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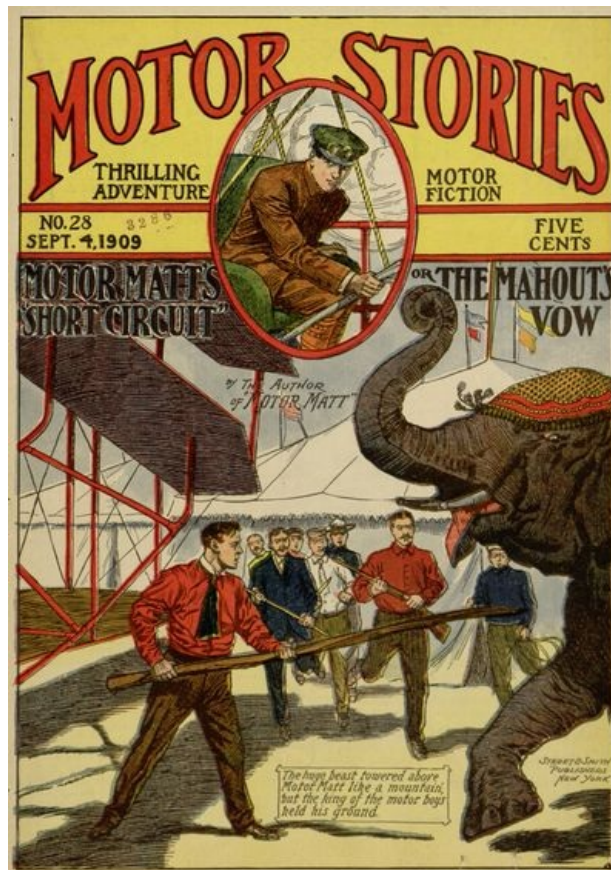
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S SHORT CIRCUIT; OR, THE MAHOUT'S VOW ***



MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

MOTOR
FICTION

NO. 28
SEPT. 4, 1909.

FIVE
CENTS

MOTOR MATT'S OR THE MAHOUT'S
"SHORT CIRCUIT" VOW

BY THE AUTHOR
OF "MOTOR MATT"

MOTOR STORIES
THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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Motor Matt's "Short=circuit"

OR,

THE MAHOUT'S VOW.

By the author of "MOTOR MATT."

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CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR IN THIS STORY.

Matt King, otherwise Motor Matt.

Joe McGlory, a young cowboy who proves himself a lad of worth and character, and whose eccentricities are all on the humorous side. A good chum to tie to—a point Motor Matt is quick to perceive.

Ping, a Chinese boy who insists on working for Motor Matt, and who contrives to make himself valuable, perhaps invaluable.

Carl Pretzel, an old chum who flags Motor Matt and more trouble than he can manage, at about the same time. In the rôle of detective, he makes many blunders, wise and otherwise, finding success only to wonder how he did it.

Dhondaram, a Hindoo snake charmer and elephant trainer, who is under an obligation to Ben Ali and gets into trouble while trying to discharge it.

Andy Carter, ticket-man for Burton's Big Consolidated Shows; a traitor to his employer, and who emerges from his evil plots with less punishment than he deserves.

Boss Burton, manager and proprietor of the "Big Consolidated," who, in his usual manner, forms hasty conclusions, discovers his errors, and shows no sign of repentance.

Archie Le Bon, a trapeze performer who swings on a flying bar under Motor Matt's aeroplane—and has a bad attack of nerves.

Ben Ali, an old Hindoo acquaintance who figures but briefly in the story. His vow, and the manner in which he sought its fulfillment, brings danger to the king of the motor boys.

CHAPTER I.

THE SERPENT CHARMER.

A brown man in a white turban sat by the river. It was night, and a little fire of sticks sent strange gleams sparkling across the water, and touched the form of the brown man with splashes of golden light.

The man was playing on a gourd flute. The music—if such it could be called—was in a high key, but stifled and subdued. Under the man, to keep his crouching body from the earth, had been spread a piece of scarlet cloth. In front of him was a round wicker basket, perhaps a foot in diameter by six inches high.

As the man played, the notes of the flute coming faster and faster, the lid of the basket began to tremble as by some pent-up force. Finally the lid slid open, and a hooded cobra lifted its flat, ugly head. With eyes on those of the serpent charmer, the cobra began weaving back and forth in time to the music. Now and then the snake would hiss and dart its head at the man. The latter would dodge to avoid the striking fangs, meanwhile keeping up his flute-playing.

It was an odd scene, truly, to be going forward in a country like ours—cut bodily from the mysteries of India and dropped down on the banks of the Wabash, there, near the intensely American city of Lafayette.

While the brown man was playing and the cobra swayed, and danced, and struck its lightning-like but ineffectual blows, another came into the ring of firelight, stepping as noiselessly as a slinking panther. He, like the other, wore a turban, and there was gold in his ears and necklaces about his throat.

The first man continued his flute-playing. The other, with a soft laugh, went to the player's side, sank down, and riveted his own snakelike orbs upon the diamond eyes of the cobra. Once the serpent struck at him, but he drew back and continued to look. With one hand the newcomer took the flute from the player's lips and laid it on the ground; then, in a silence broken only by the crackling fires, the eyes of the man snapped and gleamed and held those of the cobra.

The effect was marvelous. Slowly the cobra ceased its rhythmical movements and dropped down and down until it retreated once more into the basket; then, with a quick hand, the lid of the receptacle was replaced and secured with a wooden pin.

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"Yadaba!" exclaimed the first man.

"Not here must you call me that, Dhondaram," said the second. "I am known as Ben Ali."

Dhondaram spat contemptuously.

"'Tis a name of the Turks," he grunted; "a dog's name."

"It answers as well as any other."

These men were Hindoos, and their talk was in Hindustani.

"You sent for me at Chicago," proceeded Dhondaram; "you asked me to come to this place on the river, and to bring with me my most venomous cobra. See! I am here; and the cobra, you have discovered that the flute has no power to quiet its hostility. Your eyes did that, Yada—your pardon; I should have said Ben Ali. Great is the power of your eyes. They have lost none of their charms since last we met."

Ben Ali received this statement moodily. Picking up a small pebble, he cast it angrily into the fire.

"Why have you brought me here?" inquired Dhondaram, rolling a cigarette with materials taken from the breast of his flowing robe.

"Because," answered Ben Ali, "I have made a vow."

"By Krishna," and Dhondaram threw himself forward to light his cigarette at the fire, "vows are evil things. They bring trouble—nothing less."

"This one," hissed Ben Ali, "will bring trouble to an enemy of mine."

"And to yourself, it may be," added Dhondaram, resuming his squatting attitude on the scarlet cloth and whiffing a thin line of vapor into the air.

"The goddess Kali protects me," averred Ben Ali. "It is written in my forehead."

"What else is written in your forehead?" asked Dhondaram after a space. "What was it that caused you to send for me, and to ask me to leave my profitable work in the museum, come here, and bring the worst of my hooded pets?"

Ben Ali, in the silence that followed, picked up more pebbles and cast them into the fire.

"During the feast of Nag-Panchmi," he observed at last, "years since, Dhondaram, a mad elephant crushed a boat on the Ganges. You were in the boat, and I snatched you from certain death."

Dhondaram's face underwent a swift change.

"That, also," he said in a subdued tone, "is written in my forehead. I remembered it when your letter came to me. I owe you obedience until the debt is paid. I am here, Ben Ali. Command me."

"*Such baht!* You, with the cobra, Dhondaram, will go against my enemy and fulfill my vow. That will repay the debt."

A look of fear crossed Dhondaram's face. It passed quickly, but had not escaped the keen eyes of Ben Ali.

"You are afraid!" and he sneered as he spoke.

"And if I am?" protested the other. "I am bound to obey, and lose my life, if I must, in paying for the saving of it during the feast of Nag-Panchmi. Who is your enemy, Aurung Zeeb?"

Ben Ali struck the ground with his clinched fist.

"Aurung Zeeb is a coward!" he exclaimed. "He fled and left me to work out my vengeance alone. *Hurkutjee!* Let us speak no more of him. You knew of my brother, the rajah? How our sister married the *feringhi*, Captain Lionel Manners, of the English army? How he died, and his wife perished in the *ghats*, by *suttee*? Of the daughter they left, Margaret Manners? How, out of hatred to the rajah, I brought the girl to this country and destroyed her will by the power of the eyes? How we traveled with the show of Burton Sahib?"

Dhondaram nodded gravely.

"I know," he replied.

"But you do not know of the *feringhi* boy, the one who flies in the bird machine, and who is called Motor Matt. Because of him I have lost the girl, and she was making much money for me. I was *mahout* in the show for Burton Sahib's worst elephant, Rajah. No other could drive him, or take care of him. You are a *sapwallah*, a charmer of serpents, but you are also a charmer of elephants. You can drive them, Dhondaram, as well as I. You can take care of this Rajah beast as well as I."

"I learned to work with the elephants from my brother, the *muni*," observed Dhondaram. "You have lost the niece you called Haidee?"

"She is under the care of the British ambassador, but she is staying in this town. Perhaps I may get her back—that I do not know. But my vow, Dhondaram, against this *feringhi* boy, Motor Matt. That is for you to carry out. He has wrecked my plans. I will wreck his. He has put me in danger of my life. Through me, he shall be in danger of his own."

"What am I to do?" queried Dhondaram.

"The show of Burton Sahib is some distance from here, but I will tell you how to find it. The cobra will help you join it, for Burton Sahib is always watching for performers. You must learn to do better with this cobra. By performing with the serpent before Burton Sahib, you will please him. He must have some one to take care of the elephant, Rajah. You will apply for the place. Ha! Do you follow me?"

Dhondaram nodded.

"When you have applied for the place I will tell you what to do. The air machine must be wrecked. Rajah will do that. The *feringhi* boy must be put where he will not interfere with my plans for my niece—the cobra *must do that*."

Dhondaram stirred restlessly.

"The law of this country," he murmured, "has a long arm and a heavy fist."

"If you do as I say," went on Ben Ali, "you will not be reached by the arm nor caught by the fist. You will be safe, and so will I; and the vow of Ben Ali will have been carried out."

"You cannot do this yourself?"

"I should be seized if I showed my face again in the show of Burra Burton! I should be thrown into the strong house of the *feringhis* if I appeared among the tents. Motor Matt has said this, and he has the power to carry out his threat."

"Had Motor Matt the power to do this when he saved Haidee?"

"He had."

"And he held his hand! Why?"

"Because Haidee was under the spell of my eyes. In order to free her, he had to bargain with me. The bargain was that I should go free, but never to trouble Motor Matt or the girl any more. With the girl in my hands, I could secure many rupees from my brother, the rajah, for her. And I hate that brother. He is rich, but he made me the keeper of his elephants! He lived in luxury, but I herded with the coolies."

Again Ben Ali struck his clinched fist on the earth.

"It may be," said Dhondaram, "that Burton Sahib has secured another keeper for the bad elephant, Rajah? In that case, he would not want me."

"It is not likely," returned Ben Ali. "All the other keepers are afraid of Rajah. Aurung Zeeb was the only Hindoo who could have managed Rajah, and he dare not return to the show any more than I. Burton Sahib will want some one, and he will take you. You will go to him, perform with the cobra, win his favor. Then, and not till then, you will ask for the post of elephant keeper. Burton Sahib, my word for it, will give you Rajah to look after. Then, my friend, you can carry out the terms of my vow. You will pay your debt, and we shall be quits. I shall have no further claim on you."

"And I shall escape the arm of the *feringhi* law?"

"Even so."

"Tell me what I am to do, and how."

Then, as the little tongues of flame threw their weird play of lights and shadows over the dusky plotters, the talk went on.

CHAPTER II.

A BAD ELEPHANT.

"Great spark-plugs!"

Motor Matt was passing the canvas walls of the menagerie tent of the "Big Consolidated" when a human form ricocheted over the top of it and landed directly in front of him on a pile of hay. The dropping of the man on the hay was accompanied by a wild sound which the king of the motor boys recognized as the trumpeting of an angry elephant. Following this came the noise of quick movements on the other side of the wall, and hoarse voices giving sharp commands.

Matt ran to the man who had fallen on the hay. He was sitting up and staring about him blankly.

"Well, if it isn't Archie Le Bon!" exclaimed Matt. "What sort of way is that to come out of a tent, Le Bon?"

"Couldn't help myself, Matt," was the answer. "A couple of tons of mad elephant gave me a starter. Gee! No more of that in mine. I'm glad this hay happened to be here."

Le Bon got up. Evidently his brain was dizzy, for he supported himself against a guy rope.

"Was it Rajah?" asked Matt.

"Yes."

"Don't you know any better than to fool with that big lump of iniquity?"

"I do now. Burton has offered twenty-five dollars to any one connected with the show who'll take Rajah out in the parade. Thought I'd try it, and I began by doing my best to make friends with the brute. Rajah was about two seconds wrapping his trunk around me and heaving me over the wall. I'm in luck at that, I suppose. The big fellow might have slammed me on the ground and danced a hornpipe on me."

"You don't mean to say that Burton is going to have Rajah in the parade!" exclaimed Matt.

"Says he is," answered Le Bon, "but I'll bet money he won't get any one to ride the elephant. You'd better trot along inside. Your Dutch pard, Carl, had a row with me. We both wanted to try and manage Rajah and annex the twenty-five, and the only way we could settle the question was by drawing straws. For all I know, Carl may be trying to make friends with Rajah now. Head him off, Matt, or there'll be a dead Dutchman on the grounds."

"Carl must be crazy!" exclaimed Matt, whirling around and darting under the canvas.

Archie Le Bon was an acrobat, and one of several brothers who had a hair-raising act in the circus ring; and if Archie couldn't manage Rajah, it was a foregone conclusion that Carl wouldn't be able to.

Still, it was like Carl to be willing to try something of the sort, and the young motorist was eager to call a halt in proceedings before it was too late.

Inside the "animal top" a crowd of men was belaboring Rajah with clubs and sharp prods. The elephant, chained to stakes firmly planted in the ground, was backing away as far as the chains would permit, head up and trunk in the air. Boss Burton, proprietor and manager of the show, was directing operations.

Matt's Dutch pard was very much in evidence. Armed with a piece of sharpened iron, he was hopping around like a pea on a hot griddle, taking a hack at Rajah every time he saw an opening. Joe McGlory was hopping around, too, trying to grab the excited Dutchman and snake him out of harm's way.

Suddenly Rajah lowered his head and executed a wide sweep with his trunk, in a half circle. Carl and a *mahout* who had charge of the other elephants had their feet knocked from under them. The *mahout* was thrown flat and quickly dragged to safety, while Carl was stood on his head in a bucket—a bucket that happened to be filled with water.

McGlory caught Carl by the heels and dragged him out into the centre of the tent, the Dutchman thrashing his arms and sputtering as he slid over the ground.

"Confound the brute!" roared Boss Burton; "I'll either take the kinks out of him and have him in the parade, or I'll shoot him. Leave him alone for half an hour, and then we'll maul him some more. How's Le Bon?"

"Not a scratch," Archie Le Bon answered for himself, coming in under the canvas. "But I might have had a broken head."

"You've had enough?" queried Burton.

"A great plenty, thank you. I'm no elephant trainer, Burton, and while I'd like to make a little extra money I guess I'll look for something that's more congenial."

"Dot's me, too," said Carl to Matt and McGlory. "I don't vas some elephant trainers, I bed you. Vat a ugliness old Racha has! Dot trunk oof his hit me like a railroadt train."

"You were going to try and ride the elephant in the parade, Carl?" demanded Matt.

"I vas t'inking oof id vonce, aber never any more. He iss vorse as I t'ought."

"I heard what he was up to, Matt," put in McGlory, "and hit the high places for here. Arrived just in time to see Le Bon go out between the edge of the wall and the edge of the tent top. Sufferin' skyrockets, but it was quick! Everybody rushed at Rajah, and Carl was right in the thick of it. I thought he'd be smashed into a cocked hat before I could get hold of him."

"Who vas der feller vat left dot pucket oof vater in der vay?" grumbled Carl, mopping his tow hair with a red cotton handkerchief. "Id vas righdt under me ven I come down. I don'd like dot. Id vas pad enough mitoudt any fancy drimmings in der vay oof a pail oof vater."

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"Well, it's a lesson for you to leave Rajah alone."

"T'anks, I know dot. Oof he vas der only elephant vat dere iss, I vouldn't haf noddng to do mit him. Vile I'm vaidng for dot fordune to come from India I haf got to lif, but I vill shdarve pefore I dry to make a lifng taking care oof Racha. Br-r-r, you old sgoundrel!" and Carl turned and shook his fist at Rajah.

Just at this moment Boss Burton stepped up to Matt and his friends.

"Here's a hard-luck proposition!" he glowered. "My biggest elephant raises Cain in a way he never did while Ben Ali had charge of him. Ben Ali was a villain, but he knew how to manage elephants. But Rajah goes in the parade, you can bet your pile on *that*."

"You don't mean it, Burton!" cried Motor Matt.

"Oh, don't I?" and there was a resolute gleam in the showman's eyes as he faced Matt. "You watch and see," he added.

"You're taking a lot of chances if you stick to that notion," grunted McGlory. "The brute's liable to smash a few cages and let loose a lion or two. By the time you foot the bill, Burton, you'll find you're riding a mighty expensive hobby."

"Rajah goes in the parade," shouted the angry showman, "or I put a bullet into him. I've got my mad up now."

"Who'll take him?" queried Matt.

"If I can't find any one to put him through his paces, by gorry I'll do it myself!"

"Then the Big Consolidated," said McGlory, "might as well look for another boss."

"See here, Burton," went on Matt, "you've been having the aëroplane tag your string of four elephants during the parade, and Rajah's been at the end of the string and right in front of the flying machine. You've got to give the machine another place. I'll not take chances with it, if Rajah's in the march. You ought to remember what a close call the brute gave us in Lafayette."

"Nobody's going to change places in the parade!" declared Burton.

He was a man of mercurial temperament, and could only be managed by firmness.

"Either Rajah stays out of the procession," exclaimed Motor Matt calmly, "or the *Comet* does."

"And you can paste that in your hat, Burton," added McGlory. "What Pard Matt says goes."

"Oh, hang it," growled Burton, coming to his senses; "if you fellows bear down on me like that, of course you win out; but I hate to have a measly elephant butt into my plans and make me change 'em. Now——"

"Say, Mr. Burton," spoke up a canvasman, stepping to the showman's side and touching his arm, "there's a dark-skinned mutt in a turban what wants ter see ye in the calliope tent."

Burton whirled on the canvasman.

"Dark skinned man in a turban?" he repeated. "Does he look like a Hindoo?"

"Dead ringer for one."

"Maybe it's Ben Ali——"

"No, he ain't. I know Ben Ali, and this ain't him."

"That tin horn won't show up among these tents in a hurry, Burton," said McGlory. "He knows he'll get what's coming, if he does."

"Then," continued Burton, "it's dollars to dimes it's Aurung Zeeb."

"Not him, neither," averred the canvasman. "This bloke wears a red tablecloth and carries a basket. Looks ter me like he had somethin' he wanted ter sell."

"I'll go and talk with him. Come on, Matt, you and McGlory."

Matt, McGlory, and Carl followed the showman under the canvas and into the calliope "lean-to." Here there was a chocolate-colored individual answering the canvasman's description. But he was not wearing the red tablecloth. Instead, he had spread it on the ground and was sitting on it. In front of him was a round, flat-topped basket, and in his hands was a queer-looking musical instrument.

"You want to see me?" demanded the showman, as he and the boys came to a halt in front of the Hindoo.

The latter swept his eyes over the little group.

"You Burton Sahib?" he inquired, bringing his gaze to a rest on the showman.

"Yes," was the answer.

"You look, see what I can do?" queried the Hindoo.

"If you've got something you want to sell——"

"The honorable sahib makes the mistake. *Dekke!*"

Then, with this native word, which signifies "look," the Hindoo dropped his eyes to the round, flat basket and brought the end of the musical instrument to his lips.

CHAPTER III.

BURTON'S LUCK.

While the notes of the gourd flute echoed through the tent, the cover of the round basket began to quiver and shake. Finally it slipped back, and there were startled exclamations and a brisk, recoiling movement on the part of the spectators as the head of a venomous cobra showed itself.

"A snake charmer!" muttered Burton, disappointment in his voice. "They're as common as Albinos—and about as much of a drawing card."

"That's a cobra di capello he's working with," remarked Matt, staring at the snake with a good deal of interest. "I saw one in a museum once, and heard a lecturer talk about it. The lecturer said that the bite of a cobra is almost always fatal, and that there is no known antidote for the poison; that the virus works so quickly it is even impossible to amputate the bitten limb before the victim dies."

"Shnakes iss pad meticine," muttered Carl, "und I don'd like dem a leedle pit."

"Sufferin' rattlers!" exclaimed McGlory. "I've been up against scorpions, Gila monsters, and tarantulas, but blamed if I ever saw a snake in a sunbonnet before—like that one."

The cobra's hood, which was fully extended, gave it the ridiculous appearance of wearing a bonnet, and there was something grewsome in the way the reptile's head swayed in unison with the flute notes. Suddenly the head darted sideways.

Motor Matt's quickness alone kept him from being bitten. He leaped backward, just in the nick of time to avoid the darting fangs. McGlory, wild with anger, picked up an iron rod that was used about the calliope and made a threatening gesture toward the snake.

"Speak to me about that!" he breathed. "What kind of a snake tamer are you, anyhow? If you think we're going to stand around and let that flat-necked poison thrower get in its work on us, you——"

The cowboy made ready to use the rod, but Matt caught his arm.

"Hold up, Joe," said Matt. "No harm has been done, and this is a mighty interesting performance."

"Aber der sharmer don'd vas apke to put der shnake to shleep mit itseluf," demurred Carl. "Der copra don'd seem to like der moosic any more as me."

"Probably the snake's fangs have been pulled," put in Burton. "I know the tricks of these snake fakirs."

"He got very good fangs, sahib," declared the Hindoo, dropping the flute and getting up. "He pretty bad snake, hard to handle. Now, watch."

Leaning forward, the Hindoo made a quick grab and caught the snake about the neck with one hand. After whirling it three times around his head, he let it fall on the earth in front of him. To the surprise of the boys and Burton, the cobra lay at full length, rigid and stiff, and straight as a yardstick.

The serpent charmer then walked around the cobra, singing a verse of Hindustani song.

"La li ta la, ta perisi,
La na comalay ah sahm-re,

Madna, ca-rahm
Ram li ta, co-co-la lir jhi!
La li ta la, vanga-la ta perisi."

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Burton. "I've heard the Bengal girls chant that song when they went to the well, of an evening, with their water pitchers on their heads. That's the time I was in India after tigers."

"*Dekke!*" cried the Hindoo; "I have killed my snake, my beautiful little snake! But I have a good cane to walk with."

Then, taking the rigid reptile up by the tail, he pretended to walk with it.

"How you like to buy my cane, sahib?" he asked, swinging the cobra up so that its head was close to the young motorist's breast.

Matt shook his head and stepped quickly back.

"Take the blasted thing away!" snarled McGlory. "Don't get so careless with it."

"The snake's hypnotized," explained Burton. "When he swung it around his head he put it to sleep."

The Hindoo smiled; then, thrusting the head of the rigid snake under his turban, he pushed it up and up until all but the tip of the tail had disappeared under the headdress. After that, with a quick move, he snatched off the turban. The venomous cobra was found in a glittering coil on his head.

With both hands the Hindoo lifted the drowsy cobra from his head, dropped it into the basket, closed the lid, and pushed the peg into place.

"That's a pretty good show," remarked Burton, "but it's old as the hills. Where did you come from?"

"Chicago," replied the snake charmer. "I want a job with Burton Sahib."

"What's your name?"

"Dhondaram."

"There's not a thing I can give you to do in the big show," said Burton, "but maybe the side show could find a place for you. Snake charmers are side-show attractions, anyhow."

Dhondaram was giving most of his attention to Matt, although speaking with Burton.

"He acts as though he knew you, pard," observed McGlory.

Dhondaram must have caught the words, for instantly he shifted his gaze from Matt to the showman.

"Burra Burton can't give me a job in the big show?" he went on.

"No," was Burton's decisive reply. "You're a Hindoo. Tell me, do you know a countryman of yours named Ben Ali?"

Dhondaram shook his head.

"Or Aurung Zeeb?"

Another shake of the head. Dhondaram, seemingly in much disappointment, gathered up his scarlet robe and his basket and started out.

"Know of any one who can handle an elephant?" Burton called after him.

Dhondaram whirled around, his eyes sparkling.

"I handle elephants, sahib," he declared.

"You can?" returned the showman jubilantly. "Well, this is a stroke of luck, and no mistake. Are you good at the job?"

"Good as you find," was the complacent response.

"This elephant's a killer," remarked the showman cautiously.

"He can't kill Dhondaram, sahib," said the Hindoo, with a confident smile.

"He has just been in a tantrum, and threw one man through the tent."

"The elephant, when he is mad, must be looked after with knowledge, sahib."

"Well, you come on, Dhondaram, and we'll see how much knowledge you've got."

Dhondaram dropped in behind Burton, and Matt and his friends fell in behind Dhondaram. Together they repaired to the animal tent.

"Don't like the brown man's looks, hanged if I do, pard," muttered McGlory.

"Me, neider," added Carl. "He iss like der shnake, I bed you—ready to shtrike ven you don't exbect dot. Aber meppy he iss a goot hand mit der elephant. Ve shall see aboutd dot."

When they were back in the animal tent, Burton and the boys found Rajah still in vicious mood. Straining at his chains, the big brute was swaying from side to side, reaching out with his trunk in every direction and trying to lay hold of something.

"*Himmelblitzen*, vat a ugly feller!" murmured Carl, standing and staring. "He vouldt schust as soon kill somepody as eat a wad oof hay. You bed my life I vas gladt I gave oop trying to manach him."

"There's the elephant, Dhondaram," spoke up Burton, pointing. "He's a killer, I tell you, and I'll not be responsible for damages."

"I myself will be responsible, sahib," answered the Hindoo. "Hold my basket, sahib?" he asked, extending the receptacle toward Carl.

Carl yelled and jumped back as though from a lighted bomb.

"Nod for a millyon tollars!" he declared. "Take id away."

Dhondaram smiled and placed the basket on the ground; then over it he threw the red robe.

"*Dekke*, sahibs," he remarked, taking a sharp-pointed knife from a sash about his waist. "Look, and you will see how I manage the elephant in my own country." [Pg 6]

Fearlessly he stepped forth and posted himself in front of Rajah. It may be that the angry brute recognized something familiar in the Hindoo's clothes, for he stopped lurching back and forth and watched the brown man.

"You got to be brave, sahibs," remarked the Hindoo, keeping his eyes on the elephant's. "If you have the fear, don't let the elephant see. The elephant is always a big coward, and he make trouble only when he think he got cowards to deal with. Watch!"

With that, Dhondaram stepped directly up to the big head of Rajah. Up went the head, the trunk elevated and curved as though for a blow.

Matt and his friends held their breath, for it seemed certain the brown man would be crushed to death under their very eyes.

But he was not. Rajah's trunk did not descend. In a sharp, authoritative voice Dhondaram began talking in his native tongue. Every word was accompanied by a sharp thrust of the knife.

The huge bulk of the elephant began to shiver and to recoil slowly, releasing the pull on the chains. Presently the big head lowered and the trunk came down harmlessly.

Then, at a word from the Hindoo, the elephant knelt lumberingly on his forward knees, stretching out his trunk rigidly. Dhondaram stepped on the trunk and was lifted, gently and safely, to the broad neck. At another word of command, Rajah rose, and Dhondaram, from his elevated place, smiled and saluted.

"It is easy, sahibs," said he. "This elephant is not a bad one."

Burton clapped his hands.

"Do you want a job as Rajah's *mahout*?" he asked.

"Yes," was the answer.

The showman turned to Matt.

"Are you willing to take the *Comet* in the parade with Rajah," he inquired, "now that we have a better driver than even Ben Ali to look after the brute?"

"Dhondaram is a marvel!" exclaimed Matt. "Yes, Burton, we'll be in the parade with the aëroplane."

"Good! Hustle around and get ready. There's not much time. Come down, Dhondaram, and get the blankets on Rajah. The parade will start in half an hour."

The boys hurried out of the tent and into the calliope "lean-to." The *Comet* had to be put in readiness, and McGlory and Ping, the Chinese boy, had costumes to put on.

CHAPTER IV.

MOTOR MATT'S COURAGE.

During the exhibition at Lafayette, Indiana, the *Comet* had caught fire while in the air and the king of the motor boys had made a dangerous descent in safety. The machine had been damaged, however, and, when the show left the town, Matt and his friends had remained behind to make repairs. These repairs had occupied two days. When they were finished, Matt and McGlory had rejoined the show, flying from Lafayette in the aëroplane and scattering Burton's handbills over the country as they came. Carl Pretzel and Ping, the Chinaman, had caught up with the show by train, there being no place for them on the *Comet*.

The flight through the air had been made in the face of a tolerably stiff breeze, and Matt and McGlory had found it necessary to lie over almost the entire night on account of a high wind. The flying machine, however, had caught up with the show that very morning.

The Big Consolidated had pitched its tents in the outskirts of Jackson, Michigan, just across the railroad tracks on the road to Wolf Lake.

Matt's work, for which he and his friends were receiving five hundred and fifty dollars a week,

was to drive the aëroplane, under its own power, in the parade, and to give two flights daily on the grounds—one immediately after the parade and the other before the evening performance—wind and weather permitting. During these flights Archie Le Bon was carried up on a trapeze under the flying machine.

When the boys reached the place where the aëroplane had been left in charge of Ping, they began at once replenishing the gasoline and oil tanks and seeing that everything was shipshape for the journey on the bicycle wheels.

Ping, while primarily one of the *Comet's* attendants, had also shown a decided regard for the steam calliope. The calliope operator was teaching him to play a tune on the steam sirens, in return for which attention the Chinaman always provided the musical instrument with the water necessary to make the steam that operated the whistles.

Knowing that he would have to look after the aëroplane, Ping had performed his calliope duties early in the day.

The arrival of Carl with Matt and McGlory was a distinct disappointment to Ping. He and the Dutch boy had had a set-to at the time of their first meeting, and, although Matt had made them shake hands, yet there still rankled in their bosoms a feeling of hostility toward each other. Nevertheless, they kept this animosity in the background whenever Matt or McGlory was near them.

During the trip from Lafayette to Jackson on the train the two had ridden in different cars. They were not on speaking terms when away from Matt King and his cowboy pard.

Carl was just beginning his engagement with the Big Consolidated. He was traveling with the show while waiting for some money to reach him from India. There was nothing for him to do about the *Comet*, so he secured a job playing the banjo in the side show while a so-called Zulu chief performed a war dance on broken glass in his bare feet.

When the flying machine was in readiness the wagons and riders were already forming for the parade.

"You'll have to hustle to get into your clothes, Joe," said Matt, "you and Ping. Get a move on, now. While you're away I'll watch the *Comet*."

McGlory and Ping started at once for the calliope tent, which they used as general rendezvous and dressing room. They rode on the machine in costume—McGlory in swell cowboy regalia and Ping in a barbaric get-up that made him look as though he had tumbled off a last year's Christmas tree.

Carl had nothing to do until after the aëroplane flight, and so he remained with Matt until the procession started.

"Here comes dot pad elephant, Racha," murmured Carl, pointing to the string of four elephants lumbering in their direction from the animal tent. "Der Hintoo iss pooty goot ad bossing der elephant, aber I don'd like his looks." [Pg 7]

"He's all right, Carl," laughed Matt easily. "It's Rajah's looks you don't like."

"Vell, I dell you somet'ing, bard. Oof der elephant geds his madt oop, all you got to do is to turn some veels und sail indo der air mit der *Gomet*."

"We couldn't do that. When the *Comet* takes to the air she has to have a running start. There's no chance for such a start while we're in the parade."

"So? Vell, keep your eyes shkinnd bot' vays und look oudt for yourseluf. I got some hunches alretty dot you vill haf drouples."

"We'll not have any trouble," returned Matt confidently.

A few minutes after the elephants had dropped into line in front of the aëroplane, McGlory, his big spurs clinking at his heels, and Ping, rattling with tin ornaments and spangles, ran toward the *Comet*. Ping was helped to the upper wing, and Matt and McGlory took their places in the seats on the lower plane.

Carl drew off and cast a gloomy look at Ping, sitting cross-legged on the overhead plane and languidly beating the air with a fan.

"You look like nodding vat I efer see!" whooped Carl, envious to a degree that brought out the sarcastic words in spite of himself.

"My see plenty things likee Dutchy boy when my no gottee gun," chattered Ping.

"Py shinks," rumbled Carl, beside himself, "I vill make you eat dose topacco tags vat you haf on!"

"Makee tlacks," answered Ping, with a maddening wave of the fan; "makee tlacks to side show and plingee-plunk for Zulu man! My makee lide in procesh."

The Chinaman's lordly way worked havoc with Carl's nerves. He howled angrily and rushed forward. At just that moment the parade got under way, and the aëroplane lurched and swayed across the ground toward the road.

"Carl," cried Matt sternly, "keep away!"

The Dutch boy had to content himself with drawing back, shaking his fist at the glittering form on the upper wing of the aëroplane, and saying things to himself.

The parade was but a wearying repetition of the many Matt, McGlory, and Ping had already figured in. The glitter of tinsel, the shimmer of mirrors, the prancing steeds and their mediæval riders, the funny clowns, the camels and elephants, and the blare of the bands had long since lost their glamour. For Matt and his friends the romance had died out, and they were going about their work on a business basis.

The motor boys and their gasoline air ship always commanded attention and were loudly cheered. The fame of Motor Matt's exploits had been told in handbills and dodgers by the clever showman, and, too, Burton had seen to it that the young motorist secured ample space in the newspapers. This, naturally, aroused a great deal of interest, and it had long ago been conceded that Burton's greatest attractions were Matt and his aëroplane.

Rajah was a very good elephant during the entire parade. As usual, his mate, Delhi, marched ahead of him, and always had a pacifying effect. Dhondaram, perched on Rajah's neck, kept the huge brute lumbering in a straight line.

But it seemed strange to Matt and McGlory that Rajah, after his fit of madness, could be so suddenly brought into subjection.

"I'll bet my spurs," remarked McGlory, early in the parade, "that Rajah will cut up a caper yet."

"If he does," answered Matt, "I hope the *Comet* will be out of his way. But this Dhondaram, Joe, seems to be an A One *Mahout*, and I believe he can hold Rajah down."

It was about half-past eleven when the dusty paraders began filing back into the show grounds, the cages pulling into the menagerie tent, the riders taking their horses to the stable annex, and Matt driving the aëroplane to the spot from which the first exhibition flight of the day was to be made.

"You and Ping go and peel off your show togs," said Matt to McGlory, as soon as the *Comet* had been brought to a halt and he and his friends had dropped off the machine, "and then come back and take charge of the start. I've got to fix that electric wiring, or I'll get short-circuited while I'm up with Le Bon."

He pulled off his coat while he was speaking, and dropped coat and hat on the ground; then, as McGlory and Ping made their way toward the calliope tent through a gathering throng of sightseers, the young motorist opened a tool box and stepped around toward the rear of the aëroplane to get at the battery and adjust the connections.

A sharp tent stake, carelessly dropped by one of the show's employees, lay in the way and Matt kicked it aside. He gave a look around, and saw that Dhondaram was having some trouble getting Rajah into the menagerie tent. Thinking nothing of this, Matt proceeded to the rear of the planes and threw himself across the lower wing, close to the motor and the battery.

While he was busily at work he heard a series of startled yells, apparently coming from the crowd that was massing to witness the flight of the *Comet*. Withdrawing hastily from his place on the lower plane of the machine, Matt dropped to the ground and ran around the ends of the right-hand wings. What he saw was enough to play havoc with the strongest nerves.

Right and left the crowd was scattering in a veritable panic, and through the lane thus made came Rajah, hurling himself along in a direct line for the *Comet*. There was no one on the animal's back, and the gay trappings which covered him were fluttering and snapping in the wind of his flight.

Rajah had always had a dislike for the aëroplane. Its ungainly form seemed to annoy him. In the present instance this was no doubt a fortunate thing. Had the brute not kept his attention on the air ship, he might have turned on the frightened throng and either killed or injured a dozen people.

Motor Matt knew Rajah was charging the *Comet*, and the lad's first impulse was to get out of the way; then, reflecting that he and his friends stood to lose the aëroplane unless he made a decided stand of some sort, he caught up the tent stake, which lay near at hand, and jumped fearlessly in front of the flying machine.

This move was not all recklessness on Matt's part. He recalled what Dhondaram had said to the effect that an elephant was a coward, and brave only when he had cowardly human beings to deal with.

Well behind Rajah came a detachment of canvasmen, carrying ropes and iron bars, and one armed with a rifle. The king of the motor boys had seen these men, and he knew that if he could keep Rajah from his work of destruction until the men had had time to come up the *Comet* would be saved.

Cries of consternation went up from the spectators as they saw the elephant plunge toward Matt. The lad gave a fierce shout as the brute drew close, and waved the tent stake.

"Get out of the way, King! Out of the way, or you'll be killed!"

This was Burton's voice ringing in Matt's ears, and coming from he knew not where. But the command had no effect on the daring young motorist. He did not move from his position.

Rajah wavered. Although he slackened his headlong rush, he still continued to come on.

When he was close, and Matt could look into his vicious little eyes, he halted, crouched back, and lifted his trunk.

The lad jumped forward and began to use the pointed end of the stake vigorously. Rajah's head

was up, and his sinuous trunk twined in the air.

The huge beast towered above Motor Matt like a mountain, but the king of the motor boys held his ground.

CHAPTER V.

DHONDARAM'S EXCUSE.

What might have happened to Matt had not the canvasmen arrived while he was pluckily facing and prodding Rajah, it is hard to say. Certainly the young motorist's brave stand held the elephant at bay and saved the aëroplane. Before Rajah could make up his mind to strike Matt down and trample over him to the *Comet*, the frenzied brute was assailed on all sides and, under the angry direction of Boss Burton, was beaten into a state of sullen obedience.

"Where's that confounded Hindoo?" roared Burton, as two of the other elephants hauled Rajah off toward the animal tent.

McGlory, in his shirt sleeves, pushed through the crowd and up to the aëroplane in time to hear the question.

"Dhondaram is up there in the calliope tent," said the cowboy; "leastways he was a while ago. When Ping and I dropped into the lean-to to change our togs, the Hindoo was stretched on the floor, groaning like a man who was having a fit. He didn't seem to be so terribly bad off, in spite of the way he was taking on, and I didn't have much time to strip off my puncher clothes and get back here. Just as I got into my regular make-up, and before I could take another look at Dhondaram, a fellow ran by and yelled that Rajah was runnin' wild again and headin' for the *Comet*. That was enough for me, and I hustled hot foot for here. I saw you, pard," and here the cowboy turned to Matt, "standing off that big brute with a tent stake. Speak to me about that! Say, I'm a Piegan if I ever thought you'd get out of that mix with your scalp."

"It was a fool thing you did, King," growled Burton, very much worked up over the way events had fallen out. "You had about one chance in a hundred of getting out alive. What did you do it for?"

"There wasn't any other chance of saving the *Comet*," answered Matt, a bit shaken himself now that it was all over and he realized how close a call he had had.

"Your life, I suppose, isn't worth anything in comparison with the value of this aëroplane," scoffed Burton.

"That sort of talk is foolish, Burton," said Matt. "I remembered what Dhondaram had said about not being a coward around Rajah, so I jumped in and got between the elephant and the machine. But there's no use talking now. The aëroplane has been saved, and there's nothing much the matter with me."

"There *is* some use of talking," snapped Burton. "Here comes Dhondaram, with Ping. Now we can find out how Rajah got away. Dhondaram has starred himself—I don't think. If that's the best he can do, on his first try-out, I might as well give him the sack right here."

The Hindoo and the Chinese boy were coming through the excited crowd toward the aëroplane. Dhondaram staggered as he walked, and there was a wild look in his face.

"What's the matter with you, Dhondaram?" demanded Burton sharply, as the eyes of the little group near the *Comet* turned curiously on the Hindoo.

"I was sick, sahib," mumbled the brown man, laying both hands on the pit of his stomach and rolling his eyes upward.

"Sick?" echoed Burton incredulously. "It must have come on you mighty sudden."

"It did, sahib. I came in from the parade, then all at once I could not see and grew weak—*jee*, yes, so weak I could not stay on Rajah's back, but fell to the ground and lay there for a moment, not knowing one thing. When I came to myself I was in a tent, and the *feringhi* sahib,"—he pointed to McGlory—"and the Chinaman sahib were getting clear of their clothes. When I get enough strength, I come here. *Such bhat*, sahib. What I say is true."

"You had Rajah properly tamed," went on Burton; "I never saw him act better in the parade than he did this morning. What caused him to make such a dead set at this flying machine the moment you dropped off his back?"

"Who can say, sahib?" asked Dhondaram humbly. "He not like the machine, it may be. Has he a cause to dislike the bird-wagon? The elephant, Burton Sahib, never forgets. A hundred years is to him as a day when it comes to remembering."

One of the canvasmen stepped up and asserted that he had seen Dhondaram drop off Rajah's back and then get up and reel away. Thereupon the canvasman, expecting trouble, called for some of the other animal trainers, and they picked up the first things they could lay hands on and started after the charging elephant.

This was corroborative of the Hindoo's story, as was also the statement made by McGlory.

"Are you subject to attacks like that?" queried Burton, with a distrustful look at the new *mahout*.

"Not at all, sahib," replied the Hindoo glibly. "It was the first stroke of the kind I have ever suffered. By Krishna, I hope and believe it will be the last."

"Well," remarked Burton grimly, "if you ever have another, you'll be cut out of this aggregation of the world's wonders. Now hike for the menagerie and do your best to curry Rajah down again."

Without a word Dhondaram wheeled and vanished into the crowd. McGlory turned, caught Matt's arm, and pulled him off to one side. [Pg 9]

"What's your notion about this, pard?" he asked.

"I haven't any," said Matt. "It's something to think over, Joe, and not form any snap judgments."

The cowboy scowled.

"These Hindoos are all of the same breed, I reckon," he muttered, "and you know what sort of fellows Ben Ali and Aurung Zeeb turned out to be."

Matt nodded thoughtfully.

"I don't believe one of the turban-tops is to be depended on," proceeded McGlory. "They're all underhand and sly, and not one of 'em, as I size it up, but would stand up a stage or snake a game of faro if he got the chance."

"There you go with your snap judgment," laughed Matt.

"It's right off the reel, anyhow," continued McGlory earnestly. "That Rajah critter was as meek as pie all through the parade. It don't seem reasonable that he'd take such a dead set at the *Comet* all at once. And, as for Dhondaram getting an attack of cramps, he stood about as much chance of that as of bein' struck by lightning."

Matt was silent.

"Blamed queer," continued McGlory, "that Ben Ali and Aurung Zeeb should drop out, and then, two days after, this other Hindoo should show up. For a happenchance, pard, it's too far-fetched. There's something rotten about it."

"What had Dhondaram got against the *Comet*?" asked Matt.

"I pass that."

"You're hinting, in a pretty broad way, Joe, that the new *mahout* deliberately set Rajah on to smash the aëroplane."

"Then I won't hint, pard, but will come out flat-footed. That's just what I think he did."

"Why?"

"You've got to have a reason for everything? Well, I haven't any reason for that, but I think it, all the same."

"Ping!" called Matt.

The Chinese boy was standing by the front of the aëroplane, patting the forward rudders affectionately, looking at the machine with a fond eye, and apparently exulting over the fact that it had been saved from destruction.

At Matt's call, the boy whirled around and ran toward his two friends.

"Whatee want, Motol Matt?" he asked.

"You came here with the Hindoo," said Matt. "How was that?"

"My follow Hindoo flom tent. Him no gettee sick. My savvy. When McGloly makee lun flom tent, Hindoo jump to feet chop-chop, feel plenty fine. Him makee play 'possum. Whoosh! When him come, my come, too."

"Talk about that!" exclaimed McGlory. "Worse, and more of it. There's a hen on of some kind, pard."

"Ping," proceeded Matt, "I've got a job for you."

"Bully!" cried the Chinaman delightedly.

"What I want you to do," said Matt, "is to watch Dhondaram. Don't let him see you at it, mind, but just dodge around, keep tab on him, and don't let him suspect what you're doing."

"Hoop-ala!" said Ping, delighted at having such a piece of work come his way.

"Think you can attend to that?"

"Can do! You bettee. My heap smarter than Hindoo. You watchee, find um out."

"All right, then. Away with you."

Ping darted off toward the animal tent. At that moment Burton hurried up.

"Better get busy and make your ascent, Matt," said Burton. "The crowd's all worked up about that elephant business, and the quickest way to get the people's minds off it is by giving them something else to watch and talk about."

"I'll start at once," replied Matt, taking his seat in his accustomed place on the lower plane. "Let her flicker, Joe."

The king of the motor boys "turned over" the engine, switched the power into the bicycle wheels,

and the *Comet*, pushed by McGlory and half a dozen canvasmen, raced along the hard ground for a running start.

CHAPTER VI.

ROBBERY.

Motor Matt made as graceful an ascent and as pretty a flight in the aëroplane as any he had ever attempted. Archie Le Bon, swinging below the machine on a trapeze, put the finishing touch to the performance by doing some of the most hair-raising stunts. Loud and prolonged were the cheers that floated up to the two with the *Comet*, and there was not the least doubt but that the aëroplane had successfully diverted the minds of the spectators from the recent trouble with Rajah.

After the *Comet* had fluttered back to earth, and the crowd had drifted away toward the side show, Matt and McGlory left a canvasman in charge of the machine and dropped in at the cook tent for a hurried meal. There was now nothing for the two chums to do until the next flight of the day, which was billed to take place at half-past six.

"Did you ever have a feeling, pard," said the cowboy, as he and Matt were leaving the mess tent and walking across the grounds toward the calliope "lean-to," "that there was a heap of trouble on the pike, and all of it headed your way?"

"I've had the feeling, Joe," laughed Matt.

"Got it now?"

"No."

"Well, I have."

McGlory halted and looked skyward, simultaneously lifting his handkerchief to test the strength and direction of the wind. Watching the weather had become almost a second nature with the cowboy since he and Matt had been with the Big Consolidated. Aëroplane flights are, to a greater or less extent, at the mercy of the weather, and the more wind during an ascension then the greater the peril for Motor Matt.

"Think the weather is shaping up for a gale this afternoon, Joe?" queried Matt.

"Nary, pard. There's not a cloud in the sky, and it's as calm a day as any that ever dropped into the almanac."

"Not exactly the day to worry, eh?"

"Well, no; but I'm worrying, all the same. What are you going to do now?"

"Catch forty winks of sleep in the calliope tent. We didn't get our full share of rest last night, and I'm feeling the need of it." [Pg 10]

When they got to the "lean-to" Matt laid a horse blanket on the ground, close to the wheels of the canvas-covered calliope, and stretched himself out on it. A band was playing somewhere about the grounds, and the sound lulled him into slumber.

The cowboy was not sleepy, and he was too restless to stay in the "lean-to." Matt was hardly asleep before McGlory had left on some random excursion across the grounds.

A man entered the calliope tent. He came softly, and halted as soon as his eyes rested on the sprawled-out form of Motor Matt.

The man was Dhondaram. A burning light arose in the dusky eyes as they continued to rest on the form of the sleeper.

For some time the doors leading into the "big show" had been open. Crowds were entering the menagerie tent, and passing from there into the "circus top." The noise was steady and continuous, so that it was impossible for Matt, who was usually a light sleeper, to hear the entrance of the Hindoo.

Dhondaram lingered for several minutes. He had not his flat-topped basket with him, and he whirled abruptly and hurried out of the "lean-to."

From the look that flamed in the face of the Hindoo as he left, it seemed as though he was intending to return again—and to bring the cobra with him.

He had not been gone many minutes, however, when Boss Burton entered the calliope tent. This was where he usually met the man from the ticket wagon, as soon as the receipts had been counted and put up in bags, received the money, and carried it to the bank. This part of the work had to be accomplished before three o'clock in the afternoon, as the banks closed at that hour. The money from the evening performance always accompanied Burton in the sleeping car on the second section of the show train, and was deposited in the next town on the show's schedule.

Burton did not see Matt lying on the ground, close up to the calliope, and seated himself on an overturned bucket and lighted a cigar. The weed was no more than well started, when Dhondaram, carrying his basket, appeared softly in the entrance. At sight of Burton, the Hindoo stifled an exclamation and came to a startled halt.

"What's wrong with you?" demanded the showman.

"Nothing at all, sahib," answered Dhondaram, recovering himself.

"Feeling all right now?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Good!"

Without lingering for further talk, Dhondaram faced about and glided away.

The conversation between the showman and the Hindoo had awakened Matt. The young motorist sat up blinking and looked at Burton. He knew how the proprietor of the Big Consolidated always met the ticket man in the calliope tent, about that time in the afternoon, and checked up and received the proceeds for deposit in the local bank.

"Much of a crowd, Burton?" called Matt.

"Oh, ho!" he exclaimed. "You've been taking a snooze, eh?"

"A short one. Trying to make up for a little sleep I lost last night. What time is it, Burton?"

"About half-past two. Say," and it was evident from Burton's manner that the thought flashing through his brain had come to him suddenly, "I want to talk with you a little about that Dutch pard of yours."

"Go ahead," said Matt, leaning back against one of the calliope wheels; "what about Carl?"

"Is he square?" continued Burton.

"Square?" repeated Matt. "Why, he's as honest a chap as you'll find anywhere. If he wasn't, he wouldn't be training with McGlory and me. You ought to know that, Burton."

"You ain't infallible, I guess. Eh, Matt? You're liable to make mistakes, now and then, just like anybody else."

"I suppose so, but I know Carl too well to make any mistake about *him*. What gave you the idea he was crooked?"

"I never had the idea," protested Burton. "I just asked for information, that's all. He came to the show on your recommendation, and I've taken him in, but I like to have a line on the people I get about me."

"There's more to it than that," said Matt, studying Burton's face keenly. "Out with it, Burton."

"Well, then, I don't like the Dutchman's looks," acknowledged Burton. "Ping told me——"

"Oh, that's it!" muttered Matt. "Ping told you—what?"

"Why, that he caught the Dutchman going through his pockets last night. If that's the kind of fellow Carl is, I——"

"Take my word for it, Burton," interrupted Matt earnestly, "my Dutch pard is on the level. He makes a blunder, now and then, but he's one of the best fellows that ever lived."

"What did Ping talk to me like that for?"

"He and Carl don't hitch. There's a little petty rivalry between them, and they're a bit grouchy."

"Is Ping so grouchy that he's trying to make people believe Carl's a thief?"

"Ping is a Chinaman, and he has his own ideas about what's right and wrong. I'll talk to him about this, though."

"You'd better. Certainly you don't want one of your pards circulating false reports about another." Burton looked at his watch impatiently. "I wonder where Andy is?" he muttered, "He's behindhand, now, and if he delays much longer, I'll not be able to get to the bank before closing time."

"He may have had such a big afternoon's business," suggested Matt, "that it's taking him a little longer to get the money counted, and into the bags."

"The business was only fair—nothing unusual. Andy has had plenty of time to sack up the money and get here with it."

Andy Carter was the ticket man. He was middle-aged, an expert accountant, and was usually punctual to the minute in fulfilling his duties to his employer.

"Have you seen anything of Dhondaram lately?" Matt inquired casually.

"He blew in here with his little basket just before you woke up. Didn't you see him?"

"I heard you talking," answered Matt, "and that's what wakened me, but I didn't see who you were talking with. Did he get Rajah under control again, Burton?"

A puzzled look crossed the showman's face.

"He can manage that big elephant as easily as I can manage a tame poodle, and he wasn't two minutes with the brute before he had him as meek as Moses. What I can't understand is how Rajah ever broke away and went on the rampage like he did."

"There are others on this ground who deserve your suspicions a whole lot more than my Dutch pard," observed Matt.

"You mean that I'd better be watching Dhondaram?"

"Not at all," was the reply. Matt was already having the Hindoo watched, so it was hardly necessary for Burton to attend to the matter. "The Hindoo's actions are queer."

"Hindoos are a queer lot, anyhow. But they're good elephant trainers, and that's the point that gets me, just now."

"Where did Dhondaram say he——"

Motor Matt got no further with his question. Just at that moment a man reeled through the entrance. His hat was gone, his coat was torn, and there was a bleeding cut on the side of his face. With a gasp, he tumbled to his knees in front of Burton.

"Great Jupiter!" exclaimed Burton, leaping to his feet. "Andy! What's happened to you?"

"Robbed!" breathed the ticket man, swaying and holding both hands to his throat; "knocked down and robbed of two bags of money that I was bringing here. I—I——"

By then the startled Matt was also on his feet.

"Who did it?" shouted the exasperated Burton. "Did you see who did it? Speak, man!"

But Carter was unable to speak. Overcome by what he had passed through, he crumpled down at full length and lay silent and still at the showman's feet.

CHAPTER VII.

BETWEEN THE WAGONS.

Excitement, and a certain reaction which follows all such shocks as the ticket man had been subjected to, had brought on a fainting spell. A little water soon revived Carter, and he was laid on the blanket from which Matt had gotten up a little while before.

"Now tell me about the robbery," said Burton, "and be quick. While we're wasting time here, the thieves are getting away. I can't afford to let 'em beat me out of the proceeds of the afternoon's show. Who did it, Carter?"

"I don't know, Burton," was the answer.

"Don't know?" repeated the showman blankly. "Can't tell who knocked you down and lifted the two bags, when it was done in broad day! What are you givin' us?" he added roughly.

"It's a fact, Burton," persisted Carter. "I was hit from behind and could not see the man who struck me."

"You've got a cut on your face. How do you account for that if, as you say, you were struck from behind?"

"The blow I received threw me forward against a wagon wheel. The tire cut my cheek. I dropped flat, and didn't know a thing. When I came to myself, of course, the money was gone."

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish, and no mistake!" fumed Burton. "How much money did you have, Andy?"

"A little over eighteen hundred dollars."

"Eighteen hundred gone to pot! By Jupiter, I won't stand for that. Can't you think of *some* clue, Andy? Pull your wits together. It isn't possible that a hold-up like that could take place in broad day without leaving some clue behind. Think, man!"

"Maybe that new Dutch boy could give you a clue," replied Carter. "He's a friend of Motor Matt's, isn't he?"

"He's a pard of Matt's," said Burton, casting a significant look at the king of the motor boys. "What makes you think he might give us a clue? Don't hang fire, Andy! Every minute we delay here is only that much time lost. Go on—and speak quick."

"I had just left the ticket wagon," pursued Carter, trying to talk hurriedly, "when the Dutchman stepped up to me. He wanted a word in private, as he said, and I told him he'd have to wait until some other time. He said he couldn't wait, and that what he had to tell me was important. I couldn't get away from him, and I agreed to listen to what he had to say providing he didn't delay me more than two or three minutes. With that, he led me around back of the "circus top" and in between two canvas wagons. That's when I got struck from behind."

Motor Matt listened to this in blank amazement. Boss Burton swore under his breath.

"It's a cinch the Dutchman had a hand in the robbery," the showman declared. "He lured Andy in between the wagons, and it was there that some of the Dutchman's confederates knocked Andy down and lifted the bags. If we can lay hands on this Carl, we'll have one of the thieves."

"Don't be too sure of that," interposed Matt. "Carl Pretzel never did a dishonest thing in his life, and I'm sure he can explain this."

"Don't let your regard for the Dutchman blind you to what's happened, Matt," warned the showman. "The only thing he asked Andy to go in between the wagons for was so that the

dastardly work would be screened from the eyes of people around the grounds." He turned away, adding: "We'll have to hunt for Carl—and it will be a hunt, I'll be bound. Unless I miss my guess, he and his confederates are a good ways from here with that eighteen hundred dollars."

Burton ran toward the tent door, followed by Matt. Before either of them could pass out, Carl and McGlory stepped through and stood facing them.

Carl had a red cotton handkerchief tied round the back of his head.

"Here he is, by thunder!" cried the surprised Burton.

"So, you see," spoke up Matt, "he didn't run away, after all."

"It's some kind of a bluff he's working," went on Burton doggedly. "I want you," he added, and dropped a heavy hand on Carl's shoulder.

"For vy iss dot?" inquired Carl.

"What do you want the boy for?" said McGlory.

"He helped steal eighteen hundred dollars the ticket man was bringing over here for me to take to the bank," said Burton; "that's what I want him for."

"Iss he grazzy?" gasped Carl, falling weakly against McGlory. "Vat dit I do mit der money oof I took it, hey? Und ven dit I take it, und vere it vas? By shinks," and Carl rubbed a hand over his bandaged head, "I'm doing t'ings vat I don'd know noddin' aboutt. Somepody please tell me vat I peen oop to."

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"Don't you get gay," growled Burton. "It won't help your case any."

"Give me the straight o' this," demanded McGlory.

Burton stepped back and waved a hand in the direction of Andy Carter.

"Look at Andy!" he exclaimed. "He's been beaten up and robbed of two bags of money that he was bringing here. The Dutchman lured him in between a couple of canvas wagons, and that's where the job was pulled off."

"Speak to me about this!" murmured the dazed McGlory. "What about it, Matt?" he added.

Matt did not answer, but stepped over to Carl.

"Why did you ask Carter to step in between the wagons, Carl?" the young motorist asked.

"Pecause I wanted to shpeak mit him alone by himseluf," answered Carl. "Vat's der odds aboutt der tifference, anyvay?"

"What did you want to speak with him about?"

"Vell, I don'd like blaying der pancho for dot Zulu feller. I dit id vonce, und den fired meinseluf. Vat I vant iss somet'ing light und conshenial—hantling money vould aboutt suit me, I bed you. Dot's vat I wanted to see der ticket feller aboutt. I wanted to ask him vould he please gif me some chob in der ticket wagon, und I took him off vere ve could haf some gonversations alone. Dot's all aboutt it, und oof I shtole some money, vere it iss, und vy don'd I got it? Tell me dot!"

"That's a raw bluff you're putting up," scowled Burton. "You're nobody's fool, even if you do try to make people think so."

"I ain't your fool, neider," cried Carl, warming up. "You can't make some monkey-doodle pitzness outd oof me. You may own der show und be a pig feller, aber I got some money meinseluf oof it efer geds here from Inchia, so for vy should I vant to svipe your money, hey?"

"What happened between the wagons, Carl?" went on Matt. "Just keep your ideas to yourself, Burton," he added, "and don't accuse Carl until he has a chance to give his side of the story. Did you see the man who knocked Carter down?"

"I don'd see noddin'," said Carl.

"Do you mean to say," asked Carter, rising up on the blanket, "that I wasn't knocked down?"

"I don'd know vedder or nod you vas knocked down. How could I tell dot?"

"You were there with Carter—there between the wagons," cried Burton angrily. "Why shouldn't you have seen what happened?"

"Look here vonce."

Carl pulled off his cap and bent his head.

"Feel dere," he went on, touching the back of his head. "Be careful mit your feelings, oof you please, und tell me vat you findt."

"A lump," said Matt.

"Ouch!" whimpered Carl. "It vas so sore as I can't tell. My headt feels like a parrel, und hurts all ofer. Dot's der reason I ditn't see vat habbened. I vas knocked down meinseluf, und it must haf peen aboutt der same time der dictet feller keeled ofer."

"There you have it, Burton," said Matt, facing the showman. "Carl wanted a job in the ticket wagon, and thought he might get it by talking with Andy Carter. When they got in between the wagons they were both knocked down."

"Rot!" ground out Burton. "Why didn't Carter see the Dutchman when he came to? Or why didn't

the Dutchman see Carter, if he got back his wits first?"

"Carl was looking for Carter when I met up with him," put in McGlory.

"The Dutchman wasn't near the wagons when I recovered my senses," came from the ticket man.

"Und I don't know vedder you vas dere or nod, Carter," explained Carl. "Ven I got to know vere I vas at, I foundt meinseluf vanderin' around mit a sore headt. But I tell you somet'ing, Burton. I peen a tedectif, und a fine vone. How mooch you gif me oof I findt der t'ieves und recofer der money? Huh?"

"I believe you know where that money is, all right," declared the showman, "and if you think I'm going to pay you something for giving it back, you're wrong. If you want to save yourself trouble, you'll hand over the funds."

"You talk like you vas pug-house!" said Carl. "I ain't got der money."

"Who helped you steal it?"

"Nopody! I ditn't know it vos shtole ondil you shpeak aboutt it."

"Stop that line of talk, Burton," put in Matt. "Carl's story is straight, and it satisfies me."

"How much money did the Dutchman have when he came here this morning?" asked Burton.

"T'irty cents," replied Carl. "Modor Matt paid my railroadt fare from Lafayette to Chackson."

"Search him, McGlory," ordered Burton. "Let's see if he has anything about his clothes that will prove his guilt."

Carl began to laugh.

"What's the joke?" snorted Burton.

"Vy," was the answer, "to t'ink I haf eighdeen huntert tollars aboutt me und don't know dot. Go on mit der search, McGlory."

Carl lifted his hands above his head, and the cowboy began pushing his hands into Carl's pockets. In the second pocket he examined he found something which he pulled out and held up for the observation of all. It was a canvas sack, lettered in black, "Burton's Big Consolidated Shows."

"One of the bags that held the money!" exclaimed Carter.

"I told you so!" whooped Burton.

Matt and McGlory were astounded. And so was Carl—so dumfounded that he was speechless.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PEG TO HANG SUSPICIONS ON.

"Vell, oof dot don't grab der banner!" mumbled Carl, when he was finally able to speak. "I hat dot in my bocket und don't know nodding aboutt it! Somepody must haf put him dere for a choke."

"That's a nice way to explain it!" growled Burton. "It cooks your goose, all right. Anything in the bag, McGlory?"

"Nary a thing," answered the bewildered cowboy, turning the bag inside out.

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"Go on with the search," ordered Burton.

Mechanically the cowboy finished looking through the Dutch boy's clothes, and all the money he found consisted of two ten-cent pieces and a couple of nickels.

"Where did you hide that money?" demanded Burton sternly, stepping in front of Carl.

"I don't hite it no blace," cried Carl. "You make me madt as some vet hens ven you talk like dot. Ged away from me or I vill hit you vonce."

"Carter," went on Burton in a voice of suppressed rage, "call a policeman."

The ticket man had scrambled to his feet, and he now made a move in the direction of the tent door.

"Hold up, Carter!" called Matt; then, turning to Burton, he went on: "You're not going to arrest Carl, Burton, unless you want this outfit of aviators to quit you cold."

The red ran into Burton's face.

"Are you trying to bulldoze me?" he demanded. "I've got eighteen hundred dollars at stake, and I'm not going to let it slip through my fingers just because you fellows threaten to leave the show and take the aeroplane with you. I tell you frankly, King, I don't like the way you're talking and acting in this matter. We've got good circumstantial evidence against your Dutch friend, and he ought to be locked up."

"I admit that there's some evidence," returned Matt, "but you don't know Carl as well as I do. It isn't possible that he would steal a nickel from any one. If there was ten times as much evidence against him, no one could make me believe that."

"You're allowing your friendship to run away with your better judgment. What am I to do? Just

drop this business, right here?"

"Of course not. All I want you to do is to leave Carl alone and let the motor boys find the thief."

"I want that money," said Burton, with a black frown, "and I'm satisfied this Dutchman knows where it is."

"And I'm satisfied he doesn't know a thing about it," said Matt warmly.

"How did that bag get into his pocket?"

"If you come to that, why isn't there some of the stolen money in the bag? Do you think for a minute, Burton, that Carl would be clever enough to plan such a robbery, and then be foolish enough to carry around with him the bare evidence of it? You don't give him credit for having much sense. Why should he keep the bag, and then come in here with it in his pocket?"

Burton remained silent.

"Furthermore," proceeded Matt, "if Carl is one of the thieves, or the only thief, why did he come in here at all? Why didn't he make a run of it as soon as he got his hands on the money?"

"Every crook makes a mistake, now and then," muttered Burton. "If they didn't, the law would have a hard time running them down."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Matt. "Leave Carl alone. If I can't prove his innocence to your satisfaction, I'll agree to stay four weeks with your show for nothing. You'll be making more than two thousand dollars, and you've only lost eighteen hundred by this robbery."

Burton's feelings underwent a change on the instant.

"Oh, well, if you put it that way," he said, "I'm willing to let the Dutchman off. I only want to do the right thing, anyhow."

"You vas a skinner," averred Carl contemptuously. "I knowed dot from der fairst time vat ve met."

"Sing small, that's your cue," retorted Burton. "Remember," and he whirled on Motor Matt, "if you don't prove the Dutchman's innocence, you're to work for me for four weeks without pay. I'm willing to let it rest in that way."

With that Burton took himself off. His show was doing well and he was not pressed for funds. As for the rest of it, he had shifted everything connected with the robbery to the shoulders of Motor Matt.

McGlory was a bit dubious. He had not known Carl as long as Matt had, and had not the same amount of confidence in him.

"Matt," remarked the Dutch boy with feeling, "you vas der pest friendt vat I efer hat, und you bed my life you don'd vas making some misdakes ven you pelieve dot I ditn't shdeal der money. I don'd know nodding aboutt der pag, nor how it got in my bocket. Dot's der trut'."

"I know that without your telling me, pard," said Matt. "The thing for us to do now is to find out who the real thieves are."

"There must have been only one," said McGlory.

"There must have been two, Joe."

"How do you figure it?"

"Why, because both Carl and Carter were knocked down at the same time. Neither saw what had happened to the other. Two men must have done that."

"Vat a headt it iss!" murmured Carl. "Modor Matt vould make a fine tedectif, I tell you dose."

"You've got a bean on the right number, pard, and no mistake," exulted McGlory.

"Did you see any one near the wagons when you led the ticket man in between them?" asked Matt, turning to look at the place where he had last seen the ticket man standing.

But Carter had left. Presumably, he had followed after Burton.

"I don'd see nopody aroundt der vagons," answered Carl. "Der t'ieves vas hiding, dot's a skinch. Day vas hid away mit demselufs in blaces vere dey couldt handt Carter und me a gouple oof goot vones. Ouch again!" and Carl rubbed a gentle hand over the red cotton handkerchief.

"Take us to the place where you and Carter were knocked down, Carl," said Matt. "We'll look the ground over and see if we can find anything."

The Dutch boy conducted his two friends toward the rear of the circus tent. Here there were two big, high-sided canvas wagons drawn up in a position that was somewhat isolated so far as the tents of the show were concerned. The wagons had been left in the form of a "V," and Carl walked through the wide opening.

"Dis iss der vay vat ve come in," said he, "I in der lead oof der dicket man. Ven I ged py der front veels oof der vagon, I turn around, und den—*biff*, down I go like some brick puildings had drowed demselufs on dop oof me. Shiminy grickedts, vat a knock! I don'd know vere Carter vas shtanding, because I ditn't see him, I vas hit so kevick."

Matt surveyed the ground. The turf had retained no marks of the violent work. He examined the rear tires of the wagons. The rims, for the whole of their circumference that was off the ground, were covered with a coating of dried mud; and this caking of mud was not broken at any place.

"Carter must have stood here, in this position," observed Matt, placing himself between the two rear wheels. "He says that he fell against one of the wheels and cut his cheek on the tire. I can't find any trace of the spot where Carter came into such rough contact with either of the tires."

"Don't you think he was telling the truth, pard?" asked McGlory in some excitement. "Is it possible he was using the double tongue, just to——"

"Easy, there," interrupted Matt. "Carter was dazed when he fell, and could hardly have known whether he struck against the tire or against something else. He may have dropped on a stone ——"

"No stones here," objected McGlory, with a quiet look over the surface of the ground.

"Well, then it was something else that caused the injury to his cheek. He——"

"Here's something," and McGlory made a dive for the ground and lifted himself erect with an object in his hand. "I reckon it don't amount to anything, though."

"Let's see it," said Matt.

McGlory handed the object to the young motorist. It was a peg, perhaps half an inch thick by three inches long, and had a knob at one end as big as a marble.

"Great spark-plugs!" exclaimed the king of the motor boys, staring from the peg to McGlory and Carl.

"What's to pay?" queried McGlory. "You act as though we'd found something worth while."

"We have," declared Matt, "and everything seems to be helping us on toward a streak of luck in this robbery matter."

"How vas dot?" queried Carl.

"This peg belongs to the Hindoo," said Matt. "It's the contrivance he used for fastening down the lid of that flat basket in which he carries the cobra."

McGlory went into the air with a jubilant whoop.

"He's the thief!" he cried. "I've had a feelin' all along that he was a tinhorn. This proves it! Sufferin' blackguards, Matt, but you've got a head!"

"Vere iss der shnake?" came from Carl, as he looked around in visible trepidation. "Oof der pasket iss oben, den der copra is loose on der grounds. Vat a carelessness!"

"And remember," said Matt, addressing the cowboy, "that I had set Ping to watch the Hindoo before the robbery took place. If Dhondaram is the robber, then Ping was on his trail at the time and must know something about it."

"Speak to me about that!" exulted the cowboy. "Our friend the Hindoo has been putting in some good licks since he joined the Big Consolidated! He hasn't let any grass grow under his feet."

Motor Matt whirled around and walked out from between the wagons.

"Let's find Ping," he called back, "and get a report from him. That ought to settle everything."

McGlory and Carl, feeling that something important was about to be accomplished, hurried after Matt as he moved off across the show grounds.

CHAPTER IX.

A WAITING GAME.

The Chinese boy was not in evidence anywhere about the camp. After a search in all directions, Matt, McGlory, and Carl, reasoning that Ping's trail had led him to other places outside the show grounds, returned to the calliope tent. There, to their overwhelming surprise, they came upon Dhondaram, sitting nonchalantly on his square of scarlet cloth and smoking a cigarette.

The Hindoo's face lighted up genially at sight of the three boys.

"*Salaam*, sahibs!" said he in a friendly tone. "I come here to rest. It is permitted? I thought so. Rajah takes work to manage—*jee*, yes, much work. It tires me. Do you use the little smokes? Take one, sahibs."

Dhondaram offered his little red box of rolled paper poison, only to have his courtesy declined.

Matt was looking around. He was hoping to see the basket, but it was not in sight.

McGlory had something at the end of his tongue, and Carl was all agog with a desire to talk, but Matt silenced each of them with a look.

"Where's the cobra, Dhondaram?" asked Matt. "I'd like to see you juggle with the snake again."

The Hindoo smiled and showed his white teeth.

"*Maskee!*" he exclaimed, "that is my sorrow. My little snake is gone. Now that I am taking care of elephants, sahib, I have not the time to charm serpents. I sold the cobra an hour ago."

"Sufferin' tarantulas!" murmured McGlory. "What fool would want to buy a thing like that?"

"The cobra, sahib," said the Hindoo, turning to the cowboy, "is a curiosity. Many *feringhis* like curiosities and pay for them. 'Tis well. I like the elephants better than the serpents."

"What did you do with the snake basket?" asked Matt.

"That must be sold with the cobra, sahib. What would the new owner do with the serpent unless he had the place to keep him? *Dekke!* He take the snake, also he take the basket. I throw in the basket, as you call—give it as boot."

With eyes narrowly watching Dhondaram's face, Matt produced the peg and tossed it on the red cloth.

"What did the new owner do," the king of the motor boys inquired, "without the peg to keep the basket shut?"

Not a tremor crossed the Hindoo's face.

"Ah, ha!" said he. "I lose the peg and Motor Matt Sahib find it. But it is nothing. There are many things that can be used as pegs—a splinter, a bit of wood, almost anything. Where you pick it up, sahib?"

"Oh, out on the grounds," answered Matt indefinitely.

"Sahib recognize the peg when he find him? You have much observation, Mattrao Sahib."

The suffix "rao" is added to a name as a sign of great respect. Probably Dhondaram felt that he was paying Matt a high compliment, although, naturally, Matt knew nothing about that.

Dhondaram got up slowly and lifted the red cloth from the ground.

"I will now go," said he, "and find how my bad Rajah is conducting himself. He must be watched carefully, and spoken to."

With a courteous nod the Hindoo left the tent. As soon as he was gone Matt rolled over and lifted one side of the canvas wall. [Pg 15]

The Hindoo, with never a look behind, walked in his easy way around the calliope "lean-to" and into the "animal top," by the front entrance.

"Nerve!" sputtered McGlory, "he's got a square mile of it. Never turned a hair. Even the sight of that peg didn't phase him."

Matt was still peering from under the canvas.

"There's something here I can't understand," said he, a few moments later, and he dropped the canvas and faced his friends.

"Vat it iss?" asked Carl.

"Why, we set Ping to watching Dhondaram, and by all the rules of the game the Chinaman ought to be on the fellow's track. But he isn't, so far as I can see. What's become of Ping, McGlory?"

"Dhondaram has shaken him," hazarded the cowboy. "The chink wasn't sharp enough for the turban boy."

"That may be," mused Matt, "although I doubt it. Ping is about as smart a Chinaman as you'll find in a month's travel. It's mysterious."

"Then again," went on McGlory, "maybe Ping is on Dhondaram's trail and you don't know it. He's either too wise for us, or else not wise enough for the Hindoo. Pick out whichever conclusion you want."

But Matt shook his head, puzzled.

"He don'd vas mooch goot, dot chink feller," spoke up Carl gloomily. "Vone oof dose days you will findt him oudt."

"Don't try any slams on Ping," said McGlory. "He's the clear quill, he is, even though he's a rat-eater and a heathen. Ping has turned some pretty fine tricks for Matt and me, and like as not he's busy coming across with another. You've got too much of a grouch at the slant-eyed brother, Carl."

"I say vat I t'ink, und dot's all," replied Carl. "I can lick him mit vone handt tied aroundt my pack."

"Cut it out, Carl," said Matt. "Ping's a good fellow, and has always stood by me. I don't want any hostile feelings between two of my pards."

"Py shinks," cried Carl, "he iss more hosdyle at me as I am at him. Aber he's a shink, und he hides vat he t'inks pedder as I can do. Somedime you findt it oudt, den you know."

"Go and look for Ping, Carl," said Matt. "Find him, if you can, and bring him where I can talk with him. It's more than likely that your innocence of that hold-up will have to be proven by the Chinaman, so it will stand you in hand to be friendly with him."

"Honest," fumed Carl, getting up, "I hat radder go to chail mit meinseluf as to led der shink prove dot I ditn't took der money."

"Well, you go and find him. You and Ping must be friends if you're both to stay with me."

Carl was far from being in love with the task assigned to him, but nevertheless he went off to do what he could toward performing it.

"Those two boys don't mix worth a cent," remarked Matt, when Carl had left. "They're like oil and

water."

"They mix too much," grinned McGlory. "When they got acquainted with each other it was a 'knock-down' in more than one sense of the word. They've been hungry to mix it up with each other ever since."

Matt had no answer for this. He was well acquainted with the dispositions of both boys.

"When I first got acquainted with Carl," said Matt reminiscently, "he was having trouble with a Chinese laundryman. That was 'way off in Arizona."

For a time there was silence between the friends, broken at last by the cowboy.

"What can we do now, pard?"

"It's a waiting game for us, and if Ping doesn't know something that will help Carl out of the hole he is in, we'll have to hunt for some other clues."

"Dhondaram is a smooth article, and no mistake. If he really stole the money, who helped him? And why is he staying with the show?"

"I don't know, pard," returned Matt. "We'll have to let the thing work itself out, somehow."

"You don't intend presenting Burton with our wages for a month, do you?"

"That's the very last thing I'd ever do!" declared Matt.

"Then, if that's the case, we can't keep up this waiting game too long."

The afternoon performance was over, and the crowd of people began filing out of the tents. Only the "grand concert" remained, and that would soon be at an end, and the time would arrive for another ascension with the aëroplane.

"I wish," remarked Matt thoughtfully, "that we could work out this robbery business before we leave Jackson. Some town crook may be mixed up in it with Dhondaram, and when the show leaves the place we may all be leaving the money behind."

"Burton isn't worrying," said McGlory. "He's positive Carl is guilty, and that you can't prove anything else. In other words, Boss Burton is planning to have us work four weeks for nothing."

"He'll be disappointed," said Matt. "Let's go and get supper, Joe. It won't be long before the evening crowd begins to arrive, and I want to put the *Comet* in shape."

While they were eating at the long table in the mess tent Carl came in.

"I don'd find noddin'," said he, dropping wearily into a chair. "Der shink is harter to find as a hayshtack mit some neetles in it. Meppy he iss over in der town, or else gone oop in a palloon, or else"—and here Carl leaned closer to Matt and spoke in a whisper—"meppy he took der money himseluf und has gone pack py Shina."

"That will do, Carl," said Matt sternly. "Ping is as honest as you are."

"Anyhow," spoke up McGlory sarcastically, "he didn't ask Carter to go between the wagons, and we didn't find a bag in his pocket."

"Dot's righdt, rup id in," glowered Carl. "Oof I could ged dot money from Inchia I would fly der coop und I wouldn't come pack any more. All der tedectif vat iss in me say der shink is gone mit der show money. I say vat I t'ink."

"Well," said Matt, "don't say it to anybody else."

When he and McGlory left the mess tent and moved off toward the aëroplane, Carl was still eating.

Matt was counting upon having as successful a flight that afternoon as he had made in the morning. The repaired aëroplane was in better trim for flying than it had been when new, and there was not even the small breeze which had accompanied the first flight of the day.

But, if Matt could have known it, he was destined to meet with one of the most desperate and hair-raising exploits of his aëroplane career during that second flight from the Jackson show grounds.

CHAPTER X.

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A TRICK AT THE START.

The guard who had been in charge of the aëroplane since the parade had returned to the show grounds was relieved by Matt and McGlory. As soon as he had left, Matt, in accordance with his usual custom, made a careful examination of the machine. He knew very well what might happen if he found, after being launched into the air, that some of the many parts of the aëroplane were loose, or the machinery not working properly.

Long ropes, stretched on each side of the road on which the flying machine got its start, served to keep the people back and to give Matt and his corps of assistants plenty of room.

So far as the young motorist could see—and his investigation was always thorough—the aëroplane was in as serviceable a condition as it had been for the morning's flight. It was a most

ungainly looking machine when resting on the ground, but was transformed into a thing of grace the moment it spurned the earth and mounted skyward.

"She looks as fit as a fiddle," remarked McGlory, his face shining with pride.

"She'll do her work easy as falling off a log," said Matt. "The repairs we made on her, in Lafayette, seem to have been an improvement."

"We don't want to make any more improvements of that sort," remarked McGlory, thinking of the accident which had made the repairs necessary.

"Ah," cried Matt, "here comes Le Bon. And look who's with him," he added in a lower tone.

The cowboy turned his head and swept his gaze over the throng that pressed the guard rope to the north of the road. Le Bon, in his trapeze costume, was crawling through the press, and close behind him came Dhondaram. McGlory scowled.

"What's the Hindoo coming for?" he muttered. "I'm getting so I hate the looks of that fellow."

Le Bon came close, walking with the springy tread of the trained athlete.

"It looks as though we were going to have as nice a time aloft as we had this morning, Matt," he observed, coming to a halt and taking a look at the sky.

"What's the Hindoo trailing you for?" queried McGlory.

"He wanted to come along and see the flight at close quarters. He's a pretty good fellow, McGlory, and I told him to push along with me. What's the harm?"

"No harm at all," interposed Matt hastily.

McGlory spun around on his heel and would not remain near to talk with Dhondaram. The Hindoo, as he halted in front of Matt, was smiling in his most ingratiating manner.

"I have come to look, sahib," said he, "at your most wonderful performance. It is read of everywhere, and in Chicago most of all. It will be a pleasure. It is permitted?"

"You can stay here," answered Matt, "providing you keep out of the way."

"I will see to that, Mattrao Sahib," and the Hindoo walked around the aëroplane, giving it his respectful attention.

The wonder was growing upon Matt as to the whereabouts of Ping. The Chinese boy was always on hand when the flights were made, for the *Comet* was the apple of his eye and he took it as a personal responsibility to make sure that the "get-away" was always safely accomplished.

He did not appear to be trailing the Hindoo. If he had been, why was he not somewhere in the crowds that were pressing against the guard ropes.

"Watch the brown tinhorn, Le Bon," muttered McGlory, in the kinker's ear, "and see that he don't tinker with anything."

"Why," exclaimed Le Bon, "he wouldn't do anything like that!"

"He might," was the sharp response. "I haven't any faith in these fellows who wear a twisted tablecloth for a hat. If anything should go wrong, up in the air, it'll spell your finish as well as my pard's. I'm going to have a word with Matt."

The band had come from the mess tent. Instruments in hand, the members had climbed into the band wagon, which was hauled up near the point from which the *Comet* would start, and a rattling melody was going up from the horns, the drums, and the cymbals.

The aëroplane flight was Matt's own particular part of the show. It was an instructive part, too, for aside from the thrill of seeing a human being piloting a big mechanical bird through the air the observers were given the last word in aërial navigation.

"What's on your mind, pard?" asked McGlory, halting at Matt's side. "You're as thoughtful as a cold game gent who's looking into the open end of a gun."

"Have you seen anything of Ping, Joe?" said Matt.

"Chink 'signs' haven't been at all plentiful since our squinch-eyed brother tried to run out the Hindoo's trail."

"I'd like to know where the boy is, that's all."

"Don't fret about him. I'd like to have a picture of Ping in a corner he couldn't get out of. You take it from me, Johnny Hardluck hasn't got such a corner in his whole bag of tricks."

At that moment Burton rode up to the aëroplane on his favorite saddler.

"Innocent or guilty?" he asked, leaning down from his saddle and accompanying the words with a significant wink.

"Innocent, of course," answered the king of the motor boys.

"Can you prove it to me?"

"Not yet."

"And you never will. Better let me have the Dutchman locked up. That'll scare him so he'll tell all he knows, and maybe it isn't yet too late to get the money back."

"Keep hands off my Dutch pard, Burton," said Matt. "We've made an agreement about that."

"Exactly." Boss Burton straightened. "I guess you'd better get a-going, Matt," he added. "The whole town seems to be outside the guard ropes, and I don't think we could get any more spectators if we waited all night."

Burton backed his horse away from the starting line and lifted one hand. Instantly a breathless silence fell over the vast throng, while every individual member of it craned his or her neck to get a better view of what was going on.

The aëroplane, as has already been stated, had to make a running start on bicycle wheels in order to develop the speed necessary for the wings to take hold of the air and lift the machine. The wheels were low, and Le Bon had to sit on the lower plane beside Matt and hold the trapeze on his lap until the *Comet* was high enough for him to drop from the footboard.

The *Comet's* motor was equipped with a magneto, but, at the beginning and while the machine was on the ground, the spark was secured with a make-and-break circuit. When the motor was properly going the magneto took hold and an automatic switch brought it into commission.

McGlory superintended the ground work during the start. Some half a dozen men, under his direction, ranged behind the planes, started the machine, and ran with it. The power in the bicycle wheels soon carried the aëroplane away from them.

At twenty-eight miles an hour the great wings felt the tug of the air, the wheels lifted from solid ground, and a sharp pull at a lever started the big propeller.

Matt had made so many ascensions that he handled every part of his work with automatic precision, and the aëroplane, amid the wild cheers of the crowd, darted skyward.

McGlory, standing perhaps a distance of fifty feet back from the point where the machine left the earth, saw a bag hanging to the under plane, close to an opening that led up through the plane to the motor and the driver's seat.

What was the bag? the cowboy asked himself, and how did it chance to be swinging there?

McGlory had only a few moments to make his observations, for the *Comet* was climbing swiftly upward and the bag was growing rapidly smaller to the eye. He ran forward, stumbling and looking, and Burton, evidently with his eyes on the same object, galloped past him with glance upturned.

Suddenly a black object appeared over the top of the bag, grew longer, wriggled queerly, and could be seen disappearing into the space between the two planes.

The cowboy halted his stumbling feet and reeled, his brain on fire and his breath coming quick and hard.

That black, wriggling thing must have been the cobra! The cobra, which the Hindoo had said he had sold to some one on the show grounds!

McGlory's mind was a hopeless chaos of fears, doubts, and wild speculations. While he stood there, Burton, a wild look on his face, came galloping back.

"That bag!" he gasped, drawing rein with a quick, nervous hand at the cowboy's side. "Did you see it, McGlory?"

"Yes," answered the other.

"It was one of the bags that had stolen money in it!" declared Burton; "I saw the black lettering on the side! Is it the one you got from the Dutchman?"

McGlory shook his head, still dazed.

"I've got that—in my grip—at the calliope tent," he managed to gasp.

"Where did that one come from?"

Then McGlory came to his senses.

"I don't care a whoop about the bag, or where it came from," he shouted. "Did you see that snake come out of it and crawl up onto the lower plane? Did you see that?"

"Yes, but——"

"Don't talk to me! Find that Hindoo—he was here before the start and he put that bag there. Find him!" yelled McGlory.

Then, at the top of his lungs, the cowboy shouted frantically to Matt, in the hope of letting him know his danger and putting him on his guard.

But it was a fruitless effort. The tremendous cheering drowned McGlory's voice, and it was impossible for him to make his voice heard.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE AIR WITH A COBRA.

Both Motor Matt and Le Bon were delighted with the start of the aëroplane.

"She gets better and better," averred Le Bon. "I guess I'll take to flying myself."

While in the air Matt's every faculty of mind and quickness of body were called into action. He had to *feel* the motion of the air on the huge wings, as communicated to the framework under him, and shift the wing extensions back and forth to meet the varying resistance of air pressure and make it coincide with the centre of gravity. To withdraw his attention for an instant from the work of managing the machine might result in a disaster that would bring destruction to himself and Le Bon. But he had schooled himself to talk while keeping busy with his work.

"Better not try it, Archie," Matt answered. "It's too much of a strain on a fellow's nerves. Are you ready to drop with the trapeze?"

"Whenever you are," was the response.

There was always a jolt when Le Bon's weight reached the ends of the trapeze ropes, and extra care was required in taking care of the *Comet*.

Matt brought the air craft around in a sweeping circle and headed the other way to cover the north and south extent of the grounds. He, likewise, the moment the turn was made, turned the aëroplane upward.

"What's the matter with McGlory?" asked Le Bon, peering down. "He's looking up and waving his arms."

"He wouldn't do that," said Matt, "unless something is wrong. When you get on the trapeze, Archie, look over the under part of the machine and see if you can find anything out of whack. I can't imagine what's gone crosswise, for the aëroplane never behaved better."

Reaching the top of the airy slope, some two hundred feet above ground, Matt pointed the machine earthward.

"Now's your time, Archie," he said to Le Bon.

The athlete stood erect, firmly clutching the trapeze bar, and dived out into space. Swiftly Matt brought the craft to an even keel, just as the whole fabric fluttered under the jolt. In a twinkling the *Comet* righted herself, and Le Bon was left swinging on his frail bar, a hundred and fifty feet above the show grounds. His position under the machine was such that Matt could not see him.

"All right, Archie?" shouted Matt, keeping his eyes ahead and manipulating his levers incessantly.

"Right as a trivet," came up from below. "McGlory is still throwing himself around down there."

"Do you see anything wrong with the machine?"

"Not a thing. What's that bag hanging under the wing for?"

"Is there a bag there?"

"Yes, a canvas bag. There are letters on it. Wait, and I'll read them."

There followed a silence during which, supposedly, Le Bon was spelling out the letters.

"'Burton's Big Consolidated Shows'," went on Le Bon. "That's what's printed on the bag, Matt."

"Great spark-plugs!" exclaimed Matt. "Anything in the bag, Archie?"

"It's as limp as a rag and looks to be empty. How did it get there?"

"Give it up. If it's empty, I don't see how it can do any harm. I don't like the thoughts of the thing, though, and we're not going to remain up as long as usual. Get busy with your work."

Renewed cheering greeted the daring feats performed on the trapeze by Le Bon. In the midst of it the motor missed fire and died altogether. The slowing rotations of the propeller caused the *Comet* to glide earthward. A terrified yell broke from Le Bon.

"What's the matter, up there?"

"Keep your nerve," flung back the king of the motor boys; "something's wrong with the motor—but we'll be all right."

Yes, Matt knew that the aëroplane would glide earthward and land him and Le Bon without injury; but, if it could not be guided, it was as likely to land on the heads of that dense crowd as anywhere. That would mean serious, if not fatal, injury to many men—perhaps to women and children.

Motor Matt's face went white, and his heart pounded in his throat. Nevertheless he kept a cool head and a steady hand.

He figured out the exact point where they would come down. It was in the very thickest part of the crowd, and the people were trying frantically to get out of the way.

Then, just as it seemed as though nothing could prevent a terrible accident, the motor again took up its cycle and the slowly whirling propeller increased its speed.

A long breath of relief escaped Matt's tense lips as he drove the aëroplane upward and the direction of the roped-off road.

"What ails the blooming motor?" came from Le Bon in a distraught voice. "We came within one of killing a lot of people. I'm all in a sweat."

"I don't know what's the matter with the motor," answered Matt, "but I'm going to find out just as soon as I turn to go back on the course."

"Better descend. This is more than I can stand."

"We can't descend until we reach the right place."

Matt made a wide turn, the engine working perfectly.

"Hold on tight, below there," he called. "I've got to take my attention from running the motor for a moment, and if we give a wild pitch or two don't be afraid. I'll be able to keep the machine right side up."

"I'm pretty near all in," came from Le Bon in a subdued voice, "but it would take an axe to chop me off this trapeze."

Matt gave a quick look behind him. What he saw nearly froze him with horror.

A cobra—undoubtedly the very snake he had seen in the calliope tent—was twined about two of the electric wires.

The wires, as originally strung, were an inch and a half apart, and insulated. The coils of the six-foot cobra encircled both. As the coils contracted the wires were forced together, and two points of the copper, where the insulating material was worn off, were brought in contact. Thus a short circuit was formed and a bad leak made for the electricity.

At the moment Matt looked the coils of the cobra had loosened, causing the tightly strung wires to spring a little apart, thus restoring the spark to the cylinders. But at any moment the coils might tighten again and cause another short circuit.

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As though to crown the terrors of the moment, the cobra's head was lifted from the wires by a third of the anterior length of its body—a favorite position assumed by the cobra in gliding along the earth—and the diamond-like eyes were fastened upon Matt with deadly animosity.

Motor Matt's one thought was this: If he were bitten by the snake before he had manipulated a safe landing, the swift working of the virus in his veins would keep him from doing his duty in preventing injury to the spectators below.

With white face and gleaming eyes, he turned from the cobra and manoeuvred to place the aëroplane lengthwise of the roped-off space on the ground.

Before he could place the machine in proper position the motor again commenced to miss fire, and then died all over again. A groan was wrenched from Matt's lips as the machine fluttered downward toward the massed human heads underneath. The groan was echoed by Le Bon.

"We're dropping toward them again!" yelled the man below.

Matt turned in his seat, letting the aëroplane take care of itself. Throwing himself back, he caught at the hooded brown head with his hand.

There was a dart, quick as lightning, and Matt's wrist was touched as though by a hot coal. With a loud cry he flung his arm forward, dragging the full length of the cobra from the wires.

For the fraction of an instant the snake hung in midair, then yielded to the impetus of the arm to which it held and coiled sinuously outward and downward into space.

The motor had again resumed its work, but the *Comet* hung at a frightful angle and was dropping like so much lead, the atmosphere striking the planes almost on their edges.

Matt was calm, now, and cool as ever. He went to work at the levers, righted the machine within fifteen feet of the bobbing heads, and sent it upward into the air. He was alone, for Le Bon, when so close to the ground, had dropped. In fact, owing to the length of the trapeze ropes, Le Bon's feet had almost swept the heads of the terrified spectators.

Steadily upward climbed the machine.

Every moment was precious to the king of the motor boys, for if he was to receive medical aid to counteract the bite of the reptile, it could not be long deferred.

But what was the use of indulging in hope?

He had been bitten by the cobra, and the lecturer in the museum had declared that a person so injured could not hope.

Vaguely Matt wondered why the poison in his veins had not already rushed to his brain and paralyzed him into inaction. He was feeling as strong as ever, and as able to effect a safe landing without danger to the people on the show grounds.

That was the thing he had set out to accomplish, and it was the thing he would do.

Freed of Le Bon's weight, the *Comet* was more manageable.

With steady hand and cool, unshaken judgment, he laid the *Comet* parallel with the road, glided downward with a rush, shut off the power, and touched the hard ground squarely between the guard ropes.

The jar of the landing was hardly perceptible, and Matt stepped out of the car, to be grabbed by McGlory and to see Burton, dismounted and anxious, at his side.

"The cobra——" began Matt.

"Killed," struck in Burton.

"Did it bite any one in the crowd?"

"No; every one was out of the way, and the fall itself nearly did the business for the reptile."

"Then get a doctor for me," said Matt, showing a trickle of blood on his wrist. "That's the cobra's mark."

CHAPTER XII.

A SCIENTIFIC FACT.

For an instant, following Motor Matt's tragic announcement, McGlory and Burton were stricken dumb with horror. The cowboy was first to recover his wits, and he leaped to the back of Burton's horse.

"Doctor!" he shouted, galloping madly along the road between the ropes that separated the crowd; "we want a doctor! Where's a doctor?"

In a crowd like that it was natural that there should be many doctors, and no less than three forced themselves through the throng, dived under the ropes, and hurried to Motor Matt.

Among these three physicians was Doctor Horton, an old man of no particular school, but widely read and eminent in his profession.

"He'll die," said one of the medical men. "If that snake was a genuine cobra, and if its fangs were not removed, Motor Matt might as well make his will—and be quick about it."

"My opinion exactly," said the other physician.

"Bosh!" answered Doctor Horton derisively.

The other two turned on him.

"What do you mean, Horton?" they demanded.

"Just what I say," was the response. "This brave lad, who endangered his own life to save innocent spectators, is as sound as a dollar this minute."

"Then the snake was not a cobra," averred one of the others.

"It *was* a cobra," snapped Doctor Horton; "I saw it."

"Then its fangs had been pulled."

"They had not been pulled—I saw them, too."

"It is not possible, in that case, that the young man was bitten."

"Not bitten?" cried Doctor Horton ironically, lifting Matt's wrist, which he was holding. "Certainly he was bitten, and by one of the most poisonous snakes of which we have any knowledge. There's the mark, gentlemen, and it's as plain as the nose on your face. We were looking up at him, weren't we, when he was fighting the cobra and fighting, at the same time, to keep the flying machine from dropping into the crowd? And didn't we see him fling out his arm with the snake hanging to his wrist? The force in the throw of the arm—and there's some strength there, gentlemen, believe me," interjected the doctor, patting the biceps—"flung the reptile off. It fell, and so close to me that I had the pleasure of putting my heel on its head. Do you suppose for a minute that the cobra could hang to Motor Matt's arm without biting? I am surprised at you."

"What's the answer?" inquired one of the other two.

"The venom of the cobra," proceeded Doctor Horton, "acts swiftly on the human system. Yet we see here none of the symptoms attending such poisoning. By now, you understand, they should be well advanced. You ask me the reason our brave young friend is in a normal condition? A scientific fact has come to his rescue. It is well known," and the doctor accented the "well" and gave his medical confrères a humorous glance, "that the cobra can bite, but cannot release its poison *unless the fangs come together in the wound*. In this case, the fangs did not meet, consequently the bite was as harmless as that of the ordinary garter snake."

Dr. Horton slipped his fingers along Matt's wrist and gripped his hand.

"You are to be congratulated; my lad," he went on. "It was your quickness in seizing the snake, I infer, and in hurling it from the aëroplane, that prevented it from laying firm hold of you. Tell us what happened. We have learned a little from the acrobat who was on the trapeze, and who dropped off when near the ground, but we were all too much excited, at the time, to pay much attention to him. Besides, he was under the aëroplane, and in no position to know just what went on in your vicinity. Give us the facts."

Matt, relieved beyond expression, told of the cause of the short circuit, and of his attempts to get the machine in the right position for alighting; and finished with a terse account of the way he had grabbed the cobra and flung it from him.

The exciting chronicle was set forth in few words and with the utmost diffidence. The recital, however, struck an undernote of courage and self-sacrifice in the line of duty that caught Doctor Horton's admiration.

"Once more," said the physician, taking Matt's hand. "What you accomplished, my lad, was nobly done. How many could have kept their wits in such a situation? Not many—hardly one out of a thousand. You're the manager of this show, are you?" he added, turning to Burton.

"I am, yes, sir," replied Boss Burton.

"Then you owe Motor Matt a lot. A fearful accident has been averted, and you might have been swamped with damage suits."

The crowd surged around the *Comet*, and stout canvasmen had to be summoned to force the people back. Burton, mounted on his saddle horse, saw a chance to say a few words.

"Good people," he shouted, "every act down on my bills is faithfully given exactly as represented. I tolerate no misstatements in any of my paper. The gallant young motorist, who has exhibited his aeroplane to you this afternoon in an act more thrilling than even the most imaginative showman could advertise, is but one of many artists of world-wide reputation whom I have secured, at fabulous expense, to amuse you behind yonder tented walls. This is the only show now on the road to give, absolutely free, such a grand outdoor flying machine exhibition. Other acts, equally thrilling and instructive, will soon be performed in the two large rings and on the elevated stage under the main canvas. The doors are now open."

With that Boss Burton, having secured probably the greatest advertisement his show had ever received, rode off in the direction of the tents.

While the crowd followed, and Matt and McGlory found themselves, for the first time, able to have a little heart-to-heart talk, they drew off to one side and began making the most of their opportunity.

"Say, pard," said the cowboy glumly, "I'm about ready to quit this aeroplane business."

"Why?" asked Matt.

"There's not money enough in the country to pay me for going through what I did when I saw you swinging aloft with the cobra."

"You saw it?" queried Matt.

"That's what I did, and I yelled and tried to let you know about it, but the crowd was making so much noise you couldn't hear."

Dusk was beginning to fall, and the gasoline torches about the show grounds leaped out like dazzling fireflies. McGlory stared at them thoughtfully for a space, then passed a handkerchief across his damp forehead.

"It don't pay," he muttered. "You take all the risk, Matt, and Ping and I just slop around and kick you off when you make your jump skyward. I'd rather, enough sight, have been up in the machine with you than standing down here on the ground, watching and worrying."

Matt did not dismiss his cowboy pard's words with the careless laugh he usually had for such sage remarks.

"It's all nonsense, of course," said he, "your talking about me taking all the risk and doing all the work. I fly the machine because I'm the only one who can do it, but you help me in other ways that are just as important. I'm in the air for perhaps thirty minutes each day, while you're on the ground, old pard, and watching things during every hour of the twenty-four."

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"Watching things!" exploded McGlory. "Speak to me about that! How well do I watch things? Did I see the Hindoo when he hitched that bag with the snake to the aeroplane? It was my business to get onto that, and I didn't know until you had left the road and were too far up to hear me. That's what I'm kicking about. I fell down—and I'm to blame for the whole bloomin' mishap."

"You're not," said Matt sharply, "and I won't have you say so. It's useless to harp on such things, anyhow, Joe, so let's discuss something of more importance."

"The way you fooled the cobra? Why, that's——"

"Not that, either. The bag tied to the aeroplane has the name of the show lettered on it, so——"

"Burton and I both discovered that," interrupted McGlory. "Carter had two bags containing the show money. We already had one, and that bag's the other. Wait, and I'll get it."

McGlory dived under the lower wing of the machine and groped about until he found the bag.

"There was nothing in it but the snake," said he, as he rejoined Matt. "It was a bagful of trouble, all right, at that. Fine two-tongue performance the Hindoo gave when he said he had sold the snake. Sufferin' Ananias! I suspected him of putting the bag there the minute I saw the cobra crawling up onto the lower wing, behind you and Le Bon."

"Did you hunt for the fellow?" asked Matt.

"*Did* we! Why, Burton had every man that could be spared from the show chasing all over the grounds. What's more, he sent word to the police, and they're on the hunt. Here's what that Hindoo tinhorn has done: He tried to make Rajah wreck the aeroplane, and he tried his best to get you and the cobra mixed up while in the air. Why? What's his reason for actin' like that?"

"Give it up, Joe. Not only has Dhondaram done all that, but he has lifted Burton's ticket-wagon money. There's something back of it all, and I'd give a farm to know just what it is. If I——"

McGlory was interrupted by a cracked voice, down the road, lifted in what purported to be song:

"Hi le, hi lo, hi le, hi lo,
Bei uns gets immer je länger je schlimmer,
Hi le, hi lo, hi le, hi lo,

Bei uns gets immer ja so!"

"Carl!" exclaimed Matt. "I could tell that voice of his among a thousand."

"But what the nation is he coming with?" cried McGlory, peering along the road into the gloom. "Looks like he had a rig of some kind."

The "rig," when it drew closer, proved to be one of the donkey carts driven by the clowns in the parade. The Dutch boy was walking ahead and leading the donkey.

"Hooray for der greadt tedectif!" whooped Carl, bringing the donkey outfit to a halt. "Modor Matt, I haf dit vat you say."

"What have you done, Carl?" returned Matt curiously.

"Come aroundt by der cart und take a look!"

Thereupon Carl caught Matt's arm and led him to the cart. The cart was small and mounted on low wheels, and Matt and McGlory had no difficulty in looking down into it.

Ping, his hands and feet tied together, was roped to the seat. Suddenly he set up a wail.

"My velly bad China boy!" he whimpered, "velly bad China boy. Motol Matt, you no like Ping ally mo'."

"Dot's vat I dit," observed Carl, puffing out his chest, folding his arms, and striking an attitude. "I ketch der shink, like vat you say, und he shpeak oudt himseluf dot he don'd vas any goot. Vat I tell you ven ve vas at subber, hey? I vas der greadest tedectif vat efer habbened, I bed you."

CHAPTER XIII.

PING ON THE WRONG TRACK.

To say that Motor Matt and Joe McGlory were surprised at the odd situation confronting them would paint their feelings in too faint a color.

"How did this happen?" demanded Matt.

"Me," said Carl, "I made it habben. Venefer I go afder some fellers I ged him. Yah, so!"

"What's Ping tied up for?"

"To make sure mit meinseluf dot he vould come."

"Where did you find him?"

"In vone oof dose ganvas wagons bedween vich der money vas took. He vas ashleep. I ged me some ropes und vile he shleep, py shiminy, I ged der rope on his hants. Den I porrow der mu-el und der leedle vagon. I see der flying mashine in der air, und I hear der people yell like plazes, aber I don'd haf time for nodding but der shink. You say to pring him, und I dit. Dere he vas. Ven Modor Matt tell Carl Pretzel to do somet'ing, id vas as goot as dit."

Another wail came from Ping, but it was not accompanied by any words that could be understood.

"Take the ropes off him, Carl," ordered Matt. "You should not have tied him like that."

"Den for vy he shleep in der ganvas wagon ven you tell him to drail der Hintoo?"

"Ping will explain about that."

"My velly bad China boy," gurgled the prisoner. "Motol Matt no likee ally mo'. Givee China boy bounce."

Carl, with an air of great importance, proceeded to take the cords off Ping's hands. The moment the ropes were all removed Ping leaped at Carl over the side of the cart, grabbed him savagely, and they both went down and rolled over and over in the road. The mixture of pidgin English and Dutch dialect that accompanied the scrimmage was appalling.

Quickly as they could, Matt and McGlory separated the boys and held them apart.

"I told you somet'ing," yelled Carl, "und dot iss der shinks is der vorst peoples vat I know."

"Dutchy boy no good!" piped Ping. "No lettee China boy savee face. Woosh!"

"Here, now," spoke up Matt sternly. "Tell us all about this, Ping. Did you follow the Hindoo, as I told you?"

"Allee same," answered the Chinese boy.

"Why did you leave the trail? Did you lose it?"

"My velly bad China boy," insisted Ping, with the usual wail.

"You didn't lose the trail?"

"No losee, just makee stop."

"You quit following the Hindoo?"

"Allee same," sniffed Ping.

"What was the reason?"

"My velly——"

"Yes, yes, I know all that, but tell me why you quit following Dhondaram."

"Him makee tlacks fo' ticket wagon, makee pidgin with tlicket man, makee go to canvas wagon, makee hide. Bymby, 'long come Dutchy boy, blingee tlicket man. Tlicket man him cally two bag. Hindoo makee jump, hittee Dutchy boy, knockee down." Ping chuckled as though he considered the matter a good joke. "Tlicket man and Hindoo man takee money bags, empty allee same in hat, takee snake fлом basket, puttee snake in one bag, puttee othel bag in Dutchy boy's pocket. My savvy. Hindoo man and tlicket man stealee money, makee think Dutchy boy stealee. My thinkee one piecee fine business. Stopee follow tlail. Dutchy boy findee heap trouble. My no ketchee Motol Matt, for' Motol Matt makee China boy tellee 'bout Dutchy boy. Woosh! Ping him velly bad China boy. No likee Dutchy boy. Heap likee him get in trouble."

Here was a lot of information tied up in a small and ragged bundle of pidgin. In order to develop all the different parts of it, Matt undertook a line of patient cross-examination.

When the talk was finished the fact that stood out prominently was this, that Ping had allowed his feeling against Carl to beguile him into a most reprehensible course of conduct. He saw the thieves at work, and guessed that they were trying to involve Carl in the robbery. Ping was glad to have Carl involved, so he stopped following the Hindoo and hid himself away in order that Matt might not find him and learn the truth. It was sad but true that the China boy had let his hostility to Carl lure him away on the wrong track.

"Ping," said Matt sternly, "you acted like a heathen. Carl is a friend of mine, and entitled to your consideration. Instead of helping him out of his trouble, you held back in the hope that he would get into deep water. You can't work for me if you act like that."

"My makee mistake, velly bad mistake," moaned Ping. "No makee ally mo'."

"You have been telling yarns about Carl, too," went on Matt. "You told Boss Burton that you had found Carl going through your clothes and taking——"

"Py shiminy Grismus!" whooped Carl. "Take your handts away, McGlory, und led me ged at dot yellow feller. Schust vonce, only vonce! He has been telling aroundt dot I vas a ropper! *Ach, du lieber!* I vas so madt I feel like I bust oop."

"Hold your bronks, Carl," growled McGlory. "You're not going to get away."

"Allee same, Motol Matt, my speakee like that," acknowledged Ping. "Dutchy boy say China boy no good. My no likee."

"You told things that were not true," proceeded Matt, "and they helped to get Carl into trouble."

"My savvy."

"Are you sorry you did it?"

"Heap solly, you bettee."

"Py shinks," fussed Carl, "I'll make him sorrier as dot, vone oof dose days."

"I guess, Joe," remarked Matt, "that we'll have to cut loose from both Carl and Ping. What's the use of trying to do anything with them? They act like young hoodlums, and I'm ashamed to own them for pards."

"Pull the pin on the pair of them, Matt," counseled McGlory. "They make us more trouble than they're worth."

A howl of protest went up from Carl.

"For vy you cut loose from me, hey?" he demanded. "I dit vat you say. I pring in der shink."

"You don't do what I say, Carl," answered Matt. "I have tried to get you two boys to bury the hatchet, but you won't. This bickering of yours has resulted in a lot of trouble for all hands, and pretty serious trouble, at that. We can't work together unless we're all on friendly terms."

"My makee fliendly terms," said Ping eagerly. "Givee China boy anothel chance, Motol Matt. Plenty soon my go top-side, you no givee chance."

"Schust gif me some more shances, too, bard," begged Carl. "I don'd vant to haf you cut me adrift like vat you say."

"Well," returned Matt thoughtfully, "I'll give you just one more opportunity. Take the mule and wagon, both of you, and return them to the place where Carl found them. Remember this, though, that you can't travel with McGlory and me unless you show a little more friendship toward each other."

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Carl and Ping stepped forward in the gloom. There was a moment's hesitation, and then Carl took the mule by the halter and moved off. Ping trailed along behind.

"Don't say a word to any one about what Ping discovered," Matt called after the boys, and both shouted back their assurances that they would not.

"Well, tell me about that!" gasped McGlory, his voice between a growl and a chuckle. "Ping saw the robbery, and was keeping quiet about it just to let Carl get into a hard row of stumps. He's a heathen, and no mistake."

"But the point that interests me a lot," said Matt, "is the fact that Carter himself is mixed up in

the robbery! He planned it with this rascally Hindoo, who joined the show this morning and has been doing his villainous work all day. Carter was trying to get the benefit of the robbery and, at the same time, shirk the responsibility and stay with the show."

"How's that for a double deal?" muttered McGlory, amazed at the audacity of the ticket seller as Matt put the case in cold words. "But then," he added, "Ping may not be telling the truth."

"I've lost a good deal of confidence in Ping," returned Matt, "but I believe he's giving the matter to us straight. One of the money bags, as Ping says, was put in Carl's pocket while he was lying dazed and unconscious from the blow dealt him by Dhondaram; and Ping also says that the snake was put in the other bag. That has all been proved to be the case."

"And Carter must have slashed himself on the cheek just to make it look to Burton as though he'd had a rough time during the robbery!"

"Exactly."

"All this fails to explain, though, why Dhondaram tried to destroy the aëroplane, and then fastened the bag with the snake to the lower wing of the machine."

"We're on the right track to discover all that. Let's hunt up Burton, and then we can all three of us have a talk with Andy Carter."

"That's the talk!" agreed McGlory. "You stay here, pard, and I'll hunt up some one to watch the *Comet* while we're gone. After what's happened to-day, I hate to leave the machine alone for a minute."

McGlory was not long in coming with a man to look after the aëroplane, and he and Matt left immediately to find Boss Burton.

CHAPTER XIV.

FACING A TRAITOR.

Inquiry developed the fact that Boss Burton was in the ticket wagon with Carter, checking over the evening's receipts and making them ready to be carried to the train and safely stowed until the next town on the show's schedule was reached.

"We'll catch Carter right in the strong wagon," laughed McGlory, as he and Matt hurried to the place.

The door of the wagon was always kept locked. Matt knocked, and the voice of Burton demanded to know what was wanted.

"It's Motor Matt," replied the young motorist. "Let us in for a few minutes, Burton."

"I'll come out and talk with you. There's not much room in here."

"I'd rather talk in there," said Matt. "It's important. McGlory is with me."

A bolt was shoved and the door of the wagon pulled open.

"What's all the hurry?" asked Burton, as the boys crowded in.

"You'll know in a few moments," answered Matt, closing the door behind him and forcing the bolt into its socket.

Carter sat at a small table on which a shaded oil lamp was burning. He and Burton, it seemed, had finished their work, and there were two canvas bags, lettered like those with which Matt was already familiar, near the lamp. The bags were bulging with silver and bills. Convenient to Carter's hand lay a six-shooter.

Matt's eye was on the weapon. There was no telling what Carter would do when he learned why the boys had paid their call on him and Burton.

"What's up?" asked Burton.

"Something I've got to talk over with you and Carter," replied Matt.

Casually he picked up the revolver.

"A S. and W., eh?" he murmured, giving the weapon a brief examination. Then, still holding the weapon, he transfixed the ticket man with a steely look.

"Where's the money that was stolen this afternoon, Carter?" he asked.

Carter started up.

"What do you mean?" he flung back, his face flushing and then becoming deadly pale.

"That's what I'd like to know," blustered Burton. "You act as though you thought Andy knew where that money was."

"He does know," said Matt decisively. "The whole plot has come out. There were two robbers, Dhondaram and Carter."

"I'll not stand for this!" cried Carter wrathfully. "Burton," and he leveled a quick gaze at the showman, "are you going to let this upstart come in here and insult me?"

There was an odd glimmer in the showman's eyes.

"Be careful, Matt," he cautioned. "You're making mighty grave charges."

"Are they any graver," asked Matt, "than the charges you made against Carl?"

"You haven't the same foundation for them that I had—and have now, for that matter."

"You're on a wrong tack, Burton," proceeded Matt. "The theft of that money was the result of a plot between the Hindoo and Carter here——"

"And I struck myself in the head and cut my face, eh?" sneered Carter. "A likely yarn."

"Whether you were knocked down or not is open to question. But there isn't any doubt about your cutting your face. You say you fell against one of the wagon wheels. There's not a particle of evidence to bear out the story. You wanted to make it appear as though you were robbed. Dhondaram hid himself in one of the wagons——"

"Oh, he did!" returned Carter ironically. "He knew your Dutch pard was going to ask me to go there, I suppose. If that's the case, why wasn't your Dutch pard in the plot, too?"

That was the one weak place in Matt's theory. According to Ping, Dhondaram had gone into hiding at the wagons. Matt supposed that Ping was a little at sea, or that the Hindoo had not made for the wagons until he had seen that Carl and Carter were going there.

"Dhondaram knew what was going to happen," continued Matt, "and he placed himself where he could be of most aid in carrying out the plot. He knocked Carl down, and while the lad lay senseless you and Dhondaram emptied the money bags into your hats. One of the bags was placed in Carl's pocket, and the Hindoo took the snake from the basket and placed it in the other bag. You two wanted the basket for the money, and you wanted the empty bag in Carl's pocket in order to throw suspicion on him. We all know how the other bag was used. Dhondaram said——"

Carter gave a startled jump, and a muttered oath fell from his lips.

"Did that infernal scoundrel tell you all this?" rasped out the ticket man.

"I'm not saying a word about——"

"I know he did!" ground out Carter, going all to pieces on the mere suspicion. "He told it all, and you——"

With a sharp cry of rage, Carter flung himself at Motor Matt and made a desperate effort to secure the revolver. Matt hung to the weapon, and Burton caught Carter and pushed him down in his chair.

"Here's a fine how-d'ye-do," grunted Burton. "Andy, you've worked for me two years, and I never thought you'd turn against me like this!"

"It was Ben Ali roped me into it," was Carter's angry reply. "If I had that gun in my hands, I'd show you a trick or two. Well," and he threw a look at Burton, chagrined but defiant, "what are you going to do about it?"

The showman sat down on the edge of the table.

"You admit the whole business, eh, Andy?" he asked.

"Dhondaram seems to have given his side of the story, and I might as well give mine," answered the ticket man.

Matt flashed a look at McGlory. The king of the motor boys had not intended to convey the impression that the Hindoo had been captured and had confessed, but Carter, out of his guilty conscience, had jumped to that conclusion.

"You might as well tell it all, Andy, and be perfectly frank with me," said Burton. "What had Ben Ali to do with the affair?"

"He figured it out while he was with the show," went on Carter. "So——" He broke off suddenly. "But what good is it going to do me to tell you all this?" he asked.

"It may do you a lot of good, Andy, and it may not do you any. You'll have to take your chances on that."

Carter was thoughtful for a few moments, and then gave vent to a bitter laugh.

"Well," said he recklessly, "here goes, neck or nothing. I'll see to it, though, that this Dhondaram has his share of the responsibility," and a glitter crept into the ticket man's eyes. "As I say, Ben Ali figured out how the game could be worked. We were going to try it long before we reached Lafayette, but circumstances didn't just shape themselves so we could pull it off. I thought about the deal for some time before I agreed to go into it. The habit you have, Burton, of making me tote the money bags to the calliope tent after the ticket office closes for the afternoon show first gave Ben Ali the idea. But Ben Ali, as you all know, made things too hot to hold him, in the show, and had to pull out. I was glad of it, for I thought the temptation had been taken away from me entirely, but this morning along comes Dhondaram, direct from Ben Ali——"

"From Ben Ali?" echoed Motor Matt.

"Speak to me about that!" grunted McGlory.

"Surprise to you, eh, Motor Matt?" observed Carter, with an evil grin. "Ben Ali is a bad man to get down on you, and I guess he's got as big a grouch against Motor Matt as he could have against any fellow on earth. Ben Ali, since he left the show, has been framing up a scheme to put

the king of the motor boys out of business. In order to carry out his plan, he sent to Chicago for Dhondaram—and, between you and me, that's where Ben Ali made a mistake. The two Hindoos met near the town of Lafayette somewhere, and Ben Ali told Dhondaram what he wanted. Dhondaram was to hire out as a keeper for Rajah, and the elephant was to do the business for the aéroplane. The cobra was to make things warm for Motor Matt. It was all cut and dried between the two Hindoos. But I was rung into it when Ben Ali told Dhondaram to work the hold-up here in Jackson. Dhondaram came to me at the ticket wagon and I had a short talk with him. He said he'd bowl me over and get the money, and then take chances on getting away and playing even with Motor Matt later. I didn't know how the Hindoo was to work it; and I wouldn't have gone into the game at all if I had known all that was to happen.

"Dhondaram heard me talking with the Dutchman when he flagged me and wanted to talk. He must also have heard the Dutchman mention the canvas wagons, for he was there when we reached them. The first thing I knew the Dutchman was down, lying like a log on the ground. There was nothing for me to do then but to mar myself up and make it look as though there had been a fracas. We put the money in the basket, and hid the basket under a pile of old canvas in one of the wagons. It was arranged that I should meet Dhondaram to-night, bring the basket, and then we'd divide the loot.

"But I was suspicious of Dhondaram. He was a stranger to me, and I wasn't going to trust him. During the afternoon, while the aéroplane flight was on, I took the basket out of the wagon and stowed it in another place. By doing that I made it impossible for the Hindoo to pick it up and slope without meeting me. That's all."

"Where's the money?" inquired Burton.

He had had abundant faith in Andy Carter, and there was something almost sad in the showman's face as he listened to the tale of treachery.

Carter leaned forward.

"I'll tell you that, Burton," he answered, "just as soon as you promise to let me off and not make any move against me on account of the robbery."

The brazenness of the proposition struck Burton, and struck him hard. But it was the logical thing for Carter to do, in the circumstances. It was a trump card, and he was cunning enough to know how to play it.

"I'm getting a good many surprises to-night," muttered Burton, "but I guess I deserve it for trusting a whelp like you. I agree, of course. You know very well I can't do anything else."

"You'll not take any legal action against me?" asked Carter eagerly.

"No."

"Of course I can't work for the show any longer?"

"Well, I should say not! What do you take me for?"

"I thought as much, but I wanted to make sure."

"Just a moment," put in Matt. "Where were you to meet Dhondaram, and at what time?"

"Didn't he tell you that? It was to be sometime before the show was over, at the edge of the grounds on the south side. I was to come that way with the basket, and whistle. Where did you nab the Hindoo? I suppose it was that infernal snake business that got you after him."

"He hasn't been nabbed," returned Matt. "You took that for granted, Carter."

Carter sank back in his chair and stared. Then he swore under his breath.

"I'm a fool of the first water, and no mistake," said he, "but that Hindoo will kill me if he's left at large. You can capture him if you go where I told you and do what I said. I'm playing in tough luck, Burton," he added dejectedly.

"You're playing in more luck than you ought to have, at that," snarled Burton. "Put on your hat and coat, and we'll go for the money."

"No," put in Matt, "let me take his hat and coat."

Burton stared, then gave a short laugh as Matt's plan drifted over him.

"Right you are, Matt," said he. "Put on the hat and coat. I guess Carter won't take any harm going out in his shirt sleeves and without his hat. But give me the gun. That will be of use in case Andy forgets his agreement."

A few minutes later they all left the ticket wagon, locking the door behind them. The wagon was constructed of boiler iron, and the money in the bags would be safe where it was until the time came for loading the show and getting ready to move to the next town.

CHAPTER XV.

MEETING THE HINDOO.

Andy Carter, as it turned out, was playing his part in good faith. Perhaps he reasoned that he had

been sufficiently treacherous, and that the very least he could do was to wind up a bad business on the square.

The basket, removed by him from the canvas wagon to prevent the Hindoo from making off with it, had been carried to a clump of bushes not far from the railroad tracks, on the north side of the show grounds, and covered with a pile of broken sticks and other refuse.

Men were already pulling down some of the auxiliary tents and loading them into wagons and driving the wagons to the waiting train. The elephants and nearly all the animal cages had been loaded, while the band wagons and the "chariots" had been stowed in their cars late in the afternoon.

"I suppose you're through with me, now?" inquired Carter, after Burton had secured the basket.

"I will be," said Burton, "as soon as I make sure that all the money is here."

"You'll be too late to catch the Hindoo," demurred Carter, "if you insist on going back to the wagon and counting over all that stuff."

"Then we'll lay the Hindoo by the heels before we count it. You can go with us, Carter. It'll do you good to see the fellow caught."

"He'll kill me!" declared Carter, drawing back.

"I guess he won't. There are too many of us for him to cut up very rough."

"If he sees all of us coming across the grounds, he'll suspect something and sheer off."

"There's sense in that, all right," remarked Burton. "On the whole, I believe I'll change my plans."

Burton stopped one of the wagons that was moving toward the train.

"Where's Harris?" he asked of the driver of the wagon.

"He's comin' right behind me," was the answer.

Harris was Burton's brother-in-law, and had always been in the showman's confidence. He was riding on a pile of tent poles, holding a couple of trunks on the load.

"Harris," called Burton, "I want you to take this basket down to the train for me. Don't let it get out of your hands."

"Another snake in it, Burton?" queried Harris, as he reached down for the basket.

"Well," answered Burton, "I wouldn't look into it to find out. Mind what I say and don't let the basket get away from you."

Having been reassured on this point by Harris, Burton, Matt, McGlory, and Carter moved on. Picking up two men at the dismantled animal tent, Burton turned Carter over to them.

"Andy has resigned," the showman explained dryly to the men, "and he wants to go to the train after his trunk. You men go with him, and keep hold of him all the time. Understand? See that he don't take anything but what belongs to him."

Carter was none too well liked among the show people, and the two men agreed cheerfully to look after him.

"Now," said Burton, as he walked off with Matt and McGlory, "we're in shape to meet the Hindoo. I don't know what I can do with the scoundrel after I get my hands on him. If he is put in jail here, I'll have to come back myself, or send somebody else, to make out a case against him. That wouldn't do—it would only cause extra expense and a loss of time. I guess we'll tie him up and take him along with us on section two of the train."

"Dhondaram ought to be made pay for what he has done," said Matt. "I think you ought to go to a little inconvenience, Burton, in the interests of law and order."

"The inconveniences may be more than you think, Matt. Suppose you would have to come back here to testify against the Hindoo? That would mean no aeroplane work for two or three days. I couldn't stand for that."

By that time, the three were close to the south side of the grounds. There were scattered clumps of bushes, here, and a few trees.

"We'd better hang back, Matt," whispered Burton, "while you go on and do the whistling. We'll be near enough to help you when Dhondaram shows himself. If he's too ugly, I'll use the revolver."

"He's got a bowie, Matt," cautioned McGlory. "Don't let him get a hack at you with it. He could help out Ben Ali's scheme of vengeance a good deal handier with the knife than with the cobra."

Matt stepped on ahead of Burton and McGlory, and began to whistle softly. He had not gone twenty feet before the whistle was answered and a dark figure stepped shadowily from behind some bushes.

"Carter Sahib!" came a low call.

"Dhondaram?" returned Matt.

"Here!" came the eager answer. "Have you brought the basket, sahib?"

"You know why I was to meet you," replied Matt, ignoring the question.

He disguised his voice as well as he could, and the low tone in which he spoke served still further to hide his identity.

The Hindoo could see that Matt was not carrying anything, and evidently his distrust was aroused.

"The sahib is fooling me!" he exclaimed. "You have not brought with you the basket. Part of the money is mine."

Matt had supposed that the Hindoo would run, as soon as he detected the trick. But he did not. On the contrary, he bounded straight at Matt and caught him by the shoulders.

"I want you, Dhondaram!" cried Matt, dropping his attempts at concealment. "You're a prisoner!"

Matt was strong, but the Hindoo was as slippery as an eel. With his arms about him, Matt tried to hold the villain, and in a measure succeeded. Dhondaram, however, heard the running feet and the voices of Burton and McGlory and redoubled his desperate efforts to escape.

He broke from Matt's arms, but Matt caught his left wrist and clung to it like a leech. With his right hand the Hindoo jerked his knife from his sash and made a vicious lunge with it.

Matt avoided the lunge, and before the attack could be repeated the showman and the cowboy had reached the scene.

Then, even with all three of them against him, Dhondaram made a desperate resistance. But numbers prevailed, and the rascally scoundrel's hands were bound at his back by means of his turban, which was opened out and twisted into a makeshift rope.

"He's a fighter, and no mistake," panted Burton, as he held the prisoner by one arm while McGlory took the other. "No more nonsense, Dhondaram," the showman threatened, flashing the weapon in front of his eyes. "You see what I've got? Well, look out that I don't use it."

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The six-shooter, dimly visible in the gloom, had a quieting effect on the Hindoo.

"Don't shoot, sahib," he begged. "I go where you want."

"That's better," said Burton. "Trot along, and we'll soon be where we're going."

Their destination was the train, and they presently had Dhondaram in the sleeping car attached to section two. Very few of the show people had arrived, as yet, and an attempt was made to get a little information out of the prisoner.

But the Hindoo would not talk. In response to every question put to him, he shook his head and held his tongue.

"He'll talk with us in the morning," said Burton confidently. "Just tie his feet, boys, and leave him here. I've got to go back to the ticket wagon."

Matt and McGlory made the prisoner's feet secure, and a tap on the window called Matt's attention. Thinking it might be Burton, wishing to give him a private message, Matt left the car.

It was not Burton, but Carter and the two men set to watch him. Carter wanted his hat and coat.

While Matt was returning the borrowed garments, Carl and Ping came along, talking amiably with each other. Matt sent them into the car to look after the Hindoo, and also to tell McGlory to come out and help prepare the aeroplane for loading.

"I don't know, pard," said McGlory, as he and Matt made their way hastily to the place where the *Comet* had been left, "but I reckon the motor boys have got a little the best of this ruction that Dhondaram kicked up. Burton has recovered the stolen money, Carter has been fired, and Dhondaram is a prisoner. Luck's on our side after all, eh?"

"That's the way it looks," answered Matt.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BIT OF A BACKSET.

The preparing of the aeroplane for loading was not a difficult matter. The small front planes were removed, and lashed between the two larger planes. This narrowed the machine sufficiently so that it could be loaded into the car especially prepared for it.

After the machine had been safely stowed, the two tired lads went to their section in the sleeper. Burton was there, sitting under a lamp and hastily running over the contents of the basket.

"I guess it's all here," said he, dumping the silver and bills into the receptacle and closing the lid. "Anyhow, I'm too much fagged to bother any more with the stuff to-night. It's about time we all turned in, don't you think?"

"I'm Ready's whole family, when it comes to that," yawned McGlory. "Talk about your strenuous days! I think this has been a harder one than that other day we put in at Lafayette, Indiana. What do you say, Matt?"

"We seem to have worked harder than we did then, and to have less to show for it," said Matt.

"Less to show for it!" repeated Burton. "I don't know what you mean by that, son. It isn't every day you save your flying machine from a mad elephant and wrestle with a cobra on the *Comet*, in midair!"

"And it's not every day the Big Consolidated is held up, thieves captured, and *dinero* recovered, all before we leave town," supplemented McGlory.

"It was exciting enough," said Matt, "but it all seems so useless."

"The hand of Ben Ali was behind it all," remarked Burton, pulling off his shoes. "That villain ought to be run down and put behind the bars for ninety-nine years. You'll not be safe a minute, Matt, until he's locked up."

"I guess," ventured the king of the motor boys, "that Ben Ali, after this lesson, will keep away from me."

"I wish I could think so," said Burton.

"What'll you do with Dhondaram?" inquired McGlory. "You can't send him to jail in any other town for an offense he committed in Jackson."

"Sending him to jail is the last thing I'm thinking of," was Burton's response. "What I want is to induce him to talk. He may give us a line on Ben Ali that will enable Matt to keep away from the wily old villain."

"Don't hang onto Dhondaram on my account," said Matt. "I've told Ben Ali what to expect if he ever comes near me again."

"That's you!" exulted McGlory. "All your scare-talk, Burton, goes clean over Matt's head."

The showman pulled off his coat and leaned back in his seat reflectively. He did not seem to have heard McGlory's observation.

"I've got a notion," began Burton, "that——" He paused.

"What's the notion?" urged the cowboy. "It ain't like you to hang fire, Burton."

"Well," pursued Burton, "it's this way: I've got an elephant on my hands that can't be handled by any white trainer in the show. Dhondaram can handle the brute to the queen's taste. What's the answer?"

"You don't mean to say," expostulated Matt, "that you're going to keep Dhondaram with the show just to take charge of Rajah?"

"It's either that or sell the elephant," declared Burton.

"Then, sufferin' cats!" cried McGlory, "sell the brute. You're more kinds of a bungler, Burton, than I know how to lay tongue to. Keep Dhondaram with the show, and he'll do something, before you're through with him, that will hurt." [Pg 28]

"I'll sleep on it," muttered Burton. "I've only got four elephants, and I need Rajah."

"Schust a minid, oof you please," came the voice of Matt's Dutch pard from the aisle of the car.

Matt, McGlory, and Burton turned around and saw not only Carl, but Ping as well.

"What is it, Carl?" asked Matt.

"I vant to know somet'ing," Carl went on, "und dot iss, was I innocend or guilty? Vat you say, Misder Purton?"

"Oh, splash!" exclaimed Burton, "that was settled a long time ago. Andy Carter, the ticket man, admitted that he and the Hindoo were the thieves."

"Den Modor Matt don'd haf to vork four veeks for noddin, schust for me?"

"Of course not."

"Dot's all I wanted to know, oxcept somet'ing else."

"Well, what?"

"Der Hintoo brisoner iss in der blace vere Ping shleeps. Ping wants to go to ped, und I am to haf der ubber bert'. Vat iss to be dit mit der Hintoo?"

"Roll him into the aisle and let him lie there," replied Burton. "Put a blanket under him, if you want to, and give him a pillow."

"T'anks," said Carl, and the boys started away.

"Wait, Carl," called Matt. "There's a little something I want to know. How are you and Ping getting along together?"

"Finer as silk," grinned Carl. "He likes me pedder der more vat he knows me, und it's der same mit me. Shinks iss hardt to ondershtand, but I'm schust gedding ondo Ping's curves. He made a misdake in me, und now he feels pedder aboutt it. How iss dot, bard?" finished Carl, turning to the Chinaman.

"Awri'," answered Ping, although not very enthusiastically.

"That's the talk!" cried Matt heartily.

Two hours later, the second section of the show train was loaded and speeding on its way. All was quiet in the sleeping car, save for the snores of the tired men who occupied the bunks.

Perhaps it was two o'clock in the morning when an uproar filled the sleeper. There were yells, a revolver shot, the slamming of a door, and then a measure of quiet.

Matt thrust his head out of his berth and saw McGlory, equally curious and excited, looking out

from the berth overhead. All up and down each side of the car were other heads.

"What's the matter?" asked Matt.

Boss Burton, in his underclothes, was standing in the aisle, a smoking revolver in his hand.

"Confound the luck!" he sputtered. "The Hindoo has made a getaway. I happened to wake up and to think about him, and took a look along the aisle from my berth, just to make sure he was safe. I thought I was dreaming, or had the blind staggers, or something, when I saw him sitting up. His hands were free and he was taking the rope off his feet. I grabbed my revolver from under my pillow and rolled into the aisle. Dhondaram had started for the door. I blazed away, did nothing but smash a window, and the Hindoo jumped from the train."

"Are you going to stop and put back after him?" inquired Archie Le Bon.

"I guess I won't, although losing the fellow is a bit of a backset," observed Burton regretfully.

"The show can stand all the backsets of that kind that come its way, Burton," said Harris.

"What will we do for somebody to manage Rajah?"

"Oh, hang Rajah!" said another of the Le Bon brothers. "I hope the first section runs into the ditch and smashes the brute. He came within one of killin' Archie, back there in Jackson."

It was the general opinion, as the occupants of the various berths drew sleepily back into their beds, that it was a good thing Dhondaram escaped.

"Wonder just how much that bit of a backset means for us, pard?" McGlory inquired of the king of the motor boys before dropping back on his pillow.

"Nothing, I hope," was the response.

"We'll know for sure, I reckon, before we're many days older," muttered the cowboy as he straightened out in his bed and returned to his dreams of cobras and charging elephants.

THE END.

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OR,

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ON THE BAHAMA REEFS.

"And so your sister's going to spend the winter at Nassau, for her health, eh? Well, she might do worse, for it's very pleasant there, with its lovely climate, and pineapples, shells, sponges, and curiosities. Yes, I've been to the Bahama Islands. Didn't start for there, and didn't make any entry at the custom house, but I got there, all the same. It was a lively adventure, and no mistake."

It was Captain Joe who made this speech, one day, as we sat on a wooden pier, angling for fish, which, I may add, we didn't catch.

The captain, now that his active sea days were over, lived with his brother near-by, and was never so happy as when fishing with us boys, or spinning yarns to while away the time whenever the inconsiderate fish refused to bite.

"I reckon I may as well tell you about it," he went on, "since that steamboat has stirred up the mud till no fish can see the bait.

"I was eighteen years old then, and the doctors gave me just twelve months to live, for I was very delicate, and so, when we started, one raw November day, from Boston, for a voyage to Rio and back, I was as blue as an indigo bag.

"The wind was fierce and cold, and the sea was lumpy, and we tumbled and rolled about like the mischief for five or six days, when we struck finer weather, and I at once began to feel better.

"But a few days later the weather grew bad rapidly, so that by midnight it was blowing half a gale, with a tremendous sea on that made the good brig *Polly Ann* tumble about as lively as a Scotchman dancing the Highland fling.

"It was a fearful storm, indeed, almost a regular hurricane, and lasted for two days before it gave any signs of blowing itself out.

"And then, when at last it began to subside, we found that we had sustained considerable damage, both our topmasts being gone, the mainmast sprung, and the rudder so twisted as to be of little service.

"We had taken no observation for sixty hours, and were rather uncertain as to our location, which did not add to our comfort by any means.

"It was well past midnight, and I had dropped off into a doze, when I was awakened by a tremendous shock that made everything tremble.

"As I sat upright in my berth, there was a second shock, lighter than the first, and then the brig began to pound and thump, with a grinding, crushing sound.

"In another moment the mate came running down into the cabin after something, with a scared look on his face, and cried out:

"'We're on the reefs, and the brig's going to pieces!' and then he rushed on deck again.

"I got up and tried to climb the ladder, but a dash of water came through the open hatch and washed me back.

"Somebody jammed the hatch shut, and I was a prisoner below.

"The next moment a big wave lifted the brig up and sent her higher up on the reefs, and she rested quietly with no more pounding or thumping.

"The captain came down after a while, and said we were ashore on the Bahama reefs, and as the ship was easy now, and there was no immediate danger, we could do nothing but wait for daylight.

"As dawn broke, I was on deck with the rest, the excitement of the occasion, or something else, having put new life into me, and I cared nothing for the sheets of spray and foam that, flying over the rails, drenched us all to the skin every minute.

"Before us, half a mile distant, was a low, white coast, covered with sand hills, and a few cocoa palms, their long, slender leaves thrashing about in the wind like a lot of enormous feather dusters.

"The sea about us was churned into a mass of foam as the incoming waves were broken in pieces on the coral reefs, whose sharp, jagged tops of honeycomb rock rose here and there above the surface like the brown teeth of some marine monster.

"Between the coral reefs and the shore there was a stretch of smoother water, in marked contrast with the tumbling sea outside.

"It was a perfect caldron of foaming water close about us, in which no boat could live a second, and so we waited as patiently as we could for the going down of the adjacent sea.

"Half an hour thereafter, to our great relief, we beheld a stanch little schooner rounding a point well inside the reefs, and making for us; and as she drew nearer we saw that her decks were full

of men, white and black, clad in such a variety of costumes, with such diversity of loud colors, as at once suggested a piratical band of the seventeenth century.

"But appearances were deceptive, for instead of freebooters bent on plunder, the strangers were good Samaritans coming to our rescue—a lot of Bahamian wreckers—men ever ready to save life and property for a consideration.

"The captain of the little craft, which rejoiced in the highly appropriate name of the *Fearless*, a sturdy, square-built man of fifty, with light hair and bluish eyes, and a salty air about him, balancing himself with the skill of an acrobat on the port rail, and making a trumpet of his hands, began a shouting conversation with us, in which he informed us that he wouldn't give a penny for our lives if we weren't ashore mighty soon, as the wind, backing to the northwest, would blow great guns again in a few hours, when our brig would probably go to pieces.

"As the result of this confab, the wreckers began to make preparations to get us off the brig, which they accomplished in a skillful and courageous manner, running a line from the *Fearless* to our vessel, over which we were hauled in turn, though we were sorely battered and drenched by the angry sea that leaped up furiously, as if loath to lose its prey.

"It was well they worked so rapidly, for we were scarcely ashore, and the schooner anchored behind a point, when the storm began to rage again with great fury, burying the old brig in mountains of foaming water.

"When at last the storm abated, it was found that the brig had broken in two, the stern part sinking in deep water, and the cargo being scattered for miles along the coast, some of it being picked up, but in a useless condition, so that the wreckers realized substantially nothing in the way of salvage.

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"In a few days our company went in the *Fearless* to Green Turtle Cay village, where they eventually secured a passage home.

"As for myself, I refused to accompany them, having discovered a decided improvement in my health, which I naturally attributed to the climate, which was perfection itself, with a clear, bright sky, soft, genial breezes, and a pure, dry atmosphere that seemed to put new life into me with every breath.

"So I remained to complete the cure so auspiciously begun, lodging with a planter named Bethel, whom, to pay my board, I helped with the lighter work in his pineapple fields by day, giving his children a bit of schooling by night, to the mutual satisfaction, I am certain, of all concerned.

"The half of the hulk of the *Polly Ann* still clung to the great reefs where she had struck, at low tide being nearly out of water; and every day I looked at it, for it was in plain view from our veranda, with feelings of mingled pity and friendship—for it somehow always suggested to my mind my far-away home and the dear ones there.

"Ever since the wreck, the weather had been perfect—such charming days and nights as can be found only in the Bahamas following each other uninterruptedly, until, as Christmas approached, I conceived the idea that it would be nice to have our holiday luncheon on the deck of the hulk, and in this scheme all acquiesced, thinking it would be novel and delightful.

"But the twenty-third of December ushered in a gale that swept with fury along the coast.

"For twenty-four hours the elements held high carnival, and then, on Christmas Eve, there came a great lull, and the fierce storm, veering to the southward, died away as suddenly as it had arisen, giving us hope that our original plan might yet be carried out.

"We were up early on Christmas morning, and looking seaward, were astonished beyond measure at what we saw.

"The hulk of the *Polly Ann* had been loosened from the clutch of the coral reef and carried bodily over the ledge by the great waves—had been hurled upon the low inside beach, a huge broken mass, with its stern buried deep in the wet sand, its heavy timbers splintered to pieces, and its rusty iron bolts twisted like corkscrews.

"We rushed to the beach—now as hard and smooth as a floor—and saw, scattered about near the nose of the *Polly Ann*, some circular pieces, which we at first took to be brownish-colored shells, but which we soon discovered were nothing of the kind.

"I picked up a piece and found it to be nearly two inches broad, perfectly flat and smooth, the edge worn almost sharp, with some inscription on one side and figures on the other, which we could scarcely trace, so black and discolored was the entire surface.

"I ran to a bit of honeycomb rock and rubbed the piece briskly over it, until presently the tarnish began to come off, and I shouted to Bethel that it was a piece of silver.

"My stars!' he cried out, in great excitement, 'if it's not an old Spanish dollar.'

"And then he danced about like mad for a minute.

"Next we fell to work picking up all we could find till both our hats were nearly full of the pieces.

"Where in the world did they come from?' asked Bethel, after we had gathered in the last coin. 'I didn't suppose your old brig carried such a cargo, did you?'

"I never thought so, surely,' said I; 'nor do I believe she did.'

"Where else could these coins have come from?' asked Bethel.

"I don't know," said I. "But as the *Polly Ann* is only ten years old, and these coins are near two hundred, if they are a day, why, it doesn't stand to reason they were in the brig. However, we will soon see. If they came out of her, there's more inside. Come, we will look."

"We crept inside the old hull and examined carefully among her shattered timbers and twisted bolts, and spent two hours in prying up the planks inside the bow and along the bottom, but at last, tired and breathless, gave it up as a bad job, and came out as empty-handed as we went in.

"I told you so," said I. "They never sailed the sea in the *Polly Ann*."

"We spent the afternoon in counting our coins, finding we had between three and four hundred of them, and we grew quite hilarious over our Christmas gift, as we styled it, and speculated in vain as to where the coins could have come from.

"The next morning Bethel said to me:

"I've been thinking half the night about those coins, and I remember my father used to tell of a Spanish vessel that went ashore somewhere along here when he was a boy, and was gradually washed to pieces; and, do you know, I've an idea these pieces have been cast up by the sea from the old wreck. It's curious, however, that we never found any of them till this brig came plowing up the beach with her nose."

"While we were talking, two of the children came in with several of the pieces, which they had found at the water's edge, exactly like those we had picked up the day before.

"I tell you, sir," cried Bethel excitedly, "my guess was right. I believe that old Spaniard lies buried in the sand right where the *Polly Ann* has stuck her bow in the beach. Man alive, there may be millions down there!"

"We rushed to the beach, and with shovels began to dig up the sand vigorously all about the wreck.

"Every now and then we came across another coin, which encouraged us tremendously, and we worked until we had dug a hole big enough to hold an ox cart.

"But no more coins appeared, and we were getting discouraged, when Bethel struck a heavy timber that ran under the forefoot of the brig, and which did not belong to the *Polly Ann*.

"We cleared away the sand alongside this timber, and there lay a box, made of teak wood, split open from end to end, and jammed hard and fast between the decaying timber and the forefoot of the brig.

"The splinters from the box were fresh and clean, showing that it had been crushed to pieces by the stem of the brig when she was driven into the beach by the storm.

"And then we dug out the sand from under the debris of the teak box, and down came a shower of black silver pieces, exactly similar to the others, which we carefully and eagerly secured and piled up on the dry beach near by.

"There was no longer any mystery as to where the coins came from, for we found the rotten timbers of the old Spanish ship underlying the sand in every direction, none being less than ten feet from the surface.

"For days we pursued our hunt for treasure, tunneling all about, but except those in the teak box not another piece did we find, and at last we desisted, satisfied that we had exhausted the deposit.

"We kept the thing a secret, lest the authorities, taking advantage of some old and unjust law, might claim a portion of our treasure trove; and as there were no near neighbors, and as a brisk gale, which blew later on, filled up our excavations in the sand, this was an easy thing to do.

"We divided our find, and my portion was nearly five thousand dollars, which I brought with me to the United States late in the ensuing summer, and disposed of it to a broker in Boston, who was very curious to learn where I got it.

"But he will never know, unless he learns it from this story.

"My Christmas gift was most acceptable, as you can readily believe; but what I valued far more was the fact that my eight months' residence in the lovely climate of the Bahamas made me a well man, and my lungs ever since have been as stout as a blacksmith's bellows.

"It's all right, my boy. Tell your sister she'll have a nice time at Nassau, and if she doesn't come back in the spring as good as new, then Captain Joe'll never prophesy again as long as he lives.

"She'll not find any Spanish dollars, maybe, but there's things worth more—and one is good health."

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THE STORY OF A WILD GOOSE.

Two years ago, one evening, while I was returning home from an unsuccessful shooting excursion along the Atlantic shore, I observed a flock of wild geese coming toward me, but sailing high. I stood perfectly still, and when the flock was directly overhead I aimed and fired.

In the twilight I could see the flock scattering at the report, and a bird wheeling downward with

one wing limp and useless. He landed on a patch of plowed ground with a thud and lay half stunned. In a moment I had secured my prize.

It was a large gander in prime condition, with a full, deep body, and healthy, lustrous feathers, and I determined to spare his life.

I quickly tied his legs and fastened the uninjured wing. Then, carefully lifting the bird and getting the broken limb into as comfortable a position as possible, I carried him home. Most sportsmen have a crude knowledge of surgery, and I soon had the broken member bandaged with splints and strips of cotton and my captive resting comfortably, unbound, in a warm outhouse.

In the morning, when I went out to feed him, he was walking around lively enough, and, although, of course, very shy and timid, he ate a hearty breakfast of corn as soon as he thought himself unobserved. In a few days he grew tame enough to allow me to stroke him with a bit of stick. It was long before he would suffer himself to be touched by the human hand.

After some months the bird would answer to his name, Michael, would eat out of my hand, and when I let him out into the yard, after clipping his wings, would follow me around like a dog. He invariably fled at the approach of a stranger, but he never "hissed" like a domestic goose. Strange to say, although a flock of domestic geese was kept by a neighbor, he never paid the slightest attention to their cries and calls.

After a time I allowed him to roam the fields at will. At night he returned without fail to his pen. I became much attached to the bird, so much so that goose shooting became distasteful to me and I discontinued the practice.

Last spring I received a letter from a particular friend requesting me to secure a wild goose for him. For various reasons I could not well refuse, so I at once made arrangements for a shooting excursion. In the midst of my preparations it occurred to me that I might employ Michael as a decoy to lure the geese within gunshot. Sometimes a domestic goose is used for this purpose, but seldom with complete success. The wild goose is an intelligent bird, and rarely places implicit confidence in his domesticated relative.

In a secluded bight some miles down the coast I moored a small raft near shore and tethered Michael to it by a stout string fastened to his leg. His wings by this time had grown to the length they possessed before being clipped, and the injured limb was as strong as ever.

Michael seemed well pleased with his situation, stretched his wings a few times as if the salt breath of the ocean stirred half-buried memories, but on finding himself secured settled down comfortably on the raft and calmly preened his gray feathers.

I carefully screened myself behind a clump of scrub spruce and placed some spare cartridges conveniently near. I thought that if a passing flock should approach fairly near I might be able to fire a successful second shot if the first proved a miss.

After a wait of perhaps an hour I heard in the distance a faint "honk" that quickened the heartbeats. Michael also heard it, and ceasing to arrange his feathers, raised his head to listen eagerly. I watched him closely. His neck was proudly arched and his eyes glistened with excitement as he stepped as near the edge of the raft as his tether would allow.

Presently another "honk" dropped from the distant blue, and away to the south I could descry a large V-shaped flock flying fairly low, but altogether too much to the left of my position to render possible a successful shot.

It was now time for Michael to make himself heard, and I was beginning to grow somewhat uneasy at his silence, when all at once—"honk! honk!"—his joyous invitation sped up to the ears of the watchful leader of the air travelers.

"Honk?" queried that wary veteran suspiciously, but at once he slackened his pace somewhat.

"Honk! honk!" called Michael reassuringly; "honk! honk!" he repeated coaxingly.

For a moment the old leader seemed to hesitate, then slowly he turned in my direction, and presently the flock was sailing directly toward me.

My rifle was ready and in position. I was well screened by the bushes. The light was admirable. Everything was favorable to a good shot. In five minutes the flock was within range. Michael had uttered several invitations during this time in reply to short interrogations from the leader, but he had suddenly relapsed into silence. He could see the approaching birds and was gazing at them with intense eagerness. My finger was on the trigger, when all at once, to my amazement, Michael pealed out a strange cry, loud and shrill, utterly unlike any sound that I had ever heard him utter.

It was the note of danger, the alarm signal of the wild goose. The effect on the approaching flock was electrical. The leader instantly turned and sped away with arrow-like swiftness, closely followed by his feathered retinue, leaving me motionless with surprise.

When my captive first heard the calls of his comrades he instinctively answered with notes of invitation. The excitement of hearing and seeing his own kindred made him forget the danger that he was leading them into, but as they approached he seemed all at once to realize the situation. He knew that red death lurked behind the seemingly innocent shrubbery close at hand. Perhaps the memory of his own sharp wound sprang into his mind. At all events, although he knew that to utter the warning cry would debar himself from the companionship of his kind, he unhesitatingly gave that warning with no uncertain sound.

I laid down my rifle and pulled the raft in to the shore. Michael was standing at the limit of his tether, gazing after his retreating friends.

As the raft moved he sprang into the air, only to be jerked back by the restraining cord. I untied the string from the raft and drew the bird toward me. He submitted to my caresses, but I guessed how earnestly he longed to soar away after his kindred. He had saved some of them from death or captivity; they were free to roam the clear air of heaven while he—

I quickly untied the string from Michael's leg and gently pushed the bird from me. Instantly he spread his wings and sprang upward. With eager neck outstretched he swept rapidly after the vanishing flock, uttering hearty "honks" of jubilation.

I felt that he was worthy of liberty.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Added table of contents.

Images may be clicked to view larger versions.

Inconsistent hyphenation ("getaway" vs. "get-away") retained from original.

Page 3, corrected typo "CHAPER" in "CHAPTER II" heading.

Page 4, added missing quote after "I'll go and talk with him. Come on, Matt, you and McGlory."

Page 11, corrected "interpose!" to "interposed" after "Don't be too sure of that."

Page 15, corrected typo "aëoplane" in "repaired aëroplane."

Page 16, corrected "fo" to "to" in "Burton rode up to."

Page 17, changed ? to ! in "Don't talk to me!"

Page 24, removed extra quote after "trick or two" and before "Well." Corrected "Burton" to "Carter" in "Carter was

thoughtful for a few moments."

Page 25, corrected single to double quote after "You took that for granted, Carter."

Page 28, added missing accent to Aéroplane in contents of next issue (twice).

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S SHORT CIRCUIT; OR, THE MAHOUT'S VOW ***

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