

"Gawd bless my prisoner, and make me a good boy. Amen. 'Ere you are,
Jenkins. It's dirt cheap at a tot."

STEAM TACTICS

THE NECESSITARIAN

I know not in whose hands are laid
To empty upon earth
From unsuspected ambushade
The very Urns of Mirth:

Who bids the Heavenly Lark arise
And cheer our solemn round--
The Jest beheld with streaming eyes
And grovellings on the ground;

Who joins the flats of Time and Chance
Behind the prey preferred,
And thrones on Shrieking Circumstance
The Sacredly Absurd,

Till Laughter, voiceless through excess.

Waves mute appeal and sore,
Above the midriff's deep distress,
For breath to laugh once more.

No creed hath dared to hail him Lord,
No raptured choirs proclaim,
And Nature's strenuous Overword
Hath nowhere breathed his name.

Yet, may it be, on wayside jape,
The selfsame Power bestows
The selfsame power as went to shape
His Planet or His Rose.

STEAM TACTICS

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 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 was a vociferous steam air-pump attached to that car which could 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. Hinchcliffe, 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. Pyecroft," I called cheerfully. "Can I give you a lift anywhere?"

The attack broke up round my forewheels.

"Well, we do 'ave the knack o' meeting in puris naturalibus, as I've so often said." Mr. Pyecroft 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 fortunite in your family connections, Hinch. 'E's usin' language in derogation of good manners. Go and abolish 'im."

Henry Salt Hinchcliffe 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 Pyecroft, "leavin' us on the beach as before. Had you any particular port in your mind?"

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

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

"She'll hardly hold four," said my engineer. I had broken him of the foolish habit of being surprised at things, but he was visibly uneasy.

Hinchcliffe 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-pinnace 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. Pyecroft a question.

"Not--in--the--least," was the answer. "Steam gadgets always take him that way. We had a bit of a riot at Parsley Green through his 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 Pyecroft, driving an elbow back into the deep verdure of the hedge-foot, "is a little bit of all right. Hinch, I shouldn't let too much o' that hot muckings drop in my eyes, Your leaf's up in a fortnight, an'

you'll be wantin' 'em."

"Here!" said Hinchcliffe, 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. Hinchcliffe, 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 have a look at the forced draught."

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

"They couple very well, those two," said Pyecroft critically, while Hinchcliffe 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'm not," said Hinchcliffe of a sudden--"not if I'm expected to judge my water out of a little shaving-glass."

The water-gauge of that steam-car was reflected on a mirror to the right of the dashboard. I also had 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 ditched!" I cried, as the car ran down the road.

"I wonder!" said Pyecroft, 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 his Maker, on all fours, that he wouldn't see nor smell nor thumb a runnin' bulgine till the nineteenth prox. Now look at him Only look at 'im!"

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

"What happens if he upsets?"

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

"How rambunkshus! And"--Pyecroft 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 him. He's a vindictive carrier. He and Hinch 'ad words about pig-breeding this morning. O' course, Hinch don't know the elements o' that evolution; but he fell back on 'is naval rank an' office, an' Agg grew peevish. I wasn't sorry to get out of the cart ... Have you ever considered how, when you an' I meet, so to say, there's nearly always

a remarkable hectic day ahead of us! Hullo! Behold the beef-boat
returnin'!"

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

"You be quiet!" cried Hinchcliffe, 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 downhill again.

"What's this? 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 Pyecroft. "Do you know what the mid-link is, Hinch?"

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

"Apparently 'e don't," said Pyecroft. "What's he done now, Sir?"

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

"But he's an engineer."

For the third time the car manoeuvred up the hill.

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

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

Pyecroft and I and the rug marched up where she and Hinchcliffe 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 small privilege to accord to pure genius.

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

"An' you a family man, too," muttered Pyecroft, 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 the immortal Navy doctor, paved our way towards Linghurst, distant by mile-post 11-3/4 miles.

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

And the County of Sussex slid by in slow time.

"How cautious is the 'tiffy-bird!" said Pyecroft.

"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 Heavens 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 hundred 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," Pyecroft replied.

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

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

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

"Sometimes."

"Anytime?"

"Any time a cross-wind catches her."

The engineer produced a match and stooped.

That car (now, thank Heaven, no more than an evil memory) never lit twice in the same fashion. This time she back-fired superbly, and Pyecroft 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 Hinchcliffe, brushing down his singed beard with a singed forefinger. (He had been watching too closely.) "Has she any more little surprises up her dainty sleeve?"

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

"Change places with me, Pyecroft," I commanded, for I remembered that the petrol-supply, the steam-lock, and the forced draught were all controlled from the right rear seat.

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

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

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

We navigated for a mile in dead silence.

"Talkin' o' wakes----" said Pyecroft suddenly.

"We weren't," Hinchcliffe 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 Bromlingeigh we saw the carrier's

cart at rest before the post-office.

"He's bung in the fairway. How'm I to get past?" said Hinchcliffe.

"There's no room. Here, Pye, come and relieve the wheel!"

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

"Ring your bell," I suggested.

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

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

We passed the cart as though we had been all Bruges belfry. Agg, from the port-office door, regarded us with a too pacific eye. I remembered later that the pretty postmistress looked on us pityingly.

Hinchcliffe 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 her!"

"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," Pyecroft put in.

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

"Where d'you get it from?"

"Oh!--cottages and such-like."

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

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

"I don't want to go anywhere. 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 not beginnin' now." He shut off steam firmly. "Out you get, Pye, an' shove her along by hand."

"Where to?"

"The nearest water-tank," was the reply. "And Sussex is a dry county."

"She ought to have 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 his three-mile limit, thank Heaven!" said Pyecroft. "Fall in, push-party, and proceed with land-transport o' pinnacle. I'll protect your flanks in case this sniffin' flea-bag is tempted beyond 'is strength."

We pushed off in silence. The car weighed 1,200 lb., and even on ball-bearings was 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," said Pyecroft.

A cloud of fine dust boomed down the road.

"Some happy craft with a well-found engine-room! How different!" panted Hinchcliffe, bent over the starboard mudguard.

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 Pyecroft's comment.

At that thrice-blessed lodge our water-tank was filled (I dare not quote Mr. Hinchcliffe'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 Pigginfold, a few miles farther 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 Hinchcliffe (he was driving with greater freedom and less responsibility), "and now we have to fill our bunkers. This is worse than the Channel Fleet."

At Pigginfold, after ten minutes, we refilled our petrol tank and lavishly oiled our engines. Mr. Hinchcliffe wished to discharge our engineer on the grounds that he (Mr. Hinchcliffe) 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 any one, excepting always my engineer, when the

engines set up a lunatic clucking, and, after two or three kicks, jammed.

"Heaven forgive me all the harsh things I may have said about destroyers in my sinful time!" wailed Hinchcliffe, 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 Pyecroft 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, moved up the road.

"Look like etymologists, don't they? Does she decant her innards often, so to speak?" Pyecroft 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 homesick for the Navy by night."

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

"Your boiler's only seated on four little paperclips," he said, crawling from beneath her. "She's a wicker-willow lunch-basket below. She's a runnin' miracle. Have you had this combustible spirit-lamp long?"

I told him.

"And yet you were afraid to come into the Nightmare's engine-room when we were 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 so answer her helm 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!"

"Amen!" said Hinchcliffe. "Shall I stop, or shall I cut him down?"

He stopped, for full in the centre of the Lingham 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 manorial gardener----" Hinchcliffe 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's little roose. 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 shoregoing 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 Pyecroft, bowed forward and relaxed, was tapping with his knuckles. The hardly-checked fury on Hinchcliffe'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, Pyecroft tapped out, "Sham drunk. Get him in the car."

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

Pyecroft 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 Lingham." "

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 Hinchcliffe with apprehension.

"Of course not. You sake 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 judicially as the car gathered way under Hinchcliffe's stealthy hand.

"But you aren't driving?" he cried, half rising.

"You've noticed it?" said Pyecroft, and embraced him with one anaconda-like left arm.

"Don't kill him," said Hinchcliffe briefly. "I want to show him what twenty-three and a quarter is." We were going a fair twelve, which was about the car's limit.

Our passenger swore something and then groaned.

"Hush, darling!" said Pyecroft, "or I'll have to hug 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'?" Pyecroft added.

"I'm a constable," he said, and kicked. Indeed, his boots would have betrayed 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 tax-payer, 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 Hinchcliffe.

"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.

Pyecroft 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 Hinchcliffe jerked her up that lane with a 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."

"Not if you go on talking. 'E won't be able to," said Pyecroft. "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.

Hinchcliffe had given the car a generous throttle, and she was well set to work, when, 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 pneumatic 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 his 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. Hop-poles, then, you rural blighter. Keep on fetching me hop-poles at the double."

And he doubled, Pyecroft 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. Hinchcliffe rearranged these last to make some sort of causeway; I brought up the hurdles; and when Pyecroft and his subaltern had dropped a dozen hop-poles across the stream, laid them down over all.

"Talk o' the Agricultur'l Hall!" he said, mopping his brow--"'t isn't in it with us. The approach to the bridge must now be paved with hurdles, owin' to the squashy nature o' the country. Yes, an' we'd better have 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 her if she jibs on the uphill."

We crossed that elastic structure and stood ready amid the bracken. Hinchcliffe gave her a 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 behind her as she finished with 'em," Hinchcliffe panted.

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

"She nearly wrenched the tiller out of my hand. Don't you think I conned her 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 Pyecroft, 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 Pyecroft 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. Hence we never abandon 'em."

There was a long silence. Pycroft broke it suddenly.

"Robert," he said, "have you a mother?"

"Yes."

"Have 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 his cabinet 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. Leonard's Forest, and, despite our increasing leakage, made shift to climb the ridge above Instead Wick. Knowing the car 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 (Hinchcliffe 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 had 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 us 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 home. Unless we take off 'is boots first," Pyecroft replied.

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

"Oh, let's hang him an' be done," Hinchcliffe 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 roar 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 twenty-four 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. Pyecroft 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 over-ruling Providence? (And I put in fresh sparking-plugs this morning.) Salmon, take that steam-kettle home, somehow. I would be alone."

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

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

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

"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. "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. Hinchcliffe 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 Hinchcliffe.

"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 fifteen an hour against the collar.

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

"'Taint 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 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 eight. 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 an uncoiled solar plexus. Even Pyecroft 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 Pyecroft. "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 armpit, 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 Hinchcliffe. "You're wasted here. I'd give something to have you in my engine-room."

"He's steering with 'is little hind-legs," said Pyecroft. "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 oil her up?" said

Hinchcliffe.

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

"Two hundred miles from 'ome and mother and faithful Fido to-night, Robert," said Pyecroft, 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 Pyecroft. "We are doin' you lavish, Robert."

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

"Don't worry about the when of it, Robert. The where's the interestin' point for you just now."

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 westering light, and lifted us high upon hills that we might see and rejoice with her. She whooped into veiled hollows of elm and Sussex oak; she devoured infinite perspectives of park palings; she surged through forgotten hamlets, whose single streets 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 it disembogued yelping on cross-roads), with the grace of Nellie Farren (upon whom be the Peace) 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 incredible improprieties.

We were silent--Hinchcliffe and Pyecroft 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 our guest, reviving. "I've a aunt there--she's cook to a J.P.--could identify me."

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

"Trevington--up yonder--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. Infernal 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, Hinchcliffe yawned. "Aren't we goin' to maroon our Robert? 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' to him," said Pyecroft. "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 Pyecroft 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 him! 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 about here." 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 Pyecroft.

"Cr-r-ri-key!" said Hinchcliffe, 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 had 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 Pyecroft. "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 almost sacred beauty of

sense and association that clad the landscape.

"Does 'unger produce 'alluciations?" said Pyecroft 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 Hinchcliffe. "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 catching?" said Pyecroft.

"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 out-board on to the turf. The car ran back noiselessly down the slope.

"Look! Look! It's sorcery!" cried Hinchcliffe.

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, till one knows the eccentricities of large land-owners, 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 hectic 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 Sir William Gardner's 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.

"WIRELESS"

KASPAR'S SONG IN VARDA

(From the Swedish of Stagnelius.)

Eyes aloft, over dangerous places,
The children follow where Psyche flies,
And, in the sweat of their upturned faces,
Slash with a net at the empty skies.

So it goes they fall amid brambles,
And sting their toes on the nettle-tops,