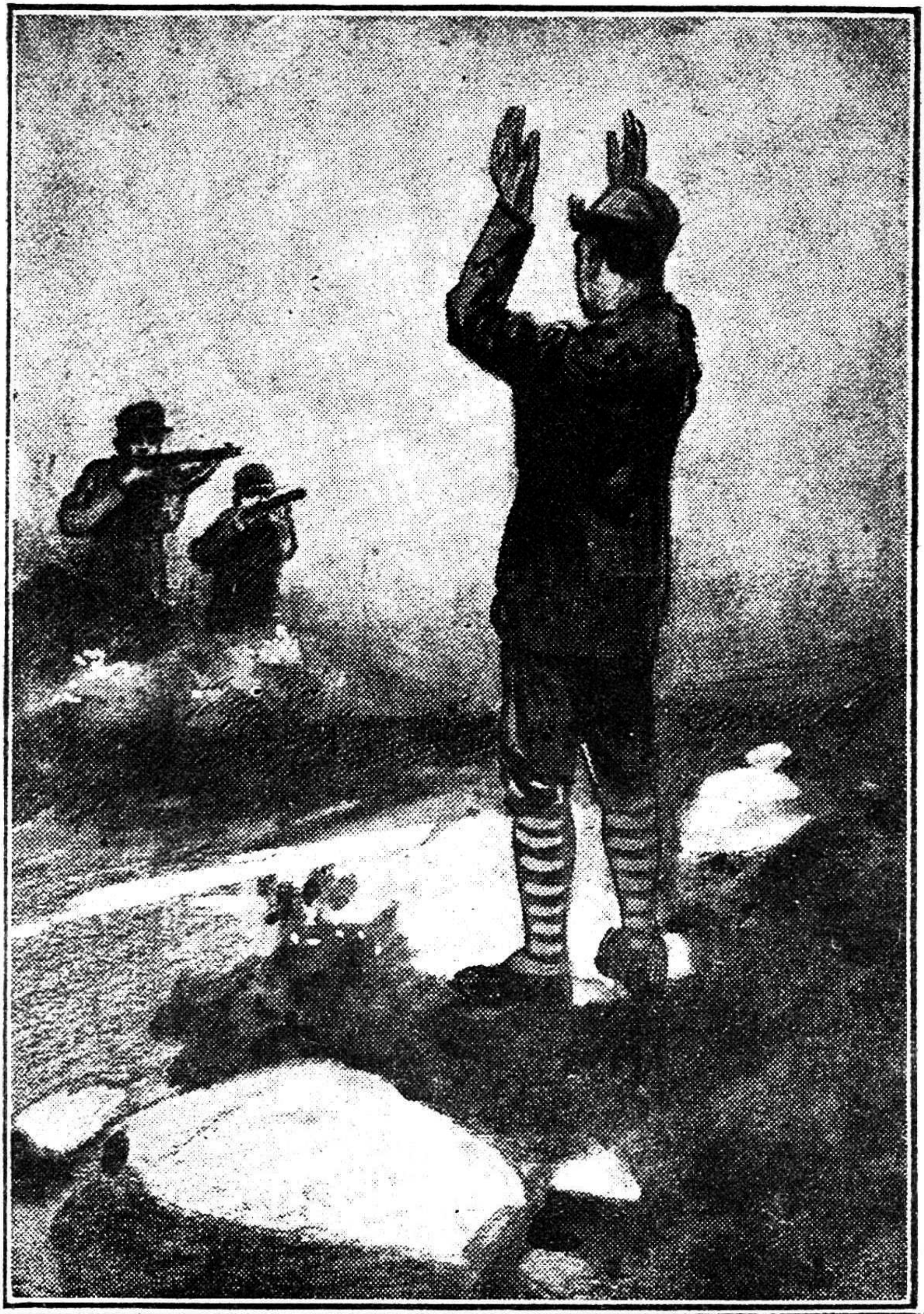
THE TRAVELLING SCHOOL; or, ST. FRANK'S IN GLORIOUS DEVON!

THE NELSON LEE 2d Library.

HANDY, AS THE ESCAPED CONVICT, IS BROUGHT BEFORE NELSON LEE! (See This Week's Story.)

No. 420. EVERY WEDNESDAY. JUNE 23, 1923.



"Hands up!" commanded a sharp voice. "No nonsense, now! Up with 'em!" Handforth gave a gulp and twirled round.

or, ST. FRANK'S IN GLORIOUS DEVON

Nelson Lee's brilliant brain-wave to solve a knotty problem of how to make room for the temporary accommodation of the River House boys at St. Frank's by starting a travelling school, composed of the Remove, comes into effect in this week's story, which marks the first phase in a fascinating new series. It is really a kind of caravan school, only instead of the ordinary horse vehicles, which are all very well on a holiday when only a few are to be accommodated, the Housemaster-detective is providing commodious motor-vans specially equipped for the purpose. Their progress through the various counties will not only be more rapid, enabling more places to be visited, but much time and trouble will be saved in dispensing with a large number of horses, which would otherwise be required. Altogether, the tour looks like being a tremendous success, and we hope it will offer a useful suggestion for other schools to follow.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE REMOVE IN LUCK!

OWEN MAJOR, of the Remove, shook his head.

"It's no good asking me," he said perplexedly. "I'm blessed if I know why the asses haven't turned up. A week we've been here—over a week, in fact. And not a sign of them!"

"Sixteen!" remarked Griffith. "Sixteen, including Nipper, Pitt, De Valerie, and all the best chaps in the Remove! It's about time something was done. I don't see why they should be missing school like this!"

Armstrong and Doyle nodded in sympathy.

Before the picturesque old steps of the Ancient House the quartette of Remove juniors were lounging in the morning sunshine. Breakfast was over, and before very long the bell would clang out for morning lessons.

It was a fine June morning, and the summer term at St. Frank's was well started. And many of the juniors were feeling jealous because a good many members of the Remove were still on holiday.

As Griffith had said, sixteen fellows had failed to turn up when the school had reassembled. These sixteen, including myself, had been away on a simple caravan tour. We had ambled along the high roads and by-lanes, enjoying ourselves hugely. And because we had failed to put in an appearance for the beginning of the new term, the other fellows in the Remove felt that they had a grievance.

But they didn't know the facts. The caravan party was in Hampshire, quite a distance from St. Frank's—and it had remained in Hampshire because Nelson Lee

had given instructions that the party was not to leave the camping ground. And Nelson Lee had a reason.

"And all these River House chaps!" went on Griffith. "It was all very well for a day or two. But I reckon it's getting a bit too thick. We're jolly well crowded out—we're like sardines in a tin. Things seem to be all wrong this term. I'm about fed up!"

"Same here!" said Owen major.

"Well, you can bet that these River House chaps won't stay long," said Armstrong. "There isn't room for them. Thirty-three of the beggars—including the Hon. Aubrey Wellborne and his set of cads!"

The fact that the River House boys had been "palmed" on to St. Frank's was another grievance in the Remove. And it was quite true that space in the Ancient House was filled to the utmost.

Sixteen fellows were away, it is true, but thirty-three new ones had come in—which, brought down to a mathematical conclusion, simply meant that there were seventeen boys too many.

Junior studies were crowded out all along the Remove passage. Rooms that ought to have accommodated three were holding five, and everything seemed to be at sixes and sevens. In fact, as Griffith had pointed out, everything seemed to be wrong.

But it really couldn't be helped.

On the very first day of term there had been a serious gas explosion at the River House School. This was a small, exclusive establishment some little distance from St. Frank's. It was presided over by Dr. Molyneux Hogge, M.A., and was really a private school. There were only thirty-three scholars all told—quite a handful compared to the enormous number of boys at St. Frank's College, which was one of the biggest public schools in the Kingdom.

That gas explosion had not been very serious in itself, for nobody had been hurt, and at first it had seemed that just one junior study had been wrecked. But almost immediately afterwards an entire wall of the building had collapsed, rendering the rest of the house not only unsafe, but positively dangerous.

The River House boys, therefore, had found themselves homeless.

And Dr. Stafford, the Head of St. Frank's, had very generously allowed all the stranded boys to remain at St. Frank's until Dr. Hogge had made new arrangements. For an army of workmen would be employed on the River House School during the whole summer term, and well into the holidays.

The Remove juniors did not mind Hal Brewster and his crowd. They were all decent fellows, and, so far as they were concerned, the invasion was rather welcome. But they objected to the Hon. De Vere Wellborne and the other members of his so-called smart set.

"It's all very well for us to growl, but what can we do?" asked Doyle. "For two or three days past we've been doing nothing else but grumble, and I can't see any change in the situation."

"No, it seems to get worse instead of better."

The juniors little realised that very active preparations had been afoot during the past four or five days. Nelson Lee, although he said nothing to the Remove, had been extremely active.

The famous Housemaster-detective, in point of fact, had been making all sorts of plans, and had spent a great deal of his time away from the school. Dr. Hogge had temporarily filled Nelson Lee's scholastic shoes.

As some of the fellows remarked, it almost seemed that Dr. Hogge was becoming their Housemaster. The Principal of the River House was getting into the habit of moving about St. Frank's as though he were a member of the permanent staff.

But it was on this particular morning that the surprise came.

The Remove was puzzled—and it didn't seem to be able to settle itself down. With practically all the best fellows away, the whole Form seemed to be topsy-turvy. And the worst of it was, nobody could provide any adequate explanation. Even the masters refused to answer when questioned on the subject.

It was nearly time for the bell to clang for lessons, and a good many of the fellows were now discussing conditions in the Form. The place seemed to be empty without the missing sixteen, and lessons were tedious and uninteresting. It was something like being in a theatre that is only half filled. Everything seemed to be flat, and even when Mr. Crowell made one of his rare jokes there was hardly a laugh.

The River House boys were being temporarily taken at lessons in the gymnasium, which had been fitted up as a class-room. Here Mr. Wragg, the under-master of the River House, presided over his boys with his usual self-importance.

"I'm getting sick and tired of lessons!" grumbled Owen major. "It's like a wet day! Everything seems to be gloomy and miserable. Even old Crowell seems to be sharper-tempered than usual. When the dickens are those rotters coming back? That's what I should like to know!"

"And what are they doing?" asked Canham.

"Why, they're still on that giddy caravan tour," declared Armstrong. "The nerve of it! Keeping up the holidays a week after term has begun! They'll be chipped to death when they come back——"

Clang—clang!

"Oh, rats! There it goes!" said Griffith despondently.

The juniors reluctantly trailed into the Ancient House, and made their way into the Remove Form-room. Others came in, and at the end of five minutes the Remove was all present—with the exception of the missing sixteen. The big, bare apartment

had a forlorn appearance. Perhaps this was because the fellows were all growling and grumbling at the same time. No longer were there any happy smiles and cheery jokes.

It was not to be wondered at.

Most of the active, virile fellows were away. The very life and soul of the Remove—the leading spirits—were far away, in Hampshire. So it was hardly surprising that the Remove Form-room was a dull and dismal place.

Mr. Crowell swept in, his gown swishing in his rear.

"Good-morning, boys—good-morning!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "Dear me! Why all these depressing expressions? Come, come! This won't do, you know!"

"Everything seems topsy-turvy this term, sir," said Owen major. "When are the other fellows going to turn up?"

"As a matter of fact, I cannot very well answer that question," replied Mr. Crowell evasively. "However, I think I shall be able to remove some of these depressing looks. I have some news for you, boys."

"News, sir?"

"Precisely. There will be no lessons this morning," said Mr. Crowell genially.

The Remove sat still for a moment, and hearts beat with greater rapidity.

"No lessons, sir?" blurted out Griffith at last.

"No lessons," repeated Mr. Crowell. "You will all proceed upstairs to your dormitory and to the box-rooms, and pack up your personal belongings. Each boy will have his trunk all ready, and any other packages he needs, by ten-thirty. So there is not a great deal of time."

Mr. Crowell was a true prophet.

The gloomy looks had vanished. Faces were flushed, and most of the expressions were ones of incredulity. For Mr. Crowell's announcement had taken everybody completely by surprise.

"We—we've got to pack up, sir?" asked Doyle wonderingly. "Are we going on a journey?"

"I am simply giving you the instructions that Mr. Lee requested," replied Mr. Crowell. "It is by his orders that you will get ready for this—er—trip. For it would be quite pointless for me to deny that a trip is contemplated. But please ask no questions, boys. Go upstairs with as little noise as possible, and make your preparations. Pack everything you own, and make all haste. As far as I know, to-day will be a complete holiday."

"Hurrah!"

"Good egg!"

"It—it seems too good to be true!"

Everybody was talking at once now, and the Remove filed out excitedly. Mr. Crowell had warned the boys not to make too much noise, but they had forgotten all about this injunction. As they hurried upstairs, they talked and shouted with sheer exuberance.

"I'll bet it's got something to do with those River House chaps," said Armstrong. "We're clearing out to make room for them. They're going to take us somewhere else ——"

"Not likely!" said Owen major warmly. "I'm blessed if we're going to clear out to make room for those River House rotters! But, anyhow, I don't care! Whole holidays are too scarce to be wasted!"

Packing went on feverishly, and the fellows were still greatly puzzled. For the life of them, they couldn't understand what was in the wind. But at ten-thirty they were all ready.

Boxes and suit-cases and baggage of all description lay piled up in heaps. And then a prefect arrived with instructions for the juniors to collect in the Triangle. The order was obeyed with alacrity.

And when the Remove emerged into the warm sunlight they found the Triangle wearing that deserted appearance which was customary in the middle of morning lessons, when all the Forms were at work.

Nelson Lee came out a moment afterwards.

"Well, boys, I dare say you are somewhat puzzled by all this activity, eh?" said the schoolmaster-detective smilingly. "It is about time that you were enlightened. I have not given any explanation earlier because I did not wish you to get too excited. But I can tell you now that you will soon be setting off on a long tour of the country."

"A—a tour, sir?"

"Yes."

"But what about lessons, sir, and all the rest of it?"

"You will continue your lessons in exactly the same way as usual," replied Nelson Lee. "To-day and to-morrow will be somewhat upset, I am afraid, but after that the customary routine will proceed. I may as well tell you that our first stopping-place will be in Devonshire."

The Remove fellows looked at Lee, and they looked at one another.

"My hat!" breathed Owen major. "He's —he's gone dotty!"

"Clean off his rocker!"

All the fellows were buzzing with excited talk. And it certainly seemed that there was some little excuse for jumping to the instant conclusion that Nelson Lee had taken leave of his senses for some reason. To say that the school would soon be in Devonshire seemed altogether too extraordinary for rational acceptance.

"You are probably surprised," continued Nelson Lee. "But I must explain, boys, that this plan has been in preparation for some days. Considering all the plans that have had to be made, I think our start is remarkably early. It may interest you to know that the other boys of the Remove, sixteen in number, will be with us later on in the day."

"You mean that Nipper and the rest are coming back, sir?"

"Hardly. We are going to join them in Hampshire," replied Lee calmly.

The juniors were frankly startled.

"Oh, it—it seems out of the question!" muttered Armstrong. "There must be some catch about it. How can we go to Hampshire, and then to Devon? And how can we carry on with our lessons?"

"It's no good asking me riddles," said Doyle.

Before Nelson Lee could say anything further to the amazed boys, there sounded a deep throbbing on the still morning air. Then an enormous object appeared at the gateway—a great motor vehicle, which turned straight into the Triangle, much to the astonishment of the juniors.

This motor vehicle was an absolute novelty. The fellows had never seen anything like it before. At the first casual glance it resembled a great motor pantechnicon. It was a powerful vehicle, with heavy, well-built chassis, and, surprisingly enough, pneumatic tyres. These latter were enormously large, and seemed incapable of being punctured.

But it was the upper part of the motor vehicle which attracted the most attention, for it seemed to be an enormous caravan. There were neatly curtained windows in the sides and at the rear. And there was a door at the rear, too, with steps that appeared to be folded up.

The whole thing was beautifully finished, and painted in red, with exquisitely executed gold lines. The huge motor caravan was brand new, and perfectly spick and span.

The juniors stared at it without comprehending. Then they opened their eyes wider. For other vehicles of exactly the same type began to enter the Triangle. At last there were six of them—all the spit of one another. Each was driven by a man in smart, well-cut uniform.

And, last of all, came a big covered van of the same style, also enamelled in the same colours. But this had no windows, and was apparently a baggage van of some description.

The seven great motors circled round, and finally came to rest in a long line, stretching from one side of the Triangle to the other. Nelson Lee looked on approvingly.

"But—but what are they, sir?" asked Armstrong, finding his voice.

"These caravans, my boy, are our future home," replied Nelson Lee calmly. "There is ample accommodation for forty-eight in perfect comfort—and the Remove does not number as many as that. So there'll be room, and to spare. I think you are beginning to understand the little scheme now, eh?"

"Are we going to tour the country in these caravans, sir?" shouted Owen major.

"Precisely!"

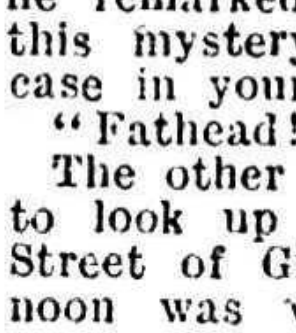
"My only hat!" gasped Griffith. "I—I must be dreaming!"

But he wasn't dreaming, neither were any of the others. Yet it seemed like a dream. The very idea of the thing was too big for the boys to grasp at once. But it was a fact.

The whole of the St. Frank's Remove was about to set off on a tour of England!

CHAPTER II.

THE TRAVELLING SCHOOL



"FOUR o'clock," said Reginald Pitt, "and not a sign of anything!"

"Well, we're here on time, so Mr. Lee can't blame us," said De Valerie, as he looked up and down the road. "That's a comforting thought, anyhow. But I wish this mystery would clear itself up!"

"So do I," growled Handforth, glaring.

"Well, you needn't look at me like that!" said Pitt.

"I'm fed up!" went on Edward Oswald Handforth. "There's been nothing but mystery for days! We were stuck down in that valley until this morning, with strict instructions from Mr. Lee not to move. Then he tells us to come here, and to be ready at four o'clock. Now it's two minutes past, and we're just as much in the dark as ever!"

Pitt chuckled.

"Well, it ought to be a good chance for you to try some of your detective genius," he remarked. "We're all itching to have this mystery unravelled, so we'll put the case in your hands. Get busy on it!"

"Fathead!" grunted Handforth sourly.

The other fellows chuckled, and continued to look up and down the quiet old High Street of Great Wayling. The June afternoon was warm, and the sleepy country town seemed to be having its afternoon nap. Hardly anybody was about, and the air was filled with the hum of insects, and the sun strove gallantly to shine through a film of fleecy clouds.

There were sixteen of us in the party, including Fatty Little and Archie Glenthorne, to say nothing of Handforth and his redoubtable chums of Study D. And we were waited for something to happen.

Our modest caravan tour, undertaken during the Whitsuntide holidays, had really given Nelson Lee his idea for the far bigger enterprise that he had now undertaken. We had had four small horse caravans between us, and had had quite an enjoyable time.

For nearly a week we had camped in a quiet valley some miles away. But we had received instructions from Nelson Lee not to move. His reasons for this were clear enough to anybody who was in the know, but we happened to be in the dark. We hadn't the faintest inkling of the big programme that the guv'nor had mapped out.

We only knew that we had been instructed to leave our caravans at the Station Hotel in Great Wayling and to wait there, with all our luggage packed. We were to be ready by precisely four o'clock.

And that's where you find us now.

There we were, wondering what in the name of goodness could be in the wind. It wasn't like Nelson Lee to play any tricks, but I must admit that I began to have a few qualms as the minutes slipped by.

But then, just as my watch was pointing to five minutes past four, I saw a curious procession coming up the High Street. There were several big automobiles—enormous vehicles with royal blue bodies. They seemed to tower up against the old-fashioned buildings of the country town.

And the procession moved rapidly towards us with surprisingly little noise. The engines were well nigh silent, and there was no noisy rumble. And my amazement was great when the first vehicle came close.

It was a motor caravan, and at the windows I recognised some heads, and the heads were wearing caps with the St. Frank's colours! I stepped out into the road, and my face was flushed with sudden excitement.

"Great Scott!" I shouted.

"They're—they're St. Frank's chaps!"

"Absolutely!"

"And—and there's Mr. Lee there!"

"Hurrah!"

We saw that there were six caravans altogether, with the seventh van in the rear. And they all came to a halt by the side of the road, their drivers smiling with cheerful amusement. And crowds of fellows commenced to pile down into the road—Owen major, Armstrong, Teddy Long, Fullwood, Bell, Gulliver, Jerry Dodd, Alfred Brent—in point of fact, every fellow in the whole Remove! Even the College House juniors were there.

We were surrounded in no time, and everybody was talking at once.

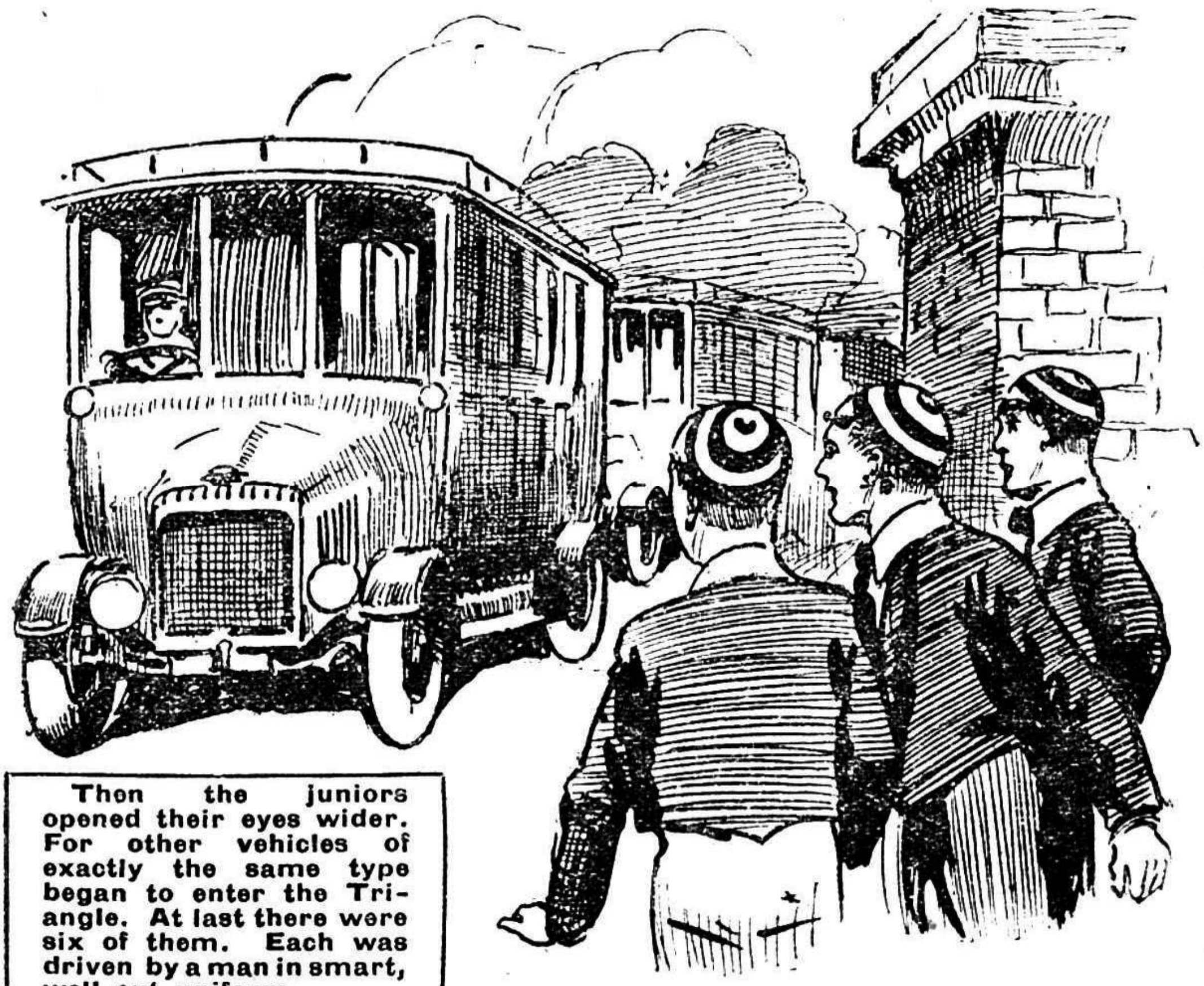
"You bounders!" shouted Owen major, rushing up to us. "So here you are at last! We thought we'd never see you again!"

"But now we're altogether!" said Armstrong. "Once again the Remove is itself. Good business!"

I stared at all the fellows rather blankly.

"But—but what does it all mean?" I demanded. "What are you fellows doing here? And what are these gigantic caravans for?"

"The fact is, Nipper, I have been taking a leaf out of your book," smiled Nelson Lee, answering that question. "I have kept you rather puzzled so far, but the mystery



Then the juniors opened their eyes wider. For other vehicles of exactly the same type began to enter the Triangle. At last there were six of them. Each was driven by a man in smart, well-cut uniform.

is now explained. What do you think of the idea?"

"What idea?" I asked. "I may be dense, but I'm blessed if I can see what the game is."

Archie Glenthorne nodded.

"To be absolutely exact, old bean, I must confess that my own top storey is somewhat clogged. I mean to say, the dashed thing won't work properly. I feel, as it were, that all this is rather too much. This business of dashing about over the old countryside, what?"

"Archie has hit it," said Nelson Lee, with a chuckle. "During this term the Remove will not be a stationary body, as heretofore. It will go dashing about over the countryside from place to place, shifting its quarters every few days. And if the experiment is successful, it will be a permanent feature of the St. Frank's organisation."

Handforth gasped.

"Do—do you mean that we're going on tour, sir?" he asked.

"Exactly."

"In these big caravans, sir?"

"Well, that question scarcely needs answering," said Lee. "Your places are already allotted to you, boys, and I want you to do just as I say. Your luggage will be attended to by the men."

And in a very short time we had been escorted to our quarters.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I were placed in the leading caravan, when Nelson Lee had his own section. Archie Glenthorne and Alfred Brent and Clarence Fellowe were also with us.

Handforth and Co. were placed in the second caravan, together with a number of others. Each van accommodated eight juniors with perfect comfort, and the amount of room in these big vehicles was quite astounding.

After our own little horse drawn caravans, these places seemed to be veritable palaces. Just try and picture an enormous motor lorry with a large, roomy body placed upon it—a body as big as that of the average char-a-banc.

Each caravan was supplied with beautifully built beds, tables, shelves, and electric lights. Soft carpets were on the floor, and the interior decorations were really exquisite. The insides of these caravans reminded one of ships cabins, with everything snug and neat and tidy.

The front of each van was quite shut off, the only entrance or exit being at the rear. In front there was a completely enclosed compartment for the driver. And this space also included the driver's sleeping quarters. There was ample room, and every man was perfectly comfortable and well provided for. In wet weather or fine weather, the caravans could proceed on their way. And those within would have nothing but comfort and ease.

"They're—they're simply wonderful, sir!" I exclaimed, as I finished my inspection. "I never believed that anything so gorgeous could travel on the road. They must have cost an awful lot of money! And how has it all come about? And are we really going on a long tour?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That is the plan at present," he replied. "If this venture is successful the tour will be continued throughout the term. In the autumn—that is, during the latter part of September and October—it is most probable that the Third Form will be taken on a similar trip."

"Good egg!" said Willy Handforth approvingly. "That's great, sir."

"Yes, you little bounder!" growled Armstrong. "You're coming on this trip, too—although it's not fair! You ought to be packed off to St. Frank's. I don't see why we should have a fag with us."

But Willy only grinned, and held his tongue. As a matter of fact, he had a kind of inward fear that he would soon be dispatched off to the school. And he thought it far better to keep perfectly quiet.

Most of the Remove fellows were in a kind of daze. Even now they couldn't realise that this thing had really happened. It seemed altogether too wonderful to be true. And many of them were waiting to wake up.

We were soon allotted to our places in the roomy caravans. At St. Frank's, of course, we had had our studies, and Nelson Lee saw that the fellows were distributed in a manner that would mean no separations. Chums, for example, were always placed together.

These caravans, indeed, would serve us as bed-rooms and studies, and everthing else. And the Travelling School would be run in exactly the same manner as St. Frank's itself. Except when actually on the road, times would be kept to rigidly and accurately.

The general scheme was to stay in each locality for abont a week. Travelling would be done on a Sunday, when there was no school, and no sports. As far as I could see, everything would go forward smoothly.

And we should see all parts of the country—beginning with Devonshire. After that we should work up through Wales, Lancashire, the lake district, and then begin a circular movement, and come down through Yorkshire and East Anglia. By about that time the term would be ended, and it would be time for the summer holidays.

Nelson Lee was in sole command of the Remove, and he would take Mr. Crowell's usual place. We all looked upon it as a kind of holiday. It was rather a nuisance having to be bothered with lessons, but we should always be having constant change, and life would indeed be enjoyable.

There were seven of us in Caravan No. 1—seven, that is, in addition to Nelson Lee. These seven were Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, Archie Glenthorne, Clarence Fellowe, Alf Brent, and the Hon. Douglas Singleton, to say nothing of myself.

Handforth and Co. resided in Caravan No. 2 with De Valerie and Fatty Little and Handforth minor and several others. Pitt and Grey and Jerry Dodd and Farman were accommodated in Caravan No. 3, in addition to a few more.

The cads of the Remove—Fullwood and Co. and their gang—occupied Caravan No. 4, and Armstrong and Griffith and Doyle were there, too. The remaining two caravans were completely filled with College House fellows. On the whole, the arrangements were everything that could be desired.

While we were talking, the seven drivers of the fleet had got busy with our baggage, and were packing it away in the rear van. And within half an hour we were all ready for departure.

And we started off.

"Now, boys, I can give you a few facts," said Nelson Lee, as he lounged back on one of the easy couches in the leading caravan. "Of course, all this has come as a great surprise to you, and you have not yet got over your astonishment. But the plan is perfectly rational and businesslike."

"It's the greatest plan that was ever thought of, sir," declared Tommy Watson.

And Nelson Lee proceeded to explain all about the explosion at the River House, and how the entire River House School had been unexpectedly rendered homeless. The guv'nor continued by telling us that Hal Brewster and Co. had been taken into the Ancient House, with Dr. Molyneux Hogge and Mr. Wragg, and everything complete.

"But, guv'nor, I can't see how you've had time," I remarked. "These motor caravans are all brand, spanking new. And they're so wonderful, too! There's everything here for a Travelling School. I've never seen anything so complete in my life! How on earth did you manage it, sir?"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"As a matter of fact, Nipper, I cannot claim any particular credit for the wonderful manner in which this whole outfit is equipped. It required months and months of study and careful organisation. The Travelling School was invented by the late Mr. Walter Langley. He put every penny of his capital into the venture, and had completed all his arrangements for obtaining pupils when he was taken grievously ill, and died.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "What frightfully rough luck, sir."

"He died before he could enjoy the fruits of his scheme," said Singleton.

"Quite so," agreed Nelson Lee. "I happened to be reading about the Travelling School only a day or two before the new term commenced. Everything new and original is generally regarded askance by the general public, and the majority of schools in England are run on strictly conservative lines. Schoolmasters do not care to break fresh ground."

"It's a pity there aren't more like you, sir," said Tommy Watson.

"No, Watson—you are giving me the credit for Mr. Langley's original invention," replied Nelson Lee. "You see, this fleet of caravans—brand new, and fitted up for immediate service—was left stranded in the hands of Mr. Langley's executors. There was nobody who would take up the idea of commencing a Travelling School. Therefore the whole outfit was on the market at an absurdly low figure. To be brief, the St. Frank's Governors decided that it would be beneficial to the school to purchase the whole fleet. And this is the result. The Remove finds itself on the road, with the object of travelling over England."

"A ripping idea, sir," declared Watson.

"Absolutely," said Archie. "I mean to say, the scheme can be accurately described as the crocodile's elbow!"

"As the what?" asked Nelson Lee.

"The cat's whiskers!" said Archie, beaming. "That, of course, is a somewhat fruity way of expressing oneself, but I trust that you grasp the trend. I've a slight idea, old bean, that this style of speech comes from the good old U.S.!"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"They have a somewhat remarkable style of speech in the good old U.S., Glenthorne," he said smilingly. "I hope you will not become too Americanised—or I fear that we shall not be able to understand you."

"You've said a mouthful!" I grinned.

We soon learned that there were not likely to be any hitches. The Travelling School was even more complete than we had at first believed. Some of the arrangements were a little short of wonderful.

It seemed that there was an eighth man in the party, although we had not seen anything of this mysterious individual so far. We had heard him referred to as Patsy, and it soon became clear that the gentleman was engaged in some mystic occupation in the last van of the line.

This van, in itself, was a kind of surprise packet.

The six caravans were quite plain and straightforward. They were just caravans of astonishing size, and equipped in the most up-to-date manner possible—even to the extent of hot and cold water, lounge chairs, cosy corners, lockers, bookcases, and a hundred and one other details.

But the seventh vehicle was enclosed. The only window was at the front, looking out into the driver's cab. But there was a skylight, too—although we had not noticed this at first.

Later on we discovered the truth.

The rear part of the van was designed for carrying the big folding tent which would be set up as soon as camp was pitched. There was also room for all the baggage that was necessary.

But the front portion of the van—a big, roomy space—was a combined store-room, larder and cook's kitchen. And Patsy was the cook. Even while we were travelling he was preparing a meal.

That kitchen was a travelling wonder.

All the heating was electrical, supplied from a big dynamo which was driven by the van's engine. And Patsy had everything to his hand, and he was an expert when it came to cooking.

We found this out two hours later when a halt was called for tea. All the caravans drew up by the side of the quiet road, and Patsy appeared with steaming canteens of tea. He was assisted by two or three of the other men, who acted as stewards. Each caravan was supplied with heaps of bread and butter and cakes and as much tea as we could possibly drink.

And when this was over we started off again, and went onward through the gathering dusk of the evening—bound for glorious Devon.

"Time for morning lessons," said Reggie Pitt. "Good! I'm keen."

"Keen on lessons?"

"Rather! It'll be a novelty," replied Reggie.

And most of the other fellows felt the same. We were in camp—not far from the outskirts of the town of Tiverton, in Devonshire. It was a warm, sunny morning, and the Travelling School was all settled down for a stay of two or three days.

The scene was very picturesque.

We were encamped in a green, delightful meadow, with a winding country lane just near by. The scenery we had been passing through had been an education in itself, and the whole trip was proving to be wonderfully enjoyable.

The tent was pitched with the caravans forming a complete circle round it. The tent was not particularly large, but it was the most perfect piece of canvas construction we had ever seen.

Within, it was practically draught-proof, although fresh air was at hand continually. There was every appearance of a Form-room, once you get inside. The familiar maps hung upon the canvas walls, there was the master's raised platform, with his desk and chair. And near by stood the blackboard.

The desks for the Remove were arranged in very much the same manner as at St. Frank's itself—roomy, comfortable desks

CHAPTER III.

THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS.

CLANG—clang!

The bell clanged out for morning lessons. It was not the bell we were familiar with at St. Frank's — that deep-toned gong that sounded out from the big old tower. This bell was smaller, and some of the fellows said it was cracked, but it rang out at exactly the same time as the St. Frank's bell, and meant the same thing.

with the footrests well raised from the ground so that there was no danger of being in close contact with the earth. The desks were of polished oak, with handy lockers, and roomy seats.

But the most remarkable thing of all was that these desks could be converted into a long dining table at a moment's notice. By touching a lever, sliding shelves came into operation, and before you could take a breath the three lines of desks converted themselves into a solid, smooth-topped table.

The Remove filed in for lessons.

This was our first day of actual work, and most of the fellows had been looking forward to it. The very novelty of the thing appealed to them. And they had an idea that Nelson Lee would be a much better Form-master than Mr. Crowell.

But the guv'nor saw that there was no slacking, or larking about.

The fact that we were under canvas made no difference. The juniors were kept hard at work until the usual time for dismissal. Then books were put away, and the Remove was only too pleased to gain its freedom.

"Jolly good!" declared Handforth, as we piled out. "Nothing like the open air. Blessed if I can understand why all schools aren't run like this. It's the greatest wheeze that was ever thought of."

"Rather!" said Church. "That Mr. Langley was a genius."

"You bet he was!" agreed McClure.

Handforth frowned at his two chums.

"Rot!" he said, feeling that it was up to him to disagree—merely as a matter of principle. "After all, there's nothing much in the wheeze. Anybody could have thought of it. And I'm not so sure that it's so very good. We shall probably be down with influenza, or hay fever, before long!"

"But you just said it was the greatest wheeze——"

"Don't argue with me!" snapped Handforth curtly. "Never mind what I just said. If you fellows want to start a squabble——"

"We don't!" interrupted Church promptly. "Let's go to the study."

"Study?"

"Well, the caravan—it's the same thing!"

"Rats! I'm going for a walk into the town," said Handy.

Church was wise. He wanted to go into the town, too, and he knew very well that if he suggested such a thing Handforth would veto the idea. So Church, in his wisdom, had suggested the opposite. The result was perfect.

And Handforth and Co. were not the only juniors who took a stroll into Tiverton.

Well over half of the Remove wandered through the delightful old streets of the town, keenly interested in all they saw. And the inhabitants of Tiverton were equally interested in the schoolboys.

There were many of these worthy folk who regarded the advent of the St. Frank's crowd with slight disapproval at first. But this was only because the idea was such a new one, and Tiverton didn't quite know what to make of it. But the juniors behaved themselves in the most exemplary fashion, and long before we left the camp we were well liked by all.

It is not my intention to go into long, tedious accounts of the various objects of interest we saw on our travels. I could write heaps about the beauties of the countryside, but I'm afraid you wouldn't appreciate it.

I could write pages and pages about the people themselves, and how we were hospitably received and honoured wherever we went. But, again, I'm afraid I should become somewhat uninteresting.

So I'll make a jump here, and you've got to picture us all encamped in quite another part of Devonshire. After staying in Tiverton for several days, and having a regular royal time, we moved on through Exeter, and merely paused to go on a tour of exploration. Then we left Exeter, and finally camped on the moorlands. It was lonely, but wonderfully fascinating.

Dartmoor!

Many of the juniors expected to see warders walking about in every direction, just because the famous convict settlement was situated somewhere in this region. As a matter of fact, we hadn't seen any sign of the prison, or the district near it. But we were certainly on Dartmoor.

The great expanse of country rolled away into the distance, undulating, with rising tors visible here and there. And there was something about that big, open space that made us feel that life was really good. Possibly one gets a different feeling when one is compelled to remain in such surroundings without the prospect of escaping.

Nelson Lee intended that we should remain in the moorland district for at least three days. The programme was all clear cut, and after breaking camp, we should make across to Barnstaple and Ilfracombe, and then follow the coast through Lynton, Minehead, and so on into Bath and Bristol, following which we should make our way up to Gloucester, cross the Severn, and then down through Monmouth into South Wales.

"And a jolly good programme, too," declared Reggie Pitt. "By jingo! We shall see something of England now. See your own country first! That's a pretty good slogan, when you come to think of it."

"Rather!" agreed De Valerie. "Personally, I'm pretty keen upon getting up to Ilfracombe. I'm longing for a bathe."

But nobody grumbled because we remained on Dartmoor. There was something extremely interesting about it. And we had seen a great deal of glorious Devon. And there was no doubt that this county was glorious at that time of the year. The poet had made no misstatement.

It was evening when we arrived—Sunday evening. On the morrow we should commence the week in just the customary way.

And we had planned all sorts of rambles for the evening.

We should have gone on the Sunday evening, only the sky was heavily overcast, and rain was spitting. So we spent an enjoyable time in the electrically lit caravans, reading or writing letters and postcards.

We were delighted to find that Monday turned out fine and clear—very different from the foggy, misty atmosphere of the previous day. But even Monday was misty to begin with. The sun didn't really come out till noon.

And by the time afternoon lessons were over, the day was bright, warm, and sunny. The Remove broke itself up into parties, and set off for rambles across the moorland.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were with me—to say nothing of Clarence Fellowe. The poet of the Remove had expressed a desire to accompany us, and we were too polite to choke him off. Not that we wanted to, anyhow.

"We've got heaps of time for a good ten mile ramble," I said, as we strode briskly along. "We'll take in a good bit of the countryside, and——"

"Begad!" interrupted Sir Montie. "Ten miles, dear old boy?"

"Yes."

"But that's a frightful distance—it is, really," protested Tregellis-West. "I don't want to grumble——"

"Then don't," I interrupted calmly. "My dear ass, you'll never notice the distance once we get fairly started. And we shall arrive home with a fifty horse-power appetite for supper."

Clarence nodded.

"We'll tramp o'er the hills and dales," he said. "We'll explore the golden vales. Oh, how the moorland stretches wide; far away to the dist' outside! I long to rove the gorse and heather, no matter how coarse the weather!"

"Help!" said Watson. "Do you call that poetry, you long ass?"

"I do," replied Fellowe. "'Tis true!"

"Nothing but doggerel!" sniffed Tommy.

"Indeed, you pain me greatly; such words are hardly stately," said Clarence severely. "Pray change your tone, old boy; I fain would hear more joy!"

"In fact, he's off his nut," I grinned. "He's simply nothing but! Six feet of walking lunatic, he'll—he'll——"

"Receive soon a kick?" suggested Watson.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "This is gettin' dreadful, dear old fellows! Clarence may be a poet, but he makes decent rhymes, you know! Kindly leave all that kind of stuff to him!"

"Yes, he's had more practice," I chuckled.

And we walked on, leaving "Longfellow" to chant his so-called poetry to his heart's content. As he didn't take the slightest notice, nobody came to any harm.

We walked for mile after mile, impressed by the great solitude of the moor. Away it stretched on every hand, undulating, rolling like the stilled waves of some vast petrified ocean.

By this time we had lost sight of the camp, and it was necessary for me to keep certain landmarks in my head, or we should be in danger of losing ourselves upon the face of that great, open space.

At last we found ourselves upon the summit of a prominent tor, and from this point of vantage we could look down upon miles of green moorland. And there, comparatively near by, was a little cottage. It nestled among some stunted-looking trees, and there was a winding lane passing in front of its crooked, old gate.

Away in the distance we could see the haze of a village with a little spire raising its point up towards the heavens. The scene was one of the most peaceful I had ever gazed upon.

"Makes you feel a bit small," I remarked. "A chap always gets that sensation out in the open spaces. We'll walk down to that cottage, and then go along the lane until we get to the village."

"That's a good idea," agreed Tommy. "In the village we'll buy some chocolates and toffee, and come back loaded."

It struck me, as we approached the cottage, that the owner of that place was evidently fond of a lonely existence. A more isolated place could hardly be imagined.

And as we approached it we noticed that a man was leaning on the gate. He was watching us with interest. He was elderly, with a grizzled beard and moustache. A pipe was in his mouth, and he was smoking complacently. His attire was a loose-fitting Norfolk suit of shabby tweed. He was not a yokel, by any means. There was something about him that suggested the gentleman.

"Good-evening, young men," he greeted us, as we were about to pass.

"Good-evening, sir," I answered, pausing. "Looks like keeping fine now."

"Ay, I think so, lad," said the old fellow, removing his pipe. "The wind's steady, and the sunset looks healthy. Strangers about here—eh? We don't often see schoolboys roaming about the moor."

"We're from St. Frank's College," I explained. "There's a whole crowd of us—touring round the country in caravans. We're camped about three miles from here, on the other side of the ridge."

"That accounts for my not having seen anything of ye," said the stranger. "Well, lads, and how do you like the moor? My name's Gregson, and I reckon that I'm known for many miles round these parts. Not many folks, you see, and we get to know one another. I'll have the doctor passing tomorrow, I fancy. And maybe the vicar will ride by on his bicycle on Thursday."

"You get an awful lot of excitement, Mr. Gregson," I chuckled. "Don't you ever grow tired of the solitude?"

"It's good for an old man," replied Mr.

Gregson. "Well, boys, I won't detain ye. Off into the village, I dare say? Well, well. Give my regards to Mr. Tremont—he's the shopkeeper yonder."

"The shopkeeper?" I repeated. "Is there only one?"

"Ay, only one, unless you count the inn," replied the old man. "Further in, if ye walk far enough, you'll find Princetown——"

"Oh, we're not going as far as that," I replied. "Perhaps we'll have a look at the convict settlement some other day. It's getting on in the evening——"

"Strangers approach, I see," interrupted Clarence "There are others in addition to we."

We turned, and looked down the lane. Two men had appeared, both of them riding bicycles. At first I thought they were postmen, for they were in uniform. Then I recognised them as prison warders.

We fell silent as the two officials came up, and they regarded us with frank curiosity. Schoolboys, as Mr. Gregson had said, were not common wanderers on the face of the moor.

The warders dismounted from their machines, and nodded.

"Evening, Mr. Gregson," said one of them. "Evening, young gents."

"Good-evening, Mitchell," replied Mr. Gregson. "Haven't seen you for nearly a fortnight. How are things going? Same 'old round as ever, I suppose? It's all right. These young gentlemen are camping near here."

"About three miles away," I explained. "We've got caravans there. You'll probably see a good many of our chaps wandering round the moors."

Mitchell looked rather serious.

"Just boys?" he asked. "All of you?"

"Well, we've got a master with us," I replied. "And, of course, several men who attend to all the work of the camp. We're not exactly on holiday—we're just a Travelling School."

"I'm glad to hear ye've got men with ye," said Warder Mitchell. "'Tain't very safe for boys to be out on Dartmoor alone."

I laughed.

"We've got Mr. Nelson Lee with us," I said easily.

"Mr. Nelson Lee!" repeated Mitchell, with a start. "My stars! You don't mean the Mr. Nelson Lee of Gray's Inn Road, London? The famous detective?"

"Absolutely!" I smiled. "He's in charge of the whole party."

Mr. Gregson nodded.

"Then I reckon you'll be safe enough," he commented, sucking at his pipe.

"Safe?" I repeated. "Safe from what, or whom? There's no particular danger on the moors, is there? I've never seen a more peaceful stretch of country. Nothing could happen here!"

"I wouldn't be so sure of that, either, young gent," said Warder Mitchell, with a grim look. "What do you think we're out

Handforth cautiously opened the door of the caravan. He had his shoes in his hand, and he had only dressed in a hurried fashion. He had felt that it would be better to complete his operations outside.

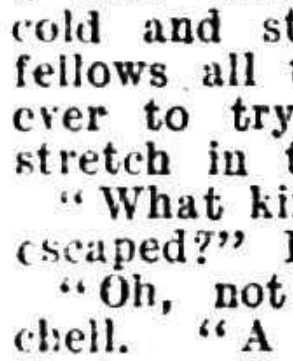
here for? I'm not feeling exactly comfortable about what you said. If any of your companions are roaming over the moor, they'd best get back to camp quickly. Didn't ye hear the signal?"

"You mean——" I paused.

"Yes," said the warder. "A convict escaped from Dartmoor Prison this morning!"

CHAPTER IV.

HANDFORTH ON THE TRAIL!



WE looked at the two prison officials, rather startled.

"A convict escaped this morning!" repeated Tommy Watson. "You—you mean he's wandering about the moors. Haven't you recaptured him?"

"The fellow's still at large," said Warder Mitchell. "Of course, he's bound to give in sooner or later. They all do. Convicts don't escape from Dartmoor. But the fellow may cause some trouble before he chucks up the sponge."

Mr. Gregson shook his head.

"One of these days you'll be just a little too sure, Mitchell," he said sagely. "It takes a clever man to escape from the prison, let alone from the moor—but I dare say it'll be done."

The two warders laughed.

"May be," replied Mitchell lightly. "And I'm not saying that the poor devil who does get away won't deserve it. I don't envy a man who's prowling about these moors, cold and starving, and is hounded by us fellows all the time. What fools they are ever to try it! They only get a longer stretch in the end."

"What kind of a man is he—the one who escaped?" I asked.

"Oh, not very dangerous," replied Mitchell. "A fairly smallish man, name of Barton. No. 530—that's how we know him. Doing a seven years' stretch for forgery. A clever sort of guy, I believe, and quite gentlemanly. But that doesn't mean to say he can't be dangerous if he likes. When a man's desperate he'll take chances. Who wouldn't?"

"Of course, I'll tell Mr. Lee about it, and he'll probably keep us confined to camp," I said. "That'll be rough on us, because we're not afraid of an escaped convict. Still, it's better to be careful."

"Ay, you're right, lad," said Warder Mitchell. "Well, Joe, we'll be getting along. Might see something of you later, Mr Gregson. Keeping well these days?"

"Oh, splendid—splendid!" said Mr. Gregson, with a smile. "By the way, if you meet a friend of mine, don't mistake him for your forger. I'm expecting him any day. He was due yesterday, in fact."

The warder smiled.

"There won't be any mistaking No. 530," he replied. "But what's the idea, Mr. Gregson? We've known you on the moors a fairish time, and you've never had a friend before. Getting sociable now that the summer's come?" he added cheerfully.

"Maybe," replied Mr. Gregson. "But young Willis needs a rest—he's been stuck in a London office for months. You'll know him if you see him. He's got a bad scar across the chin. Relic of the war. He was a sergeant of infantry, and was cut about a good deal at Mons."

The warders again nodded, and prepared to move on.

They bade Mr. Gregson good evening, and walked on. We nodded to them, too, and parted company with the old fellow at the same time—continuing on our way to the village.

"Well, we're getting a bit of excitement, after all," I remarked. "Of course, it's not likely that we shall see anything of convict No 530. But we'll be on the watch."

"Shall we get a reward if we collar him?" asked Watson, with a grin.

"You bet!" I replied. "But you won't get easy money like that, my son. I'm rather curious about Mr. Gregson. He seems an interesting character. A bit of a hermit, by what I can understand."

"Oh, you meet all sorts of queer people, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "Really, I think we ought to be getting back—I do, really. Not that I'm feeling at all nervous. But I think the other fellows ought to be warned."

I didn't think the matter was quite so urgent as Montie intimated, and we arrived in the village, and had an excellent interview with Mr. Tremont, who presided over the one establishment that the village boasted. It was a kind of a miniature Harrods—Mr. Tremont supplied everything. His shop was a department store with only one department. But it contained everything from soap and candles to sugarsticks.

"Oh, so you've been having a chat with Mr. Gregson, eh?" said the shopkeeper, as we gave him the old fellow's message. "A nice old gentleman. One of my regular customers. A lonely man, too—never known him to have a soul in his cottage—yet I understand that he is having a visitor this week."

"So we heard," said Watson.

"Good luck to him," remarked Mr. Tremont, as he ladled out some brandy balls. "It's about time he came out of his shell, I reckon. It don't do a man any good to keep to himself too long. It don't strike me as being natural. Folks weren't made to keep to theirselves."

And Mr. Tremont, having stated his opinion at even greater length, accepted the sum of six-shillings-and-fourpence-halfpenny from us, and wished us a very good evening, adding an invitation to come again as frequently as we liked.

"We're getting to know the whole neighbourhood," I remarked. "If we go on like this we shall know every inhabitant for ten

miles round before a couple of days are over. Well, it's just as well to be on friendly terms with people."

By the time we arrived in camp it was growing quite dusk, and we found that practically all the other fellows were home. They had been coming in by twos and threes for the past half hour.

And we were not the first with the news regarding the escaped convict. The camp already knew about it. Warder Mitchell and his companion had looked in on their way and had had a little chat with Nelson Lee.

"There's not the slightest need to be alarmed, boys, but we must be careful," said the guv'nor, as a group of fellows clustered round him. "There is not the slightest peril of this convict approaching our camp. The only danger is to any isolated boy who goes for a ramble across the moor. You must all remain in camp. These are my strict orders."

"All right, sir."

"We'll stick round, sir."

"And to-morrow," continued Lee, "we'll set off for Barnstaple. It's only a short run, and will take merely an hour or so in the evening, after lessons are over. I think it will be better to get out of this neighbourhood."

Handforth glared.

"Rot, sir," he said warmly.

"What did you say, Handforth?"

"I—I mean, it seems like running away, sir," growled Handy. "I don't see why we should bunk with our tails between our legs—just because a convict happens to be mooning about on the moor."

"When it comes to a question of tails, you may speak for yourself, Handforth—but please refrain from including others," said Nelson Lee severely. "And there is no justification for saying that we are running away."

"But——"

"I am not quite so foolish as your own chums, Handforth—I will not argue with you," said Nelson Lee. "My orders are that no boy shall leave the camp, and to-morrow evening we move on to Barnstaple. There must be no discussion on the point, and I hope you will be reasonable."

Everybody was reasonable—with the exception of Handforth. And nobody expected him to be, so it didn't matter. If Nelson Lee had suggested that we should remain, Handforth would have promptly declared that we ought to have moved on. His one joy in life was to have a different opinion to everybody else.

"Piffle!" muttered the leader of Study D, seizing Church by one hand and McClure by the other. "Come on!"

"What?"

"I want you fellows!" said Handforth darkly.

"Want us? What for?" demanded Church, in an uneasy voice. "Look here, old man, if you're going to start any of your hokey-pokey——"

"Any of my what?" demanded Handforth wrathfully. "Look here, my son, this is going to be a serious business. We're not talking about ice cream."

"Ice cream!" said McClure.

"Well, you said something about hokey-pokey," snapped Handforth. "Come with me into the caravan. And don't start any rot, because I'll biff you on the nose if you do! This is my big chance—with a capital C!"

Church looked at McClure, and McClure looked at Church. They both sighed. They knew well enough that it was quite hopeless to argue. The only thing they could do was to humour their leader, so they meekly accompanied him into the caravan, and sat down with looks of melancholy resignation on their faces.

"Well?" said Church in a hollow voice.

"If you use that kind of tone to me, my lad, I'll knock you sideways!" roared Handforth, his voice causing the fittings to rattle. "My hat! I get nothing but insubordination from you rotters! Just because we're on a caravan tour, you think you can do what you like! Don't forget that things have got to go on in just the same way as if we were still in Study D."

"They always go on in the same way," grunted Church hopelessly.

"And they always will!" said McClure. "What's the idea now?"

Handforth closed his fist.

"Unless you chaps can look cheerful, I'll start some trouble!" he said grimly. "As soon as ever something comes that interests me—as soon as I get a chance to show what I'm made of—you fellows start kicking!"

"And you start punching!" retorted Church.

"Well, I'm determined," said Handy "This is a glorious opportunity. It's one of those opportunities that only come once in a lifetime. And he who hesitates is lost."

"What the dickens are you jabbering about?" asked McClure blankly.

"This is my Big Chance!" said Handforth, in a whisper.

"I heard something like that a minute ago!"

"Oh, did you?" said Edward Oswald. "Well, you'll hear again! Don't you realise the possibilities? Here we are, on the moor, with a desperate convict at large—a hulking ruffian who wouldn't stick at murder if he could meet his ends by so doing!"

"I read that paragraph in 'The Clue of the Blood-stained Acid Drop'," remarked McClure, with a grin. "Besides, this chap isn't a hulking ruffian at all. He's only a smallish chap, and quite gentlemanly in his ways——"

Biff!

"Yaroooh!" said McClure wildly.

"And if you try to be funny again, I'll slosh you some more!" said Handforth. "By George! Fancy a chap having chums

like this! He might just as well have a couple of tadpoles!"

Church and McClure turned red.

"I say, steady!" growled Church. "Go easy, old man——"

"Tadpoles!" repeated Handforth firmly. "You've got no more brains than an unhatched egg! And all the time we're talking, the time's going!"

"Never!" said Church, amazed.

"What we've got to do is to get busy on this job," continued Handforth impressively. "If only you chaps had some backbone, it would be better. I shall have to take you seriously in hand. I shall have to train your backbones, and bring 'em to the front——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure howled.

"You—you cackling asses!" hooted Handforth. "What's the matter now?"

"If you bring our backbones to the front, we shall be just ready to go into Barnum's show!" grinned Church. "And it would be rather awkward if we wanted to bend down. I mean, fancy having a backbone down the face of your giddy waistcoat!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"I've nearly had enough!" he said tensely. "Just one more funny remark like that and I'll do something!"

Church and McClure realised that they had gone almost the limit, and they subsided.

"About this convict!" went on Handforth. "As soon as all the other chaps are asleep, we're going to creep out, and search the moors. Long before morning we'll have that convict, and we'll bring him in. There's a reward, I believe, but that's nothing. I'm out after the honour."

Church and McClure gazed at their leader, aghast.

"You—you're going to search the moor for that convict?" gasped Church.

"In the dead of night?" said McClure.

"Yes!"

"But -- you're mad!" panted Church. "It'll be like looking for a needle in a haystack! It's bad enough in the daytime, but even the warders don't search at night—they've got more sense. This moor stretches for miles and miles in every direction. It would take you weeks to cover it all. Besides, there are all sorts of woods and forests——"

"That's right—make all the difficulties you can!" said Handforth fiercely.

"I'm not making them—they're there!" said Church. "Look here, Handy, don't be so dotty! It'll be a sheer waste of time to go out on the moor after lights-out. You don't seem to realise the position. Warders are scouring the moor all day long—men armed with guns. Even they haven't been able to collar this convict. He's still at liberty. So what chance do you stand?"

Handforth snorted.

"It's no good trying to put me off!" he said obstinately. "You don't think I take any notice of these warders, I suppose? What are they, anyhow? Just a bunch of stolid fatheads who only use their hands and feet! When it comes to brains, it needs a chap like me!"

"I don't think the Dartmoor warders would feel complimented!" muttered McClure.

"What?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"And don't mutter!" snapped Handforth tartly. "I won't have you chaps muttering rotten things about me! If you want to say insults like that, say 'em to my face—and then I'll pulverise you!"

Neither Church nor McClure took advantage of this cordial invitation.

"And you can talk till Doomsday, and it won't make any difference," continued Edward Oswald. "When I make up my mind I'm as keen as mustard. There's no holding me back!"

"Oh, Handy!" protested Church earnestly. "Just consider! Imagine yourself out on that moor all alone——"

"I don't imagine anything of the sort!"

"But you said——"

"I imagine myself out there, and you chaps with me!" said Handforth

"But we're not going!" said McClure.

"Of course not," agreed Church.

Handforth regarded them grimly.

"Not going, eh?" he said. "You—you cowards! You funks! You miserable caterpillars! You crawling grubs! Haven't you got more grit than to——"

"We're not going!" roared Church, goaded into defiance by this unwarranted tirade. "Do you hear? We're not going! Are we, Mac?"

"No!" agreed McClure, loyally.

Handforth stared in amazement.

"You—you mean you defy me?" he gasped faintly.

"Yes, we do," said Church. "We're fed up with your dotty ideas! Mind you, we shan't sneak—we won't tell Mr. Lee or any of the other chaps. But we're not going on this dotty expedition!"

And Church lost no time in beating a strategic retreat. McClure followed him. In fact, the two juniors practically fell over themselves in getting out of the caravan.

But they succeeded in doing so just before Handforth recovered himself sufficiently to give chase. And then, of course, it was too late. Once outside, among all the other fellows, Church and McClure were safe.

He stood in the doorway of the caravan, glowering.

"I'll never speak to 'em again!" he told himself. "From this moment they ain't my

(Continued on page 15)

GRAND NEW NELSON LEE SERIAL STARTS TO-DAY!

No. 29. PRESENTED WITH "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY." June 23, 1923.

THE SILVER DWARF

Begin To-day this Opening Instalment of a Powerful New Detective Serial, Featuring the Thrilling Exploits of Nelson Lee.

CHAPTER 1

A DEATHBED CONFESSION.

"IS there no hope?"

"None whatever. It would be cruel to deceive you. You may possibly linger until to-night, but that is the best I can promise you."

The doomed man shivered and closed his eyes. He was still comparatively young—barely forty-seven—and only a couple of hours ago the stream of life had been coursing through his veins with the vigour of a youth of twenty-one. Mounted on his favourite hunter, he had been following the Easington hounds in an early morning cross-country run. Dozens of eyes had marked his well-set figure, his handsome, aristocratic face, his faultless horsemanship.

"There goes Lord Easington, the richest man in Cornwall!" had been the remark which had passed from mouth to mouth. And, as often as not, the remark had been added: "What a pity he never married!"

Two short hours ago, and now he was dying! In attempting a difficult leap, his horse had fallen, and had rolled on top of him. He had been carried to the nearest house, which happened to be Penleven Grange, the Cornish home of young Jack Langley, the famous electrical engineer. The village doctor had been hastily summoned, and had found that his illustrious patient was suffering from a fractured spine. And this was the verdict:

"You may possibly linger until to-night, but that is the best I can promise you."

A tall, young fellow, with a handsome, troubled face, stole over to the side of the bed, and gently laid his hand on Lord Easington's pallid brow. It was Jack Langley.

"I have wired for your cousin," he said. "Is there anybody else you would like me to send for?"

The doomed man slowly opened his eyes. His features twitched convulsively It was plain to be seen that a terrible mental struggle was taking place. Then a look of grim determination came into his face.

"Yes," he said, in a scarcely audible voice; "telegraph for Nelson Lee!"

Jack Langley started, scarcely believing his ears. There was no suspicion of foul play. Twenty people had witnessed the earl's mishap, and could testify to its purely accidental nature.

"For Nelson Lee?" repeated Jack.

Lord Easington nodded, and once more closed his eyes.

"Tell him to come by special train, if needs be," he said. "I want to see him before I die."

In a whirl of bewildered surprise, Jack Langley left the room. Outside the door he met his wife. They had only been married a few short months, and before their marriage they had both been victimised by a terrible secret society known as "The Order of the Ring." From the toils of this infamous organisation they had been rescued by the very man whose name had just been uttered by the dying earl —Nelson Lee, the celebrated detective.

"What do you think, Ethel?" said Jack, in a voice that was tremulous with suppressed excitement. "We're going to have our wish, after all!"

"How?" asked Ethel. "I don't know what you mean!"

"Well, you know how keen I was on getting Nelson Lee to come and spend a few days with us?"

"Yes," said Ethel; "and I also know that he wrote and declined our invitation."

"Well he's coming!" said Jack.

"Coming! Have you heard from him, then?"

"No; but Lord Easington has just asked me to telegraph for him."

"For Nelson Lee!" cried Ethel, unconsciously repeating Jack's previous exclamation. "But why does Lord Easington wish to see him?"

"I can't imagine," said Jack. "I told him that I had wired for his cousin, Professor Rymer, and I asked him if there was anybody else he would like me to send for. He hesitated a moment, and then he asked me to telegraph for Nelson Lee. He said I was to tell him to engage a special train, if needs be; but, of course, there'll be no necessity for him to do that. It's only just gone nine, so he'll get my wire before ten, which will give him ample time to catch the Penzance corridor express, which leaves Paddington at 10.35. He'll be here at half-past seven. I'll go and send off the wire."

Jack went downstairs, and five minutes later his groom was on his way to the village post-office. Three-quarters of an hour later, the following wire was handed to Nelson Lee at his rooms in Gray's Inn Road:

"Lord Easington met with accident. Brought to my house. Sinking fast. Wishes to see you. Don't know why. Come at once. Doctor says may not last day out. Wire reply.—LANGLEY, Penleven."

The detective whipped out his watch. He had all the trains at his finger-ends.

"Just time!" he muttered to himself.

He scribbled a reply, stating that he was leaving Paddington by the 10.35 express. He gave this to the telegraph-boy, then hurried into his bedroom, where a kit-bag stood ready packed.

A few minutes later he was on his way to Paddington in a taxi; and half-past ten found him seated in an empty first-class compartment of the Penzance express.

The train was just about to start, when the door was suddenly flung open, and a porter's voice cried:

"Now then, sir, hurry up, or you'll be left behind!"

The detective glanced up from his paper. Gliding across the platform, with a peculiar, stealthy, snakelike motion, was a thin, cadaverous-looking man, rather under the average height, with a Roman nose, out of all proportion to the size of his face. His lean form was enveloped in a heavy, fur-lined overcoat. His shoulders were so bowed that he had almost the appearance of a hunchback. His dome-shaped forehead rose high and white above two deep-sunk, glittering eyes; whilst his square, determined-looking chin was suggestive of strength of will.

Notwithstanding the porter's injunction to hurry, he made no attempt to quicken his pace, and the train was actually on the move ere he reached the carriage door and leisurely stepped aboard.

He sank into a corner seat, and fixed his glittering eyes on Nelson Lee, who had once more buried himself in his paper. For several minutes he favoured the detective with a searching stare, his eyes alternately narrowing and dilating in a curious catlike fashion that was positively uncanny. Then his thin lips parted in a cynical smile.

"Not a badly-shaped head, on the whole," he said. "Better than I expected, in fact, though somewhat flat in the region of the occiput."

The detective looked up with a start of surprise.

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. "Were you addressing me?"

The stranger smiled and blinked his eyes.

"I am afraid I was guilty of speaking my thoughts aloud," he said. "Accept my apologies, and, at the same time, permit me to express my regret that you should be called away from home by this unexpected summons to Penleven."

Again the detective started. He had shown Jack Langley's telegram to nobody. He had not even told his landlady where he was going.

"How do you know I am going to Penleven?" he asked.

The stranger laughed, a dry, harsh cackling laugh.

"Look at your bag!" he murmured.

The detective glanced at his kit-bag, which was lying on the seat beside him. On the front of it was a label, still wet with paste, bearing the words, "Penleven, via Penzance."

Lee felt annoyed—annoyed with the stranger, and annoyed with himself for being surprised at such a simple trick of deduction. He ripped the label off, and tossed it through the open window; then he picked up his paper again, as though

to intimate that the conversation was ended.

But the stranger was not so easily discouraged.

"Very sad about Lord Easington, isn't it?" he said. "I'm afraid there's not much hope of his recovery."

The detective flung down his paper with a gesture of irritation. He glared at the stranger, who was rubbing his hands and blinking his eyes with an air of exasperating self-possession.

"May I ask who you are, sir?" he said curtly.

By way of reply, the stranger slowly unbuttoned his fur-lined overcoat, and drew out a card-case. With irritating deliberation, he selected a card, and handed it across to Nelson Lee. The detective glanced at it, and read the following inscription:

MARK RYMER, D.Sc., F.I.C.,
Professor of Chemistry, Westminster University.

A gleam of intelligence leaped into the detective's eyes. He had never met the professor before; but the name of Mark Rymer was perfectly familiar to him as that of one of the ablest scientists of the day. Moreover, the name of Rymer was also familiar to him in another connection. It was the family name of the Earls of Easington.

"Now I begin to understand," he said, as he thrust the card into his pocket. "I thought at first that you were taking advantage of a chance acquaintanceship to interfere in matters in which you had no concern. I see now that I was mistaken. You are, doubtless, one of Lord Easington's relations."

"I am his only relation," said the professor.

"Then you are the heir to the title and estates?"

The professor blinked his eyes, and spread out the palms of his hands.

"For the title I care nothing," he said; "but I will freely confess that the estates—or, rather, the income they represent—have a very solid value in my eyes. I am sick of the drudgery of scientific work. For years and years I have hungered to enjoy life as other men enjoy it—to have what I want, to do as I please, to go where I wish, without having to count the cost beforehand. All this is now within my grasp, for my cousin, as you doubtless know, was one of the wealthiest men in the kingdom."

"But your cousin isn't dead yet," said Nelson Lee quietly.

The professor's eyes narrowed to the merest slits. His face grew cold and pitiless.

"But he soon will be!" he said, as he softly rubbed his clawlike hands. "Mr. Langley said in his wire that he was sinking fast."

"Ah! Then you, too, have received a telegram from Mr. Langley?"

"Of course. Which reminds me, by the way, that I haven't yet asked you why they have sent for you. Did my cousin ask them to?"

"My telegram came from Mr. Langley," said the detective evasively.

"Yes, yes; I understand that, of course," said the professor. "But Mr. Langley would hardly have wired for you unless there was some suspicion of foul play, or unless my cousin had specially requested him to do so."

The detective made no reply. He picked up his newspaper, and began to read. The fact was, Professor Rymer repelled him. His gloating satisfaction at the prospect of his cousin's death filled Lee with disgust. But, even apart from this, there was something about the professor which affected Nelson Lee in much the same way as the sight of a loathsome reptile.

He knew that the professor was clever—brilliantly clever—and no one had a greater admiration for cleverness than Nelson Lee. But even his admiration for Mark Rymer's cleverness could not conquer the repugnance which he felt for the man himself.

The professor read his thoughts like an open book. For one brief instant his corpse-like face was distorted by an ugly, vindictive scowl. Then he, too, picked up a newspaper, and followed the detective's example.

In this manner, and for the most part in silence, they travelled to Penzance, and from Penzance, by local train, to Penleven. A carriage met them at the station, and conveyed them to the Grange, a distance of about a couple of miles.

Jack Langley met them at the door, and greeted the detective with effusive cordiality. With Professor Rymer he was more constrained, though perfectly courteous.

"You will find your cousin wonderfully well, considering what happened," he said—"in fact, the doctors are quite surprised at his extraordinary vitality, though they are both inclined to think that it is merely his intense anxiety to see Mr. Lee which is keeping him alive."

"You will permit me to see him first, I presume?" asked the professor coldly.

"Certainly, if you wish," said Jack.

He led the professor upstairs; but a moment later he reappeared, and beckoned to Nelson Lee, who was chatting to Ethel in the hall.

"You're to come upstairs at once," he said. "The earl was quite angry that I hadn't brought you up at the same time as his cousin."

Nelson Lee followed his host upstairs. In the bedroom, in addition to the dying earl, were Professor Rymer, the Penleven doctor, a second doctor from Falmouth, and a nurse.

"Thank Heaven, you have arrived in time!" said the earl, grasping the detective's hand. "Never have I longed for anything so earnestly as I have longed for your coming here to-day! But I mustn't waste the precious moments. The doctors

tell me that I haven't many hours to live, and I have much to say to you before I die!"

He paused, and glanced significantly at the others. The Penleven doctor was the first to take the hint.

"Do you wish us to leave the room?" he asked.

"If you please," Lord Easington whispered.

"But you don't wish me to leave the room?" said the professor, in his thin, dry voice. "Surely you cannot have anything to say to Mr. Lee which I may not hear?"

The doomed man raised his eyes and regarded his cousin with a curious glance, that had something of pity in it.

"No," he said at last; "you may remain if you wish."

The rest filed out of the room, leaving the earl alone with Mark Rymer and Nelson Lee. Almost before the door had closed behind them, the earl turned quickly to Nelson Lee, and once more grasped his hand.

"Twenty-five years ago," he said, in trembling, agitated tones, "I was guilty of the most despicable act of cowardice which a man can commit. The remembrance of my sin stands between me and the grave, and I cannot die until I have made atonement. This is not the first time my conscience has tortured me, but I have always been too cursedly proud to confess my fault. Now, when the shadows of death are closing round me, the old desire to do what is right comes back with resistless force. You may call it a deathbed repentance, if you will, but it is better than no repentance at all. Tell me, Mr. Lee, will you help me to make amends for the great sin of my life?"

"I will," said Nelson Lee, little dreaming that he was pledging himself to one of the most difficult and dangerous investigations he had ever undertaken. "What is it you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to find my son and heir!" said the dying earl.

At the words "son and heir" the professor recoiled with a hoarse cry that was half a snarl.

"Your son and heir!" he hissed, regarding his cousin with blazing eyes. "What nonsense is this? You are mad! You have no son and heir! I—Mark Rymer—am your only living relative, and as such I am your heir!"

Once more the earl looked up, and again that pitying look came into his pallid face.

"It's hard on you, Mark, I admit," he said. "For twenty-five years I have let you think that you were my heir, and that you would succeed to the title and estates. For twenty-five years I have posed before the world as a man who never married. For twenty-five years I have lived and acted a cowardly lie. As a matter of fact, I was married in 1898. My wife gave birth to a son in 1899, and, to the best of my belief, that son is still alive.

"My marriage was a secret one. I married under an assumed name, and my wife never knew to the day of her death that her husband was Lord Easington. Shortly after the birth of the child she was taken ill, and died a few days later. The nurse who attended her during her last illness was a middle-aged widow, and I gave this nurse a thousand pounds to adopt the child as her own. I did not tell her that I was the Earl of Easington; and a few months later, at my suggestion, she emigrated to one of the Colonies, and took the little one with her.

"Five years ago, in a roundabout way, I made inquiries, and learned that my son was alive and well. Since then I have made no inquiries whatever, and I have never until to-night revealed my marriage to a living soul. Now that I am dying, my conscience reproaches me for the part I have played, and I want you to promise me, Mr. Lee, that after my death you will spare neither time nor expense to find my son, and restore him to his rightful position. Will you do so?"

"I will," said the detective for the second time. "Tell me the name under which you married, the date and place of your wedding, the date when your son was born, the name under which he was registered, the name of the woman who adopted him, and the Colony to which she emigrated—give me, in short, the names and dates which are necessary to enable me to secure the proofs of your son's identity, and I will leave no stone unturned to carry out your dying wishes."

Before the earl could reply, the professor leaned over the bed, his face no longer distorted by passion and excitement, but as calm and impassive as that of a marble statue. On a small round table by the side of the bed stood a medicine-glass and a bottle of champagne, with a silver tap driven through the cork. Whilst his cousin had been speaking, Mark Rymer had picked up the medicine-glass, and had filled it with champagne.

"You are faint and overworn," he said, in a gentle, insinuating voice. "Take a drink of this before you continue your story."

A feeble smile illumined Lord Easington's face.

"You are very good to me!" he murmured. "I'm awfully sorry for you, Mark, but I dared not die till I'd eased my conscience by confessing my sin."

"Don't you worry about me," said the professor quietly. "I've always managed to scrape along without your money in the past and I've no doubt I shall continue to do so in the future."

He raised his cousin's head, and held the medicine-glass to his lips. The doomed man drained it at a single gulp. But no sooner had he done so than a horrible change came over him. His face turned purplish-blue, his eyes seemed starting from their sockets, his features twitched convulsively, and a bubbling foam of crimson froth oozed through his quivering lips.

With a startled cry, Nelson Lee thrust the

professor aside, and caught the earl in his arms.

"What have you given him?" demanded Lee.

"Champagne, of course," said the professor, with an evil smile. "There's the bottle—Heidsieck's Dry Monople, 1908."

But the detective was not listening. The earl had motioned him to lower his head.

"The proofs of my marriage——" he began.

Then a spasm of pain convulsed his frame, and his voice died away in an inarticulate moan.

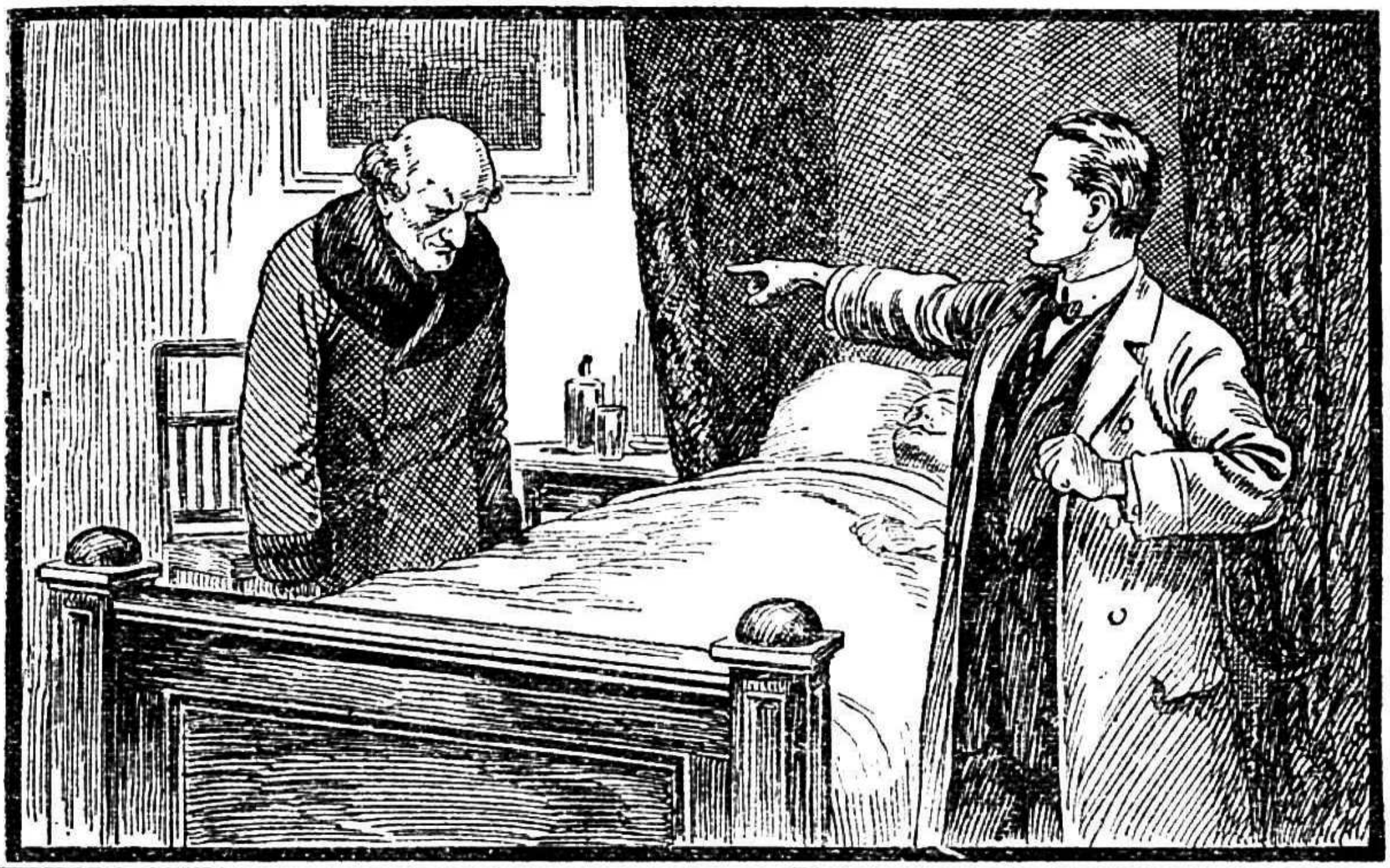
Again he strove to speak.

"Go to my house——"

Once more his utterance failed him. For a second or two he writhed and groaned in agony indescribable. Then he clutched the detective's arm in a vicelike grip.

"The Silver Dwarf!" he gasped.

And even as he uttered the words his writhing limbs grew suddenly stiff and still, his head fell back, the death-rattle gurgled in his throat, and the Earl of Easington was dead!



For barely a minute neither of them spoke. The detective's pent-up horror found vent in three sharp, biting words of accusation:

"You poisoned him!"

The professor blinked his eyes, and softly rubbed his hands.

CHAPTER II.

A DECLARATION OF WAR.

ACROSS the dead man's body, one on each side of the bed, Mark Rymer and Nelson Lee—henceforward to be bitter rivals—stared at each other in grim silence, for all the world like a pair of wrestlers measuring each other's strength before they grappled.

For nearly a minute neither of them spoke. Then the detective's pent-up horror found vent in three sharp, biting words of accusation:

"You poisoned him!"

The professor blinked his eyes, and softly rubbed his hands.

"With champagne?" he murmured, peering into the detective's face like some ill-omened bird of prey—to which, indeed, his huge and hawklike nose gave him more than a passing resemblance.

"You put something in it when I wasn't looking," said Nelson Lee. "Where's the medicine-glass?"

The professor glanced at a little heap of powdered glass which lay on the carpet.

"I'm afraid it's broken," he said, still rubbing his hands. "I dropped it when you pushed me away from the bed, and I must have trodden on it afterwards."

The detective bit his lip. He turned on his heel and strode towards the door.

"One moment," said the professor, holding up his hand. "What are you going to do?"

"I am going to summon the others, and announce the fact of your cousin's death," said Nelson Lee.

"Indeed!" said the professor, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "Does it not

occur to you that you are overstepping the limits of your position here? Surely it is my melancholy privilege, as the new Lord Easington, to announce the fact of my predecessor's decease?"

"But you are not the new Lord Easington," said Nelson Lee. "The new Lord Easington is your cousin's hitherto unacknowledged son."

The professor indulged in a deprecating gesture.

"Really, Mr. Lee, you surprise me!" he said. "Surely you do not attach any importance to the wild and meaningless words which fell from my cousin's lips a moment or two before his death?"

"Most certainly I do!" said Nelson Lee.

"How very preposterous!" ejaculated the professor. "Why, my dear sir, the poor, unfortunate man was simply wandering in his mind—raving, if you like. He was not responsible for what he was saying. All that cock-and-bull story about a secret marriage ——"

"Was true!" said the detective, interrupting him. "I believe every word of it; and, what is more, I am going to do my best to find the missing heir and restore him to his inheritance."

The professor took two hasty strides, and planted himself in front of Nelson Lee. He fixed his eyes on the detective's face. They were shimmering with a weird, unearthly glow, that came and went like the flash of a will-o'-the-wisp. Slowly they began to narrow until they were mere slits, like those of a cat watching its prey; then they suddenly widened, and he crushed back a savage oath.

The detective laughed.

"It's no good, Professor Rymer!" he said. "You can't mesmerise me. I'm hypnotic-proof."

Once more he moved towards the door, and once again the professor held up his hand.

"Let us clearly understand each other, Mr. Lee," he said. "You are now going to repeat my cousin's statement to the others, and after that you are going to do your best to find his son?"

"That is my intention," said the detective.

"Have you counted the cost?" asked the professor suavely. "Do you realise that if you are successful in your quest you will deprive me of an inheritance worth over a hundred thousand a year? Am I likely, do you think, to relinquish such a prize without a struggle?"

"I should say not!" replied the detective promptly.

"And I am not an enemy to be lightly despised!"

"I have already discovered that," said Nelson Lee.

"The man who strives to thwart me need expect no mercy at my hands."

"I believe you."

"Yet, in spite of this, you still persist in your intention of trying to find my cousin's son?"

"I do."

"You will regret it."

"I hardly think so."

"Then you refuse to withdraw?"

"Absolutely! I will withdraw when I have found the missing heir, and have restored him to his inheritance, not before!"

"Then it is to be war to the knife between us, is it?" the professor asked.

The detective shrugged his shoulders, but did not deign to reply. This melodramatic style of conversation had no charms for him.

"If you have nothing more to say to me I will call the others," he said.

The professor bowed, and sadly shook his head. The detective accordingly opened the door, and a few moments later Jack Langley and his wife, together with the doctors and the nurse, came into the room, and grouped themselves around the bed.

When the doctors had examined the body, and had announced that life was extinct, the detective turned to Mark Rymer, who was gazing at his cousin with an air of grief-stricken abstraction.

"Will you tell them, or shall I?" asked Nelson Lee, in a low voice.

"Tell them what?" said the professor innocently.

An impatient frown furrowed the detective's brow. He raised his voice, and addressed the others.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "it is my duty to inform you that before Lord Easington died he confessed to Professor Rymer and myself that he contracted a secret marriage in 1898, and that his wife, who is now dead, presented him with a son. This son is still alive, and is, therefore, the lawful heir to the Easington title and estates. He was sent abroad a few months after his birth, and his present whereabouts are unknown; but, in accordance with the late Lord Easington's dying wishes, I have undertaken to find the heir and restore him to his rightful position."

At the conclusion of Nelson Lee's speech, all eyes were instantly turned on the professor, who was rubbing his hands, and shaking his head, and staring at Lee with an air of reproachful surprise.

"I am sorry that Mr. Lee has thought it necessary to tell you this," he said. "I do not deny, of course, that my poor dead cousin made the statement which Mr. Lee has repeated; but I am more than surprised that Mr. Lee should attach any serious importance to it. It was obvious to anybody that when my cousin made that statement he was in the throes of delirium. You will probably think that I say this from motives of self-interest; I think you will agree with

me that my cousin must have been raving when he made this so-called confession, when I tell you that the very last words he uttered were a meaningless allusion to a silver dwarf."

"That is perfectly true," said Nelson Lee.

"Well, doesn't that prove he was raving?"

The doctors nodded their head. It was plain to be seen that they, at any rate, were of the same opinion as the professor. But the detective was not in the least discouraged.

"I do not admit the inference for a moment," he said. "I acknowledge that the words—'the silver dwarf'—sound meaningless enough when taken by themselves; but Professor Rymer has not told you all. As a matter of fact, the last words which crossed Lord Easington's lips were these: 'The proofs of my marriage. . . go to my house . . . the Silver Dwarf.' It seems to me, therefore, to be highly probable that the proofs of his lordship's marriage are connected in some way with a silver dwarf, and that the silver dwarf is connected, in some equally mysterious way, with his lordship's house. In other words, though I cannot explain the meaning of Lord Easington's dying words at present, I have every hope that I shall be able to do so after I have been to his lordship's house, and have made inquiries on the spot."

"When will you go?" asked Jack Langley.

"At the earliest possible moment," said Nelson Lee. "His lordship lived, I believe, at Easington Towers. Is that far from here?"

"About eighteen miles, by road," said Jack. "If you intend to go there, however, your best plan would be to take train from here to Falmouth, which is less than a couple of miles from the Towers."

"Can I catch a train to Falmouth tonight?"

Jack consulted his watch.

"Yes," he said; "it's a quarter-past eight now, and the last train for Falmouth leaves Penleven at half-past nine."

"Then I'll go by that."

Jack Langley turned to the professor.

"Shall you go with Mr. Lee to the Towers, or may I offer you a bed for the night?" he asked.

"Neither, thank you!" said the professor. "Before I left London this morning, I wired to a very dear friend of mine in Penzance, and asked him if he could put me up for the night. He replied in the affirmative, so I mustn't disappoint him."

"Then I'd better order the trap for you at once," said Jack. "The last train for Penzance leaves here at nine o'clock, and it's a quarter-past eight now."

"Please don't trouble!" said the professor. "The station is only a couple of miles away, and I shall enjoy the walk."

He picked up his hat and walked over to Nelson Lee.

"Good-bye for the present, Mr. Lee!" he said, holding out his hand, on the third finger of which was a curious antique ring.

"Good-bye!" said the detective curtly, putting his hand behind his back.

"Surely you won't refuse to shake hands with me!" said the professor. "We may not agree as to the state of my cousin's mind at the last, but surely that need not prevent us parting in a friendly manner."

The others were regarding Nelson Lee with looks of pained surprise. They knew nothing of what had happened before they had been called into the room, and they evidently thought he was acting in a churlish and ungenerous fashion. The detective read their thoughts, and made an effort to conquer his repugnance. He drew his hand from behind his back, and clasped Mark Rymer's in a cold and formal grasp.

There was nothing cold and formal about the professor's grasp, however. He seized the detective's hand, and gave it a hearty, vigorous grip. Even as he did so, a burning, stinging pain shot up the detective's arm, and the next instant, to everyboy's amazement, he snatched away his hand, and clapped it to his mouth.

"Dear, dear!" said the professor blandly. "Did I grip too hard?"

For a moment the detective made no reply. He was sucking a wound on the back of his hand, no bigger than a pin-prick. Then he walked across to the fire and spat out a mouthful of blood.

"That ring of yours wants filing down," he said meaningly. "There's a jagged spike on the under-side which is positively dangerous."

The professor held up his hand to the light.

"Why, so there is!" he said, in tones of feigned astonishment. "I must have it seen to. Pray accept my sincere apologies for the inconvenience it has caused you. Good-night, everybody!"

And, peering and blinking, he bowed himself out, and vanished through the door.

CHAPTER III.

THE SMUGGLER'S LEAP.

"IF you are going to catch the half-past nine train," said Jack Langley, after the professor had left, "you'd better come downstairs at once, and have a snack of something to eat. You'll have to start from here in another three-quarters of an hour at the very latest."

The detective thanked him and followed him down to the dining-room. Over a hasty meal he unbosomed himself to Jack, more fully than he had done to the others, on the

subject of Lord Easington's confession, the manner of his death, and the professor's subsequent half-veiled threats.

"Between you and me," he said, "I have not the slightest doubt in the world that the professor dropped some subtle poison into the champagne which he offered to his cousin a moment or two before his death. I am equally convinced that the ring he wears is provided with a poison-covered spike, and that he insisted on shaking hands with me with the deliberate intention of pressing the spike into my hand and killing me. If I am right—and I am sure I am—you will readily understand that I shall have need of all my wits in the quest upon which I have entered. A man who is daring enough to commit a cold-blooded murder under the very eyes of a detective, and afterwards to attempt to murder that detective in the presence of a room full of witnesses, is not an enemy, as he himself expressed it, to be lightly despised."

"I agree with you there," said Jack. "But I have no fear as to who will win in the end. You are more than a match for Mark Rymer, clever as he is. Do you think he knows what Lord Easington meant by his allusion to a silver dwarf?"

"Yes," answered Nelson Lee. "I am quite sure he does. I am also sure that Professor Rymer has not gone to spend the night with a 'a very dear friend' at Penzance!"

"Then where has he gone? There are only two trains out of Penleven to-night—one to Penzance at nine o'clock, and one to Falmouth at half-past. If Rymer hasn't gone to Penzance, and isn't going to Falmouth, where is he going?"

"I don't know," confessed the detective. "And it is because I don't know that I feel so uneasy. If I could fathom the professor's next move, I should know how to set about countering it. That he has some wily scheme on hand, I am positive; but what it is I can't even imagine."

Presently, while they chatted, a servant came and announced that the dogcart was waiting at the door. A few minutes later Nelson Lee and Jack were seated in the vehicle, and were rattling down the carriage-drive.

The night was pitch dark, and a moaning wind was blowing off the sea. The road from the Grange to the railway-station ran for some distance along the edge of the cliffs—so near the verge in places that less than a couple of yards divided the off-wheel of the dogcart from it.

"This is a pretty dangerous road to drive along at night," remarked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, and it's even worse a little further on," replied Jack. "Wait till we come to the Smuggler's Leap!"

"What's that?"

"We shall be there in half a minute, and then you'll see. It's the name given by the fishermen to a deep and narrow inlet cut out of the cliff as if by a gigantic cheese-scoop. The road runs absolutely to the very edge, with a low stone wall on one side, and a sheer descent on the other side of over two hundred feet of perpendicular cliff. The story goes that a certain notorious smuggler, being hard-pressed one night by the Revenue officers, leapt from the road at the spot in question, and was miraculously saved from destruction by falling into an enormous clump of gorse-bushes half-way down the cliff's side."

Jack had scarcely ended his explanation ere they reached the place referred to.

"This is the Smuggler's Leap," he said, as he reined in the mare, and allowed her to proceed at walking pace. "One false step here and——"

His sentence was interrupted by the sharp crack of a revolver, the bullet from which sped from behind the low stone wall and buried itself in the mare's neck.

With a shrill scream of pain, the animal reared up on her hind-legs, and began to kick and plunge.

"Jump!" yelled Nelson Lee.

But almost before the word had crossed his lips, the trap gave a sudden violent lurch and rolled backwards over the edge of the cliff, dragging the struggling animal after it!

At the word "Jump!" Nelson Lee had leaped out of the trap, and had fallen on his hands and knees in the middle of the road. As he picked himself up he heard Jack Langley shouting for help, and, on peering through the darkness, he perceived that the young engineer had flung himself out of the trap in the very nick of time, and was hanging by his finger-tips to the crumbling edge of the cliff.

The detective sprang to his assistance. Grasping Jack by the collar of his coat, he exerted all his strength to haul him up over the edge of the cliff. Ere he could accomplish his purpose, however, a dark form vaulted the low stone wall, darted across the narrow road, and gave him a violent push.

The next instant both Nelson Lee and Jack were rolling down the steep face of the cliff towards the hungry sea.

NEXT WEEK!

Another Thrilling Instalment of

THE SILVER DWARF!

The Case of the Newmarket Mystery!

The Adventures of Gordon Fox, Detective.

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN GODFREY'S VISITOR—THE FIRE ON THE HEATH—THE MISSING HORSE.

IT was between eleven and twelve o'clock of a summer's night, and the old racing town of Newmarket had settled down to its usual quiet, save for the occasional tramp of footsteps in the High Street. Captain Godfrey was lounging in a big basket-chair in his sitting-room at the Jockey Club—a fair, well-knit gentleman of forty, popular and successful on the Turf, and with an income to be envied. His cigar had gone out, and he was feeling drowsy, when he was aroused by a sharp rap.

"Come in!" he called.

The door opened, and a man entered quietly. He had a rakish, sporting appearance. He wore riding-breeches, and a horse-shoe pin flared and glittered in his scarf. His florid features, shrewd and clean-shaven, suggested intemperance.

"My good fellow, haven't you made a mistake?" drawled Captain Godfrey. "Who sent you up here-"

"No mistake, guv'nor," replied the man. "You sent for me yourself," he added, in a changed voice.

"I did? Why, by Jove, surely you're not——"

"Gordon Fox, at your service!"

The captain laughed heartily.

"I'd never have known you!" he cried. "Ripping idea! Deuced clever disguise! Sit down, Mr. Fox, and have a drink and a cigar."

The detective mixed a whisky-and-soda, and took a chair. "I was not at home when your wire came," he said, "so I had to come down by a late train. You want me, no doubt, to look after the safety of Black Diamond?"

"You've made a jolly good guess!"

"It was very simple. I keep track of racing matters, and there is little that doesn't come to my ears. I know that a set of unscrupulous bookmakers mave been accepting heavy odds against your three-year-old for the Derby. By some means they lately discovered the horse's good qualities, and now they are in a state of considerable alarm."

"Quite right," declared Captain Godfrey. "Black Diamond is sure to win the Derby, and that means ruin for the bookies. I have received several anonymous letters of warning, and I believe that the gang are plotting mischief. The horse is at John Marsh's training establishment at Hill Farm, and a lad named Jim Lucas, who bears a good reputation, sleeps in the box with him. But I am not satisfied, in spite of all the precautions that are being taken, and that is why I have sent for you."

"What do you think is in the wind?" asked Gordon Fox.

"I don't know. I imagine, however, that one or more scoundrels, hired by the bookies, are lurking about Newmarket in the hope of——"

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

The loud, shrill cry drowned Captain Godfrey's voice, and as he sprang to the window and tore aside the curtain, a red flare was seen on the sky to the north. In a trice he and the detective had rushed downstairs and out of the building. The alarm was spread with incredible rapidity, and already the inhabitants of the town were swarming from their houses. The light on the sky was growing redder and redder.

"That's in the direction of Marsh's place!" vowed Captain Godfrey.

"It looks like it," Gordon Fox assented gravely.

No vehicle was to be had. They hurried on with the increasing crowd, and a couple of fire-engines passed them at a gallop before they had gone far. They breathlessly mounted the long stretch of the High Street, and at last, reaching the top of the heath, they saw their fears were only too well founded.

"By Jove, look there!" groaned Captain Godfrey.

John Marsh's training establishment, a short distance off the road, was the scene of the conflagration. The captain and his companion pushed through the throng, and were admitted to the stable enclosure, which was in the form of a square. Half a dozen of the thatched boxes on one side were burning, but the town engines and the trainers' fire brigade were pouring water on the flames, and were already getting control of them. There was shouting and confusion, but no panic.

The bloodstock, consisting of eleven three-year-olds and yearlings, had all been rescued, though it had been necessary to blindfold them before they would leave their quarters. So a fireman told Captain Godfrey, and this satisfied him for a time. Then he hastened with the detective to the yard where the group of frightened animals had been led, and looked over them for a moment.

"By heavens, Black Diamond is not here!" he gasped. "Where is my horse, Marsh?" he cried, taking hold of a man who was passing.

The trainer turned with a start.

"I have bad news for you," he said. "your horse——"

"It has been burnt to death?"

"No, not so bad as that, sir. But step this way."

The flames were now yielding to the torrents of water. The glare was sinking, and the tumult had subsided. John Marsh led his companions into an adjoining yard, where he could speak without being disturbed.

"It's an ugly business, Captain Godfrey," he said, "and I hope you won't blame me, for I've done my best. I'll tell you just what happened. I was roused by a cry of fire, and I was the first to reach the stabling. As I ran I saw that the big gate was wide open. So was the door of Black Diamond's box, and the horse and young Lucas were gone. The straw was burning furiously, and it had been set on fire by a lantern that someone knocked over. Lying partly in the flames was Fred Cantley, one of my own men. We got him out in a hurry, but he was so terribly burnt—and unconscious as well—that he died five minutes after we carried him into my house. That's the whole story."

"It's as plain as daylight," declared Captain Godfrey. "That gang of scoundrels bribed the lad to steal the horse, so that it could be kept out of the way until after the Derby."

"That's about right, sir," said the trainer. "Cantley, suspecting something wrong, must have gone over to the box, entered it, and caught young Lucas in the act of leaving. The lad stunned him with a cudgel, led the horse out, opened the big gate, and rode away across country. By then the straw had taken fire from the lantern, and he didn't dare stop to put it out."

"Yes, it's quite clear," exclaimed Captain Godfrey. "You must find Black Diamond for me in five days, Mr. Fox. I wouldn't have him scratched for the Derby for £10,000!"

"I'll do my best," promised the detective. "This boy had a good reputation, Mr. Marsh?" he asked.

"One of the best, sir. There's nobody I would have trusted more."

"And Cantley?"

"I don't know much about him," replied the trainer. "He came to me six months ago from Letford, over in Suffolk."

Gordon Fox did not put any further questions; but he was keenly interested in the case, and an hour later, when the flames had been extinguished, he examined the ruins of the box in which the fire had started. In one corner, under a heap of charred and water-soaked straw, he found an open pocket knife. On the buckhorn handle were carved the initials "B.S.," and these at once suggested a familiar name to him. With a smile of deep meaning, he closed the weapon and put it in his pocket.

CHAPTER II.

THE CLUE OF THE KNIFE—BLACK QUARRY—THE CAPTIVE OF THE ROCK CHAMBER.

BEFORE morning the telegraph was busy flashing in all directions a description of the missing horse, and also one of young Lucas, who was wanted for the serious crime of murder as well as theft. The next day Captain Godfrey was scouring the country with mounted men, but Gordon Fox did not join them. He was busy making inquiries in Newmarket, and with some success. He knew the haunts of the lower class racing element in the old town, and he soon hunted up a man who identified the knife as the property of Barney Sykes, a notorious tout and welsher, who had disappeared some months before and was believed to be at Doncaster. Still better luck in the afternoon. A man was discovered who swore that he had seen Barney Sykes and Fred Cantley talking together at nine o'clock on the previous night at a lonely spot on the edge of the town.

"There's no mistake about it," he continued, "for both men were Letford born, and I hail from there myself."

"Then Sykes would be well acquainted with the country over that way," said the detective. "Is there any good hiding-place in the neighbourhood?"

"The only one I know of is Black Quarry," was the reply, "a couple of miles north of Letford. It's a wild and lonely place, and it hasn't been used for half a century. Nobody ever goes near it nowadays. A man fell over the cliff once, and his body wasn't found for six years."

Half a sovereign changed hands for information that was worth much more. There was no news of any kind by evening, when the search-parties returned.

Gordon Fox was lodged at an hotel in the High Street. The next morning, after a brief interview with Captain Godfrey, he hired a bicycle and rode out of Newmarket in a north-easterly direction. He made inquiries along the way, and the middle of the afternoon found him dismounted by the roadside, looking towards a large tract of woodland that gradually rose and spread over a hill of some height. He hid his bicycle behind a hedge, crossed a field, and struck into the timber.

A cautious tramp of a mile brought the detective to rising ground, and when he had climbed for a considerable distance he bore

to the right, and presently emerged on the higher brink of Black Quarry.

A hundred feet below him, down a sheer precipice of limestone, was a gloomy pool of water, surrounded by dense thickets and large trees.

Looking across, he saw that the opposite side sloped gently up by a rude path that had once been a cart-track.

For five minutes he watched, peering from the overhanging bushes, but saw or heard nothing; and then, as he was about to creep away, his ears caught a faint sound from below. It was the muffled stamp of a horse's hoof.

Gordon Fox retraced his steps as cautiously as he had come, and mounted his bicycle. He pedalled three miles to the little village of Letford, by a road that led partly round the hilly tract of woods, and did not take him more than two miles from the quarry.

He stopped at the Red Lion Inn, and his first step was to wire to Captain Godfrey to join him in the morning.

The evening wore on, and darkness fell. Gordon Fox sat smoking outside the inn until ten o'clock, when he went to bed, and slept for a couple of hours.

He woke with a troubled mind, with a feeling of uneasiness that he could not shake off.

He struck a light, and looked at his watch. It was just half-past twelve o'clock.

He dressed, swung from the low window to the ground, and hastened away to the direction of Black Quarry, which he had previously located by questioning the landlord.

He entered the woods at a point a mile from the village, and by the help of the rising moon, which here and there shone through the foliage, he kept his bearings, and finally came to the abandoned and overgrown cart-tract.

He followed this for half a mile, when it led him up for some distance, and then dipped downwards. He was now within the mouth of the quarry, and as he paused, hesitating to go any farther, a man rose almost at his feet, and struck at him with a heavy stick.

The detective dodged the blow, and grappled with his assailant. The two slipped, fell, and rolled over and over down

"I didn't like the idea of the boy perishing in the flames. I hoisted him on to Black Diamond, mounted behind, and set off like the wind to Black Quarry, where Jeffries had everything fixed up and was waiting for us."

the steep path, coming to a stop within a few inches of the water.

The man did not stir, for he had been stunned by striking his head on a stone. Gordon Fox got to his feet, peered, and listened.

"All quiet!" he told himself. "This scoundrel is Barney Sykes, of course, and it is not likely that he had a confederate. I dare say he has been watching by night and sleeping by day. And now to ascertain if the rest of my theory is correct."

Having securely bound his prisoner—he had a rope with him—Gordon Fox switched on his pocket electric lamp, and crept along the brink of the pool.

He went half-way round it, until he was at the farther side of the quarry, and then he struck into a network of trees and bushes.

Emerging a moment later, he found himself on the threshold of a fairly large rock-chamber at the base of the cliff.

It was completely hidden by the boughs of the trees, and had no doubt been carved out by the old-time quarrymen.

The light streamed within. Dry grass was spread on the rocky floor; and to one side, bound and gagged, lay a lad, with wide-open eyes; but the horse was missing.

The detective bent over the lad, severed his fetters, and took the gag from his mouth.

"Thank, Heaven, sir!" Jim Lucas said faintly, as he sat upright. "I thought I was done for."

"Where is Black Diamond?" exclaimed the detective.

"Gone. He was led away about an hour ago."

"But not by Barney Sykes. I've just had a struggle with the ruffian, and have made him a prisoner."

"That must have been the other man—Ben Jeffries."

"So there were two of them?" muttered the detective.

"Yes, sir. Sykes left with Black Diamond, and then Jeffries went away, meaning to leave me here to starve."

"Where is he taking the horse?"

"He has been altered with white spots," replied the lad, "Sykes is riding him across country to catch the early train at Barstead. The horse is going to London, and then he's to be shipped to France——"

"That's enough!" broke in Gordon Fox. "Can you walk, my boy?"

Jim Lucas could, but not until he had exercised his cramped limbs and the detective had given him some brandy from a flask.

Then the two crept around the pond, paused for a glance at the still unconscious prisoner, and climbed out of the quarry.

CHAPTER III.

THE RACE FOR THE EARLY TRAIN—BARNEY SYKES MAKES A CLEAN BREAST OF IT.

The first flush of dawn was on the sky when Gordon Fox and the rescued lad reached the Red Lion. Captain Godfrey had just arrived, having travelled most of the night by a roundabout course, and was inquiring for the missing guest of the landlord, whom he had roused from sleep.

It was now half-past two o'clock, and a Bradshaw showed that a train for London was due at Barstead at twenty-five minutes past three.

"I know it," said Captain Godfrey. "It really carries a couple of horse boxes."

The landlord led the way to the stable, where he quickly harnessed a bay mare to a trap.

Jim Lucas climbed in with the two men, Gordon Fox cracked the whip and the vehicle went tearing through the quiet village street, and out into the open country.

Five miles to go, and less than three-quarters of an hour to do it in, with hills on the way. The mare pounded the miles behind her, while the morning flashed brighter and brighter.

The train was still there. The guard, who about to blow his whistle, took it from his lips in sheer amazement when the detective shouted at him.

Captain Godfrey dashed to a horse-box at the rear. Inside, a black horse, at once recognised by its master, in spite of the disfiguring white patches made by chemicals.

Inside, also, a little man, with pinched features and a wiry moustache, dressed as a gentleman's servant.

"You scoundrel!" cried the captain.

He seized the little man, dragging him to the platform, and as quickly Jim Lucas pulled Black Diamond out.

Then the train started, rolled swiftly away, with a shrill "Toot-toot!"

"Just in time!" exclaimed Gordon Fox.

Barney Sykes was a picture of misery and fear.

"I'll make a clean breast of it!" he said. "Cantley and I planned to steal the horse, but when we entered the box, hoping to find the lad napping, he was wide awake. He fetched Cantley a stunning blow on the head with a cudgel, and the next instant I whacked him one that tumbled him over like a log.

"The lantern had been upset, setting the straw ablaze, and there wasn't any time to lose. I sort of lost my wits, and clean forgot about Cantley; but I didn't like the idea of the boy perishing in the flames, I hoisted him on to Black Diamond, mounted behind, and set off like the wind to Black Quarry, where Jeffries had everything fixed up, and was waiting for me."

Game to the last, Barney Sykes and Ben Jeffries, refusing to betray their confederates, were in due course convicted, and sentenced to long terms of penal servitude.

THE END.

(*Continued from page* 14.)

chums! The rotters! I suppose they think I'll chuck it up now. If so, they've made a bloomer. I'm more determined than ever!"

And Handforth went back into the caravan, sat down in one of the chairs, and thought out the details of his wonderful scheme.

He was still there when the Remove turned in. De Valerie and Somerton and the other fellows who shared Caravan No. 2 with the other fellows could not fail to notice that relations were somewhat strained between the chums of Study D.

Church and McClure, for example, took care not to come in until everybody else was present. Then they remained as far away from Handforth as possible. Across the big caravan, Handforth fixed a cold, malignant glare upon them.

"I can't see any effect!" remarked De Valerie, cocking his head on one side. "It's no good, Handy—they don't seem to be shrivelling up! You ought to put some more 'fluence on!"

"Fathead!" said Handforth witheringly.

"It's all right—leave him alone," said Church. "We had a bit of a bust up, and I think he's still sore. Don't bother about him. We don't!"

"You—you—you——"

Handforth paused simply because he couldn't think of words that adequately described his feelings. So he commenced undressing, and in less than five minutes he was in bed. He had vented his rage on that bed, too—simply because he couldn't vent it on anything else. The sheets were mixed up with the blankets, the bolster was down at the foot, and the pillow was coming out of its case. Incidentally, Handforth had put his pyjamas on inside out.

"You look as if you've had a merry evening," grinned Handforth minor, looking at his brother critically. "It must be the bracing atmosphere of the moors. What's wrong, Ted? Who's been biting you?"

"Grrrrrrrh!" said Handforth fiercely.

"As bad as that, eh?" grinned Willy. "Poor old Ted! We shall have to steer clear of you, or there'll be a few fireworks! That's the worst of having such a shocking temper. You ought to do something about it old man. I mean, if a stranger came in here now he'd gain a wrong impression."

Whizz!

Handforth's pillow shot across the caravan, and caught Willy full in the face. That cheerful youngster went over backwards, collapsed into Fatty Little, who staggered and crashed aganst the side of the caravan. Dick Goodwin declared that the wooden wall positively bulged out.

"Great pancakes!" gasped Fatty. "You dangerous young idiot!"

Willy grinned, and continued undressing. But he said nothing more to his major. The next time it might be a boot. And, one by one, the fellows got into bed, until at last all was quiet. The lights were turned out, and the juniors prepared themselves for sleep.

But there were three who slept not.

Handforth kept wide awake, determined to go on that convict-hunting expedition. And Church and McClure remained awake because they wanted to see if their leader was really in earnest. If so, they would have to take steps to subdue him.

Nothing happened for well over half an hour.

The little noises of the camp died down. All lights were out, and everything was perfectly still and silent. Even the men had retired. And Church and McClure were just beginning to doze off peacefully when they were aroused.

Handforth sat up in bed.

"You chaps asleep?" he whispered cautiously.

Only silence followed. But Church and McClure heard—and they knew that their leader had not abandoned his project.

CHAPTER V.

NIGHT ON THE MOORS.

HANDFORTH cautiously opened the door of the caravan.

He had his shoes in his hand, and he had only dressed in a hurried fashion. He felt that it would be better to complete his operations outside. He didn't want any interruption.

The night was still and calm, with a few fleecy clouds in the sky, half hiding a crescent moon. The moors were flooded with a dim, uncertain kind of pale radiance. One could see for quite a distance, although no object stood out in definite relief.

"Good!" murmured Handforth. "Just the right kind of night for detective work. Couldn't be better."

He crept away from the caravan, and paused when he came to a little hump of ground. He sat down upon this, and proceeded to complete the operations he had commenced in the caravan. He buttoned his braces, donned his shoes, and so forth.

And in the meantime keen eyes watched him.

Church and McClure were at the window of Caravan No. 2. The very instant their leader had vanished through the door they sprang out of bed. Their one great fear was that he would disappear into the gloom before they could get on his trail.

They had considered matters carefully, and had decided that it would be impossible to let Handy go on this expedition alone. They hated the idea of it—they would have preferred to remain in bed. But for Handforth to go wandering about the moors all by himself was not to be thought of.

Church and McClure decided to protect him.

They would follow close in his rear, and

would see that he came to no harm. After all, this would be better than to actually accompany him, because he would certainly argue. And that might lead to trouble.

They would keep fairly close behind, and see that he didn't lose himself on the moor. But there was still that doubt. Handforth had a big start. Would they be able to dress themselves and get out in time?

They simply flew into their clothes.

"It's all right—he's still here!" breathed Church, peering out of the window. "He's squatting down on a tuft of grass, shoving his boots on. If we hurry up, we shall do it all right."

"Good!" said McClure, as he wrestled with his trousers.

It was a very creditable piece of work. Just as Handforth was setting off from the camp Church and McClure tip-toed down the caravan steps. And they could see the dim, hazy figure of their leader disappearing in the direction of the open moor.

"Come on!" whispered Church. "And don't forget to crouch down. If he catches sight of us, it'll be all up."

"Don't worry!" muttered McClure. "We're better detectives than he is!"

"That's not saying much," breathed Church.

At intervals Handforth would pause, and look round him. But on these occasions he never caught sight of any living soul. Church and McClure managed to remain invisible.

They picked their way cautiously—never showing their figures above the skyline. Bending almost double at times, they kept within reasonable distance of their quarry, and could watch all his movements with ease.

And Handforth was satisfied that he was quite alone, and continued on his way.

Now that he had fairly started upon the hunt, he didn't quite know how to proceed. Somehow, it wasn't so simple, after all. He began to realise that it might be something of a task to locate a solitary individual who was prowling about these moors somewhere within a radius of twenty miles.

And it now began to strike Handforth that Convict No. 530 might have got out of the district altogether. In that case, the very idea of searching at all was absurd. A good deal of Handforth's enthusiasm began to ooze away.

"Oh, rot!" he grunted. "The fellow's bound to be here. He must be! And, what's more, I shall find him."

And, fired with new hope, the amateur detective of the Remove walked on. He decided that he would go round in circles, widening out as he progressed. In this way he would cover every inch of ground.

"There's nothing to beat a scheme like that!" he told himself. The Indians used to do it—either the Indians, or the African blacks. Blessed if I know! Anyhow it's the only way to search properly."

It would have been fairly all right, perhaps, if Handforth had kept to this idea. But his circles were somewhat erratic, and by the time he had completed one he was well over half a mile from his starting-point.

He found himself almost at the summit of a rising tor, which stood out like some grim sentinel on the moor. His figure, as he mounted to the top of that rocky hill, was clearly outlined against the night sky. For a detective to act in this way was incautious, to say the least.

Church and McClure, lower down, paused, waiting.

"Just look at him!" whispered Church. "Did you ever see such an ass? How does he hope to capture anybody like that? He's showing himself all the time!"

"Oh, you know what he is!" said McClure gruffly.

Handforth abruptly vanished.

It seemed quite startling to the two watching juniors. One second their leader's form was there, and the next second it had vanished. In reality, Handforth had merely jumped off a ledge of rock to the soft earth, a few feet below.

And he was now making his way down the other side of the tor.

Just here there grew a big clump of stunted bushes—rather thick and black-looking in the gloom of the night. Church and McClure were just in time to see Handforth plunge into that bush clump.

"We'll wait here until he shows himself again," whispered Church. "Too exposed for us to move on yet."

In the meantime, Handforth had decided to explore that bush thoroughly. There was no telling. Any convict might select a spot like that to spend the night in. And Handy meant to make sure.

And from the other side of the little clump—quite hidden from Church and McClure—a figure appeared. It was a dim, uncertain figure, and it arose from behind a loose boulder of rock.

Handforth emerged from the clump of trees just in time to see the figure approaching. The leader of Study D came to an abrupt halt, his heart giving a big jump.

Inwardly, he had never believed for a moment that he would have his search rewarded. But here was a figure on the moor—a stranger. Handforth felt tremendously excited.

"Hi!" he said, in a hoarse whisper. "Who's that?"

He decided that he wouldn't take any chances. It was better to pounce, and ask questions afterwards. Perhaps the fellow was only a warder, and warders carried guns. Handforth didn't want to be the cause of an unfortunate inquest.

So he pounced.

He gave one swift run, hurled himself upon the stranger, and there was a distinct thud as the two bodies met. Handforth bore the fellow to the ground with the sheer force of his rush.

"Now then!" he hissed. "No messing about! I've got you!"

"Don't—don't hurt me—I'm done!" panted a weak voice.

Handforth was astonished to find that his captive made no attempt to struggle. He lay where he had fallen, with Handforth sprawling over him. And in the dim moonlight Handforth was thrilled by the sight of a drab, nondescript kind of suit—with broad arrows marked upon it at intervals.

The man was Convict No. 530!

It was sheer luck—fool's luck, as they call it. More by chance than anything else, Handforth had encountered the man who had eluded the united efforts of a whole host of warders and police.

And the convict didn't even put up a fight.

Handforth regarded this as a kind of swindle. He became indignant. He had pictured all sorts of desperate battles with the escaped convict—and here was the fellow, meekly pleading for mercy!

"You—you marrowless bounder!" snorted Handforth. "Ain't you going to fight?"

"Don't be hard on me, young 'un!" whispered the convict, his voice breaking. "I—I'm just about through! I can't go on any longer. I haven't tasted a bite of food for over twenty-four hours."

"That's nothing!" said Handforth tartly. "Some chaps fast for weeks!"

"I've been hunted from pillar to post!" muttered the convict feebly. "Do anything you like—but don't hurt me! I'm done for! I shall be glad to get back to that accursed prison. Anything—anything but this!"

Handforth looked down at the smallish figure in disgust.

"Well, you're a fine convict!" he snapped. "Come on! Get up, and I'll take you into camp. We'll keep you a prisoner until the morning, and then hand you over to the warders."

No. 530 began to struggle to his feet.

"All right—I'll go with you!" he said listlessly. "Lead the way."

Handforth gave another sniff, and half turned, and as he did so, the convict's whole attitude abruptly changed. He brought his right hand from behind him, revealing the fact that it contained a big, ugly stick.

Swish!

The stick shot through the air, and, with a snarl, the convict was upon Handforth. The stick descended upon the junior's head with a sickening thud. He was taken absolutely unawares, and hardly felt the blow.

Handforth was merely aware of a sensation of falling, and there was a dull, throbbing feeling in his head. Then everything became absolutely blank. It was over in a flash.

Handforth opened his eyes a second later, and stared up at the hazy, twinkling stars. That throb was still there, and he felt rather chilly. Then he sat up, and was startled to find that he was attired in nothing but his underclothes. Near by lay a pile of rumpled clothing.

"Oh, my goodness!" muttered Handforth blankly.

His head felt as though he had rammed a brick wall. And it was so amazing, because the chap with the stick had only whacked him a second earlier. At least, it only seemed to be a second earlier.

Handforth would have been startled if he could have known that fully twelve minutes had elapsed. Convict No. 530 had made no mistake about that hit. He had scored a bull's-eye.

Handforth staggered to his feet, and placed a hand to the back of his head. He winced. There was a bump there—a swelling that was extremely tender to the touch. But, second by second, Handforth was feeling better.

He shivered again, and as he picked up the convict's discarded clothing, the dreadful truth dawned upon him. The fellow had knocked him out, and had then pinched all his things—leaving the prison garb in its place.

"My only hat!" muttered Handforth dazedly.

Alarm surged through him. He didn't care so much about the loss of his suit. But what would the chaps say when he appeared in camp? What would Church and McClure say?

He—he who had boasted that he would go out on the moor and capture the convict! He would have to crawl back, and admit that he had not only failed, but that the convict had actually bested him. As an example of keen detective work, it was not exactly brilliant.

"Great pip!" muttered Handforth, in a hollow voice. "They—they'll chip me to death over this. The—the awful rotter! Pretending that he was weak and exhausted! He spoofed me completely."

Handforth writhed as he thought of it. He had been hopelessly hoodwinked by the "exhausted" convict.

But it was no good standing there, getting a shocking cold.

Handforth hastily commenced to dress himself in the hateful convict garb. The suit fitted him fairly well, but there was an awful feeling about that coarse, arrow-branded material.

Somehow or other, Handforth felt like a hunted animal as soon as he got into the clothing. And he began to have a slight idea how dreadful it must be for a man who really is a convict, and is escaping from justice. It made Handforth think for a moment—but his feelings against No. 530 were just as bitter as ever.

If the man had put up a fair fight, it wouldn't have mattered so much.

But Handy had been tricked, and knocked on the head from behind. That was what raised his wrath to the utmost. And the thought of going back—the thought of being laughed at by all the fellows—made him get desperate ideas into his head.

Should he go back, or should he wander off somewhere until——

Until what? As far as he could see, there was no alternative. And it suddenly occurred

to him that he might be able to get back unseen, and unheard. Yes, that was it!

He had left everybody asleep, and he was tremendously thankful now that Church and McClure had not come with him. With luck, he would be able to get into the caravan, undress, and don some of his own clothing. Then he would creep out again, and bury the convict suit in some hidden place.

"That's the wheeze!" Handforth told himself. "There's nothing like being brainy! It doesn't matter tuppence about the things the convict took—only an old pair of flannel trousers, and a sports jacket. They'll never be missed."

With new hope rising within him, Handforth crept away from the scene. Church and McClure were not there now—for reasons that I shall explain presently. Handforth had the moor completely to himself.

And he made a bee line for the camp.

It will be as well to make it clear that this bee line was one of Handforth's own particular kind. Nobody else would have called it a bee line. The camp was about a mile distant, straight across the moor. After Handforth had trudged about three miles, he began to wonder what had happened to the camp.

"Great pip!" he muttered suddenly. "They must have moved on!"

It didn't seem to strike Edward Oswald that he was out of his bearings. Handforth never believed that he was wrong in anything—it was always the other party. And it was only after careful thought that he was reluctantly compelled to admit that in some extraordinary way he had lost the Caravan Camp.

The only thing, of course, was to start searching. But it was a heart breaking task. The moor was a most exasperating place at night. Nothing but hidden hollows, rising tors, and long, flat stretches of rolling country without a road or a lane or a footpath.

Considering that Handforth was such a wonderful tracker, his present predicament was doubly unaccountable. He had not only mislaid the camp, but he had actually lost himself.

Then something happened.

"Hands up!" commanded a sharp voice. "No nonsense, now! Up with 'em!"

Handforth nearly jumped a yard into the air. The voice was so unexpected—so surprisingly near. He gave a gulp and twirled round. Two men were running up to him from behind a hummock of rocky ground.

"Yes, it's our man all right, Joe!" said the voice of Warder Mitchell.

Handforth said nothing—he wasn't capable of speech just then. He had never met these gentlemen before, but he could see that they were prison warders. And after the first start, he was relieved.

"So you couldn't make it after all, Barton—eh?" said Warder Mitchell grimly. "We'd begun to suspect that you had escaped from the moor——"

"Wait a minute, George!" interrupted the other warder, as he peered closely into Handy's face. "This—this isn't——"

"What!" shouted Mitchell.

He grasped Handforth's arm, and then looked closer Both the warders had been convinced that they had got their man. There was no mistaking those prison clothes. And the figure, too, was just the right size.

Handforth found his voice, and destroyed all doubt.

"You—you funny fatheads!" he said warmly. "Do you think I'm a convict? Haven't you got more brains than to make a bloomer like that? For two pins I'll biff you on the nose!"

Mitchell frowned.

"One of those youngsters from the School Camp—eh?" he said. "What's the idea of this, my lad? Playing a trick on us? It won't do; you'll get into trouble if you're not careful. Coming out here at the dead of night, dressing up like a convict! You may think it a joke——"

"A joke!" howled Handforth. "My hat! I'm blessed if I can see where the joke comes in! I'm not exactly screaming with merriment, am I? You—you dotty lunatics! I met the convict half an hour ago, and he pinched my clothes."

The two warders exchanged glances.

"You met the convict?" repeated Mitchell sharply.

"Yes; I was looking for him," said Handforth. "But the rotter played a trick on me and biffed me on the napper. He's cracked a hole in my skull as big as your fist, and if it wasn't for my iron will I should be dying! But all detectives have to have iron wills!"

Warder Mitchell nodded slowly, and came to a wise decision.

"The best thing we can do, young man, is to get you back to the camp as soon as possible," he said. "We'll question you there, after we've had a word with Mr. Lee. You don't seem to be quite yourself."

Handforth didn't object—he was feeling pretty rotten, and the thought of tumbling into bed was very enticing. So, twenty minutes later, Nelson Lee was aroused. The warders tried to awaken Lee without any of the others, but were not successful.

I heard them at once, and got dressed at the same time as the guv'nor.

And it was not long before we were in possession of the facts. Nelson Lee heard all that Handforth had to tell, and he was quite concerned in addition to being seriously annoyed.

"It was very wrong of you, Handforth, to leave the camp after my strict instructions to the contrary," he said. "I am thankful that you have not come to any real harm."

"What about my head, sir? Don't you call that real harm?"

"You received an ugly crack, my boy, but your head is fortunately thick," replied

Nelson Lee. "Within a day or two you will be none the worse. Perhaps you can explain where Church and McClure are."

Handforth stared.

"Why, in bed, aren't they, sir?" he said.

"They are not—they are missing."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "I—I expect the fatheads found I was gone, and went out after me. I'll bet a penny to a quid that they've lost themselves on the moors. Just the silly kind of thing they would do—they've got no more sense than a couple of rabbits!"

Handforth had apparently quite lost sight of the fact that he himself had been hopelessly lost before the warders came across him.

He was sent to bed at once, and Nelson Lee conferred with the two warders. The matter was serious. Handforth's encounter proved conclusively that the convict was lurking about in the near vicinity, but now that he was in possession of flannel trousers and a sports coat, he stood more chance of getting clear away.

Instant action was necessary.

So the warders started off at once, with the intention of scouring the moors. And Nelson Lee went with them. Incidentally, I went with Nelson Lee. He tried to stop it at first, but I wasn't having any of it.

It seemed that we were to have some more excitement before the dawn came.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT CHURCH AND McCLURE SAW.

"NOT a sign of him," whispered Church, in a puzzled tone.

"I'm blessed if I can understand it," said McClure. "The fathead's been in that clump of trees for over five minutes. He couldn't have come out of the other side, because we should have spotted him at once. The ground's all clear in that direction."

Handforth's faithful chums were still on the watch.

They had seen their leader disappear into that little clump of bushes, and did not intend to show themselves until he emerged. For if he happened to turn he could easily see them outlined against the sky.

The two juniors had no knowledge of what was actually going on. Just beyond that little patch of bush there was a blind spot. They could not see anything just there.

But it was quite impossible for Handforth to continue his way over the moor without being seen by the watchers. Then, at last, just as the pair was growing rather anxious, a figure appeared.

"There he is!" breathed Church. "I wonder what he's stopped for?"

"Goodness knows," said McClure. "There's no accounting for anything that Handy does. Fancy his coming out to-night

Handforth was astonished to find that his captive made no attempt to struggle. He lay where he had fallen, with Handforth still sprawling over him. And in the dim moonlight, Handforth was thrilled by the sight of a drab, nondescript kind of suit, with broad arrows marked upon it at intervals.

—trying to find a convict on the moor! Of all the dotty ideas, this is about the dottiest!"

"Well, we've got to stick to him until he goes back," declared Church. "We can't leave him in the lurch. It wouldn't do to tell him so, but the poor fathead is as helpless as a two-legged kitten!"

Handforth's chums didn't get a move on until the figure had progressed for about a hundred yards. They were not to know they were now following Convict No. 530. The figure was still wearing the sports coat and flannel trousers, to say nothing of the old slouch hat which Handforth had donned.

So Church and McClure could hardly be blamed for making the error. Handforth, of course, was lying down there, just beyond that clump of trees, in a state of coma, and attired in nothing more substantial than his summer underclothing.

Firmly convinced that they were on Handforth's track, the two juniors crept on. And before much time had elapsed they were becoming very impatient. Their quarry appeared to be walking fast, and he was moving straight away from the camp in a direct line.

"What on earth is he up to?" asked Church, in a gruff voice. "Does the ass think that he's going to walk to Princetown, or what? I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he goes to the giddy prison. When he gets one of his detective fits, he's hardly responsible for his actions."

"Oh, what's the good of talking?" grunted McClure. "And we'd better keep our voices low, too, or he might hear us. I'll tell you what. If he doesn't turn back within the next half-hour, we'll go up to

him, and tell him what we think of him. Then he'll get some sense, perhaps."

Church entirely approved of this idea, and the pair continued to trudge on. It was not pleasant work. They had to take all sorts of precautions to prevent themselves being seen.

For Handforth, in front—or the person they thought to be Handforth—was now far more cautious than he had been at first. At intervals he would pause, and look all about him, as if to convince himself that he was unwatched.

And it speaks well for the astuteness of Church and McClure that they were not even once seen or heard. As trackers, they proved thmselves to be quite adept in the art.

But it was very tiresome, all the same.

"It's getting near the time limit," murmured McClure, after an age. "Shall we reveal ourselves now?"

"Not yet," replied Church. "I may be wrong, but it seems to me that there's a bit of a lane just in front. And isn't that a cottage tucked away there? No, not that direction—over here!" he added, pointing.

"By jingo, yes!" said McClure. "But why on earth has he come here?"

"I'm no good at riddles!" grunted the other.

They lessened the distance between them and their quarry now, for they wanted to see exactly what Handforth was about to do. They saw the figure approach the cottage, and then for several minutes it remained perfectly still.

The night was now well advanced, and the moon was still coyly hiding behind that filmy layer of white clouds. And the moor lay utterly sombre and lonely. As far as the eye could see there was not a single light. There were no sounds. It seemed that this place was completely cut off and isolated from the rest of the world.

"My goodness!" breathed Church. "I wouldn't like to live here for long!"

"It gives you the creeps!" said McClure, nodding. "I wonder—— Hallo! What's he doing now? Why, I believe he's going up to that cottage——"

They had been crouching behind some loose rocks, and now they peered steadily round, and stared at the figure in front of them. Handforth's double had cautiously opened the gate in front of the little cottage, and was now quietly walking up towards the tiny front door. And this was the cottage that was occupied by the peaceful old hermit, Mr. Gregson.

What strange development was this?

Church and McClure were surprised by what they had seen, but now they were positively amazed.

For the visitor proceeded to tap lightly upon the door. Although he was fully two hundred yards away, Church and McClure heard those taps. Then they waited.

"Oh, I expect he's feeling thirsty!" said Church, who was getting fed up. "It would be just like Handy to knock somebody up in the middle of the night just to ask for a drink of water!"

"Oh, go easy!" protested McClure. "Even Handy wouldn't do a thing like that—particularly when he's out on the moor for the purpose of capturing escaped convicts. There's more in this than meets the eye, my son."

They waited, intensely curious, to see what would happen.

Nothing very exciting. For after a few minutes the door of the cottage was cautiously opened, and after a brief pause the visitor was admitted. The door closed again.

And the moor became more silent than ever.

"Well, what do you make of that?" asked Church, rather blankly. "Handy was admitted into that cottage—taken in as though he had been expected! I say, there's something fishy about this!"

"Seems to be," agreed McClure. "What shall we do?"

"Better creep up, and have a squint round."

There seemed no other course to adopt, and so the two juniors made their way very carefully and cautiously towards the cottage. They did not allow themselves to be seen in the open.

And, at last, they were successful in getting quite close to the east wall of the little dwelling. They had chosen this side because there was no window, and it was impossible for them to be seen. In fact, Church and McClure were proving themselves to be quite clever in their amateur detective work.

Having reached this safety zone, they cautiously crept round. But although they listened intently, and used their eyes to the best advantage, they heard no sound whatever, and saw nothing unusual.

"Well, it's a mystery!" said Church. "Just fancy Handforth going into this place, and keeping quiet! I should have thought his voice would have been heard as easy as anything. There's something about it that I don't like."

"Same here," breathed McClure. "What shall we do?"

"I think we'd better go back."

"To camp?"

"Yes."

"But what for?"

"We'll wake up Mr. Lee, and tell him all about it," said Church. "I don't like the way things are going."

"Neither do I," said McClure. "But I don't think we'd better bother Mr. Lee—he might not see the thing in the same light. we should only get ourselves into trouble. I suggest that we wake Nipper up!"

"All right—perhaps he'll do."

The pair, having come to a decision, lost no time.

They could do nothing at the cottage without actually knocking, and making ju-

quiries. And they hesitated to do that. There was something so strange about the behaviour of the supposed Handforth that they couldn't resign themselves to the conclusion that everything was in order.

Handforth had frankly come out to search for his missing convict. Yet he had disappeared into this cottage under mysterious circumstances. The two juniors decided that the thing was too big for them.

So they cautiously made their way back to the open moor, and as soon as all fear of being seen was over, they broke into a brisk trot. And after about a mile and a half of this progress they came within sight of four figures.

The encounter was quite unexpected.

Church and McClure had just topped a rise, and below them there was a declivity in the moor with another rise just beyond. As they topped their piece of prominent ground, so the four figures appeared on the opposite side of the hollow.

Church and McClure came to an abrupt halt.

"My hat!" panted Church. "Warders, I expect."

"Well, we can't avoid meeting 'em," said McClure. "Might as well make the best of it, and explain that we're doing a bit of running exercise, or something. They can't hurt us. The moor's public property."

They commenced trotting again, and within a few moments came up to the quartette. The members of this little party were, needless to say, Nelson Lee and myself and the two warders from Dartmoor Prison.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, as the juniors arrived. "So here you are! Well, Church and McClure, what have you got to say for yourselves? What are you doing out on the moor at this time of night."

"Mr. Lee!" gasped Church, startled.

"We—we followed Handforth, sir," said McClure quickly. "You see, he had a dotty idea about capturing the convict, and he started off on his own. We couldn't see him running into danger, and so we got on his track."

"Quite so—but why did you not return earlier?" asked Lee.

"We've been following Handforth all the time, sir," replied McClure. "For some strange reason he vanished into a little cottage——"

"What?" said Warder Mitchell sharply.

"That's right," said Church. "We left him right across the moor——"

"There is something wrong about this," broke in Nelson Lee. "You'll probably be surprised to know, my boys, that Handforth is at present in bed. He is probably sleeping by this time, and he is——"

"In—in bed!" ejaculated Church. "But—but that's all wrong, sir—he can't be! We followed him!"

"Handforth encountered the convict, and the latter stunned the boy," said Nelson Lee quietly. "It is quite evident that you have been following the convict, under the impression that he was Handforth."

Church and McClure were aghast at this sudden revelation.

"Oh, but that's impossible, sir!" ejaculated McClure. "We know it was Handforth. We saw his hat and his coat and——"

"The convict deprived Handforth of his clothing and donned it himself," interrupted Lee. "I can quite understand your error. This information is of the utmost importance, boys. Tell everything in detail."

Handforth's chums, although utterly startled by what they had learned, lost no time in describing their full adventures. Nelson Lee and the two warders listened with great attention.

"At first I had looked upon this escapade with disapproval," said Lee, at length. "But it seems that everything worked out for the best. For now we have a direct clue regarding the whereabouts of this convict."

Warder Mitchell scratched his head.

"I'll be hanged if I can understand it," he said bluntly. "It's a bit of a puzzle to me, sir. You're sure that the man went to that little cottage along the moor, young gentlemen?"

"Positive," said the juniors.

"He was admitted after knocking?"

"Yes."

"He didn't break in?" persisted the warder.

"No, of course not," said Church. "He distinctly rapped on the door, and after a few moments it was opened, and he went inside. We waited for a time, and scouted about a bit, but it was no good. You see, we thought the fellow was Handforth, and couldn't understand why he had gone into that cottage."

"And it's still more puzzling now that we know he's a convict," said Warder Mitchell. "You see, Mr. Lee, that cottage is occupied by an old gentleman named Mr. Gregson—one of the best, I should imagine. We've known him for many a day. Quite a character in these parts. I can't possibly picture him inviting an escaped convict into his parlour!"

"Well, the fact remains that these boys saw the man enter that dwelling," said Nelson Lee. "The only thing to do, as far as I can see, is to hurry to the place, and see what is happening."

"You're right, sir," agreed the warders.

And in a few moments the party set off. Nelson Lee did not attempt to send Church and McClure back to the camp—they came along with us. And at length, after a long trudge, we arrived at that little cottage.

The warders made no bones about it.

They went straight to the front door, and rapped upon the woodwork. And we waited in a kind of clump on the little gravel path, wondering what the result of this investigation was to be.

I was as much astonished as the warders, for I had seen Mr. Gregson, and had, indeed, chatted with him. There was nothing what-

ever to suggest that he was the kind of man to harbour a fugitive from Dartmoor Convict Settlement.

We did not wait long.

The sound of a key turning in the lock came to our ears, the door opened, and the light of a candle shone into our eyes. And there stood Mr. Gregson, attired in his dressing gown, peering out inquiringly.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE VANISHED CONVICT.

"WELL, well!" said Mr. Gregson. "What's all this? Why, Mitchell, has anything happened? What's all the excitement about?"

The warder coughed.

"Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Gregson, but we'd like to have a few words, if you don't mind," he said. "Hope we haven't dragged you out of bed."

The old man laughed.

"Well, it's not usual for me to be anywhere else but in bed at this time of night," he said drily. "Never mind, Mitchell. Don't worry about me. I see you have some friends with you. Come in—come in! Don't stand out there in the darkness."

He went back into the little lobby, and led the way into the living room. Nelson Lee and the warders followed, with Church and McClure and myself bringing up the rear. Mr. Gregson set the candle down to the table.

"Well, gentlemen?" he asked, with mild curiosity.

"Let me introduce Mr. Nelson Lee," said Warder Mitchell. "We were talking about Mr. Lee this evening, Mr. Gregson. He's in command of the school camp, just over the ridge."

Mr. Gregson bowed.

"This is an unexpected honour, Mr. Lee," he said. "I did not anticipate having such a distinguished visitor in my humble cottage. Am I very curious in wondering why you have called upon me at such an unusual hour?"

I could not help noticing that Mr. Gregson's manner was somewhat different to what it had been during our earlier meeting. His voice seemed slightly more refined, and he was evidently putting the tone on for the guv'nor's benefit. There was no indication of nervousness in his bearing.

"I thing I will leave the explanations to our mutual friend, Mitchell," replied Nelson Lee.

The warder coughed again.

"The fact is, Mr. Gregson, it's about this convict of ours," he said awkwardly. "I think you know that No. 530 escaped, and is still at large?"

"Yes, you told me."

"Well, it seems that some of these boys were out and about during the night," went on the warder. "To cut it short, one of the youngsters met the convict, and there was a bit of an argument. The young gentleman was knocked silly for a time, and No. 530 took his clothing."

"Indeed," said the old man. "I am sorry to hear this."

"The lad isn't very much hurt—just a bump on the head," continued Mitchell. "But that's not the point I'm getting at, sir. These two other boys were out at the same time," he went on, indicating Church and McClure. "And they've told us a rather curious story concerning the movements of the convict."

I was watching Mr. Gregson closely, and he did not move a hair. His expression was one of slightly bored interest.

"And am I connected with this nocturnal affair?" he inquired, smiling.

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Gregson," said Mitchell, with a cough. "But it seems that these young gentlemen saw the convict come to your door. They were watching from behind some rocks——"

"My door?" repeated the old man, interrupting.

"Yes," said Church. "The fellow came right up to your front door, and knocked."

Mr. Gregson looked very keen now.

"This is most remarkable," he said. "Are you quite sure of this, my boy? I have been in the cottage during the whole night, and I heard nothing whatever of this knock. Indeed, I was fast asleep when you first arrived, and only just had time to attire myself as you now see me."

"There's more in it than that, Mr. Gregson," said the warder. "The boys say that the convict not only knocked, but that he was admitted, and the door closed after him."

"Ridiculous," said the old man, showing the first signs of feeling. "Perfectly preposterous! What nonsense have you been saying, boys? Not a soul has come to this cottage, and there is no question about the convict. He did not come here and he has never stepped foot inside the place."

There was an awkward silence for a few moments, and the situation was rather tense.

Church and McClure were looking astonished, but in no way startled. Both the warders seemed very uncomfortable, and Nelson Lee was watching Gregson closely. I was engaged in the same occupation.

What was the actual truth concerning this affair?

Had Church and McClure made a mistake? Did Mr. Gregson know anything about the convict? Or was there somebody else in the house who might have admitted the man? The air seemed to be full of possibilities.

"Of course, Mr. Gregson, I don't wish to doubt your word," said Mitchell, at length. "You quite understand that this is my duty, and I must perform it. We have been told that this man came here, and our only course was to look into the matter."

"I see—I see," said the old man. "But you ought to have had more sense than to

disturb me at this hour of the night. The whole thing is preposterous. Why on earth should the convict come to this cottage? The boys have probably been playing one of their practical jokes."

Warder Mitchell looked at Church and McClure, and frowned.

"Oh, you needn't think we made a bloomer," said Church promptly. "The convict came to this door, and knocked on it, and a minute later the door was opened. Do you think we can't see? Do you think we haven't got any ears? We're not quite such fatheads as all that."

"You are absolutely sure, boys?" asked Lee

"Positive, sir."

Mr. Gregson frowned.

"Well, what is to be done?" he inquired. "I am not asking you to accept my word against that of these boys. Perhaps they are right—perhaps these things have been happening while I slept. I can only assure you that I know nothing whatever about the matter, and the information comes as a complete surprise to me."

The other warder thought that it was about time for him to say something.

"We know you, Mr. Gregson—and we wouldn't doubt you," he said gruffly. "But it's just possible that you may be a bit too kind hearted. This fellow Barton—No. 530—is a very mild sort of man, and a bit of an actor. It struck me that he might have come pleading to you with one of his usual yarns. It don't do to be too generous, sir."

"Are you intimating that I might have sheltered this man?"

"I didn't exactly say so, sir——"

"But that is what you meant," interrupted Mr. Gregson. "You are quite wrong. I have never set eyes on No. 530, and I am absolutely certain that he never came to this cottage. I think the boys must have been dreaming."

Again there was an awkward pause.

"Well, sir, I suppose we'd better go," said Warder Mitchell, at length. "At the same time, it'll be our duty to take a look through the cottage—just as a matter of form. We don't doubt your word, Mr. Gregson but it's part of our job. I hope you'll understand."

Mr. Gregson nodded.

"I was expecting it," he said coldly. "Very well—search to your heart's content. If you find this convict I shall be more delighted than anybody. It is very unfortunate that such an affair as this should have happened on the very first night of my friend's arrival."

I saw the warders exchange a rapid, significant glance,

"Your friend?" repeated Mitchell quickly.

"Yes—he turned up late in the evening, having walked over from the railway," replied Mr. Gregson. "Being tired, he went to bed at once, and I rather fancy he is fast asleep. I was hoping that he wouldn't be disturbed."

The very air seemed to be electrical. The knowledge that another man was in the cottage changed the situation considerably. The presence of such a man was more than significant.

It was not as though Mr. Gregson was in the habit of entertaining visitors. It was totally opposed to his usual procedure. And that this man should have arrived at such a time as this was doubly remarkable.

Of course, everybody at once jumped to the conclusion that Mr. Gregson's guest was none other than Convict No. 530. Indeed, it seemed quite obvious. The thing was as plain as anything could be. And I wondered why Mr. Gregson had made such an elaborate attempt to get out of the thing.

"You mean your friend Willis?" asked Mitchell. "You referred to him last night, sir. From a London office, I think? A Mons hero?"

"Yes," said the old hermit. "I regard this as the most unfortunate occurrence that could have taken place. Month after month I have lived here alone—peaceful, quiet and on good terms with everybody. And on the very first occasion a friend comes to visit me I am suspected of harbouring a convict! And my friend is suspected of being a convict! It is positively scandalous."

Warder Mitchell scratched his chin.

"I see your point, sir, but duty is duty," he said stolidly. "If we left without searching the cottage, and having a few words with young Mr. Willis, we should get it pretty hot from them above us."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Much as I regret this invasion, Mr. Gregson. I must confess that I agree with the warders," he said. "Surely you must understand that it is only a matter of duty? It is hardly fair to be annoyed with them."

"Well, well!" said the old man gruffly. "Get it over as quickly as you can—that is all I say"

"I'll tell you what, sir," put in Church shrewdly. "Perhaps the convict was admitted by this other man. I don't care what Mr. Gregson says— the convict came here, and he was allowed to enter!" he added defiantly.

"We saw him with our own eyes," added McClure.

Mr. Gregson flashed a look of anger at them.

"Am I to be called a liar in my own house by these impertinent boys?" he asked harshly. "This is getting beyond a joke, Mitchell! I insist upon you completing your work, and getting out! I have had enough nonsense."

Warder Mitchell did not relish his task, and he plainly showed it. And soon

afterwards he and his companion were making a thorough search of the cottage. Nelson Lee and I assisted, leaving Church and McClure in the living room.

The warders were plainly suspicious, although they tried their utmost not to show it. And it so happened that I was near at hand when the stranger came into the scene.

Willis, the visitor, was brought downstairs by Mitchell. He was yawning prodigiously, and seemed only half awake. He was attired in an old dressing gown, slippers, and pyjamas. And he was escorted by the warder. The others came down at about the same time.

The cottage had been searched, and Willis was the only discovery.

He was a smallish man—just about the same size as the convict—and not older than twenty-four or twenty-five. His hair was brushed straight back, and I imagined that when he was dressed he would look very smart and dapper.

"Well, what's all the fuss?" he asked plaintively. "Can't a fellow have some sleep now-a-days? After a whole day's journey, too! It's a bit too bad, Mr. Gregson, to have all these people clattering about in the middle of the night."

"I can't help it, Willis—it's the fault of this infernal convict," snapped Mr. Gregson. "Just because he's at liberty, everybody seems to imagine he's taken refuge in my cottage. I'm tired of it!"

Willis laughed.

"Oh, it's all right, grand-dad!" he said lightly. "There are worse troubles at sea, I daresay. All I hope is that the gentlemen don't mistake me for the Dartmoor bird! I don't look much like a convict—at least, I hope I don't!"

He lighted a cigarette, and calmly looked round. The warders were regarding him closely—not that they needed to make any careful examination. One glance had satisfied them that Willis was not the man they were after.

They knew the convict well, and by no stretch of imagination could Willis be mistaken for him. Willis was the same size, but there all resemblance ended. To make the thing absolutely conclusive, Willis had a livid, ugly scar across his chin. It was a relic of the Great War, and there was no possibility of that scar being a fake. The escaped convict had no scar.

Warder Mitchell was very apologetic.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Gregson—but it seems that we were wrong," he said. "It's all the fault of these boys, darn 'em! I might have known that they'd fool us in some way or another!" he added, shooting an angry glance at the juniors.

"Well, I like that!" snorted Church. "I tell you the man came here——"

"That will do, boys," interrupted Nelson Lee quietly. "It is quite evident that the convict is not here, and we are merely wasting time in remaining—to say nothing of annoying Mr. Gregson and his guest. I think it is our plain duty to leave at once, Mitchell," he added.

"Yes, sir," said the warder promply.

And no further time was lost.

We bade the old hermit and his guest good night, and we were ushered out of the cottage. The door closed, and we were left standing on the little garden path. Both the warders were perfectly satisfied that they had been fooled.

"I hope you'll deal with them boys pretty severely, sir," said Mitchell gruffly. "It's a bit thick when youngsters like that start interfering——"

"We didn't interfere!" interrupted Church hotly. "We saw that convict come here, and you can talk until you're blue in the face—we know we were right! This is all we get for trying to help justice!"

"Well, we searched that cottage, and there wasn't a sign of anything," declared Mitchell. "We know Mr. Gregson, and we wouldn't suspect him of anything like that. He's not the kind of man to narbour a convict. If you boys didn't do it deliberate, you must have made a mistake. That's all."

The juniors didn't argue—for the simple reason that I nudged them as an indication not to. I had seen that Nelson Lee was looking at them keenly. He didn't want them to say any more.

And after we had walked along the moorland road for some little distance we parted from our two friends in uniform. They went on towards the village to make inquiries there.

Nelson Lee and I and Handforth's chums went off in the direction of the camp. But, somehow, I had an idea that the adventures of the night were not over.

CHAPTER VIII.

NELSON LEE DOES THE TRICK!

NELSON LEE came to a halt after we had walked a short distance. The little cottage was hidden behind a rocky tor.

"I want to have a few words with you, boys," said the guv'nor.

"I'm bursting to speak, sir!" broke out Church eagerly. "There's something fishy about this business! I know it, sir! That old man was spoofing—he diddled the warders!"

I looked at the juniors closely.

"Are you really certain about that convict——"

"Oh, come off it!" interrupted McClure impatiently. "We thought the chap was Handy—you know that. He came right across the moor, and made a bee-line for Gregson's cottage. He knocked, and the door was opened. We couldn't under-

stand it because we thought that Handforth——"

"All right, McClure—you need not enlarge further," said Nelson Lee. "I accept your story in every detail. I am convinced that the convict entered that cottage."

"But, if so, where did he go to?" I asked.

"You seem to forget, Nipper, that a period of at least an hour elapsed before we arrived on the scene," replied Nelson Lee. "During that time the convict could have changed into a completely new outfit, and started off on his way to liberty. But, somehow, I fancy that the explanation is different."

"It's queer about that visitor—Willis," I said slowly

"Yes—very queer."

"You think he's connected with the mystery, sir?"

"I do.

"But how?" I asked. "I can't make head or tail——"

"I think it will soon become clear," interrupted Nelson Lee smoothly. "I have made up my mind to settle this affair at once—but it is a whim of mine to accomplish my object single-handed. The warders can take their man afterwards."

I looked at the guv'nor eagerly.

"What's the wheeze, sir?" I inquired. "I knew you had something up your sleeve!'

"I was not unobservant during my survey of the cottage," said Lee drily. "And I noticed several positive indications that Gregson was lying. For example the oil-stove in the little kitchen was distinctly warm—proving that it had been alight about half-an-hour before our arrival. Gregson declared that he had only just got out of bed."

"I thought we might find Handy's clothes, sir.' I remarked.

"Oh, no!" said Lee. "Gregson would not be so incautious as that. However, although we did not find Handforth's clothing. I saw something that was practically as good. Upon the polished linoleum there were two or three distinct impressions of revolving rubber heels—and I know full well that Handforth has recently been wearing——"

"That's right, sir," put in Church quickly. "My hat! What eyes you have! Handy put those rubber heels on only last week."

"Exactly" said Lee. "No convict wears such heels, and I took particular notice that Gregson's boots were plain leather—there were several pairs lying about. The inference was clear. Somebody wearing Handsforth's boots had been in the cottage during the night."

"Then—then we were right all the time!" breathed McClure. "I'm blessed

The stick shot through the air, and, with a snarl, the convict was upon Handforth. The stick descended upon the junior's head with a sickening thud.

if I hadn't begun to suspect that we'd been dreaming, or something!"

Nelson Lee regarded us steadily.

"Well, boys, I don't like to send you back to camp alone," he said. "Yet I cannot take you with me on this expedition. There may be danger. However, you may accompany me back to the cottage and wait outside."

"But——"

"Don't question me, Nipper," interjected Lee "Do as you are told."

I subsided, and we all commenced walking back to the cottage. I knew well enough that the guv'nor had got the whole thing clear in his mind. But for the life of me I couldn't get the hang of it.

Where had the convict vanished to?

That was the puzzling question. The prison officials had no suspicions against the elderly Mr. Gregson—probably because they had been in the habit of seeing the old man week after week, and month after month. They had grown accustomed to passing the time of day with the old fellow. He was such a fixture on the moor that the very idea of him helping a stray convict seemed out of the question.

We arrived at the gate of the cottage, and paused.

Nelson Lee motioned us to stay there, but I winked at Church and McClure, and nudged them. I followed the guv'nor up the little garden path, and the other juniors remained in the road. They had sense enough to realise that Nelson Lee would not object if I alone accompanied him.

Rap—rap!

Nelson Lee gave two sharp knocks, and

then waited. It was only a few seconds before the door was opened; and old Gregson stood there. There was a frown on his face as he gazed at us.

"This is getting quite beyond a joke, Mr. Lee," he said coldly. "Am I to be continually disturbed throughout the whole night?"

"I regret that I should trouble you again so soon, Mr. Gregson, but I should greatly appreciate a few words in private," said Nelson Lee. "The warders have gone."

"Interfering busybodies!" snapped Gregson. "It's just about time they learned a little sense! Well, what do you want? I will tell you frankly that I resent this intrusion!"

"I shall not remain here long," said Nelson Lee. "I can assure you, Mr. Gregson, that I have not sought this interview without an excellent reason. You may remember that one of my boys was struck down by the convict, and I am personally interested."

Mr. Gregson grunted.

"What is that to me?" he asked. "Good gracious! What do I know about this infernal convict? Why should you come pestering——"

"I strongly advise you to calm yourself," urged Lee quietly.

Mr. Gregson shrugged his shoulders, and stepped aside.

"We cannot talk here," he exclaimed. "Come indoors—but remember, my patience will not last for very long. The boy, too? Oh, well—there seems to be no end to this nonsense."

He spoke with irritable impatience, and Nelson Lee and I entered. I noticed that Church and McClure still remained at the gate, and I felt a bit sorry for them. I knew well enough that they were longing to join us—but they had orders not to come in.

They were intensely curious to know what was going on, for it seemed rather pointless to them that Nelson Lee had returned to the cottage. They disobeyed orders to the extent of creeping up to the front door, and peeping in—for the door had been left slightly ajar.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee and I were in the living-room. Gregson was facing us, and Willis was sitting over by the old-fashioned fireplace, smoking. In spite of the peaceful air of the place, there was a certain tenseness in the room.

"Well?" said Mr. Gregson.

"It is not my intention to waste any time, Mr. Gregson," said Nelson Lee quietly. "But there is one action that must be performed at once—in the interests of justice. You'll pardon me, I am sure!"

The next second Lee acted with the rapidity of a tiger.

He gave one swift, forward movement. Something metallic gleamed in his hands, and for an instant he appeared to be struggling with the amazed Mr. Gregson.

Click! Click!

Lee stepped back, a quaint smile on his lips. The hermit stood before him, securely handcuffed. The thing had been done so rapidly that I was hardly able to believe the evidence of my own eyes.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" panted Mr. Gregson hoarsely.

"It means, Mr. Barton, that your little game was not quite clever enough to deceive me," said Nelson Lee. "Quite a brainy notion, I will agree, but I have no doubt that you would have hoodwinked the warders ——"

"Curse you!" snarled Willis, on the other side of the room.

He leapt from the chair, and grabbed at something in one of his hip pockets.

Crack!

Willis held a revolver, and even as he pulled it out, his finger pressed on the trigger. The bullet sang past Nelson Lee's shoulder, and splintered the glass of a picture-frame on the opposite wall.

It was time for action.

My heart was in my mouth. I expected to see the guv'nor fall to the ground, mortally hurt or killed. The next shot might come at any second. Willis was mad with sudden rage.

Nelson Lee stood perfectly still. He hadn't moved an inch—for he instinctively knew that the next bullet would come if he attempted to gain his own revolver. And the whole affair was over in a flash.

Just near me there was a shelf, with a heavy, ornamental vase standing on it. I didn't hesitate. With one swift movement, I grabbed the vase, and sent it hurtling across the room. Willis didn't even see it coming.

Crash!

The vase struck the man on the side of the head--just as he was pulling the trigger for the second time. The weapon went off, but the muzzle had been jerked upwards, and the bullet sped harmlessly into the sea.

The man dropped to the floor, dazed.

"See that Barton doesn't get away!" shouted Lee.

He leapt across to Willis, and before the man could get to his feet, or even recover from the effects of the blow, he was also handcuffed. Blood was streaming from the side of Willis' head, but he was not much hurt. He had only suffered a comparatively slight gash.

Church and McClure, tremendously excited by the shooting, had come dashing in, forgetting all about their orders. And they were just in time to lend a hand. For several minutes there was a fierce struggle.

The two crooks, although manacled, put up a desperate fight.

But it was only brief. Church and McClure held Gregson while the guv'nor and I dragged Willis across the room. And in less than five minutes the pair were securely bound, back

to back. In this position they were as helpless as a pair of trussed fowls. But they cursed vigorously.

"You—you mad fool!" shouted Gregson. "What's the meaning of this? I'll have the law on you for this outrage——"

"Come, come," interrupted Lee. "You won't help yourself by adopting that tone, my friend. And bluff will be quite useless now. You see, I am fully acquainted with the little scheme."

As he spoke, Nelson Lee tugged at a portion of Gregson's grizzly beard. It did not actually come away, but it partially left its moorings, so to speak. Lee tried an eyebrow, and this came away completely.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Church, open-eyed.

"Well, Mr. Barton, what have you got to say now?" inquired Nelson Lee. "You see, I was not deceived for a moment. When I first set eyes on you I knew that you were wearing a disguise—and, considering the brief time at your disposal, you did extremely well."

The man had nothing to say—at least, nothing intelligible. He went off into several reels of foul and bitter language. His disappointment was tremendous. Liberty had seemed certain—until Lee had intervened.

"Church, put your best foot foremost, and hurry into the village," said Nelson Lee. "You will find the warders there, I am sure. Bring them back with you at once—and also a policeman, if one is available. Barton must be handed over to the warders, but they have no authority to take the other man. The police will require him."

Church sped off at once, only too eager to be of service. And as he was hurrying down into the little moorland village he was aware that the first gleam of dawn was appearing in the sky. This had been an all night job—although, of course, in June the dawn comes at a very early hour.

Church was lucky.

He found the warders actually in converse with a member of the local constabulary. The latter had been prowling about all night, with the assistance of a bicycle. But he had nothing to report.

The three men were electrified by Church's announcement.

"You say that Mr. Lee has collared our man?" demanded Mitchell.

"Yes—he was Gregson all the time!"

"What!"

"Fact!" said Church.

"Don't try to fool me, young man!" declared Warder Mitchell. "We've known Gregson for months, and Barton only escaped yesterday morning. You can't tell me anything foolish like that——"

"All right—come and see for yourself," interrupted Church. "I don't want you to believe me. I'm just as much in the dark as you are. But you can't get away from facts.

The three men still looked rather sus-

picious, but they lost no time in hurrying to the cottage. And when they arrived they were astounded to find the two men handcuffed, and bound back to back. Another change had taken place. By means of hot water and soap and other things Nelson Lee had completely removed the make-up from Barton's face.

And he was now revealed as a fairly youngish man, refined-looking except for his crafty eyes, and scowling with rage and disappointment.

"By thunder!" said Mitchell, at once. "That's our man!"

"I deliver him into your charge, Mitchell," said Nelson Lee. "With regard to Willis, I rather fancy the police will require him. Until to-night he has been known to you by the name of Gregson."

Warder Mitchell stared.

"But--but that man's not Gregson, sir!" he protested.

"He does not look like Gregson—but disguise makes a great difference," smiled Nelson Lee. "I think we can be going now——"

"Hold on, sir," interrupted the warder. "I'd like to know how you got on to the game. And I must admit that I'm still puzzled."

"Yet there is nothing in it—and the scheme is certainly not new," replied Lee. "You see, these two men are brothers—there is no question about that. The resemblance is obvious. I imagine that they were trained in their younger days for the theatrical profession, for they are both excellent actors, and skilled in the art of make-up."

"Barton was an actor, sir," said one of the warders. "His forgery was connected with some theatrical contract or other."

"I thought I was not far wrong," said Lee. "Well, it needs no great imagination to understand what took place. Barton's brother evidently made arrangements well in advance. As soon as he knew that the man was sent to Dartmoor he came here and established himself in this cottage, wearing a very distinctive disguise—a disguise which could be equally well adopted by his brother, and at a moment's notice. The two voices, you may have observed, are very much alike."

"Now you mention it, sir, I do notice it," said Mitchell.

"The idea was quite simple," continued Lee. "You knew this man as an old hermit. He took particular pains to make himself very agreeable to every warder that came his way. And so he gained the confidence of all. His plan was to stay here until his brother gained an opportunity to escape. That opportunity might be a month in coming, or it might be a year."

"No. 530 has been with us for ten months, sir."

"You see, it was not a very rapid job," said Nelson Lee. "But the brother was patient. He continued his life here, and he was so thoroughly 'into' the character of the old man that he temporarily lost his own identity. Then his brother escaped, as he had been hoping all along. The convict arrived, and the first thing to be done was to ring the changes."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Why, the brother removed his disguise, and Barton immediately donned it," said Lee. "He became Gregson, and was able to act the part because he is the same size, has the same mannerisms, and very much the same voice. The brother, whom we know as Willis, is the unfortunate possessor of that livid scar across his chin. In this instance it served him well, for under no circumstances could he be mistaken for the convict, and the slight facial resemblance would never be noticed unless particularly pointed out. The convict himself, wearing the Gregson disguise, was quite safe, for he was an established character in the district."

"Very clever, sir—very smart," said Warder Mitchell.

"Exactly; but Barton made a great mistake in changing clothes with Handforth," continued Nelson Lee. "He would have done far better if he had come straight to this cottage in his present garb. But he was tempted by opportunity, and thus brought the whole scheme to ruin. But for that encounter with Handforth, I dare say you would have lost your convict for good."

. . . . . .

And didn't Handforth crow!

The next day, when all the facts were known, and all the camp was talking about it, Handforth strutted about, declaring that he was solely responsible for the capture of the desperate convict.

But as nobody took any particular notice of him, it didn't matter. The affair was over, and we should have cause to remember our short sojourn on Dartmoor. And now we were booked for Barnstaple, Ilfracombe—and then Wales.

And all sorts of adventures were ahead.

THE END.

Printed and Published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd. The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad, 11/- per annum; 5/6 for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited; and for Canada: The Imperial News Co. (Canada), Limited.