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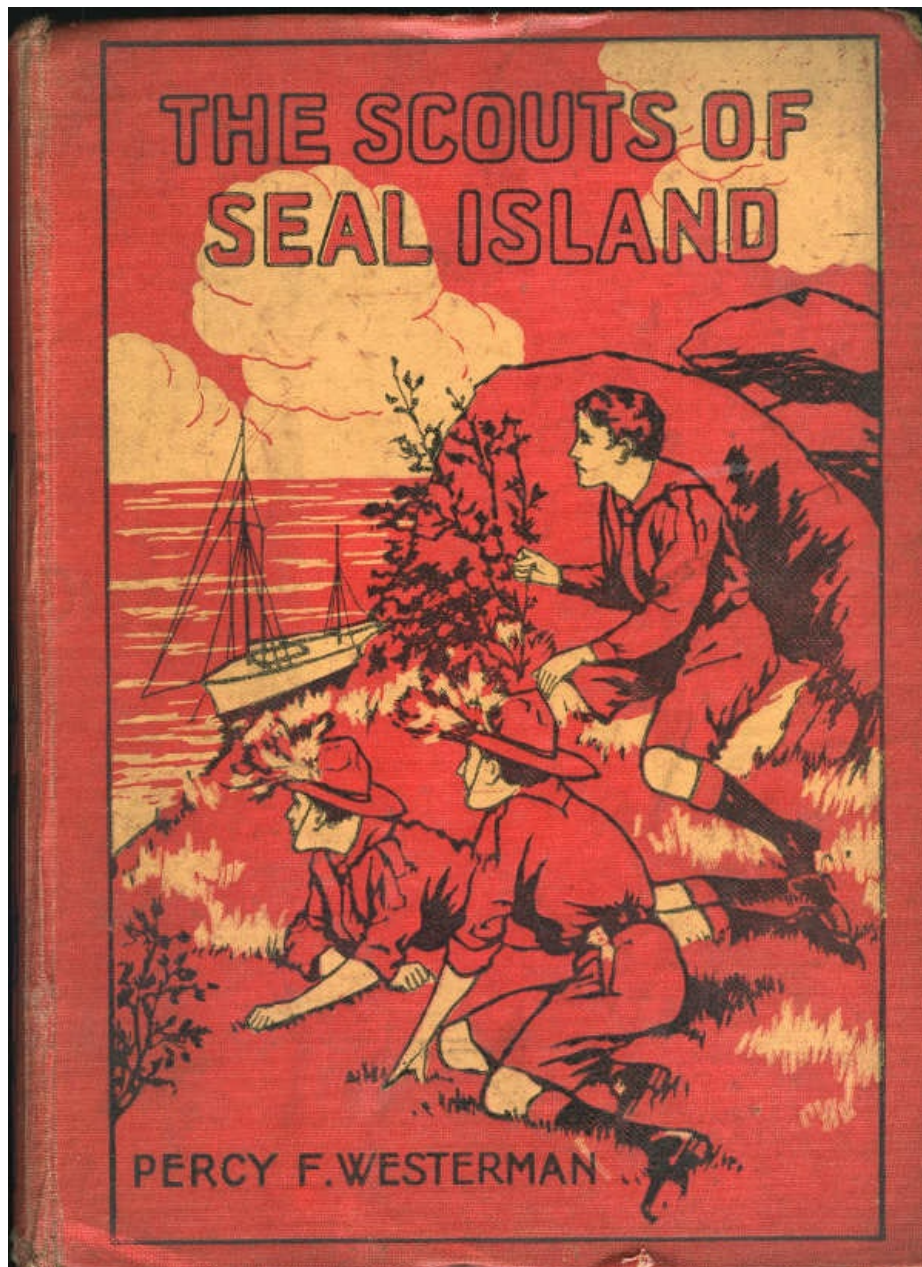
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[Illustration: cover art]

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“They landed safely on the lee side of the stone pier.”—Page 132.

[Illustration: "They landed safely on the lee side of the stone pier."—Page 132.]

## **THE SCOUTS OF SEAL ISLAND**



BY

**PERCY F. WESTERMAN**

AUTHOR OF  
"SEA SCOUTS OF THE PETREL"  
"THE SEA MONARCH" ETC.

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"THEY LANDED SAFELY ON THE LEE SIDE OF THE  
STONE PIER" *Frontispiece*

"LOOK HERE, YOUNG GENTLEMAN, CAN YOU GIVE ME  
ANY INFORMATION AS TO WHAT OCCURRED?"

"HE SLIPPED OVER THE CLIFF AND WAS SLOWLY  
LOWERED"

"QUITE EXHAUSTED, THE FIRST SURVIVOR WAS  
ASSISTED TO THE MOST SHELTERED POSITION ON  
THE LEDGE"

"IN BROKEN-STEP FORM THE SCOUTS CARRIED THEIR  
COMRADE TOWARDS THE CAMP"

"IN THE NAME OF THUNDER, WHAT HAVE YOU  
SCOUTS BEEN UP TO?"

"THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THE AFTERNOON THE  
WOLVES KEPT ON THE WATCH"

"HANDS UP INSTANTLY OR I'LL FIRE!' ORDERED  
MR. BUCKLEY STERNLY"

# THE SCOUTS OF SEAL ISLAND

## CHAPTER I

### SIR SILAS DISAPPROVES

"LADS," exclaimed Scoutmaster Leslie Trematon, "I am sorry to announce a disappointment, but I trust you will receive the news like true Scouts and keep smiling."

The Scoutmaster paused to note the effect of his words. Practically every boy of the "Otter" and "Wolf" patrols knew what was coming, but one and all gave no sign of disgust at the shattering of their hopes. Two or three pursed their lips tightly, others set their jaws grimly, while a few looked at their comrades as if to gauge the state of their feelings on the matter.

"We must, I'm afraid, give up all hope of our Cornish trip and set our minds upon a fortnight's camp at or in the neighbourhood of Southend," continued Mr Trematon. "I had an idea, when I

approached Sir Silas Gwinnear, that my application would be favourably considered, and that in less than a week's time you would be enjoying the pure bracing air of Seal Island. Unfortunately, Sir Silas does not see eye to eye with us. His opinion of Scouts in general is not a flattering one. Of course every man is entitled to his own opinion, but at the same time I sincerely trust that Sir Silas may be convinced that his estimate of the qualities of Scouts is inconsistent with facts. I would not hold your confidence if I did not read his letter to you. At the same time I feel sure you will make due allowances for the somewhat scathing strictures upon Boy Scouts in general."

Leslie Trematon, the third master of Collingwood College, was a tall, broad-shouldered muscular Cornishman of twenty-four years of age. He was just over six feet in height, his complexion was ruddy, though tanned by exposure to the sun, while his crisp, light brown hair and kindly blue eyes gave him a boyish appearance. He had been two years assistant master at Collingwood College, and, although a strict disciplinarian during school hours, was the idol of his scholars. Out of harness he was almost as one of them: full of spirit, keen on games, and sympathetic with lads who sought his confidence.

A little more than twelve months previously, Mr Trematon had raised four patrols of Scouts amongst the pupils of Collingwood College, and the troop was officially designated the 201st North London. Trematon saw possibilities in the Scout movement. His superior, the Rev. Septimus Kane, the dignified and somewhat old-fashioned Principal of the College, did not regard the newly raised Scouts in a favourable light. He set his face against new institutions; but, finally, on the Scoutmaster's representations he grudgingly consented to give the experiment a term's trial.

At the end of the first term he condescended to admit that the 201st Troop justified its existence. More recruits came in, and the school-games club flourished more than it had done before. Scouting went hand in hand with sport, and the Collingwood College football team attained a higher place in the junior league than it had since its formation.

The second term gave even better results. The whole school seemed infected with the spirit. There was more esprit de corps, the physical condition of the boys was decidedly on the improve, while the Midsummer Examination percentage of passes caused the Rev. Septimus to beam with satisfaction and the governors to bestow lavish praise upon their headmaster and his staff of assistants.

Even Monsieur Fardafet, the second French master, noticed the change in the boys' behaviour, and weeks went by without his having to complain to the Head about the conduct of certain irreconcilables who had hitherto been the worry and despair of his existence.

The fact was that the whole College was imbued with the principles of scoutcraft. Every boy realised that it was incumbent upon him to develop his individual character, and that it was impossible for his masters to confide in him if he failed to confide in them.

It had always been a strong point with the Rev. Septimus to impress upon his assistants the necessity of appealing to a boy's honour, but hitherto there had been a flaw in the working of the Head's scheme. The boys regarded any advance on their masters' part with suspicion. It was their firm belief that masters existed simply and solely for the purpose of driving in the dreary elements of knowledge. But when Mr Leslie Trematon arrived upon the scene matters began to improve, till, at the time our story opens, a state of harmony existed betwixt the masters and scholars of Collingwood College.

The number of patrols had now increased to ten. Of these the "Otters" and the "Wolves" were composed solely of boarder who, through various circumstances, were unable to spend their holidays in the home circle. Mr Trematon looked upon it as a pleasurable duty to give up a portion of his summer vacation to these two patrols, and, with this object in view, had approached Sir Silas Gwinnear to obtain his permission to have the use of Seal Island for a fortnight in August.

Sir Silas was a city magnate whose name was generally to the fore in every large commercial transaction that would bear close investigation. With the exception of a comparatively brief holiday, invariably spent on his large Cornish estate near Padstow, Sir Silas stuck closely to his business. He was a self-made man, whose wealth had been accumulated by sheer hard work and indomitable determination. In his earlier days he knew Mr Trematon's father intimately, and the young Scoutmaster took decorous advantage of this friendship to ask a boon for his Scouts.

Seal Island, which formed but a small portion of Sir Silas' estates, is situated off the north Cornish coast, being separated from the shore by a stretch of deep water barely a quarter of a mile in width. It is a little more than half a mile in length, and half that distance across its widest part. Roughly, the island resembles the shape of the body of a pig, the back being seawards. It is uninhabited, save for numerous rabbits and countless sea-birds. Its north-western side is honeycombed with caves; a romantic ruin, that tradition ascribes to the work of a saintly hermit, occupies the highest position, which is two hundred and fifty feet above the sea.

Needless to say the Scouts voted that Seal Island was an ideal place to spend a holiday, and one and all looked for the expected reply.

And now Sir Silas Gwinnear had replied, and their hopes were dashed to the ground.

"I may as well let you hear what Sir Silas says," continued Mr Trematon. "You will then be able to know what some people think of us Scouts:—

"DEAR MR TREMATON,

"I must apologise for the slight delay that has arisen in replying to your letter of the 2nd.

"It is an unpleasant thing to have to refuse the request of the son of an old friend of mine, but in so doing I merely adhere to the principles I am about to explain.

"I give you my reasons. They may not meet with your approval, but they are certainly what I believe to be correct. In the first place, I strongly disapprove of the Boy Scout movement. To me, a man of strong commercial instincts, the whole scheme suggests militancy and is merely the thin end of the wedge of 'National Conscription,' which to a man of peace is utterly abhorrent.

"Nor can I see that any useful purpose can be served by grotesquely garbed youths running about the country with broomsticks in their hands and wild cat-calls on their lips. The very privacy of a country ramble is menaced by the apparition of an inquisitive youth in a Scout's hat peering through a gap in the hedge.

"To-day, too much time is wasted in outdoor amusements—in fact, in amusements of all sorts. The commercial vitality of the nation is seriously threatened. I can assure you that I've had the greatest difficulty in obtaining a suitable junior clerk. There were scores of applicants for the post, but in almost every case the lads wanted to know what holidays were given, and what the hours were on Saturdays—in order, I suppose, that they can go to football.

"By granting you permission to take your Scouts to Seal Island I realise that I should be tacitly violating my principles. It is not because of the damage the boys might do: there is very little to harm on the Island. I trust, therefore, that you will understand the reason of my refusal, and accept my assurance of regret at not being able to accede to your request.—Yours faithfully,

"SILAS GWINNEAR."

"Jolly hard lines, sir," exclaimed Jack Phillips, the Second of the "Otters." "Can't you write and explain that his ideas are wrong."

"Hardly," replied the Scoutmaster, with a smile. "Sir Silas does not ask for my opinion. All the same it is up to us to show him that he is in error. All great organisations are misunderstood by some, especially during the initial stages. Time alone will wear down opposition, and in due course I sincerely hope that Sir Silas may have cause to change his opinions. Meanwhile, lads, we must not be downhearted. I must say you appear to take the bad news in a true Scout-like spirit. Perhaps, after all, we will have almost as jolly a camp at Southend, although I am sorry we are not going to sample the glorious Cornish climate. But now let's to work: its bridge building to-night, and there's quite a lot to be done in the time."

Five minutes later the old gym., which the Rev. Septimus Kane had, as a token of appreciation, handed over to the sole use of the Scouts, was a scene of orderly bustle. For the time being the lads had put Seal Island from their minds.

## CHAPTER II

### DICK ATHERTON'S GOOD TURN

ON the following Wednesday afternoon Leader Dick Atherton, of the "Otters," was invited to his chum Gregson's to tea. Gregson was a day boarder whose people lived at Brixton. He wished very much to join the Scouts, but his parents strongly objected. This was a source of keen disappointment both to Gregson and Atherton, for instinctively they realised that there was bound to be an ever-widening gap in their friendship.

Dick Atherton was a good specimen of a British school-boy. He was sixteen years of age, fairly tall, and with long supple limbs and a frame that showed promise of filling out. At present he was, like a good many other lads of his age, growing rapidly. Plenty of outdoor exercise and an abundance of plain wholesome food had turned the scale, for instead of becoming a lank, over-studious youth he showed every promise of developing into a strong, muscular man.

One of the first to avail themselves of Mr Trematon's offer to become Scouts, Dick Atherton was by the unanimous vote of the patrol appointed Leader of the "Otters." He took particular pains to prove himself worthy of the honour his comrades had paid him, with the result that he soon gained his Ambulance, Cycling, Pathfinder, Swimming and Signalling badges.

Scoutmaster Trematon was strongly opposed to the idea of any lad hastily qualifying for badges merely for the sake of having the right sleeve decorated by a number of fanciful symbols; he preferred to find a Scout making himself thoroughly proficient, and keeping himself up to a state of efficiency in a comparatively few number of subjects, rather than a slipshod scramble for badges that could only be regarded in a similar light to the trophies of a "pothunter."

Dick Atherton, as did most of his comrades, saw the good sense of his Scoutmaster's wishes. Therein he laid the foundations of his success in after life: he specialised. It would be hard to find another Scout in the whole of the London Troops who could excel Atherton in any of the branches he had taken up. To the Scouts' motto "Be prepared" he instinctively added another, "Be thorough."

Shortly after six o'clock Atherton bade his friends farewell and started on his return journey to Collingwood College. It was imperative that he should be back before a quarter to eight in time for evening "prep."

A heavy mist, almost a fog, had settled down earlier in the afternoon, driving most people to the Tubes. Atherton, however, preferred to take a motor-bus.

As the vehicle was passing under the railway viaduct in the Waterloo Road it skidded on the greasy surface and dashing into the kerb smashed the nearside fore-wheel. The Scout promptly alighted, thinking that perhaps he might be of assistance. To his request the motorman curtly told him to "Chuck it and clear out," advice that Atherton deemed it expedient to carry out.

Just then he remembered that to-morrow was Fred Simpson's birthday. Simpson was the Leader of the "Wolves," and a jolly good sort, and Atherton resolved to spend the remainder of his weekly allowance in some small present for his chum. Stamp-collecting was one of Simpson's hobbies, and Atherton knew that it was his ambition to get a set of Servian "Death Masks."

"I saw a set in a shop in the Strand only last week," thought Atherton. "I'll take a short cut across Hungerford Bridge, buy the stamps if they are still to be had, and pick up the Tube at Charing Cross. There will be ample time if I make haste."

The approach to the bridge consists of a fairly steep wooden gangway with an abrupt turning at its upper end. The worn planks were slippery with mud, while, being close to the river, the mist seemed denser than ever. From the bridge it was just possible to see the outlines of the adjoining brewery and the tiers of heavy barges lying on the reeking mud, for the tide had almost ceased to ebb.

Less than half-way across the bridge Atherton saw the figures of two men. One was leaning over the low parapet, the other, hands in pockets and his hat stuck on the back of his head, was looking fixedly along the narrow footway. Suddenly the latter poked his companion in the ribs and pointed at the oncoming Scout; then both men turned and leant over the parapet as if interested in the swirl of yellow water twenty or thirty feet beneath them.

"What can their interest be in me, I wonder?" thought Atherton. "No use showing the white feather. I'll walk straight past them—but I'll 'Be prepared.'"

Somewhat to his surprise the two men took particular care to keep their faces averted. But swiftly as he walked by the Scout did not forget the value of unobtrusive observation.

"No. 1.—Height about five feet five, broad shouldered, short legs; back of neck dirty yellow, hair black and long, showing a tendency to curl. Clothes: a billy-cock hat, soiled stand-up collar, with a frayed yellow-and-black necktie showing above the back collar-stud, coat rusty black, circular patch of deep black material on left elbow; trousers grey, frayed at bottoms; boots pale yellow, badly in need of a clean, and much worn on the outside of each heel.

"No. 2.—Height five feet ten, back of neck red, iron-grey hair closely cut, shoulders bent, legs long, feet planted well apart. Cloth cap; blue woollen scarf, blue serge coat and trousers, black boots that had apparently been treated with dubbin. Should take him to be a seafaring man; more than likely a bargeman. I feel pretty certain that I could pick out these men in a crowd of—"

A stifled shout for aid was faintly borne to the Scout's ears. He stopped, turned, then without hesitation ran as hard as he could in the direction from which he had come. The mist hid the two men from his sight, while at the same time a light engine running slowly over the adjacent bridge threw out a dense cloud of steam that, beaten down by the moist atmosphere, made it impossible



for Atherton to see more than a yard ahead.

Once more came the cry, this time nearer, but gurgling, as if the victim's mouth was being held by one of his assailants. Imitating a man's voice, the Scout shouted. Just then the cloud of steam was wafted away, and Atherton was able to see what was taking place.

The two men he had previously passed were struggling fiercely with a tall, elderly gentleman, who in spite of his grey hairs was strenuously resisting. Even as the Scout dashed up, the two rascals deliberately lifted their victim over the iron balustrade. There was a stifled shriek followed by a heavy splash, while the assailants bolted as fast as their legs could carry them.

Three or four pedestrians, looming out of the mist, promptly stood aside to let the hurrying men pass. The former made no attempt to stop the fugitives. All they did was to stand still and gaze after them till they were lost to sight.

"A man has been thrown into the river!" shouted Atherton. "Run down to the Charing Cross Pier and get them to send out a boat."

Throwing off his coat and shoes the Scout climbed over a parapet and lowered himself till his whole weight was supported by his hands. There he hung for a brief instant. He realised that the drop was a long one, and in addition there was the possibility of falling not into the water but upon the deck of a barge that might at that moment be shooting under the bridge. In that case it might mean certain death, or at least broken limbs.

Shutting his eyes and keeping his legs tightly closed and straight out, Atherton released his hold and dropped. He hit the water with tremendous force, descending nearly ten feet. Instinctively he swam to the surface and, shaking the water from his hair and eyes, struck out down stream.

Twenty yards from him, and just visible in the murky atmosphere, he caught sight of a dark object just showing above the surface. The next moment it vanished. Putting all his energy into his strokes Atherton swam to the spot and, guided by the bubbles, dived. It seemed a forlorn hope, for at a few feet below the surface the thick yellow water was so opaque that he could not distinguish his hands as he struck out. For nearly half a minute the brave lad groped blindly. His breath, already sorely taxed by the force of his drop from the bridge, was failing him. He must come to the surface ere he could renew his vague search. Just as he was on the point of swimming upwards his left hand came into contact with a submerged object. His grip tightened. With a thrill of satisfaction he realised that he had hold of the victim of the outrage.

Thank Heaven, the surface at last! Turning on his back Atherton drew in a full breath of the dank yet welcome air, then shifting his grasp to the collar of the rescued man drew him face uppermost to the surface. To all appearance the old gentleman was dead. His eyes were wide open, his lips parted, his features were as white as his hair.

The Scout looked about him. His vision was limited to a circle of less than fifty yards in radius; beyond this the mist enveloped everything. The Embankment, the bridges, the Surrey side—all were invisible. But above the noise of the traffic on the Embankment and the rumble of the trains across the river came the dull roar of voices, for already a dense crowd had gathered almost as soon as the alarm had been given by the hitherto apathetic pedestrians on the foot-bridge.

"The wind was blowing down stream," thought Atherton. "If I keep it on my left I ought to strike shore somewhere, so here goes."

Still swimming on his back, and holding up the head of the rescued man, the Scout headed towards the Middlesex side. His progress was slow, for his burden was a serious drag, and his strength had already undergone a severe strain. His clothes, too, were a great impediment. Had it been clear weather Atherton would have been content to keep himself afloat till picked up by a boat, but he did not relish the idea of drifting aimlessly on the bosom of old Father Thames; his plan was to make for land, hoping to reach the Embankment somewhere in the neighbourhood of the steps by Cleopatra's Needle.

All this while, owing to a slight veering of the wind, Atherton was swimming, not towards the shore, but almost down stream. He wondered faintly why his feet had not yet touched the mud. More than once he thrust his legs down to their fullest extent, hoping to find something offering more resistance than water, but each time his hopes were not realised.

He was momentarily growing weaker. His movements were little more than mechanical, yet not for one instant did he think of abandoning his burden to save himself. His clothing seemed to hang about his limbs like lead. Ofttimes he had practised swimming in trousers, shirt and socks—for one of the Scouts' swimming tests is to cover fifty yards thus attired; but he had already covered more than four times that distance, while, in addition, he was heavily handicapped by having to tow another person.

Presently a dull throbbing fell upon the Scout's ears.

"A steamboat," he muttered. "Wonder if she'll come this way."

And expending a considerable amount of his sorely tried breath he shouted for aid. A sharp blast upon a steam-whistle was the response, while a hoarse voice bawled, "Where are you, my man?"

"Here," replied Atherton vaguely, for owing to the mist the direction in which the sound came from was quite unable to be located.

Fortunately the steamboat was heading almost down upon the nearly exhausted lad. Her bows, magnified out of all proportion, loomed through the misty atmosphere.

"Stop her!" shouted the coxswain to the engineer, then, "Stand by with your boathook, Wilson."

Losing way, the boat—one of the Metropolitan Police launches—was brought close alongside the rescuer and the rescued. The Bowman, finding the lad within arm's length, dropped his boathook, and leaning over the gunwale, grasped Atherton by the shoulder. The coxswain came to his aid, and the victim of the outrage was hauled into safety.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PATROL LEADER'S DILEMMA

SHIVERING under the stern canopy of the launch, Scout Atherton assisted the Bowman in his work of restoring the half-drowned man to life. Before the craft reached Charing Cross Pier, the policeman was able to announce that there was yet hope.

Feeling dizzy and numbed Atherton stepped ashore.

"Can I help, sir?" he asked.

"You'd better run off home and get out of those wet clothes," replied the coxswain, a sergeant of police. "Do you feel equal to it, or shall we get you a cab?"

"I'm all right, I think," replied Atherton.

"Let's have your name and address," continued the sergeant, pulling out his notebook. "You're a plucky youngster, that you are."

Atherton was not at all keen on giving the particulars. Publicity was the thing he wished to avoid. He had done a good turn, and, Scout-like, he wanted, now that he could render no further assistance, to modestly retire from the scene.

His desire was gratified, for at that moment a doctor, two reporters and an ambulance man came hurrying down the incline leading to the pier. The doctor turned his attention to the still unconscious man, while the Pressmen tackled the sergeant in a most business-like manner.

Atherton seized the opportunity and slipped off.

The water was still dripping steadily from his things. He started into a run, partly to restore his numbed circulation and partly to get back to the spot where he had taken his venturesome dive, for he remembered that he had left his boots and coat on the bridge. By the time he reached the top of the three flights of stairs leading from the Embankment to the bridge his watery tracks were quite insignificant, and of the few people hurrying on their way home none noticed the hatless, coatless and bootless youth.

The crowd of curious spectators had dispersed. A rumour that the water police had picked up the body of the victim had resulted in a wild stampede along the Embankment. Atherton made his way to the place where he had dropped into the river. His coat and boots had vanished.

"I'm in a pretty fine mess!" he exclaimed, ruefully. "Dirty trick, sneaking a fellow's clothes, though. I wonder what the Head will say when I turn up late."

Atherton knew that if he journeyed to King's Cross otherwise than on foot he would be exposing himself to a great risk by taking cold, so adopting the "Scout's pace"—alternately walking and running twenty paces—he found himself at the Great Northern metropolitan station in very quick time.

Upon arriving at Collingwood College a slice of good luck awaited him. Jellyboy, the porter, was standing on the kerb beckoning frantically to a newsboy. The outer door was open, and the Scout slipped in unobserved.

Under ordinary circumstances he would have gone straight to his house master, but the desire to keep his good turn a secret caused him to make straight for the dormitory. Here he changed, placing his still damp clothes under his bed till he could find an opportunity of drying them.

"Prep." was over. Harrison, the junior science master had been in charge, and had not noticed Atherton's absence. The Scouts were assembling for the evening's instruction, and, not without curious glances from his chums, the Leader of the "Otters" joined them.

Somehow Atherton did not feel quite satisfied with himself. He began to realise that by avoiding publicity he had placed himself in a false position. By promptly giving the police a detailed description of the two assailants, the arrest of the culprits might have been speedily effected. Besides, he did not relish the stealthy tactics he had to adopt in returning to the College without being detected.

"I'll see Mr Trematon and tell him all about it," he declared. "It seems to me that I've made a pretty mess of things, so here goes."

"Well, Atherton, what do you want?" basked the Scoutmaster, as the Leader went up to him and saluted. "A suggestion for the camp, eh?"

"No, sir," replied Atherton. "I'm in a difficulty and want advice. Can I speak to you in the store-room, sir?"

"Certainly," assented Mr Trematon kindly. "Now, Atherton, what is it that's worrying you?"

The Scout told the story of his adventure, omitting nothing, although he put the account of his part of the rescue in as brief a form as possible.

"You had better come with me to the Head," said Mr Trematon, when Atherton had finished. "I think I can account for your reticence, and no doubt Mr Kane will see things in a similar light."

"Whatever possessed you to go without giving your name and address, Atherton?" asked the Rev. Septimus. "Don't you see you are putting obstacles in the way of the police?"

"I have thought of that since, sir," replied Atherton; "but at the time all I wanted was to make myself scarce."

"Make yourself scarce!" repeated the Head, reprovingly. "That is hardly the right way to express yourself."

"Well, sir, you see I did not want any reward for my good turn."

"What a strange idea," remarked the Rev. Septimus Kane to his assistant.

"One of the principles of Scout law, sir; to do a brave action with the prime motive of self-advertisement is deprecated by all true Scouts."

"Yet I notice names of Scout heroes frequently figure in the Press," added the Head, musingly.

"Possibly not with their consent, sir."

"There are volumes in the meaning of the word 'possibly,' Mr Trematon. However, the best thing you can do is to take Atherton over to the police-station. Ask that his identity may be concealed if practicable. They will telephone the description of the two assailants to the other stations, and in that way a tardy assistance may be rendered to the Force. Don't wait, it is late already."

"Very good sir. Do you want me——"

Mr Trematon's words were interrupted by a sharp knock at the study door, and in response to the Head's invitation Jellyboy, the porter, entered, followed by a stalwart constable.

"Good evening, sir," exclaimed the policeman, saluting. "I've been sent to make a few enquiries, sir; can I speak to you in private?"

"I do not think privacy is desirable, constable," replied the Rev. Septimus, who at times possessed a keen intuition. "You have called with reference to that case of attempted murder on Hungerford Bridge."

"You're right, sir," said the astonished policeman. "You'll excuse me, sir, but might I ask how you know?"

"Easily explained, constable. You have a parcel under your arm. It has been crushed. The brown paper covering has burst. I can see a portion of the contents: a boy's cap with the badge of Collingwood College. Since one of my pupils—this lad, as a matter of fact—has arrived without a cap, coat or boots, and has reported to me that he jumped into the Thames after a gentleman who was thrown over the bridge by a couple of roughs, it naturally follows that I can guess the nature of your errand."

"You are quite right, sir," said the constable, admiringly.

"I frequently am," rejoined the Head, complacently. "But to return to the point: has the identity of the victim been established?"

"Yes, sir, the gentleman is Sir Silas Gwinnear. You might have heard of him, sir."

Leslie Trematon gave an exclamation of surprise. Atherton, equally astonished, could hardly realise the news. It seemed like a dream. Only a few days previously Sir Silas had written expressing his opinion of the Scout movement in emphatic terms of disapproval, and now, by the irony of fate, he owed his life to a Scout's promptitude and bravery.

"What is the matter, Mr Trematon?" asked the Head, who could not fail to notice the Scoutmaster's ejaculation of astonishment.

"I happen to know Sir Silas, sir," he replied. "He was a friend of my father's. Only the day before yesterday he wrote to me."

"And how is Sir Silas?" asked the Rev. Septimus, addressing the policeman.

"Getting along finely, sir, considering he's not a young man by any means."

"And his assailants?"

"No trace of them, sir. One of our men found these articles of clothing and took them to the station. A letter addressed to Master Atherton was in one of the pockets, so the Inspector sent me here to make enquiries. Is this the lad, sir?"

"That is Atherton, constable."

"Look here, young gentleman, can you give us any information as to what occurred?"

The Scout accurately described the appearance of the two men whom he saw commit the assault. The policeman, hardly able to conceal his surprise at the detailed description, laboriously wrote the particulars in his notebook; the Head was also surprised at his pupil's sense of perception. Only Mr Trematon maintained a composed bearing. Inwardly he was proud that his instruction in scoutcraft had borne such good fruit.

"Let me see," remarked the Rev. Septimus. "Atherton is, I believe, a—er—Scout?"

"Yes, sir," assented the Scoutmaster.

"He ought to be a detective, sir," observed the constable. "Only it's a great pity he didn't inform us at once. We might have nabbed those rascals."

"He quite realises that," said the Head. "One thing, he has been the means of saving life under very trying circumstances. The capture of the assailants is, after all, a secondary matter. Trematon, you ought to be proud of your Scouts if they are all like this one."

"I trust they will prove themselves equal to the occasion should necessity arise, sir," replied the Scoutmaster.



“ ‘ Look here, young gentleman, can you give me any information as to what occurred ? ’ ”— *Page 27.*

[Illustration: "Look here, young gentleman, can you give me any information as to what occurred?"—*Page 27.*]

## CHAPTER IV

### OFF TO SEAL ISLAND

"You'll be sure to get the Bronze Cross, Dick," exclaimed his chum, Phil Green, as he paused in his work of varnishing a tail-board to critically admire his handiwork.

"Don't talk rot," replied Atherton, for the congratulations of his fellow-scouts were beginning to be embarrassing. "Don't talk rot, and get on with your work. We've only four clear days, and this trek-cart is nothing like finished."



The lads were hard at work in the old gym. The place reeked of elm sawdust and varnish, for sixteen Scouts were all busily engaged in constructing a cart.

"What did it feel like when you jumped of the bridge?" asked Fred Simpson, the Leader of the "Wolves."

"I cannot explain; I simply dropped," replied Atherton. "Perhaps if I had hesitated, I might have funk'd it. But dry up, you fellows, I've had enough. Come on, Baker, are those linchpins finished yet?"

"The papers made a pretty fine story about you, Dick," said Green, returning to the charge. "'The Scout and the Baronet,' the report was headed. Funny that it was Sir Silas Gwinnear you rescued, wasn't it?"

"You'll be funnier still if you don't hurry up with that coat of varnish," exclaimed the Leader, with mock severity. "Stick to it, man; we want to be able to show Mr Trematon something by the time he returns."

Just then Jellyboy stalked in.

"Mr Atherton, you're wanted at once in the Head's study."

Atherton hurriedly washed his hands, smoothed his hair and donned his blazer over his Scout's uniform. It was the custom for the lads to wear their uniform during their work in the gym., after "prep." was over; but for the first time on record was a Scout in full war-paint summoned to see the Head. The Rev. Septimus took particular pains to avoid sending for any of his pupils except when in their ordinary clothes; but on this occasion the warning was evidently urgent.

"Come in," said the Head, briskly. "Atherton, this is Sir Silas Gwinnear."

The Scout could hardly recognise the stranger as the same person he had rescued. Sir Silas under ordinary everyday conditions was a tall, thin-featured man with grey hair and beard. He bore the stamp of a self-made merchant, for he was somewhat showily dressed, an obtrusive gold watch-chain of old-fashioned make with a heavy seal, a massive signet ring and a thick scarf-pin being the outward signs of his opulence. His manner was pompous; but in his deep-set grey eyes there lurked the suspicion of a kindly nature.

"Ah, good evening, Atherton," exclaimed the Baronet, rising and shaking the Scout's hand. "I am out and about, you see, thanks to your bravery, my dear young sir. I took the first opportunity of calling and thanking you personally for what you have done for me."

"I only did my duty, sir."

"And did it well, too, I declare. To get to the point, Atherton: I am a man of few words, but you will not find me ungrateful. If at any future time I can be of assistance to you don't hesitate to ask. I flatter myself that I have a fair share of influence. Meanwhile I don't suppose you will object to having a little pocket-money. School-boys, I believe, are always fond of tuck."

So saying, Sir Silas thrust his hand deep into his trousers' pocket and fished out a fistful of gold and silver coins. From these he selected five sovereigns and offered them to his youthful rescuer.

Atherton drew himself erect.

"No, thank you, sir," he said firmly but politely. "I cannot take the money."

"Cannot take the money!" repeated Sir Silas, hardly able to credit his sense of hearing. "Why not?"

"I am a Scout, sir, and a Scout is not allowed to receive any reward for doing a good turn."

"A Scout! Bless my soul, so you are!" exclaimed the Baronet, as his eyes noticed for the first time the lad's knotted handkerchief showing above his buttoned-up blazer, and his bare knees. "I am afraid I am not in sympathy with the Scout movement," he added bluntly.

"We have recently formed a troop as a kind of experiment," explained the Rev. Septimus, apologetically. "But I must admit, Sir Silas, that I have had no reason up to the present to regret my decision in granting Scouts to be enrolled from my pupils."

"Atherton's refusal to take a small present surprises me," said the Baronet. "Is that rule strictly adhered to?"

"I know very little about the rules and regulations of Scoutcraft," replied the Head. "Perhaps Atherton can answer your question."

"Well, is it?" asked Sir Silas abruptly. "Yes, sir," replied the Scout, rather relieved to find that the conversation had turned into a channel that was more to his liking than being the object of embarrassing congratulations.

"H'm. The upkeep of the movement costs money, I suppose. How do you manage? I always thought Scouts cadged to meet their expenses."

"No, sir, we are not allowed to cadge. That is also against regulations. We are self-supporting."

"How?"

"To take our own case, sir, all our pocket-money is paid into the troop funds at the beginning of the term. We have to be thrifty, that is also an obligation. We all do something to add to the funds."

"I gave the permission, Sir Silas," remarked the Head. "In a commercial training school like Collingwood College I think that judiciously supervised earnings tend to develop commercial instincts and teach lads the value of money at an age when they are apt to disregard it."

"That is so," agreed the baronet. "'Take care of the pence,' you know. But suppose, Atherton, a sum of money was presented to the troop funds, what would you do then?"

"Our Scoutmaster, Mr Trematon, could answer the question better than I, sir," replied the Scout.

"Trematon? Is he here? That's strange. He wrote to me the other day. I thought the name Collingwood College seemed familiar, but until this moment I failed to connect the two circumstances. He asked me to allow him to take a party of Scouts to my place in Cornwall—to Seal Island."

"Yes, sir."

"And I refused. I gave my reasons. I suppose you fellows called me all sorts of uncomplimentary names, eh?"

"Oh, no, sir. We were disappointed, of course. Mr Trematon was too, for he loves Cornwall, so he tells us. Now we are going to Southend instead."

"I suppose you wouldn't mind if I altered my decision?"

"Indeed, sir, it would be ripping," replied Atherton, enthusiastically.

"Well, I will write to Mr Trematon on the matter to-morrow," declared Sir Silas. "If you won't accept a pecuniary reward perhaps I can pay off a portion of my debt of gratitude to you in another way. All the same," he added, with a touch of pomposity, "I wish it to be clearly understood that the objections I have expressed to Mr Trematon I still believe in: but since you refuse any pecuniary reward I think I am justified in making this offer. I suppose there is no reason why you should decline this slight concession?"

"Thank you very much, sir," replied Atherton warmly. "In the name of the troop I thank you."

"No need for that," said Sir Silas grimly. "The troop, whatever that is—I suppose it has something to do with Scouts—has to thank you, not me. I will write to Mr Trematon this evening on the matter."

As soon as Leader Atherton was dismissed he ran as hard as he could out of the schoolhouse, and crossed the playground and burst excitedly into the old gym.

"I say, you chaps," he exclaimed, "it's all right after all. Sir Silas Gwinneer has reconsidered his decision and we have permission to camp out on Seal Island."

The roof echoed and re-echoed to the hearty cheer the Scouts raised, while little Reggie Scott, the Tenderfoot of the "Otters," showed his enthusiasm by attempting to dance a hornpipe on the back of the vaulting horse. His efforts came to an abrupt conclusion, and he rose from the floor dolefully rubbing the back of his head, while his comrades were unable to restrain their mirth.

In the midst of the uproar the Scoutmaster entered.

"What's all this, boys?" he inquired. "More play than work it looks like; and only a few days more before we go to Southend, and our preparations are not half made."

"No need to trouble about Southend, sir," said Fred Simpson, in an excited tone. "Atherton has seen Sir Silas, and we can go to Seal Island."

"Atherton has seen Sir Silas?" repeated Mr Trematon. "Come, Atherton, let me hear all about it."

"It is rather a pity that Sir Silas gives his consent under these conditions," he continued when the Scout had related what had occurred in the Head's study. "A gift grudgingly bestowed is but half a gift. No matter, lads; Atherton has made a good impression as a Scout, and I feel certain that the rest of us will leave no stone unturned to convince the baronet that Scouts are not what he imagines them to be. So it is to be Seal Island after all. I am glad, and I think you will agree

with me that the possibilities of a thoroughly enjoyable fortnight under canvas are far greater there than at Southend. It was lucky I called in to see how you were getting on, for I meant to buy the tickets to-night. But now, lads, stick to your work, for I see there is still much to be done. Work first and play afterwards—and talk if you can without hindering each other."

For the next two days preparations were hurriedly yet methodically pushed forward. On the Friday the school broke up, the day boys and most of the boarders bidding goodbye to their studies for seven long weeks. Of the boarders who remained all belonged to the Scouts, and formed two patrols.

The "Otters," with Dick Atherton as Leader, were composed of Jack Phillips, Second; Phil Green and Tom Mayne, 1st class Scouts; Will Everest and George Baker, 2nd class Scouts; and Jim Sayers and Reggie Scott, the Tenderfoots.

The "Wolves" were made up of Fred Simpson, Leader; Harry Neale, Second; Jock Fraser, Arnold Hayes and Vernon Coventry, 1st class Scouts; Pat Coventry, 2nd class Scout; and Basil Armstrong, Tenderfoot. Little Dick Frost, the other Tenderfoot of the "Wolves," and one of the keenest of the troop, was the only one who was unable to go camping. His mother had written to the Head saying that as she considered her son a delicate lad, she did not wish him to run unnecessary risks by sleeping in the open. Even the Rev. Septimus smiled when he read the epistle, for Dick was really one of the toughest of a hardy set of lads.

Sir Silas kept his promise by writing to Mr Trematon, confirming the permission he had given to Atherton. In the letter he enclosed a railway pass to Wadebridge for seventeen persons, available for fifteen days.

"No doubt the laws of your organisation will permit you to accept the enclosed," he wrote. "Don't thank me, thank young Atherton. As regards Seal Island, I have written to my bailiff informing him that you are to have uninterrupted possession of the place for a fortnight. There are springs of fresh water, but fuel you will have to obtain from the mainland. Dairy produce is to be had of Trebarwith, the farmer who lives just outside Polkerwyck. You can shoot as many rabbits as you like, on the estate, but remember that the sea-birds are not to be killed or molested. Not only is it an offence against the law to kill birds, being close season, but I am strongly adverse from seeing these creatures harmed, so I sincerely trust that you will take strong measures to carry out my wishes in this respect. Should my keepers report any violation of this condition I will immediately give orders for your lads to quit the island."

Sir Silas' gift had relieved the Scouts of any possible pecuniary difficulty. For months they had put aside their pocket-money, paying into the troop funds for the purpose of defraying the cost of the camp training. For example, Tom Mayne and Coventry major earned sixpence a week for weeding the Head's garden. This sum was promptly paid in. Simpson and Everest had each won prizes in competitions organised by a leading boys' journal. In each case the articles were sold and the sums received added to the general fund. Every lad had done his utmost, and enough had been raised to pay for the railway fares. But there would be very little left when the expenses were met, and now the baronet's generous gift had made it possible for the Scouts to have a splendid holiday and still keep a balance in hand.

On the eve of the momentous journey to the west country, Leaders Atherton and Simpson, on behalf of the two patrols, sprang a little surprise upon their Scoutmaster. Unknown to Mr Trematon the Scouts had purchased a quantity of second-hand, yet serviceable, canvas, and from this they constructed a really smart and well-made ridge-tent suitable for one person. This they presented to the Scoutmaster as a token of appreciation from the "Otters" and the "Wolves."

For their camp equipment the Scouts had to exercise their wits. Their trek-cart was completed; their kit bags packed and stowed; their cooking utensils, truly Spartan in simplicity, were ready; but so far as sleeping accommodation was concerned the lads fully expected to have to construct rough shelters of brushwood and heather. Almost at the last moment the Scoutmaster of another North London Troop came to the rescue. The Collingwood College lads had more than once done his Scouts a good turn, and the opportunity arrived for their services to be reciprocated. The troop in question had just returned from a fortnight under canvas at Shoreham, and acting on their Scoutmaster's suggestion the Scouts lent three large bell-tents to the "Otters" and the "Wolves."

At length the eventful day arrived. The Scouts, all in full marching kit, fell in to be finally inspected by the Head. The trek-cart, filled to its utmost capacity, was placed in charge of Sayers and Armstrong—to be duly noticed and admired by the Rev. Septimus, who, a skilful amateur carpenter himself, always encouraged his pupils to take up carpentering for a hobby.

"Now, boys, I wish you all a very pleasant holiday," exclaimed the Head. "I have every reason to believe that you will do your best to enjoy yourselves and at the same time to keep up the credit of Collingwood College—and of the Scouts. I trust that you will have good weather, and that you will return safe and sound and ready to resume your studies with renewed keenness when the time comes. I will say no more, except perhaps that I wish I were coming with you."

The Scouts cheered at the last remark. They appreciated the Head's envy, but at the same time they were secretly glad that he was *not* accompanying them. There was a certain austerity about

the Rev. Septimus that acted as a barrier betwixt master and scholar, a barrier that, out of school hours, did not exist between Mr Trematon and the lads.

The Head stepped up to Mr Trematon and shook hands.

"Scouts!" exclaimed the Scoutmaster. "Patrols right—quick march!"

The first stage of the long journey to Seal Island had begun.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ARRIVAL

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when the Scouts detrained at Wadebridge, the termination of their railway journey. Seven miles of hilly country separated them from the village of Polkerwyck. The afternoon was hot and sultry, there was no wind to cool the heated atmosphere; but braced up by the attractiveness of their novel surroundings the lads thought lightly of their march.

By some unexplained means the news of their impending arrival forestalled them, and at the station two Cornish troops, with drum and fife bands, awaited them. With typical kind-heartedness their west country brother-Scouts regaled their London visitors with tea, Cornish cream, pasties and other delicacies for which the Duchy is noted, while to still further perform their good turns they insisted upon dragging the camping party's trek-cart for nearly five miles.

It was a delicious march. Everything seemed strange to the visiting Scouts, and novelty was one of the chief delights of the holiday. The wild, moorland country, the quaint stone cottages, stone walls in place of hedges, the broad yet attractive dialect of the villagers, and last but not least their wholehearted hospitality, filled the lads with unbounded delight, while Mr Trematon, being in his native county, was as enthusiastic and light-hearted as his youthful companions.

The shadows were lengthening as the "Otters" and the "Wolves" breasted the last hill. The lads had relapsed into comparative silence. The strangeness of their surroundings so filled them with keen joy that they could only march in subdued quietness and feast their eyes on the natural beauties of the country.

Suddenly Fred Simpson, who headed the march, stopped, and, raising his stetson on the end of his staff, gave a mighty shout. His example was followed by the others as they gained the summit of the hilly road. Almost beneath his feet, and extending as far as the eye could see, was the sea, bathed in all the reflected glory of the setting sun. Not one of the Scouts had previously seen the sun set in the sea: their knowledge of the seaside was confined to the Kentish and Essex coast towns where the orb of day appears to sink to rest behind the inland hills.

On either hand dark red cliffs cut the skyline, forming the extremities of Polkerwyck Bay. The headlands, fantastic in shape, reared themselves boldly to a height of nearly three hundred feet. On the easternmost point, appropriately named Beware Head, stood a tall granite lighthouse, the stonework painted in red and black bands. On the western headland—Refuge Point—stood the white-washed houses of the coastguard station. Between the headlands was Polkerwyck Bay, the village giving it its name nestling on either side of a small tidal estuary, and enclosed by a gorge so narrow and so deep that the Scouts imagined that they could throw a pebble from the road upon the stone roofs of the picturesque cottages.

Of the estuary, and separated from the land by a stretch of deep blue water, lay what appeared to be a small rock.

"Where's Seal Island, sir?" asked Atherton, who was the first to find his tongue.

"There," replied the Scoutmaster, pointing to the rock.

"Why, it's ever so small," cried several of the Scouts in a chorus.

"Large enough for us, lads," replied Mr Trematon with a hearty laugh. "Objects look deceptive when viewed from a height. Now, then, fall in! Sayers, Scott, Pat Coventry and Armstrong, follow the trek-cart with the drag ropes. You will want to keep it well in check going down the hill. Patrols—quick march!"

Down the zig-zag hill the Scouts made their way; at every step Seal Island seemed to get larger and larger, till at length the lads halted in the main and only street of Polkerwyck, where they were surrounded by all the available population: men, women and children to the number of

about eighty.

"Welcome back to Polkerwyck, Mr Trematon, zur," exclaimed a hale, grey-headed fisherman, picturesquely attired in sou'wester (although the day was hot), blue jersey, tanned canvas trousers, and heavy sea-boots.

"Thanks, Peter Varco," replied the Scoutmaster, heartily shaking the old man's hand. "I am glad to see you again. You look just the same."

"Sure us old 'uns keep powerful hearty in these parts, Mr Trematon. Thanks be, I be middlin'. These be the Scouts, eh? Likely lads they be, although I reckon as they bain't up to our Cornish lads, eh, Mr Trematon? Squire's man, Roger Penwith, he comed down to see I yesterday. Says 'e, 'Squire has written to say Mr Trematon's Scouts are a' comin' to Seal Island, and Squire wants 'em looked after prop'ly-like.' 'Trust I to do my part,' says I, and sure enow I have a-done. The *Pride of Polkerwyck*—you'll remember 'er, Mr Trematon—is at your sarvice, an' the three small craft as well; so when you'm ready to go over along, them boats is ready."

"Thank you, Varco," said the Scoutmaster. "The sooner we get to the Island the better, for it is past sunset."

"And Roger Penwith 'e 'as placed a load or two o' firewood close alongside the landin' place, Mr Trematon. Thought as 'ow you'd be wantin' it."

"Good man, Mr Penwith!" ejaculated Mr Trematon. "We can find a place to store this cart, I suppose?"

"Sure there'll be a sight of room in yon hut," replied the fisherman.

"Unload the trek-cart, lads," ordered the Scoutmaster. "Keep each patrol's belongings apart. Atherton, will you take charge of one boat; Simpson, another; load the heavy gear into the third boat, and Phillips and Green will assist me in taking her across."

Hither and thither the Scouts ran, each with a set purpose, while the on-lookers watched with admiration as the baggage was unloaded and the trek-cart bundled at the double into the hut.

"Have you a key to the door, Mr Varco?" asked Everest, with characteristic caution, after the cart had been housed.

"Key, young man? What do 'e want wi' a key for, might I make so bold as to ax? Sure, us be all honest men in these parts," said Varco, in a tone of mingled reproof and pride.

At length the three boats were manned, and the Scoutmaster gave the word to push off and give way. Thanks to his early training Mr Trematon was thoroughly at home both on and in the water, and he had developed particular pains to instruct his lads in the art of managing a boat, till the style of the Collingwood College Scouts on the Highgate Pond became a subject of envy to most of the other troops in the district.

It was a ripping row. The only fault that the Scouts had to find was that it was far too short. The water was as calm as a mill-pond, although a faint roar betokened the presence of the customary ground-swell on the shore beyond the bay.

The Scouts landed in a sandy cove in the south-eastern side of the Island, where a winding footpath, that showed little signs of frequent image, wound its way up in a zig-zag fashion to the higher ground. The baggage was carried ashore, and the lads, having secured the boats' painters, prepared to convey their goods to the camping-place.

"You are not going to leave the boats like that, are you?" asked Mr Trematon.

"Aren't they all right, sir?" said Leader Simpson, inquiringly. "I made sure each painter was properly made fast with a clove-hitch, sir."

"Yes, that's all very well, but it is not good enough. You forget the rise of tide, which here exceeds fifteen feet at springs. Besides, it might come on to blow in the night, and even though the Island is sheltered from on-shore winds there would be sufficient swell to smash the boats to splinters. We must haul them well above high-water mark."

Back trooped the Scouts, and, taking up positions all round the first boat, tried to drag her up the steep incline; but as soon as the craft was clear of the water it was evident that the task was beyond them. The boat was heavily built, and all hands could not lift her forward another inch.

"Now what is to be done?" demanded Mr Trematon, with a view of testing the Scouts' practical knowledge.

"Put her on rollers, sir," suggested Jock Fraser.

"A good idea, but where are the rollers?"

"We can use our staves, sir."



"And spoil them by the rubbing of the boat's iron-bound keel. That would only be advisable in a case of necessity. To make use of the oars is open to a similar objection. Open that stern locker, Fraser. You'll find a powerful tackle there, if I'm not mistaken. Ah! There it is, and I can see a post driven in on purpose for hauling boats up."

The upper block was soon placed in position, and Fraser was about to bend the painter to the lower block when the Scoutmaster again called him to order.

"Won't do," he exclaimed. "You'll more than likely pull the stem out of her. Look at her forefoot, Fraser: do you see a hole bored through it?"

"Yes, sir," replied the Scout.

"Very well, then. There's a short iron bar in the locker. Thrust that through the hole and bend the block to it by this rope. That's it: now we can haul away, and the keel will take the strain. Four of you keep the boat upright and the rest tail on to the tackle."

By this means the heavy craft moved slowly and surely, and was at length hauled above the line of dead seaweed that denoted the level of high-water spring tides. The remaining boats were treated in the same way, and the Scouts were free to proceed to the camping-ground.

Before ten o'clock the tents were pitched, a roaring camp fire threw its comforting glow upon the scene, and the two patrols were discussing their hard-earned and frugal supper with commendable avidity that betokened a healthy mind in a healthy body.

"Now, lads," exclaimed the Scoutmaster, as soon as the meal was concluded, "we must turn in. It has been a long day for us, and I don't suppose the majority of you will sleep very soundly the first night under canvas. But no talking, mind. There is a time for everything, and if talking is kept up those who might otherwise be able to sleep will be disturbed. Good-night!"

## CHAPTER VI

### A SPOILT BREAKFAST

"ANYONE awake?" enquired Mr Trematon softly, thrusting his head through the partially unlaced opening of the tent, where the eight "Otters" were lying like the spokes of a wheel, each lad's feet towards the tent-pole.

"I am, sir," replied Atherton and Green.

"Slip on your things and come out. I've a little job for you."

Without hesitation the two lads obeyed, and were soon blinking in the early morning sun. It was just after five o'clock—*réveillé* was to be at half-past six.

The air was keen and the dew still thick upon the short grass. The village of Polkerwyck was yet in shadow, for the sun had not risen sufficiently high to throw its slanting beams upon the deep-set hamlet. But already there were signs of activity, for several of the fishing boats that had been out all night had just returned and were landing their cargoes for conveyance to the nearest railway station. So still was the air that the reflections of the frowning cliffs and the deep browns of the tanned sails were faithfully reproduced in the placid water. The morning mist still lingered on the hill-tops, and drifted in ill-defined patches across the headlands that defined the limits of the bay.

"Best part of the day, sir," said Atherton cheerfully, as he surveyed the scene of tranquillity.

"It is," assented Mr Trematon. "It makes one pity the sluggards who never see the sun rise. But I want you two to come with me across the Polkerwyck. Old Varco promised he'd have an old boat's mast ready for use as a flagstaff, and I want to commence our first day on Seal Island by saluting the flag."

It was now nearly high tide, and thanks to the steepness of the shore there was little difficulty in launching the smallest boat. The Scoutmaster steered, while Atherton and Green rowed.

"Isn't the water clear," said Green, looking over the side. "I wish we could have a bathe."

"All in good time," replied Mr Trematon. "There's a splendid bathing cove just past that point of the island, where there is hardly any current."

"How do we get there, sir?" asked Atherton. "The cliffs rise straight from the sea."

"There's a path leading to a cave, that in turn communicates with the sea. It used to be a favourite smugglers' haunt a century or more ago. Easy now, Green, we're nearly there."

The boat's forefoot grounded on the sand; Green jumped out and secured the painter, while the Scoutmaster and the Leader stowed the oars and sprang ashore.

"Here's the mast," said Mr Trematon, indicating a thirty-foot pole lying on the little stone quay. "I see Varco has rove some signal halliards—thoughtful man."

"It's a lump, sir," remarked Green. "How are we to get it into the boat? It will project ten feet at each end, and we will have no end of a job to row."

"I don't mean to place it in the boat. We'll tow it. Atherton, make this rope fast to that ring-bolt: we'll parbuckle the spar."

The Leader knew what his Scoutmaster meant. To push the mast over the edge of the quay would scratch the paint and roughen the wood. Making the end of his rope fast to a ring about a foot from the edge of the wharf, Atherton waited till Mr Trematon had performed a similar operation, the two ropes being twenty feet apart. Carefully the spar was rolled till it rested on the ropes, the "free ends" of which the Scoutmaster and Atherton held.

"Push the mast over the quay, Green," said Mr Trematon.

The pole, prevented from falling by the bights of the ropes, was now easily and slowly lowered into the water, and attached by its tapered end to the stern of the boat.

"That went smoothly enough, sir," said Green.

"Yes, two men can parbuckle a suitably-shaped object of thrice their combined weight. All the same it won't be such an easy task to haul the mast up the slope of Seal Island."

Upon landing on the Island, Atherton took the tapering end on his shoulder, Mr Trematon and Green supporting the heavier end.

"Don't keep step," urged the Scoutmaster, "or the mast will sway and possibly capsize us. Now, proceed."

It was no light work carrying the thirty-foot spar up the steep path, but dogged energy prevailed, and before it was half-past six the flagstaff was in position, ready for the hoisting of the Union Jack.

The first call on Hayes' bugle brought the Scouts from their tents. Baker and Pat Coventry, who overnight had been detailed for cooks, raced off to construct earth ovens and light fires. Sayers, Scott, and Armstrong, the three Tenderfoots, marched off with buckets to bring a supply of water from the spring that the Scoutmaster had pointed out; Everest and Fraser took a boat and crossed to the mainland to procure milk, eggs and bacon from the farm; while the rest of the two patrols opened up tents and aired the bedding.

At seven, coffee and bread and butter were served out: not a standing meal, but merely a "stay" before breakfast. This was followed by prayers, then all hands fell in for bathing parade.

All except Atherton and Green were somewhat surprised when Mr Trematon led the way, not to the landing-place, but up hill in the direction of the ruined hermitage.

"What's that?" exclaimed young Armstrong, as a small brown animal with a tuft of white on its tail darted into a hole on the site of the path. "Why, I believe it's a rabbit."

"Look, there are dozens of them," added Everest, pointing to a hollow about two hundred yards off. "There they go as hard as they can."

"Yes, the Island is overrun with them, and so is most of Sir Gwinnear's estate. The farmers look upon them as a pest, and destroy as many as they can."

"Why pests, sir?" asked Phillips.

"Because they eat the grass that feed the sheep, nibble the young corn shoots, undermine hedges, and so on. Of course, they are not so numerous as in Australia, where agriculture is threatened with disaster by their depreciations. One day, Phillips, you can have a chance of shooting a few for our dinner. It will be necessary for you to get a gun licence before you can carry a gun. I'll see to that, however. But steady now: here's the entrance to our bathing cove."

"What, here, sir?" asked several of the lads in chorus, and in a tone of incredulity, for the place indicated by the Scoutmaster was a circular hole surrounded by a ruinous stone wall. "Yes: follow me. Mind where you tread. It's quite safe if you take reasonable precautions."

The shaft, a natural tunnel, was descended by means of a spiral path, in places less than three

feet in width, a rusty iron handrail—a relic of the good old smuggling days—serving as a none too reliable protection.

At eighty feet from the summit a steeply shelving floor was reached, whence a long, irregular tunnel led seawards. For part of this distance the place was in almost total darkness, while the air was moist and chilly.

Presently the tunnel began to get lighter, and the rocky floor gave place to a carpet of smooth white sand, terminating at the water's edge.

"What a ripping bathing-place, sir," exclaimed Neale.

"Come on, lads, let's see who will be the first in," shouted Coventry major, hastily slipping off his scanty garments: an example that the others followed.

"Steady, boys," said the Scoutmaster. "Not so fast. I know that you can all swim more or less: but what precautions are you taking against accidents?"

"We're all together, sir," replied Coventry senior. "If needs be there is plenty of assistance ready."

"Quite so," assented Mr Trematon. "But that is hardly sufficient. I remember the case of a party of fifty soldiers bathing together. One of them suddenly sank without a shout, and he was not missed until the men paraded to march back to barracks. So I think we will have a boat out. The two Leaders and I will man the craft, and we can have our swim afterwards."

"A boat, sir? We will have to go back to the landing-place to fetch one."

"No need to do that. Come this way."

A few feet above high-water mark a side passage branched from the main tunnel, and within it was a small rowing boat about twelve feet in length, with oars and thole pins ready for use. A life-buoy and a length of rope lay under the sternsheets.

"This is one of Peter Varco's boats," said Mr Trematon. "He always keeps it here for the use of visitors who come to the place—Dollar Cove it is called—for bathing. He told me we could make use of it."

"Why is this called Dollar Cove, sir?" asked Basil Armstrong.

"They say a Spanish treasure ship was wrecked on the west side of Seal Island, and that her precious cargo was strewn over the bottom of the sea. Curiously enough the only coins ever washed ashore have been found at the mouth of this cove."

"Should we find any if we looked, sir?" asked Fraser.

"That I cannot say; but suppose instead of standing here in the cold we launch this boat?"

Soon the placid waters of the bathing-cove were disturbed by the splashing of the lads of the two patrols, and all were somewhat reluctant to hear Mr Trematon's voice calling for them to come and dress.

When the Scoutmaster and the Headers had had their swim the Scouts made their way to the top of the natural staircase, and, doubling, returned to the camp glowing with health and excitement.

Directly the bedding was replaced and the tents tidied, breakfast was served. The camp oven fires had been banked up, and a plentiful supply of hot water was instantly available. Eggs, boiled in salt water,—which, according to Mr Trematon's idea, were far more appetising than if done in fresh water—small flat loaves baked on hot ashes, and cocoa formed the repast.

"Whatever is the matter with you, Hayes?" asked Mr Trematon as the Scout gave a partly suppressed gurgle, rolled his eyes, and clutched his throat with both hands.

Without replying Hayes suddenly bolted, while the Scoutmaster and several of the Scouts followed to see what was amiss.

"The bread, sir," gasped Hayes, after several attempts to make him explain.

"The bread? What's wrong with it."

"It tastes horrible," replied the victim. "I feel awfully queer."

Just then young Coventry came running up, making similar grimaces to those of the first sufferer. He in turn was followed by little Reggie Scott, who, though undoubtedly equally as upset as his bigger comrades, kept himself more under control.

"It's the bread, sir," he announced, holding up half of one of the flat cakes. "I believe there's oil in it."

The Scoutmaster took the proffered bread and smelt it.

"You're right," he replied. "It is paraffin. What on earth have Baker and Pat Coventry been doing? Cheer up, you sufferers; you're not poisoned. Smile and look pleasant, and we'll hold a court-martial on the cooks."

Further examination revealed the fact that all the bread was tainted with the unpleasant odour of paraffin. On being questioned Pat Coventry replied that he took no part in making the dough, while Baker admitted that he had noticed an oily substance on the water when mixed with the flour.

"I skimmed it off, sir," he explained. "I didn't know that it was paraffin."

"Haven't you a nose? Why didn't you use your sense of smell?"

"I didn't think of it, sir."

"Well it cannot be helped now; another time, if you have any doubts, ask me. That's what I am here for," said Mr Trematon. "Serve out the biscuits, Atherton. The bread is useless. After breakfast we must find out how the paraffin got into the flour. But it's close on eight. Fall in."

The two patrols, staves in hand, lined up under their respective Leaders on either side of the flagstaff. The Union Jack was toggled to the halliards, and at the hour the ensign was slowly hoisted, while the Scouts stood alert and loyally saluted the Emblem of Empire.

"Sit easy!" ordered the Scoutmaster, and the Scouts sat down to listen to Mr Trematon's instructions.

"This is our first complete day in camp," he said, "and we can hardly hope to get into proper working order so soon. During the rest of the morning we must make more arrangements for our welfare. Coming in late last night we contented ourselves by merely pitching the tents. Had it rained, there would have been considerable discomfort on Seal Island, I fear. By this evening I hope to have the whole routine outlined, so that we may carry out our daily programme without a hitch. Simpson, I want you to take Armstrong and Hayes with you, cross to the mainland and purchase a sack of flour. Four of the 'Otters' will take spades and dig trenches round the tents and other holes where required. Four of the "Wolves" will attend on the cooks. and build a watertight hut for the kitchen. The rest of you can construct mattresses of bracken. You remember instruction was given on that subject only a few weeks ago. Now set to work and see how much you can do before one o'clock."

Calling the two cooks to accompany him, Mr Trematon walked over to the spot where the temporary ovens had been erected. A brief inspection showed the cause of the failure of the breakfast arrangements. In loading the boats for the journey across to Seal Island a can of paraffin had been dumped alongside the sack of flour, and the screw top of the former having worked loose a portion of the oil soaked into the flour.

During the rest of the morning the lads worked hard putting the camp in order. Trenches to drain the surface water in a possible heavy downpour of rain were dug round the tents; a mud and wattle hut, large enough to afford complete shelter for the cooks and their utensils, was erected; while a large tub was sunk in the little stream fed by the spring, so that a supply of fresh water was easily obtainable without having to make a lengthy journey to the fountain head.

The mattresses, too, were in a forward state. The frames of these were constructed of straight branches, the side pieces being five feet six inches in length, the head two feet, and the foot fifteen inches. By tapering the shape of the cots it was possible to arrange them systematically round the tent, so that each Scout slept with his feet towards the tent-pole. A coarse netting of thick twine filled the space between the cot frames, and through the meshes bracken was woven, forming a springy and comfortable couch, the frames being raised sufficiently to prevent the "sag," caused by the sleepers' bodies, from touching the ground.

For dinner, boiled bacon, cabbage and potatoes and suet pudding were provided, and the cooks of the day did themselves credit, as if to atone for the spoiling of the breakfast. True, Tom Mayne found a boiled caterpillar in his share of the cabbage, and Coventry minor all but swallowed a piece of string that had been mixed up with the suet, but as the Scoutmaster remarked such incidents are really blessings in disguise, since the lads afterwards carefully examined every portion of the dinner and thus prevented any undue haste in eating.

"It is certainly advisable that we should make ourselves thoroughly acquainted with our temporary domain," said Mr Trematon, after dinner was over. "It is now half past one. We will rest for half an hour and then set out for an exploration of Seal Island."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MYSTERIOUS FOOTPRINTS

At the expiration of the stipulated time, preparations were made for the circuit of the Island. The "Otters" were ordered to take their staves, while to the "Wolves" was allotted the task of carrying several lengths of two-inch rope, iron crowbars, a pair of double "blocks" and a pair of single ones. Mr Trematon did not give the reason why these articles need be taken, and speculation as to their use ran high.

"Two lads must remain as camp orderlies," he remarked. "Who will volunteer? Remember a volunteer is worth two pressed."

There were several moments' hesitation. All were exceptionally keen on the trip, and the suggestion that two of them should remain did not appeal to them in a favourable light.

"I will, sir," said Atherton.

"No," rejoined the Scoutmaster. "The Leaders are exempt, since they are responsible to me for their patrols."

"I'll remain, sir," exclaimed Tom Mayne.

"That's good. Now, then, a volunteer from the 'Wolves.' That will be fair, won't it?"

Coventry major signified his willingness to stay, for although in different patrols the two lads were close chums.

"That's settled," continued Mr Trematon. "Now, orderlies, you must not go beyond the limits of the camp, except down to the landing-place. You are to receive any visitors that may come to the Island, and show them round, giving them any information as courteously as you can."

In high spirits the two patrols set out, their first halt being at the ruined oratory. Here Mr Trematon explained the use and nature of these buildings in mediaeval days, how that recluses devoted their lives to prayer and watching. No doubt many vessels in pre-Reformation days owed their safety to the friendly light that burned every night from hundreds of oratories scattered round the coast.

The ruins being situated on the highest part of the Island, the Scouts had an extensive view of the Cornish shore and of the expansive Bristol Channel. The day was clear, and the water was dotted with ships of all sizes, all looking like miniature boats in the distance. There were colliers, distinguishable by having their funnels well aft; tramps, rusty-sided, and with stumpy masts serving mainly to support the derricks for handling cargo; topsail schooners, in which most of the coast-wise trade between the smaller ports is now carried on; Bristol Channel pilot boats engaged in keen competition to pick up a job; and a host of small fishing boats from the neighbouring ports of St Ives and Padstow.

"How far can we see out to sea, sir?" asked Tenderfoot Scott.

"That depends mainly upon the clearness of the atmosphere. From the height on which we are now standing—250 feet—we might be able to see nearly twenty-one miles."

"It's very clear to-day, sir," observed Fraser.

"Yes, too clear for my liking," asserted the scoutmaster. "Tregantle Head—over twenty-five miles away—stands up quite plainly. That's a sure sign of wet weather and probably a storm in addition."

"A storm! Will there be any wrecks?" asked little Reggie Scott, eagerly. "Will we be able to see them if there are?"

"I trust not," replied the Scoutmaster, solemnly. "I have seen several wrecks, and it is not an experience to be desired. Now, lads, forward. Bear away to the right. I want you to see that part of the Island nearest to Beware Head."

Through a dense belt of gorse and bracken, out of which the startled rabbits scooted with amazing rapidity, the Scouts trooped till Mr Trematon called to them to halt. They were then within ten feet of the edge of the cliffs that here descend abruptly for a distance of one hundred and eighty feet.

"Don't ever go closer to the brink of the cliffs than this, unless you have a line round you," cautioned Mr Trematon. "The ground might crumble under you, although there is far less probability of doing so here—where the rocks are composed of granite—than on the south-eastern coast of England, where the cliffs are of chalk and soft sandstone."



From where they stood the Scouts could see almost the whole extent of water between the Island and Beware Head, a sheet of deep blue sea interspersed with patches of pale green denoting sandy bottom between the weed-covered rocks. Long oily rollers came tumbling inshore with unfailing regularity, breaking with a smother of foam against the base of the headland.

"What makes those rollers, sir?" asked Baker. "There's very little wind, and farther out the sea is quite calm."

"It's called a ground-swell, and is said to be caused by a storm many miles out to sea. Their presence is also an indication of the approach of bad weather. I don't want to dishearten you, lads, but we must 'Be prepared' for all emergencies, and if we are I don't think our holiday will be any less enjoyable."

"There's a signal from the lighthouse, sir," announced Atherton.

"Now, then, signallers: what do you make of that?" asked the Scoutmaster, as a burst of flags fluttered from a staff rising from the gallery of the lighthouse.

"We can't make out, sir," replied Phillips and Neale. "They are not spelling anything."

"No, it is in code. The combination of those three flags means a message which we could only interpret if we had a signal-code book. One of those vessels 'made her number'—that is, has reported herself on first sighting a British signal-station—and the information will be telegraphed to Lloyd's. See, there's a keeper on the gallery. Watch him through your pocket telescope, Phillips, and when he looks this way tell Neale to call him up."

"What shall I semaphore, sir?" asked the Second of the "Wolves."

"Ask him for permission to visit the lighthouse," replied Mr Trematon. "Then, if he says yes, ask what day and what time will be convenient."

"He's looking this way, sir," reported Phillips.

Standing well apart from his comrades, Neale "called up" the lighthouse. In a few moments Phillips announced that the man was looking towards them through a glass.

"He's acknowledged, sir," continued the Second of the "Otters." "Another man has taken the glass from him."

"Carry on," ordered the Scoutmaster, and Neale began semaphoring with considerable rapidity and accuracy.

Back came the reply: "The keepers of Beware Head lighthouse will be pleased to show the Scouts over the building any day between 9 A.M. and one hour before sunset."

"Acknowledge and thank them, Neale. Say we hope to inspect the lighthouse tomorrow at 2 P.M."

"Has this point any name, sir," asked Phillips, indicating the northernmost limit of Seal Island.

"No, I think not," replied the Scoutmaster. "Suppose for our own convenience we give it a name. What shall it be?"

"Why not North Cape?" suggested Green.

"I am afraid it doesn't jut out sufficiently into the sea. It is bold and lofty; suppose we say North Head?"

"And the other extremities, East, South and West Heads, sir?" asked Sayers, the lad who shared with Reggie Scott the distinction of being the Tenderfoot of the "Otters."

"Very good," assented Mr Trematon. "The names are simple enough, which is a consideration, since there is little chance of getting confused over the various designations. Now, forward once more."

The route now lay in a south-westerly direction along an ill-defined track that followed the edge of the cliffs, which hereabouts attained a height of about eighty feet.

"We are now over what is known as the Tea Caves," announced the Scoutmaster. "These caves are well worth exploring, but at present I intend to show them to the 'Otters' only. The 'Wolves' must remain here and attend to the ropes, for we can only reach the caves by being lowered over the cliffs. The descent is, with proper precautions, perfectly safe, but a certain amount of nerve is required. Should any lad not feel equal to the task he is at liberty to fall out."

"So long as I don't fall in, I don't mind," remarked Tenderfoot Sayers, in an undertone to his chum Scott.

"If Mr Trematon says it is perfectly safe, 'nuff said," replied Reggie Scott. "I'm game." Lashing a

pair of staves together to form sheerlegs, the Scouts planted the ends into the ground so that the crossed portion overhung the cliffs. To the projecting end one of the blocks or pulleys was secured, while "guys" prevented the sheerlegs from toppling over. A rope with a bowline at one end was rove through the pulley for the purpose of lowering the explorers. The Scouts employed on this work were all provided with life-lines to guard against serious accidents should the cliffs crumble.

"That seems perfectly secure," said Mr Trematon, after he had put the gear to a severe test. "Now we are ready for the descent. At twenty-five feet from the summit of the cliff is a fairly broad path. Each Scout in turn will be lowered on to this ledge, and there he will stand easy till I rejoin you. Atherton, since you are the Leader, it is your place to go first."

Passing the bowline under his arms. Atherton walked to the edge of the cliff, sat down, and waited till the "Wolves" took the strain on the rope. Then, unhesitatingly, he slipped over the cliff, and was slowly lowered through the intervening twenty-five feet. It seemed a long distance, especially as the lad had to ward himself off the face of the granite cliff with his hands. He knew, as did his companions, that it was foolish to look down, even if secured by a bowline, and although the temptation to glance downwards to see how much farther he had to go was great he had sufficient strength of mind to carry out instructions.

Presently his feet touched fairly level ground; the bowline slackened. He found himself upon a rocky "bench" or path nearly eight feet in breadth, which sloped with irregular gradations towards the base of the cliffs.

Casting off the rope, Atherton called to his comrades to haul away, and he found himself cut off on the face of a wall of granite, that, save for a ledge on which he stood, looked as smooth as a board.

One by one the "Otters" were lowered. Finally the Scoutmaster descended, and the little party, eight all told, proceeded along the path leading to the caves.

"Funny name, sir," said Phillips. "Why do they call them Tea Caves—because the place is shaped like the letter T?"

"No, merely another reminder of smuggling days."

"Did they used to smuggle tea?" asked Everest.

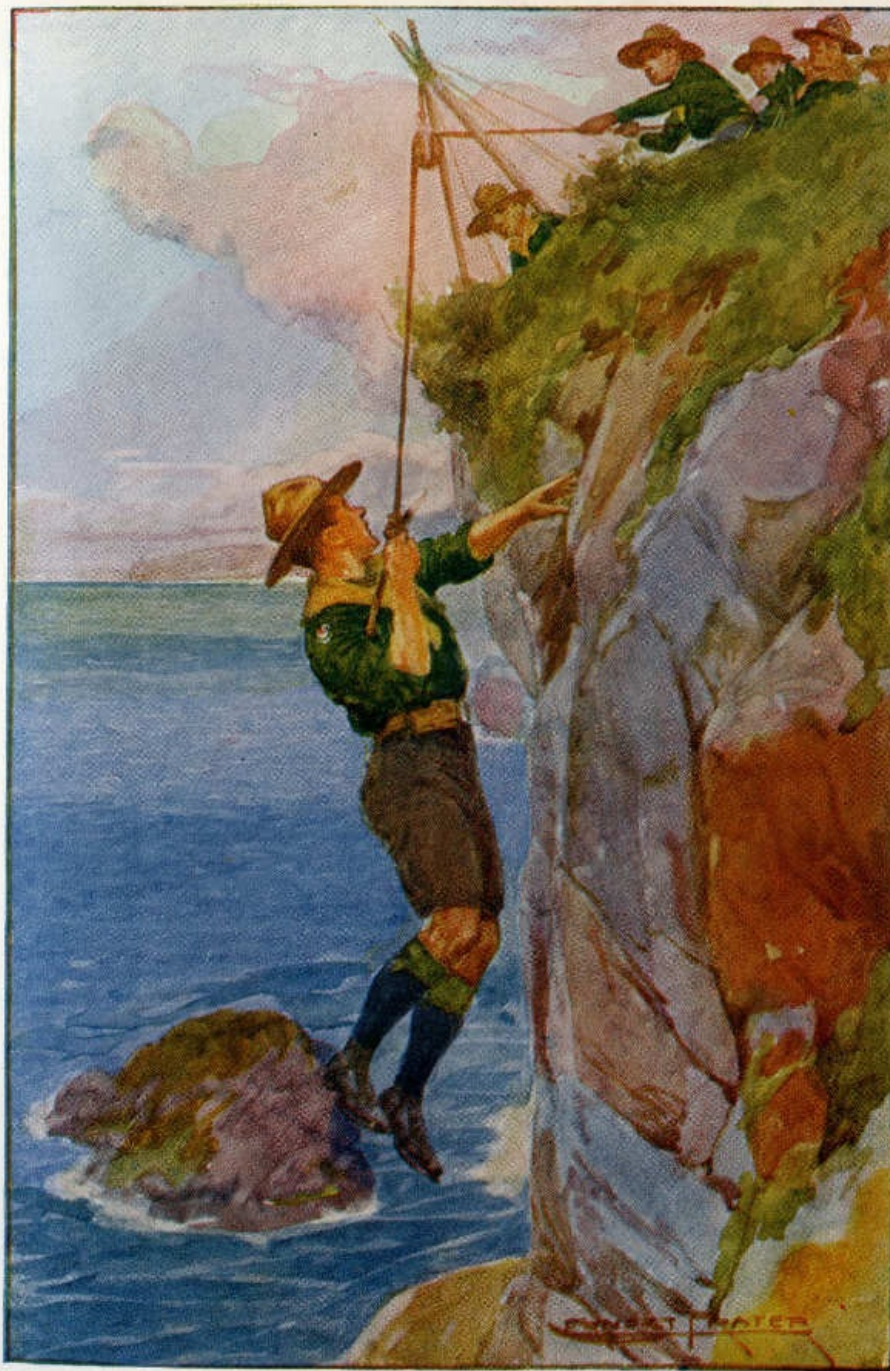
"Yes; in the eighteenth century there used to be a very heavy tax on tea in this country; hence smuggling tea was almost as paying a game as smuggling spirits and lace if the run came off successfully. Here is the main entrance; do you notice anything peculiar about the roof?"

"Yes, sir," replied several of the lads. "There looks as if there's a deep notch cut across it."

"That is where the smugglers used to hang a painted canvas curtain from to deceive the revenue people. Viewed from seaward it was almost impossible to detect the mouth of the cave."

"But how was the tea carried there? There is no place for a boat to land at the foot of the cliffs."

"That was another smugglers' ruse. The contraband goods were brought ashore at the same place as where we first landed on Seal Island. Wines and spirits were usually taken to Dollar Cove, and hidden in the cave we explored this morning. The chests of tea were carried across the Island, lowered over the cliff, taken along the path we have just traversed, and stored in these caves.



“He slipped over the cliff and was slowly lowered.”—Page 73.

[Illustration: "He slipped over the cliff and was slowly lowered." Page 73.]

By choosing a hiding-place not directly accessible from the sea, the law-breakers put the excise authorities off the scent."

"Isn't it dry here," remarked Phillips. "The dust on the floor is as dry as powder."

"Yes, and you will find that in a few moments our footprints will be wiped out by the wind smoothing over the sand and dust. Did anybody think to bring a candle?"

"I have two, sir," replied Baker.

"Good, lad!" exclaimed Mr Trematon, approvingly. "Quite a display of foresight, eh?"

"No, sir," admitted the Scout, candidly. "They fell out of a parcel as we were carrying the baggage up to the camp last night. I picked them up and put them in my pocket, forgetting all about them till you spoke."

"All the same they will be useful. Give one to Everest, and the two will be sufficient light for us to see our way."

"Are we going to use twine as a guide, sir?" asked Atherton. "I have a ball of it."

"Not necessarily in this case, Atherton," replied the Scoutmaster. "I know the ins and outs of this place very well, and after all they are not so very extensive."

At twenty yards from its mouth the cave apparently terminated, but Mr Trematon called attention to a small hole barely eighteen inches across, and almost on the floor level.

"Slip through, Atherton, feet first and let yourself drop."

Unhesitatingly the Leader obeyed. It was an uncanny sensation allowing oneself to drop into an invisible pit, but five feet from the edge of the hole Atherton's feet encountered soft sand.

"I'm all right," he said, his voice sounding hollow and unreal in the pitch dark cave.

"Follow on, you fellows," ordered the Scoutmaster. "Pass the light to Atherton, Baker."

Soon the "Otters" found themselves in a much larger cavern, the walls of which were most fantastic shapes, while the dust on the floor, no longer disturbed by air currents, showed that the place had been visited at no distant date. There were the footprints of a man, both going and returning.

"What do you make of these, Atherton?" asked the Scoutmaster, pointing to the tracks on the sand.

Candle in hand, the Leader knelt down and examined the footmarks.

"They are the footprints of a man wearing a ten boot," he announced. "They are not those of a working man, I think, because there are no hobnails. The person, whoever he is, seems to be a timid individual, as he evidently walks on his toes; the impression of the heels are much fainter."

"A good deduction, Atherton; it looks as if we are on the verge of a mysterious discovery."

"What if the man is still in the cave, sir?" asked Green, cautiously. "He might be listening to what we are saying."

"No fear of that," replied Mr Trematon. "There has been only one man here recently, and his tracks show that he came and went again. Follow the footprints, Atherton, and see if you can make any more deductions."

Keeping by the side of the trail in order that the marks should not be obliterated the Leader proceeded slowly and cautiously, the rest of his companions following.

Ten yards from the "needle's-eye," that served as a means of access to the inner cave, Atherton discovered one used and two unused wax vestas.

"What do they suggest, Atherton?" asked Mr Trematon.

"I think, sir, that they confirm my previous theory. A poor man is not in the habit of carrying wax vestas. He is usually content with Swedish safeties. Besides, this person is evidently careless and wasteful, since he drops two unlighted vestas."

"So well, so good, Atherton," replied the Scoutmaster. "Now let's proceed."

Once or twice the tracks became confusing, since the footmarks crossed each other; but with little difficulty Atherton followed the in-going track till they stopped at a deep niche in the rocky walls on the right-hand side of the cave.

In the candle-light Atherton thoroughly examined the sand and dust. A piece of charred newspaper attracted his attention. He picked it up, unfolded it, and studied the printing.

"Quite recent," he commented. "Here is an account of the King's visit to the new Naval and Military Orphanage at Bexhill. That took place on Saturday, so that if this is not a portion of a Sunday paper, it appeared yesterday. That proves, I think, that the person, whoever he is, visited the cave as recently as yesterday."

"No doubt it was a tourist, keen on visiting the Tea Caves," suggested Everest. "His supply of matches ran short, so he made a torch of a piece of newspaper. After all there's nothing in that, except that it has given us a chance to practise spooring."

"I am not so sure of that, Everest," said Mr Trematon, quietly. "In the first place the Tea Caves are difficult of access, and a stranger would enlist the services of one of the local fishermen as a guide. This man comes alone. Secondly, he visits the cave with an avowed object: he walks straight to this place, stands almost in the same spot for some time, and then kneels. The impressions of his toes and one knee prove that. Then he returned to the open air as directly as he came."

"Perhaps he's buried something, sir," suggested Sayers.

"For the time being we will let our investigations rest," said Mr Trematon. "We have no spades

with us, and should the mysterious visitor return he would notice that the soil had been disturbed, and become alarmed and suspicious. So we must endeavour to detect the man should he come again. If he were here for no good purpose it is more than likely that he will not revisit the Tea Caves till after our camp is struck."

"You mean us to dig, sir?" asked Reggie Scott.

"Yes. Unless anything unforeseen occurs we will bring spades and thoroughly examine this portion of the ground on the day before we return home. But we must be off or the 'Wolves' will wonder what has happened to us. Cover your footprints, lads."

The Scouts' footprints were carefully obliterated as they retraced their steps, an empty haversack drawn over the trail completing the finishing touches. Only a minute inspection would reveal the fact that a party of lads had traversed the inner cave.

"What have you been up to, Atherton?" asked his chum Simpson, as the Leader of the "Otters" was hauled up to the top of the cliff.

"Wait and see," retorted Atherton, laughing. "That's all right, Simpson. Mr Trematon will tell you everything round the camp fire to-night."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MISSING THOLE-PINS

"I HAD no idea it was so late," exclaimed the Scoutmaster, consulting his watch. "There is not enough time for us to explore the south-western portion of the Island. There is something very interesting to be seen there, but as I want to give you fellows a little surprise I won't say what it is. Perhaps tomorrow we will find time to complete the circuit of the Island."

Hungry as hunters the Scouts returned to camp, where Mayne and Coventry senior had a sumptuous tea awaiting them.

"Anything to report?" asked the Scoutmaster.

"Yes, sir," replied Mayne. "Mr Trebarwith, of Polkerwyck Farm, has been here. He brought three dozen eggs and several pounds of Cornish cream as a present. He wouldn't hear of payment when I suggested that you would square up with him. He also invites us to visit his farm to-morrow at half-past nine."

"What did you say to that?"

"I thanked him, sir, and said you would let him know this evening."

"Very good. After tea you might take a message for me. Now, lads, set to, for if you are all as hungry as I am we will make short work of this provender."

"No one else landed on the Island, I suppose?" asked Atherton.

"No, Peter Varco rowed Mr Trebarwith over, and he remained in the boat. Why do you ask?" questioned Coventry major.

"Because we came across the spoor of a recent visitor in the Tea Caves," replied Atherton, and at Mr Trematon's suggestion the lad gave his companions of the "Wolves" and the two former guardians of the camp a detailed report of what had occurred.

After tea, the Scoutmaster wrote a letter to the genial farmer, accepting his invitation, and stating that he hoped to bring the Scouts to Polkerwyck Farm to-morrow at nine-thirty. Mayne and Baker were despatched to take the missive to Mr Trebarwith, while the others were free to amuse themselves at camp games till half-past seven, when the camp fire was lighted for the customary evening palaver.

Just before sunset Mr Trematon called the Leaders and Seconds of both patrols aside.

"Atherton and Simpson, I want you to take charge of the camp till I return," he said. "Phillips and Neale will no doubt feel up to an evening stroll. I have reason to revisit the cliff immediately above the ledge leading to the Tea Caves."

As the Scoutmaster and the two Seconds passed by the ruined oratory, Neale called attention to the wild yet beautiful sunset tints. There were streaks of deep purple, orange, pale yellow and



indigo in the western sky, while rugged, dark grey clouds, tipped with copper-coloured points, gave every indication that the bad weather was at hand.

"Yes," assented Mr Trematon, "the colours are remarkable. What do you say to a little experiment?"

"An experiment, sir?" asked Neale. "How?"

"Stand here, both of you, side by side," said the Scoutmaster. "Backs to the sunset: that's right. Now stretch your legs wide apart, place the palms of your hands together and bend forward till your fingertips touch the ground."

The two Scouts promptly obeyed, wondering what was the reason for this exaggerated "leap-frog" posture.

"Now look at the sunset," continued Mr Trematon.

"The colours are ever so much brighter," exclaimed both lads, who, heads downwards, were observing the western sky between their outstretched legs. "They look too bright to be real."

"All the same they are natural colours. Stand up now, or the circulation of the blood towards your head will be obstructed. Yes, it has a peculiar effect. An artist friend of mine gave me the tip. By so doing one can see the vividness of an Italian sky in the corresponding misty atmosphere of our native land. But we must be moving."

Arriving at the edge of the cliff, Mr Trematon produced from his pocket a reel of black cotton. Cutting three or four twigs from a neighbouring bush, he set these in the ground so that they projected four inches from the surface. Their exposed ends he connected up by a length of cotton.

"If anybody comes here, the broken thread will give us proof," exclaimed the Scoutmaster. "I do not suggest that anyone will come, but if they do this is the best means of detecting their presence without giving them cause of suspicion."

"But the cotton only stretches for a distance of about ten feet, sir," remarked Phillips. "If anyone descended to the ledge from a point farther along the cliffs, this arrangement would not give any warning."

"I am afraid, Phillips, you didn't use your eyes sufficiently this afternoon. If you had you would have noticed that at all other places except this the cliffs overhang the ledge, and anyone being lowered would drop clear of the path leading to the caves. Hence it is reasonable to conclude that anybody knowing of the existence of the caves would naturally know the easiest means of gaining the ledge. Do you follow?"

"Yes, sir," answered the Second.

"Now let us be off, back to the camp. Those fellows are enjoying themselves to be sure. You can hear them quite plainly at this distance—it is another sign that stormy weather is near when sound travels clearly over a long distance."

Ten minutes after "Lights out" the camp at Seal Island was wrapped in slumber. Dead tired with their exertions and aided by the health-giving fresh air, the Scouts were soon lost to the world, till a blaze of red in the eastern sky betokened the dawn of another day.

Before *réveillé*, Atherton was up and about. His mind was full of the tracks that had been discovered in the Tea Caves. It was not presentiment that influenced his thoughts. His deductions were based upon actual facts that were certainly suspicious. On the other hand the mysterious visitor might have gone to the cave for a perfectly legitimate purpose. In that case the following up of the clues would result in nothing more or less than a little practice.

Something more than curiosity prompted him to run across the Island to the edge of the cliffs by the caves. Phillips had told him of the harmless and effective booby-trap that the Scoutmaster had prepared.

The cotton had been snapped.

Atherton knelt down and examined the ground, but the dew lay thick upon the long grass, and no sign of human footprints was visible.

Upon his return to the camp, the Scout found Mr Trematon clad in a long overcoat, for the morning air was chilly.

"The cotton has been broken, sir," announced Atherton.

"I am not surprised," replied the Scoutmaster. "As a matter of fact I expected that it would be, for by a stupid blunder on my part I tied the thread without making allowance for its shrinking through the moisture of the night air. But apart from that, Atherton, I have made a discovery. Two of the thole-pins have been taken out of one of the boats."

"Perhaps Mayne and Baker brought them ashore when they returned from the mainland last night, sir?"

"Oh, no: I went down to the landing-place last night to see that the boats were properly secured. The thole-pins were in their proper places then."

"One of the fishermen, perhaps——"

"They are honest men, and it is against their primitive yet effective code of honour to trifle with the gear of anybody's boat. Still, although there is a faint possibility that such might have taken place, and we have an explanation for the broken thread, the double occurrences seem to suggest very forcibly that some one has landed on Seal Island during the night and has paid a visit to the Tea Caves."

"Are we going to explore the caves again to-day, sir?"

"If time permits. Our morning and afternoon are pretty full up: we may make an opportunity after tea. But turn those fellows out, Atherton; it's time, and there's a lot to be done before we pay a visit to Farmer Trebarwith."

As soon as the meal was over and the camp tidied up, the two patrols prepared for their trip to Polkerwyck Farm. The weather still remained calm and bright, and there was little or no wind. All the same the ground-swell was troublesome, as the "Wolves" learnt to their cost, for upon landing, a heavy roller threw their boat broadside on to the beach, and drenched the lads to the skin.

"It's salt water; it won't hurt," shouted Leader Simpson to his patrol. "Our clothes will be dry by the time we get to the farm."

Meanwhile Atherton had landed and was quietly and unostentatiously examining the other boats hauled up on shore or else lying within the shelter of the land-locked harbour. Presently he went up to Mr Trematon.

"There are our thole-pins, sir: I found them in that double-ended boat," he announced, pointing to a whaler lying just inside the old stone pier.

"One of Peter Varco's boats," observed the Scoutmaster. "Perhaps, after all, he had occasion to land on Seal Island last night. He might have gone to look at his boat in Dollar Cove. We'll ask him."

The old Cornish fisherman was discovered sitting in the sun and mending his nets by the side of his cottage.

"No, sir. Sure I hadn't no call tu go over tu t'Island last night. Now you comes tu mention it, sir, I did notice as 'ow some one 'ad a-meddled wi' my boat, the *Pride o' Polkerwyck*. Says I tu myself, 'Tis they young gen'lmen over up-along, wot come ashore last night."

"How did you know that one of your mates hadn't used her, Peter?" asked Mr Trematon.

"Sure, none o' they wud a-made fast the painter wi' a granny, sir."

"And none of my Scouts would have done so: that I feel sure," added the Scoutmaster with conviction. "No, Peter, it's not any of our lads. Some one, I believe, is in the habit of paying night visits to Seal Island."

"Better not let Roger Penwith, Sir Silas' bailiff, catch 'em," said the old fisherman with conviction. "All as goes tu Seal Island after sunset without permission be liable tu be taken up for poachin', sir."

Returning to the harbour Atherton and the Scoutmaster made a careful examination of the boat in question. The thwarts and bottom-boards were scratched and almost destitute of paint or varnish, but in addition to the innumerable traces of old Peter's iron-heeled boots, Atherton made the discovery that some one wearing indiarubber shoes had recently been in the boat.

"Size ten," he added, after measuring one of the footprints with his finger joint. "And seven bars across the soles."

"Pity we did not know of this before we left the Island, Atherton," said Mr Trematon. "However, we must keep a sharp look-out for a spoor up the road."

The two patrols formed up and began their two-mile march to the farm. The traces of the person wearing indiarubber shoes were at first fairly well defined. In spite of the large size the wearer had taken comparatively short steps, a circumstance that coincided with the discovery made in the Tea Caves. But half way up the hill the spoor broke away to the left. Here the short, sun-dried grass effectually baffled all farther traces.

The Scouts were, for the time being, baulked. There was nothing left but to continue their way to the farm.

## CHAPTER IX

### AT THE LIGHTHOUSE

"GOOD-MARNIN', Mr Trematon, and good-marnin' tu you young gen'lmen," exclaimed the genial farmer as the patrols halted outside the farmhouse. "Du'ee come right in and have a drink o' milk. Mary, du'ee ask missus tu bring a score o' glasses out; cups'll du, if there bain't enow."

Refreshed, the Scouts began their tour of inspection, their host accompanying them and answering to the best of his ability the innumerable questions with which his visitors plied him. Not once but a dozen times Farmer Trebarwith was forced to own himself beaten, so intricate were some of the problems put to him.

"There be Polkerwyck House," announced the farmer, pointing to a long, two-storeyed stone mansion lying in a broad valley snugly sheltered from the north and east by a steep, tree-clad hill. "Sir Silas Gwinnear lives there when he's at home, which ain't often. Heard the latest news about his affair in Lunnon, sir?"

Mr Trematon shook his head. Newspapers were to be almost strangers to him during the fortnight at Seal Island. Atherton felt a strange sensation in his throat; he realised that if the miscreants had been caught it meant an end to his holiday at Seal Island, since he would have to be one of the principal witnesses for the prosecution.

"The police says as that they knows who the villains are as half murdered Sir Silas," continued Farmer Trebarwith. "Only the rascals have padded the hoof—gone somewhares to foreign parts. They says as 'ow Sir Silas, bein' 'ead of the Associated Shippers' Federation—whatever that might mean—has upset some o' the dockers over the new scale o' payments, and the dockers have got their back up."

"Look, they're haymaking over there," exclaimed little Reggie Scott. "What fun it would be if we could toss the hay about."

"Du it, an right welcome, young gen'lmen," said the farmer. "Us be tur'ble short-handed, what with three o' my chaps 'aving gone to 'Merica, and two more down wi' mumps. Sure, I'd be main glad to see the hay safe under cover afore the rain comes on." And Trebarwith glanced anxiously towards the western sky.

"A chance to do a good turn, lads," exclaimed Atherton. "Tell us what to do, sir, and we'll tackle the job."

For the rest of the morning the Scouts toiled in the sultry air like young Trojans, tossing and carting the hay to one corner of the meadow where the farmer's men were at liberty to commence the construction of the rick. By noon, when the labourers ceased work to enjoy their mid-day meal of bread and cheese washed down with cyder, Farmer Trebarwith expressed his opinion that Scouts were main handy lads, and that, by their aid, he did not expect any difficulty in getting the crop safely under cover before the evening.

After a bounteous dinner provided by the grateful farmer, the Scouts formed up and started on their march to the lighthouse on Beware Head. Their route lay on the same road as far as Polkerwyck, and thence by a narrow cliff-path, skirting Seal Island bay to the promontory where the lighthouse is situated.

As the patrols were passing the Polkerwyck post-office—a small cottage converted into a general shop, draper's, grocer's, Chandler's combined,—a smart dogcart was drawn up outside. From the shop came a tall, ungainly and not prepossessing man dressed in black. His face was pale; his eyes deep-set, shifty and heavily lined underneath; his closely trimmed side-whiskers gave the appearance of a superior manservant.

Furtively looking up and down the narrow street and giving a supercilious glance at the passing Scouts, the man jumped into the dogcart and urged the horse at a rapid and unnecessary pace up the steep road leading towards Wadebridge.

Atherton asked and obtained permission to fall out, and giving the tip to his chum Simpson, induced that worthy to accompany him into the post-office.

"Two picture postcards and two halfpenny stamps, please," he asked of the old lady who was the local representative of His Majesty's Postmaster-General.

"It be middlin' warm, sir," remarked the postmistress, as she laboriously counted out the

change.

"It is," agreed the Leader of the "Otters." "By the by, I didn't know that Mr Jones lived anywhere about here."

"Mr Jones, sir?" asked the old lady in a puzzled tone.

"Yes, the gentleman who was in here a minute ago: the one who drove up in a dogcart."

"You must be making a mistake, sir," replied the old dame. "That bain't Mr Jones. No one of that name bides hereabouts—leastways I can't call the name to mind, an I've lived here maid and wife these sixty-seven years come Michaelmas. Sure, now, that wur Mr Tassh—Paul Tassh commonly socalled—as is butler up at the big house."

"Polkerwyck House?"

"Yes, Sir Silas' place."

"Thank you: I've made a mistake in supposing his name was Jones," said the Scout, and saluting he left the shop.

"I say, old fellow," exclaimed Simpson. "What's the move? You don't know anyone called Jones living about here, I feel certain."

"Neither do I," agreed Atherton calmly. "I only wanted to find out who that fellow was. He may be the man who paid a night visit to Seal Island."

"Of course he may be, but there are ever so many chances that he may not be," said the Leader of the "Wolves." "One thing I noticed: he was not wearing indiarubber shoes."

"It is not at all unusual for a man to change his shoes more than once in a day," remarked Atherton. "It was his walk that I noticed. He has big feet, yet he took very short steps. The suspicious way in which he looked over his shoulder did not impress me very favourably."

Before any more could be said the two Leaders separated to rejoin their respective patrols, and the ascent of the cliff path commenced. It was a tedious tramp up and down, as the route descended almost to the sea-level in order to traverse the numerous small streams that found their way into the bay. Five times the lighthouse was hidden by intervening ground ere the Scouts drew up at the whitewashed stone wall enclosing the lighthouse and the keepers' houses adjoining.

The lighthouse men were most painstaking in their task of explaining everything to their young guests. The clockwork and manual-worked machinery for actuating the occulting light, the ingenious construction of the lenses of the lantern, the usual and the emergency means of supplying its illumination—all were in turn shown to the Scouts, none of whom had ever been in a lighthouse before.

"Bill!" exclaimed one of the keepers in the midst of a technical discourse. "It's coming on thick. You can't see the Island already. Throw me the key of the rocket store."

The keeper addressed as Bill handed over the required article, and then drew back the curtains of the lantern room, which, during the day, were always kept closed in order to prevent the rays of the sun from damaging the dioptric lenses of the lantern. A sea-fog—another sign of an approaching storm—had banked up with considerable rapidity. Wreaths of vapour were curling over the waters of Seal Bay, while, as the keeper had announced, the Island itself was quite lost to view.

"This'll give you a chance to see how we work the explosive fog-signals," remarked the man, as he hauled down a fishing-rod-like apparatus from outside the lighthouse. "Here are the charges—gun-cotton, fired electrically; two every five minutes."

Securing the two cartridges to the forked ends of the rod, the keeper hoisted the latter to its former position and touched a key. A sharp crack, that in the outer air resembled the discharge of a seven-pounder, announced that the first of the warning signals had been fired. Ten seconds later the second was discharged, and the keeper lowered the holder to recharge it.

"What makes the light blink?" asked Scott.

"This revolving screen, sir," answered the keeper. "It is worked by the action of a slowly falling weight, after the principle of a grandfather's clock. We have to wind it every two hours. If that goes wrong we have to grind the lantern round by hand, and a precious stiff job it is."

"That's where we would come in handy," observed Baker. "Scouts to the rescue, eh?"

"All right, young gentlemen. I'll bear that in mind, and if the apparatus goes wrong while you are on Seal Island we'll signal for a party of you to bear a hand. There'll be stiff arms and aching backs in the morning, I'll warrant."

The inspection came to an end at last, and Mr Trematon led his Scouts out into the now dense fog.

Upon reaching Polkerwyck, the Scoutmaster went into the post-office, for since he had promised Phillips that he should be the hunter of the party, he had to get the lad a gun licence.

"Now you'll be all right, Phillips," exclaimed Mr Trematon. "To-morrow morning you can take my gun and see if you can knock over enough rabbits to provide us with dinner."

"There'll be a telegram for you, sir," said the post-mistress, handing the Scoutmaster a buff-coloured envelope. "Came in this afternoon, and Peter Varco told me as there was no one on t' Island to take it, so I kept it back."

Mr Trematon hastily opened the envelope and scanned its contents, then filling in a telegraph form he handed it in and left the shop.

"Lads," he explained, "I've had bad news. Circumstances demand that I return to my home at Guildford as soon as possible. Atherton, until I send some one to take charge, you must be Acting Assistant Scoutmaster. I know I can trust you. Here is enough money to carry you on for a few days, and here is the key of the portable locker. If I hurry I may be able to catch the evening train from Wadebridge. Let me know every day how you get on."

"We are sorry, sir," said several of the Scouts in chorus.

"Thank you, lads," replied the Scoutmaster. "I trust it is not so bad as the telegram leads me to believe. Can you get across to the Island all right in the fog, or shall I ask Varco to pilot you over?"

"We'll manage all right, sir," said Atherton confidently. "I have my pocket-compass, and I know the bearings."

"Very good; now good-bye, lads; I hope you'll have a decent time in spite of the impending weather."

"Good-bye, sir," shouted nearly a score of voices with genuine regret.

The next moment Mr Trematon, hurrying up the hill as fast as he could, was lost to sight in the fog, while the "Otters" and the "Wolves" remained on the stone quay of Polkerwyck till the sound of his footsteps faded into a silence broken only by the ground-swell upon the wild and rugged coast.

## CHAPTER X

### THE WRECK

"KEEP close in our wake, Simpson," cautioned Atherton, as the two boats cleared the end of the stone quay. "Give way, lads; long easy strokes."

It was an eerie experience to the two boats' crews, rowing in a dense mist that seemed to have a most bewildering effect upon all save Atherton, who, implicitly trusting to the small magnetic needle, knew that it was a matter of impossibility to miss hitting Seal Island somewhere. By having to frequently pull the starboard yoke-line Atherton realised that without the aid of the compass his boat would inevitably have described a wide circle, since the rowers on that side were pulling a stronger stroke than those on the port side.

"Rocks ahead!" shouted Everest, who was perched in the bows of the "Otters" boat.

"Stop pulling: backwater," ordered Atherton, and soon both boats were lying five yards apart and within twice that distance of the lee side of Seal Island.

"We've missed the landing, Atherton," announced Simpson.

"We have," agreed the Leader. "And what is more, I don't know on which side of it we are. One part of the cliff is very much like another. Look here, Simpson, you take your boat to the right, and I'll steer mine to the left: we cannot be very much out. The first one that finds the landing must give a hail."

The boats separated, both skirting the shore in opposite directions.

"There's some one rowing," exclaimed Everest. "Right ahead."

"I think it's Simpson's boat," replied Atherton. "It is difficult to locate sound in a fog."

Nearer and nearer came the sound, till Atherton knew that he was mistaken.

"Boat ahoy!" he bawled.

There was no reply. Whoever it was scorned to take notice of the hail, and the splash of the oars grew fainter and fainter.

"Here's the landing," announced Everest. "Why, that boat must have put off from there."

"Hope the fellow's honest," muttered Atherton, "or our camp might be ransacked. I didn't like his churlish manner in not replying. Shout to Simpson, Phillips, and let him know we've found the place."

As soon as the boats were hauled up and properly secured and their gear removed, the Scouts wended their way up the zig-zag path to the camp.

Atherton gave a sigh of relief to find that nothing had been interfered with. Speedily the tents were opened, the cooks tackled the kitchen fire, while foragers were sent to collect fuel and cover it up so that it might be dry for the morning.

As soon as the belated meal was over and the "camp fire" fairly in swing, Atherton called Simpson aside.

"What do you say to keeping watch all night?" he asked. "It may be a useless job, but there is something not quite right. I want to find out who the mysterious visitor to the Island is, and what he comes here for."

"I'm game," answered the Leader of the "Wolves." "We'll pick one fellow from each patrol and take two hours each; that will carry us through till sunrise, and I don't fancy any night prowler will be knocking about after that."

"Beastly rotten night to keep watch, though," commented the "Otters" Leader. "The mist is turning to rain. Tell those fellows to pile on more wood, make sure the tent pegs are firm and the guy-ropes eased off. They had better get into the tents before they get drenched."

With the rain the wind rose. At first it was content with moaning fitfully, but before nine o'clock it was literally howling, the explosive fog-signals still maintaining their accompaniment every five minutes.

"What's that noise?" asked Armstrong, in the interval between two stirring choruses.

The Scouts listened. Above the roar of the wind and the loud tattoo of the rain upon the drum-like canvas of the tents came a weird screech, like the shriek of a human being in agony.

"There it is again!" exclaimed Baker. "Perhaps some one has fallen over the cliff."

"It's too loud for a man's voice," said Simpson.

"All the same I don't like it," remarked Reggie Scott, in a subdued voice.

"Come on, kid, you're not afraid?" asked his Leader encouragingly, as he patted the Tenderfoot on the back.

"No, I'm not afraid," replied Scott. "But I wish that horrid noise would stop. There it goes again."

"Pick your man, Simpson," said Atherton, in a low voice. "I've spoken to Mayne and he's game. Phillips will remain in charge of our tent, and I suppose you will let Neale know that he will be responsible for order in the 'Wolves' tent."

"Think it's any use?" asked the "Wolves" Leader. "It's raining and blowing great guns, and a boat could hardly get across. We may be isolated here for days."

"Won't matter so long as the grub holds out," replied Atherton, cheerfully. "We'll stick to our plan. With greatcoats on we shall be all right."

As soon as the other occupants of the two tents were asleep, the two Leaders, with Mayne and Coventry major, donned their heavy coats and made their way down to the landing-place. It was hard work to prevent themselves being forced down the steep path at a break-neck pace, for the force of the wind behind them was terrific, but lower down the overhanging rocks afforded excellent protection.

"Got your flash lamp?" asked Simpson.

"I should jolly well think I have," answered Atherton. "Have you?"

"Yes; but, I say, will the tents stand it? It is blowing up there."

"They would have been down before this, I fancy," remarked Atherton. "There's that rummy noise again. What on earth can it be?"

"We'll find out to-morrow, if it keeps on," said Simpson. "Now, Coventry, you keep first watch: two hours, my fine fellow. We'll snooze in the hollow of the rocks. If anything suspicious occur, rouse us."

Sheltering as best he could, Coventry major took up his stand and commenced his lonesome vigil. He might well have been spared the task, for, although the Island acted as a kind of natural breakwater, the waves were beating so furiously on the landward side of the bay that it would be a matter of sheer impossibility for one or even three men to launch a boat.

At the end of his "trick" Coventry was relieved by Mayne, and he, too, cooled his heels in watchful inactivity. Atherton followed, and at length came Simpson's turn.

"Rain's knocking off," he remarked, as he took his chum's post. "That's one blessing."

"It will be daylight in less than an hour and a half. As soon as it is fairly light we will get back to our tents and have a decent sleep till half-past six," said Atherton. "I've neither seen nor heard a sign of anyone. There's only the howling of the wind, the noise of the fog-signals, and that peculiar shrieking sound to cheer you up, old man."

Once or twice to the lad's slightly overstrained nerves, Simpson imagined he saw something move, but unwilling to rouse his comrades he kept still long enough to make certain that his sense of sight had played him false. He was tired. Several times he caught himself dozing: his head would fall forward, only to recover itself with a jarring jerk as he became aware that he was on the point of sleeping at his post.

Suddenly, at no great distance off, came the heavy report of a gun.

The noise brought Atherton and his two companions out of their rough-and-ready shelter, and hardly able to realise what was amiss they rejoined Simpson.

"It was a gun; a vessel in distress off the back of the Island, I fancy," said the latter.

"Back to the camp for all you're worth," exclaimed Atherton. "We must turn the others out, and see if we can be of use."

But there was no need to arouse the rest of the two patrols. The detonation, sounding much louder on the higher ground than it had in the hollow where Atherton and his fellow-watchers had been sheltering, had effectually alarmed the Scouts, who, under Phillips' orders, had turned out in greatcoats, ready for action.

"Bring those ropes," shouted Atherton, striving to make himself understood above the howling of the wind, "and the large pulleys. There it goes again."

A vivid flash, outlining the crest of Seal Island, was immediately followed by the report, while simultaneously an answering rocket soared skywards from the coastguard station at Refuge Point. This was acknowledged by the lighthouse on Beware Point, and a message transmitted to Padstow summoning the lifeboat.

Bending to the storm the Scouts, bearing their gear, doubled towards the seaward side of the Island, in the direction indicated by the discharge of the gun.

Dawn was just breaking as they gained the edge of the cliffs. Below them, with her bows driven hard against an outlying rock, was a steamer of about eight hundred tons. Her funnel and masts had gone by the board, her foremast showing a stump of about ten feet above the deck. Cataracts of white water were pouring over her, while cowering on the fo'c'sle were about twenty men.

"What can we do?" asked Simpson anxiously. "We can't get a rope on board, and the cliffs are too steep to climb."

"Make fast the rope round me, old chap," said Atherton calmly. "I'm going to look over the edge to see what it is like down there."

Thus secured, the Leader of the "Otters" crawled over till he was able to command a view of the base of the cliffs.

The outlook was not promising. In the grey dawn the kelp-covered rocks were barely distinguishable from the water that lashed itself against the bulwarks of Seal Island. Close to the foot of the cliffs, and immediately below the place on which he was lying, Atherton descried a ledge about twenty feet in breadth. Although slippery with spray this flat-topped rock was sufficiently high to be out of reach of the actual waves. From it other lower ledges ran seaward, and between two of these the ill-fated steamer had piled herself up on the rocks.

"Simpson," said Atherton, hurriedly, "we must get half a dozen of our fellows down there. There we may be of use. Signal to the ship and tell them to try and send a rope ashore. It is impossible for us to heave a line to them in the face of this gale. Send down half a dozen staves after us: they



may come in useful."

While Simpson was flag-wagging the message, Atherton, Phillips, Green, Mayne, Everest and Baker were lowered down to the ledge, the two Tenderfoots of the "Otters" remaining with the "Wolves." Before the last Scout was down a man was observed standing in the bows of the wrecked craft. Wave after wave broke over him, but secured by a lashing he worked desperately in order to form a means of communication with the shore with a coil of rope and a life-buoy.

"Look out!" cautioned Atherton, as the life-buoy was hove into the raging waters. "We must get hold of that, somehow."

Jack Phillips, ever resourceful, had already uncoiled about thirty feet of thin but strong line, and had bent one end to the centre of his staff. Steadied by his companions the Second of the "Otters" stood on the brink of the ledge, his staff held harpoon-wise, ready to make a thrust at the life-buoy, that was momentarily drifting nearer and nearer the shore.

Up went his arm; the ash pole darted obliquely towards the crest of a wave on which the buoy was being swept. He missed the mark by less than a foot, and the life-buoy, left by the receding wave, was jammed in an almost vertical position between two jagged rocks.

"I must wait till the next wave shifts it," he bawled to his comrades, for the roar of the wind and waves made ordinary conversation inaudible.

With a smother of foam the next breaker hurled itself against the cliff. It was lower than the preceding one and failed to dislodge the life-buoy from its resting-place.

"Has it gone?" shouted Atherton.

"No," replied Phillips, "I wish it would." Then seized by an inspiration, he cast off the line from his staff, tied it round his body and called to his chums to lower away. The next moment he was on his way down to the stranded life-buoy.

It was a distance of only ten feet, but every inch of that space was fraught with danger. Not only was there a possibility of a huge wave dashing the young Scout against the rocks with resistless force, but there were risks of losing his hold on the slippery wall and of the cord that steadied him being unable to withstand the sudden strain.

Without mishap Phillips came within reach of the object of his dangerous task. He grasped the life-buoy, and shouted to the Scouts on the ledge to haul away. To his consternation there was no attempt to raise him to safety, while on the other hand a tremendous wave was bearing down upon him.

Phillips' first impulse was to let go the buoy and swarm up the rope hand over hand. On second thoughts he realised that it was his life against the lives of all the crew of the doomed ship, and to relinquish the means of communication at this juncture would be cowardly and selfish.

Planting his heels firmly into a niche in the rocks and setting his shoulders against the natural wall, Phillips unhesitatingly cast off the cord round his waist and bent it on to the life-buoy. The wave was now barely thirty yards off, and to the inexperienced lad it looked mountainous.

"Never say die," he muttered between his tightly clenched teeth; but all the same he realised that it was the tightest corner he had yet been into in the course of the sixteen years of his life.

Then a strange thing happened. The huge breaker was preceded by another of considerable less height. Pounding against the rocks the first wave rebounded and met the dangerous one just as it was on the point of curling ere it broke. The collision was insufficient to stop the oncoming wave, but it considerably checked its impetus. It broke; the solid water swirled over the lad's legs till it reached above his knees, while for the next few seconds he was gasping for breath as he swallowed the salt-laden air.

The work he had undertaken being accomplished, Phillips hesitated no longer. Hand over hand he dragged himself, encumbered though he was by his sodden clothing, towards the ledge, till to his unbounded relief he felt his wrists grasped by his companions.

"Where's the buoy?" asked Atherton.

"Haul away," gasped Phillips, "you'll find it," and too exhausted to say more he staggered to the base of the main cliff and sat down to recover his breath.

Foot by foot the saturated rope came home till the "Otters" hauled ashore a large block, through which was rove a heavier rope.

"It's a kind of life-saving line, lads," exclaimed Atherton. "Make fast the pulley as quickly as you can. Wedge these staves between these two rocks. See they don't slip: they'll stand the strain."

As soon as this was done a message was signalled to the ship announcing that all was in readiness.

Without delay those on board began to haul on the endless rope, and the Scouts saw a man, seated in a life-buoy, leave the stranded vessel.

The next instant he was buried in a white-crested wave. The strain upon the ropes was terrific, but they stood the test right well, and as the breaker swept ahead the man was found to be still clinging to the buoy. Thrice ere he was hauled to a place of safety he was overtaken by the waves, till quite exhausted the first survivor was assisted to the most sheltered position on the ledge.

Again and again the buoy made its double journey, and each time it returned with one of the crew. Ropes were lowered from the summit of the cliff, and as the rescued men were hauled up by the "Wolves" they were escorted to the camp, whither the three Tenderfoots had previously been sent to prepare hot coffee.

Four men only remained on board. The hull was already showing signs of parting amidships. The tide had fallen considerably, and the task of hauling the buoy with its living burdens up to the ledge continually became harder.

One of the four, slipping into the buoy, began the hazardous journey. Half the distance was accomplished in safety, when a huge wave swept over and passed the doomed vessel.



“Quite exhausted, the first survivor was assisted to the most sheltered position on the ledge.”—Page 114.

[Illustration: "Quite exhausted, the first survivor was assisted to the most sheltered position on the ledge."—Page 114.]

The Scouts felt the strain suddenly relax. When the breaker had passed, their worst fears were realised. The life-line had parted, the man in the buoy was at the mercy of the waves, and the retreat of the remaining three was cut off:

## CHAPTER XI

### HOW CAME PAUL TASSH ON SEAL ISLAND?

STEADYING himself on the rope, Atherton stood on the brink of the ledge and watched for the

reappearance of the submerged man. The buoy was floating, but for quite a quarter of a minute its late occupant was nowhere to be seen. When at length he rose to the surface, the buoy had drifted ten yards to leeward of him.

Fortunately the seaman was a swimmer, and without hesitation he struck out for the buoy.

"Haul in!" ordered Atherton, as the man grasped the life-saving object, and passed it over his head and shoulders.

Promptly the "Otters" obeyed, till the Leader ordered them to stop. Another wave was breaking, and should the man be caught close to the cliffs he would assuredly be dashed to death against the rocks.

Down came the mountain of water, but instead of carrying the seaman with it, it passed harmlessly by, expending its energy in a blow that raised a column of spray forty feet in the air.

"Now, haul!" bawled Atherton, and to his relief he saw the man drawn clear of the turmoil of foam and unceremoniously dragged upon the ledge.

"Signal to them to send another line ashore," ordered the Leader; but in reply the despairing message came from the wreck, "We have no more rope."

"Could I swim off to the ship?" asked Green. "I'll risk it."

"Impossible," replied Atherton. "It is hopeless to attempt to swim against such a sea."

"What is to be done?" asked Phillips. "We cannot stand here and let those fellows drown before our eyes."

Atherton shook his head. All that was humanly possible for them to do had been done. He knew that it was not the first time by any means that men had been drowned in full view of their would-be rescuers.

"Forepeak's full o' water," announced the last of the saved crew. "That's where there's many a coil o' rope."

"Couldn't they dive for it or fish it up with a boathook?" asked Atherton.

"Maybe they haven't thought o' that, sir," was the reply.

"Tell them to make another attempt to find a rope," ordered Atherton. "Failing that, their only chance is to jump overboard and trust that they lay hold of the ropes we lower to them."

But before Phillips could send the signal, Tom Mayne gave vent to a loud shout.

"Look! Look!" he exclaimed, pointing seaward. "The lifeboat!"

The Scout was right. Riding lightly over the mountainous seas was the red-white-and-blue painted lifeboat from Gwyll Cove. Under sail she stood down till within a cable's length of the wreck. To approach closer under sail or oars would be fatal, for the heavy seas would carry the craft upon the jagged rocks.

Breathlessly the Scouts watched the completion of their work of rescue. Anchoring well to windward of the wreck the lifeboat men veered out fathom after fathom of stout cable, till the craft drifted to within twenty yards of the fast-disappearing wreck.

From this distance it was a fairly easy matter to heave a loaded cane, to which was attached a line, across the steamer's deck, and in a very short time means of communication were established between the lifeboat and the doomed vessel.

One by one the three remaining seamen were dragged into safety; the lifeboat hauled out, buoyed and slipped her cable, and hoisted sail. Washed again and again as she pounded against the heavy seas, she beat up for Gwyll Cove, her errand of mercy completed.

"Come on, lads," said Atherton. "We must be getting back to camp."

Two by two the "Otters" were hoisted to the top of the cliffs, whither the last of the men rescued by the Scouts had preceded them. Breaking into a run, for their work and subsequent wait in the salt-laden atmosphere had chilled them to the bone, the lads made their way towards their temporary home.

Presently Phillips overtook his Leader.

"Don't stop," he panted. "Wait till I fall back a bit and then look at the left side of the ruins. There's some one watching us."

Atherton followed this advice. Standing close to the ruined chapelry, and clearly defined against the skyline, was a figure that the lad recognised as Paul Tassh, the butler at Polkerwyck House.

"How on earth did the fellow get to the Island?" thought the Leader. "It has been much too rough since yesterday evening for a boat to put across."

When he again glanced in the direction of the ruins, Tassh was no longer to be seen.

On first thoughts Atherton felt inclined to get both patrols to surround the man, for the Scout felt now perfectly convinced that he was the mysterious visitor to the Tea Caves. But, after all, Sir Silas Gwinneer's butler had as much, if not more, right to be on Seal Island than they had. The man's presence was certainly suspicious, but until he was actually detected in an act that would justify the Scouts taking strong measures, Atherton felt it advisable to lie low but at the same time keep his eyes and ears open.

The Tenderfoots had done their task right well, for upon arriving at the camp the other Scouts found that not only had the rescued men been provided with hot coffee and food but there was a liberal supply for the lads who had toiled so hard in their act of rescue.

The shipwrecked mariners were almost too overjoyed to thank their youthful rescuers. For a long time they could only pat the Scouts on the back and utter short, disjointed sentences of mingled admiration and thanks.

At last Atherton managed to learn the details of the disaster.

The wrecked vessel was the ss. *Polybus*, of Cardiff, homeward bound from Bilboa with a cargo of copper ore. In the fog she lost her bearings, and when the storm piped up and dispersed the mist she mistook the lighthouse on Beware Head for one farther down the coast. A blinding rain-squall shut out the loom of the shore, and ere it passed away the *Polybus* ran hard and fast aground on the ledges to the south-west of Seal Island.

"Who is the owner of the ship!" asked Atherton, who was jotting down the particulars in his note-book.

"Blest if I can tell you, sir," replied the seaman, who acted as spokesman. "Can any of you, mates?"

"Not I. S'long as I gets my dibs paid every month 'taint no business o' mine to know who the owners be."

The others replied in a similar strain, and for the time being Atherton was compelled to leave the answer to this question a blank.

"There's no getting across to the mainland to-day," said Atherton. "It has left off raining and we may have a chance of drying some of our clothes. You men will have to stay with us till the sea moderates sufficiently for us to put you ashore at Polkerwyck. We can let you have the use of a tent, and there's food enough to last us all for some days."

Although it was now fine, and there were occasional bursts of sunshine between the masses of swiftly driving clouds, the wind howled as loudly as ever. Nevertheless the Scouts were able to start a large fire, in front of which they and their involuntary guests dried their clothes.

Atherton's mind was fairly centred on the appearance of Tassh on the Island, and while the others were occupied he crossed over to where Phillips was standing with a pile of dried clothing under his arm.

"I say," he remarked. "Did you notice where the man went to? Did he go into the ruins?"

"No, he walked towards the shaft leading to Dollar Cove," replied the Second of the "Otters." "Baker spotted him and waved his staff and that made the man disappear sharp enough."

"Baker was a bit of a donkey to attract attention like that," said Atherton. "But I mean to find out——"

"Atherton, there's a man coming this way," announced Tenderfoot Sayers.

The Leader looked up. Approaching the camp was Paul Tassh.

The butler walked with short, jerky steps. His right shoulder was slightly higher than the other. His face showed that he was badly in need of a shave, for the lower part beneath his side whiskers was covered with a thick stubble.

"Good-morning, young gentlemen," he exclaimed, with a forced air of jauntiness.

"Good-morning," replied Atherton politely, as was his wont, although he distrusted the man.

"If I may be so bold as to ask, sir," continued the butler, "I should like a snack of something to eat. I've had nothing since yesterday morning."

"I think we can manage that all right," said Atherton. "What has happened to you, then?"

"Oh, I might just as well explain," said the man between the mouthfuls of bread and cold meat that the Scouts gave him. "My name is Todd—John Brazenose Todd. I am a stranger in these parts, having been staying in a cottage just outside Polkerwyck. Yesterday morning I thought I would like to visit the Island, so I hired a boat and landed. Before I could return the fog came on, and afterwards the terrible storm. Being of a retiring disposition I did not like to intrude, so I kept away from your camp and took refuge in yon ruins. But a man cannot fail to be hungry on two or three biscuits in twenty-four hours."

Atherton nodded. He knew, as did his fellow Scouts, that the fellow's story was a tissue of lies from beginning to end, and he wondered at his audacity when he could not have failed to notice the Scouts passing the post-office at noon on the preceding day. Atherton's only fear was that some of the Scouts might feel inclined to "chip in and give the show away"; but to his relief the lads left all the talking on their side to their Leader.

"There's not much to see on the Island," he remarked. "I suppose you know there was a wreck, and those men over there are some of the crew?"

"A wreck? 'Pon my word I didn't," replied Tassh. "Truth to tell I must have been sound asleep in the ruin. Never heard a sound. When was it?"

"At daybreak this morning," announced Atherton. "You must have been sound asleep if you failed to hear guns."

Paul Tassh finished his meal in silence, furtively eyeing the Scouts with a supercilious smile on his thin, bloodless lips.

"They're too jolly well taken up with fooling about to trouble me," he soliloquised. "All the same they are a confounded nuisance on the Island. Still, since my retreat is cut off, the only thing to be done is to put up with them. A fine yarn I'll have to pitch up when I get back to the House."

Meanwhile Phillips and Simpson had been busily engaged in signalling the names of the rescued men to the coastguard station at Refuge Point, and a request that a boat should be sent, if possible, to take the men off the Island.

To this the chief officer of coastguards replied:

"Well done, Scouts. We will put off as soon as the weather moderates. There is still too much sea running in Seal Bay."

It was not until five o'clock that afternoon that a temporary lull occurred, and with the utmost promptitude boats were launched from Polkerwyck besides one from the coastguard station.

"There be a telegraf for you, sir," announced Peter Varco, who was the first to land on the Island.

Atherton took the envelope. The message was brief and to the point: "Scoutmaster Buckley arrives Wadebridge Station 8.15 P.M. Send Scouts to meet him. Hope all well, Trematon."

"Everest and Baker," explained their Leader, "our temporary Scoutmaster, Mr Buckley, is coming by the 8.15 train. Mr Trematon has wired the information, and has asked me to send some Scouts to meet Mr Buckley. So get some one to put you across, proceed to Wadebridge as quickly as you can, and wait there till the Scoutmaster arrives. Hulloo! Where's that fellow, Tassh?"

Mr Tassh, *alias* Todd, was nowhere to be seen. Unnoticed in the excitement of the arrival of the boats, he had slipped off to the landing-place. There he told a portion of his plausible tale to old Roger Tregaskis. He knew that it would be hopeless to stick to the name of Todd, since he was well known to the inhabitants of Polkerwyck, but the yarn of how he had been cut off by the fog went down well enough, and old Tregaskis was profuse in his sympathetic expressions, and promptly offered to row Mr Tassh across to the mainland in order that he might keep an important engagement at Polkerwyck House.

"Good on you, lads!" exclaimed the chief officer of coastguards. "And without a rocket apparatus, too. Well, you did the lifeboat men nearly in the eye, this time."

"I don't know about that, sir," replied Atherton. "You see, we couldn't get the last three men off the wreck, and if the lifeboat hadn't turned up in the nick of time they would have been lost."

"All the same you were jolly plucky. I am proud to meet you, lads. Don't forget, if you've time to give us a look up at the station, we'll do our best to let you have a right good time."

"Thank you, sir," replied Atherton. "We will be very pleased to visit your station. We went to the lighthouse yesterday, and fully intended to ask whether we might visit the coastguard at Refuge Point some time next week."

"And by the by," said the coastguard officer at parting, "I suppose you know that any cargo or gear that comes ashore is to be handed over to the custody of the Receiver of Wrecks? I was going to leave a couple of hands to keep a look-out, but I guess you're quite capable and willing

to do that part of the business. If you should see anyone tampering with the wreck after the gale moderates, just signal to us, and we'll stop their little game."

"Very good, sir," replied Atherton then, as the weird noises that had so puzzled the Scouts during their all-night vigil commenced again, he asked, "What is that sound, sir?"

"A bit of a startler when you're not used to it, eh? That is the noise made by the blowing-holes on the south-west side of the Island. In rough weather, and at certain states of the tide, the waves force confined air through several small fissures in the hollows of the rocks. It's well worth seeing."

The various boats returned to the mainland with the rescued men, Everest and Baker having been given a passage in Peter Varco's craft, and once more Seal Island was untenanted save by the Scouts, the rabbits, and the countless seabirds.

"Thank goodness we've a chance to have a good sleep," ejaculated Simpson, with a sigh of utter weariness. "All the same I should like to know how came Paul Tassh on Seal Island."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BURGLARY

"GREEN," said Atherton, "I hope you are not so dead tired as I am: will you do me a good turn?"

"Rather, old chap," replied Green, without hesitation.

"Well, the four of us who stuck up on watch all last night are going to turn in at once. The other fellows won't be long after us, I fancy. What I want you to do is this—to take charge, maintain order, and keep watch for the arrival of Mr Buckley. Directly you hear the boat approaching the landing wake us up. We must give him a rousing welcome, you know."

"Right-o! I'll see to all that," assented Green. "My word, you do look tired."

"And I jolly well feel it," agreed Atherton, with an irrepressible yawn. "Now, you fellows, who's going to have a snooze?"

When Atherton awoke he could hardly believe his senses. It was broad daylight. The other occupants of the tent, thoroughly tired out with their exertions, were sleeping soundly.

The Leader sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Surely young Green never let me sleep like this on purpose," he muttered. "And the new Scoutmaster has arrived and I wasn't there to receive him and hand over the care of the two patrols. A pretty fine Scout I am; and a nice mess I've made of things."

In anticipation of being called at ten o'clock Atherton had "turned in all standing." He pulled out his watch. It was seven o'clock.

Unlacing the door of the tent, the Leader stepped out. The sun was shining brightly. The storm had passed, but the wind still remained fairly high.

Atherton gazed at the ashes of the camp fire. They were still red hot. An iron pot, suspended by a chain from a tripod, was hanging over the embers. The fire had evidently been kept up for long past midnight.

"I'll wake Green and ask him all about this," said Atherton to himself; but a comprehensive examination of the blanket-enshrouded fellows in the "Otters" tent revealed the fact that Green was not one of them.

The Leader made his way to the ridge tent that had been appropriated to the Scoutmaster's use. It was closed: the knot securing the flap was on the outside, and since it was quite evident that it was a matter of impossibility for the occupant of a tent to lace the flap on the outside, Atherton rightly concluded that Mr Buckley had not arrived.

He gave a sigh of relief; then, seized by an inspiration, he set off at a run towards the landing-place.

There, muffled in his greatcoat, and leaning heavily on his staff, was Phil Green. Hearing the approaching footfalls the Scout turned.

"What's the meaning of this, Green?" demanded Atherton.

"You told me to wait till Mr Buckley arrived," replied the Scout, without the faintest sign of reproach. "I am a bit tired, but really I've enjoyed myself. It was a beautiful sunrise. You missed something by not seeing it, Atherton."

Leader Atherton looked at the Scout to see if he could detect any signs of "pulling his leg" on Green's part.

"I'm sorry," he said at length. "It was my fault. I ought to have given more definite orders. Cut off now, and get something to eat and then turn in."

"Nothing to be sorry for, Atherton. It was like a bit of the real thing. But how about Everest and Baker?"

"Goodness only knows why they haven't turned up. I'll rout out the rest of the 'Otters,' and we'll tramp into Wadebridge directly after breakfast."

"Now, 'Otters!'" exclaimed Atherton, after the meal was over, "we are off to Wadebridge to bring in Everest and Baker, and find out why our temporary Scoutmaster hasn't arrived. The 'Wolves' can do camp duty till we return. By the by, Phillips, since Mr Trematon got you a gun licence you might just as well make yourself useful. There's his gun: you know how it works, and here are a couple dozen cartridges. See if you can't knock over enough rabbits to make a jolly good stew for supper to-night."

Accordingly Atherton, Mayne, Sayers and Scott manned one of the boats and rowed over to Polkerwyck. It was a fairly lively experience crossing Seal Bay, for there was still a heavy swell running in from the open sea; but at the expense of another drenching with spray—a circumstance that the Scouts were quite used to by this time—they landed safely on the lee side of the stone pier.

"Good morning, Mr Varco," said Atherton, as he formed up his diminished patrol on the quay.

"Good marnin', young gents. That be a fine piece o' work o' yours yestermorn."

"I'm glad we did what we were able to," replied the Leader. "By the by, did you see Mr Tassh come ashore yesterday?"

"Sure I did. He left t'Island in old Tregaskis' boat. What wur 'e a-doin' on t'Island I should like to know?"

"Wasn't it too rough last night for a boat to put off?" asked the Leader, since he could not satisfactorily reply to the old fisherman's question. "Two of our Scouts went to Wadebridge to meet the 8.15 train. I thought perhaps they couldn't get back, and had slept in the village."

"No, 'tweren't rough, in a manner o' speakin'. An no Scouts came this way up till eleven o'clock, that I du declare."

"Then they must have found a place to put up at in Wadebridge. Well, good-bye for the present, Mr Varco. We must be on the move."

As the patrol was passing the post-office the old lady came hobbling out with a small bundle of telegrams.

"These came in from Wadebridge this marnin'," she explained. "They were too late to be sent on from there last night. I was just a-going to ask Peter Varco if he'd mind a-taking them across to 'e."

"What's up now, I wonder?" asked Atherton, looking at the six envelopes.

The first one was from Mr Trematon: "Just heard of rescue. I am proud of my Scouts."

The second was from Mr Buckley: "Missed connection at Exeter. Arriving to-morrow morning 11.45."

The third completely mystified the Scout.

"Again I am indebted to Scouts for a good turn to me and mine. Am coming to Polkerwyck to personally thank you—Silas Gwinneer."

"What ever does Sir Silas mean?" asked Atherton. "How have we done him a good turn? I vote we reply to say that we do not know that we have done anything for him, unless he means that by helping Farmer Trebarwith complete his haymaking we have rendered Sir Silas a service in a roundabout way."

"Better wait a bit," suggested Sayers. "I am as much in the dark as you; but evidently Sir Silas knows more than we do. What's in the other telegrams, Atherton?"



Number four was from headquarters: "Well done, Scouts. Glad you know how to 'Be prepared.'"

Numbers five and six, couched in similar terms, came from two North London troops who had often co-operated with the 201st, and were well acquainted with the "Otters" and the "Wolves."

"My eye, they are making a song about it," remarked little Reggie Scott. "I wish you had let me bear a hand instead of sending me away to make coffee, Atherton."

"Yours was not the least part of the business, Scott," replied the Leader. "We were all jolly glad you did your part so well, I can assure you. But I agree with you, they are making a song about it. It reminds me of Shakespeare's words: 'Seeking a bubble reputation at the cannon's mouth.' That's what the bard said, eh, Phillips?"

"I don't know," replied that worthy. "I only hope we won't be bothered too much, or our holiday will be somewhat spoiled."

Maintaining a steady pace, the Scouts made light work of their march to Wadebridge. Arriving there they were greeted by Everest and Baker, who, looking as "chirpy as crickets," were patrolling the station platform.

"No luck yet," said the former, nonchalantly. "The Scoutmaster hasn't turned up yet."

"Why didn't you return last night, then?" asked Atherton.

"Return? You said we were to wait for Mr Buckley. We've had a ripping time. One of the porters made us a jolly bed in the waiting-room, and the stationmaster gave us supper and breakfast. And we know an awful lot how railways are run now, Atherton. You've missed something."

After being told this on two occasions that morning, Atherton began to think he really had missed a novel experience.

"We've had a wire," he remarked. "Mr Buckley is arriving by the 11.15. Only another ten minutes to wait."

"Here she comes," announced Atherton, when at length the train was observed in the distance. "Form up, lads, and let's give our new Scoutmaster a proper Scouts' welcome."

So intent was Atherton upon looking out for the familiar Scoutmaster's uniform that he was startled to hear a hearty voice exclaim:

"Bless my soul, Atherton! You here to meet me! And these are your chums, eh?"

Turning, Atherton saw that the speaker was Sir Silas Gwinnear.

"No, sir, we are not here to meet you. We did not know you were coming by this train," explained Atherton. "All the same we are awfully pleased to see you. It is our new Scoutmaster we are waiting for. Mr Trematon had to go home on important business."

"Oh," exclaimed the Baronet with a slight tinge of disappointment. "No matter; we'll all run down to Polkerwyck House in my motor. Squeeze you all in at a pinch. Ha there is your Scoutmaster, I see."

Mr Buckley, having seized the opportunity of doing a good turn by assisting out of the carriage a very timid and fussy old lady with a heap of small parcels, had not been able to make a prompt appearance.

He was a heavily built man of about thirty-five, slightly above middle height, clean shaven; his full face and fairly heavy jaw denoting firmness and good temper. He had been a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, but owing to a gunnery accident that greatly impaired the use of his right arm, he was invalided on a modest pension. It was galling to him to be compelled to give up his prospects in the service, but he made the best of a bad job. In spite of his disability he took up a Scoutmastership, and soon worked his troop into a state of efficiency. Always ready to oblige his friends, Mr Buckley had willingly agreed to take over temporary charge of the Scouts of Seal Island, and now he was in touch with one of his future patrols.

Returning the Scouts' salute, Mr Buckley looked enquiringly at the gentleman who was waxing so enthusiastic over the lads.

"This is Sir Silas Gwinnear who is letting us have the use of Seal Island, sir," explained Atherton.

"And who is indebted to young Atherton for saving my life, and to him and his fellow Scouts for saving the lives of several of the crew of one of my ships," added the baronet.

"One of your ships, sir?" asked Atherton, in astonishment.

"Yes, the *Polybus*: you saw the account in this morning's papers, Mr—?"

"Buckley," said the Scoutmaster. "Yes, I saw the account in the papers, but I did not notice to whom the vessel belonged."

"Haven't you seen the papers, lads?" asked Sir Silas.

"No, sir," was the reply.

"H'm; when you do I hope you won't suffer with swollen heads, lads. All the same it was a gallant deed. Do you know, Mr Buckley, up to only a few days ago I held strong unfavourable views on the Scout movement. It will be unnecessary for me to state what they were as I am now convinced of my error. If all Scouts are like these—and I have been assured that they are no better and no worse than their fellows in all parts of the world—mankind owes a debt of gratitude to the founder of the movement. To show my practical appreciation of what these lads have done, I have come down to Polkerwyck House for the rest of the time they remain at Seal Island. Mr Buckley, I trust you will avail yourself of my offer and ride down to Polkerwyck in my car?"

"But these lads?" asked the Scoutmaster.

"They, of course, are included: the more the merrier. My car is a fairly large one, and I have no doubt that the Scouts can exercise their ingenuity in stowing themselves somewhere."

So saying, Sir Silas led the way out of the station to where a powerful six-seater was drawn up.

Sir Silas and the Scoutmaster occupied a seat each, one of the Scouts perched himself beside the chauffeur, and the remaining five contrived to squeeze in without regard to their cramped quarters. All the lads agreed that it was infinitely better than tramping up and down dale upon the hard granite roads, for the car, under the guidance of the skilled chauffeur, simply flew. Eleven minutes from the time of leaving the station the car drew up at the gates of Polkerwyck House.

The lodge keeper hastened to throw open the massive iron gates embellished with Sir Silas Gwinneer's arms, but before the chauffeur could restart, a sergeant of the Cornish constabulary, accompanied by a policeman and a plain-clothes officer, stepped up and saluted the baronet.

"Sorry to have to inform you, Sir Silas, that up to the present we haven't any clue," said the sergeant.

"Clue? What on earth do you mean, Coombes?" asked the baronet in astonishment.

"About the burglary, sir; haven't—"

"Burglary—where?"

"Didn't Mr Tassh wire to you, sir?"

"Certainly not. What's wrong now?"

"Mr Tassh reported to us early this morning that Polkerwyck House had been broken into during the night and a large quantity of silver had been taken away."

"My silver? Surely none of the presentation plate I had given me by Lloyds'?"

"Unfortunately, sir, that is missing."

"Come back to the house, Coombes. Drive on, Rogers."

"We had better get down, Sir Silas," suggested Mr Buckley. "I am sure that in this unfortunate trouble we do not want to thrust our company upon you."

"There's no thrust about it. Stay where you are, Mr Buckley, and you, too, lads. Now, Atherton, you're a sharp lad. You've been jolly useful to me twice, and there's nothing like three for luck. Use your wits, and put your scouting abilities to the test."

There was a constrained silence amongst the numerous servants as Sir Silas entered the hall of Polkerwyck House and led his youthful guests into the study.

"The police will be here directly," he observed. "Meanwhile I'll have the butler in and see what he has to say."

In a few minutes Tassh, dressed in his black suit, obsequiously entered the room.

"What's all this I hear, Tassh?" asked the baronet. "Some of my silver gone, eh? Tell me about it."

"I locked up last night, sir, as I always do. This morning when I came down at 7.30 the safe was open, and the silver, which you gave orders was to be placed there for safety, was missing. There were marks of a jemmy on the window-sash, and footprints on the flower-beds outside. I immediately told the housekeeper, and sent Williams on horseback to fetch the police."

"H'm; have you made a list of what is missing?"

"Not yet, sir; truth to tell I was so upset that I haven't recovered my normal self."

"It would have been better if you had recovered my silver," remarked the baronet, grimly. "Or better still if you had taken steps to prevent the burglars from making their haul. How about the electric alarm?"

Tassh hesitated before replying.

"It must have been out of order, sir."

"Then it was your place to see that it was in order, Tassh. You are quite sure you slept in the house last night? I remember I had to speak to you on one occasion for stopping at Padstow one night last winter."

"I've never slept out of the house since you left, sir," said the butler, with conviction.

Atherton and his companions exchanged glances. The cool, bold-faced audacity of the man to make a declaration like that when he had been the involuntary guest of the Scouts only the day before seemed too stupendous for words.

"Very good, Tassh, you may go," said Sir Silas. "Ah, here is Coombes! Now, Coombes, let us hear what you know of the matter."

"Precious little, sir, unfortunately. The front of the safe has been cut through with an electric drill. Here is the lock, sir. The window was forced, showing that the burglars entered that way, but the strange thing about it, sir, is that they must have left by some other way, since none of the footsteps lead away from the house."

"There were two or more burglars?"

"Undoubtedly, sir. The weight of the stolen stuff is too great for one man to carry."

"Well, do your best, Coombes. Tell your inspector that I am offering two hundred pounds reward for the capture and conviction of the burglar or burglars. Let me know at once if there is any information."

"Very good, sir," said the sergeant, and, saluting, he withdrew.

"Now, Atherton, have you any suggestions to make?" asked Sir Silas. "You are the—er—Leader, don't you call it?—of the patrol. But perhaps you haven't had time to consider the case properly?"

"Can I examine the window by which the burglars are supposed to have entered, sir?"

"Certainly, you have a free hand."

"I wonder if Sir Silas is trying to pull Atherton's leg?" whispered Baker to his chum Everest.

"Shut up!" replied Everest. "If he is, he doesn't know Atherton as I do. Atherton's on to something, I'll stake my word."

The Leader of the "Otters" carefully examined the marks of the jemmy, tried the window fastenings and the sash frames.

"Now, sir, may I see the lock of the safe?"

Sir Silas pointed to the cut-out portion of metal containing the complicated lock.

"The story of the burglars is a make-up, sir," announced Atherton.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FLIGHT

"WHAT!" exclaimed Sir Silas and Mr Buckley, simultaneously. "A make-up? Explain yourself, Atherton."

"That I think is fairly simple, sir," said the Scout. "The marks on the window-frame show that a jemmy has been used, but unless the sash-frame on that side were prised out the window could

not be opened by those means. No professional burglar would attempt to use a jemmy on a window; he would stick a piece of putty to the glass close to the fastening, and cut round it with a diamond. That would be a noiseless operation, while the force that caused those dents would make quite a racket. Then, sir, there is the lock. The front of the safe has been electrically drilled. Upon examining it I find that the drill was applied from the inside."

"From the inside?" repeated the baronet.

"Yes, Sir Silas. The door was first opened with the proper key, swung back, and cut whilst in that position."

"By Jove, Atherton, I believe you are right," exclaimed the Scoutmaster, holding a pocket microscope to the portion of the metal door. "Do you suspect anyone in your house, sir?" he added, addressing Sir Silas.

"It looks a serious matter for my butler to explain. I'll send for him."

"One minute, sir," said Atherton. "Mr Tassh spent the night before last on Seal Island."

"But he declared just now that he never slept out of the house during the whole time I was away. Are you sure of this?"

"Well, sir, he pitched a yarn into us that his name was Todd, and that he was a stranger to the place. He couldn't get back to Polkerwyck because it was too rough, and in the morning we gave him some food."

"I won't say anything about your discovery to him at present, Atherton. I'll ask him to bring in some refreshment. In my concern about this robbery I quite overlooked my duties as a host, Mr Buckley."

"Tassh, bring in some sandwiches, cake, lemonade and anything else you think these young gentlemen may fancy," ordered the baronet.

"Yes, sir," replied the butler; and in a few minutes he returned with a loaded tray.

"By the by, Tassh," said Sir Silas in a well-assumed casual tone, "I suppose you have seen these young gentlemen before to-day?"

"Yes, sir. Saw them when they arrived, and again the other day when I called in at the post-office."

"But the night before last?"

"The night before last, sir?" repeated the butler, in a mechanical voice. "I don't understand, sir."

"But I hear that you were on Seal Island."

"Quite a mistake, sir. I haven't set foot on Seal Island for more than a twelvemonth, and that was when I went with Farmer Trebarwith."

"It is sometimes awkward for a man to have a double, Tassh," said Sir Silas grimly, "especially in a small place like Polkerwyck. All the same, Tassh, I have a few questions to put to you later on. Go to your room and remain there till I send for you."

"Very good, sir."

Without the faintest trace of emotion the butler withdrew. The baronet waited till the latch of the door clicked and turned to Atherton.

"You are quite sure of what you said about Tassh?"

"Yes, sir; and the rest of us saw him too."

"But there is such a thing as mistaken identity?"

"Well, then, sir, in that case both Peter Varco and Tregaskis saw him. Tregaskis took him off the Island in his boat."

"Strange," commented Sir Silas.

"And, sir," continued Atherton, "since Tassh is so keen on concealing his movements, I must say that his downright bluff in denying his identity confirms our suspicions. More than once some one has visited the Tea Caves by night. One man only, and one wearing large boots and taking very small footsteps. On one occasion he came by boat and took some of our thole-pins. How he managed on other occasions we cannot yet make out."

"I think there is enough circumstantial evidence to warrant his arrest," declared the baronet. "You know the local police station, I suppose, lads? Ah, that's good. Will one of you slip out

quietly and see if Sergeant Coombes is still there. If not, bring Gregory, the policeman."

"I say, Atherton, you are making a most grave statement against the man," cautioned Mr Buckley. "If there is a mistake the result will be serious, you know."

"There is quite enough cause, since Tassh has deliberately told me falsehoods concerning his visit to Seal Island," said the baronet. "I'll take all responsibility should there be any question of illegal arrest, Mr Buckley."

A quarter of an hour later Polglaze, the plain-clothes officer, cycled up to the house.

"Sergeant Coombes is following, sir," he announced. "Have you discovered any clue, Sir Silas?"

"Yes," replied the baronet, grimly. "Thanks to these Scouts. I want you to arrest Paul Tassh on a charge of theft."

In a few words Sir Silas explained the situation, and in spite of professional jealousy the detective was bound to admit that Atherton's deductions were quite sufficient to justify the step the baronet was about to take.

Sir Silas touched the bell communicating with the butler's private room. He waited a full minute and rang again. There was no reply.

"Strikes me very forcibly that I've given the fellow a chance and he's taken it, by Jove!" remarked Sir Silas, as he touched an electric push that rang a bell in the servants' hall.

"Jones, go to Tassh's room and tell him to come instantly," ordered the baronet, as a young under-footman entered. "Stay: perhaps, Mr Polglaze, you would like to accompany Jones?"

Two minutes later the detective returned.

"He's in his room, sir, but he's locked himself in," announced Polglaze. "I demanded admittance three times, but before I burst open the door I thought I would tell you, Sir Silas."

"Do you think Tassh has done himself an injury?" asked the baronet, anxiously.

"Judging by the man's appearance I should say not. He may have slipped off. Station two of your Scouts outside his window, Mr Buckley, if you don't mind."

The under-footman pointed out the window to Baker and Mayne, and returned with the intelligence that it was closed. Since the window was fifteen feet from the ground, and had a very narrow sill, it was most unlikely that Tassh could have made good his escape and at the same time closed the window after him.

Outside, in the corridor, Sir Silas, the detective, the Scoutmaster and the remaining Scouts halted. Polglaze knelt down and attempted to peep through the keyhole. The key was in the lock and effectually thwarted the detective's action.

"Does Tassh carry firearms, sir?" he asked.

"Not to my knowledge."

"Then it is possible that he is armed. If he is desperate we may have a lively reception. Suppose, Sir Silas, we tell these lads to go downstairs out of danger? We will then wait till Coombes and Gregory arrive, force the door and rush our man."

Somewhat reluctantly in spirit, yet with alacrity, the Scouts obeyed their Scoutmaster's order to get out of harm's way. As they were descending the stairs the sergeant and the village policeman, both very red in the face with exertion, came hurrying up.

"Open the door instantly, Tassh," ordered Sir Silas in a loud voice.

There was no reply. Only the ticking of a grandfather's clock at the head of the stairs and the laboured breathing of the two policemen broke the silence.

"Force it," said the baronet, laconically.

Polglaze put his shoulder to the door. The good, old-fashioned oak resisted his efforts.

"Bear a hand here, Coombes," he said. "Now, together."

The sixteen-stone Cornish sergeant's weight added to the detective's modest eleven did the trick. The door, forced from its hinges, flew inwards, Coombes following it and sprawling heavily upon the floor.

The room was empty.

"He must be somewhere about," said the detective. "We know the door is locked on the inside. A man cannot go out of a room, shut a door, and lock it on the inside, can he?"

The room was in a fairly tidy state. A white table-cloth covered the table. On it were the remains of a meal, and a box of cigars that Sir Silas recognised as containing his special brand. A sporting paper and a copy of one of the county journals with an account of the supposed burglary lay on one of the chairs, the former apparently having been dropped there when the butler received his orders to attend upon Sir Silas. His watch was hanging from a hook by the side of the large mantelpiece. All pointed to the fact that Tassh's departure had been hurriedly performed; at the same time the question arose, how did he manage it?

"Well, Polglaze?"

"This knocks me, Sir Silas," replied the detective, rubbing his shoulder that was beginning to forcibly remind him that oaken doors cannot be charged with impunity.

"Shall I see what those Scouts make of it?" asked the baronet, with a grim sense of humour.

"Let 'em have a shot at it, by all means, Sir Silas," said Polglaze. "This beats cockfighting."

But the Scouts had to own themselves beaten for the time being at least. They tried the walls, floor, chimney, and everything they could think of, but without success.

"I believe he got out by the chimney," suggested Sergeant Coombes, who, since his tumble, had judiciously kept silent in order to regain his breath.

"The soot hasn't been disturbed," said Atherton. "That's what I particularly noticed."

"All the same I say it's the chimney, young man," said the sergeant, with a brave show of dignity. "And until you prove to my satisfaction that 'tain't, well then, 'tis the chimney, I say."

"Don't stand there laying down the law, Coombes," said the detective. "Every minute Tassh is no doubt getting farther and farther away. Gregory, hurry back to the village and telephone through to all the stations nearabouts. Give the full details, although I'll stake my life there's hardly a policeman within twenty miles who doesn't know Paul Tassh."

At Mr Buckley's suggestion the Scouts made a complete circuit of the house, examining the ground for possible trails; but all to no purpose.

At three o'clock the lads bade farewell to their host, at the same time expressing their sympathy at the loss, and their regret at their inability to do anything of service in the matter.

As the patrol descended the hill leading to the village, Baker pointed to Seal Island.

"Look," he exclaimed. "There's something wrong with the 'Wolves,' I do declare."

## CHAPTER XIV

### PHILLIPS' DISCOVERY

As soon as his comrades of the "Otters" had embarked on the first stage of their journey to Wadebridge Station to meet their temporary Scoutmaster, Jack Phillips sallied forth on his shooting expedition.

He was a crack miniature-rifle shot, but although he understood the principle of a twelve-bore gun, he was an absolute novice at the task that had been deputed to him.

A few hundred yards brought him to the fringe of the rabbit warren—an extensive undulating tract of gorse-covered heath liberally honeycombed with holes. Pulling a couple of cartridges from his pocket, Phillips loaded; then, every sense on the alert, he moved cautiously forward.

Yard after yard he walked at a slow pace, but, although he saw hundreds of the swiftly moving little animals far beyond range, not one accommodatingly showed itself to be shot at.

"That's jolly strange," muttered the Scout. "When a crowd of us came over here there were rabbits running about everywhere; now they keep a very respectful distance. I wonder if they know a gun when they see one?"

Phillips halted to straighten his back and to wipe the moisture from his forehead.

"What's that?" he exclaimed to himself, as the sound of a sharp thud came from almost under his feet.

He listened intently. The noise was repeated.

"I wonder if there's a cave underneath here?" he thought. "Seems almost as if there's a man using a pick, only the noise is rather different."

He knelt down and placed his ear against the ground. A wasp, busy amongst the gorse, promptly buzzed so close that he jumped hastily to his feet.

"Bothered if I can understand it," he said to himself. "I'll mention it to Atherton when he comes back. The Island seems chock full of mysterious noises. But, there, I shan't get any rabbits if I fool about here, so here goes."

On and on he went till he neared the cliff on the eastern side of the Island, but without the chance of a shot.

"The rabbits are not out to-day, that's evident," he muttered. "Perhaps they will be more in evidence this afternoon. I'll get back to the camp, for the longer I stay the more the other fellows will expect me to bring back."

With his gun under his arm, Phillips set off at a steady pace, following almost the same route that he had taken on his outward journey.

Half way across the warren, a rabbit suddenly darted out of the furze bush and tore off as hard as it could away from the lad, at the same time making a wide curve to the right.

Before Phillips could fully cock his gun and raise it to his shoulder the rabbit was beyond ordinary range. The Scout took a rapid aim and pressed the trigger. With a report that, compared with the crack of a miniature rifle, was like a cannon going off, the gun kicked and sent the lad spinning. In his excitement he forgot the pain of the blow, for the rabbit was sprawling on the ground.

"Got one, at any rate," exclaimed Phillips, gleefully.

Placing his gun on the ground with more haste than care the Scout ran towards his prize; but before he had covered half the distance the rabbit contrived to regain its feet and crawl down a hole.

"What a nuisance," said the Scout dolefully, and, lying at full length, he thrust his arm down the hole in the hopes of being able to secure the wounded animal. He could hear it scuffling only a few feet away, but it was a case of so near and yet so far: as far as he was concerned he had lost his trophy.

Rather crestfallen, Phillips returned to the camp, where he found Farmer Trebarwith surrounded by an attentive audience of the "Wolves."

"Got anything?" asked Neale. "We heard you firing."

"Of course he's got some," said Hayes. "He's shot so many that he's had to leave them for us to go out and fetch."

"You jolly well shut up," retorted Phillips. "I knocked one over, and that's more than you could do, Hayes."

"Where is it, then?" asked his tormentor.

"It slipped down a hole."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Hayes and the two Coventrys.

"That's enough," said Simpson, reprovingly. "I'll bet Phillips did his best."

"Have you unloaded, young gentleman?" asked the farmer. "Always make sure you have no cartridges in your gun when you leave the warren. Bless me I'll tell ye how to knock over the rabbits, if you like."

"You usually take a dog with you, don't you?" asked Phillips.

"Yes, a dog will turn out any rabbit that is lying close. All the same it isn't necessary. Now, I saw you going through the warren, and I said to myself, 'Sure he'll be main lucky if he gets a shot.' You have to stalk 'em. Keep dead against the wind, and have your gun ready to let fly directly you see a movement in the bushes. You were going with the wind, and they know your scent. Coming back you walked too quickly. It was only haphazard-like that you had a shot at one at all."

"I believe I walked over a cave or something," said Phillips. "I heard a funny sort of tapping noise."

"Whereabouts?" asked several of the Scouts.



"Right in the middle of the warren."

"Don't you know?" asked the farmer. "That's the rabbits in their holes giving warning to those in other burrows. They hit the ground with their hind foot. When you hear that 'tain't much use to stay there: they won't come out again in a hurry."

"I'll try again," said Phillips, giving a glance at the large iron pot that stood in a suggestive position close to the fire.

Making a wide detour, he got to leeward of the warren, then stealthily made his way against the wind. Before he had gone fifty yards two young rabbits of fair size fell the victims of his gun. Three minutes later another excellent shot at sixty yards added a third to the Scout's bag.

"It seems to me that I shall have to send Hayes to fetch them after all," he mused, as he lifted the three dead rabbits. "They are heavy."

Phillips waited a little longer to give the denizens of the warren time to recover from their fright at the discharge of the gun, then he resumed his stealthy advance. Right ahead were the ruins of the old oratory. The Scout remembered that there was a fairly open expanse on the other side where he had often seen the rabbits frisking in the sunshine.

"I'll take cover in the ruins and see if I cannot get in a double-barrelled shot," he said to himself, and with that object in view he crept up the slope on which the ruins stood.

The remains of the chapelry consisted of three roofless walls with open lancet windows. On the west side the masonry had been removed, several masses of stone lying in disorder all down the slope. The walls were destitute of foliage, not even so much as a tendril of ivy softening the hard effects of the dark grey stone.

Since by entering the building on the west side the Scout would have to run the risk of being observed, Phillips decided to crawl through one of the lancet windows, cross the dust-covered floor, and take up a favourable position at the window looking northward.

The opening was narrow. Phillips just unloaded his gun, passed the weapon through, and then began to squeeze between the stonework. As he did so he was surprised to see a portion of the floor almost underneath that window give an upward motion. The dust rose, and as the slab fell there was a well-defined trace of the joint in the stonework.

Again the slab trembled: it was being forced up from beneath.

The Scout took in the situation at a glance. Quickly grasping his gun, he dragged it through the window and propped it against the outside wall, so that it could not be seen from within. Then removing his hat, he peered between two displaced stones, and waited.

He had not long to wait. With a lusty heave the stone rose and toppled backwards, disclosing a circular cavity of about two feet in diameter. Out of the hole appeared the head and shoulders of a man.

Placing his hands on the edge of the aperture, the fellow raised himself clear of the hole and stood blinking in the strong sunlight.

"Golly! It's that chap Tassh. Whatever is his little game," thought Phillips.

As soon as his eyes grew accustomed to the daylight, Tassh replaced the stone, scattered dust over it, and stole to one of the windows in the opposite wall to the one behind which the Scout was crouching.

Looking in the direction of the camp, Tassh muttered an inaudible exclamation, then bending low he crept across the fairly open space and gained the shelter of the gorge. Here he broke into a run, and was soon lost to sight as he made off in the direction of the Tea Caves.

"Atherton was right: that chap's up to mischief, I'll be bound," thought Phillips. "Well, it's not much use my following him alone. He's making for the caves we explored the other day. I'll rout out Simpson and the 'Wolves,' and we can decide what's to be done."

"I say, Simpson," he exclaimed breathlessly, as he reached the camp, "I've seen——"

"Yes, seen—but how many did you shoot?" asked the Leader of the "Wolves." "We're waiting to dress the rabbits in time for our new Scoutmaster."

"They'll have to wait. I've knocked over three. But, I say, I've made a discovery. I've just seen Tassh crawl out of a secret tunnel opening into the old ruins."

At this startling information the "Wolves" were in a state of excitement. Neale and Fraser proposed following the butler, surrounding him and peremptorily demanding an explanation of his suspicious actions—a suggestion that the two Coventrys and Armstrong backed up for all they were worth.

"No, we must wait till we've spoken to Mr Buckley," said Simpson. "We have no authority to waylay the man. I'll tell you what we can do: we'll take possession of the ruins so that he cannot return to the cave or tunnel, whatever it is, without being seen. Hurry up, you fellows; get your staves. No shouting, mind. Double."

It did not take the "Wolves" long to reach the ruins.

"Where's the hole, Phillips?" asked several of the lads.

Without replying, Phillips walked across to the concealed stone and swept away a layer of dirt and dust that Tassh had thrown over it.

"Here you are; help me to heave it up," he said, as soon as the position of the slab was disclosed. "Why, here's a ring let into the stone! Now, all together."

Thrusting a staff through the rusty ring, the Scouts gave a combined heave. The stone came up quite easily.

"I might have known that," remarked Phillips to the Leader of the "Wolves." "Tassh pushed it up, and he does not look a particularly strong man. But why is the lid so light in comparison with its size?"

An examination revealed that the lid was deeply hollowed on the under side, so that its weight was hardly a quarter of what it would have been had the cavity not existed.

"We must have walked over the stone dozens of times and not noticed it sounded hollow," said Hayes. "Now what are we going to do, Simpson?"

"We'll just have a look at this hole or tunnel, whatever it is. Golly! Atherton's missed something by going off to meet the Scoutmaster."

"I wonder how deep it is," said Coventry minor, peering into the pit that yawned at his feet. "There are no steps as far as I can make out."

"I can see a niche on your side, Coventry," announced Fraser. "It looks deep enough to get a good foothold."

"Be careful, young Coventry," cautioned Simpson, as the lad sat down at the edge of the hole, turned face downwards and groped for the niche.

"I'm used to it," replied Coventry minor, confidently. "Here's another one. It's quite easy."

Phillips and the remaining "Wolves" watched the Scout make his way farther and farther down the shaft, till he had descended quite a dozen of the rough footholds cut into the rock.

"Haven't you got to the bottom yet, Coventry?" Simpson called out, with a tinge of anxiety in his voice. "You had better come back, and we'll go to the camp and get some rope and candles."

The Scout instantly began to retrace his footsteps. Possibly owing to the fact that he had already performed the harder task of descending, he momentarily allowed his sense of caution to desert him. The fingers of both hands simultaneously slipped from a lichen-covered niche. He struggled desperately to recover his hold, and fell.

The lads, gathered round the mouth of the pit, heard a stifled cry followed by a dull thud, then all was silent.

"Off belts, lads," ordered Leader Simpson.

In a few seconds a leathern rope, twenty feet in length, was made up. Simpson fastened one end round a staff which was held by four of the Scouts, and threw the free end down the pit; then, without hesitation, he grasped the improvised life-line and swung himself lightly over the edge.

Simpson knew he could trust to these belts. They were not the cheap shoddy article, but well-made ones of well-seasoned leather. The buckles, too, were strong and reliable, so that the Leader of the "Wolves" had good cause to have perfect faith in the rope of belts.

Hand over hand he descended, until he knew that he was literally almost at the end of his tether. Then, proceeding slowly and cautiously, and keeping his feet rigid, he continued his downward course till his hand encountered the buckle joining the two lowermost belts.

"I must risk it and drop," he thought, finding himself unable to touch the side of the pit. "It cannot be so much farther to the bottom."

Relaxing the muscles of his legs in order to bear the shock with the least risk of broken limbs, Simpson released his hold and dropped—a distance of less than two feet. With a sigh of relief he drew a box of matches from his pocket and struck a light.

Lying almost at his feet was the unfortunate Coventry minor. The lad was senseless and bleeding from a cut just above the left ear.

There was no time to be lost. It was imperative that the luckless Scout should be brought up to the open air as quickly as possible.

By the aid of another match, Simpson discovered the position of the line of niches. Then, unfastening the unconscious lad's belt, he refastened it round his chest just beneath his arm-pits. This done, the Leader clasped the buckle at the end of his emergency rope to the ring in Coventry minor's belt.

"Haul up, slowly and steadily!" he shouted.

Ascending by means of the niches, Simpson accompanied his senseless charge, steadying the lad's body to prevent it swaying against the rock, till at length to his great relief Neale and Fraser grasped the rescued Scout and grew him clear of the shaft.

"Is he dead?" asked the unfortunate lad's brother, anxiously.

"No, he's stunned. The sooner we get back to camp and fetch a doctor the better, Hayes and Armstrong, cut off as fast as you can, take the small boat and row across to Polkerwyck and fetch Dr. Carraway. Leave your staves here. Now, 'Wolves,' form a stretcher."

In remarkably quick time the stretcher, formed by means of staves, belts, and long stalks of bracken, was made, and in broken-step form the Scouts carried their comrade towards the camp, Phillips walking by the side to guard against the possibility of the patient falling off.

Before they had covered half the distance, Phillips perceived his patrol descending the road to Polkerwyck harbour.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE EXPLORATION OF THE TUNNEL

BRINGING his binoculars to bear upon the stretcher party of the "Wolves," Mr Buckley saw that an accident had occurred.

"You look through my glasses, Atherton," said the Scoutmaster. "You'll know who it is."

Atherton did so. He was half afraid that there had been a shooting accident, but a glance removed that anxiety. The injured Scout he recognised as Coventry minor, and since Phillips understood that on no account was he to be accompanied by anyone else while carrying the gun, the logical conclusion was that the injured Scout had not received his hurt by this means.

"There's Hayes at the landing-place," announced Atherton. "He's calling us up by semaphore. Reply to him, Baker, and I'll read the message."

Baker stood upon the end of the stone pier so that his dark green shirt showed up plainly against the white-washed wall behind him.

"Coventry has fallen down a hole. Concussion. Still unconscious. Fetch doctor," read Atherton.

"Hurry up and bring the doctor along with you, Everest," said Mr Buckley. "Green and Baker will remain here with one of the boats. How many have you?"

"Two, sir," replied the Leader. "One is on the Island side."

"Signal to those fellows to bring that boat over, then," continued the Scoutmaster. "We can then get across and see what's wrong."

While Everest was on his way to Dr Carraway—for the Scouts had made it a point of finding out where the doctor lived almost as soon as they arrived at Polkerwyck—the Scoutmaster and the four "Otters" crossed to the Island. During the passage Hayes and Armstrong told their comrades what had occurred, and how Phillips had discovered the butler's hiding-place.

"Hiding-place," repeated Atherton. "Most likely a tunnel communicating with Polkerwyck House. Didn't Sir Silas say that the House used to be an old monastic building, and that it was partially rebuilt on the existing foundations? What puzzles me, though, is why Tassh did not return by the tunnel on the night of the wreck, since he evidently came to the Island by that way."

"You've a fine site for a camp here, lads," remarked Mr Buckley, as the two patrols met. "It is unfortunate, though, that your holiday should be marred by this accident."

The Scoutmaster knelt by the unconscious Scout.

"Yes, he's had a nasty blow," he said, observing Coventry's skin was pale and cold, his pulse feeble, and his breathing slow and punctuated by distressing sighs. "Raise his head a little more; we ought to place him in a darkened room as soon as possible. In any case, one of you stand so that the shadow falls across his face."

"There's a small cave down by the landingplace, sir," said Phillips. "It will not be so far for the doctor to come."

"Very good," assented the Scoutmaster. "Lead on. Steady now, stretcher-bearers. Mind you don't slip on this steep path."

Carefully little Coventry was carried into the cave, where in the semi-gloom he was carefully tended by two of his comrades. Mr Buckley also remained in the cave, awaiting the arrival of the doctor.

The rest of the Scouts returned to the camp, when, under Atherton's directions, steps were taken to keep Tassh under observation. Three of the "Wolves" were sent to take cover close to that part of the cliff overhanging the Tea Caves. A strong party, carefully concealed, occupied the ruined oratory, in order to cut off the rogue's retreat by force, if necessary; while between the ruins and the Tea Caves relays were posted in order to hasten to the assistance of the outlying Scouts should occasion arise.

It was not long before the doctor arrived on the scene, and was escorted to the cave where the patient lay.

"You've done excellently, lads," he remarked to the Scouts in attendance. "He has had a severe blow, but youth and clean living are in his favour. He'll soon be all right. Meanwhile, keep him here in the dark until nearly sunset. See that his feet and arms are kept warm. When the twilight gathers in, you must bring him across to Polkerwyck. I will make arrangements for him to be nursed at my house."

"It's awfully good of you, doctor," said Mr Buckley, warmly.

"Nonsense: we're used to it. Every summer I have on an average a dozen similar cases. Visitors seem to have an insane desire to climb the cliffs. They are not used to it, they look down, and then the mischief is done. Well, I cannot do more at present. Give him a draught of this every hour, and keep him warm, especially when bringing him across the bay in the boat."

In duty bound Mr Buckley gave information to the police that Tassh was seen on the Island. At the Scouts' earnest request he did not say by what means the butler got there, since the lads wished to have the honour of exploring the tunnel.

Within a very short time Seal Island was invaded. A dozen county police, drawn from the neighbourhood, nearly the whole of the detachment from Refuge Point coastguard station, and almost all the male population of Polkerwyck flocked to the place. Every nook and cranny was investigated, the caves systematically explored, but without result. Although nearly thirty people searched the ruined oratory not one noticed the granite lid covering the pit, in spite of the fact that the Scouts, with an idea of fair play, took no steps to conceal the joints in the stone floor with dust.

Tired out with their exertions, the Scouts retired to rest as soon as Coventry minor had been carried to the doctor's house. Undisturbed by the noise of the untrained searchers the lads slept soundly, till the morning revealed Seal Island untenanted save by themselves and a couple of policemen, who, at the Scoutmaster's suggestion, had installed themselves in the old oratory to keep a long and fruitless vigil.

"He's slipped through our fingers, sure enough, sir," remarked one of the constables. "All night we've been on the alert. No doubt he's managed to swim across to the mainland when he found we were hard on his track. We'll be going now, sir, and leave you in peace and quietness, so to speak. If you see or hear anything, sir, happen you won't mind sending one of your young chaps to give us the tip?"

As soon as the policemen were well clear of the Island, and the Scouts had had breakfast, steps were taken to continue the search for Sir Silas Gwinneer's butler, and also to explore the tunnel which they had good reason to believe communicated with the mainland.

The latter task was the more enviable. Both patrols wished to undertake that particular business, and urged their respective claims till the Scoutmaster had gently and firmly to remind them of their sense of discipline.

"You cannot all explore the tunnel," he added. "One patrol will be quite sufficient for that. The other will keep an eye on the camp, guard the landing-place and the approach to the Tea Caves. I

suppose you have no objection to decide the matter by lots?"

Walking away for a few steps, Mr Buckley gathered a handful of long grass. From this he selected two blades, one much longer than the other. These he held in his hand, with an inch of each showing at equal length.

"Now, Scouts, the one who draws the longest blade represents the patrol to explore the tunnel. One of the Tenderfoots can draw: that's right, Scott."

Reggie Scott pulled out one of the blades of grass from the Scoutmaster's clenched fist. It was the long one.

"Good: the 'Otters' will explore the tunnel. The 'Wolves' will take up positions I have indicated on this map. It is a very clear map, Simpson, by the way. You did it excellently. Already by its means I have quite a comprehensive knowledge of Seal Island."

Carrying ropes, two camp lanterns, and a supply of candles and matches, the "Otters" made their way to the ruined oratory, where the stone covering to the pit was soon raised.

"I do not mean to go with you, lads," said the Scoutmaster. "I feel confident you will get on all right without me. Rope your men, Atherton; keep one well ahead of the rest in case there is an accumulation of poisonous gases, which I do not for one moment suppose is the case. So long as the candles burn brightly there is no danger on that score."

"Tassh came through all right, sir," remarked Everest. "That was only yesterday."

"And once, at least, according to all accounts, he was prevented from returning. So it is evident that at times there is some obstruction. However, 'Be prepared' and you'll come out on top."

One by one the "Otters" were lowered into the gaping pit, Mr Buckley letting Tenderfoot Sayers down last of all. This done, he took up his position at the top of a spiral stone staircase that terminated abruptly almost on a level with the roofless walls. Here, with only the upper portion of his face showing above the masonry, he was able to command a panoramic view of the Island and Seal Bay. Moreover, he was ready to render assistance should the "Otters" find the tunnel impracticable and have to return by the same way as they went.

The "Otters" found themselves in the mouth of a passage hewn out of the solid rock.



“ In broken-step form the Scouts carried their comrade towards the camp.”—Page 168.

[Illustration: "In broken-step form the Scouts carried their comrade towards the camp."—Page 168.]

It was roughly from five to six feet in height and thirty inches wide. The floor was ankle deep in dry dust that showed unmistakable signs of the same person having passed to and fro on several occasions.

With the candle-light glimmering on the walls the Scouts advanced, Atherton leading by twenty paces, the rest following at shorter intervals and linked together by a light yet strong rope. The progress was slow, for Atherton, cautious lest he should stumble into a hidden pitfall, systematically sounded the ground with his staff at every other step.

For nearly three hundred paces the tunnel sloped steeply downwards, the walls remaining perfectly dry—a circumstance that showed the passage was still under the Island. Beyond that distance, although the tunnel was still on the down grade, the roof and walls showed signs of moisture, while in place of the dry dust the floor was ankle deep in slime. Overhead a deep muffled roar betokened the fact that the sea was only separated from the Scouts by a few feet of rock, through which the sound of the ground-swell was audible.

Suddenly Atherton came to a halt, and held his lantern above his head.



"Anything wrong?" asked Phillips.

"It's all right here," he announced. "The air is quite fresh. I've found something: looks like a seat with some carving above it."

On the right-hand side of the tunnel, in a cavity three feet in depth and extending the whole height of the passage, was a stone bench. Above the latter were several carvings in relief, all more or less damaged by the ravages of time and the moisture of the rock.

"Here's a crucifix," said Atherton, pointing to a Cornish cross. "And there's some inscription underneath. I can't quite make out the letters, though."

"I can read one word," said Green. "The first letter is supposed to be a P. The word is 'Pax.'"

"And here's a date: MCCLI—that's 1251," announced Atherton. "This must be a sort of half-way resting place for the monks who visited the oratory. If it's not half way it's at the lowest level of the tunnel, for the gradient is now on the ascent. But let's go on. I wonder where we shall find ourselves when we come to the end."

"Why, at the end, of course," replied Everest. "Where else did you expect?"

The forward movement was resumed, Atherton placing the previous distance between him and the next Scout. At length the rocky walls began to show less signs of moisture, and the Scouts knew that they had passed under Seal Bay and were now not far from, if not actually underneath, the village of Polkerwyck.

"Hulloa, here's some steps," said Atherton in a low voice. "Come along, you fellows; before we go any farther we must search this place. It won't do to leave any unexplored places behind us. Green and Mayne, you come with me, the others can stand by. If I call for assistance, Everest and Baker can come to our aid. Five of us ought to be a match for Tassh, if he's hiding here."

"Do you think he is hiding here, Atherton?" asked Tenderfoot Sayers in a whisper.

"He may be. Since he hasn't been found on the Island he may be lying low in this place till the coast is clear. We'll soon find out. After me, Green."

Holding the lantern in his left hand and well away from his body, Atherton commenced the ascent of a spiral flight of steps. Unlike those in many old ruins scattered about the country, these steps were in a good state of preservation, showing that during the flight of centuries they had been but comparatively little used.

The Leader ascended cautiously. At any moment he might be assailed by the fugitive from justice. The Scouts were strangers to the place and therefore at a disadvantage; a trap might be laid for them, while in addition they were handicapped by having to carry a lantern which would render them conspicuous to anyone lurking in the darkness. Yet, in spite of these drawbacks, Atherton and his two companions had embarked upon an enterprise from which there was no turning back until the task of exploring the place was completed.

At the twentieth step the Leader discovered that he was level with the topmost part of the staircase. On all sides was a cavernous space that was almost all in darkness, save for that portion within the field of the rays of the lantern.

"What's that?" whispered Green, laying a detaining hand on Atherton's wrist. "There's some one moving."

"Yes, I can hear footsteps," assented Atherton, as the muffled sounds of a firm, steady tread came from the dark recesses of the vault-like room. "They are coming this way. Stand by with your staff, Green. I'll challenge him."

In spite of his customary coolness, Atherton felt his heart beating violently.

"Who's there?" he called.

There was no reply. The noise of the footsteps continued as if the person walking was quite unconcerned at being called upon to explain who he was.

"Who's there?" repeated the Scout, in a louder voice.

There was silence for a few moments, then the sound of a person walking was resumed, only, instead of approaching, footsteps were obviously those of some one retiring.

Atherton waited no longer. Gaining the floor, he raised the lantern above his head. The comparatively feeble rays gleamed upon a glittering object standing on the ground close to the wall of the underground room.

Resisting the temptation to pounce upon and examine the article, the Scout waited till his companions rejoined him, and then began an examination of the place. It was circular and barely five yards in diameter. The roof was domed, the highest part being about ten feet from the floor.



The walls, hewn from the solid rock, were smooth and uninterrupted by any visible openings communicating with elsewhere. To all appearances the Scouts had struck a blind alley.

Having thus taken stock of their surroundings, the Scouts discovered that the glittering object was a massive silver bowl, filled with forks and spoons of the same precious metal.

"Hidden treasure," gasped Mayne.

"Not much," retorted Green. "Stolen from Sir Silas, that's what it is. You can see the stuff isn't tarnished, and there's no dust on it."

"Georgian silver," added Atherton, examining the markings on the spoons and forks. "It must be some of that rascal Tassh's plunder. We may find some more here. Ha! What's that?"

A rumble, momentarily growing louder, could be heard, the sound apparently coming from overhead. Then, waning, it ceased to be audible.

"A cart—that's what it is, and the sound we heard just before that was a man walking overhead. It's my belief that the place is immediately under the only street in Polkerwyck," declared Atherton.

With their staves, the Scouts sounded the walls, floor and ceiling. There was no trace of any secret openings. The walls were solid enough; only the distance between the dome and the open air was thin enough to enable the noise of the traffic to be heard with comparative distinctness.

"All right up there?" called out Phillips from the foot of the spiral staircase.

"Yes," replied Atherton. "We'll be with you in a minute."

"What shall we do with this lot?" asked Green, indicating the silver. "It's jolly heavy."

"We'll take it with us. We can put a few of the forks and spoons in our pockets and the bowl can be slung from a staff and carried by two of us. Mind how you carry it, Green."

As soon as the three Scouts returned to their waiting companions, the silver was distributed for the sake of easier carriage, and the march of exploration resumed. Presently, instead of continuing the upward slope, the tunnel dived with considerable abruptness. At the bottom of the dip there was water on the floor to the depth of six inches, while from the signs of excessive moisture on the walls and ceiling it was fairly conclusive that the whole of this portion of the tunnel had recently been flooded. A slight stream of water was still running from a fissure in the wall.

"This must be a proper trap in wet weather," said Phillips. "The water lodges in the dip until it soaks out again. That accounts for the fact that Tassh was unable to return to Polkerwyck House on the night of the storm."

"It certainly seems like it," said Green, as he splashed boldly through the water. "Doesn't it feel cold?"

From this point the tunnel again sloped upwards, in places so steeply that the incline had to be broken by short flights of steps.

"I reckon we've come quite two miles," said Baker, "and in a fairly straight direction according to my compass. If I had known——"

The remark was suddenly cut short by a low warning whistle from Atherton. The rest of the patrol closed upon their Leader, who had come to a standstill before a blank wall. Right and left were short passages terminating in spiral flights of steps.

Once more Atherton and his two chosen comrades began their subsidiary investigations, while the remaining members of the "Otters" remained at the junction of the two cross-ways.

It was not long before the Leader returned.

"No go," he announced. "There are only eleven stairs and then a bricked-up wall. By the undisturbed state of the dust on the steps we know that no one has been there for months at the very least. Come on, all of you, we'll try our luck with this branch."

Round and round, up and up, went the Scouts. They realised that they were on the eve of an important discovery, for here there were undoubted traces of human footsteps. At the fifty-fourth step, Atherton found farther progress barred by a stone wall, each block being roughly fifteen inches wide and twelve high, and set in hard, black cement.

The Scouts looked at each other with feelings akin to dismay. It seemed hard lines, after traversing the whole length of the subterranean passage, to find a blank wall.

"I'll tell you what, Atherton," said Green. "It's my opinion that Tassh, or whoever it is, discovered the tunnel at the Seal Island end, and, like us, explored it as far as it went. He then

had to retrace his footsteps, and that accounts for the complicated nature of the trail."

"Yes, that's all very well," replied Atherton. "But how do you account for the finding of the silver stuff in the underground chamber?"

"Perhaps Tassh meant to hide it there, or it was too heavy for him to carry any farther," suggested Mayne, as he rested on the edge of a step his end of the staff from which the bowl was slung. As he did so the end of the pole touched the stonework at the side of the staircase. The slab of granite trembled visibly.

"This part of the wall is quite loose," exclaimed Mayne.

"Steady," whispered Atherton, warningly. "Keep quiet, you fellows."

The Leader felt the face of the granite slab. It was certainly loose, but the joints of the masonry were not wide enough for his fingers to obtain a grip.

"Hold my lantern a minute, Phillips," he said. "I'll see what I can do with my knife. You have matches handy? Good! Now blow out all the lights."

These orders were promptly carried out. The darkness was darkness indeed. To the excited lads it seemed to have weight. Even Phillips, strong-minded as he was, grasped his box of matches tightly, as if he derived some consolation from the fact that he held a weapon that could be used to effectually banish the stifling sensation imparted by the intense darkness.

Scratching lightly with the blade of his knife, Atherton at length found the joint of the stonework once more. Deftly inserting the blade, he cautiously prised the block of granite. It gave, then slid back in its position.

"The stone is pivoted," he whispered. "Where's your hand, Mayne? Put it here, and when I swing the stone out half an inch try and get a grip."

The blade bent almost to breaking point. The stone swung outwards. Mayne, gripping the rough edge, sought to retain a tenacious hold.

"It's slipping," he gasped in low, tense tones. Atherton instantly drove the blade home till the handle was tightly wedged in the enlarged orifice. Then, relaxing his hold upon the knife, he aided Mayne with his wiry fingers.

The block swung stiffly outwards another inch, then with hardly any resistance it turned, disclosing an aperture sufficiently large for a man to crawl through.

The sudden rush of daylight blinded the lads, but at length their eyes grew accustomed to the scene. They found themselves looking into the room in Polkerwyck House that had been the rascally butler's quarters. It was not untenanted.

Seated in a canvas deck-chair, with his back turned to the secret opening, was a man. Only the back portion of his head was visible above the top rail of the chair.

"It's Tassh," said Atherton to himself.

The question was how the Scouts were to act. To crawl through the narrow opening one by one and throw themselves upon the culprit was a business that was not only fraught with danger but well-nigh impossible to perform without giving the man due warning. Yet to Atherton it seemed the only way.

Beckoning to Phillips to follow him, the Leader began to edge carefully through the gap in the stonework. Could he but gain a footing in the room and await his Second's entrance without alarming the occupant of the chair, there was a possibility that the rascal, taken by surprise, might be seized and secured.

The Scout was almost through. One foot was actually on the floor, when Green accidentally knocked the staff to which the silver bowl was slung. With a crash and a clatter the heavy metal ornament went rolling down the spiral stairs, cannoning against the ankles of Scott and Sayers as it did so.

In a trice the fellow in the chair was on his feet.

"The game's up," he exclaimed. "Come out of that or it will be the worse for you."

## CHAPTER XVI

### TRAPPED

ATHERTON stood stock still, his eyes fixed upon the small suggestive muzzle of a revolver levelled at his head. It was horribly disconcerting. He was unable to go forward; his movements were hampered. Nor could he retreat with the possibilities of being shot at staring him in the face.

The tension was acute whilst it lasted, but the Scout was greatly relieved to hear the voice of Polglaze, the detective, exclaim:

"In the name of thunder what have you Scouts been up to?"

Atherton hastened to complete the awkward crawl through the opening, the rest of his companions following.

The detective, with wonderment written on every line of his face, examined the revolving stonework, patting it with his hands and testing the cunningly concealed mechanism.

"Well, this beats everything," he exclaimed. "I've been investigating this room for hours, tried the floor, walls and ceiling, and not a suspicion of a secret passage did I discover. Yet, from a logical point of view, there must have been some means of escape other than by the door, which was locked. How on earth did you fellows find this out?"

"We walked along a tunnel from Seal Island," explained Atherton. "It leads to the ruins in the centre of the Island. And we've found some of the booty, Mr Polglaze."

"You have?" The detective's jaw dropped slightly. Visions of a substantial reward slipping through his fingers accounted for his tone of disappointment. "Where?"

"In a side passage out of the main tunnel. There's a large silver bowl at the bottom of these steps, and each of us have smaller articles."

One by one the Scouts placed on the table the spoons and forks they had discovered. Polglaze snatched one up and examined.

"Yes, that's part of Sir Silas' stuff," he announced. "Is that all you've found?"

"Yes, sir," answered Atherton. "With the bowl, of course."

"Then there's a heap more to be recovered," said the detective. "Tell me about the tunnel."

Polglaze listened attentively and in silence to the Scout's narrative.

"You are quite sure you examined every part of the tunnel?" he asked, when Atherton had finished. "There is no place where Tassh might hide that you neglected to make sure of?"

"I think not, sir."

"Good. I'll inform Sir Silas."

The detective was certainly jealous of the Scouts' success, but the news could not be withheld from the baronet. It also opened a fresh channel for the detective's energies. Since the robber's retreat was discovered, the ends could be bricked up and no further attention paid to it. Polglaze would be free to devote his skill to the tracking of the butler on Seal Island.

Great was the astonishment of Sir Silas to find that the dust-grimed members of the "Otter" patrol had entered his house by a means hitherto unknown to him.

"A remarkable thing, Polglaze," he observed. "Now I come to think of it there is a legend to the effect that Polkerwyck monastery was connected with the oratory on Seal Island by a subterranean passage. I regarded it as a myth. You get the same story wherever there are any old ruins. But what an elaborate piece of work, by Jove!"

Sir Silas had closed the revolving stone. When in position it seemed exactly like a portion of the solid wall, and opening in the old-fashioned chimney corner it was rendered still more unnoticeable by the soot that clung tenaciously to the grate. "You've closed it, sir," exclaimed Atherton, unable to prevent the baronet's action. "We don't know how to open it from this side."

"Bless my soul, I am thoughtless!" ejaculated Sir Silas. "See what you can make of it, Polglaze."

The detective prised the stonework with his penknife, thrust his shoulder against the unresisting granite, and fumbled for possible springs, all to no purpose. The sliding door was to all appearances part and parcel of the wall.

"Now, Atherton, you have a shot at it," suggested Sir Silas.

The Scout did his best, but without result. He was completely baffled.

"And there's a large silver bowl down there, sir," he remarked, "and all our lanterns too. I'll tell you what, sir: we must get back to the Island as quickly as possible, or our Scoutmaster will be anxious. We'll let him know we're all right, and then some of us will go through the tunnel again and open the slide from the inside. I think I know how to do that."



“ ‘ In the name of thunder, what have you Scouts been up to ? ’ ”—Page 189.

[Illustration: "In the name of thunder, what have you Scouts been up to?"—Page 189.]

"Very good," assented Sir Silas. "Only I hope you won't overtire yourselves. Polglaze, I wish you to remain here till Atherton returns. As a temporary measure I mean to have the tunnel sealed up at both ends before to-night. Later on, when we have laid my rascally butler by the heels, the place can be thoroughly explored by competent antiquarians. I have no doubt but that it will prove of considerable interest to persons making a study of mediaeval architecture."

Atherton gave the half-salute and retired with his fellow Scouts. Once clear of the House, they broke into a Scout's pace, and soon covered the distance between them and Polkerwyck village.

Outside the post-office they were stopped by Farmer Trebarwith, who was bubbling over with

excitement.

"Heard the news, young gentlemen? They du say that Tassh has been seen in Bodmin, and that he has taken the train to Lunnon with a girt box—full o' stolen silver I du say. We'm expecting news that he's been apprehended as soon as he gets to his journey's end."

Atherton thanked the farmer for his information, and, excusing himself, hastened his patrol into one of Peter Varco's boats, that the old fisherman obligingly lent them.

"I was beginning to wonder what had happened to you," said Mr Buckley. "In fact, I was on the point of taking two of the 'Wolves' with me and following up your trail. They say that Tassh has been traced to London, eh? Well, I hope it's true, for we shall be able to carry out our camp routine, which from all accounts has been subjected to interruptions of various sorts from the first day you arrived. All right, Atherton, you can go through the tunnel again. Three of you will be enough, I think. Get back as soon as you can."

The second trip through the subterranean passage was performed with alacrity, and without incident Atherton and his companions succeeded in reaching the far end.

"Give a push with the end of your staff, Green," he said, pointing to a well-defined mark on the stonework where the mechanism had previously been actuated.

Green pushed his pole, at first gently, then harder. It was all to no purpose. The sliding stone seemed as immovable as it had done on the other side.

"That's strange," commented the Leader. "Bring the other lantern here and let's see if we can find anything."

For a quarter of an hour or more Atherton prodded the stone and groped for a concealed spring.

"We're done again, I'm afraid," he remarked. "We must retrace our steps. Blow one of the candles out, Mayne. We've none too much left. I didn't reckon on this."

"It won't do to be stranded in this hole without a light," agreed Mayne. "What about the lanterns we left behind us?"

Atherton picked up the two candle-lamps. In one there was less than a quarter of an inch. In the other there was hardly as much, and what made matters worse, the Scouts who took spare candles had not handed them over to their comrades when the latter set out on their second journey through the tunnel.

"Back as fast as we can," ordered Atherton. "Don't wait to bring that bowl with us. It will be quite safe here."

Lighted by the glimmer of the solitary candle, the Scouts hastened on their homeward way.

Presently Green called out:

"I say, Atherton. What's that noise?"

A dull swishing sound came faintly to the ears of the listeners.

"It's like a tap running," remarked Mayne. "Water running into a bath, for example."

"Foot it as fast as you can," exclaimed Atherton. "It may be all right, but I fancy the water is pouring into the hollow we noticed just this side of the place we found the silver bowl."

The three lads broke into a run, guided by the flickering light of the lantern. Louder and louder grew the sound of the inrush of water.

"Steady," gasped Atherton, as his feet came in contact with the water. "Wade through it."

He was hoping against hope. His practical eye had already noted that the water extended far beyond the limits of the little puddle they had encountered in the lowest level of the dip. This meant that there might be five feet or more of water in the tunnel, or there might be sufficient space between the surface and the top of the vaulting to enable the lads to proceed.

"What's happened, I wonder?" asked Green, who, like the other, was knee-deep in water.

"Don't worry: keep on," enjoined the Leader. "There's no current, luckily, but let's hang on to one another in case there's a pitfall. Keep the spare pieces of candle dry, Mayne, whatever you do. I've put the matches in my hat."

Waist deep now. The rate of progress was visibly retarded by the resistance of the water. Peering ahead, Atherton could see that at less than twenty yards from where he stood the roof of the tunnel met and dipped below the surface of the newly formed lake.

The Scouts were trapped.

"No go, lads," announced Atherton, in a cheerful tone. "We must get back to the higher level. It must be raining pretty heavily, and the water soaks through."

"A jolly good soak, I should say," added Green. "What do you propose doing now, Atherton?"

"Exercise patience, and have another shot at that revolving stone. It's merely a question of time and an element of luck. Besides, when the water begins to subside it will do so pretty rapidly, I expect."

"Why?" asked Green.

"I don't know why, unless the floor of the tunnel is very porous. Don't you remember that within twenty hours of the time that Tassh was unable to leave Seal Island he was back again by means of this passage?"

"That's so," agreed Green, stooping to wring the moisture out of his shorts. "How's the candle going, Atherton?"

"It will last us a bit," replied the Leader; but he knew that in less than an hour at the outside their whole supply of candle ends would be consumed.

"Let's shout altogether," suggested Mayne, after they had returned to the top of the spiral staircase and had made another unsuccessful attempt to discover the secret of the mechanism of the revolving stone.

The Scouts gave a united yell. The echoes rang in their ears, but no answering sound came from the other side of the baffling granite wall.

"Look here, you fellows," said Atherton, "it's no use our waiting here on the off chance of some one opening the door or whatever you call it, from the inside. One of us ought to stand by and watch for the water to subside. Who's game?"

"It will mean that one of us will have to be in the dark," observed Mayne gloomily. "I'm not frightened of the dark, of course, but it's pretty miserable sticking about by yourself in a pitch-black hole."

"That's so," agreed Green. "I vote we all keep together."

"That won't do for me, lads," said Atherton. "I'll go. You keep what's left of the candle. When I find the level is sinking I'll shout and let you know. This tunnel is like a giant voice-tube: you'll hear me plainly enough."

"Oh, I'll go if you want," said Mayne, somewhat shamefacedly.

"Or I will," added Green.

"You'll jolly well stop here. Take half of these matches. Keep on trying, and perhaps you'll find the secret of the opening after all."

So saying, Atherton felt his way down the steps, and began his solitary progress along the tunnel. On and on he went, feeling the rough wall with his hand and methodically counting the number of paces he took.

At the five hundred and twentieth step his foot splashed into the water. The Scout halted, struck a match and examined the rock close to the surface of the pool. It was fairly dry.

"That means the water is still rising," thought the Leader. "I'll draw a line in the dust, and look again in five minutes' time, just to make sure."

Taking a piece of twine from his pocket, Atherton measured off as near as he could guess a length slightly exceeding a yard. To one end he attached his knife. Holding the other end in his hand, the Scout allowed the weighted string to swing.

"A pendulum thirty-nine inches in length swings one every second," he said to himself. "This ought to be near enough for my purpose."

He waited till the knife had swung three hundred times—it seemed more like an hour than five minutes,—then, striking another match, he examined the mark he had made on the ground. It was already on the point of being covered. The water was still rising.

"Cheerful," he remarked. "After all, there is no danger, it's only the discomfort, and all true Scouts make light of trivial matters like this. It's another all-night business: that's my opinion."

"Atherton!" shouted Green, his voice rumbling down the tube-like passage.

"Hulloa?"

"Our light's gone out. Is the water falling?"

Atherton struck a match.

"I'm sorry to say it isn't," he shouted in reply.

"Then it's no use waiting there. Come back to us. It's mighty cold and we're precious hungry."

"I can't feed you, Green, and if you're cold jump about a bit and flap your arms. I'll be with you soon."

After giving this advice, Atherton began to walk along the now familiar tunnel. Ere he had covered a hundred paces he was surprised by the sound of a sharp detonation, followed by shouts of alarm on the part of his two comrades.

"What's up?" hailed Atherton.

The shouting still continued, but the anxious Scout could make neither head nor tail of what was being said. Presently a strong current of air, followed by the pungent fumes of powder, drifted down the tunnel.

Gasping, Atherton tied his scarf over his mouth, and dashed as hard as he could through the inky darkness, keeping his left hand on the wall to guide him. Stumbling over the silver bowl at the foot of the stairs was the first intimation he received of the fact that he had reached the end of the passage.

Then, as he mounted the spiral stairs, to his utter relief he heard Mr Buckley's voice calling him by name.

Removing his scarf, Atherton gave a reassuring answer.

"Thank heaven, you're safe!" replied the Scoutmaster, as Atherton emerged through an irregularly shaped hole that took the place of the narrow opening into the butler's room.

"And Mayne and Green?"

"They're all right, only a bit shaken up."

In the room, in addition to Mr Buckley, were Sir Silas Gwinnear, Polglaze the detective, and a gentleman whom Atherton had not seen before, and who was a mining engineer for one of the neighbouring "wheals" or mines, and three workmen.

"We knew something was amiss," explained the Scoutmaster. "Soon after you descended the tunnel for the second time it came on to pour with rain. Phillips suggested to me the danger of one portion of the passage being filled with water, and he and I going down found this to be the case, and that your retreat was cut off, unless you succeeded in turning the revolving stone.

"Thinking that there was a chance of your not being able to do so, Phillips and I made our way across the mainland, and on to Polkerwyck House.

"We found the secret opening still remained fast closed. We hammered at it, tried crowbars, and did everything to attract your attention. Green tells me you never heard a sound."

"We made as much row as we could, sir," said Atherton. "The walls must be practically soundproof."

"I should say they are not soundproof now," continued Mr Buckley. "On Sir Silas's advice we sent to Polkarnis Mine for some men accustomed to the use of explosives, and this gentleman—Mr Copperas, the electrical works' manager—kindly came over to give his technical assistance."

"Yes, it's a wonder we didn't do more harm," added Mr Copperas. "Since we heard no sounds from within we naturally concluded that the three of you were farther along the tunnel. However, all's well that ends well, and your two chums have been through an experience I never wish to meet with: standing within a few feet of five pounds of gun-cotton when it exploded."

"Now, Atherton, we must be making a move," declared the Scoutmaster. "It will soon be dark, and you've had a couple of very trying days."

"How about the silver bowl, sir?" said the Scout, who had already noticed the signs of preparations of bricking up the gap. "I'll get it if you like."

"Don't worry about that, Atherton," interposed Sir Silas. "Get a good night's rest. You can have a bed here if you wish."

"No, thank you, sir," replied Atherton. "I think I shall sleep pretty soundly in camp."

"As you like," said the baronet. "I'll see that the bowl is brought out. Mr Copperas and I have a wish to have a look at this remarkable tunnel before it is actually sealed."

"Any further news of Tassh, sir?" asked Atherton, as, accompanied by the five "Otters," the Scoutmaster started at a brisk walk towards Polkerwyck.



"Nothing, save that the police hope to effect his arrest in London. As far as we are concerned I think the Scouts have finished with the business. It will give us a chance to settle down to a less strenuous holiday."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE MYSTERIOUS YACHT

UNTIL over the following Sunday the Scouts of Seal Island "stood easy." The usual routine was maintained, but operations necessitating arduous work were temporarily dispensed with. The lads were all more or less done up. Want of sleep, exposure to the rain, and a surfeit of excitement tried them to a very great extent; but, thanks to their physical training, they were soon little the worse for the experiences they had undergone.

Even Coventry minor's case showed good signs of improvement. He was still unable to leave the doctor's house, but there was every chance of his being fit to take part in the camp before the end of a fortnight.

Early on Tuesday morning, the two patrols started on a boating excursion. The "Otters," with the Scoutmaster, took Varco's largest boat, while the "Wolves" embarked in a craft only slightly smaller. Both boats were provided with masts and sails, the area of the latter being comparatively small, so that there was little chance of a catastrophe occurring. Mr Buckley was a skilled and keen boat-sailer, while Simpson and Fraser of the "Wolves" knew enough about the management of a small craft under sail to be entrusted with the care of the one in which their patrol embarked.

After the gale, which had finished with the torrential rain that had caused the flooding of the subterranean passage, the weather set in fair, with a very high temperature. The Scouts unanimously voted that it was simply ripping weather for camping, and the discomforts of the gale were now almost forgotten.

It was the intention of the Scouts to circumnavigate Seal Island. A better day could not have been chosen. There was hardly any wind: what there was was off shore, while—a somewhat unusual circumstance—the ground-swell was absent.

Past the now familiar Dollar Cove the lads rowed, pausing every now and then to admire the fantastic outlines of the rugged cliffs.

"Mackerel in the bay," announced Mr Buckley, pointing to a shimmering light on the surface of the water, about half way across to Beware Head.

"I wish we had some rag worm for bait," said Jim Sayers. "There are two lines in the boat, but without bait they might just as well not be there."

"Don't say that," rejoined the Scoutmaster, laughing. "Let me have a look at the lines. Ah! they're properly hooked. Sayers, I see an old tin can under the bow thwart. Give it a rub on the leather of your oar and pass it to me."

The Tenderfoot did as Mr Buckley suggested. With a pair of pocket scissors the Scoutmaster cut three spoon-shaped pieces from the now glittering tin, curved them with his fingers and attached the metal to the line just in front of the three-barbed hooks.

"Well I never!" ejaculated Sayers. "To think that fish make a meal out of a chunk of tin."

The lines were paid out, the metal discs jumping erratically under the resistance of the water.

Three minutes later, Sayers felt a sharp tug on his line.

"A fish!" he exclaimed excitedly.

"Haul it slowly and carefully or you'll lose it," cautioned Mr Buckley. "Yes, Sayers, you've hooked a beauty."

Wildly struggling, a fair-sized mackerel was landed into the boat, its gills impaled by two barbed hooks. After that the sport was fast and furious, and before the boats were abreast of Beware Head eleven fish were lying on the bottom boards of the "Otters" boat, and nine fell to the lot of the "Wolves."



"There's a cutter close inshore," observed Phillips, as the boats rounded North Head.

"She's too close in for safety," added Mayne. "She can't be very far from the reef where the tramp steamer struck."

"She's anchored," declared Atherton. "I can see the cable. She's a good distance this side of the reef, nearly opposite the Tea Caves, I should imagine."

"We'll pull close to her and see if anything's wrong. Perhaps they've missed the tide, and have anchored close inshore till slack water," said Mr Buckley. "Give way 'Wolves'; we'll race you."

The "Wolves" did give way with a will, and being in a lighter and fairly narrow-beamed boat they outstripped their friendly rivals.

"That will do," ordered the Scoutmaster. "Take it easy now."

The cutter was a yacht of about ten tons. Since she had no name on her counter, Mr Buckley came to the conclusion that she belonged to a recognised yacht club in spite of the fact that she flew no burgee.

She was moored with two anchors and cables—an unnecessary business unless she was to stay over one tide. A dinghy was made fast astern, and this was the only intimation the Scouts had that there was some one on board the yacht, for her deck was deserted.

"Yacht ahoy!" hailed the Scoutmaster.

Two disreputable-looking men clad in blue jerseys and dirty canvas trousers emerged hurriedly from the cabin.

"Wot d'ye want, Capting?" asked the taller of the two, with an insolent ring in his voice.

"We thought you were brought up too close inshore," said the Scoutmaster. "Perhaps you're strangers to this part of the coast?"

"I'll chaunce me arm over that, old mate," was the reply. "We're bloomin' well all right, cocky. When the tide serves we'll sweep the blinkin' boat rahnd to Padstow if there's no bloomin' wind."

"Give way, lads," ordered the Scoutmaster.

Not a word more was spoken till both boats had put an intervening headland between them and the cutter and her surly crew.

"They're a churlish set," remarked Mr Buckley. "I wonder what their little game is, bringing up so close to the Tea Caves?"

"Do you know, sir, I believe—although I am not quite sure—that the shorter man is one of the fellows who threw Sir Silas over Hungerford Bridge."

"Eh?" exclaimed Mr Buckley, incredulously. "I think so, sir. And another thing I noticed: those fellows said they would sweep the yacht to Padstow if there were no wind."

"That's so," agreed the Scoutmaster.

"Then why would they want to row her when there's a motor on board, sir?"

"A motor—how do you know, Atherton?"

"I noticed the propeller under the water, sir."

"You did? I missed that, then. I was directing my attention to the stern to see if a name had been painted out. It is quite possible, since the yacht is a fairly decent one, that those two fellows have stolen it. Such acts are not uncommon. That also might be an explanation for their statement that they intended to use their sweeps. They might be ignorant of how to run a motor."

"Looks fishy, sir," remarked Phillips. "Do you think, since they are close to the mouth of the Tea Caves, that they have anything to do with Paul Tassh?"

"The possibility is somewhat remote. Tassh is, according to all accounts, hiding in London."

"With the bulk of the booty, sir?"

"Well, since you suggest it, there might be something in the wind between those two surly fellows and Paul Tassh," admitted Mr Buckley. "I thought we had finished with the business. However, I'll call for volunteers to patrol the cliffs above the Tea Caves tonight if the yacht hasn't cleared off in the meantime."

With that the voyage was resumed. At the blowing holes the Scouts landed, in order to investigate this natural curiosity; but, owing to an absence of wind and no sea running, the "performance was off," as Neale expressed it.

The lads thoroughly enjoyed a scamper over the remarkably shaped rocks, which were only accessible from the sea; and here a substantial lunch was partaken.

"I wonder what would happen if we stopped up the blowing hole?" asked Reggie Scott of his churn Sayers, pointing to an orifice in the rock about three inches in diameter, which was worn perfectly smooth by the violent up-burst of water.

"I reckon it would go off like a pop-gun the first time the waves broke under it," replied Sayers. "But what's the use? We shan't be here to see what happens."

"I'll fill it up, just for fun," said Scott. "Let's see how deep it is first."

Lying at full length on the flat-topped rock, the Tenderfoot bared his arm and thrust it down.

"I can't reach anything like far enough, Sayers," he began. "It will take a lot of filling up—"

His remarks were rudely interrupted by a sudden rush of compressed air. Before Scott could throw himself clear of the blow-hole he was drenched to the skin by a torrent of water forced through the circular hole in the rock.

Sayers yelled with delight, but his mirth was brought to an abrupt termination by a regular waterspout from another blow-hole close to where he was standing. Slipping on the weed-covered rock, he subsided on his back, and while in this ignominious position he was completely enveloped in the falling spray.

At the first sign of the spout Atherton, Simpson, Phillips, and Coventry made a hurried dash for the boats. They were only just in time to prevent them from being dashed broadside on to the beach as three rollers in quick succession hurled themselves up the rocks.

"It must have been the swell of a steamer," declared Simpson, after the sea had resumed its placid condition.

"Steamer? I saw none within a mile or so of shore," remarked Phillips, "and the last one quite a quarter of an hour ago."

"That, no doubt, was the one that caused the three rollers," remarked Mr Buckley, who had overheard the Scouts. "The swell of a large steamer, travelling at a fair speed, will be felt five miles off, and at a considerable time after the ship has passed abreast of that part of the shore on which the waves break. But come along, lads, we've seen the blowing holes at work, and some of you have wet shirts in consequence."

Into their boats the Scouts jumped, and once more the coasting trip was resumed. Without further incident the lads landed at the cove, hauled the boats up the slope, and returned to camp for dinner.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### HOT ON THE TRAIL

THE more Atherton thought about one of the crew of the mysterious yacht the more he became convinced that the fellow was Sir Silas Gwinneer's assailant.

After dinner, seizing a favourable opportunity, the lad approached his Scoutmaster on the subject.

"You're falling a victim to the powers of suggestion, I'm afraid, Atherton," remarked Mr Buckley. "When you first mentioned the matter to me you said you *thought* he was the man. Now, after ruminating, you come to the conclusion that he *must* be the culprit. Such definite conclusions based upon flimsy suppositions are dangerous. Over and over again one reads of cases of persons being wrongly arrested owing to definite yet mistaken zeal on the part of an impressionable constable. Now, for example, what do you suggest would be the best course to adopt? Inform the police?"

"Yes, sir; my idea is that he should not be allowed to slip through our fingers, so to speak."

"And if the fellow gives a perfectly corroborated statement, and claims damages for illegal arrest, where would the funds of the troop go, eh? No, no, Atherton, we must get to work more cautiously. I am quite in agreement with you that the action of these two men on the yacht is suspicious, and that they ought to be kept under observation. All the same, I do not like the idea

of so much night work. Before I took over for Mr Trematon, you had more than one restless night."

"If it has to be done, sir, it must be," replied Atherton earnestly. "The other fellows are of the same mind."

"Very well, so long as the yacht remains of the Island we will keep her under observation. I'll send Simpson and the 'Wolves' out till sunset, and then the 'Otters' can carry on till morning. Only, mind you, it is to be distinctly understood that your patrol must rest this afternoon and also to-morrow morning. Seven hours' sleep in every twenty-four is essential."

"Very good, sir," said Atherton.

"And," continued Mr Buckley, "I mean to take the night watch with you. We must find a likely spot whence we can command the approach to the Tea Caves as well as the yacht. Now tell the 'Otters' to turn in. No talking, mind. I'll see that Simpson has his instructions, and then I'll have a nap myself."

Two hundred yards to the south-west of the Tea Caves a rocky headland afforded all the shelter the Scouts required. The place seemed as if it had been a Titan's playground, for huge flat boulders, some weighing more than twenty tons, had been piled up in picturesque and even grotesque formations. On one group of rocks the Scouts had bestowed the name of "The Mushrooms," and the designation was not inapplicable. Three separate columns, composed of discshaped rocks twelve feet in diameter, rose to the height of twelve feet above the general ground level. On the summit of these were still broader rocks with slightly rounded upper surfaces, their edges overlapping the bases by three to five feet, and two of the top rocks touched each other; the third was separated from the other by a space of less than a foot.

On the lee—side of "The Mushrooms" there was sufficient shelter for the four Scouts of the "Wolves," for Hayes and Tenderfoot Basil Armstrong were left behind in camp while the "Otters" were resting in their tent.

The yacht still remained close inshore, in the same position as when the Scouts had first sighted her. The tide had long since changed, but the crew had made no attempt to shift her, either by means of the motor or sweeps.

Throughout the rest of the afternoon the "Wolves" kept on the watch. The shadows lengthened as the sun sank down in the west; but the two men on board gave no signs of their presence.

"Anything wrong?" asked Atherton, as the "Otters" came to the relief of their comrades, Sayers and Scott being left in camp to perform a like duty to the one Hayes and Armstrong had been detailed to do.

"Not a sign," replied Simpson. "Just our luck. I suppose they'll do something as soon as it gets dark, and we'll be out of it."

"May not," rejoined Atherton. "Anyway, if anything exciting does occur we'll rouse you up right enough."

With that the "Wolves" reluctantly betook themselves off, and the "Otters" carried on the task of watching the mysterious yacht. The Scouts knew their work well. Even in the gathering twilight they refrained from showing themselves against the skyline. Each lad, with a cluster of gorse in his hat to still lessen the risk of detection, kept well behind cover.

Night fell. There was no moon, but the stars gave sufficient light to distinguish the outlines of the coast and the grimly silent yacht, that, two hundred feet below, rocked gently on the bosom of the ocean.

"It's eleven o'clock and slack tide," said Phillips to his Leader. "What do you say to this: suppose we get the others to lower us down the cliffs by the Tea Caves? It's hardly any distance."

"What then?" asked Atherton.

"Well, there being no tide, we could easily swim off to that yacht. It would be worth doing to find out what those fellows are doing on board."

"I'm game," agreed Atherton. "But we'll have to mention it to Mr Buckley."

"Do you think he'll let us go?" asked Phillips, anxiously.

"If he won't there's an end to it," rejoined Atherton, sturdily. "So here goes, I'll ask."

"A hundred yards from the shore at least," observed the Scoutmaster, when Atherton made the proposal. "Are you quite sure you can do the distance there and back?"

"Both Phillips and I hold half-mile certificates, sir," said the Leader. "If the other fellows will lower us on to the ledge leading to the Caves, it will be a fairly simple matter to swarm down the rope to the base of the cliff."

"Very well, then," assented the Scoutmaster. "But, whatever you do, exercise the greatest caution. Everest and Baker can remain here, the rest of the available 'Otters' can support you."

"Thank you, sir," replied Atherton, saluting, and without further delay the work of preparation began.

Green and Mayne were to remain on the top of the cliff above the ledge leading to the Tea Caves, the Scoutmaster was to descend to the ledge, make sure that there was no one lurking at the entrance to the caverns, and to assist the two swimmers during their descent and ascent to and from the sea.

Noiselessly the little party gained the spot, almost opposite the anchored yacht. No signs of life were visible from the unlighted craft. Her outlines could only just be discerned against the dark surface of the water.

It did not take the Scouts long to discover the holes into which the staves and crowbars had been driven on the first occasion of their first exploration of the Tea Caves. The tufts of earth that had been placed in them to hide the traces of the Scouts' operations were removed and two stout iron bars deftly inserted.

Giving a final glance round, Mr Buckley made one end of the rope fast round his body. "Lower away, lads," he exclaimed. "I'm not a heavy weight, and when one has a groggy arm it puts a stopper on hand-over-hand work."

As soon as Mr Buckley reached the ledge, Atherton and Phillips swarmed down. They were now only twenty feet above the sea, and at that particular spot the irregular shape of the cliffs permitted a fairly easy descent.

"We'll go with you, sir, as far as the Caves," whispered the Leader, but the Scoutmaster demurred.

"One can go where three cannot sometimes," he replied. "If there's any bother I'll whistle for you. I think I can well hold my own till then."

In five minutes Mr Buckley returned.

"It's all clear, I think," he remarked in an undertone. "The dust seems undisturbed and there's been no wind to level it. I've covered my tracks very carefully in case of accidents."

Quickly undressing, Atherton, with a rope tied round his waist, in case he slipped, made his way down to the water's edge. Casting off the rope, he waited till Phillips joined him, and as noiselessly as the little creatures from which the patrol took its name, the two Scouts slipped into the water.

Not a word was spoken as the lads swam with steady strokes towards the yacht. The sea was quite warm, warmer in fact than the air. Both Scouts knew how to swim with the least exertion and without making a splash. They did not hurry, realising that haste in swimming means loss of strength; so, keeping side by side, they made light work of their outward journey.

The mysterious yacht was now riding lightly to her anchor. There was little or no tide; and her cable was, in nautical parlance, "straight up and down." By a fortunate chance, owing no doubt to the slovenliness of her crew rather than to their lack of seamanship, the yacht's bobstay was still hove taut, and this afforded a fine foothold for the two lads.

Atherton could just manage to grasp the bowsprit. Raising his legs, he threw his heels over the low bulwark and contrived to draw himself on deck. He waited, every sense keenly on the alert. All was quiet, save for a muffled conversation in the cabin.

Assisting Phillips on board, the elder lad led the way aft. Their bare feet made no sound upon the dew-sodden decks; and, cautiously picking their way over coils of ropes and avoiding formidable-looking cleats that would, in the event of hitting them, cause painful results, the two Scouts came to the closed companion hatch communicating to the main cabin.

Through a chink in the teak door, Atherton saw that a light was burning. The scuttles had been covered with a thick material in order to screen the light within.

It was a remarkable sight that met the Scout's gaze. On the swinging table was a quantity of silver plate. Sitting on one bunk was one of the crew, who was apprehensively regarding his companion. Of the latter Atherton now had no doubts. He was the same red-necked fellow who had been one of the assailants of Sir Silas Gwinneer. There was no mistaking the closely cropped iron-grey hair, the rounded though massive shoulders and back, the long legs and all the other characteristics the Scout had so carefully noticed. In his hands he held a sporting rifle, which was pointed in the direction of his companion.

"Ere, chuck it, Bill. Turn that blessed thing away," remonstrated the seated man.

"'Tain't loaded, yer blinkin' juggins."

"That's wot yer says, Bill."

"Struth: don't yer know as well as I does that there ain't a blinkin' cartridge aboard. All the same it'll come in 'andy-like to frighten them nippers if they comes a' nosin' abaht 'ere agen."

"They won't. I'll chaunce me arm on that, Bill."

"Ow d'ye know that? Ain't they properly kippered that old fool Tassh, till 'e ain't got no mind to call 'is own? If it weren't for them blessed Scouts we'd a' hid all the blessed swag aboard afore now. Tassh won't budge till nigh on one in the mornin', as yer bloomin' well knows, the white-livered swob."

"'E was late last night. Arter three afore 'e gived the signal."

"Ef 'e's blinkin' well late to-night we'll go ashore and rout 'im out of 'is blessed cave."

"Not this 'ere child, Bill. I ain't got no likin' to wormin' me way through that 'ole between the two caves. I'll wait in the outer one if yer likes."

"You'll blessed well do as I tells yer," retorted the latter man, laying the gun down on the bunk. "Onderstand that. Well, 'ere goes. I'll 'ave a look on deck, and see if anything's stirrin'. Douse that glim for a minnit, while I opens the 'atch."

Atherton touched his companion's shoulder. Both lads rose to their feet and began to make their way for'ard, Phillips treading on one side of the deck and Atherton on the other, so as to prevent the craft from heeling. Even the faintest heel would be noticeable to the two men below, and their suspicions would be instantly aroused.

Phillips lowered himself noiselessly over the bows, but before Atherton could clamber over the windlass that occupied a portion of the foredeck, the noise of the hatch being slid back told him that Bill was in the act of coming on deck.

There was no time to be lost. Atherton hurried to rejoin his comrade, but his haste led to his undoing. His bare feet slipped on the wet planks, and the next instant he was sprawling at full length upon the deck.



“ Throughout the rest of the afternoon the Wolves kept on the watch.”—Page 217.

[Illustration: "Throughout the rest of the afternoon the Wolves kept on the watch."—Page 217.]

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE FIRST CAPTURE

ATHERTON'S first impulse was to regain his feet and jump overboard. By so doing he knew that he would run no personal risks, since Bill and his companion in crime could not possibly capture him, even if they went to the length of leaping into the sea dressed as they were, in their clothes and sea-boots. But, on the other hand, the Scout realised that, if discovered, the confederates of the rascally butler would make haste and clear off in the yacht, and the whole chance of capturing both the rogues and their booty would receive a serious set back.

With these thoughts flashing through his mind, Atherton pulled several folds of the staysail over his recumbent form, as, fortunately for him, the slothful crew had lowered the sail and had

neglected to stow or even secure it. His chief anxiety was that Phillips, finding that his companion had not followed him, would climb on board again, or, equally as bad, raise a premature alarm.

Second Phillips was made of the right stuff. Since Atherton had not called for aid he felt convinced that his Leader was still keeping Bill under observation. Holding on to the bob-stay, and keeping close to the bows of the yacht, Phillips waited, chin deep in water, either till the expected shout for assistance came or else till Atherton got clear of the mysterious craft.

With many muttered curses the truculent Bill ascended the short companion-ladder and gained the deck. Pulling back the hatch he remained by the companion, his gaze directed towards the frowning cliffs by the Tea Caves.

"Two more cursed hours!" muttered the man, loudly enough for the Scout to overhear.

"Wot's 'e got to be afraid of I should like to know. Well, any'ow, to-night'll see the last o' the swag safe aboard."

Atherton felt a quiver of excitement pass through his frame. If the silver were to be recovered the opportunity was at hand. There was little time to be lost. To send for the assistance of the local police and the coastguards might result in the scoundrels "getting the wind of it."

It must be the Scouts to whom the credit of recovering Sir Silas Gwinnear's plate must fall.

The seaman was coming for'ard. From his place of concealment, Atherton could hear his heavy footfall upon the yielding deck. Would it be possible that the fellow had any suspicions that some one in addition to his mate was on board?

In any case the Scout realised that he must evade capture. Nearer and nearer came the man. Atherton prepared to spring from his hiding-place and leap into the sea, but to his great relief Bill turned on his heel and retraced his footsteps.

"He's going to pace the deck for the next hour or so, I suppose," thought Atherton. "A nice pickle we are in: Phillips shivering in the water and I doing ditto under a damp sail."

But Atherton was wrong in his surmise. The fellow took two or three turns up and down the deck, gave another glance shorewards and then whispered to his companion to "douse the glim again."

With the utmost satisfaction Atherton heard the seaman push back the hatch. His heavy sea-boots grated on the brass stair-treads; and then, with a vicious bang, the hatch was shut once more.

Rising from his place of concealment, Atherton lowered himself into the water, and the two lads began their shoreward swim; at first in silence, and then, as soon as a safe distance had been covered, they conversed in low tones.

"We're in luck, Atherton."

"Yes, if things turn out all right. I wonder what Mr Buckley will suggest?"

"No doubt he will order the boats to be manned, and we'll have to try our chances with Bill and his pal. It's fortunate we know his gun isn't loaded. Here, Phillips, are we heading the right way? I don't see the place where we climbed down."

"The tide must be setting in by now," replied Phillips. "We're being swept away to the west'ard. I vote we swim straight for shore and then keep close to it until we come to the right spot. The tide won't run so strong inshore."

"You lads have been a long time," remarked Mr Buckley, as the two Scouts, tired with their exertions, scrambled on to the ledge where the Scoutmaster had been anxiously awaiting their reappearance.

"It's all right, sir," exclaimed Atherton; "we've found out something": and as briefly and explicitly as he could the Scout related what had occurred on board the yacht.

"You're quite right, Atherton," said Mr Buckley, when the Leader had finished his report. "Something must be done at once. It is now close on twelve o'clock. You're both dressed? Good. Shin up the rope, Phillips; it will take three of you to haul me up, I am afraid."

As soon as the Scoutmaster and the two Scouts had reached the summit of the cliff, a hasty palaver was held and a rough plan of action decided upon. Green was despatched to the camp to turn out the "Wolves," who were to double to the place where the Scoutmaster awaited them.

"That's good, Simpson," said Mr Buckley, as the patrol turned up in fine fettle. "You left the Tenderfoots in camp? Hayes and Coventry, take that flashing lamp and call up the coastguard at Refuge Point. Tell them that there's a yacht lying off the Tea Caves, and that her crew are going to remove the stolen silver. The rest of us had better make tracks for the Tea Caves as soon as



possible. Since Tassh is concealed in the inner one—that is what you heard, I believe, Atherton?—we ought to nab him as he squeezes through the narrow passage between the two divisions. Now, Scouts, silence is essential as soon as we gain the ledge."

One by one the "Wolves" descended by means of the rope; then the Scoutmaster was lowered by the "Otters," who brought up the rear of the expedition. Treading cautiously, the Scouts crept in single file towards the rascally butler's lair.

Within the caves all was quiet. If Tassh lay concealed in the innermost one he gave no sign of his presence. Apparently he had learnt a certain amount of caution, for all tracks between the mouth of the cave and the narrow "needle's-eye" communicating with the two divisions were carefully obliterated.

Without a word being spoken the Scouts took up their allotted positions: Simpson and the 1st and 2nd class Scouts of his patrol stationed themselves on either side of the entrance to the inner cave; Atherton and the available "Otters" hid in a deep recess just inside the outer entrance; while Mr Buckley remained without in order to keep the yacht under observation.

Slowly, in utter silence, the hours passed. Although the Scoutmaster could not see the time by his watch, he felt fairly convinced that it could not be much past midnight. To the waiting Scouts the period of waiting seemed interminable.

At length the Scouts pricked up their ears. From the depths of the inner cave came an uncanny sound. As Simpson afterwards described it, it was like the armoured body of an enormous crab grating over the rocks. This was followed by the deep breathing of a man who had been put to great physical strain. Then came the stealthy footfalls of some one walking over the dry sand that formed the floor of the cave.

Simpson and the "Wolves" were tingling with excitement.

It was Tassh.

The rascally butler began to crawl through the "needle's eye." Once or twice he paused, as if scenting danger; then, drawing himself clear, he regained his feet.

It was as much as the "Wolves" could do to restrain themselves from falling upon and overpowering their quarry, since the man stood almost within arm's length of Simpson on the one hand and Neale on the other. But to do this would be acting prematurely. Unless otherwise compelled to tackle their man, the Scouts were content to let him alone until he had lured Bill and his companions ashore. So, crouching behind the huge boulders that had at some time fallen from the roof of the cave, the lads watched Tassh stealthily make his way towards the entrance.

"I wonder if he'll spot Mr Buckley," thought Simpson. But the Scoutmaster was too wary for that. He had clambered upon a narrow ledge seven feet above the main path, whence he could command a view of the cave and the sea as well as the misty starlight would permit.

"Oh, there you are, my fine fellow," muttered Mr Buckley, as Tassh, looking anxiously along the main ledge that gave access to the caves, emerged into the open, utterly ignorant of the fact that seven of the "Otters" were within ten yards of him and that a few inches above his head the Scoutmaster had him under observation.

Still Tassh hesitated. He even walked a few paces along the ledge, and scanned the rugged cliffs above his head. At length, drawing a portable electric lamp from his pocket, he flashed it twice in quick succession in the direction of the yacht.

This signal was instantly replied to by the light of a match. The Scoutmaster could see the gleam light up the features of the man Bill. To guard against causing suspicion the fellow was pretending to light a pipe, twice closing his fingers over the flickering match in order to reassure the ex-butler that his message was understood.

Tassh waited no longer. He turned and literally sneaked back to his den, none of the Scouts attempting to bar his passage.

Another ten minutes passed. There were no further signs of movement on the yacht. The Scoutmaster began to wonder whether Tassh's signal was intended to mean that he was suspicious about something, to defer the visit of Bill and his companion in crime until another night.

"I wish they'd hurry up," soliloquised Mr Buckley. "I shouldn't wonder if the coastguard boat doesn't turn up soon and nab them. It's a pity. I wish I had told Hayes not to signal quite so soon. The Scouts will only share the fruits of victory, I am afraid."

Just then came the sound of a splash in the water. The crew of the yacht had dragged a collapsible boat from the cabin and had launched it over the side.

The Scoutmaster waited till the boat was fairly close inshore, then, having made certain that only one man was on board, he silently slipped from his post of observation and rejoined Atherton



and the "Otters" in the recess by the mouth of the cave.

Grasping Atherton's hand the Scoutmaster, by means of a series of long and short grips, spelled out a message in Morse.

"Man coming; tackle him on entering cave."

The Leader signified that the message was understood, and passed it on to Phillips, who in turn communicated it to Green and Mayne. Before the remaining "Otters" could be informed, the man from the yacht was heard scaling the cliff between the water's edge and the ledge.

With a strange sensation in his throat, Atherton braced himself for the onslaught. He could hear the partially suppressed breathing of his companions and the rapidly approaching steps of Tassh's nocturnal visitor. The patch of starlit sky at the mouth of the cave was darkened by the hulking figure of Bill.

Unhesitatingly the fellow advanced into the cave, then drawing an electric torch from his pocket he flashed it ahead to guide his footsteps. The beam of light fell, not upon the sanded floor, but upon the figure of the Scoutmaster standing full in his path.

With a muttered oath, Bill threw down the canvas bag, hurled his lamp at Mr Buckley, and turned to seek safety in flight.

Up from their hiding-place the "Otters" ran as one man and threw themselves upon the rogue. Bill's fist shot out straight at Atherton's chin, but luckily for the Scout it was light enough for him to see to parry the blow. Down went Bill, struggling and raving like a madman, with his six youthful yet active assailants on to him like a pack of bulldogs.

"Chuck it," growled Bill sullenly, as Atherton applied an arm-lock. "Chuck it orl you'll break my bloomin' arm. I gives in."

Securely bound hand and foot the prisoner was carried out into the open. The first phase of the capture of the robbers of Sir Silas Gwinnear's silver was effected.

"Now, lads!" exclaimed Mr Buckley, "that's number one. 'Wolves'! Keep watch over the inner cave; we'll rout out Mr Tassh later on. Everest and Baker stand by the prisoner. The rest of the 'Otters' follow me. We must board the yacht and capture the remaining member of the crew."

## CHAPTER XX

### A GOOD NIGHT'S WORK

"GIVE me a hand down here, Atherton," exclaimed Mr Buckley. "We can't wait for a rope this time."

Without mishap the Scouts and the Scoutmaster descended the jagged cliff by the same path that the luckless Bill had so lately ascended.

Hauled up on a shelving ledge and practically awash by the rising tide, was the canvas boat. It seemed a flimsy craft to hold five persons, but reassured by Mr Buckley's word the Scouts embarked.

There were but two oars, and these were short; the boat was deeply laden, and progress was, in consequence, slow. Before they were thirty yards from the cliff the Scouts heard the clanking of a windlass. The sole occupant of the yacht, alarmed at the commotion ashore, was weighing anchor.

"He means to start the motor and leave his comrades to their fate," exclaimed Mr Buckley. "Put your backs into it, lads."

Desperately the fellow worked the windlass, but unfortunately for him there was good scope of chain out. Ere half of it was inboard, the canvas boat swept under the yacht's counter and ranged up alongside his starboard quarter.

"Surrender!" shouted the Scoutmaster.

The man's only reply was to drop the handle of the winch, snatch up the gun from the deck and present it full at Mr Buckley's head.

"Won't do, my man," exclaimed the Scoutmaster affably. "We know there isn't a single cartridge

on board."

The rascal's jaw dropped with sheer amazement.

"I'll bash in the skull of the first chap who tries to get on deck," he replied, swinging the butt end of the weapon above his head.

"Hands up instantly, or I'll fire!" ordered Mr Buckley, sternly. The pale light glinted on the bright barrel of a sinister-looking object he held extended in his right hand. Somewhat to the Scoutmaster's surprise the fellow immediately complied, holding his arms extended to their fullest extent above his head to show that there was no deception, while the gun clattered noisily upon the deck.

In a trice Atherton and Phillips were once more upon the yacht. Without further resistance the fellow allowed them to secure him.

"Take him below," ordered Mr Buckley. "Phillips and Mayne will look after him all right. Come on, you others, if you want to be in at the capture of Mr Tassh."

Before pushing off, Mr Buckley called to Phillips to come out of the cabin.

"Here's my revolver," he said, in a voice loud enough for the prisoner to overhear. "Put it in your pocket, and don't hesitate to use it if the fellow gives trouble."

And to the surprise and amazement of the Scouts, the Scoutmaster held up for inspection—not a dangerous weapon, but one of the brass rowlocks of the canvas boat.

Phillips rejoined his companion in the task of guarding the prisoner. They heard the sound of the oars growing fainter and fainter till all was quiet.

"Look 'ere, you chaps," said the prisoner, breaking the silence, "I ain't to blame for this 'ere business. 'Swelp me, it was orl Bill's doin'!"

"The less you say about it the better," remarked Phillips.

"No 'tain't. I mean to turn King's evidence, so the sooner I get's it off me chest the better, says I. Bill is that silly lubber Tassh's brother-in-law, that's wot yer don't know, eh? Well, Bill 'ad 'is knife inter old Gwinnear over the shippin' strike. I knows as 'ow Bill 'ad a 'and in chuckin' the old josser inter the Thames: that's gospel truth. An' then 'e cods old Tassh inter sneakin' the silver. Told 'im 'e 'd 'ave 'arf the proceeds, and Bill and me 'ud share the rest, and Tassh like a blinkin' fool believed 'im. 'Tis like this——"

"Yacht ahoy!" came a peremptory hail from without.

Phillips dashed up the companion-ladder, and gained the deck to find a coastguard gig alongside.

"Hulloa, my lad!" exclaimed the petty officer in charge. "What's the game? Having a joke with us, eh? Some of you Scouts signalled to us that some of the thieves were on board with the stolen silver."

"One of them is," replied Phillips. "You're a little too late. He is a prisoner; the other one is also captured. He's on shore, and if you hurry up you may have a look in when our fellows collar Mr Tassh."

\* \* \* \*

Upon rejoining the "Wolves" the elated "Otters" found their comrades keeping watch in front of the "needle's-eye." Until their Scoutmaster's return Simpson would not allow his patrol to enter the inner cave. Nevertheless there was now no need for absolute silence, and the lads were able to converse and wile away the otherwise tedious vigil; nor was there any necessity to do without artificial light.

"Now, Simpson," said Mr Buckley, "it's the 'Wolves' turn. You've plenty of candles?"

"Yes, sir."

"Carry on, then," said the Scoutmaster, dropping into a phrase reminiscent of his former service in the Royal Navy.

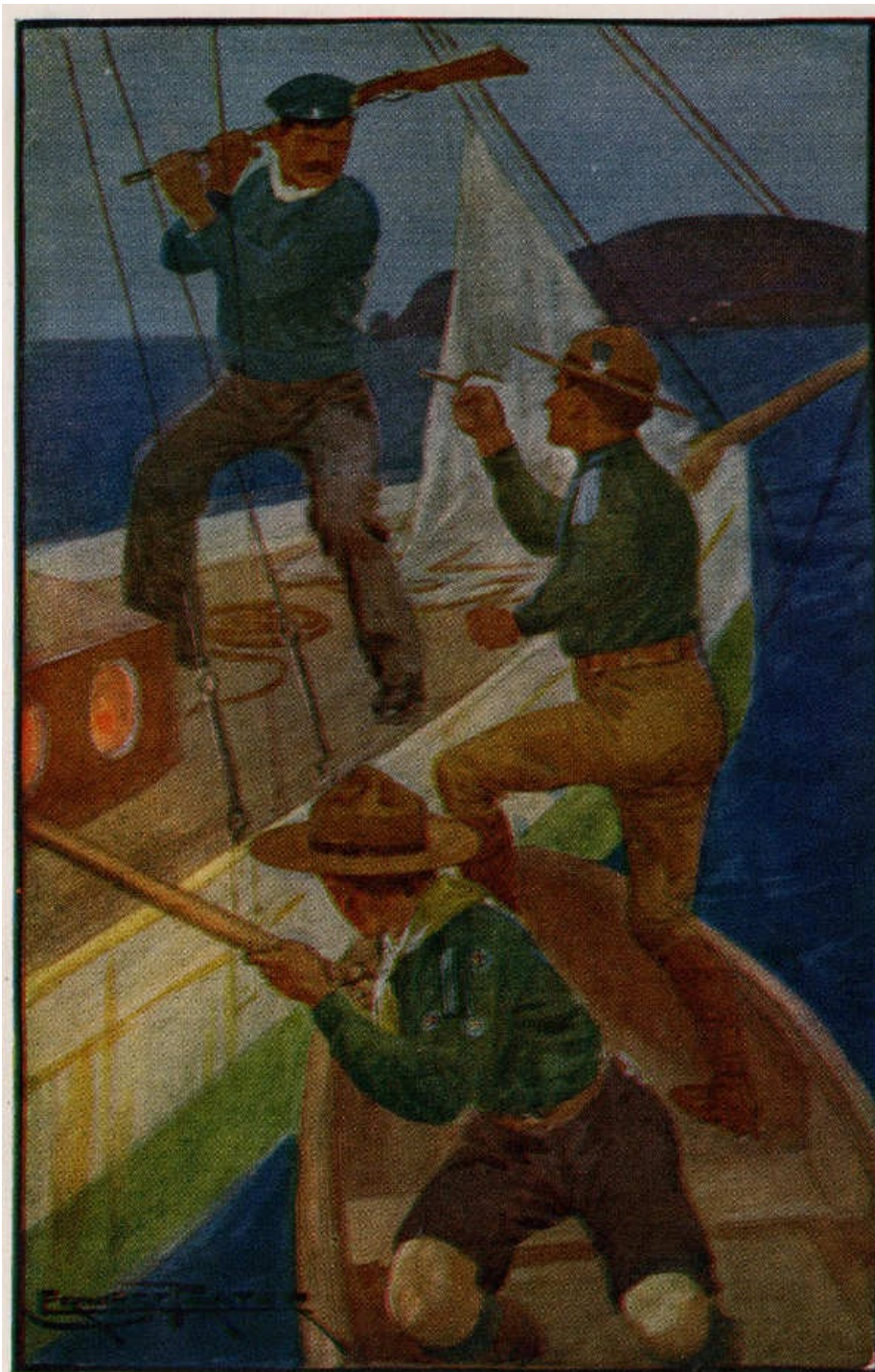
The Leader of the "Wolves" was not a fellow to rush headlong into danger. He knew that if Tassh had the courage and determination he could hold the entrance to the inner cave with impunity.

Placing his hat on the end of a staff he thrust it through the narrow opening. Nothing happened.

"The fellow's missed his opportunity," said Simpson to Neale in a low tone. "So here goes."

Wriggling through the "needle's-eye," Simpson gained the spacious vault. He waited, his staff held in readiness to defend himself from attack, until Neale and Jock Fraser joined him.

Bill's electric torch now served a useful purpose, augmented by the light of several candles. The rest of the "Wolves" were quickly on the scene, and in quite a blaze of light the Scouts followed the trail which in his flight the rascally butler had made no attempt to conceal.



“ ‘ Hands up instantly or I'll fire ! ’ ordered Mr. Buckley sternly.”—Page 237.

[Illustration: "Hands up instantly or I'll fire!" ordered Mr. Buckley sternly."—Page 237.]

The tracks led straight to the place where Atherton had previously found the burnt matches. But in place of the smooth sand there gaped a deep hole, from which the rays of a lantern were visible.

"Come out, Tassh: the game's up," said Simpson. The only reply was a hollow mocking laugh, so eerie that the lads scarce believed it came from a human being. Then came the sound of metal being violently thrown about, to the accompaniment of disjointed and incoherent sentences that

told their own tale.

"The fellow's quite mad; he's amusing himself with smashing the silver," exclaimed Fraser. "We must stop him."

Dropping lightly through the hole, the Scout found himself in a small cave, about twenty feet in length and half that distance in breadth. Two candle lanterns—one hanging from a hook driven into the roof and the other standing on the floor—gave sufficient light for Fraser to see clearly what was going on.

Tassh, seated on the ground with his chin resting on his knee, was amusing himself by throwing the valuable silver cups against the farthest wall, gibbering the while in maniacal delight.

With a bound the Scout stood over the luckless rascal and laid a detaining hand on his shoulder. The man merely smiled and held up a chased goblet as if he wished his captor to join in the game.

"He's as mad as a hatter," said Fraser to Simpson and Neale, who had promptly followed into the thief's lair. "We'll have a job to get him out of this."

"Come on, Tassh," said Simpson, quietly and firmly. "We've something to show you. Come along."

The ex-butler turned his head and looked at the Scout in a dazed manner; then, with a suddenness that almost took Simpson by surprise, the madman jumped to his feet and flung himself tooth and nail upon his captors.

In the struggle the lantern on the floor was upset. The candle in the one hanging from the roof was almost burnt out. In semi-darkness, deep in the farthest recesses of the cave, the three lads struggled with their prisoner, who seemed to possess the strength of a gorilla.

Twice Simpson was hurled against the wall; Fraser, partly dazed by a tremendous blow on the forehead, was hardly of use to his companions; while Neale, his bare knees bleeding from the result of a series of vicious kicks, was banging grimly and desperately round the madman's waist.

The situation was indeed serious. The Scouts had bitten off more than they could chew, yet not one of them raised a shout for help.

For the third time the Leader of the "Wolves" tackled the madman, but ere he could obtain a hold his feet slipped on the smooth rock. Tassh's fingers closed on Simpson's throat with a force that threatened to choke the Scout into insensibility. Simultaneously, by a back kick, the maniac sent Neale staggering, and well-nigh breathless, upon the prostrate Fraser. A multitude of lights flashed before Simpson's eyes . . . then his opponent's grip suddenly relaxed, and Atherton's voice was heard exclaiming:

"It's all right, Simpson. Pull yourself together, man. I hope I haven't killed the fellow."

Atherton had arrived in the nick of time. Something had prompted him to follow Simpson's scanty patrol; he knew by the sounds from the rogue's lair that a desperate struggle was taking place. He leapt into the little cave and with his staff struck the violent madman a stunning blow, causing Tassh to sink inertly to the ground.

As soon as Simpson and Fraser had sufficiently recovered, steps were taken to get the insensible thief from his den. With a bowline round his waist, Tassh was hauled out of the hole, carried across the inner cave and out into the open air.

"We've found the rest of the silver, sir," announced Simpson.

"That's good business," replied Mr Buckley. "It's time we had a rest. Put those lights out, Green, it must be close on dawn. Why, where is the yacht?"

In the pale grey light, the sea showed an unbroken expanse of rippling water. The yacht with Phillips and Mayne had vanished.

\* \* \* \*

"I trust that rascal on board hasn't got the better of Phillips and Mayne," said Mr Buckley.

"So do I, sir," added Atherton. "He must be very smart to get the better of those two fellows."

"Criminals are usually smart," remarked Green.

"Not necessarily," replied the Scoutmaster. "They are frequently only clever in comparison with their dupes. But there is Hayes standing on the cliff."

Hayes and Coventry, having accomplished their task of signalling to the coastguard, had returned to their post of observation, and had dutifully remained there during the whole of the

night, since the Scoutmaster had given no further instructions as to what they were to do.

"Seen anything of the yacht?" shouted Atherton.

"Yes," replied Hayes, "the coastguards towed her away."

"Then Phillips and Mayne are all right," said the Scoutmaster, thankfully. "Now, lads, let's get our prisoners to the top of the cliff. The sooner we hand them over to the proper authorities the better."

In very little time the police arrived from Polkerwyck, and Bill and the madman, Tassh, were conveyed to the mainland. The Scouts, after a well-earned meal, were one and all soon sound asleep, never waking till close upon five in the afternoon, when Sir Silas Gwinnear crossed over to Seal Island to personally compliment the Scouts on their success.

"I am afraid, sir," said Mr Buckley, "we have been acting contrary to Headquarter instructions. Particular emphasis is laid upon the fact that no Scouts' night operations should go on after eleven-thirty. I only hope that the exigencies of the case are sufficient excuse for turning day into night."

"All the same, I do not know how to express my gratitude to the Scouts," said Sir Silas. "That raises an awkward topic, Mr Buckley. You know that there is a reward out for the recovery of the silver?"

"Scouts, Sir Silas, do not accept rewards for services rendered: good turns, we call them."

"So I previously learned," said the baronet, smiling at Atherton. "All the same, if there is anything I can do . . . I suppose there is a limit of age for Scouts, Mr Buckley?"

"Once a Scout, always a Scout, sir."

"H'm. Well, perhaps I may be able to have a bit of my own way in the matter of showing my practical gratitude, Mr Buckley. Meanwhile, Scouts, I hope for the rest of your stay in Seal Island you will be able to conform to regular habits and enjoy yourselves far more than you have up to the present."

"We've had a rattling good time, sir," replied the "Wolves" and the "Otters" in a chorus that carried conviction.

"I'm glad to hear it," returned Sir Silas. "And, believe me, you have made me envious of the Scouts of Seal Island."

\* \* \* \*

Little more remains to be said. The "Otters" and the "Wolves" prolonged their stay on Seal Island for three whole weeks beyond the fortnight originally intended, the extension being due to the fact that the Scouts had to give evidence at Bodmin Assizes against the rascal known as Bill.

The fellow was proved to be one of the assailants of Sir Silas Gwinnear on Hungerford Bridge; and not only was he found guilty of being concerned in the robbery of the baronet's silver, but an additional charge, that of stealing a yacht from Avonmouth—the one the Scouts captured with a quantity of the booty on board—was proved against him.

His companion got off with six months' hard labour against Bill's seven years' penal servitude. Tassh, hopelessly insane, was taken to the county asylum.

Thus the rogues of this story are accounted for.

Collingwood College runs a larger, and equally efficient, troop than of yore. Mr Trematon, now second master of the school, is still in command; but we will look in vain for Dick Atherton, Phillips, Simpson, Neale and others of the young heroes of Seal Island amongst the crowd of uniformed Scouts.

Atherton is now fourth officer of the Empire Line—a steamship company largely under Sir Silas Gwinnear's control. Fred Simpson is likewise in the merchant service, thanks to the Cornish baronet's patronage. Phillips, Neale and Fraser have accepted good appointments in Canada, in connection with the wealthy firm of Gwinnear Ltd.; while every other original member of the "Otters" and "Wolves" patrols has to thank Sir Silas for a good start in life.

At all important Headquarter functions, Sir Silas will generally be found. He is never tired of expressing his high appreciation of the movement, and seems to take a delight in relating the circumstances under which his opinion changed, and how he had reason to be proud of certain members of his firm—the former Scouts of Seal Island.

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Transcriber's Notes:

This book contains a number of misprints.  
The following misprints have been corrected:

[anything unforeseen occur] > [anything unforeseen occurs]  
[the dust-grimmed members] > [the dust-grimed members]  
[ordered Mr. Bulkley] > [ordered Mr. Buckley] (this error occurs twice)  
[embarassing] > [embarrassing]  
[chosing] > [choosing]

A few cases of punctuation errors were corrected, but are not mentioned here.



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