



BY RICHARD MARSH.

I.  
 “CONVICT’S escaped !”

“Oh—when?”

“Last night. Didn’t you hear the guns?”

I had not heard them. I don’t think that Ted had heard them, either. We had not gone to bed with the intention of lying awake to listen to guns.

We sat down to breakfast, Ted and I, thinking rather of the food in front of us than of the unfortunate or fortunate individual who, according to our landlord, had quitted Princetown Prison, in the small hours of the morning, without first going through the form of obtaining his host’s permission. But the landlord was full of the subject. He went on talking while we went on eating.

“They’ll catch him, safe enough. I’ve been here a few years, and I’ve seen a few of ’em escape, I tell you. But I’ve never known one that wasn’t brought back yet. You see, there’s five pounds to anyone who gives the screws the office—they call the warders ‘screws,’ them chaps up here. So pretty near everyone’s hand’s against them. And then Princetown isn’t like Millbank. You can’t drop over the wall and find a pal waiting for you round the corner. It’s when they’re out that their troubles begin. They don’t know their way about Dartmoor any more than they know their way about the moon.”

Mr. Pethick paused to take in a little

breath. So Ted asked a question : “Have you heard who it is has got away?”

Mr. Pethick winked.

“They keep that dark just at first, you know. They like to lay their hands upon him before anybody gets to know who it is has tried to slip his collar. But I was told it was a ‘lifer’—a chap who, if he’d got his rights, would have been hung. I shouldn’t be surprised if he made a bit of a fight for it before he lets them lay their hands on him.”

Ted Lane and I were staying at a certain little inn within two miles of Princetown Prison, which is not unknown to brethren of the rod and the line, and of the palette and the brush. It stands just at the junction of the tiny stream which they call the River Cowsick with the River Dart ; in the heart of a country which, at least in summer, is as beautiful as it is wild. We had gone there ostensibly to sketch, but we had done a little fishing, and to tell the truth, I don’t think that we had done much of either.

I was a lazy man in those days. I don’t know that I am much more hard-working now.

But that particular day we had planned a ten-mile walk over the moor—ten miles out and ten miles home—to Erme Head. And if we felt in the mood, and not too lazy, and that sort of thing, we had vague intentions of pushing on to Red Lake, about a mile farther on.

It was good walking weather, a clear sky

overhead, and just breeze enough to keep one cool; and I need scarcely observe that we did not allow the fact of a man having escaped from the convict establishment at the top of the hill to make any alteration in our plans.

The man, however, seemed to be running in Mr. Pethick's mind. There is not much to talk about at Two Bridges except the weather, and an escape from Princetown is undoubtedly an event.

"You are sure to meet him," our landlord remarked, as we set out. I will only hint that if I had only been as sure of this as our host professed to be, at least one of those pedestrians would have stayed at home. I am not at all sure that the stay-at-homes would not have extended to two. I am not a thief-catcher. I had no desire to earn five pounds by what Mr. Pethick had termed "giving the 'screws' the 'office.'" As for the members of the criminal classes, I have always felt that the less I have to do with them, the better I am pleased. I do not know how it is with other men. It has always been that way with me. And I am sure—on that point there cannot be the slightest possible doubt!—that if I had anticipated having an interview, in the remotest and most secluded fastnesses of wild Dartmoor, with a gentleman who would have been hung "if he had had his rights," I, for one, should have postponed that little excursion *sine die*. Indeed, I should not have minded if it had never come off at all. Ted Lane, however, gave me the impression that he was not of my way of thinking. I am persuaded that if you had listened to the remarks which he made as we went along—casual remarks, as it were—you would have supposed, as I supposed at the time, that nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to capture, or recapture, all the inmates of Princetown Prison single-handed. Nor do I deny that I might have dropped a hint, a distant hint, that under certain circumstances I should do, or endeavour to do, my duty to my Queen and to my country. But when Ted Lane declares, as he since has declared, that I said that I should

be only too glad, five pounds or no five pounds, to have a chance of taking the blood-stained villain by the throat, and "scrunching the life right out of him!" he libels me. I hope and I believe, in fact I know, that I would "scrunch the life" out of no man, whether convict or, so to speak, layman.

We had gone five miles, it may be; perhaps a little more, because we had passed For Tor. We were not talking about convicts—nothing of the kind. We were in the middle of a discussion about the Whistlerian theories of art, when I turned round, the better to get a light to my pipe. As I turned I saw, or thought I saw, someone or something drop down behind a hillock some two hundred yards away. But as I continued to look steadily in that direction and saw nothing and no one, I concluded that I was mistaken, and that some chance object had deceived my eye. Having lit my pipe, I rejoined Lane, who had gone on and was a few yards ahead.

We resumed the thread of our discussion; but as we argued I could not rid myself of the impression that, after all, I might not have been mistaken, and that someone had dropped down behind the hillock. To make quite sure, I glanced backwards, over my shoulder. As I did so I gave an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" inquired Ted.

I had stood still and turned. He also stood still and turned.



"CASUAL REMARKS."

"It's very queer," I said, "but I could have sworn that I saw somebody peeping over the top of that hillock."

"Which hillock?"

"That one—with the patch of gorse at the side."

Ted looked in the direction in which I pointed.

"There's nothing there."

It was true that there was nothing there just then; but if there had not been something there a moment before, then I had been the victim of an optical delusion, and of an optical delusion of a curious kind. But for some reason, on which I need not dwell, I did not altogether relish the idea of there being someone in that wild place who, while he was anxious to look at us, was even more anxious that we should not look at him. So I did not think it worth while to insist that I could scarcely have been twice deceived, in broad daylight, in such a very singular manner.

Ted went on talking in his light-hearted way.

"You were dreaming, my dear fellow." He recommenced his forward march. "In Whistler's portrait of his mother——"

My thoughts were not with Whistler's portrait of his mother. They were behind my back. As Ted went prosing on, I gave another glance over my shoulder. What I saw—well! I do not wish to use exaggerated language, so I will not say that it made my blood run cold, but I do affirm that it did not increase my sense of comfort. I saw that a man was following us, as it seemed to me, upon his hands and knees. He must have been well on the alert, because directly I looked round he dropped down, so that he lay concealed among the ferns and grasses. But I had seen him, though he might not think it. Upon that point I had no doubt.

I was at a loss as to what was the best course to pursue. I am aware that it may seem obvious enough on paper. I can only state that I did not find it quite so obvious in fact. I am not a fighting man, and what is more, I never have been. I do not know that that is anything to be ashamed of, though, to listen to some people, and to some ostensibly respectable people, you would think that it was. There is nothing I object to so much as a row; and, in fact, although I may be an artist, I am a peace-loving and peace-abiding citizen. And I defy even a cross-examining barrister to prove that I am otherwise.

After a few moments of what I will call inward meditation, I gathered myself together, moistened my lips, and said, "Ted!"

"Yes?" He looked at me. I suppose he saw that there was something in my face. "What's up?"

"Keep cool, old man."

"Keep cool! What do you mean?" I caught his arm.

"Don't turn. Perhaps it would be as well not to let him think we see him."

"See him? See whom?"

"Keep cool. Don't get excited, Ted." I dropped my voice to what I have seen described as a "lurid" whisper. "The gentleman who escaped from Princetown last night is just behind. He's following us."

I used the word "gentleman" advisedly; because, although, of course, I knew that he could not hear what we were saying, still I did not wish him even to *think* that we were using towards him the language of discourtesy.

I had not imagined that my observation would have had the effect it did have upon Ted Lane. He pulled up short.

"Don't stop," I said. "Don't let him think we've noticed him."

Ted went on again, as it seemed to me, a little hurriedly.

"You're sure it's the man?"

"Quite sure."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know where he is now. When I just looked back he was rather more, perhaps, than fifty yards behind us."

"Fifty yards? That all? Why is he following us?"

"I'm sure I don't know why he's following us. I say, Ted, I wish you wouldn't walk so fast. I can scarcely keep up with you."

"I'm not walking fast." I did not see how he could walk much faster, unless he ran. But I said nothing. I did my best to keep at his side.

After we had walked a dozen or twenty yards at the rate of about seven miles an hour, Ted gasped out:—

"What sort of man is he?"

"I didn't see. I only just had a peep at him."

"Look where he is!"

"Then don't go tearing off like that."

I caught him by the arm, to make sure that he did not walk on and leave me behind. I glanced behind. As I did so I uttered an exclamation. What I saw was enough to make any man exclaim. A truculent-looking scoundrel, apparently about eight feet high,

attired in the hideous costume of a convict, was striding after us as if he were in possession of the seven league boots, and was wearing them just then.

My exclamation caused Ted to look behind him. When he saw that murderous-looking monster bearing down upon us in a manner which inevitably suggested a bloodthirsty pirate bearing down upon an inoffensive trading craft, Ted tore his arm out of my grasp, and, without giving me the slightest hint of what his intentions were, made off as fast as his legs would carry him. When that convict saw that Ted had taken to his heels, he took to his, and, of course, when he took to his heels, I also took to mine.

"Stop!" I cried to Ted. "Don't run away from the man."

I protest that I shouted this with the full force of my lungs, although—in this way is history told—Ted denies that I did so to this hour.

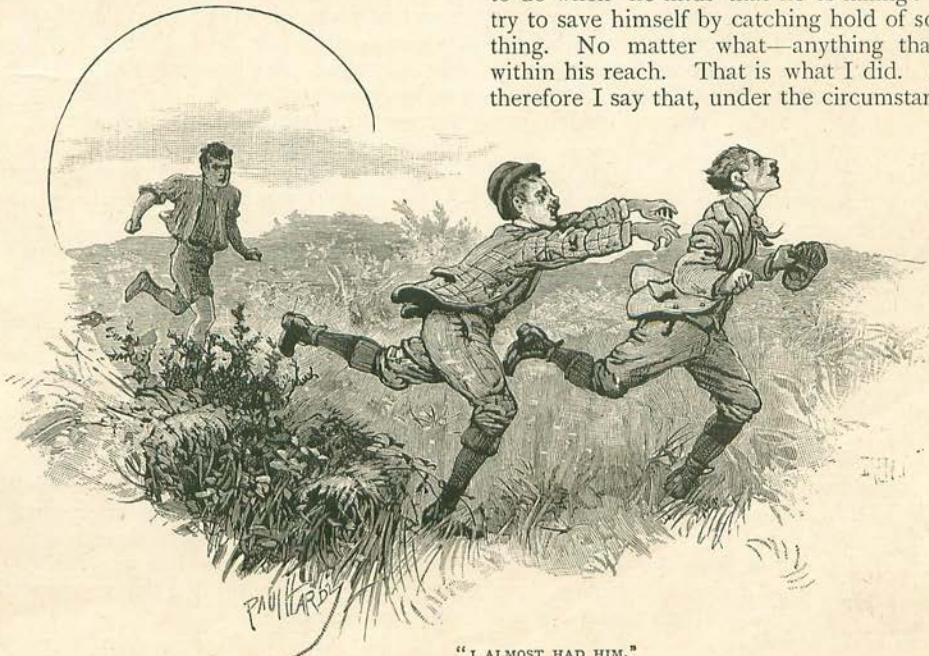
I had no idea that Ted Lane could run so fast. He simply flew over the ground. All I did was to try to catch him, and, I need scarcely observe, I had to strain every nerve if I wished to have a chance of doing that. As for that convict, no sooner had the procession started, than that audacious villain gave utterance to an ear-piercing yell, which must have been audible all the way to Princetown. When that sound fell upon Ted Lane's ear, he stood, if possible, still less

upon the order of his going even than before. He tore off the light knapsack which held his sketch-book, his palette, and his lunch, and cast it to the winds. When he let his knapsack go, of course, I let mine go too. But, merely on that account, it is absurd to suppose that I was running away from the man behind. I repeat that my sole desire was to catch Ted Lane, who was in front. And how could I expect to be able to catch him if I was more heavily weighted than he was?

That convict, instead of pausing as he might have been expected to do, to see what the knapsacks contained, came on, if anything, faster than before. He moved so much faster than I did that I already seemed to feel his outstretched hand upon my collar, which is a sufficient refutation of the ridiculous suggestion that, in the *true* sense of the words, I was running away from him.

So, as it was plainly a case of at once or never, I increased my already almost super-human efforts to catch Ted Lane. I gained upon him, perceptibly, inch by inch—though seldom was a man more winged by fear than he was then. I almost had him. In another second we should have been side by side, when my foot caught against some obstacle on the uneven turf, and I fell head-foremost to the ground.

What is the most natural thing for a man to do when he finds that he is falling? To try to save himself by catching hold of something. No matter what—anything that is within his reach. That is what I did. And therefore I say that, under the circumstances,



"I ALMOST HAD HIM."

Ted Lane's simulated indignation is simply nonsense.

When I felt myself going, I did the most natural thing in the world—I made a snatch at something. I suppose it is not my fault if Ted Lane's leg was the only thing there was to snatch. I presume that even Ted Lane himself will not venture to suggest that I put his leg where it was. Nor, when I touched his leg, if he chose to go sprawling forward on to his face, was that any affair of mine. Anyhow, he did go forward. And there we both of us lay.

"So I've got you!"

This observation was made in a tone of voice which induced me, after a short interval for reflection, to look round. The speaker was the gentleman—but why should I write "gentleman"? I will write it plainly. The speaker was the unmitigated ruffian who had escaped from Princetown Gaol.

I sat up, feeling a little out of sorts. In my sanguine way, I imagined that the time had not yet passed for peaceful overtures. So I spoke to the fellow as I would have spoken to an ordinary Christian.

"Good-day! Warm weather for walking."

"I'll make it warmer for you before I've done."

That was what the crime-stained wretch replied. Yet, such was the extent and fullness of my Christian charity, still I did not wish him to look upon us as his natural enemies.

"You need not be afraid of us, my dear sir," I remarked, in that friendly and affable way I have. "We have a fellow feeling for a fellow creature in distress, and rather than re-assign you to the dungeons which you appear to have so recently quitted——"

"Afraid of you!" he yelled. He gave a whoop which would have done credit to a Red Indian on the war-path. He also bounded about four feet from the ground. "I am Jim Slim, the Camden Town murderer. I have slain nine people with this right hand—seven women, three men, and a boy." His arithmetic reminded me of a dining-room waiter's, but that is what he said. "And why should I not add you to the number of the slain?"

This inquiry was such a peculiar one, even proceeding from an escaped convict in the middle of Dartmoor, that I was induced to look more carefully at the speaker. He was quite worth looking at, from the point of view of the people who derive satisfaction from gazing at the ladies and gentlemen in the "Room of Horrors."

A more horrible and malignant-looking scoundrel I never saw. I am not prepared to state what were his exact measurements in inches, but he was certainly head and shoulders taller than I am. I should say, if we had been placed rear to rear, that the top of my head would have reached somewhere about the middle of his back. And, what is more, he was *more* than broad in proportion.

But he was not only a dreadful object as regards his physical configuration, but, if the thing was possible, his attire lent to his appearance an added charm. He was, of course, clad in convict's clothing, but, although one does not expect that clothing to be "cut" in Savile Row, one certainly does expect to see about it *some* sort of a fit. For instance, one does not expect to see a man of, say, seven foot in a suit of clothes which would not be large enough for a man of three foot six. The hideous miscreant in front of us had been crammed into garments which had apparently been intended for his infant brother. I don't know, but I had always supposed that they provided even convicts with boots or shoes. This individual had neither. He had on a pair of stockings, the whole of which was scarcely large enough to contain his feet. His knickerbockers stopped short about ten inches above his knees. They looked more like curtailed bathing drawers, of novel design and pattern, than any other garment I ever saw. He had apparently cut them open at the back to induce them to meet in front, and the result was singular. He had cut his jacket open at the seams to enable him to get into it. Between the bottom of that garment and the top of his knickerbockers was a vacant space of about two feet. This was scantily covered by the ragged remnants of a parti-coloured shirt. No waistcoat was visible to the naked eye. As for hat or cap, perhaps the gentleman had come away so hastily that he had forgotten to bring that with him.

I felt that if that is the costume in which a grateful country attires her criminals, honesty may be the better policy, after all.

While Ted and I regarded the guilt-smirched scoundrel with eyes of wonder and admiration, he plunged his hand into the bosom of what, I presume, was intended for his shirt. When that hand reappeared it held what I have seen described as a "shooting-iron." A revolver was flashed in our faces. It only needed that to make the situation perfect.

"What shall I do with you?" he de-



"A REVOLVER WAS FLASHED IN OUR FACES."

manded, in a manner which, so far as I was concerned, required no reply whatever.

Ted, however, seemed to think otherwise.

"I haven't brought much money with me ; but so far as half a sovereign is concerned——"

"Half-sovereign me no half-sovereign !"

Ted ducked. He appeared to be under the impression—which, I am bound to own, I shared—that that ideal candidate for Falstaff's ragged regiment was about to "take a shot" at him. Our new acquaintance, however, restrained his zeal.

"My dear sir," cried Ted, "don't fire ! I assure you that my sympathy is yours. I have always been conscious that a gentleman in your position may be, if all were known, a better man——"

"Sympathy me no sympathy !" (Another duck from Ted.) "What I want," yelled the stranger, as if he were addressing a meeting in Hyde Park, "is clothes !"

I felt that this was true ; indeed, we both of us felt that this was true. But none the less, we were not prepared for what immediately followed.

"Take off your coat !"

Ted chose to take the request as being addressed to him.

"I am afraid you will find my coat too small for you."

"The two of you take off your coats. I will sew them both together."

The proposition did not commend itself to me as being of a practicable kind, nor as one which was likely to lead to a satisfactory result. I did not see how he proposed to provide himself with a well-fitting garment even when the two coats were sewn together. However, as Ted took off his coat, of course I took off mine. I had always regarded that man as my friend, and I was not going to desert him then. I have some consideration for the claims of friendship, whatever other men may have.

But the stranger was not content when he had got our coats.

"Take off your waistcoats," was his next demand.

Here Ted made a stand ; not such a stand as I should have made—still, he made a stand.

"You really must excuse me, my dear sir, but if you wouldn't mind——"

"Strip !" roared the stranger.

And—well, I may say, in fact, I do say it, without the slightest hesitation, that if Ted had not stripped first, I should not have stripped : I should have remonstrated with that ruthless ruffian. I should have pointed out to him that there are circumstances which an escaped convict ought to consider even in the centre of Dartmoor. I should have done this in a manner which would have commended itself to his sense of what was right and what was wrong. But, as I have already pointed out, I am not a man to desert a friend, especially in the hour of his need. So, when Ted stripped, I stood to him, shoulder to shoulder, and I stripped too.

There was one thing—the weather was tolerably warm, and the spot was a secluded



"TAKE OFF YOUR WAISTCOATS."

one, ten miles from anywhere, so that there was nothing to shock the proprieties. Otherwise, if I know myself, I should certainly have refrained.

I must confess, though, that I did not understand why he would not allow us to keep our socks. Even if he had sewn the two pairs together he would not have been able to get into them. And as for our shoes, the idea of his ever being able to wear them was simply ridiculous. But no, he would not even allow us to keep a pocket-handkerchief. He would only allow us to keep our hats. And that was absurd. A man cannot do much in the way of outdoor exercise if he only has a hat on. The thing would make the absence of the rest of his apparel more marked than ever.

"Take six steps to the left," observed the stranger.

We took six steps to the left; or, rather, Ted took six steps to the left, and, of course, I followed him. I never *would* desert a friend.

When we had taken six steps to the left, the stranger tucked my clothes under one arm, and Ted's clothes under the other. He

turned away. He disappeared among the heather, down a winding path which led, with a sharp descent, to some lower ground upon the right.

I will not attempt to describe the feelings with which we watched him disappear. We waited for him to reappear. But we waited in vain. We saw nothing more of him, or of our clothes. We spent the greater part of that day, in the heart of Dartmoor, with "nodings on" except our hats. And what is even a Lincoln and Bennett when you have no other garments with which to keep that article in countenance?

## II.

"STAND! or we fire!"

This was the agreeable observation which was addressed to us from the rear, when we had become more than a little tired of

wandering about a rough, and a rugged, and a thorny country in a state of arcadian simplicity. Our first impression was that the gentleman who had replenished his wardrobe at the expense of ours, after carefully considering the matter, desired the pleasure of our further acquaintance. Perhaps he had come back after our hats.

But our first impression was a mistaken one, as we perceived when we looked behind us.

A little distance off stood a small group of warders, evidently a search party from the prison. Their guns were raised to their shoulders, and the muzzles were pointed in our direction, with evident and obvious intent. But we had no objection to "stand." Not the slightest. We had already been standing for some time, chiefly because we had experienced a difficulty in sitting or lying on the prickly turf with "nodings on."

As the warders advanced they stared at us with unmistakable and increasing surprise, which conduct, on their part, was not altogether without excuse. In front of them walked a superior officer, perhaps a "chief" warder, or something—I don't know; I have



"STAND, OR WE FIRE!"

myself not yet "done time." At his side was an individual who, as he was attired in the ordinary costume of every-day life, was, apparently, a civilian. When he had come close enough to make quite sure that our attire was represented by a minus quantity, he addressed us:—

"Who are you; and what are you walking about like that for?"

We told him who we were. We also told him why we were walking about like that. We explained, with a certain dignity, that we had encountered the gentleman he was in search of, and that he had relieved us of what we would charitably hope he had supposed to be our superfluities.

That officer's surprise, for some occult reason, appeared to increase rather than to diminish.

"You don't mean to say that you two men allowed a little man like that to strip you both stark-naked?"

Little man! I don't know what he called a little man. I pointed out to him, with sarcastic and even cutting emphasis, that a man seven foot six could be only called "little" in a land of giants.

"Seven foot six! Why, he scarcely tops five foot."

Scarcely topped five foot! Then that was the most liberal five foot I ever yet encountered. I said so.

The individual who was attired in civilian costume interposed:—

"If the man these gentlemen are speaking of was unusually tall, it is possible that it was Mr. Mogford, and if so——"

He got no further; because just then there came sauntering out from among the gorse and the heather "Jim Slim, the Camden Town murderer." His appearance created a sensation. His costume, in particular, seemed to occasion almost as much surprise as ours had done. He carried under each arm a bundle of clothing. Ted Lane and I recognised those bundles without a moment's hesitation. The fellow had been wise enough not to attempt to clothe himself with our belongings. With an air of the most perfect tranquillity he approached the group of warders. Then he stretched out his arm, letting Ted's garments tumble to the ground, and he shook the civilian by the hand.

"How do, Pierce?" he observed. "I'm Jim Slim, the Camden Town murderer."

He said he was—but he wasn't. There have been moments since then when I have almost wished he had been.

The man was a lunatic—in a legal, not merely in a colloquial sense. His name was Mogford. He was residing, for the benefit of his health, in a cottage, somewhere—I cannot say exactly where; I never knew, but somewhere upon Dartmoor. The individual in civilian clothes, Mr. Pierce, was his keeper. Mr. Mogford had risen at a very early hour that morning and, unknown to his keeper, gone out upon the moor. He





"I'M JIM SLIM."

had not been heard of since. Mr. Pierce was looking for him when he had encountered the search party from the prison.

That lunatic, Mogford, had met that convict, who was probably then in the first ardour of his flight. The chaste beauty of the flying convict's costume had filled his lunatic soul with longing. He had insisted upon a change of clothing. What that convict thought of the transaction history does not record. Although the fit must have left something to be desired, he probably needed but slight coercion.

Mr. Mogford, having got himself in—and very much in—his new garments, somehow, felt himself bound to act up to his attire. Coming upon us he had insisted not exactly upon another exchange, but upon rank robbery.

I have heard it whispered since that my conduct on that occasion did not exactly merit the cross for valour. I have even heard it insinuated that it showed rank cowardice

for two men to allow one man to strip them to the skin. That sort of observation merely denotes inexperience. If you go to the United States, that great country, you will find that a couple of men with "shooters" can, and do, "hold-up" a whole train full of passengers, and among them men of valour.

I beg to observe, with emphasis, and without hesitation, that it is only when ten miles away from anywhere you meet a bloodthirsty, blood-guilty, gigantic, murderous, truculent, reckless ruffian, who has everything to win and nothing to lose, and who is in possession of a revolver which he shows every intention of using on the slightest possible pretext, that you learn what force of persuasion there is in a certain kind of argument.

Ted Lane *may* have been a coward. I wish it to be understood that I say nothing to the contrary. For myself, I spurn the paltry suggestion with the withering contempt which it deserves.