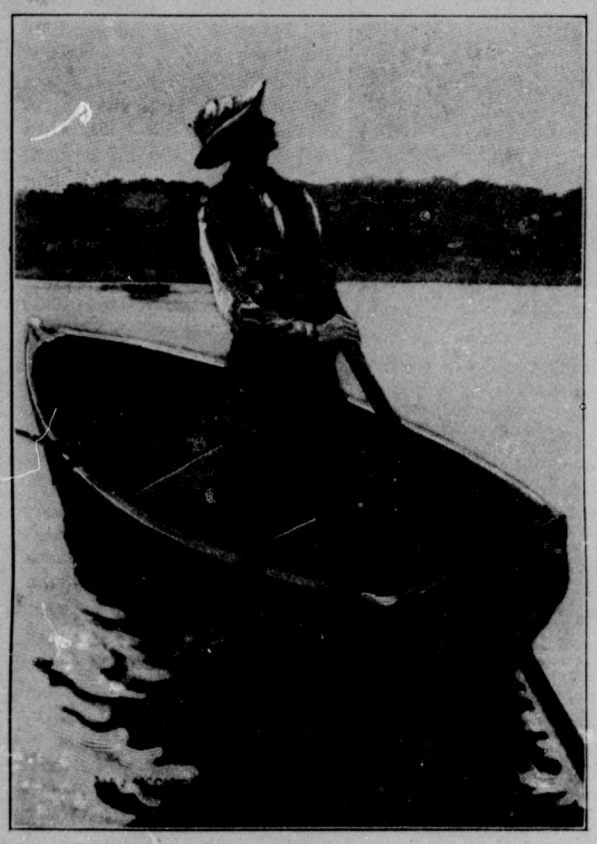
self of a series of extreme and uncouth gestures. John, with all the goodwill in the world, could make nothing of them. He smiled extravagantly; and catching at some vague memory of how some exploring worthy had manifested his good will to savages, he held out his right hand, palm upward. This time the honored gesture did not work. It did not seem to be what the remarkable visitor was wanting. With something like a look of scorn, which John was far too interested to resent, he turned on his heel and strode away. John watched him stalk solemnly once around the great rock, and then vanish into the thickets, which at this point lay between the rock and the brookside. Some minutes later, he came into view on the other side of the brook, making his way toward the river. He crossed the dyke, and disappeared. And as this time his disappearance seemed to be final, John concluded he had gone away in a boat, slipping along close in shore where the dyke, at that stage of the tide, would hide him from view.

John felt himself delightfully excited. Here, at last, was an event, and one which Whitewaters would not naturally account for. He thought at once of "Treasure Island"; although, knowing that masterpiece almost by heart, he realized quite well that the suggestion was merely one of flavor, not of fact. With smiling face, he guided the cultivator up one more row; and then, feeling that for the moment he could no longer hold himself down to potatoes, he took the horses back to the barn. The better to clear his mind for a solution of this mystery, he would go and fish for tom-cods down at the mouth of the creek. The homely and confiding tom-cod, so easy to catch and so excellent in the pan, might in a way help him to some insight.

In a pleasant exhilaration of spirit, such as he had not known for months, John hurried down to the creek mouth. There, moored under the shadow of his little wharf, he found a strange boat. It was a ship's jolly-boat; but to John's surprise, it carried no ship's name under the gunwale. He was far too well-mannered, both natively and by tradition, to enter the boat and investigate it. But, as far as he could observe, there was nothing noteworthy about it except this absence of a name. However, it was something unaccounted-for, so he eyed it with approval. Most likely, he concluded, it belonged to the mysterious negro, who, instead of going away, was perhaps lying asleep in the deep, sun-steeped grass of the neighboring meadow. John baited his hook, threw it into the slack water beside the wharf head, and was soon contemplatively drawing out tom-cods, so deep in his thoughts that he hardly knew he was fishing. He intended to stay there till the apparition should come for its boat.

He had been fishing, thus mechanically, for he knew not how long, when he heard strange voices, in a strange tongue, behind him. His heart leaped; but with true Whitewaters deliberation, he did not at once turn his head. When at length he did so, calmly, he saw the huge negro lolling on the slope of the dyke, staring up at the blue, while two strangers, with an instrument which he recognized as belonging to the surveyor's craft, stood



He was almost abreast of her, his eyes fairly boring through her planks

at the back of the wharf. John perceived at a glance that they were both sea-faring men. One, gaunt of frame, with lean red-tanned features and a thin fringe of reddish whisker under jaw and chin, looked English or American, in spite of the foreign speech that was flowing from his lips. The other, yellow-swarthy, with thick black eyebrows, greasy black hair, huge rings in his ears, and a big knife conspicuous in his belt, John took to be a Portuguese. They were paying no attention to him whatever; but were glancing from the red rock back on the slope to the ruined tower of an old stone windmill on the other side of the river, and then down at the instrument between them. To John, it looked as if they were making some sort of a survey of his farm; and he was filled with a not unnatural, but altogether friendly, curiosity. Grateful for such a diversion, and seeing in these strangers only an unhoped-for answer to his longings, with overflowing goodwill he strolled down the wharf, halted beside them, and greeted them with a cordial: "Good day, friends! Where do you hail from?"

The Portuguese glanced at his smiling, boyish face with a look of venomous hostility thinning down to scorn, then turned his back upon him with frank insolence. The other, who was plainly the leader, hardly looked at all; but he spat upon the planks from a tobacco-stained mouth, and snarled: "None o' yer business!"

John's face fell. His first feeling was one of disappointment. He could not so quickly readjust his emotions as to at once get as angry as he was entitled to be. He flushed, then paled, and his mouth began to square itself; but there was still a remnant of civility in his tones as he replied:

"But I think it *is* my business to some extent. This is my property here. This is my wharf you are standing on. And I would like to know what you are doing."

The Englishman — for such his accent proclaimed him to be — jerked his head up and glared at John with savage little bloodshot eyes.

"You git to —— out o' this!" he ordered.

By this time John had come to the realization that he had been insulted. For so novel an experience he had not been quite ready. But now he woke up. Being awake, he thought with lightning rapidity, and of everything at once. Only of the wisdom of discretion he did not think. His heavy hand, with a grip of steel, descended hard upon the whiskered one's shoulder, and he said coldly:

"*You* get out of this, or I'll throw you out."

His plans had formed themselves as clear as crystal on the instant. He saw just where he would strike his man; then hurl him upon the Portuguese; and then turn to meet the gigantic negro whom, out of the corner of his eye, he saw still lounging indifferently on the dyke. It was a rather big contract he had laid out for himself; but when really angry John Ellerson was not modest.

The Portuguese, with an oath, whipped out his knife. But to John's astonishment he promptly, as if at a sign from his leader, thrust it back again, and turned his eyes carelessly upon the landscape. The other, as if remembering something and controlling himself by a mighty effort, gave vent to a harsh laugh and spread his great hairy hands with a gesture of deprecation.

"No offence intended, Squire," he protested, suddenly smooth as oil. "I ask yer pardon fer bein' so rough spoken."

Amazed at this sudden change of front, John drew back. But he was not mollified.

"There's your boat, tied up at my wharf," said he. "Now, clear out."

But the stranger did not want to go. In a coaxing voice, absurdly at variance with his fierce and merciless face, he pleaded:

"*Don't* be too hard on a chap, Gov'nor! I was bothered over them figgers, an' did n't know jest what I was sayin'. Did n't think you was the owner. Jest let me stay five minutes an' finish these here observations, or I'll get into trouble with Captain Luther, sure. He's sent us to take some bearin's fer a chart he's makin' of the river."

"What Captain Luther?" demanded John shortly.

"Captain Luther Bass, o' the brig *Samantha*, which come in last night," answered the stranger. "I'm mate aboard her — name o' Simmons, at yer sarvice."

John eyed him keenly. What in the name of all wonders, thought he, is Captain Luther about to have such rabble on his worthy ship! But if Captain Luther wanted bearings, he must have them. John was in no way conciliated, however. He itched to kick the fellow into the boat.

"Go on then, and finish your job," said he. "But be quick about it. I don't want your sort around here."

The truculent mate had good control of himself.

"Thank you kindly," said he, apparently unruffled.

Capt. Luther appeared at the taffrail

"The Captain told us to be careful an' not git into any muss. He *said* that the Whitewaters chaps was n't so soft as they looked, an' we was to keep a civil tongue in our heads."

Unjarred by the thrust, John turned away in contemptuous silence, and seated himself on the top of the dyke. With his hat brim pulled well down over his eyes, he watched his unwelcome visitors at their task, and slowly began to realize how well he had come out of a nasty situation. The great negro, meanwhile, in his fantastic attire, had never stirred, or shown the slightest interest in the proceedings. John Ellerson glanced from that unreal figure to those of the two men before him on the wharf, bending over the theodolite — scoundrels both, if looks meant anything — and then thought with bewilderment of Captain Luther Bass and the brig *Samantha*. He knew them both so well. They were "steady." They were competent. They were respected, man and ship. They stood for what made Whitewaters so safe and quiet. In their long voyagings of two and three years at a time, they might traffic in the most God-forgotten thoroughfares of the Seven Seas, and return to Whitewaters with never a shadow of disrepute, never a shred or ravelling of the unusual or the picturesque clinging about them. And yet, here were these curious goings on! John inquired of himself if he were dreaming, and found that he was still very angry, which reassured him. Then he noticed that the negro was staring straight at him, with eyes that no longer rolled. He felt, too, that there was no longer scorn in that curious, enamelled stare; but rather some intense significance, which he was expected to understand. It irritated him, because he could get no clew to it.

Presently, the two men on the wharf came to an end of what they were doing. Paying no more heed to John, they made for their boat. Instantly the negro rose and went to join them. As he went he held his hands behind him, and John noticed in his great black fingers, with their pinkish under-sides, a bit of yellow paper. The hands gesticulated, so that John could not help but notice them. The fingers twisted the yellow paper in a small fold; then dropped it on the wharf, with obvious intention. John started up to get it; then checked himself, for the Portuguese, his hand on the boat's painter, had turned his head and was looking back insolently. At the same instant, a puff of wind swooped down, lifted the paper, whirled it high into the air, then dropped it over the other side of the wharf. John held himself rigid till the boat was well out into the stream. Then he descended from the dyke-top, dropped on his hands and knees, and peered anxiously down into the muddy water. His heart was thumping with expectancy.

He was too late. The bit of mysterious paper had disappeared; perhaps it had been snapped up by an undiscriminating fish. But there, caught in the long, bedraggled salt-grass, and nested, as it were, in a cluster of muddy froth, John saw something equally mysterious. Sodden with the salt water, it glowed, nevertheless, a sullen, smouldering red. It looked like a girl's dancing shoe.

(*Continued on Page 12*)