

STEAM TACTICS.

By RUDYARD KIPLING.*

"To P. O. EMANUEL PYECROFT,
"Cape Station : H.M.S. *Postulant*.

"DEAR PYECROFT,—This should reach you about the time you turn over to the *Hierophant* at Zanzibar, and I hope finds you as fit as when we parted.

"I always thought, as you said three years ago, that it would be a sin and a shame not to make a story out of some of the things that have happened between you and Hinchcliff and me, every time we met.

"Now I have written out some of the tales. Of course, I ought to have stuck to what I knew would go down quietly : but one thing leading to another, I put it all in, and it made six Number One tales. I put in about the reply-telegram at Wool—when you and Cordery tried to help the dumb girl with the pig ; I put in about the Plymouth baby—the night after the *Belligerent* paid off ; and I put in about Portland Station and the Captain, and the penny-piece which we saw. Nevertheless, when it was all done, a man that I can trust in the literary line said that, to go down at all, those three last numbers would have to be translated into French ; and he recommended me to hand them over to a captain in the French Navy called Loti. I did not care to accede to this, so I took them out and laid them by till happier times, and now people will never know what they have lost. However, enough residuum remains to amuse, if not to instruct ; and I can always put the rest into a large, fine book.

"Hinchcliff had the *Djinn* at the *Coronation Review*. I met him on the beach afterwards, and I got him to check the story of our trips in the motors. He said he could guarantee your being agreeable to it, if I cut out all about what happened on the Cramberhurst Road, as it would hurt Agg's feelings. I know, from what you said at the time, that you didn't care about Agg's feelings ; so I suppose Hinchcliff and Agg have made it up.

"The other two tales you checked yourself, *vivâ voce*, before last Manœuvres ; but I put some more to them on my own later, and it is very likely that I have not got all the Navy *minutiae* quite right. About Antonio, you were not then in a condition to be accurate all through ; and about No. 267, I was then in strange surroundings and rather excited myself. Therefore there may be much that is not technically true ; but Hinchcliff says I have got the spirit all correct. You will see, as these stories come out, the care that I have taken to disguise your name and rating, and everything else that might reflect upon you. Unless you care to give yourself away, which I have never known you do yet, detection is quite impossible for you or Hinchcliff. Hence I am writing freely, and though accused of extravaganzas by some people, can rest confident that there is much more in these literary efforts of mine than meets the casual eye.

"Yours as before,
"RUDYARD KIPLING.

"P.S.—Since writing the above there has been a hitch about the Antonio tale and the proceedings of No. 267 ; it being freely alleged that Antonio won't go down, because it is a bit too thick (this shows how much people know), and 267 would be subversive to discipline, as well as likely to annoy admirals. Consequently I have had to begin at the wrong end—with the motor trips—which is about the same as securing arms at the beginning of G. Q.'s, if I am right in my technical inferences. Both you and Hinchcliff will thus suffer from being presented to the public manœuvring upon the land, which is not your natural element, instead of upon the sea, which is. I, being an author, am not supposed to have any feelings."

* * * * *

I caught sight of their faces as we came up behind the cart in the narrow Sussex lane ; but though it was not eleven o'clock, they were both asleep.

That the carrier was on the wrong side of

* Copyright, 1902, by Rudyard Kipling, in the United States of America. All rights reserved.

the road made no difference to his language when I rang my bell. He said aloud of motor-cars, and specially of steam ones, all the things which I had read in the faces of superior coachmen. Then he pulled slantwise across me.

There is a vociferous steam air-pump attached to my car which can be applied at pleasure. . . .

The cart was removed about a bowshot's length in seven and a quarter seconds, to the accompaniment of parcels clattering. At the foot of the next hill the horse stopped, and the two men came out over the tail-board.

My engineer backed and swung the car, ready to move out of reach.

"The blighted egg-boiler has steam up," said Mr. Hinchcliff, pausing to gather a large stone. "Temporise with the beggar, Pye, till the sights come on!"

"I can't leave my 'orse!" roared the carrier; "but bring 'em up 'ere, an' I'll kill 'em all over again."

"Good morning, Mr. Pycroft," I called cheerfully. "Can I give you a lift anywhere?"

The attack broke up round my fore-wheels.

"Well, we *do* 'ave the knack o' meeting *in puris naturalibus*, as I've so often said." Mr. Pycroft wrung my hand. "Yes, I'm on leaf. So's Hinch. We're visiting friends among these kopjes."

A monotonous bellowing up the road persisted, where the carrier was still calling for corpses.

"That's Agg. He's Hinch's cousin. You aren't fortun't in your fam'ly connections, Hinch. 'E's usin' language in derogation of good manners. Go and abolish 'im."

Henry Salt Hinchcliff stalked back to the cart and spoke to his cousin. I recall much that the wind bore to me of his words and the carrier's. It seemed as if the friendship of years were dissolving amid throes.

"'Ave it your own silly way, then," roared the carrier, "an' get into Linghurst on your own silly feet. I've done with you two runagates." He lashed his horse and passed out of sight still rumbling.

"The fleet's sailed," said Pycroft, "leavin' us on the beach. Had you any particular port on your mind?"

"Well, I was going to meet a friend at Instand Wick, but I don't mind—"

"Oh! that'll do as well as anything! We're on leaf, you see."

"She'll 'ardly hold four," said my engineer.

I had broken him of the foolish habit of being surprised at things, but he was visibly uneasy.

Hinchcliff returned, drawn as by ropes to my steam-car, round which he walked in narrowing circles.

"What's her speed?" he demanded of the engineer.

"Twenty-five," said that loyal man.

"Easy to run?"

"No; very difficult," was the emphatic answer.

"That just shows that you ain't fit for your rating. D'you suppose that a man who earns his livin' by runnin' 30-knot destroyers for a parstime—for a parstime, mark you!—is going to lie down before any blighted land-crabbing steam-pinnacle on springs?"

Yet that was what he did. Directly under the car he lay and looked upward into pipes—petrol, steam, and water—with a keen and searching eye.

I telegraphed Mr. Pycroft a question.

"Not—in—the—least," was the answer.

"Steam gadgets always take him that way. We 'ad a bit of a riot at Parsley Green through 'is tryin' to show a traction-engine haulin' gipsy-wagons how to turn corners."

"Tell him everything he wants to know," I said to the engineer, as I dragged out a rug and spread it on the roadside.

"He don't want much showing," said the engineer. Now, the two men had not, counting the time we took to stuff our pipes, been together more than three minutes.

"This," said Pycroft, driving an elbow back into the mallow and the scabious of the hedge-foot, "is a little bit of all right. Hinch, I shouldn't let too much o' that 'ot muckings drop in my eyes. Your leaf's up in a fortnight, an' you'll be wantin' 'em."

"Here!" said Hinchcliff, still on his back, to the engineer. "Come here and show me the lead of this pipe." And the engineer lay down beside him.

"That's all right," said Mr. Hinchcliff, rising. "But she's more of a bag of tricks than I thought. Unship this superstructure aft"—he pointed to the back seat—"and I'll 'ave a look at the forced draught."

The engineer obeyed with alacrity. I heard him voluntæer the fact that he had a brother an artificer in the Navy.

"They couple very well, those two," said Pycroft critically, while Hinchcliff sniffed round the asbestos-lagged boiler and turned on gay jets of steam.

"Now take me up the road," he said. My man, for form's sake, looked at me.

"Yes, take him," I said. "He's all right."

"No, I aren't," said Hinchcliff of a sudden—"not if I'm expected to judge my water out of a blighted shaving-glass."

The water-gauge of a steam-car is reflected on a mirror to the right of the dashboard. I also have found it inconvenient.

"Throw up your arm and look at the gauge under your armpit. Only mind how you steer while you're doing it, or you'll get

"What happens if he upsets?"

"The petrol will light up and the boiler may blow up."

"'Ow rambunkshus! And"—Pycroft blew a slow cloud—"Agg's about three hoops up this mornin', too."

"What's that to do with us? He's gone down the road," I retorted.

"Ye—es, but we'll overtake 'im. He's a vindictive blighter. He and Hinch 'ad words about pig-breeding this morning. O'

course, Hinch don't know the elements o' that evolution; but 'e fell back on 'is naval rank an' office, an' Agg grew peevish. I wasn't sorry to get out of the cart. . . .

'Ave you ever considered how when you an' I meet, so to say, there's nearly always a remarkable hectic day ahead of us? Hullo! Be'old the beef-boat returnin'!"

He rose as the car climbed up the slope, and shouted: "In bow! Way 'nuff!"

"You be quiet!" cried Hinchcliff, and drew up opposite the rug, his dark face shining with joy. "She's the Poetry o' Motion! She's the Angel's Dream. She's—" He shut off steam, and the slope being against her, the car slid soberly down hill again.

"What's this here? I've got the brake on!" he yelled.

"It doesn't hold backwards," I said. "Put her on the mid-link."

"That's a nasty one for the chief engineer o' the *Djinn*, 31-knot T.B.D.," said Pycroft. "Do you know what a mid-link is, Hinch?"

Once more the car returned to us; but as Pycroft stooped to gather up the rug, Hinchcliff jerked the lever testily, and with prawn-like speed she retired backwards into her own steam.

"Apparently 'e don't," said Pycroft. "What's he done now, sir?"



"The cart was removed about a bowshot's length in seven and a quarter seconds."

ditched!" I cried, as the car ran down the road.

"I wonder!" said Pycroft, musing. "But, after all, it's your steamin' gadgets he's usin' for his libretto, as you might put it. He said to me after breakfast only this mornin' 'ow he thanked 'is Maker, on all fours, that he wouldn't see nor smell nor thumb a blighted bulgine till the nineteenth prox. Now look at 'im! Only look at 'im!"

We could see, down the long slope of the road, my driver surrendering his seat to Hinchcliff, while the car flickered generously from hedge to hedge.

"Reversed her. I've done it myself."

"But he's an engineer."

For the third time the car manoeuvred up hill.

"I'll learn you to come alongside properly, if I keep you 'tiffies out all night!" shouted Pycroft. It was evidently a quotation. Hinchcliff's face grew livid, and, his hand ever so slightly working on the throttle, the car buzzed twenty yards up hill.

"That's enough. We'll take your word for it. The mountain will come to Ma'ommed. Stand *fast!*"

Pycroft and I and the rug marched up where she and Hinchcliff fumed together.

"Not as easy as it looks—eh, Hinch?"

"It is dead easy. I'm going to drive her to Instead Wick—aren't I?" said the first class engine-room artificer. I thought of his performances with No. 267 and nodded. After all, it was a little thing to accord to pure genius.

"But my engineer will stand by—at first," I added.

"An' you a family man, too," muttered Pycroft, swinging himself into the right rear seat. "Sure to be a remarkably hectic day when we meet."

We adjusted ourselves and, in the language of Maryat's immortal doctor, paved our way towards Linghurst, distant by mile-post $11\frac{3}{4}$ miles.

Mr. Hinchcliff, every nerve and muscle braced, talked only to the engineer, and that professionally. I recalled the time when I, too, enjoyed the rack on which he voluntarily extended himself.

And the County of Sussex slid by in slow time.

"'Ow cautious is the 'tiffy-bird!" said Pycroft.

"Even in a destroyer," Hinch snapped over his shoulder, "you ain't expected to con and drive simultaneous. Don't address any remarks to *me!*"

"Pump!" said the engineer. "Your water's droppin'."

"I know that. Where the 'Eavens is that blighted by-pass?"

He beat his right or throttle hand madly on the side of the car till he found the bent rod that more or less controls the pump, and, neglecting all else, twisted it furiously.

My engineer grabbed the steering-bar just in time to save us lurching into a ditch.

"If I was a burnin' peacock, with two 'undred bloodshot eyes in my shinin' tail, I'd need 'em all on this job!" said Hinch.

"Don't talk! Steer! This ain't the North Atlantic," Pycroft replied.

"Blast my stokers! Why, the steam's dropped fifty pounds!" Hinchcliff cried.

"Fire's blown out," said the engineer. "Stop her!"

"Does she do that often?" said Hinch, descending.

"Sometimes."

"Any time?"

"Any time a cross-wind catches her."

The engineer produced a match and stooped.



"Pycroft kept him at bay with a rake-handle."

My car never lights twice in the same fashion. This time she back-fired superbly, and Pycroft went out over the right rear wheel in a column of rich yellow flame.

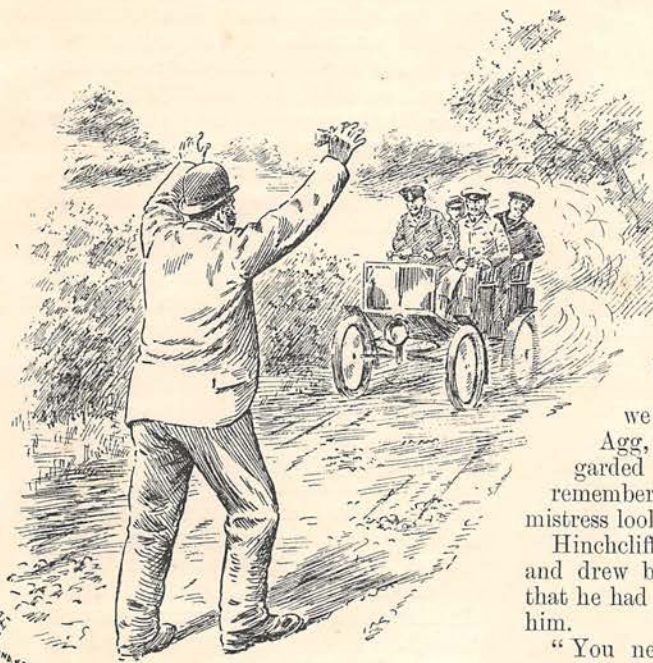
"I've seen a mine explode at Bantry—once—prematooor," he volunteered.

"That's all right," said Hinchcliff, brushing down his singed beard with a singed

forefinger. (He had been watching too closely). "As she any more little surprises up her blighted sleeve?"

"She hasn't begun yet," said my engineer, with a scornful cough. "Someone 'as opened the petrol-supply-valve too wide."

"Change places with me, Pycroft," I commanded, for I remembered that the



"Shall I stop, or shall I cut 'im down?"

petrol-supply, the steam-lock, and the force draught were all controlled from the right rear seat.

"Me? Why? There's a whole switch-board full o' nickel-plated muckin's which I 'aven't begun to play with yet. The starboard side's crawlin' with 'em."

"Change, or I'll kill you!" said Hinchcliff, and he looked like it.

"That's the 'tiffy all over. When anything goes wrong, blame it on the lower deck. Navigate by your blighted self, then! I won't help you any more."

We navigated for a mile in dead silence.

"Talkin' o' wakes——" said Pycroft suddenly.

"We weren't," Hinchcliff grunted.

"There's some wakes would break a snake's back; but this of yours, so to speak, would fair turn a tapeworm giddy. That's all I wish to observe, Hinch. . . . Cart at anchor on the port-bow. It's Agg!"

Far up the shaded road into secluded Bromingleigh we saw the carrier's cart at rest before the post-office.

"He's bung in the fairway. 'Ow'm I to get past?" said Hinchcliff. "There's no room. 'Ere, Pye, come and relieve the wheel!"

"Nay, nay, Pauline. You've made your own bed. You've as good as left your 'appy 'ome an' family cart to steal it. Now you lie on it."

"Ring your bell," I suggested.

"Glory!" said Pycroft, falling forward into the nape of Hinchcliff's neck, as the car stopped dead.

"Get out o' my back-hair! That must have been the blighted brake I touched off," Hinchcliff muttered, and repaired his error tumultuously.

We passed the cart as though we had been all Bruges belfry.

Agg, from the post-office door, regarded us with a too pacific eye. I remembered later that the pretty post-mistress looked on us pityingly.

Hinchcliff wiped the sweat from his brow and drew breath. It was the first vehicle that he had passed, and I sympathised with him.

"You needn't grip so hard," said my engineer. "She steers as easy as a bicycle."

"Ho! You suppose I ride bicycles up an' down my engine-room?" was the answer. "I've other things to think about. She's a terror. She's a whistlin' lunatic. I'd sooner run the old South Easter at Simon's Town than 'er!"

"One of the nice things they say about her," I interrupted, "is that no engineer is needed to run this machine."

"No. They'd need about seven."

"Common sense only is needed," I quoted.

"Make a note of that, Hinch. Just common sense." Pycroft put in.

"And now," I said, "we'll have to take in water. There isn't more than a couple of inches in the tank."

"Where d'you get it from?"

"Oh!—cottages and such-like."

"Yes, but that being so, where does our much advertised twenty-five miles an hour come in? Ain't a fly more to the point?"

"If you want to go anywhere, I suppose it would be," I replied.

"I don't want to go anywhere special. I'm thinkin' of you who've got to live with her. She'll burn her tubes if she loses her water?"

"She will."

"I've never scorched yet, and I ain't goin' to begin now." He shut off steam firmly. "Out you get, Pye, an' shove 'er along by 'and."

"Where to?"

"The nearest water-tank" was the reply. "An' Sussex is a dry county."

"She ought to 'ave drag-ropes—little pipe-clayed ones," said Pycroft.

We got out and pushed under the hot sun for half a mile till we came to a cottage, sparsely inhabited by one child who wept.

"All out haymakin', o' course," said Pycroft, thrusting his head into the parlour for an instant. "What's the evolution now?"

"Skirmish till we find a well," I said.

"Hmm! But they wouldn't 'ave left that kid without a chaperon, so to say . . . I thought so! Where's a stick?"

A bluish and silent beast of the true old sheep-dog breed glided from behind an outhouse and without words fell to work.

Pycroft kept him at bay with a rake-handle while our party, in rallying-square, retired along the box-bordered brick-path to the car.

At the garden gate the dumb devil halted, looked back on the child, and sat down to scratch.

"That's 'is three-mile limit, thank Heaven!" said Pycroft. "Fall in, push-party, and proceed with land-transport o' pinnace. I'll protect your flanks in case this sniffin' flea-bag is tempted beyond 'is strength."

We pushed off in silence. The car weighs 1,200 lb., and even on ball-bearings is a powerful sudorific. From somewhere behind a hedge we heard a gross rustic laugh.

"Those are the beggars we lie awake for, patrollin' the high seas. There ain't a port in China where we wouldn't be better treated. Yes, a Boxer 'ud be ashamed of it."

A cloud of fine dust boomed down the road.

"Some 'appy craft with a well-found engine-room! 'Ow different!" panted Hinchcliff, bent over the starboard mud-guard.

It was a claret-coloured petrol car, and it stopped courteously, as good cars will at sight of trouble.

"Water, only water," I answered in reply to offers of help.

"There's a lodge at the end of these oak palings. They'll give you all you want. Say I sent you, Gregory—Michael Gregory. Good-bye!"

"Ought to 'ave been in the Service. Prob'ly is," was Pycroft's comment.

At that thrice-blessed lodge our water-tank was filled (I dare not quote Mr. Hinchcliff's remarks when he saw the collapsible rubber bucket with which we did it) and we re-embarked. It seemed that Sir Michael Gregory owned many acres, and that his park ran for miles.

"No objection to your going through it," said the lodge-keeper. "It'll save you a goodish bit to Instead Wick."

But we needed petrol, which could be purchased at Pigginsfold, a few miles further up, and so we held to the main road, as our fate had decreed.

"We've come seven miles in fifty-four minutes, so far," said Hinchcliff (he was driving with greater freedom and less responsibility), "and now we 'ave to fill our bunkers. A pair of stilts would be quicker—*my* way of thinkin'."

At Pigginsfold, after ten minutes, we re-filled our petrol tank and lavishly oiled our engines. Mr. Hinchcliff wished to discharge our engineer on the grounds that he (Mr. Hinchcliff) was now entirely abreast of his work. To this I demurred, for I knew my car. She had, in the language of the road, held up for a day and a half, and by most bitter experience I suspected that her time was very near. Therefore, three miles short of Linghurst I was less surprised than anyone, excepting always my engineer, when the engines set up a most bitter clamour and, spasmodically kicking, refused to rotate.

"Eaven forgive me all the 'arsh things I may 'ave said about destroyers in my sinful time!" wailed Hinchcliff, snapping back the throttle. "What's worryin' Ada now?"

"The forward eccentric-strap screw's dropped off," said the engineer, investigating.

"That all? I thought it was a propeller-blade."

"We must go an' look for it. There isn't another."

"Not me," said Pycroft from his seat. "Out pinnace, Hinch, an' creep for it. It won't be more than five miles back."

The two men, with bowed heads, mooned up the road.

"Look like etymologists, don't they?"

Does she decant her innards often, so to speak?" Pycroft asked.

I told him the true tale of a race-full of ball bearings, strewn four miles along a Hampshire road, and by me recovered in detail. He was profoundly touched.

"Poor Hinch! Poor—poor Hinch!" he said. "And that's only one of her little games, is it? He'll be 'omesick for the Navy by night."

When the search-party doubled back with the missing screw, it was Hinchcliff who replaced it in less than five minutes, while my engineer looked on admiringly.



"She came like a destroyer on her trial."

"Your boiler's only seated on four little paper-clips like," he said, crawling from beneath her. "She's a wicker, willow lunch-basket below. She's a runnin' miracle! 'Ave you 'ad this combustible spirit-lamp long?"

I told him.

"And yet you was afraid to come into the *Nightmare's* engine-room when we was runnin' trials!"

"It's all a matter of taste," Pycroft volunteered. "But I will say for you, Hinch, you've certainly got the hang of her steamin' gadgets in quick time."

He was driving her very sweetly, but with a worried look in his eye and a tremor in his arm.

"She don't seem to answer her 'elm, somehow," he said.

"There's a lot of play to the steering-gear," said my engineer. "We generally tighten it up every few miles."

"'Like me to stop now? We've run as much as one mile and a half without incident," he replied tartly.

"Then you're lucky," said my engineer, bristling in turn.

"They'll wreck the whole turret out o' nasty professional spite in a minute," said Pycroft. "That's the worst o' machinery. Man dead ahead, Hinch—semaphorin' like the flagship in a fit!"

"Oh, 'Eavens!" said Hinchcliff. "Shall I stop, or shall I cut 'im down?"

He stopped, for full in the centre of the Linghurst Road stood a person in pepper-and-salt raiment (ready made) with a brown telegraph envelope in his hands.

"Twenty-three and a half miles an hour," he began, weighing a small beam-engine of a Waterbury in one red paw. "From the top of the hill over our measured quarter-mile—twenty-three and a half."

"You manurial gardener—" Hinchcliff began. I prodded him warningly from behind, and laid the other hand on Pycroft's stiffening knee.

"Also—on information received—drunk and disorderly in charge of a motor-car—to the common danger—two men like sailors in appearance," the man went on.

"'Like sailors'! . . . That's Agg. No wonder he smiled at us," said Pycroft.

"I've been waiting for you some time," the man concluded, folding up the telegram. "Who's the owner?"

I indicated myself.

"Then I want you as well as the two seafaring men. Drunk and disorderly can be treated summary. You come on."

My relations with the Sussex constabulary have, so far, been of the best, but I could not love this person.

"Of course you have your authority to show?" I hinted.

"I'll show it you at Linghurst," he

retorted hotly — “all the authority you want.”

“I only want the badge, or warrant, or whatever it is a plain-clothes man has to show.”

He made as though to produce it, but checked himself, repeating less politely the invitation to Linghurst. The action and the tone confirmed my many-times tested theory that the bulk of English shore-going institutions are based on conformable strata of absolutely impervious inaccuracy. I reflected and became aware of a drumming on the back of the front seat that Pycroft, bowed forward and relaxed, was tapping with his knuckles. The hardly checked fury on Hinchcliff's brow had given place to a greasy imbecility, and he nodded over the steering-bar. In longs and shorts, as laid down by the pious and immortal Mr. Morse, Pycroft tapped out: “Sham drunk. Get him in the car.”

“I can't stay here all day,” said the constable.

Pycroft raised his head. Then was seen with what majesty the British sailor-man envisages a new situation.

“Met gennelman heavy sheeway,” said he. “Do' tell me British gelman can't give 'ole Brish Navy lif' own blighted ste' cart. Have another drink!”

“I didn't know they were as drunk as all that when they stopped me,” I explained.

“You can say all that at Linghurst,” was the answer. “Come on.”

“Quite right,” I said. “But the question is, if you take these two out on the road, they'll fall down or start killing you.”

“Then I'd call on you to assist me in the execution o' my duty.”

“But I'd see you further first. You'd better come with us in the car. I'll turn this passenger out.” (This was my engineer, sitting quite silent). “You don't want him, and, anyhow, he'd only be a witness for the defence.”

“That's true,” said the constable. “But it wouldn't make any odds—at Linghurst, you see.”

My engineer skipped into the bracken like a rabbit. I bade him cut across Sir Michael Gregory's park, and if he caught my friend, to tell him I should probably be rather late for lunch.

“I ain't going to be driven by *him*.” Our destined prey pointed at Hinchcliff with apprehension.

“Of course not. You take my seat and keep the big sailor in order. He's too drunk

to do much. I'll change places with the other one. Only be quick; I want to pay my fine and get it over.”

“That's the way to look at it,” he said, dropping into the left rear seat. “We're making quite a lot out o' you motor gentry.” He folded his arms judiciously as the car gathered way under Hinchcliff's stealthy hand.

“But *you* aren't driving!” he cried, half rising.

“No. He ain't,” said Pycroft, and embraced him with one anaconda-like left arm.

“Don't kill him,” said Hinchcliff briefly. “I want to show him what twenty-three and a quarter is.” We were going a fair twelve, which is about her limit.

The passenger said something and then groaned.

“Hush, darling!” said Pycroft, “or I'll 'ave to 'ug you.”

The main road, white under the noon sun, lay broad before us, running north to Linghurst. We slowed and looked anxiously for a side track.

“And now,” said I, “I want to see your authority.”

“The badge of your ratin'?” Pycroft added.

“I'm a constable,” he said, and kicked. Indeed, his boots would have bewrayed him across half a county's plough; but boots are not legal evidence.

“I want your authority,” I repeated coldly. “Some evidence that you are not a common, drunken tramp.”

It was as I had expected. He had forgotten or mislaid his badge. He had neglected to learn the outlines of the work for which he received money and consideration; and he expected me, the taxpayer, to go to infinite trouble to supplement his deficiencies.

“If you don't believe me, come to Linghurst,” was the burden of his almost national anthem.

“But I can't run all over Sussex every time a blackmailer jumps up and says he is a policeman.”

“Why, it's quite close,” he persisted.

“'Twon't be—soon,” said Hinchcliff.

“None of the other people ever made any trouble. To be sure, they was gentlemen,” he cried. “All I can say is, it may be very funny, but it ain't fair.”

I laboured with him in this dense fog, but to no end. He had forgotten his badge, and we were villains for that we did not cart him to the pub or barracks where he had left it.

Pycroft listened critically as we spun along the hard road.

"If he was a concentrated Boer, he couldn't expect much more," he observed. "Now, suppose I'd been a lady in a delicate state o' health—you'd ha' made me very ill with your doings."

"I wish I 'ad. 'Ere! 'Elp! 'Elp! Hi!"

The man had seen a constable in uniform fifty yards ahead, where a lane ran into the road, and would have said more but that Hinchcliff jerked her up that lane with a

"Not if you go on talking. 'E won't be able to," said Pycroft. "I don't know what traverse you think you're workin', but your duty till you're put in cells for a highway robber is to love, honour, an' cherish *me* most special—performin' all evolutions signalled in rapid time. I tell you this, in case o' anything turnin' up."

"Don't you fret about things turnin' up," was the reply.

Hinchcliff had given the car a generous throttle, and she was well set to work, when,



"She surged through forgotten hamlets."

wrench that nearly capsized us as the constable came running heavily.

It seemed to me that both our guest and his fellow-villain in uniform smiled as we fled down the road easterly betwixt the narrowing hedges.

"You'll know all about it in a little time," said our guest. "You've only yourselves to thank for runnin' your 'ead into a trap," and he whistled ostentatiously.

We made no answer.

"If that man 'ad chose, 'e could have identified me," he said.

Still we were silent.

"But 'e'll do it later, when you're caught."

without warning, the road—there are two or three in Sussex like it—turned down and ceased.

"Holy Muckins!" he cried, and stood on both brakes as our helpless tyres slithered over wet grass and bracken—down and down into forest—early British woodland. It was the change of a nightmare, and that all should fit, fifty yards ahead of us a babbling brook barred our way. On the far side a velvet green ride, sprinkled with rabbits and fern, gently sloped upwards and away, but behind us was no hope. Forty-horse power would never have rolled wet tyres up that verdurous cliff we had descended.

"H'm!" Our guest coughed significantly. "A great many cars thinks they can take this road; but they all come back. We walks after 'em at our convenience."

"Meanin' that the other jaunty is now pursuin' us on 'is lily feet?" said Pycroft.

"Precisely."

"An' you think," said Pycroft (I have no hope to render the scorn of the words), "that'll make any odds? Get out!"

The man obeyed with alacrity.

"See those spars up-ended over there? I mean that wickyup-thing. 'Op-poles, then, you rural blighter! Keep on fetching me 'op-poles at the double."

And he doubled, Pycroft at his heels, for they had arrived at a perfect understanding.

There was a stack of hurdles a few yards down stream, laid aside after sheep-washing; and there were stepping-stones in the brook. Hinchcliff rearranged these last to make some sort of causeway; I brought up the hurdles; and when Pycroft and his subaltern had dropped a dozen hop-poles across the stream, laid them down over all.

"Talk o' the Agricultur'l 'All!" he said, mopping his brow—"t isn't in it with us. The approach to the bridge must now be paved with 'urdles, owin' to the squashy nature o' the country. Yes, an' we'd better 'ave one or two on the far side to lead her on to *terror fermior*. Now, Hinch! Give her full steam' and 'op along. If she slips off, we're done. Shall I take the wheel?"

"No. This is my job," said the first class engine-room artificer. "Get over the far side, and be ready to catch me if she jibs on the uphill."

We crossed that elastic structure and stood ready amid the bracken. Hinchcliff gave her full steam and she came like a destroyer on her trial. There was a crack, a flicker of white water, and she was in our arms fifty yards up the slope; or, rather, we were behind her pushing her madly towards a patch of raw gravel whereon her wheels could bite. Of the bridge remained only a few wildly vibrating hop-poles, and those hurdles which had been sunk in the mud of the approaches.

"She—she kicked out all the loose ones be'ind her, as she finished with 'em," Hinchcliff panted.

"At the Agricultural 'All they would 'ave been fastened down with ribbons," said Pycroft. "But this ain't Olympia."

"She nearly wrenched the tiller out of my 'and. Don't you think I conned 'er like a cock-angel, Pye?"

"I never saw anything like it," said our guest propitiatingly. "And now, gentlemen, if you'll let me go back to Linghurst, I promise you you won't hear another word from me."

"Get in," said Pycroft, as we puffed out on to a metalled road once more. "We 'aven't begun on *you* yet."

"A joke's a joke," he replied. "I don't mind a little bit of a joke myself, but this is going beyond it."

"Miles an' miles beyond it, if this machine stands up. We'll want water pretty soon."

Our guest's countenance brightened, and Pycroft perceived it.

"Let me tell you," he said earnestly, "I won't make any difference to you whatever happens. Barrin' a dhow or two Tajurrah way, prizes are scarce in the Navy. 'Ence we never abandon 'em."

There was a long silence. Pycroft broke it suddenly.

"Robert," he said, "'ave you a mother?"

"Yes."

"'Ave you a big brother?"

"Yes."

"An' a little sister?"

"Yes."

"Robert. Does your mamma keep a dog?"

"Yes. Why?"

"All right, Robert. I won't forget it."

I looked for an explanation.

"I saw 'is blighted photograph in full uniform on the mantelpiece o' that cottage before faithful Fido turned up," Pycroft whispered. "Ain't you glad it's all in the family somehow?"

We filled with water at a cottage on the edge of St. Leonards Forest and, despite our increasing leakage, made shift to climb the ridge above Instead Wick. Knowing her as I did, I felt sure that final collapse would not be long delayed. My sole concern was to run our guest well into the wilderness before that came.

On the roof of the world—a naked plateau clothed with young heather—she retired from active life in floods of tears. Her feed-water-heater (Hinchcliff blessed it and its maker for three minutes) was leaking beyond hope of repair; she had shifted most of her packing, and her water-pump would not lift.

"If I 'ad a bit of piping, I could disconnect this tin cartridge-case an' feed direct into the boiler. It 'ud knock down her speed, but we could get on," said he, and looked hopelessly at the long dun ridges that hove up above the panorama of Sussex.

Northward we could see the London haze. Southward, between gaps of the whale-backed Downs, lay the Channel's zinc-blue. But all our available population in that vast survey was one cow and a kestrel.

"It's down hill to Instead Wick. We can run her there by gravity," I said at last.

"Then he'll only have to walk to the station to get 'ome. Unless we take off 'is boots first," Pycroft replied.

"That," said our guest earnestly, "would be theft atop of assault, and very serious."

"Oh, let's 'ang him an' be done," Hinchcliff grunted. "It's evidently what he's sufferin' for."

Somehow murder did not appeal to us that warm noon. We sat down to smoke in the heather, and presently out of the valley below came the thick beat of a petrol-motor ascending. I paid little attention to it till I heard the howl of a horn that has no duplicate in all the Home Counties.

"That's the man I was going to lunch with!" I cried. "Hold on!" and I ran down the road.

It was a big, black, black-dashed, tonneaued twelve-horse Octopod; and it bore not only Kysh my friend, and Salmon his engineer, but my own man, who for the first time in our acquaintance smiled.

"Did they get you? What did you get? I was coming into Linghurst as witness to character—your man told me what happened—but I was stopped near Instead Wick myself," cried Kysh.

"What for?"

"Leaving car unattended. An infernal swindle, when you think of the loose carts outside every pub in the county. I was jawing with the police for an hour, but it's no use. They've got it all their own way, and we're helpless."

Hereupon I told him my tale, and for proof, as we topped the hill, pointed out the little group round my car.

All supreme emotion is dumb. Kysh put on the brake and hugged me to his bosom till I groaned. Then, as I remember, he crooned like a mother returned to her suckling.

"Divine! Divine!" he murmured. "Command me."

"Take charge of the situation," I said. "You'll find a Mr. Pycroft on the quarter-deck. I'm altogether out of it."

"He shall stay there. Who am I but the instrument of vengeance in the hands of an overruling Providence? (And I put in fresh sparking plugs this morning). Salmon, take

that steam-kettle home, somehow. I would be alone."

"Filsey," I said to my man, "help Salmon home with my car."

"Home? Now? It's hard. It's cruel 'ard," said Filsey, almost with a sob.

Hinchcliff outlined my car's condition briefly to the two engineers. Mr. Pycroft clung to our guest, who stared with affrighted eyes at the palpitating Octopod; and the free wind of high Sussex whimpered across the heather.

"I am quite agreeable to walkin' 'ome all the way on my feet," said our guest. "I wouldn't go to any railway station. It 'ud be just the proper finish to our little joke." He laughed nervously.

"What's the evolution?" said Pycroft, disregarding. "Do we turn over to the new cruiser?"

I nodded, and he escorted our guest to the tonneau with care. When I was in, he sat himself broad-armed on the little flap-seat which controls the door. Hinchcliff sat by Kysh.

"You drive?" Kysh asked, with the smile that has won him his chequered way through the world.

"Steam only, and I've about had my whack for to-day, thanks."

"I see."

The long, low car slid forward and then dropped like a bullet down the descent our steam toy had so painfully climbed. Our guest's face blanched, and he clutched the back of the tonneau.

"New commander's evidently been trained on a destroyer," said Hinchcliff.

"What's 'is wonderful name?" whispered Pycroft. "Ho! Well, I'm glad it ain't Saul we've run up against—nor Nimshi, for that matter. This is makin' me feel religious."

Our impetus carried us half-way up the next slope, where we steadied to a resonant twelve an hour against the collar.

"What do you think?" I called to Hinchcliff.

"Tain't as sweet as steam, o' course; but for power it's twice the *Furious* against half the *Jaseur* in a head-sea."

Volumes could not have touched it more exactly. His bright eyes were glued on Kysh's hands juggling with the levers behind the discreet backward sloping dash.

"An' what sort of a brake might you use?" he said politely.

"This," Kysh replied, as the last of the hill shot up to one in eleven. He let the

car run back a few feet and caught her deftly on the brake, repeating the performance cup and ball fashion. It was like being daped above the Pit at the end of your uncoiled solar plexus. Even Pycroft held his breath.

"It ain't fair! It ain't fair!" our guest moaned. "You're makin' me sick."

"What an ungrateful blighter he is!" said Pycroft. "Money couldn't buy you a run like this . . . Do it well overboard!"

"We'll just trundle up the Forest and drop into the Park Row, I think," said Kysh. "There's a bit of good going hereabouts."

He flung a careless knee over the low raking tiller that the ordinary expert puts under his oxters, and down four miles of yellow road, cut through barren waste, the Octopod sang like a six-inch shell.

"Whew! But you know your job," said Hinchcliff. "You're wasted 'ere. I'd give something to 'ave you in my engine-room."

"He's steering with 'is little hind-legs," said Pycroft. "Stand up and look at him, Robert. You'll never see such a sight again!"

"Nor don't want to," was our guest's reply. "Five 'undred pounds wouldn't begin to cover 'is fines even since I've been with him."

Park Row is reached by one hill which drops three hundred feet in half a mile. Kysh had the thought to steer with his hand down the abyss, but the manner in which he took the curved bridge at the bottom brought my few remaining hairs much nearer the grave.

"We're in Surrey now; better look out," I said.

"Never mind. I'll roll her into Kent for a bit. We've lots of time; it's only three o'clock."

"Won't you want to fill your bunkers, or take water, or anything?" said Hinchcliff.

"We don't use water, and she's good for two hundred on one tank o' petrol."

"Two 'undred miles from 'ome and mother and faithful Fido to-night, Robert," said Pycroft, slapping our guest on the knee. "Cheer up! Why, I've known a destroyer do less."

We passed with some decency through some towns, till by way of the Hastings road we whirled into Cramberhurst, which is a deep pit.

"Now," said Kysh, "we begin."

"Previous service not reckoned towards

pension," said Pycroft. "We are doin' you lavish, Robert."

"But when's this silly game to finish, anyhow?" our guest snarled.

"You'll fall in at six bells all right enough. Don't worry about the *when* of it. The *where's* the interestin' point for you, sonny."

I had seen Kysh drive before, and I thought I knew the Octopod, but that afternoon he and she were exalted beyond my knowledge. He improvised on the keys—the snapping levers and quivering accelerators—marvellous variations, so that our progress was sometimes a fugue and sometimes a barn-dance, varied on open greens by the weaving of fairy rings. When I protested, all that he would say was: "I'll hypnotise the fowl! I'll dazzle the rooster!" or other words equally futile. And she—oh! that I could do her justice!—she turned her broad black bows to the westerling sun, and lifted us high upon hills that we might see and rejoice with her. She whooped into still hollows of elm and Sussex weed; she devoured infinite perspectives of grey split-oak park palings; she surged through forgotten hamlets, whose one street gave back, reduplicated, the clatter of her exhaust, and, tireless, she repeated the motions. Over naked uplands she droned like a homing bee, her shadow lengthening in the sun that she chased to his lair. She nosed up unparochial byways and accommodation-roads of the least accommodation, and put old scarred turf or new-raised molehills under her most marvellous springs with never a jar. And since the King's highway is used for every purpose save traffic, in mid-career she stepped aside for or flung amazing loops about, the brainless driver, the driverless horse, the drunken carrier, the engaged couple, the female student of the bicycle and her staggering instructor, the pig, the perambulator, and the infant school (where that disembogued on cross-roads), with the grace of Lottie Venne and the lithe abandon of all the Vokes family. But at heart she was ever Judic as I remember that Judic long ago—Judic clad in bourgeois black from wrist to ankle, achieving marvellous improprieties.

We were all silent—Hinchcliff and Pycroft through professional appreciation; I with a layman's delight in the expert; and our guest because of fear.

At the edge of the evening she smelt the sea to southward and sheered thither like the strong-winged albatross, to circle enormously amid green flats fringed by martello towers.

"Ain't that Eastbourne yonder?" said



"In his bowler hat he kneeled before kangaroos—gigantic, erect, . . . in the heart of Sussex!"

our guest, reviving. "I've a aunt there could identify me."

"Don't worry her for a little thing like that," said Pycroft; and ere he had ceased to praise family love and domestic service, the Downs rose between us and the sea, and the Long Man of Hillingdon lay out upon the turf.

"Trevington — up left — is a fairly isolated little dorp," I said, for I was beginning to feel hungry.

"No," said Kysh. "He'd get a lift to the railway in no time. . . . Besides, I'm enjoying myself . . . Three pounds eighteen and sixpence. Beastly swindle!"

I take it one of his more recent fines was rankling in Kysh's brain; but he drove like the Archangel of the Twilight.

About the longitude of Cassocks, Hinchcliff yawned. "Aren't we ever goin' to maroon the blighter? I'm hungry, too."

"The commodore wants his money back," I answered.

"If he drives like this habitual, there must be a tidyish little lump owin' him," said Pycroft. "Well, I'm agreeable."

"I didn't know it could be done. S'welp me, I didn't," our guest murmured.

"But you will," said Kysh. And that was the first and last time he addressed the man.

We ran through Penfield Green, half stupefied with open air, drugged with the relentless boom of the Octopod, and extinct with famine.

"I used to shoot about here," said Kysh, a few miles further on. "Open that gate, please," and he slowed as the sun touched the sky-line. At this point we left metalled roads and bucked vigorously amid ditches and under trees for twenty minutes.

"Only cross-country car on the market," he said, as we wheeled into a straw-yard where a lone bull bellowed defiance to our growlings. "Open that gate, please. I hope the cattle-bridge will stand up."

"I've took a few risks in my time," said Pycroft, as timbers cracked beneath us and we entered between thickets, "but I'm a babe to this man, Hinch."

"Don't talk to me. Watch 'im! It's a liberal education, as Shakespeare says. Fallen tree on the port bow, sir."

"Right! That's my mark. Sit tight!"

She flung up her tail like a sounding whale and buried us in a fifteen-foot deep bridle-path buttressed with the exposed roots of enormous beeches. The wheels leaped from root to rounded boulder, and it was very dark in the shadow of the foliage.

"There ought to be a hammer-pond somewhere." Kysh was letting her down this chute in brakeful spasms.

"Water dead ahead, sir. Stack o' brushwood on the starboard beam, and—no road," sang Pycroft.

"Cr-r-ri-key!" said Hinchcliff, as the car on a wild cant to the left went astern, screwing herself round the angle of a track that overhung the pond. "If she only 'ad two propellers, I believe she'd talk poetry. She can do everything else."

"We're rather on our port wheels now," said Kysh; "but I don't think she'll capsize. This road isn't used much by motors."

"You don't say so?" said Pycroft. "What a pity!"

She bored through a mass of crackling brushwood and emerged into an upward sloping fern-glade fenced with woods so virgin, so untouched, that William Rufus might have ridden off as we entered. We climbed out of the violet-purple shadows towards the upland where the last of the day lingered. I was filled to my moist eyes with the deep, instriking beauty of sense and association that clad it all.

"Does 'unger produce 'allucinations?" said Pycroft in a whisper. "Because I've just seen a sacred ibis walkin' arm in arm with a British cock-pheasant."

"What are you panickin' at?" said Hinchcliff. "I've been seein' zebra for the last two minutes, but I 'aven't complained."

He pointed behind us, and I beheld a superb painted zebra (Burchell's, I think), following our track with palpitating nostrils. The car stopped, and it fled away.

There was a little pond in front of us from which rose a dome of irregular sticks crowned with a blunt-muzzled beast that sat upon its haunches.

"Is it contagious?" said Pycroft.

"Yes. I'm seeing beaver," I replied.

"It is here!" said Kysh, with the air and gesture of Captain Nemo, and half turned.

"No—no—no! For 'Eaven's sake—not 'ere!" Our guest gasped like a sea-bathed child, as four efficient hands swung him far outboard on to the turf. The car ran back noiselessly down the slope.

"Look! Look! It's blighted sorcery!" cried Hinchcliff.

There was a report like a pistol-shot as the beaver dived from the roof of his lodge, but we watched our guest. He was on his knees, praying to kangaroos. Yea, in his bowler hat he kneeled before kangaroos—gigantic, erect, silhouetted against the light

—four buck-kangaroos in the heart of Sussex!

And we retrogressed over the velvet grass till our hind-wheels struck well-rolled gravel, leading us to sanity, main roads, and, half an hour later, the "Grapnel Inn" at Horsham.

* * * * *

After a great meal we poured libations and made burnt-offerings in honour of Kysh, who received our homage graciously, and, by the way, explained a few things in the natural history line that had puzzled us. England is a most marvellous country, but one is not trained to accept kangaroos, zebras, or beavers as part of its landscape.

When we went to bed, Pyecroft pressed my hand, his voice thick with emotion.

"We owe it to you," he said. "We owe it all to you. Didn't I say we never met in *pup-pup-puris naturalibus*, if I may so put it, without a remarkably 'ectic day ahead of us?"

"That's all right," I said. "Mind the candle." He was tracing smoke-patterns on the wall.

"But what I want to know is whether we'll succeed in acclimatisin' the blighter, or whether the keepers'll kill 'im before 'e gets accustomed to 'is surroundin's?"

Some day I think we must go up the Linghurst Road and find out.

