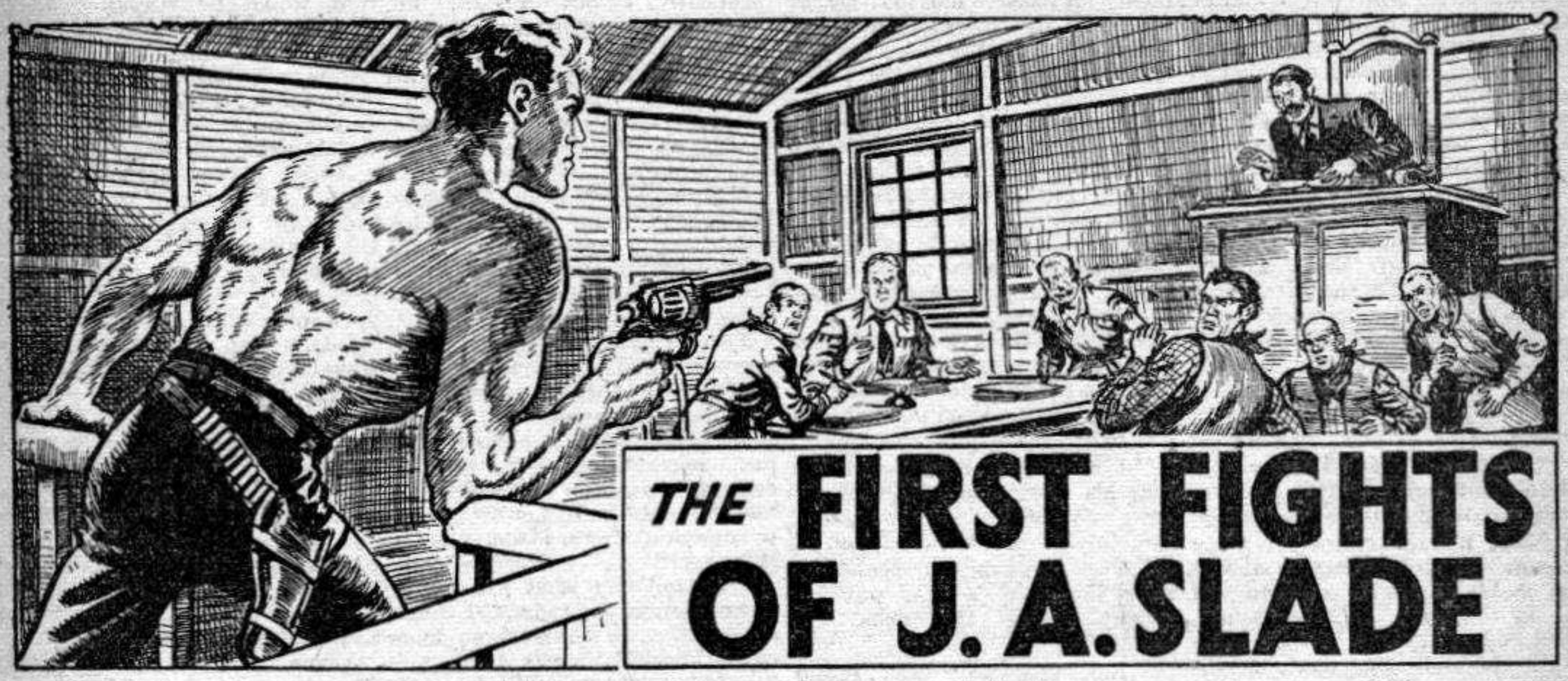
"Colonel Max Muller is here, sir," he reported.

"Send him in," said the Big Fellow.

Wearing a drab, badly-cut suit and taking off a small black hat with a curling brim, the visitor appeared in the doorway. He had a face that looked as though it was carved out of granite. Over his left eye was a deep scar. There was a hazy film across the eyeball and he wore a monocle.

Will the Big Fellow be tricked by Muller's daring masquerade? You'll find out in next Thursday's story.

Uproar in court when one of the witnesses — J. A. Slade — produces a gun and starts to cross-examine the judge!



THE FIRST FIGHTS OF J. A. SLADE

THE HIGH COURT JUDGE.

"HERE she is!"

J. A. Slade's keen eyes had seen the cloud of dust at the bend of the trail down in the valley. He was standing on top of the big red coach which was known everywhere between Comstock and Carson City as The Lode Flyer. At the reins sat Wal Loader, the owner and driver.

They were off their usual route, waiting alongside the overland trail between Carson and Sacramento, and the coach they were awaiting was coming from the west.

Recently, three members of the notorious Scar gang had been caught robbing a mule-train near Comstock, and were now awaiting trial for robbery and murder. It had been necessary to send to Sacramento for a High Court judge, for there was no such personage in western Nevada.

Word had been received that Judge Gantlett was travelling on the Wells Fargo coach from Sacramento to Carson, and the request was made that someone should meet the mail coach at Carson and take the judge direct to Comstock, so saving him more than fifty miles of rough journeying.

Wal Loader had agreed to do the job.

The Wells Fargo coach came toiling up the hill, covered with dust, the horses well lathered.

The driver raised his whip in salute, and brought the coach alongside the Flyer. A grizzled veteran of the trails, he looked at Wal Loader in patronising fashion.

J. A. Slade jumped down and hurried towards the door which had been opened by the Wells Fargo guard. He was in time to see a tall, fleshy, grey-haired man getting out, carrying a small gladstone bag in his hand. Dressed in severe black of city cut, the man had a pink and white complexion and clear blue eyes.

"I'm Judge Gantlett," he announced. "I understand I'm transferring to your coach here."

Slade jerked a thumb towards the Flyer. This was the first High Court judge he had ever met, and he was not impressed. He wondered why the man wore a collar that cut into his neck and nearly choked him.

"You'll be in Comstock within the hour," Slade told him. "Any other baggage?"

"Three bags in the boot. See they are transferred," said the judge, and walked over to the Flyer, where, after a nod to Loader, he climbed to one of the top seats.

With the aid of the other guard, Slade transferred the rest of the baggage, and the Wells Fargo coach went her way.

Two minutes later Slade was back at his post with the shot-gun across his knees, and The Lode Flyer was leaving the overland trail and cutting north-east over a cattle path.

From time to time the judge asked the names of various landmarks. Slade turned sideways in order to talk to him more freely, and saw that the bottom three buttons of his waistcoat could not be done up because of the judge's fatness.

The judge asked them many questions about Comstock and the three prisoners.

"There seems to be a good deal of doubt that they are the right men," said the judge.

"No doubt at all!" snorted Slade. "They're the right men. I don't know why they've gone to all the trouble to fetch you up here, judge. Best thing would've been for the sheriff to have strung 'em up right away."

The judge looked shocked.

"The Law must be respected. Comstock is too big for lynch-law now. The men must have a fair trial. I understand there were no witnesses."

"They shot an' killed the three drivers of the mule-train. There were five in the gang, and they were seen from a hilltop by an old prospector who happened to hear the shooting an' ran to see what it was all about. He watched which way the skunks went, an' directed the posse which caught three of them. He's the only witness."

"Well, I understand these men swear they were not concerned in the hold-up, and that the prospector was too far away to identify anyone," said Gantlett.

"Maybe, but he could see the colour of their horses, one grey, one sorrel, an' one black. He told the sheriff that before they overtook them."

The judge shook his head.

"The prosecution will have to do better than that. It so happened that those five men all rode horses of different colours, so that if the prospector had mentioned any three colours he was almost certain to be right."

Slade frowned. He was not much good at arguing with words. His guns could talk better than he could. Wal Loader sent the coach down a long, gentle slope at a trot, and tried to change the subject.

"What about givin' the judge a song, Slade? He'll have enough palaver about them prisoners when he reaches Comstock."

Judge Gantlett was keen to hear a song, and Slade rather reluctantly pushed back his hat and let loose with his powerful baritone voice, which always seemed to encourage the horses to greater efforts:

"I've worked in the town and I've worked on the farm,
And all I've got to show is this muscle in me arm,
Got a blister on me foot, got a callous on me hand,
But I'll be a cowpuncher as long as I can.
Ride around, little dogies, ride around them slow,
The fiery and the snuffy are a-raring to go."

To his surprise, the judge joined in the next verse with a mellow tenor:

"Oh, when I die, take my saddle from the wall,
Put it on my pony, lead him out of his stall,
Tie my bones on his back, turn our faces to the West,
And we'll ride the prairie that we love the best.
Ride around, little dogie, ride around them slow,
The fiery an' the snuffy are a-raring to go."

Wal Loader cracked his whip in applause, the horses twitched their ears and increased their speed.

"You been up in Montana, judge?" asked J. A. Slade curiously.

The man at his side jerked.

"Montana? No, never! I've never been further north than this."

The judge continued to display unusual interest in the countryside, and asked questions incessantly until they finally clattered down the long slope into the busy main street of Comstock.

They drove the judge to the solitary hotel, where he was expected.

SLADE HAS DOUBTS.

TALK that evening in Comstock was of little else but the forthcoming trial of the three hold-up men. Like Slade, there were many who considered it a waste of time, and who declared the ruffians ought to have been strung up right away.

Among these was old Washoe Pete, the prospector who had witnessed the attack on the mule-train. He was saying this for the hundredth time that evening in the Bucket of Blood saloon, when Slade interrupted to say:

"I'm not so sure they're going to be strung up at all. The judge said identity's got to be proved. He says you couldn't have been able to recognise them from a mile away."

Washoe Pete scowled.

"Said that, did he? Anyone'd think he was on their side. Maybe I couldn't see their faces, but I could see the colour o' their hosses, couldn't I? Didn't I tell the sheriff there was one sorrel, one grey, an' one black?"

"Yes, but he says that was easy, for the five horses were all of different colours. There was almost bound to be one grey, one sorrel, and one black amongst 'em."

Washoe Pete considered this, stirring the sawdust with his foot.

"Doggone it, I never thought o' that before! He's right. They was all of different colours. There was a sorrel, a grey, a black, a bay, an' a chestnut. I can see

'em all clear now, but I hadn't thought o' that before. Just shows how clever these law men are."

He shook his head and sucked at his pipe. Slade, who was looking for Wal Loader, strolled on to another saloon, and he was halfway there when he suddenly thought of something and dashed back to where Washoe Pete was still holding court.

"Pete, about those hosses. Did you tell the sheriff all five horses were of different colours ?"

"No, how could I ? I didn't remember till you told me just now."

"And you've told nobody else ?"

"O' course not ! I tell you, I didn't remember it till you recalled it to my mind."

Slade nodded and went away again. He looked across at the hotel. He had seen Sheriff Murphy go in there half an hour before, and guessed he was in conference with the judge about the forthcoming trial. He started to cross the street in the same direction, changed his mind, and turned about, almost colliding with Wal Loader.

Slade took him by the arm and led him out of the crowd into one of the quieter alleyways.

"Loader, I'm worried about that judge we brought in to-day."

"What's the matter with him ? I thought he was a reg'lar hombre. What's wrong ?"

"Who said he was coming on that coach from Sacramento to-day ?"

"Sheriff Murphy told me last night, an' asked me to meet it where we did. Seems he had a letter from Sacramento by the mail yesterday, sayin' the judge was comin' an' that he was empowered to conduct the trial forthwith. The judge had been sent up from San Francisco, but had been tryin' cases in Sacramento. Seems he finished there sooner than he'd expected."

Slade's prominent cheek-bones seemed to stick out more than ever.

"I don't think he is a judge. I think he's a fake !"

"What ?" Loader took him by the arm and turned his face to the light. "Are you all right ?"

"I mean it. Did you notice that his collar was too tight for him, an' that his waistcoat wouldn't do up at the bottom ?"

"Yes, I did, but thousands of men the judge's age put on weight round the neck an' middle."

"But that suit was brand new. I'd swear it was the first time worn. Would he buy a new suit that was too small on him, or collars that nearly choked him ?"

"No, but——"

"Then that song I sang. That was the Montana version of it. There are scores of versions, but that one's from Montana, where I learned it. He had the same words as me — exactly — yet when I asked him if he'd ever been in Montana he looked scared and swore he hadn't. I bet he's been to Montana and that he learned those words there."

"Yes, but——"

"Lastly, he let drop that all the five hold-up men who attacked the mule-train rode different coloured horses. How did he know that ?"

"Guess Washoe Pete told the sheriff, an' the sheriff put it in his report."

"Wrong ! I've been talking to Washoe Pete, an' he swears he told nobody that. It was true, but he didn't remember it until I told him. How then did Gantlett know about it, unless——"

They looked at one another sharply. Wal Loader shaped his lips in a silent whistle.

"I see what you mean. How could he know unless he knew the men concerned, or the two who escaped have been in touch with him an' told him ? You've got on to somethin' there, Slade. What's it mean ?"

"I'll tell you what I think it means," went on Slade. "I think it means that these three men belong to The Scar's gang, an' that he's trying to pull a fast one by sending one of his own gang in place of the rightful judge. If that's so, this man can force the trial to go whichever way he likes, and can find these men innocent. If that's done, the sheriff will have to turn 'em loose."

Wal Loader considered this, but he was a cautious man.

"Maybe you're right, but this needs thinkin' about. We'll sleep on it, an' if you think the same way in the mornin' we'll have a talk with Bullfrog Murphy."

J. A. Slade allowed himself to be led back to the rooming house where they had bunks, and because he had been out in the open air since dawn that morning, he was soon in the land of dreams.

The first piece of news he heard when he wakened in the morning was that old Washoe Pete had been stabbed late the previous night. Nobody seemed to know how it had happened.

When he heard this, J. A. Slade grabbed for his gun-belt and buckled it on.

"You know what that means ?" he stormed to Loader. "I'm——"

"Take it easy," drawled the other. "You can prove nothing. I was thinkin' about this set-up when I went to bed last night. If this Judge Gantlett is a phoney, what's happened to the real Judge Gantlett ?"

"Most likely he's still in Sacramento trying cases, and will be there for some days to come. Or he may have been kidnapped."

"More likely what you said first. The trial here's comin' off to-morrow. If we was sure this judge was not a judge, we could scotch his game, but there's only one way o' findin' out. We've got to get word from Sacramento about the real judge. It's all of one hundred and thirty miles from here to Sacramento, over the Sierra Nevadas. If a man could ride there an' back in thirty-six hours——"

"I will !" said Slade impulsively. "Let me take that bay mare you bought the other day, and I'll get there and back before the trial's over."

Wal Loader rubbed his chin.

"I'd half thought o' takin' the Flyer an' doin' a bit o' business at the same time, but I guess that would be stupid. Those mountains would slow us down. Besides, we couldn't replace six horses en route as you could one. Take the mare, slip away as soon as you can, an' I'll stay here an' watch what happens."

Slade's preparations were soon made. He chose the lightest saddle for the mare, and packed the minimum of things into the saddle-bag. He emptied his pockets of everything weighty, gave one of his revolvers into Loader's care, retaining only the Naval gun, and clad himself as lightly as possible before going to the stable and leading the bay down to the river as though to let her drink.

Once out of sight of everyone, he mounted her, kicked in his heels and rode fast across country, making for the overland trail which ran through the Sierra Nevadas down to Sacramento and the distant Pacific coast.

When there was no longer any fear of him being seen by anyone from Comstock, he kicked off his boots and tossed them away, preferring to ride barefooted for lightness. He shed his heavy shirt and discarded that also, riding stripped to the waist, like a Redskin.

THE LAST WITNESS.

ALL that morning the trial of the three hold-up men had been proceeding in the big room put at the disposal of the judge by one of the local mining companies. The room was crowded with miners.

Sheriff Murphy was acting as prosecutor, and he was greatly handicapped by the fact that his only witness had been murdered, although he was at pains to stress what this meant.

"Someone wanted to shut Washoe Pete's mouth," he cried. "He was murdered in cold blood because the friends of these three defendants did not want him to describe what he had seen."

"I object !" exclaimed the young lawyer who was acting for the prisoners. He had not wanted this thankless job, but Judge Gantlett the previous day had prevailed upon him to accept it, saying that it was only just that the men should have some defence. "There is no way of proving Washoe Pete was killed because of his connection with this case. He may have been killed by a personal enemy, by a robber who thought he had gold on him, or in some quarrel."

"Objection sustained," said the judge, looking very dignified on the rostrum that had been rigged up for him. "In any case, this Washoe Pete had already given a written statement. You can read it, Sheriff Murphy."

The sheriff did so, but it was not the same as having the prospector there.

"Exactly how far from the scene of the crime was the witness when he saw all this ?" asked the judge. "Does he say that ?"

Murphy blinked at the paper before him.

"He says about a mile."

"About a mile. That's not exact enough. We do not know if

Washoe Pete was a good judge of distance. I would have liked to have asked him to estimate what a mile was, and then we would have known what he really meant," said Gantlett. "He states, too, that he identified the horses by their colours. Almost anywhere one could find a sorrel, a black, and a grey horse. Did he say what colour the other two horses were ?"

"He doesn't mention it here," admitted Murphy.

"He said there was a bay and a chestnut," shouted one of those who had been listening to Washoe Pete in the saloon two nights before. "Slade suggested they were all different colours, an' Washoe thought a bit, then agreed with him."

"Slade ? Who is this Slade who made this suggestion to Washoe Pete ?" demanded the judge. "Why did he do this ? Where is he ?"

Everyone looked round. Seeing a chance to cause a further delay, Wal Loader got up and said :

"Slade was the guard on the coach that brought you here the other day, judge."

"Ah, yes, I remember. Where is he ?"

"Out tryin' one o' my hosses," said Loader, with perfect truth.

"Then fetch him. I want to ask him why he brought up that point of colours. I'll adjourn the court until he is found, or until two o'clock," said Gantlett.

The court adjourned, and Wal Loader, who knew perfectly well that Slade could not be found, made a pretence of looking for him. He even climbed to the top of a hill to the south of the town and looked towards the overland trail, wondering if he would see the lone rider returning. The thirty-six hours were nearly up. If Slade had succeeded in covering the distance in the time, he ought soon to be visible.

By two o'clock there was still no sign of him, and Loader went back to the court and said he could not find his partner. Gantlett grumbled, but ordered the trial to continue.

"So far, the only evidence we have against these men rests on the statement of an aged man whose eyes cannot be considered at their best," said the judge. "Nobody here actually saw these men holding up the mule-train, and unfortunately no member of the mule-train survived to give his evidence. Has anyone else here any evidence against these men before I sum up ?"

Wal Loader cast a despairing glance towards the back of the court. He could see down the trail towards the edge of the town, but there was no sign of Slade.

"I have !" he said desperately, and was brought forward. "A month ago my coach, The Lode Flyer, was held up by the Scar and half a dozen other men. We were coming back from Virginia City at the time, and had a bull-dog aboard — O.K. Hargrave's bulldog. That man there," he pointed at one of the trio, "that man there opened the door of the coach when we were covered, in order to make the passengers hand over their rings, watches, and wallets. The bulldog leapt at him and knocked him flat. The mask he had over his face came off as he went down, and that was the face I saw."

There was a roar of applause from the crowd, and cries of :

"That's enough ! String 'em up !"

Again the judge hammered for silence. He looked angry.

"Is there anyone else who can bear out your evidence ?"

"Yes, J. A. Slade was there, and he saw the man unmasked."

"Then bring forward Slade," ordered Gantlett.

"The unconfirmed evidence of one witness is not enough to condemn a man," boomed the judge. "Find Slade and let me question him."

Loader saw a cloud of dust moving rapidly down the trail towards the town from the south.

"Here is Slade returning !" he cried.

The judge did not turn his head.

"Very well, we will wait for his evidence," he said.

The crowd turned and watched the oncoming rider.

The rider was spurring his horse unmercifully, and the luckless beast was nearly at the end of its tether. But somehow its stout heart carried it to the outskirts of the crowd, and Slade slid from the saddle. He almost fell, but clutched at a bystander and kept himself erect.

"The trial ?" he gasped.

"Still going on. You're wanted," someone told him, and way was made for him to the centre of the improvised court.

There was a murmur of surprise at his appearance, and Judge Gantlett narrowed his eyes.

"The witness appears to be fatigued," he said. "Have you ridden far ?"

"Two hundred and sixty miles since yesterday morning," replied J. A. Slade coldly, and he hitched his gun-belt to a more comfortable position.

There was another murmur round the court, and the judge frowned.

"It sounds a lot, but it does not really matter how far you have ridden, young man. Will you cast your mind back to the occasion about a month ago when your coach was held up by masked men on the trail from Virginia City. Apparently you had a bull-dog aboard, and——"

"Wait a minute," broke in Slade, twin specks of red on his prominent cheekbones. "By what authority do you ask me this ?"

"By my authority as a High Court Judge !" thundered the man on the rostrum. "I am empowered to hold this trial, to probe and to——"

"You lie !" snapped Slade, and his words cut like a knife. "You are empowered to do nothing. You are no more Judge Gantlett than I am. He is in Sacramento carrying on trials there. A few days ago one of his cases was stolen from his hotel room, and that suit you are wearing was in it, as well as various papers and other things."

He pointed, and the crowd was stricken dumb with amazement. As for the man on the rostrum, he leapt to his feet with ashen face, and hammered on the table madly.

"Silence ! I shall commit you for contempt of court. I shall——"

He gulped. Slade was walking towards him with levelled revolver.

"Sit down !" he ordered. "Sheriff Murphy, I have here a letter from the marshal of Sacramento confirming what I've just said. This man is not Judge Gantlett. I think he is one of the Scar gang sent here to secure the release of the prisoners by trickery."

He seemed to have taken his eyes from the stout man for a moment, and not to have seen the other snatch a revolver from under his armpit, where it must have hung in a special holster, but before anyone in the crowd could shout warning, the old Naval gun had barked once, and the so-called judge whirled round with a shattered shoulder, dropping his weapon.

At that, the three prisoners made a dive for liberty. They must have seen that their fate was sealed, and that they could no longer reckon on being acquitted by a fake judge.

Coolly and calmly J. A. Slade pulled trigger three times, and the three runaways went down with shattered legs.

Then came uproar, and the sheriff and his deputies found it hard to prevent the crowd from lynching both the false judge and those he had come to save.

Somehow the four wounded prisoners were got back to the lock-up, and a seething crowd blocked the main street in ugly fashion until someone remembered that J. A. Slade was the hero of the occasion and rushed him in order to carry him round the town, shoulder-high.

He would rather have been in his bed, but he knew that while they were paying him attention they were not getting up to mischief, and while they concentrated on him, the sheriff persuaded Wal Loader to smuggle the prisoners out of Comstock in The Lode Flyer.

At top speed they were rushed to the lock-up in Silver City, and were kept there until the real judge arrived to try them a week later. There was no longer any doubt about them being members of the Scar's gang, and they all got their desserts.

Ever after that J. A. Slade was pointed out as the man who had ridden one hundred and thirty miles over the Sierra Nevadas and back in thirty-six hours, using only two horses, a record that was to stand for many a year.

Next week a new gang starts to operate in the Comstock area— until J. A. Slade hears about it!

FAMOUS MEN OF THE WEST [SECOND SERIES]

(No. 8) CAPTAIN MOSSMAN

Captain Burton Mossman was the man who organised the Arizona Rangers and cleared the state of outlaws. His first job was as boss of a cattle ranch. He had been only a few days in the job when he rounded up a complete gang of rustlers.

Mossman carried the fight to the rustlers. In a battle with a Mexican gang, he captured the leader, and by threatening him with death forced him to order his men to surrender. The rustlers gave up and were roped to their horses and driven to jail.

Mossman next encountered a gang of Texas gun-fighters. With a sheriff and his deputy, he waited by a water-hole and rounded up the outlaws as they came in to water their horses. The state then formed the Rangers and asked Mossman to command them.

Mossman got down to the job of cleaning up the state. To bring in a killer called Chacon, Mossman enlisted the help of an outlaw, Burt Alvord. After a warm reception from Alvord's Mexican guards, Mossman reached the outlaw's hide-out and came to terms.

The plan to arrest Chacon failed and Mossman had to cross the Mexican border and "kidnap" him. He surprised Chacon and another killer, forcing them to surrender. Because he had broken the law by crossing the border, Mossman resigned from the Rangers.

Pool your "Famous Footballers" with your pals and win a football!

FOOTBALLS

Hundreds of boys have won A FIRST-CLASS FOOTBALL by saving up photographs of "FAMOUS FOOTBALLERS" like the ones on this page. If you haven't won a football yet, don't worry—there's still a chance to get your name on the winners' list.

Here's how to set about it.

START NOW. Cut out and save up the Pictures of "FAMOUS FOOTBALLERS," printed here.

NEXT WEEK you will be asked to send in as many "FAMOUS FOOTBALLERS" Pictures, cut out of "THE ROVER" and its companion papers, of the players of the FOUR teams, Hibernian, Preston North End, Portsmouth, and Stoke City, as you can collect.

The 400 boys who send in the BIGGEST number of Hibs, Preston, Portsmouth, and Stoke players in "FAMOUS FOOTBALLERS" Pictures will be awarded a First-Class Match Football.

You will be told NEXT WEEK how to send in your collected Pictures.

DO NOT SEND YET, because more Pictures will appear.

You can join in saving up with your school pals and teammates to get the biggest possible number of Pictures.

You can get more "FAMOUS FOOTBALLERS" Pictures in "ADVENTURE," "THE WIZARD," and "THE HOTSPUR."

Save up all "FAMOUS FOOTBALLERS," because other teams will be called up, and hundreds and hundreds more footballs will be awarded in the weeks to come.

Nick beams with joy! Blackford Wanderers have found a supporter at last!

IT'S GOALS THAT COUNT

PUG GETS FIRED.

FROM my office window overlooking the field, I saw Pug Gummer swing a punch at Basil Harris, my new outside-left from Tottenham North End. In falling, Harris struck his head on the wheelbarrow and fell sprawling and stunned, writes Nick Smith, the international inside-left, in resuming his story of the season when he was player-manager of Blackford Wanderers.

Anger gripped me as I rushed for the door. I had befriended Pug Gummer and this was how he repaid me. My old pal, Arnold Tabbs, our left-half, and myself had seen him take a hammering at a boxing show. His courage had appealed to us.

Finding out that he was paid thirty shillings for a fight, two pounds if he won and realising that he was undernourished and would soon be punch-drunk if he didn't get out of the game, I had given him a job on the ground staff.

Down the stairs I ran. I was pinning a lot of faith in Basil Harris to help us retain our place at the top of the Second Division—a position I knew was false and unsupported by any adequate reserve strength. I had brought him from Tottenham North End for a fee of £20,000 and had, of course, picked him to play against Priorford Rovers next day. Money was plentiful because the Vanex Corporation of America, with a huge factory in Blackford, had taken over the Wanderers and given me the job of turning them into a world-famous team.

When I got outside, Basil lay stretched out with Arthur Anders, the old trainer, bending over him.

Pug still had an angry flush on his pale, battered face. Arnold had got hold of him by the arm. Bert Bunting, our inside-right, went to give Anders a hand.

"What on earth were you doing?" I shouted.

"He called me a low lout, so I hit him," said Pug. "I ain't going to be called names like that, mister."

"Tell the boss what you told me," exclaimed Arnold.

Pug scowled.

"I came round the corner with the barrow and never saw him as I was shoving," he said. "I gave him a bit of a bump with the wheel and the mud got on his trousers. He called me a low lout and I slapped him one."

"Harris has got a nasty crack," Anders declared. "He's got concussion."

I had had a tense and anxious week and my temper boiled over.

"It's evidently not safe to have you around," I snapped at Pug. "You can take your money and go."

Pug shrugged. He looked round at us and then down at Harris. Then he went and put on his threadbare jacket that was hanging on the railings and trudged away towards the exit.

It was a bitter experience for me to see my new player carried into the dressing-room on a stretcher. Obviously he wouldn't be fit to play at Priorford.

Eddie Barnacle, the veteran winger, was out of the game with a pulled muscle. I would have to field Ray Hughes, who was a poor substitute.

I hurried to a phone, rang the surgery at the factory and asked the doctor to come over.

I returned to the dressing-room. Basil Harris had regained his senses.

"Why did he hit me?" he asked. "First he pushed his barrow into me and then he socked me."

"You got his goat by calling him a low lout," Arnold said.

"I never called him anything," muttered Harris weakly.

"But that was his excuse," I exclaimed. "He must be crazy to go lashing out with punches for nothing."

Harris spoke slowly as if it were an effort to remember.

"All I said was 'Oh, look out'," he stated.

Arnold's expression was perplexed.

"Then he didn't hear you right," he said. "He misunderstood you."

Bert Bunting had a thoughtful scowl on his big, brown face.

"Pug must be hard of hearing," he said. "He's probably a bit deaf from all the wallopings he's taken."

"That's it! That's the explanation," exclaimed Arnold. "The poor kid's had a hard time. How about fetching him back, Nick?"

"You can go and see him if you like," I said.

The doctor came in and had us all out of the room pretty quickly. I soon received a report that Harris would have to stay in bed over the week-end and be kept under observation. I had had concussion myself so I knew the treatment. Rest is the cure.

I went into the dressing-room to speak to Ray Hughes.

"You've got your big chance," I said. "You'll be playing at Priorford to-morrow."

"Okay," he answered. "I'm going to London for the week-end. Shall I be able to get a train from Priorford?"

Yes, he was that type of person! If I'd had another player available I wouldn't have taken a fellow who was more concerned about his week-end than his job.

I was still fuming at Hughes' lack of keenness when Arnold returned.

"Pug's gone," he said. "I went round to his digs looking for him. He's paid what he owed and cleared straight off."

THE LONE SUPPORTER.

WHEN I was having my breakfast on Saturday morning, I could hear Mr and Mrs Baker, with whom I stayed, talking in the kitchen.

"What are you doing this afternoon, Arthur?" she asked.

"There's a big match to-day," replied Baker, who was a colliery engineer.

"Oh, so the Blackies are playing at home, then," exclaimed Mrs Baker.

"That's right," said Baker. "It'll be a good game."

I shrugged ruefully. There was only one Blackford team so far as the local folk were concerned, and that was the Rugby League side. When we played at home, the folk regarded it as a blank Saturday.

The railway station was not far, so I walked.

The players were assembling outside the station. I went to the booking-office and got the tickets.

We went through to the platform where the train was waiting and got into our first-class compartments—everything connected with Vanex had to be first-class.

The platform inspector was giving a solo on his whistle and the doors were being banged when Arnold glanced through the window.

"Look at him, Nick," he gasped.

Across the platform from the barrier ran a man in tall hat and muffler. Pinned to his coat was a huge blue and gold rosette—our colours. His hat was bedecked with blue and gold ribbons. His muffler was in our colours. He carried a big rattle and waved it to a group of porters.

"'Away, Wanderers," he exclaimed.

"Wonders will never cease," I remarked.

At Priorford, we were in a soccer town. The fact that we were top of the Division and that the Rovers would be trying to knock us off our perch made the turnstiles click busily.

When I led the team out, a single rattle whirred and a lone voice shouted, "Wade into 'em, Wanderers!"

The teams were:

Priorford Rovers: Burns; Taunton, Raleigh; Colby, Deakin, Thistell; Radway, Edge, Milford, Topp, Penn.

Blackford Wanderers: Shears; Wheeler, Hoddart; Gray, Ironmonger, Tabbs; Lane, Bunting, Van Hamer, Smith, Hughes.

From the kick-off, I put the ball back to Arnold and ran ahead. He came along a few strides and lobbed the ball accurately to me. I hit it along the ground into the middle. Bert Bunting was galloping up. He steadied himself and let fly with a shot that would have raised blisters on the goalkeeper's hands if he had touched the ball. The net bulged and we had scored in 15 seconds.

While the Rovers were still shaken we came on again. In shifting into the middle, Taunton left Ray Hughes uncovered. I put the ball towards Hughes. Though he had the whole goal to aim at, our outside-left kicked the ball into the hands of Burns.

The goalkeeper's long kick had us in trouble as Topp, a very speedy player, swerved round Gray and put a swift pass down the middle.

Our centre-half, Nol Ironmonger, fresh out of the Army, was a big, promising player, but

What is put on the table, cut, but never eaten ?—A pack of cards.

lacked experience. He glanced round to take in the position of his colleagues before running for the ball and consequently was beaten to it.

Milford got a shooting chance and took it. He slashed in a shot from 15 yards.

It was a drive with plenty of biff behind it, but a nimble goalkeeper would have got to it. Veteran Syd Shears missed it and the score was 1-1.

It was ebb and flow after the interval. Fred Wheeler was playing a great game for us at right-back and with Arnold a raging lion on the left, the home forwards failed to get close in.

During a spell of intensive pressure by the Rovers, Bunting and I dropped back to give a hand.

I nipped on to the ball just outside our penalty area. As I was challenged, I pushed the ball across to Bunting. He put in a terrific low kick far up the right wing. I thought it must go out by yards but, speeding like a greyhound, Ginger Lane chased it.

He made a lunge, stopped the ball from rolling out and sped inwards.

Van Hamer lay back a bit so as not to be offside. Ginger made the centre-half come to him and then middled the ball. Van Hamer scored with a well-placed shot.

The Rovers, with the crowd cheering them on, came at us and forced a series of corners. Each time, with the excitement on the boil, we managed to scramble the ball away. Fred Wheeler was giving Shears fine support and saved a goal with a header off the line.

Nol Ironmonger rose to the flying ball and headed it out to Arnold. He gave me a racing start and I did a sprint up the field.

If Ray Hughes had been half-awake we should have scored. I wanted him to cut inside, but by the time he understood my signal, it was too late. Even so, I beat a man and, with Taunton coming out at me, I managed to get the ball to the winger.

Again his shot was straight to the goalkeeper.

Burns ran forward and hurled the ball wingwards to Penn. The outside-left cut towards goal. Fred Wheeler was coming at him so he tried a pot shot from all of thirty yards.

Shears turned too late and the ball went into the top of the net on the far side to make it 2-2.

The whistle blew for time a couple of minutes later. An away point was not so bad, I suppose, but it was a game we ought to have won. If Basil Harris had been in the team, and if Shears had been more nimble in goal, I reckoned we should have won 3-0.

PUG TURNS UP.

ON Tuesday morning, I was in my training strip and talking to Arnold and Bert Bunting before setting out on some laps of the running track.

Our doorman came out and said a man named Glibberd wanted to see me. The name seemed vaguely familiar and when the visitor came down the gangway I recognised him.

He had a big cap, a pink shirt and a foxy face. I had seen him at the boxing. He was Stew Glibberd, Pug Gummer's manager. That is to say he had a string of boxers available for third-class shows.

His shifty eyes flickered round.

"Where's Pug Gummer?" he asked. "I'm told he has a job here."

"What's that to do with you?" I said.

Glibberd gave me a sharp look.

"He's under contract to me, see?" he exclaimed nastily. "He doesn't take jobs unless I say so. I've a fight for him to-night, see?"

"Let's see your contract," I said.

Glibberd scowled.

"I don't happen to have it with me," he replied. "I don't carry my papers about."

It was seeing the fellow again that produced a fresh surge of sympathy in me for Pug. Judging by their expressions, Arnold and Bunting were feeling the same.

"You'd better fetch it, then," I said.

"Don't you take my word?" he snarled.

"No," I said.

"If you keep Pug away from me, I'll have damages off you," he retorted viciously.

We all scowled at Glibberd as he made off.

"I was glad you didn't let on that Pug had gone," Arnold exclaimed. "It riles me to think of that lad taking a hiding to make Glibberd a few quid."

"How about fetching him back?" Bunting asked.

Within twenty minutes, Arnold and Bunting were on their way.

One of my engagements during the day was to have lunch with Sampson P. Brill in the boss's dining-room at the Vanex works.

He was a big, husky man always brimming over with enthusiasm.

"Nick, we're already getting a return for the interest we're taking in the Wanderers," he said as he came towards me. "We had a big order for refrigerators from Portugal to-day, and the customer ended up his letter by saying he observed that Blackford Wanderers were top of the Second Division and that he hoped to see the team play on his next visit to England."

"I hope we're still on top when he comes," I chuckled.

"Well, we don't sleep on suggestions like that," said Brill. "We're fetching him over by air to see the game on Saturday."

While we were having the meal, we talked football. I mentioned that I was on the look-out for a new goalkeeper.

"Syd Shears can't get to the hard shots," I said. "He's too much of a veteran to be agile."

"Are goalkeepers in short supply?" he asked.

"There are plenty of good average goalkeepers," I replied. "The outstanding men are few. That's the sort I want."

"Let me know when you want a cheque," said Brill. "Did you hear any more about that boxing lad?"

I told him about Glibberd's visit, and he showed his sympathy for Pug in a practical fashion as usual.

"If Glibberd produces his contract, hand it over to our lawyers," he said. "Our lawyers will soon pull it to pieces if it's a phoney."

"We haven't found Pug yet," I pointed out.

It was in the late afternoon that my phone rang. Arnold was on the line.

"Have you had any luck?" I asked.

"We have half a clue now," said Arnold. "We hunted about till we found the place where Pug stays. It's just a back street lodging-house where chaps can get a bed for one and six a night. The bloke who keeps it says Pug slept there last night. Everybody has to be out by nine and Pug passed some remark about getting a fight to-night.

"We're making inquiries and there are three shows—one at Barsea Drill Hall, another at Marden, and the third at Manchester Baths. I reckon the only way is to buzz round the three places and see if we can get a line on him. We'll come back and pick you up."

I agreed to the suggestion, and by seven o'clock Arnold and Bunting were back at Blackford and picked me up in a Vanex car.

We started off on the forty miles' trip to Barsea and, with a clear road, pulled up outside the drill hall in about an hour. The din from inside showed that the contests had started.

I couldn't get past the doorman to make any inquiries until I had paid half a crown. Then I had the promoter pointed out to me. He was a big, bluff-looking man and followed football for he knew me when I introduced myself.

"I'm looking for a boxer named Pug Gummer," I told him.

"Never heard of him," he said.

"He used to be in Stew Glibberd's string," I replied.

"You go to Marden," he advised. "The boxing place there is run by Abe Corey. He's as big a twister as Glibberd."

I returned to the car and off we went on a thirty miles' trip to the big industrial town of Marden. A policeman told us where to find the hall.

Through a maze of streets we came to a dark thoroughfare with a red glare from a sign over the entrance to an old warehouse.

The poster outside merely stated "Boxing To-night, 7.30." We paid one and six each and a curtain was tugged aside for us to go in.

The crowd were yelling like wolves. Through the smoke the arc lamps blazed. Pug was up in the ring. Glibberd, a cigar in his mouth, was standing outside the ropes talking to a man in a dinner jacket and a dress shirt that had been worn too often since its last washing.

Pug's opponent looked a couple of stone heavier. The crowd was shouting, "Go on, Murphy! Hit him! Put him down, Murphy, boy!"

The gong clanged and Pug tottered to his corner. He was bleeding from the mouth.

"How many rounds have gone?" Arnold asked a spectator.

"A couple," was the answer.

We started down the gangway as the bell clanged. Murphy charged across at Pug who covered up and was using his footwork to get away when he slipped.

Murphy swung his right over and got Pug on the side of the head. The lad sank on his knees, head down and his shoulders twitching.

"Get up," howled the "sportsmen" in the audience.

Glibberd stepped to the ringside.

"Get up, you yellow rat," he yelled viciously.

On the count of seven, Pug was tottering to his feet when I snatched the towel from the hands of the second and threw it into the ring.

Glibberd raced over to us yelling insults. It was all Arnold needed for an excuse. He lashed out with his fist and I heard the crack as his knuckles came up against the manager's jaw. A couple of chairs and their occupants were bowled over as Glibberd vanished among the spectators.

Bunting lowered Pug from the ring and jumped after him. I thought we might have to fight our way out, but though the din was terrific, nobody seemed keen on coming to close quarters with us.

We got out of the hall and went along to the dingy dressing-room to get Pug's clothes.

"We're taking you home," boomed Arnold. "It was all a mix-up between you and Basil Harris. He wasn't calling you names, all he said was 'Look out'!"

"Lummy, I oughtn't to have hit him," muttered Pug.

"He'll shake hands with you," said Bunting.

Well, that was how we rescued Pug from a manager who would soon have turned him into a semi-idiot.

We had a practice game on the programme for the following morning. I was the last to get my boots on and the other players had gone out.

As I went down the passage, I met Shears coming in.

"I'm going to get my cap," he remarked. "The sun's brighter than I thought."

I trotted on into the open. The players were shooting in. I saw Bunting shaping for a shot and I slithered to a stop.

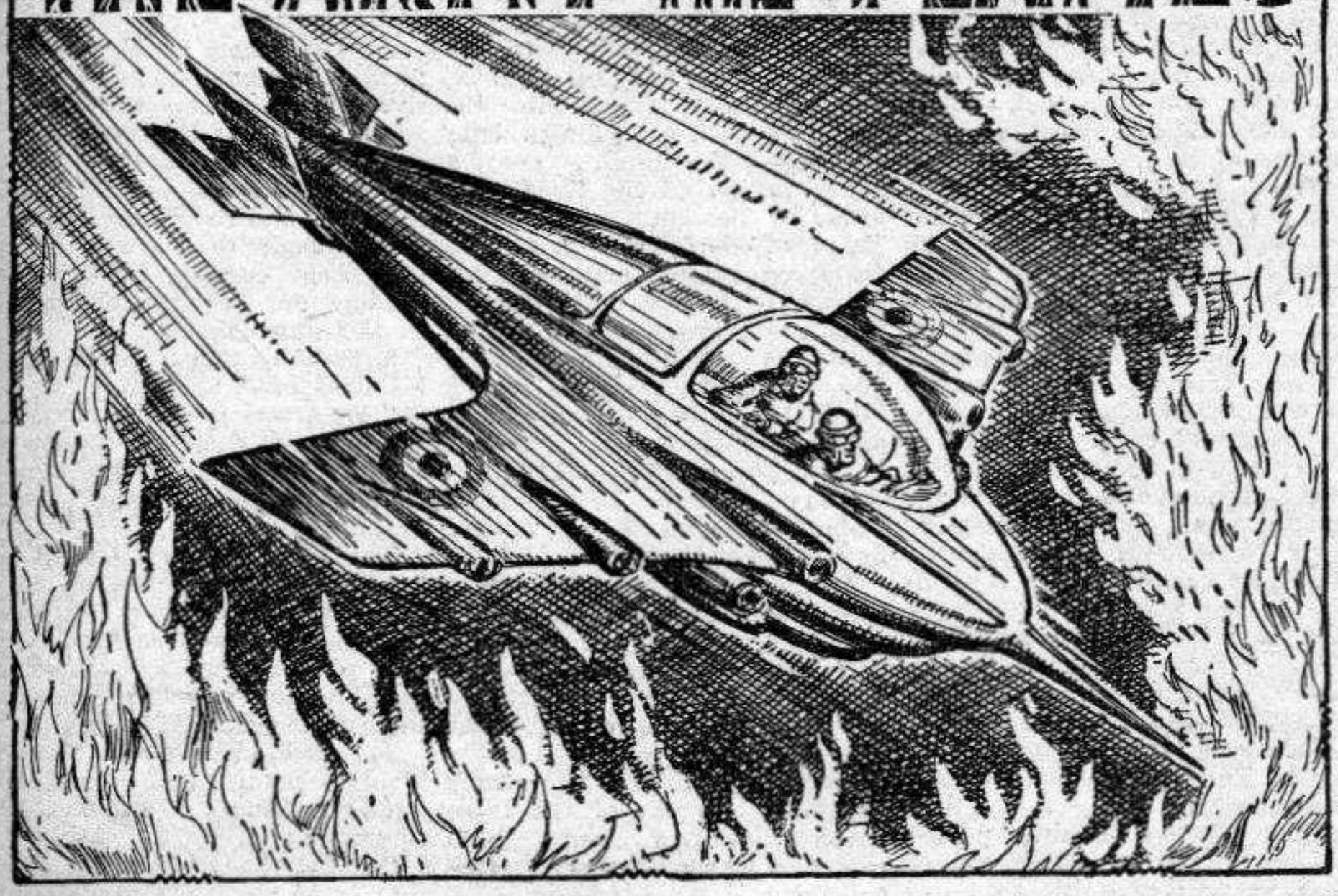
Pug had parked his wheelbarrow at the side of the posts and was in the goal that Shears had left.

Bunting let fly and the ball sped from his foot at a terrific speed. Pug spun sideways and his punch at the ball slammed it away outside the penalty area. Arnold lashed it back with a smashing kick. With a left-hook, Pug punched the ball out.

It looks as if Nick has had a first-class goalie on his doorstep all the time. Read next week how Pug shapes in a full-scale practice match.

John Dobie dives through the barrier of blue flames in a daring attempt to destroy the space platforms !

THE ARMY OF THE FLAMES



THE PULSING NOTE.

DAILY the tension at Beacon Hill increased. Each day brought nearer the time when the Mercurians would launch their great Rocket Armada at Earth.

Britain literally lived under a cloud, for whenever the natural clouds were blown away, smoke-screens formed an artificial cover over the country. It was the only way to make sure that our foes out in space did not use their burning rays to destroy us.

Daily, patrols went out from Beacon Hill to watch and listen to what went on aboard the three space platforms which the Mercurians had placed at distances varying from 3000 to 4000 miles above the Earth.

These patrols were always flown by members of the special squadron that was equipped with the new Rocket Vs, the latest long-distance craft that the R.A.F. possessed.

An entire squadron of these was kept in instant readiness to take off, with a full cargo of the hard-hitting A99 atomic-rockets aboard.

One morning, Flight-Sergeant Dobie, one of the squadron's leading pilots, was cruising with Don Haden as his companion at about 3000 miles from the Earth.

Ahead of them were the great space platforms, the advance bases of the Mercurians, placed at intervals of 500 miles in a straight line. Not an unusual movement on these platforms escaped the observations of the R.A.F. men.

Don Haden was listening continuously, while Dobie used the infra-red search-glasses to study the movements of the Mercurians.

"For three days now they haven't even probed the clouds with their burning-glasses," he said. "It makes one think."

Don Haden nodded. He knew what the pilot meant. It almost seemed that the Mercurians had given up all idea of using their giant lenses to burn Britain out of existence, knowing full well that their attack by war-rockets was imminent.

Many miles away, something flashed in the sun. Dobie stiffened. It was some form of aircraft made of the transparent metal that the Mercurians used, but it had arrived from outer space, not far from one of the other platforms.

It disappeared behind Platform C, which was the one most distant from the Earth, and it did not reappear. He had little doubt that it had alighted and was passing through the air-locked entrance into the great sealed dome. Inside that transparent dome, the atmosphere was much as it was on Earth, for the Mercurians had lungs like ourselves.

"Something doing!" he muttered, and reached for the radiophone.

"Wait!" It was Haden who spoke. "I can hear a new note—a distant rushing note—like a waterfall. Wait till I find out if it's coming from either of the platforms, or whether it's some form of atmospheric."

He fiddled with his instrument, and the noise in his phones was so loud that even Dobie could hear it. It was a high-pitched rushing noise, and it came in long, pulsing waves. It was a sinister, eerie note.

"It comes from all three platforms," reported Haden. "Unless I am mistaken, it is directive. It is being sent out in the other direction—towards Mercury."

"We'll soon see," muttered Dobie, and he sent the Rocket V shooting round to the right of the three platforms at top speed.

It took them twenty minutes to get beyond the furthest space platform, and then they were almost deafened by the noise in their receivers.

"This is it!" snapped Dobie. "They are sending back some kind of direction beam towards Mercury. It can mean only one thing."

His companion nodded, and his face flushed behind his protective goggles. This meant that the Rocket Armada had left Mercury. The great armada of war-rockets was now speeding through space towards these advanced bases, and from here they would be guided to Britain, little more than 3000 miles away.

Dobie sped back towards the Earth and excitedly called into his phone:

"Calling Beacon Hill! D for Dobie calling Beacon Hill! They've started. The war-rockets are on their way. I will await the rest of the squadron at the agreed point."

He repeated this three times, and was satisfied that the message had been received and understood. After that there was nothing he could do but proceed to a point 2000 miles from the Earth and there cruise around until the rest of the squadron arrived.

He could imagine the sensation that his words would have caused at Beacon Hill. This was the moment for which everyone had been waiting ever since the day when a dying Mercurian prisoner had told them of the Rocket Armada.

Even now, the news would be on its way over the wires to London, to the Cabinet and to the selected few who alone in the country knew the great peril that threatened, for the general public had been told nothing.

"If we fail to stop the war-rockets, people will know soon enough!" thought John Dobie, as his craft automatically took avoiding action against a shower of meteorites which flashed by.

These meteoric showers, or star-dust, as the pilots called them, were one of the worst hazards that space flyers had to meet. In the earlier days, many machines had been wiped out in the super-stratosphere by collision with these whirling fragments of shattered stars.

Various devices had been invented to enable planes in space to avoid collision, but it was only on the new Rocket Vs that one such device had been perfected. Now the planes automatically veered from their course whenever there was danger of collision.

To-day there seemed to be a continuous stream of these meteorites hurtling past. At times they were so thick that the Rocket V was dancing and turning incessantly.

Don Haden used the radiophone, and was soon talking to some of the approaching pilots. The men of the Special Squadron were on their way. They were also having trouble with the meteorites.

They continued to circle, awaiting the arrival of the rest of the squadron who were to do battle with the Mercurians with the Earth as the prize.

THE BLUE BARRIER.

"HERE come our craft!" yelled Haden, during a lull in the storm of star-dust. "They're all there—eleven of 'em."

He began to check each by number and got back acknowledgments from the pilots.

Everyone knew his part. The plan had been worked out at Beacon Hill to the last letter. The squadron was to divide into three groups of four, and one of these groups would attack each of the three space platforms with volleys of A99 rockets.

The attacks were to be pressed home regardless of danger or losses.

"Section A join me here!" called Dobie, and three planes came hurtling out of space towards him. They took up their positions, no more than fifty feet apart, even though they were travelling at 2000 miles an hour. "Section B follow behind! Section C bring up the rear!"

Their speed was so controlled that the three sections of four were 500 miles apart. This had been arranged because Dobie's section was to attack the furthest space platform, Section B the middle one, and Section C the nearest.

Dobie led them parallel to the three great platforms, about 400 miles to their right. That would keep them out of range of many of the weapons with which the platforms were equipped. At the right moment, when each section was opposite its target, all would turn at right-angles and speed to the attack.

They were almost in position to turn when the sky about them

became filled with forked lightning.

"They've spotted us!" called Dobie, over the phone. "Don't let this stuff worry you. It can't hurt us."

That was a fact. Artificial lightning was one of the most terrifying weapons that the Mercurians possessed, and it had meant destruction to any of the earlier R.A.F. planes touched by it, but the new Rocket Vs were specially insulated against it.

They were moving 50 miles every minute, so there was not much time for thought. The three sections were rapidly approaching the moment when they would turn and make their final dive. On the space platforms there must have been sudden realisation that this was a serious attack.

The recent fate of a space platform over the north-east corner of England must have warned the Mercurians that the Earthmen were capable of hitting hard. Every weapon that the Mercurians possessed began to blaze away. Hordes of the Mercurian suicide aircraft, the transparent flying-coffins, were shot out to meet the attackers.

Dobie had given orders that his men were to ignore these. If there were a collision, that was just too bad, but at the speed they were moving it was unlikely that suicide attacks against them would succeed.

"Action!" yelled John Dobie, and each of the twelve Rocket Vs turned as one, each group of four heading for the nearest platform.

Instantly the space ahead of them became filled with blue fire. A roaring blast blinded Dobie and all the other pilots. This fire was expelled in some way from the platforms. Solid sheets of blue flame barred the way, and threatened to destroy the Rocket Vs.

"Steady, chaps!" shouted the Flight-Sergeant. "Once we're through this we shall be all right."

He tried to sound confident, but his fear was that the planes would be scorched out of existence or that their cargoes of atomic-rockets might burst before they were through the barrier of flame.

Dobie did not know it at the time, but not a man had failed to fly straight into the flames. Not a pilot had changed course.

Almost immediately, they shot out of the other side of that wall of fire, and Dobie could see again.

The wings of the Rocket Vs were scorched black, but undamaged. Even the tyres were fireproof, and the fuel, unlike the old-fashioned petrol, was not inflammable.

Dobie knew nothing of what was happening with the other sections, each of which had its own leader. All he knew was that he had two of his attendant craft still with him, and they were holding in line splendidly, rushing towards their target at 3000 miles an hour.

"Ready!" came the voice of Don Haden, and Dobie had a last glimpse of frantic Mercurians racing about on the inside of their transparent dome, then a red light flashed on his control-board.

That meant Haden had fired their terrible broadside, and Dobie immediately threw the plane into a steep dive.

Down — down — down they went, and John Dobie soon blacked out.

Less than a minute passed before they were pulled out of that vertical dive by an automatic device, and Dobie and Haden began to recover their senses. As usual, John Dobie had the quicker reaction, and found himself peering through the blackened window ahead at another machine which was pulling out of its dive some miles away.

He grabbed the controls, then looked above and behind him. He was still too close to see more than two of the space platforms simultaneously, but from both of these, black smoke was pouring. He knew that this meant that their domes had been shattered and the platforms thus destroyed.

But that one British machine on his right was the only one he could see. He called up on the radiophone and after a few seconds got a reply. It was Flying-Officer Gordon who piloted that craft, and he reported that there were no other craft nearby.

"That means poor old Teddy and Bill have had it," thought Dobie, then heard Don Haden asking what had happened.

"Don't know the full story yet, Don, but two of the space platforms have been wiped out. Give the lads a few seconds to recover, then try and get in touch with Section C. We want to know how they got on."

He began to circle with the other survivor of his section, whilst Haden talked into the radiophone. Two minutes later they knew the worst.

The attack on the third platform, by Section C, had failed. Three of the planes had been destroyed before they got close enough to launch their rockets. Only one had got through, that flown by the Squadron-Leader, and he reported that although the platform was rocking madly, and the dome was bent, it had not received a knock-out blow.

"Try Section B," ordered Dobie, and again call and answer flashed through space.

Section B, under Flying-Officer Bates, had been the luckiest of all. Only one of their machines had been lost, and they had driven home their attack so effectively that their target had been destroyed.

So the sum total of the attack was that two out of the three space platforms had been shattered at a cost of six craft—exactly half the squadron.

The next thing was to find out whether the surviving space platform was still sending out that guiding wave to the oncoming Rocket Armada. The question was answered in no uncertain fashion when the surviving half squadron gathered together and pooled their information. The power-note was still going out. So long as that one platform remained in action, the Rocket Armada would be guided towards the Earth.

Dobie and the Squadron-Leader from Section C had a brief consultation over their phones, and then the order was sent out to all the surviving planes.

"Re-load, and prepare for another attack on Platform A."

THE ARMADA FROM SPACE.

RELOADING was in part automatic, otherwise it could never have been achieved by the co-pilot. Within a short time, word came that each craft was fully ready to launch another ten rockets at the target.

On this occasion the Squadron-Leader led the way, and word was given for the combined section to move up in readiness for the second attack.

At last Dobie could see Platform A, rocking and bucking like a captive balloon in a rough wind. Oris, the Mercurian leader who had once captured John Dobie, was in command of this platform, and the Flight-Sergeant could imagine him grimly awaiting their coming, whilst still sending out the guiding signals to the war-rockets.

Squadron-Leader Jones gave his final order:

"We attack from above. That will give us a better chance of smashing the dome and of avoiding their fire. Good luck! Follow me!"

The six machines turned in formation, and zoomed up to a distance of fifty miles or more above the space platform. Oris was putting out a barrage of blue fire, but it was irregular and there were many gaps in it.

The six Rocket Vs reached their highest point, and from the Squadron-Leader came the command:

"Action!"

Over he went and nosed down towards the great transparent dome at dizzy speed. The others followed in line, close together, for they knew the importance of dealing their blows in a restricted area.

A few seconds later, the craft at the end of the line caught fire and went into a dizzy dive. What had hit it, or what had caused the disaster, there was no means of telling.

"Ready!" came the voice of the Squadron-Leader. "Fire!"

The red light glowed on Dobie's dash-board, and he knew their rockets were away. Over he rolled and went shrieking down into space in a vicious power-dive.

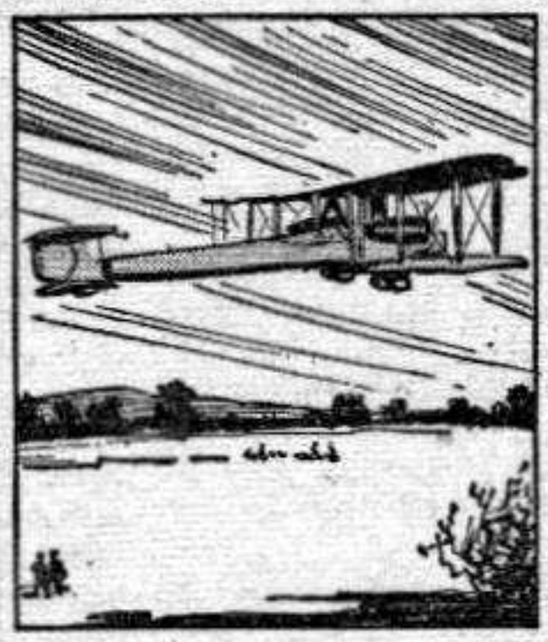
Black-out followed almost at once.

Again the automatic pilot pulled them out of their shrieking dive a hundred miles away, and again there were those moments when they recovered consciousness and fought to steady their fuddled wits.

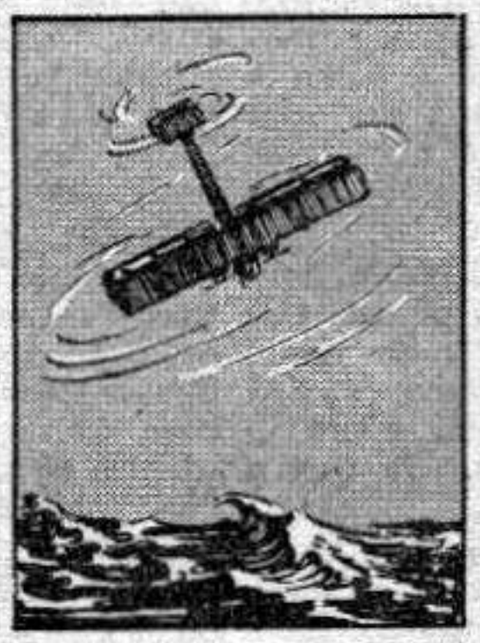
(Continued on Back Page.)

THE CONQUEST OF SPACE (No. 11) THE FIRST ATLANTIC CROSSING

In June, 1919, Captain John Alcock and Lieut. Whitten Brown made the first flight across the Atlantic Ocean. They flew the 1890 miles from Newfoundland to Ireland in 16 hours 12 minutes.



Their plane was a Vickers Vimy, designed as a heavy bomber during the 1914-18 war. It had a maximum speed of 100 m.p.h. The flyers took off on June 14, their plane loaded with 3½ tons of petrol and 50 gallons of oil.



In the darkness over mid-Atlantic the air-speed indicator failed and the plane went into a dive from 4000 feet. Alcock got the heavy plane under control 40 feet from the sea.

At 8.25 a.m. on June 15, the coastline of Ireland was sighted through the mist, by the flyers. Verey signals were fired from the cockpit but there was no response from the ground.

Alcock decided to land in what he thought was a meadow. It turned out to be a bog. The wheels sank and the nose of the plane was buried in the ground, but the two flyers stepped out unhurt.

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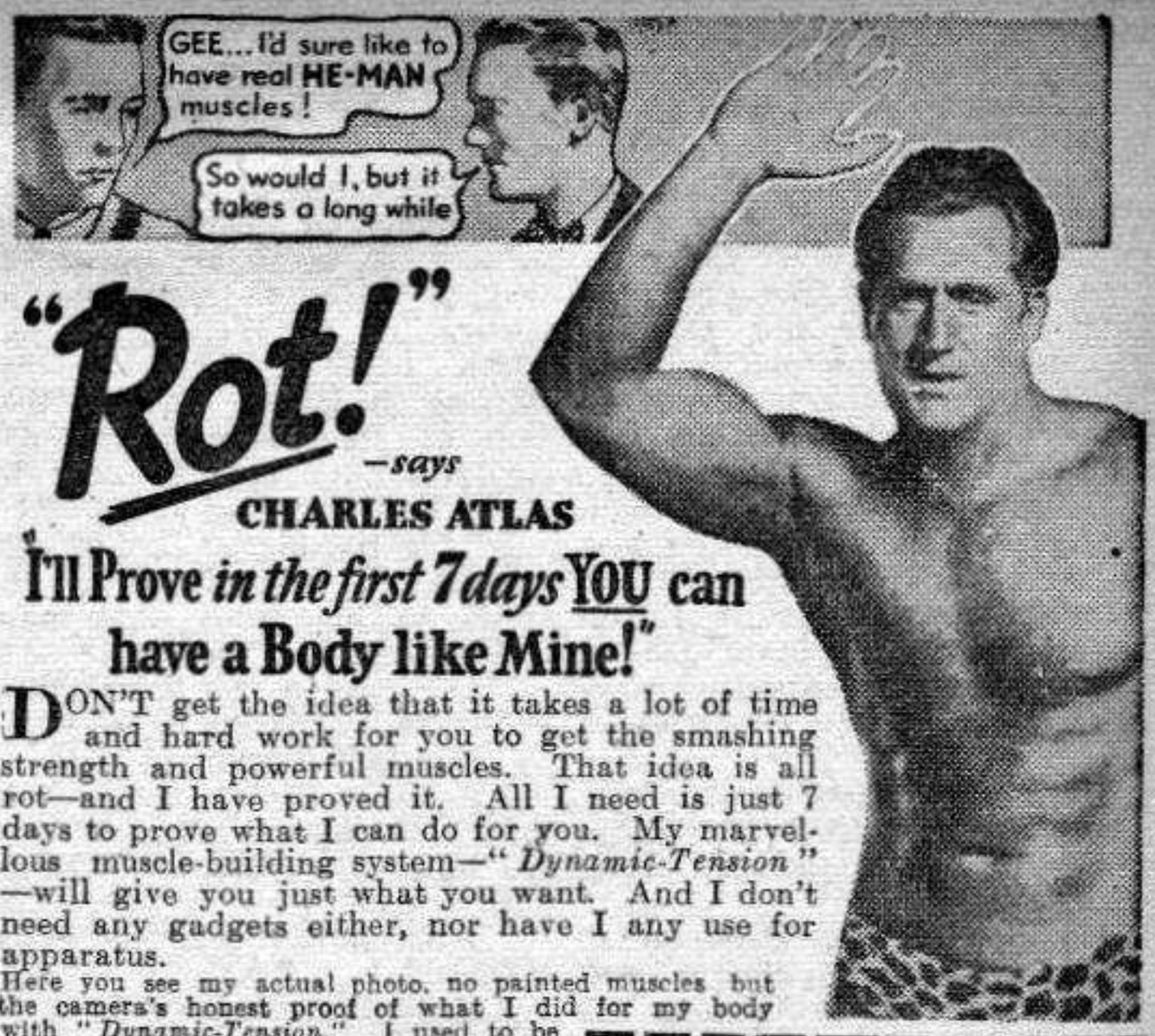

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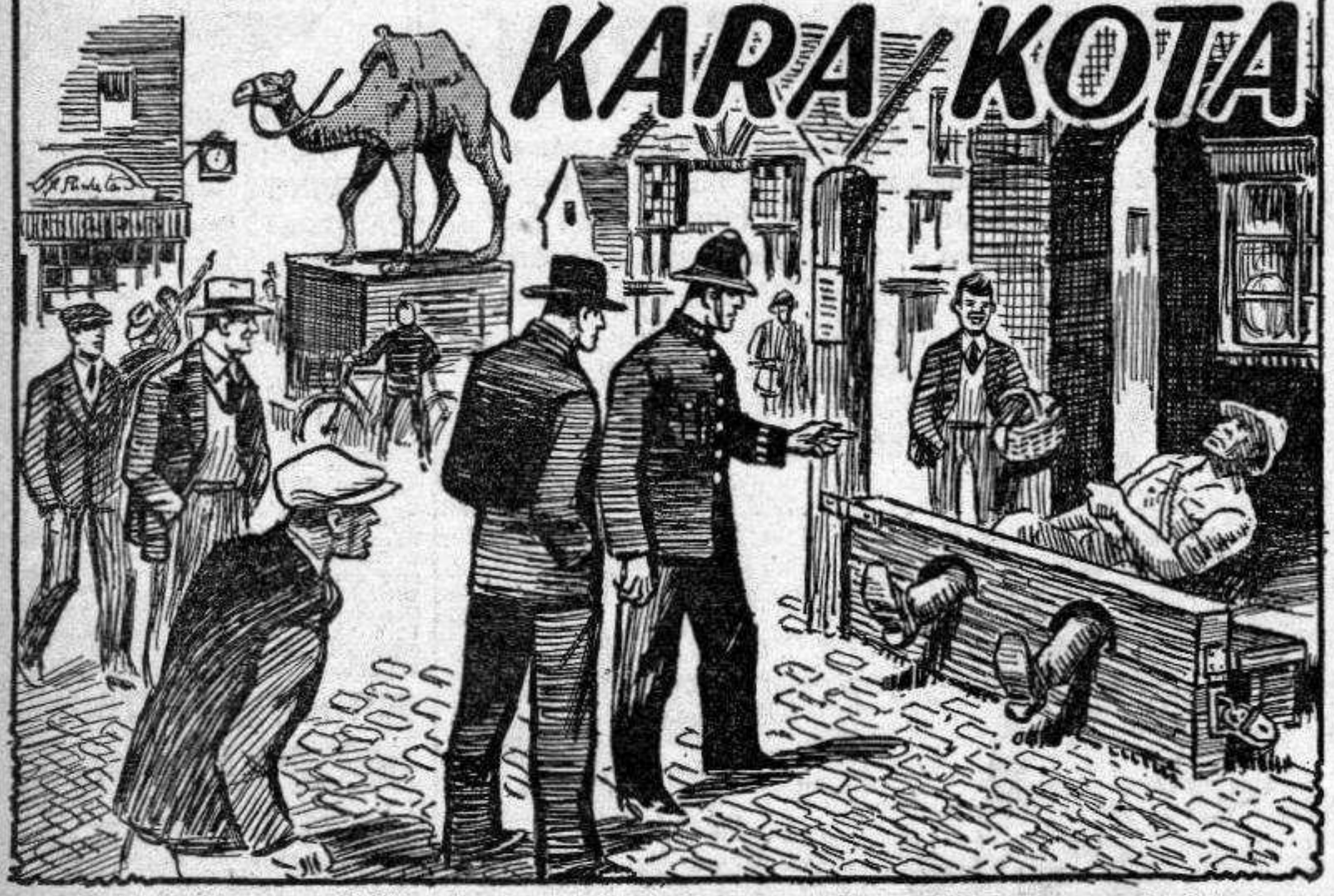
Barrington Todd is the victim of another hoax—his statue is taken down off the camel and placed in the stocks!

THE RED SANDS OF KARA KOTA



HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR JOHN HANTOR of Scotland Yard is investigating a mysterious campaign against **SIR BARRINGTON-TODD**, the famous explorer and discoverer of the lost city of Kara Kota in the Gobi Desert.

A statue unveiled in his honour is replaced by that of a man called **MAX BROWNE**, who is given the credit of discovering Kara Kota. The statue is that of a man with a withered arm, limping leg and pain-wracked face. Browne was Todd's assistant on the expedition to Kara Kota, and is reported by Todd to have been killed.

A SHOCK FOR JOHN HANTOR.

SIR BARRINGTON TODD had slept badly. When he awakened, he lay for some minutes thinking over the mysterious events of the past few days. They were not pleasant memories, and he quickly rang the bell for his manservant to bring him his tea, papers, and mail.

He skimmed through his mail, for he was looking for a letter with an American postmark. He had recently been on a successful lecture tour through the United States, and was expecting payment by cheque from his American agent.

He smiled when he found it. There were few things in life that Sir Barrington Todd loved better than money.

He opened the envelope to make certain the cheque was there, and ran it through his fingers. It was good to feel it. He glanced at it casually. It said—

"First National Bank of America. Pay to the Order of Max T. Browne, the sum of ten thousand dollars."

He paused, frowned, and reread it from the beginning. He had made no mistake. Gradually the colour flooded to his face, and he leapt out of bed with a groan of dismay.

Instead of being made out to Sir Barrington Todd, the cheque was made out to Max T. Browne.

Choking noises came from Sir Barrington. He sat on the edge of the bed, staring vacantly at the pink slip of paper in his hand.

The cheque had come from the big syndicate which had engaged him to lecture in a dozen different American cities. It was a genuine cheque, the signature seemed genuine, and the date was correct.

"But the name—Max Browne," he whispered. "Always Max Browne!"

The colour faded from the explorer's cheeks as rapidly as it had risen. Then anger came, and he stormed over to the telephone, rang Scotland Yard, and demanded to speak to Detective-Inspector Hantor, who was investigating the strange things which had happened to Sir Barrington lately. He was told that as John Hantor had not gone off duty until 2 a.m., he would be a little late at his office.

So Sir Barrington bathed and dressed. As he went down the stairs to his study, his manservant met him and said—

"Beg pardon, Sir Barrington, but there is someone to see you."

"Who is it?" growled Todd.

"A Mister Brown. He——"

Sir Barrington stumbled and fell the last two steps. He had gone deathly pale.

"What name did you say?" he croaked.

"Mr Brown, sir. He is from the Hemmingway Hall about something that happened last night," replied the servant.

"Oh, yes, show him into the study." The great man nearly swooned with relief. He had forgotten that the name of the chairman of the society to which he should have lectured the previous evening was Benjamin Brown.

The same little man who had been so flustered when they had discovered the alterations in the notices on the wall very soon appeared, and murmured—

"Excuse me, Sir Barrington, but I thought you would like to know the result of our enquiries with the printers of those dastardly bills."

"I certainly should. What did the printers say?" demanded Todd.

"They could offer no explanation. They say the paper is theirs, the type is theirs, but that they did not print the bills," declared Brown.

"Then how do they account for what happened?" demanded the explorer.

"They can only guess that someone broke into their works by night, when the type was set up, and that this mysterious person must have altered the words before printing off a few more copies. Their watchman reported that a Chinaman was seen loitering near their premises the other night," said Brown.

"A Chinaman!" Sir Barrington was noticeably startled. "Is he sure it was a Chinaman?"

"Not entirely, Sir Barrington. He admits he may have been a Japanese or a Siamese. He is certain, however, that the man had a yellow skin. Of course, there is no proof that it was this particular person who broke in and printed those bills," admitted the other.

"Do no more about it. I'll get Scotland Yard on to this," said Barrington Todd. "In fact, they're working on it now. Many thanks for coming. Good-day!"

He hustled the man away and sat down again to think things over.

Ten minutes later he again rang Scotland Yard to ask if Detective-Inspector Hantor had arrived.

Very soon he heard the cheerful voice of the detective—

"Good morning, Sir Barrington! I was going to ring you later to tell you that we have so far failed to trace the strange man whom you saw in that taxi-cab. He——"

"Never mind about that now, Inspector!" interrupted Sir Barrington Todd. "Something else has happened. I received a cheque this morning from my American agents for ten thousand dollars, and instead of being made out in my name, it was made payable to Max Browne."

A low whistle came over the wire.

"That is very interesting, Sir Barrington," said Hantor. "I will come round and see you at once. I will—excuse me a moment, please!"

Detective-Sergeant Ruddle, Hantor's assistant, had just entered the room and pushed a piece of paper on to the pad before his superior. Hantor read—

"A report is just in from Amberwell, the birthplace of Sir Barrington Todd, where in the market-place there stood a life-sized bronze statue of Sir Barrington mounted on a camel. Last night, the figure of Sir Barrington was removed from the camel, and was found at the other end of the market-place, in the old stocks which were at one time used for the punishment of criminals. The local police want our help. The Commissioner would like you to go there immediately."

The Inspector spoke into the phone again.

"I must ask you to excuse me for a little while, Sir Barrington," he said. "Something important has just turned up. I will have to go out of town for a little while."

"Yes, but what about this cheque?" demanded the explorer.

"Good morning!" said the detective firmly, and hung up the receiver before grabbing the slip of paper and reading the message again. "Is all this true, Ruddle?"

"Yes, sir, just in," his assistant told him. "We've got twenty minutes to catch a fast train to Amberwell."

THE MYSTERIOUS GREGORY.

AMBERWELL was a small market-town. The market-place was the pride of the town, for it contained an old town hall, with a pillared arcade in front. The arcade had the stocks, 300 years old, and two cannon from Waterloo days.

The statue of Sir Barrington Todd, the most distinguished of the town's sons, had stood across the square from the town hall. It had shown the explorer, in shorts and sun-helmet, going across the Gobi Desert on a camel.

When Detective-Inspector Hantor arrived in the square, after calling at the local police station and meeting Superintendent Bailey, he found half a dozen police trying to control the crowd.

It certainly was a comical sight. The camel stood at one end of the square, and at the other, underneath the overhang of the town hall, a bronze figure of the explorer lay back with his legs locked in the stocks. As the legs had been astride the camel's back originally, they were now wide enough apart to fit the two openings in the stocks.

"That figure is made of bronze, and weighs several hundredweight," said Superintendent Bailey grimly.

"And was the figure merely balanced on the camel ?" asked Hantor.

"No, it was bolted in place by four hidden bolts. They had all been removed without damage to either camel or rider, and this in our main square where someone is nearly always about," said Superintendent Bailey.

The crowd watched with goggling eyes as the detectives examined both parts of the statue. Hantor noted that there were no scratches or other signs to show that the heavy bronze figure had been dragged the fifty yards across the square.

The detectives retired to the police station, where Hantor asked to see the constables whose duties had taken them through the market-square during the night.

The discovery had been made at 6.10 a.m. by a market gardener on his way to work,

It was known that everything had been normal at 9.50 the previous evening, when it had got dark, and up till 11.30 there were a number of people in or about the square. A dance had been held that night in one of the local halls. The nights were short at that season, and it had been reasoned that the figure of Sir Barrington had been removed from the camel between the hours of midnight and 4 a.m.

"None of your constables saw anything suspicious during their hours of duty ?" persisted John Hantor.

"They did not. You can talk to them yourself, but I have their statements here. Two of them passed through the square during those four hours. It was P.C. Wood's beat. He went through four times. P.C. Gosling had to cross the square when he came off duty at 2.30. He noticed nothing unusual, but it was a dark night, and the church throws a deep shadow on the square. I'll get Wood now," said Bailey.

An alert, raw-boned young constable arrived. John Hantor asked him if he had noticed anything at all unusual in the market-square during the night.

"Yes, I did, sir, twice. I've been thinking about it, and know I didn't imagine it. It was a queer smell. It seemed to be in the air —not in any one place. At first I thought there was a bonfire somewhere, but I went up-wind and found nothing to explain the smell. It wasn't exactly smoke."

"Then what sort of smell was it, Wood ?" demanded Hantor. "Like burning grass or what ?"

"Not like burning grass, sir," the constable assured him. "It was a heavy, queer sort of smell, something like you can smell in them temples out East. I was in Burma during the war, and used to notice it there."

"Joss-sticks — incense !" suggested the Detective-Inspector.

"That's it, sir," agreed P.C. Wood. "That's what it reminded me of. It was very strong at 1.30, and nearly as strong at 2.30, but I couldn't trace the source of it."

"Did you meet anyone in the square ?" asked Hantor.

"No, sir—there wasn't a soul about," declared Wood.

"And the statue—did you look at it ?" John Hantor was rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

The young constable looked troubled.

"I don't believe I did, sir. Of course, the camel was there on the plinth all the time, and even if I'd looked I don't suppose I would have missed the figure. You don't think of such things disappearing."

"Wood must surely have imagined the smell of joss-sticks," put in the Superintendent.

"I'm not so sure." John Hantor had a faraway look in his eyes. "One thing is obvious. To transport that heavy figure fifty yards, more than one man was required, or transport of some kind. Did anyone see a lorry enter or leave the town during the night ?"

P.C. Wood said nobody had seen anything larger than an ordinary touring car passing through at midnight. He was sure of that.

Hantor sighed. It was going to be as difficult as the recent affairs in London. What particularly interested him was the report about the smell of joss-sticks. At the London Universal Museum, from which Sir Barrington's manuscripts had been stolen, there had been mention of the same thing.

"Another matter," remarked the Detective-Inspector. "Has anyone seen a stranger in the town, a cripple, with one leg bent at the knee, one withered arm, a raised shoulder, a big nose, and wizened face ?"

"Yes, sir !" exclaimed P.C. Wood immediately. "I have to pass the station coming on duty, and a man exactly like that came off the London train. He asked me the way to the best hotel in the town. I directed him to the Wheatsheaf, and he hobbled off, carrying one small bag."

John Hantor flashed a glance at Detective-Sergeant Ruddle.

"What time was that ?" he asked.

"Just before ten o'clock, sir," replied Wood.

"Then he must have intended putting up at the Wheatsheaf for the night," declared the Detective-Inspector. "This is luck I didn't expect. I believe a man answering to that description holds the answer to this riddle. Don't ask me why just now, Superintendent. It's a long story. We'll get across to the Wheatsheaf now, Ruddle."

It was only a hundred yards to the Wheatsheaf Hotel, an old-fashioned place, with oak beams and ingle-nooks. The arrival of Superintendent Bailey, with the two Scotland Yard men, created a sensation behind the reception desk.

Bailey did the talking, describing the queer, twisted little man they were after, and asking whether he had stayed there the night.

"You mean Mr Gregory, in Room 11. He came late last night," said the clerk.

"That's the man !" exclaimed Hantor. "Has he left yet ?"

"Not yet, sir. He told us not to disturb him until he rang for breakfast, so he'll still be in his room," the clerk told them.

This sounded almost too good to be true. Bailey and John Hantor had a brief conference, and decided to go up and see the mystery man rather than wait for him to come down. The clerk showed them the way. There was only one floor, and Number 11 was at the far end of the corridor.

A pair of dusty brown shoes stood outside the door. Detective-Inspector Hantor knocked. There was no movement within and no reply. He knocked again. Again there was no answer, and Superintendent Bailey turned to the clerk and ordered—

"You should have a master key. Open up."

When the clerk tried to do this, he found there was already a key on the inside. He could not insert his master key.

"Leave this to me," said John Hantor, and produced from his pocket a pair of strangely-shaped pliers. He inserted the narrower end of these in the lock, gripped the end of the other key, and turned.

Another brief knock and he walked in.

The windows were closed, and the first thing they noticed was the strong smell of joss-sticks. The second was that the bed had not been slept in. The room appeared to have been unoccupied.

"He can't have gone out yet, sir, because he's left his shoes outside," broke out a maid who had arrived in the corridor.

They searched the room and found absolutely nothing belonging to the mysterious Mr Gregory.

Ruddle fetched the shoes. They were a well-worn pair of nines, of a cheap, mass-produced make. The dust was fresh.

"Get the porter, or whoever cleans shoes here," ordered Hantor.

Ruddle disappeared, and came back with an elderly man whom they had already noticed in the hall.

"Why didn't you clean these shoes ?" demanded John Hantor.

"Because they weren't there at six o'clock when I did all the others," replied the man. "I do all shoes then, and have other things to do afterwards. The gent hadn't put 'em out then."

"Then he must have left the hotel after that," put in the Superintendent.

"Couldn't have, sir. I was cleaning up the hall and the front steps until seven, when the maids arrived. There's been someone in the hall or on the stairs ever since. He couldn't have gone out without us seeing him."

"Did you notice him last night ?" queried Hantor.

"Yes, sir, I carried his bag upstairs for him, and uncommonly heavy it was for a small bag, as though it was filled with lead."

Further questioning of the staff confirmed the fact that the elusive Mr Gregory had not been seen by anyone after he had entered his room about 10.30 the previous night.

Superintendent Bailey gave his own men the task of searching the locality for the missing man, and of questioning the staff at the station. In all cases a blank was drawn. The wizened man had vanished utterly.

John Hantor phoned through his report to the Yard, and was recalled to London.

Your School Chum's Name May Be Here !

The Editor wishes to thank the following readers, who sent in copies of the school badges on this week's cover. More will appear in future issues of "The Rover."

A. M'Call, White Cottage, Fritham, Lyndhurst, Hants.
M. Murray, 17 Anderson Rd., Stornoway, Isle of Lewis.
D. Marcus, 16 Digby Mansion, Hammersmith, London, W.6.
M. Gartl 45 Kingswood Road, West Bridgford, Notts.
A. Gunstone, 5 Beaufort West, Grosvenor, Bath, Somerset.
David Davies, 10 Bryndulais Row, Seven Sisters, nr. Neath, Glam.
A. F. Noronha, P.O. Box 1268, Dar-es-Salaam, British East Africa.
E. V. Kelly, 38 Holmside, Gillingham, Kent.
Mary Stenning, 22 Woodman Close, Sparsholt, nr. Winchester, Hants
Brian E. Potter, Raehills, 58 Essex Rd., Bognor Regis, Sussex.
Peter E. Woods, 41 Breck Lane, Dinnington, nr. Sheffield, Yorks.
Gerard M'Donald, 52 Coursington Rd., Motherwell.
Auster Gale, Oaklyn, North Stainley, Ripon, Yorks.
J. Tingle, 4 Ada St., Sheffield, 6.
David Allen, Canberra, Toome Rd., Ballymena.
H. R. Cullis, West Glasdon, Lanjore, St Germans, Cornwall.

LETTERS FOR THE DEAD.

SIR BARRINGTON TODD had called on his bank manager.

The manager was shocked at the change in the appearance of his important client. A big man, somewhat inclined to flesh, with a usually ruddy face, the explorer was now pale and haggard.

"I want you to get in touch with some New York bankers for me, Mr Green," said Sir Barrington.

"Certainly, Sir Barrington. We are here to be of service. May I say how very sorry we are about recent happenings, and——"

"Quite ! Quite ! We'll forget all that," snapped the explorer. "The fact is I have just received the cheque in payment for my last lecture tour in the States." He produced the pink slip from his pocket-book. "It is for ten thousand dollars, but by some error it has been made out as payable to Max Browne, my assistant, who died in the Gobi Desert ten years ago."

He was trying to keep cool. The bank manager hid his surprise and examined the cheque.

"Ye-es, I see that, and—it's a certified cheque on the First National Bank for ten thousand dollars, and—h'm !" Mr Green hemmed and hawed for some minutes, then exclaimed—"Most

extraordinary! Max Browne has been dead these many years."

"Of course he has!" exploded Sir Barrington. "Everyone knows that. Why in the name of thunder did some idiot do this? I'd like you to get through to the First National Bank in New York and ask how the mistake happened. Meantime, I suppose it will be all right if I endorse it and pay it in to my account?"

"I—I fear not, Sir Barrington," said the manager. "It is payable only to Max Browne. We used to have a small account of his many years ago, but——"

The explorer's veins were bulging.

"You mean to say I cannot touch the money? I cannot bank it?" he exclaimed.

"I'm afraid not, but I'm sure the First National Bank will make some arrangement as soon as they hear about this. I will put a trans-Atlantic call through at once, and you should hear in about two hours," Mr Green told him, ringing a bell for a clerk.

The explorer seemed on the verge of choking, but he calmed himself and gasped—

"You'll find me at my club—the Morpheus Club."

He stalked away, looking stunned, and was thankful he had brought his own car.

Not long afterwards he was climbing the steps to the stately entrance of the Morpheus Club. He was greeted by the commissionaire respectfully, but made no reply. By long custom, he glanced at the notice-board where letters for members were displayed, for some of his mail went to the club.

It was as he took out about ten of his own letters that he noticed three other letters beside them. They were addressed to "Max Browne, Esq., c/o Morpheus Club, Pall Mall, London."

Sir Barrington recoiled as though he had been slapped in the face. He remembered that young Max Browne had joined this club about twelve years before, but here were letters of recent date addressed to a man who had been dead for ten years!

The commissionaire had been watching him, and came to his side.

"Are you feeling quite all right, Sir Barrington?" he wanted to know.

"Yes, yes, quite all right, but these letters——" Sir Barrington pointed a shaking finger. "How—why are those here? Doesn't everyone know that Browne died in the Gobi Desert ten years ago?"

He raised his voice almost to a shout.

"Blessed if I know how they got there, Sir Barrington," admitted the commissionaire. "I didn't put 'em there. They weren't there when I put your letters on the board an hour ago."

"But you must know!" roared the explorer, then calmed himself. "It was a shock to me to see that name after all these years. You'd better give them to me! I was one of the few people who knew him."

He put the letters into his pocket and went through to the lounge, where he retired to a corner chair.

Several of his friends greeted him, but he did not notice them. His thoughts were far away. He was itching to see what was in those letters. He opened the first letter.

It bore the date of the previous day, but no address. It had been posted in London, and said—

"Dear Max, I wonder if you could do me a favour by coming round to my place one evening and viewing some pottery which has been brought back from the Gobi Desert by an American friend of mine. I have told him you are the greatest living expert on Mongolian art, and he is desperately anxious for you to give your expert opinion on his finds. Give me a phone call any evening. Yours,—G. M."

Sir Barrington uttered a low groan, closed his eyes, and leaned back further in the chair. His face was twitching. He suddenly tore all the letters in half and pushed the pieces back into his pocket.

He sat slumped in his chair to wait for the answer to the trans-Atlantic phone call that his bank manager had put through.

It came an hour later, and he was ushered into the phone box to speak to Mr Green.

"Well, well?" demanded the explorer. "Have you heard from the First National Bank?"

"Yes, Sir Barrington. That is why I am ringing you," came the calm, precise tones of the bank manager. "It is a most peculiar affair."

"Of course it is a peculiar affair!" choked Sir Barrington. "How do they explain the mistake? I hope they sack the fool responsible. What did they say?"

"That's the peculiar part about it, Sir Barrington," Mr Green told him. "They swear that no mistake was made. They swear that when the cheque left their bank it was correctly made out to you in your name. The president of the bank himself examined it and saw that it was correct. They say that in some mysterious way the names must have been altered on the journey."

"Some—some mysterious way. How often do I hear those words?" muttered the explorer, and he hung up the receiver and staggered from the box like a very tired man.

Next week the mystery man strikes again and Sir Barrington Todd disappears!

The Army Of The Flames

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 60.)

Three machines alone remained out of the six. Two had collided as they took avoiding action, and the other had been destroyed before the rockets had been launched.

But this time there was no doubt of the success of their attack. Platform A was breaking up.

The great triumph had been dearly bought. Of the twelve Rocket Vs and twenty-four men who had left the Earth to destroy the advanced bases of the Mercurians, only three machines and six men remained.

But the measure of their success was the fact that the power-note had ceased. The wave, or beam, which had been guiding the Rocket Armada, was no longer heard.

The three survivors shouted to one another over their phones, then flew towards the Earth, for the Squadron-Leader to make his report.

It was a report that must have caused everyone at Beacon Hill to heave a sigh of relief.

"All three stations destroyed. Power wave silent."

After a minute's interval, back came the reply.

"Well done. Watch for the rockets and give as much warning as possible. We are ready for them."

Their task was not finished. The three Rocket Vs turned and flew outwards into space. Now it remained to be seen whether the destruction of the platforms would upset the invaders.

Everyone was counting on this happening, but they knew it was far from certain. It was possible that the Rocket Armada was already so far on its way that the loss of the guiding beam no longer mattered.

"Better reload with the last of your rockets—just in case," came the voice of the Squadron-Leader. "If the fiends get through we might as well have a smack at 'em."

But loading operations on this occasion were made difficult by another storm of star-dust, which cut across their path and separated the three machines.

Again and again it was only the automatic device suddenly turning his plane from its course that saved John Dobie from collision. The meteorites were of all shapes and sizes. He had never seen so many before. The sky seemed filled with them.

The two other craft were suffering in the same way. They kept contact by the radio phones, but they were now more than fifty miles apart.

The Squadron-Leader got in touch with Beacon Hill and asked whether the meteorological experts had any explanation for this phenomenon, and got the reply that Greenwich Observatory reported the collision of two giant asteroids at a point which would inevitably bring the showers of fragments towards the Earth.

As suddenly as they had run into the storm, they came out of it again, and were able to fly in formation once more. They were now about 4000 miles from Earth.

The Squadron-Leader gave the order for them to cruise, and they still maintained their scrutiny of the route by which they expected the rockets to arrive.

"It must be getting near time," murmured Don Haden, voicing his companion's thoughts. "I wonder how the blighters will come, in a single line, or in formation. That dying Mercurian said there would be 200 of them."

"And each as large as a naval destroyer!" muttered Dobie. "It will be an amazing sight. We had better not be in their path or we'll have had it."

Time elapsed. They became worried by their fuel supply. They had been up much longer than usual.

"What's that?" suddenly exclaimed Don Haden, but it turned out to be a number of meteorites cutting across their course a hundred miles or more away.

It was the beginning of many such false alarms. Their nerves were on edge, and their eyes were strained to the utmost.

Then came such a terrific storm of meteorites that Squadron-Leader Jones gave the orders for them to move several hundred miles to the east. The storm raged for the next twenty minutes, and greatly added to their difficulty in seeing approaching objects, for they had to watch from an increased distance.

"There they are!" yelled Dobie suddenly. "Take a look through the eye-piece, Don. Unless I'm mistaken—here they come!"

Don Haden eagerly bent to the eyepiece of the infra-red glasses, and emitted a gasp.

Far, far away, moving at terrific speed towards the Earth, were rows and rows of what looked like tiny spears. They were in formation, like a fleet going into action.

There were ten in the front line, and Haden counted more than a dozen similar lines behind this. As they came into the rays from the sun, they sparkled and gave off a metallic glint.

"That's 'em, without a doubt!" whispered Haden. "To think they've come all the way from Mercury—carrying men and weapons! Shutting down that guiding beam hasn't stopped 'em after all."

Will the rockets get through and destroy Britain, after all? Don't miss next week's thrilling instalment!

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY D. C. THOMSON & CO., LTD., AND JOHN LENG & CO., LTD., 12 FETTER LANE, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.4. REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION BY CANADIAN MAGAZINE POST.