GRAND SUMMER HOLIDAY ADVENTURE SERIES BEGINS IN THIS NUMBER !

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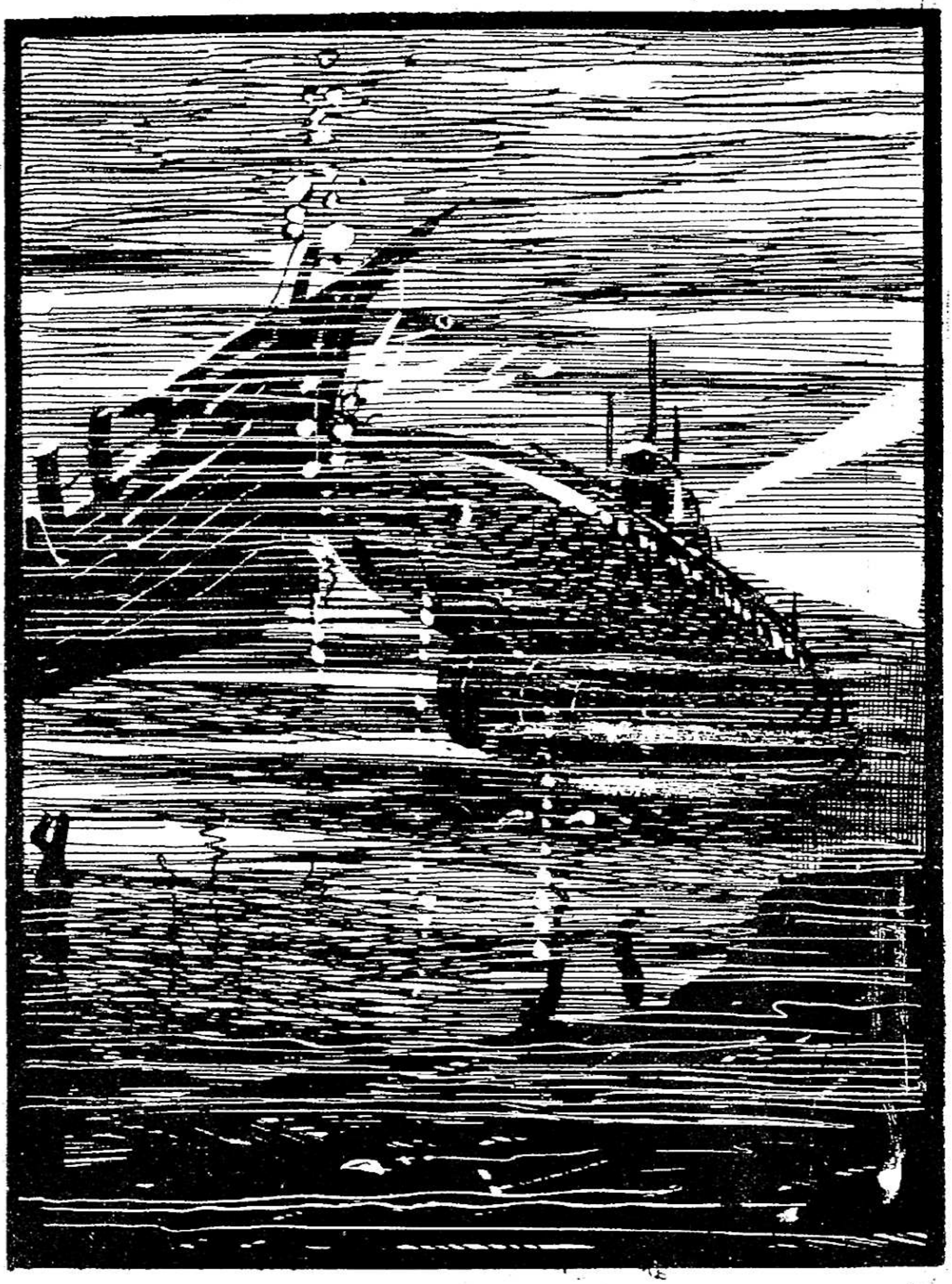
Nelson Lee waved the torch up and down while we shouted ourselves hoarse. Had the liner seen us?

From This Week's Stirring Narrative:—

ADRIFT ON THE ATLANTIC;
or, The Remove at Sea.

No. 424. EVERY WEDNESDAY. JULY 21, 1923.



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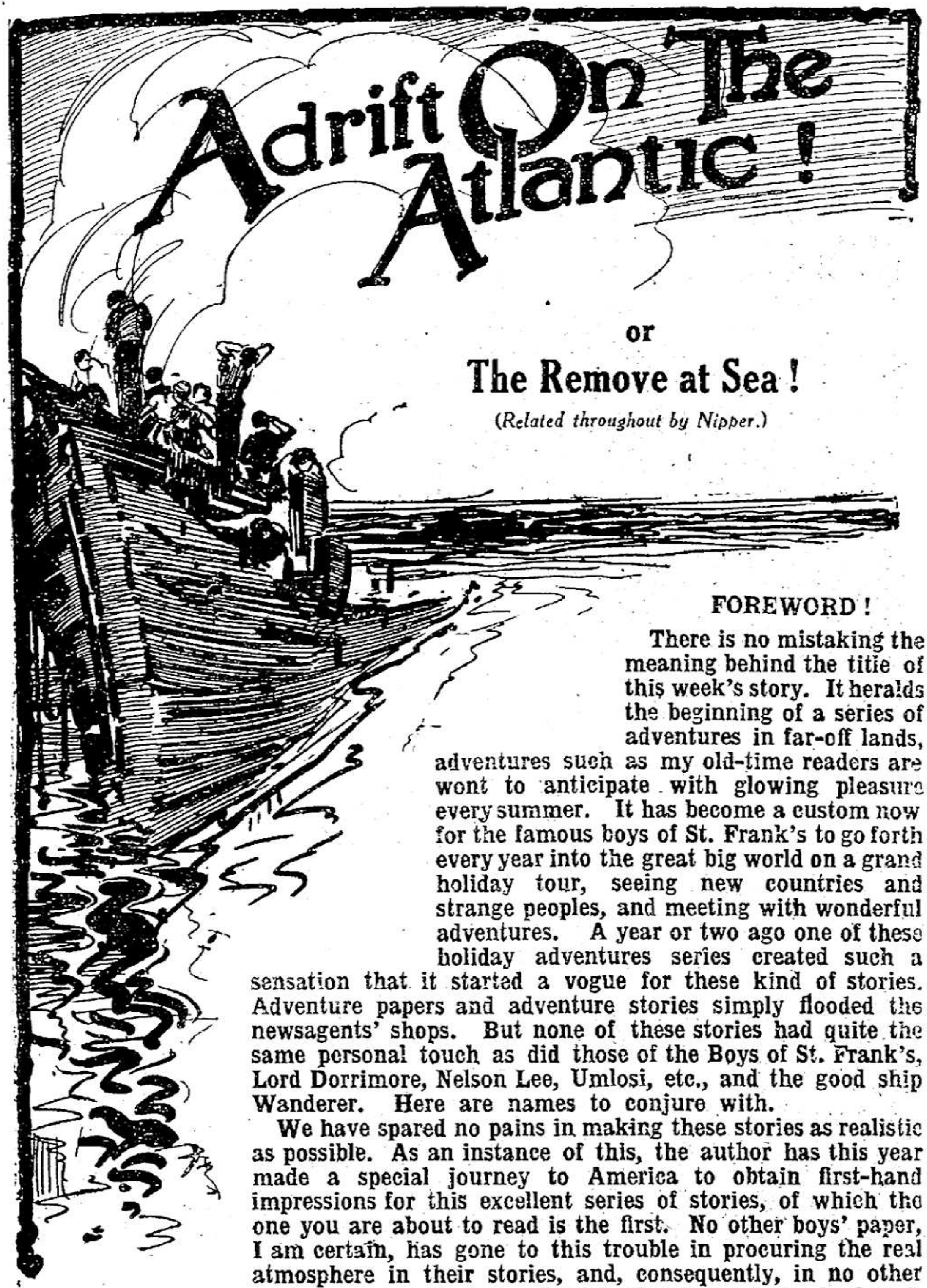


Adrift On The Atlantic!

or

The Remove at Sea!

(Related throughout by Nipper.)

FOREWORD!

There is no mistaking the meaning behind the title of this week's story. It heralds the beginning of a series of adventures in far-off lands, adventures such as my old-time readers are wont to anticipate with glowing pleasure every summer. It has become a custom now for the famous boys of St. Frank's to go forth every year into the great big world on a grand holiday tour, seeing new countries and strange peoples, and meeting with wonderful adventures. A year or two ago one of these holiday adventures series created such a sensation that it started a vogue for these kind of stories. Adventure papers and adventure stories simply flooded the newsagents' shops. But none of these stories had quite the same personal touch as did those of the Boys of St. Frank's, Lord Dorrimore, Nelson Lee, Umlosi, etc., and the good ship Wanderer. Here are names to conjure with.

We have spared no pains in making these stories as realistic as possible. As an instance of this, the author has this year made a special journey to America to obtain first-hand impressions for this excellent series of stories, of which the one you are about to read is the first. No other boys' paper, I am certain, has gone to this trouble in procuring the real atmosphere in their stories, and, consequently, in no other contemporary will such splendid adventure stories be found.

(Story begins overleaf.)

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE CRUISE OF THE SHARK.

"WHOA! Up she goes!" said Reggie Pitt cheerfully.

"She'll never do it—never!" declared Tommy Watson.

They were watching with intense interest the movements of the submarine-tank, Shark. Other members of the St. Frank's Remove were watching, too, including Handforth and Co., Archie Glenthorne, and myself.

It was early morning, and the scene was a desolate stretch of shore on the Westmorland coast, in the north of England. The spot was rather rugged, and there were no houses or cottages of any kind within sight.

Just back of the beach were some rough hillocks, with clumps of rock dotted here and there. And the Shark was attempting to surmount a particularly steep ridge, struggling valiantly at her job.

As a tank, the vessel was an enormous size—but as a submarine boat she would be ranked as quite small. Seen in the water, she looked insignificant. But here, on the beach, her size was inspiring.

This craft was the invention of Mr. Holby Maxwell.

She was an experimental vessel, constructed to his own patented designs, and he was now awaiting the British Admiralty officials to make a thorough inspection. The trial was arranged for the following week.

In the meantime, Mr. Maxwell was bent upon giving the Remove a treat.

We had met the gentleman while sojourning in the Lake District. We had, indeed, saved his precious craft from a gang of crooks who had attempted to steal it. And Mr. Maxwell's gratitude to the Remove was enormous. Curiously enough, it was Edward Oswald Handforth who had been the chief mover in the game.

Our caravan tour had led to many surprising adventures, but this really seemed to be the most wonderful of all.

This morning we were booked for a whole day's cruise in the Shark. This was not Mr. Maxwell's name for the ship. Pitt had likened the vessel to a shark because she fairly bristled with guns—which Reggie said were teeth. So, among the juniors, the name was adopted in general.

Of course, Nelson Lee had thoroughly satisfied himself that the ship was seaworthy—otherwise he would never have permitted us to start on the trip. He, himself, had been for a very extensive trip the previous day, and his knowledge of mechanics had shown him that the Shark was a thoroughly businesslike piece of work, and just as safe as any ocean-going liner.

In addition to that, she was a real wonder craft.

For she was fitted with a new system of caterpillar wheels, and was capable of crawling calmly along the ocean bed. More than that, she could walk right out of the sea, and travel across country, contemptuous of all obstacles. As a land craft, she was miles and miles ahead of the tanks that were used in the Great War.

And now, Mr. Maxwell was giving us a little demonstration of how she could climb. The Shark was essaying to mount one of the steep, rugged hillocks at the rear of the beach.

It seemed almost impossible that she could succeed.

The ground was extremely rocky, and at this point rose at a terrifying angle. The Shark, looking as big as a house, was rearing her nose skyward, and climbing with steady persistence.

"She'll never do it," repeated Tommy Watson, shaking his head.

"Won't she—just wait and see!" said Handforth. "This ship is a wonder. I was inside the engine-room, and I know all about it! In fact, strictly speaking, she's mine."

"Yours?" grinned Pitt.

"Yes."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, didn't I save her from those crooks?" asked Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth snorted, and gave it up. He had been given full credit for his smartness in saving the vessel from the thieves, but he would insist upon assuming that he had a half share in the Shark. He argued that as he had saved her, he naturally had a right of possession.

We watched the ship with great interest.

Up she rose, until, indeed, it seemed that nothing could save her from toppling over backwards and completely capsizing. But at last, with one great effort, she reached the top, and thudded down on an even keel.

"Hurrah!"

"My goodness! I never thought she'd manage it!"

"Wonderful!"

The fellows were full of praise. The Shark was now turning about, and she came cautiously down that steep declivity, scarcely making any noise. Unlike the war-tanks, she made no ear-shattering din. Her mechanism worked with an almost uncanny quietness.

And at length she came to a halt, and a door in her side opened. Mr. Holby Maxwell stepped out, smiling. Nelson Lee was close behind him. The juniors gathered round.

"Well, boys, now that I have made that little test, we'll see about a start," said Mr. Maxwell. "We have the whole day before us, and I intend to take you out upon the open Atlantic."

"That's the stuff, sir!"

"We're just longing to go, sir."

"Rather!"

"I hope there'll be plenty of grub," said Fatty Little anxiously. "I've brought a snack with me, but that won't last long."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pitt looked at Fatty, and noticed that he was carrying a big suit-case.

"Is that the snack?" he asked.

"Yes, of course," said Fatty. "There's nothing much—only two packets of sandwiches, and a dozen cakes, and two dozen muffins, and a few packets of biscuits, and a dozen hard-boiled eggs, and three tins of sardines, and some bags of tarts and cream puffs, a pot of fish paste, and——"

"My hat!" ejaculated Pitt. "Have you brought grub for the whole crew?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great pancakes!" gasped Fatty. "This is just a snack for me! I expect it'll last me until about lunch time! I brought it in case I go hungry during the morning. The sea air is pretty appetising, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's one thing about it—if the machinery happens to go wrong, and we drift upon the broad bosom of the waters, we shall have grub for a month," said Pitt calmly. "No fear of starvation!"

The fellows chuckled, and Fatty looked indignant.

"You—you funny fathead!" he snorted. "I can't spare any of this stuff for you chaps. I'm not greedy, but you ought to be more thoughtful. If you want grub, you ought to bring your own snacks!"

De Valerie shook his head.

"I'm not feeling at all safe," he said dubiously. "I think we're taking a great risk by having Fatty in the party. Every time he walks to the side of the ship, she'll take a terrific list!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty merely grunted. He was quite accustomed to this kind of banter, and took no notice of it. And soon afterwards all the fellows were hustled on board. There was ample room for everybody—the whole Remove, without a single absentee. There was one additional fellow, too—Willy Handforth, of the Third. Handy's younger brother had been with us all the time, and he certainly wasn't going to be left out of this adventure.

The submarine had practically no deck, for when she was riding on the surface only a very small proportion of her steel grey hull was to be seen—just the conning tower and a tiny railed-in deck.

But down below there was plenty of room for all.

There were several perfectly empty apartments—with numerous portholes. For Mr. Maxwell had designed his craft as a kind of transport, in addition to being a weapon of attack. He had in mind a much larger model—a craft capable of carrying hundreds of troops, and smashing down any obstacles—including, if necessary, brick walls or forests. An immense fleet of these craft could do almost anything they liked, for nothing but heavy artillery could stay their progress.

But the Shark was a smaller model—just the first one of its type.

"Well, it doesn't seem as though we shall see much," said Handforth, as he looked out of one of the portholes. "When we get under the sea, there'll be nothing to look at."

"We don't know yet," I said. "Let's wait."

Everybody was aboard, and the trip was ready to commence. The door was hermetically sealed, the upper hatch was closed, and the engineer was at his post. Mr. Maxwell was in the conning tower, at the controls—for he was going to pilot us on this trip.

The vessel began to throb throughout its length and breadth, although there was comparatively little noise. And then she moved forward—slowly and deliberately, towards the gently breaking waves.

Crowding at the portholes, we watched her progress.

At last she was actually in the water, and it seemed impossible to realise that we should still be safe after she had become completely submerged. Mr. Maxwell had decided to take his craft straight in along the ocean bed, and to proceed in this way for some little distance.

The spray came dashing past the portholes. A green slab of water rose up and obliterated the glass. Then, almost before we knew it, we were under. We could see nothing through the glass except a dim, greenish light. But here, near the shore, the water was so disturbed that nothing clear was visible.

Within five minutes we were well out in the bay—twenty or thirty feet below the surface. From the shore, now completely deserted, nothing whatever was to be seen of the vessel. She had vanished.

And there she was, progressing sedately along the ocean bed, rising over little sand hills, and now almost in complete darkness. We were almost on the point of giving up looking through the portholes.

But, suddenly, a change came about.

Peering through into the gloom, I gave a sudden start. The entire sea surrounding us had become brilliantly illuminated. And I found myself looking at all sorts of fish that swam near by.

"My hat!" I exclaimed breathlessly.

"Look—look!"

"Why, what—what's happened?"

The fellows crowded round, excited.

I knew exactly what had happened. Great, powerful searchlights had been switched on all round the submarine. Thus, the sea, in every direction, was made brilliant. We could see exactly where we were going, and could watch the wonders of marine life in perfect safety.

The effect was astonishing.

It seemed that we were progressing through a phantom world, where strange objects loomed up out of the green distance—visible for a second or two, and then being swallowed up again in the unreality of our surroundings.

Soon afterwards the Shark came to a standstill. And there she lay, on the bed of the ocean, and we gazed out of the windows, fascinated by everything we saw.

CHAPTER II.

THE DISASTER!

"WONDERFUL!"

"It's—it's uncanny!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie Glenthorne, as he adjusted his monocle. "I mean to say, all these dashed funny objects! It makes a chappie think of the dreams he's had, don't you know! I've seen these frightful things in nightmares!"

There was certainly some reason for Archie's remark. From the various windows of the submarine, where we were all looking out, the most extraordinary objects of the deep could be seen.

To one who has never witnessed such a thing, it is almost impossible for the imagination to picture what lay in front of us. The searchlights caused the ocean to be filled with a kind of green luminosity. And there floated all manner of fish.

Some were enormously large—fish of remarkable shape and colour that one never sees on the surface. Some were tiny little objects, wriggling and squirming about erratically.

Others, more sedate, paused now and again to gaze at us with bleary kind of eyes. Then, with a swirl of their tails and fins, they would pass on, as though disgusted with our appearance.

And from the ocean bed all kinds of weeds rose up—just like land vegetation, only coarse, thick, and of remarkable appearance. We felt as though we wanted to walk outside and obtain a nearer view.

"Why, it's almost impossible to believe that we're just off the coast of England," said Pitt. "And we can't be so very far below the surface, either. It's wonderful!"

"Let's hope we get out alive—that's all," said Gulliver nervously.

Pitt grinned.

"Getting funky?" he asked.

"No, I'm not!" snapped Gulliver. "But I'm jolly sorry I came! I think it's a mad idea, bringing a ship like this on to the bed of the ocean!"

"Same here!" declared Fullwood. "We've often read about submarines gettin' stuck on the bottom of the sea, an' unable to rise. What's goin' to happen if we can't get to the surface? We shall all die like rats in a trap!"

"We—we oughtn't to have come!" muttered Bell huskily.

The other fellowe gazed at the cads of Study A in disgust.

"You blessed cowards!" said Handforth witheringly. "For two pins I'd open one of these portholes, and chuck you out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the cackle for?" asked Handforth glaring.

"Well, if you open one of these ports, you won't do any chucking out!" grinned De Valerie. "The sea will rush in like a cascade!"

Handforth sniffed.

"Go hon!" he sneered. "You don't say so! Marvellous chap! I never thought you were so brainy, De Valerie! Go and teach your grandmother to suck eggs! As for Fullwood, I'll biff him unless he dries up!"

"I've got as much right to speak as you have!" retorted Fullwood sourly. "I was against this trip all the time, but I didn't like to back out, an' be unsociable. But you mark my words—there'll be trouble."

"You're a true prophet," said Handforth. "There's going to be trouble—now!"

Edward Oswald lunged out, but we wouldn't allow him to do any scrapping. This was no time for that kind of thing. And Ralph Leslie Fullwood was allowed to move off. The fact was, the cads of the Remove were not very courageous, and all they thought of was the possible danger.

Fatty Little seemed strangely uninterested He gave one look at the sea marvels, mentioned that some of the fish would be better fried, and then proceeded to dip into his "snack."

And after that there came a change.

We felt the submarine give a kind of quiver. And then, slowly, she rose from the ocean bed, and proceeded to rise upwards. In less than three minutes the Shark was on the surface.

Her engines throbbed again, and she proceeded at a fair speed. The hatch was opened, and Nelson Lee stepped out on the little deck. I accompanied him, together with Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West.

It had been arranged that the fellows should take it in turns to go on deck, for it was impossible for more than three or four of us to be there at a time. And my chums and I were taking the lead.

It was very exhilarating, out there.

The submarine was now travelling at a surprisingly high speed, sending two great curling waves, one on either side. She dipped and rose gently, but with very little real motion, for the sea was wonderfully calm.

And the Shark was heading straight out for the open ocean. Already the shore was becoming far distant. And our enthusiasm for the craft grew as we were permitted to see her wonderful capabilities.

There were no other ships in sight—and if there had been, Mr. Maxwell would have steered well clear of them, for he did not want publicity.

"Why, she's got a speed like a fast motor boat," I remarked, as we stood on deck, the breeze blowing against us. "I wouldn't have believed it possible that this craft could have travelled so rapidly."

"She is a wonderful piece of work, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Unless I

had been fully satisfied as to her good qualities, I would never have permitted you boys to make the trip."

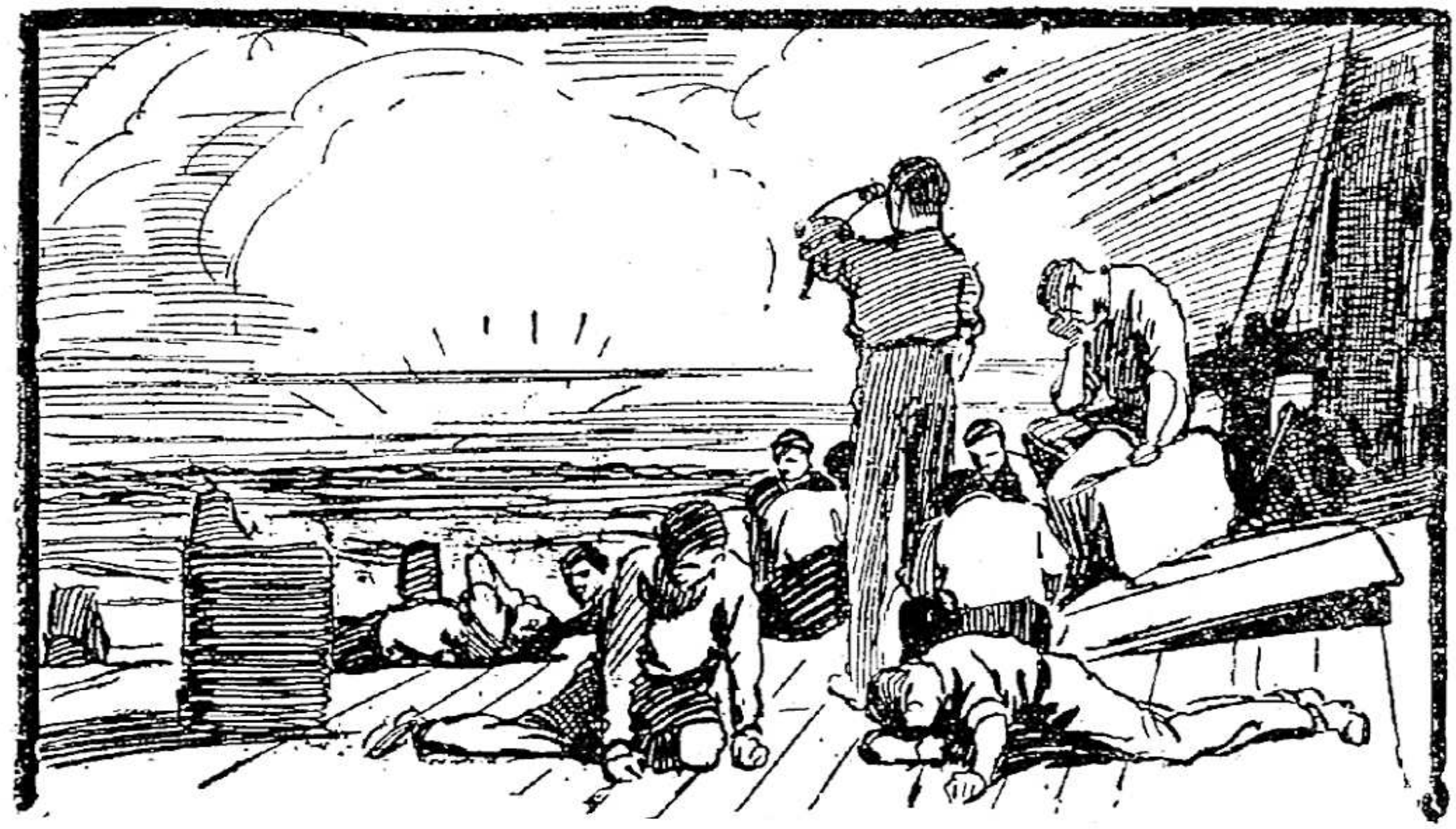
Soon afterwards, we went below, and some more fellows came up. And when they had all had their turn, and the hatch was closed down once again, Mr. Maxwell demonstrated the diving powers of his craft.

The Shark did not slowly submerge as might be imagined. Instead, she tucked her nose under the waves while going at full speed. And she drove down in a long, slanting dive. The sensation was rather alarming at first, and the juniors clutched at one another, startled.

forgot to feed. But our host had not overlooked this important point. And when lunch-time came round we found that sandwiches galore had been provided, to say nothing of innumerable bottles of mineral waters. It was a kind of alfresco meal, helping ourselves as we liked.

And the surprising fact was that Fatty Little piled in as heartily as anybody, in spite of the fact that he had been eating all the morning.

We were still going at a good speed when lunch was over, and were now feeling the slight swell of the Atlantic. Before long, we learned, Mr. Maxwell would be turning back.



And when the sky lightened, and the sun peeped over the rim of the ocean, we found that we were still alone upon the bosom of the sea. We gazed anxiously in every direction, but there was no sign or indication of a ship. We were alone, drifting helplessly, with only a remaining flicker of hope.

"Good Heavens!" gasped Fullwood. "She's sinkin'!"

"Something's gone wrong!" wailed Bell.

"You—you silly fatheads!" exclaimed Bob Christine. "There's nothing in this—we're only diving!"

"I shall be glad when we get ashore again!" muttered Gulliver.

Mr. Maxwell did not take the Shark down very far—for he was not keen upon risking his vessel, or our lives. And after a few moments the Shark began climbing upwards.

She burst out upon the surface of the sea like some huge whale coming up to spout. And then, with the water rushing from her gleaming deck, she sped onwards.

The fellows were provided with a never ending source of entertainment, and almost

The demonstration had been entirely successful, and the inventor was quite delighted on his own account. He had every reason for his optimism in believing that the Admiralty would adopt the Shark as a standard model for the navy. There could be no doubt at all that this vessel was unique.

Soon after luncheon had been disposed of Archie Glenthorne complained of a slight indisposition, and declared that he needed "forty of the best." This meant, in plain language, that he was sleepy.

"You can't very well take a nap here, Archie," I smiled. "Of course, you might go into the skipper's cabin, and ornament the lounge—but I don't know whether Mr. Maxwell would care for your presence."

Archie shook his head.

"Absolutely not," he said firmly. "What I mean to say is, I wouldn't dream of it, laddie. Intruding, what? Dash it all, a chappie can't whizz into the skipper's department and partake of the old forty winks. That kind of thing distinctly isn't done."

"Then it seems that there'll be no snooze," I remarked.

Archie sighed.

"That, of course, is foul," he said, holding a hand to his middle. "It's a dashed queer thing, old tomato, but I'm feeling poisonous. I mean to say, there's a buzzing in the old attic—a kind of thudding and hammering, don't you know. And down here, in the centre section, it feels that the dashed luncheon is having a somewhat brisk encounter with the good old breakfast!"

I chuckled.

"You're seasick!" I said briskly.

Archie turned slightly green.

"What-ho!" he said feebly. "In fact, what-ho with emphasis! Great gadzooks and what not! So the ghastly thing has happened! Archie is seasick—what? It's all frightfully interesting, old boy, but it's bally awkward."

"What's awkward?"

"Well, I mean to say, we ain't on deck!" explained Archie, with a gulp. "Decks are frightfully handy at times. You've simply got to stagger to the side, and there you are! You grasp the trend?"

"I don't think you're so bad as all that, old man," I grinned. "Just sit down a bit, and forget all about it. It's more imagination than anything else. And I always thought you were a good sailor!"

"Well, rather!" said Archie stoutly. "I mean——"

He suddenly lurched into my arms as the Shark gave a terrific kind of jar. The pair of us slithered over the floor, and collapsed in a tangled heap. Other juniors were bowled over, too.

All around us came the clatter and smashing of crockery and fittings. And the submarine heeled right up, and then wallowed over with a sickening lurch that made everybody feel deathly bad.

In a moment there was complete confusion.

Juniors jumped up, shouting excitedly. Fullwood and Co. made a mad dash for the narrow stairway which led up into the conning tower. I looked at Archie, and my face was drawn. Archie nodded.

"Something," he observed quietly, "has happened!"

"We—we hit against another ship!" panted Tommy Watson.

"A collision!"

"We're sinking!"

"Good Heavens!"

Just for a moment there was a kind of awed silence. And from far below, from the very bowels of the ship, came an ominous hissing roar. And while we held our breath, and while our hearts beat rapidly, Nelson Lee appeared.

"Steady boys—keep calm!" he said smoothly. "There has been a slight accident but you need not be alarmed."

"An—an accident, sir?"

Mr. Maxwell is not certain, but everything indicates that we collided with a half-submerged derelict," said Nelson Lee quietly.

CHAPTER III.

ADRIFT ON THE ATLANTIC!

"A DERELICT!"

We repeated the words softly, in an awed kind of way. There was something so sinister—so terribly awful—in the thought. And for a moment there was a complete hush.

A derelict!

The very thought was sufficient to conjure up grim tragedies of the sea that we had read of from time to time. A derelict—that curse of all navigation, which lies in the path of shipping. A derelict—the one thing in the world that a shipmaster fears.

He can guard himself against storms, against fogs—but a derelict lurks in the path of his vessel, hidden and deadly. Sometimes a derelict will be just visible, so that the helmsman of a ship will have time to steer clear. But often enough these ocean death traps are completely submerged. They float just beneath the water, a horrible menace to life and property.

The Shark, travelling at a good speed, had struck this derelict a jarring, shattering blow. Heaven alone knew how many of the submarine's plates had been ripped and torn. But the very force of the impact was sufficient to show that the damage was likely to be serious.

And even now the Shark was listing badly.

Members of her crew—and there were only three or four on board—were doing everything in their power to discover the full extent of the peril. And Mr. Maxwell himself believed that the Shark was still interlocked with the derelict. For she failed to respond when her engines were restarted. Her propellers simply thrashed the water, and she scarcely moved.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee was doing his utmost to keep the boys calm.

There was danger—ghastly, horrible danger. Both Lee and Maxwell knew that well enough, but they did not allow their expressions to reveal what was in their thoughts

Ten minutes—perhaps twenty minutes—and then the Shark would lose her buoyancy, and slide down into the ocean depths in her last long dive—carrying with her the precious human freight.

There were one or two collapsible boats on board, but these were not capable of accommodating the entire crowd. The only possible hope was that the vessel had not suffered severe damage. There was a bare possibility that she would be able to stagger home—crippled, but still seaworthy.

But this possibility was remote.

"Nothing to be scared about," said Handforth calmly. "In fact, this has made a bit of a change. Nothing like excitement, you know. It would be rather rummy if the giddy ship went down."

"Rummy!" said Church. "It would be the end of us!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We can swim, I suppose?"

"Swim about a hundred miles?"

"Well, not—but we could keep afloat until a ship came and picked us up," said Handforth. "After all, we're only a short distance from the Irish coast, and there are bound to be heaps of ships about."

Neither Nelson Lee nor I made any comment, although we heard Handforth's optimistic remarks. We certainly were near the Irish coast, and it was just as true that there was plenty of shipping about. But it would be possible for us to lay on the ocean surface for days without being seen. Ships might pass within a mile without seeing us, or knowing of our dire peril.

And the Shark was not equipped with wireless. We could not send any S.O.S. calls. We could only hope for the best.

"We're doomed!" muttered Gulliver, white to the lips. "We shall go down—we shall all be drowned!"

"Didn't I say so?" snarled Fullwood, nearly hysterical with fear. "This is what comes of takin' us on a fool trip like this! We're all goin' to be taken to the bottom—an' nobody will ever know what happened to us! By gad! Somebody ought to suffer!"

"It's—it's murder!" said Bell huskily.

I turned to the Study A trio, and looked grim.

"You fellows had better keep quiet—unless you can alter that tone," I said curtly. "What are you made of—straw? Haven't you got an ounce of backbone in you? Pull yourselves together, and don't be such cads!"

They scowled, and said nothing.

Nelson Lee, finding us calm, and having assured himself that there would be no panic, made a swift visit to the deck.

And here his worst fears were confirmed.

Mr. Holby Maxwell was there, his face drawn and haggard, and he looked at Nelson Lee with a dull expression of hopelessness.

"Heaven forgive me, Mr. Lee!" he said huskily. "The ship is doomed!"

"You have no reason to ask forgiveness, Mr. Maxwell," said Nelson Lee. "No captain can be prepared for one of these deadly derelicts—lurking in the path of shipping—invisible and treacherous. An accident of this sort was the last thing in the world that we feared. But, then such mishaps always occur when everything appears to be favourable. We can only do everything in our power to save the precious human lives that are in our keeping."

Mr. Maxwell nodded.

"For my ship I care nothing," he said steadily. "After all, she is an experimental vessel, and it will merely be the loss of so much steel. All my designs and patents are intact. This disaster will merely mean a little delay—providing that we come out of it alive."

Lee made no comment—he was looking round keenly. Although Mr. Maxwell declared that he cared nothing for his ship—Lee could see that the inventor was almost dazed. The shock of the disaster had partially stunned him mentally. And precious minutes were going—minutes that might mean all the difference between life and death.

It was afternoon now—bright, sunny, with a freshening breeze whipping the surface of the sea into little creamy white-caps. Not a sail of any kind was within sight—not a sign of land. The submarine's deck was so low in the water that the entire horizon was confined. It was only possible to see a short distance in any direction.

Lee fixed his attention upon the sea in the near vicinity.

The water was foamy and disturbed, as though some rocks lay immediately under the surface. But this could not be the case. And Lee understood.

The derelict was just there—and the Shark, indeed, was firmly jammed against her rotten timbers. The force of the collision had driven her right into the derelict, and she had clung there, locked in a firm embrace with that dead vessel.

Lee turned quickly.

"Do you know the extent of the damage?" he asked, in a keen voice.

"No—the men have not reported yet."

"We must get to know—at once," said Lee. "As long as we remain fixed to the derelict there is no particular danger. But if the sea roughens we may drift apart—and that would mean probable disaster."

Already Lee's active brain was at work. He was thinking of ways and means. It might be possible to lash the submarine to the derelict, although Lee couldn't quite see how it was to be done.

And while he was thinking, the engineer appeared.

"She's badly holed for'ard, sir," he reported. "The plates are buckled and ripped open, and the sea is pouring in furiously. We can't do a thing, sir—she'll fill up within the half-hour."

"Good Heavens!" muttered Mr. Maxwell huskily.

Lee himself went below and surveyed the damage. And the engineer's report was correct. The sea was pouring into the Shark in vast cascades. Her lower compartments were already filled—the engine-room was awash, and the water was rising so rapidly that the place would be uninhabitable within a few minutes.

It would not be so very long before the other parts of the vessel filled, too. And what could be done then? There was not sufficient room for all on deck. It was an awful problem.

Lee went out into the open air to think. Something had to be done on the instant—but what?

As soon as Lee arrived on deck he saw a remarkable change.

The derelict was no longer invisible. There, rising out of the water near by, lay a water-soaked hulk—a pitiful mass of rotten timbers, and the remains of a deck, with torn and jagged bulwarks. Even the stump of a mast was visible, and rotted, rusted chains.

The derelict, no doubt, was an old sailing craft—a ship that had been the pride of the sea in her day. Loaded with timber, probably, she still floated. And for months—perhaps years—she had been a menace to all shipping. It was the irony of fate that the Shark should have been in collision with her.

Lee could easily understand why that sodden deck was now visible.

The Shark, as far as Lee could judge, had rammed the derelict astern. The submarine had plunged with fearful force into the rear section of the hidden ship. And there she lay jammed—the two being locked together.

And as the submarine filled, so she became greatly weighted. And this added weight, of course, was brought to bear directly on the stern of the derelict. And this caused her bows to ride out of the water—for the first time, perhaps, in years.

Lee came to a quick decision.

The only possible thing was to get the boys out of the submarine—and on to the slimy, rotted deck of the derelict. Within twenty minutes the Shark would be full—completely submerged, in all probability. She was filling so fast that not a second was to be lost.

Indeed, Lee's scheme was the only one possible.

And there was awful danger in this, too. For if the Shark should become disentangled—if she should drop away—the derelict would resume her former position. She would slump down beneath the surface of the water again. And everybody would be washed off to certain death.

But what else could be done? To stay in the Shark was impossible—to repair her was equally out of the question—and there were not sufficient boats for the whole party to escape.

So the thing had to be chanced.

In a moment Lee was full of energy. He gave sharp orders to Mr. Maxwell's men. And the inventor himself awoke out of his dazed condition and took a lively interest in the proceedings.

There were two collapsible boats, and these were quickly brought up, and prepared for action. Fortunately, the sea was still comparatively calm, and there would be no difficulty in transferring the boys across that short strip of water to the exposed section of the derelict.

The work was commenced at once.

In parties, the Remove was carried across. They took blankets with them, and everything else that could be handled quickly—cushions, stools, and things of that kind.

And well within fifteen minutes we were all in comparative safety. But so rapidly had the Shark filled that she was now lying at an acute angle, and there was imminent danger of her slipping out of that embrace and plunging to her last resting-place.

If she did take such a plunge, she would carry everything with her. There would be no opportunity for anybody to save themselves. It was essential, therefore, to desert her at once.

Nelson Lee and Mr. Maxwell were the last to leave.

They had been unable to bring a morsel of food or water—for the galley had been submerged almost from the first. And now the submarine had practically vanished. She had filled, but still clung to the derelict.

Her dead weight caused the bows of the old timber ship to rise steeply out of the water. And that was the position. So long as the submarine remained as she was, there was no particular danger. But in all our minds the thought was present—how long would it be before the Shark slipped away? And what would be the result for us?

"Well, there's one thing about it—we're still alive," said Reginald Pitt. "This last hour has brought about a tremendous change, but we haven't come to any actual harm."

"Oh, we shall be all right—we'll sight a passing ship before long," said Bob Christine. "We're bound to. We shall be picked off before night."

"You bet we shall."

"Rather!"

And the juniors convinced themselves that everything was all serene.

Nelson Lee was cheerful, jokey, and seemed as though he enjoyed the whole experience. And the majority of the fellows caught this spirit, and didn't even think of being nervous.

But Nelson Lee, beneath his veneer of cheerfulness, was worried more than he had ever been worried in his life before. It was

the uncertainty of the position that caused his concern—the thought of all these boys risking a dreadful death. If only the submarine could be made secure in some way——

But what was the good of supposing? Possibly the vessels would still remain interlocked. The very fact that they were in that position now seemed to indicate that they would remain so. Only a severe roughening of the sea would bring disaster.

And at present the sky was fair, with prospects of continued fine weather.

But our position was unenviable.

We were adrift on the Atlantic—without food or drink—and there was no other ship within sight. Our haven of refuge was nothing but a sodden, rotten mass of timber that was smothered in slime and clinging seaweed.

But we were optimistic.

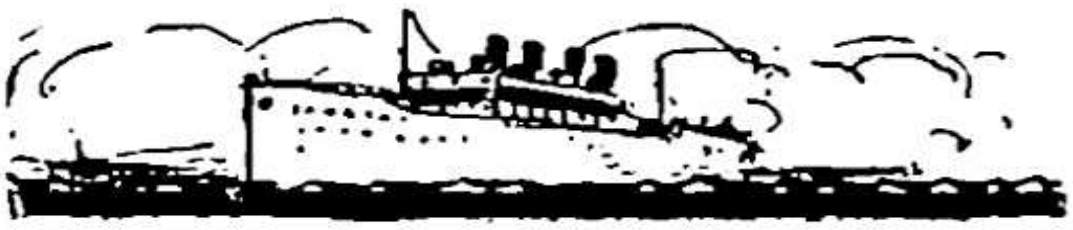
We were absolutely certain that rescue would soon come. Being so near to the British Isles, there would be ships galore passing to and fro. And one of these, surely, would catch sight of us, and come along to investigate.

But the period was likely to be trying. I knew even better than the other fellows how serious our position was. I knew that it would be possible for us to drift for a week without being picked up. But I said nothing to the others.

Like the true sportsmen they were, the juniors kept smiling.

CHAPTER IV.

A DAY OF SHATTERED HOPES.



EVENING.

The sun was low in the west, and the breeze dying down to a complete calm. And there, on the wide bosom of the ocean, a little speck—the raised forepeak of the derelict, with its cargo of survivors.

Hours had passed, and during this time we had seen no sign of any sail, with the single exception of a smudge of smoke towards the southward. There had been some excitement when that smoke first appeared. Eyes were strained for the first appearance of the steamer herself.

But she remained hidden below the horizon, and the smoke faded. And now night was approaching, with still no indication of rescue. Even those fellows who had been most optimistic were beginning to have doubts.

But the perfectly smooth sea gave us a feeling of security. The fact that the Shark had remained interlocked with the derelict all this time gave us confidence. We felt that we were safe.

Thirst troubled a good many of the juniors, to say nothing of hunger. But not one complained as yet. They all knew we had no food or drink—so what was the good of asking for any?

Our position was pretty rotten, on the whole. We were crowded together on those rotten, soaking planks which had once been a deck. If it had not been for the stools and cushions and blankets our discomfort would have been worse.

Even as it was, we could only sit down or lie down a few at a time—all the others standing or tramping about to keep warm.

In fact, Nelson Lee had so arranged things that a few of us took rest at a time. We had turns, and so there could be no complaining. And night was now coming down in real earnest.

"Well, I call it a rotten shame!" said Owen major disgustedly. "With all the shipping there is about, it's a queer thing nobody's come near us! I'm blessed if I can understand it."

"We must have drifted hundreds and hundreds of miles," said Hubbard.

"Not necessarily," I pointed out. "Even near the coasts the ships keep to well-defined traffic lines. They don't go wandering off here and there. There might be ten ships within three miles of us even now, for all we know. It doesn't seem far when you think of it calmly—but in actual experience it's a long way."

"For all we know, we might be hundreds of miles from land," growled De Valerie.

"It's no good talkin'—we're doomed," said Fullwood, who seemed to take a delight in making the worst of things. "If you fellows think we're goin' to be rescued, you're fools. There's no chance of it—we shall stay here until we die of exposure an' hunger. Either that, or we'll sink!"

"Oh, dry up, you croaker!" snorted Handforth.

"Haven't I got reason to croak?" demanded Ralph Leslie. "What's the good of you chaps tryin' to kid yourselves? An' what about grub? Ain't we all hungry an' thirsty? Do you think we can live on nothin'!"

"It's a rotten shame!" said Bell. "Mr. Lee ought to have prepared for it—he ought to have seen that food and water was brought with us. If we die, it'll be his fault——"

"I don't want to start any trouble, considering the circs., but you're asking for a pile of it!" interrupted Handforth, as he slowly pushed up his sleeves. "Any more talking against Mr. Lee, my lads, and I'll chuck you overboard!"

Fullwood scowled.

"Oh, don't start your rot now!" he snapped sourly.

"I'm giving you a fair chance—and if you don't take it, it's your own look out," said Handforth. "Mr. Lee did the best he could—he saved us all without even getting us wet. You know jolly well he couldn't bring

any grub. The giddy lar-der was flooded first of all!"

"Yes, dry up, Fullwood!" said the others.

The leader of Study D subsided into a growling silence. And then Fatty Little rose from a blanket he had been sitting on. It wasn't his turn to stand, but he came over towards the group of us, looking serious.

I had been rather astonished that Fatty had made no complaints about food. I had thought that he would be the first to wail. But the fat junior had said nothing. And there was a thoughtful, intent expression upon his round face.

"I say, you chaps," he remarked, as he joined us. "I've been thinking."

"About food?" asked Pitt.

"Of course! What else should I think about?" said Fatty. "The fact is, I wasn't able to make up my mind properly. You see, there are a good many of us here—between forty and fifty, all told. And a snack isn't calculated to go far amongst such a crowd."

"What are you getting at, my lad?" asked Pitt.

"Well, it makes a difference, everybody being marooned like this," went on Fatty Little vaguely. "I mean, it's a pretty rotten position, ain't it? All of us being stuck on this giddy derelict without any grub or water!"

"Fatty, you're a brick!" I said heartily. "All this time, and you haven't complained about being hungry. You've set an example to everybody. Good man! You're made of the right stuff!"

Fatty gave a weak smile.

"Of course, I'm starving!" he said, in a feeble kind of way. "It's only my iron will-power that's kept me going. But I'm starving—I've lost about a couple of stone. Can't you see how I'm wilting away?"

We looked at Fatty critically.

"I can't say I see much difference," said Pitt. "You've still got about fifty-six pounds of unnecessary avoirdupois. Your clothes seem to be tighter than ever, Fatty!"

"Great bloaters! I'm shrinking like a pricked football!" said Fatty Little. "And I'm so hungry that I can't see straight. You see, I've got a snack, but I don't like to start on it—it seemed a bit selfish to eat it without sharing it amongst the rest."

"You—you've got a snack?"

"Some grub?"

"Where—where?"

The chaps gathered round Fatty like flies round a honey-pot.

"Here—steady!" protested Fatty. "Don't get excited! That's just the trouble—I was expecting it! What's the good of a giddy little snack between all the lot of us? We shall just have a crumb each—see? That wouldn't satisfy anybody's hunger, would it? So I've been thinking, and I reckon the best thing we can do is to draw lots. The chap who wins eats the whole snack!"

"Spoken like a man, O thou of much blubber!" said Pitt solemnly. "You're game for a gamble, even though it's a question of grub. It's the right spirit, too. But I think we'll waive the point, and let you do the eating."

"Yes; he needs it more than we do," said Handforth.

"Let him scoff it up—but do it quickly."

Most of the fellows agreed, knowing what a hungry merchant Fatty Little was. But Teddy Long and Hubbard and Gulliver and one or two others raised objections. They reckoned that everybody ought to have a chance.

"Oh, all right," said Fatty resignedly. "I'm game."

"Good!" said Gulliver. "Empty your giddy pockets!"

The whole Remove crowded round, intensely interested. Nelson Lee, who was standing a little apart, could easily guess what the excitement was about, and he smiled quietly to himself. He was pleased, because anything was good if it kept the boys' minds off their perilous position.

And Fatty Little proceeded to empty his pockets. We might have known that he would have a certain supply on him—he never went out without grub.

Several packets of sandwiches came to life, followed by two bags of biscuits, some squashed cake, two big packets of butterscotch, and, most precious of all, a pound slab of chocolate. This latter was indeed a valuable find—for chocolate is highly sustaining.

"Why, you fat ass!" I said indignantly. "We're not going to draw lots for this! There's enough here to go round the lot of us—even a morsel of chocolate is better than nothing. Is that all?"

Fatty had finished emptying his pockets, but he looked astonished.

"All?" he repeated. "Of course not—this is only a bit!"

"A bit!" howled the juniors.

"Why, yes—I've got that suit-case over there—under the blankets," said Fatty indignantly. "Just as if I'd come away without it! Didn't you chaps see me bring it over on the boat?"

"The suit-case!" I roared. "You've got it here?"

"Of course!"

"And—and is there something in it?" asked Pitt breathlessly.

Fatty gave him a scornful look.

"Only a snack, of course," he said. "Three or four dozen sandwiches, and a

couple of big cakes, and a pound of chocolate, and half a dozen bottles of ginger-pop, and some——"

"What!"

The fellows all yelled in one voice.

Then, without waiting for Fatty to say anything further, they made a rush at the blankets. And, sure enough, there was the suit-case, and as soon as it was opened we found that it contained a veritable treasure of food, and, most important of all, the bottles of ginger-pop. No longer did we laugh at Fatty for bringing his own food along.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "And—and you had nerve enough to suggest drawing lots, so that one chap could scoff the whole pile! My goodness! There's enough here for an army!"

"Rather!"

"Hurrah!"

"Food—food!"

"Steady on, you fellows—steady!" I cautioned. "Don't get excited, and don't grab at anything. Pitt—De Valerie—Christine! Guard this stuff as you would guard your giddy lives! I'm going to fetch the guv'nor. This food has got to be shared out to everybody, and it's got to be rationed. Why, with careful distribution, there's enough here for three meals. We shall be able to carry on until to-morrow night."

Nelson Lee was overjoyed when we told him. He had had no idea of the position, and he agreed with me that the stuff had to be rationed out.

We all received a half sandwich each, a portion of cake, and a small piece of chocolate—to say nothing of a sip of ginger-beer. It was meagre enough, in all conscience—we felt hungrier and thirstier than ever.

But the main fact was that we had received a little sustenance, and would be able to carry on until the morning, if it was necessary for us to remain adrift all night.

And a vote of thanks was passed round to Fatty Little. In a time of sheer necessity he had proved himself to be unselfish and sporting in the extreme. But for Fatty our sufferings would have been much more acute.

For it seemed, indeed, that rescue was not coming.

Night arrived—black, chilly, and mysterious. Sleep was not thought of. We paced up and down as best we could, trying to keep ourselves warm, and scanning the ocean for the first sign of a sail. It seemed incredible that no ship would come near us—for, after all, we were not far from well-travelled waters.

We were drifting all the time. We were being carried further and further out into the Atlantic. And it was quite possible that we were getting a greater distance away from the normal path of shipping.

Archie gazed at his reflection in the long mirror, and turned pale. "Whatho!" he observed faintly. "Greetings, old lad! I should say, what a ghastly looking object! It appears that some foul blighter has been playing the deuce while I indulged in the forty winks!"

It was a trying, terrible ordeal.

With the coming of night, and the absence of any incident on board, a kind of depression descended upon everybody. The most optimistic among us became affected. It seemed all so hopeless.

We were adrift on the wide ocean, with no certainty of rescue—hungry, thirsty, and chilled with cold. But we were all healthy fellows, and those who were the weaker among us were allowed longer spells of rest in the blankets. As long as we kept on the move there was no danger of ill effects.

For, after all, it was midsummer, and the night was comparatively mild. It only seemed chilly to us because of the moist sea air, and because we had not partaken of our usual food. It was only natural that our vitality should be slightly lower than normal.

A bit of excitement cropped up just before midnight—while the glow of evening still lingered in the western sky. As we wallowed in the long, steady swells of the Atlantic we caught sight of a twinkling light far away in the darkness towards the east.

Now and again the light would disappear for a minute at a time, in a most mysterious way. Then it would be visible for several seconds on end.

"It's a ship!" declared Handforth. "And it seems to me the light's getting brighter, too. I'll bet we're picked up within an hour."

Handforth always had been an optimist—and nothing could subdue him.

The hour passed, and after the light had grown much nearer, it began to diminish and twinkle into the distance. The ship was far away on the horizon, and I knew well enough that there was no prospect of it coming near us.

Nelson Lee certainly did fashion a torch out of some of the food wrappings. He set light to this, and waved it steadily until it burned down to his fingers.

We were all anxious and excited for a time—hoping against hope that the signal would be seen and answered. But there was no result. If those on the ship had seen the torch, they did not think it worth while to investigate.

And soon after midnight the sea remained deserted. The moon appeared, and shed a soft, silvery light upon the ocean. And it seemed that we were alone in the world.

It was hardly credible that we could be so deserted by mankind when we were so comparatively near to shipping and to land.

The night passed slowly—monotonously.

Taking it in turns, we slept for a half-hour at a time. And it seemed that the night, short though it was in the month of July, would never end. But at last the first faint streaks of dawn appeared in the east.

And when the sky lightened, and the sun peeped over the rim of the ocean, we found that we were still alone upon the bosom of the sea. We gazed anxiously in every direction, but there was no sign or indication of a ship. We were alone—drifting helpless, with only a flicker of hope.

The morning passed like a week. The fellows had ceased to speak much. They could do nothing but stare towards the horizon—waiting for a sail to appear—waiting for a smudge of smoke. Before many hours had passed it was quite a novelty for any fellow to utter a dozen words. The strain was tremendous, and even the youthful faces of the juniors were becoming haggard and drawn.

It was the constant sameness of the scene that cast a deadly depression over the whole party. And even when a ship did come within sight for a brief spell, it only did so to fade away again, like some elusive phantom.

The afternoon was just the same.

It passed by reluctantly, as though unwilling to go. And we saw steamer after steamer—thus proving that we were getting further into the general track of shipping.

We saw these vessels now on the horizon—just for a moment now and again as the Atlantic rollers raised us high and then sent us swooping down into the hollows.

Several of the fellows were becoming ill, too. It was a kind of seasickness, for the motion of that waterlogged hulk was peculiarly sluggish. We just rose and fell—rose and fell continuously.

But it was the absence of food and the lack of drink that caused most of the trouble. Our tongues were beginning to swell in our mouths, and our lips were becoming cracked and parched.

For the day had been blazingly hot—a brilliant summer's day, with the sun beating down mercilessly from a cloudless sky. Without an atom of shade, we were compelled to stand there in the open—or lie down upon the rotten timbers.

Occasionally, Nelson Lee would have a chat with us, making encouraging remarks, and cheering us up. And at intervals we were given a scrap of chocolate. This, indeed, proved to be a Heaven-sent gift. The rich, nutritious sweetmeat eased our parched throats, and seemed to give us new life—although it tended to increase our thirst.

By the evening we had exhausted the supply of ginger-beer—and there was no other liquid of any kind. We dared not think of the morrow. Another blazing day such as this, with nothing whatever to drink, and some of the fellows would become delirious—and delirium under such circumstances, was the first sign of madness.

Although we tried to buoy ourselves up with constant hope, we were becoming more and more despondent. Our hopes had been shattered so many times—we had seen so many ships, but they, apparently, had not seen us.

By the evening we were really suffering.

It was sheer torture. Our throats burned like fire. And it was only with difficulty that some of the juniors were able to speak. Many of them were becoming listless, dull, and almost glassy eyed. They sat about like wooden blocks, taking no interest in anything.

And it must be recorded to Fatty Little's credit that he never complained. As a rule, he was the first one to declare that he was starving, and to yell for food. But now he remained perfectly cheerful, and made the best of things. When there was no food to be had, Fatty Little asked for none.

"After all, it's doing me good, I expect," he said resignedly. "I used to think that I should peg out if I didn't eat a good meal every two hours. But I'm feeling as fit as a fiddle. I wouldn't eat if it was given to me!"

"Good old Fatty!" said Pitt thickly. "You're the right sort!"

We all knew well enough that Fatty would be raving for food as soon as we were rescued. His present lack of interest in grub was merely a pose.

Handforth was practically himself.

He strode about, telling everybody that a sail would come along soon—that we shouldn't have to wait long. His optimism was unbounded. Disappointment after dis-

appointment made no difference to Edward Oswald.

And the leader of Study D never uttered a word of complaint. He certainly threatened to kick Fullwood and Co. overboard if they persisted in their grumbles, and Fullwood and Co. subsided. Handforth strode about with his hands in his pockets, and scouted the suggestion that he was thirsty.

But when nightfall arrived—when the long summer's day had come to an end, and the second night was approaching—the fellows began to give way to despair. It seemed that there was no hope—no possibility of rescue.

Fortunately, the weather remained calm, and the position of the old derelict remained unchanged. By marvellous good fortune, the sunken Shark still remained interlocked with the old hulk.

But there was a slight freshening of breeze at nightfall—a breath of wind that gave prospects of different weather on the morrow. Clouds were coming up, too; this night was not to be as calm and peaceful as the previous one. I noticed Nelson Lee and Mr. Maxwell talking earnestly together, and I guessed the subject of their conversation.

Should we be able to last till morning?

The weather was changing, and the slightest roughening of the sea would mean stark, deadly peril—a peril even greater than the hunger and thirst. For if the Shark sank, we should be submerged at once.

It was my turn to take a little doze between ten and eleven. I went off to sleep without difficulty, for I was tired and weary from long standing. But it seemed that I had only just closed my eyes when I was awakened by excited talk.

As a matter of fact, it was nearly eleven o'clock, and the sea was black on all sides. The sky was so overcast that the last lingering rays of day had long since been obliterated. I saw that most of the fellows were awake, standing in clumps, and all gazing in one direction. In spite of their swollen throats and tongues, they were talking loudly and excitedly.

I got to my feet, stiff and aching, and heavy with sleep. Then I started, and stared out across the sea.

Apparently quite near by—certainly no further off than half a mile—a great blaze of light could be seen—a mass of twinkling windows and portholes, and, above, four enormous smoke stacks.

A gigantic trans-Atlantic liner!

It was the first one we had seen so close. Most of the other ships we had seen were just coasting steamers, or old-fashioned cargo boats. But this was one of the vast Atlantic greyhounds, ablaze with electric light from stem to stern.

For a moment the juniors ceased their talk. He could hear the thud-thud of the engines, the swirl of the waters, and, occasionally, the strains of an orchestra. It seemed so close—so wonderfully near by.

Handforth turned to me, his face gleaming.

"All serene!" he said gladly. "She's coming straight at us!"

And this, indeed, seemed to be true. The great liner was going at full speed—doing between twenty-four and twenty-six knots an hour. And almost before we realised it she was within two or three hundred yards.

We could even see the figures of people on the decks—we could see into the windows of the great saloons and lounges. And Nelson Lee had not been slow to take advantage of this glorious opportunity.

He had made a big torch out of all remaining inflammable material. And this was now blazing fiercely, and Lee was waving it up and down.

And as the liner swept by, we yelled—my goodness, how we yelled!

We seemed to forget all about our bad throats. Some of our voices were cracked and strained, but we made a good noise, nevertheless. And the ocean monster swept by us majestically.

"She's stopping—she's stopping!" shouted Handforth, in triumph.

"She's not—she's going straight on!" moaned Owen major.

And, although we were sick and dizzy with the disappointment, he was right. Without taking the slightest notice of our existence—without appearing to see us at all—the liner went on her way.

She was by, and we were beginning to feel the great disturbance of the foaming wake. And now we stood dumb—dim-eyed, as we watched the great ship bearing further and further away.

It was as though somebody had turned our hearts to lead!

CHAPTER V.

RESCUED!

"OH, it's a shame—a shame!" sobbed Armstrong weakly. "They've gone by, and they haven't seen us!" moaned Hubbard. "They've left us here to die—to die of thirst and starvation!"

"Dear old boy, it seems to be all up!" murmured Sir Montie, taking my arm.

I nodded silently.

And then Handforth clutched at my other sleeve, and let out a crackled yell.

"Look! Look!" he roared. "She's turning—she's slowing down! I knew it! Didn't I say that everything was all serene?"

I stared. I rubbed my eyes. My heart thudded violently. For a moment it seemed that I was dreaming.

This couldn't be true!

I had resigned myself to the fact that the liner had gone on her way without heeding our plight. Only too well did I know the reluctance of ocean liners to pause in their stride. The captains of such giant ships grow accustomed to passing scraps of

wreckage—flotsam and jetsam of the seas. And it is a costly business to stop a liner of thirty or forty thousand tons. It means a loss of valuable time, and these big boats are scheduled down so closely that delays are avoided whenever possible. Knowing all this, I had never really hoped that the mighty vessel would stop for us.

I rubbed my eyes again. And Handforth shook me.

"Asleep, or what?" he shouted. "Can't you see, you ass?"

"Yes!" I muttered. "You're right, Handy! She's turning—she's slowing down! It—it means rescue!"

"Hurrah!"

"We're saved—saved!"

"Grub!" said Fatty Little dreamily. "Grub! Tons of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The change that had come over the fellows was remarkable. They crowded there on that old hulk, staring out at the giant liner. She was now making a wide, graceful sweep round, her engines stopped, and her siren hooting vigorously—as an indisation to us that we were seen.

And the juniors laughed and shouted half hysterically. It was the effect of the reaction after rescue had seemed so hopeless. In a moment we knew that everything was all right—that we were to be picked up.

And what better rescue could we wish for?

We weren't going to be taken on board an old tramp steamer, or a dilapidated coasting vessel, but on one of the vast trans-Atlantic mammoths where we should find every comfort. It would be like entering a city—a floating hotel. We should find everything of the best.

And within a comparatively brief period—a few fleeting hours—we should be in Liverpool, or Southampton. The end of our troubles were at hand. Almost before we knew we should be back in our caravans, continuing our tour.

Not that it would continue very long now, for St. Frank's was due to "break up" for the summer holidays within a few days. And there had been discussions as to whether we should continue the caravan tour or not.

After the first excitement, the fellows discovered that their thirst had increased a thousand fold, and that shouting hurt their throats. So they became silent—watching.

With rapidly beating hearts we waited, knowing that rescue was simply a matter of minutes. There was a fresh cheer when a brilliant searchlight blazed out from the liner. It hovered about on the sea for a short time, and then the dazzling beam hit the derelict, and remained steady.

For a spell we were almost blinded by the light, which lit up our faces with clear brilliancy. With one accord, we all waved our hands, gesticulating wildly. And again the siren hooted out its message of cheer.

It seemed a terribly long wait.

Practically half an hour had elapsed before we caught sight of a boat coming towards us. But it takes some time for a great vessel of that kind to become stationary. And, indeed, the liner was nearly half a mile away by now, and some of the juniors could not understand why.

The boat that was coming to our rescue was a motor-launch, and we could hear its engine plugging away. During the past ten minutes or so we had felt a slight quiver now and again in the old hulk. Nelson Lee and Mr. Maxwell were anxious, for they believed that the freshening sea was causing the Shark to loosen her grip. It would indeed be disastrous if we were precipitated into the sea now.

But no. The motor-launch came alongside, and a fresh-looking young officer in a neat uniform jumped on board the derelict.

"Well, what's the trouble here?" he asked cheerfully. "What's all this—a school picnic, or what?"

"Hurrah!" yelled the juniors, in cracked voices.

They were not at all surprised to find that the officer was English—they had never expected anything else. Although, of course, it had been quite possible for the liner to prove an American or a Frenchman. Needless to say, we were all delighted at the discovery.

It was Nelson Lee who briefly explained the position to the officer. In the meantime, the liner's doctor, with three or four assistants was handing out mugs of water.

Guessing that we might have been adrift for days, the liner's commander had sent medical relief. The doctor was delighted to find that the case was by no means serious, and that we were all capable of helping ourselves.

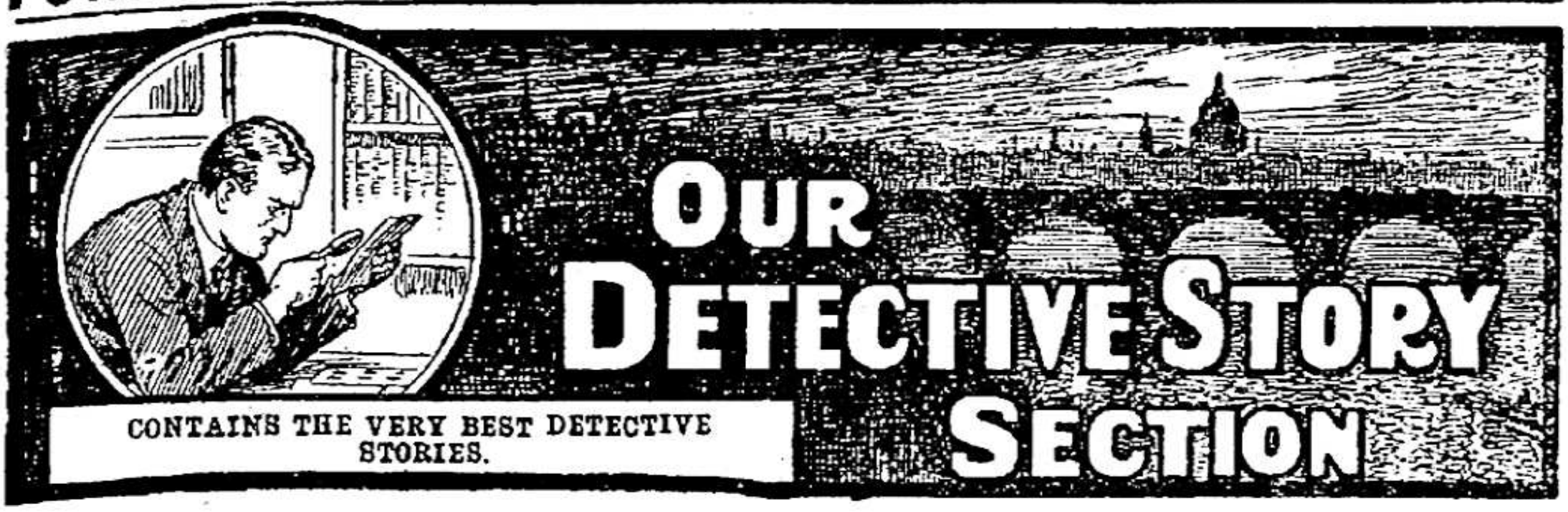
"Why, you'll be as right as a trivet within twenty-four hours," said the doctor cheerily. "Some good hot broth, and a long sleep—that's what you need. Not a serious case among the lot of you. Now then, young men—tumble in!"

That drink of water had put new life into us all—and the thought of hot broth and cosy beds made us fairly glow with eagerness. Certainly, Fatty Little scouted the idea of broth—he wanted something more substantial.

In a very short time we were on board the launch, progressing towards the liner. The old derelict remained deserted—a menace to passing shipping. I saw that Mr. Holby Maxwell was staring rather wistfully over towards the ancient hulk—where his wonder-

(Continued on page 15.)

POWERFUL NEW NELSON LEE SERIAL JUST STARTED!



No. 33. PRESENTED WITH "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY." July 21, 1923.

THE SILVER DWARF

In this amazingly clever detective story, NELSON LEE is matched against the brains and subtle skill of Professor Mark Rymer, an exceedingly dangerous type of intellectual criminal—inhuman, crafty, resourceful and daring.

FOR NEW READERS.

If the rascally cousin of the late Lord Easington, Professor Mark Rymer, can destroy certain documents hidden inside the silver effigy, known as the Silver Dwarf, he will inherit his cousin's title and wealth. There is a son living by a secret marriage of the late peer, evidence of which is contained in the documents aforementioned. So far, the Silver Dwarf has eluded the clutching fingers of the unscrupulous professor. Nelson Lee, who is determined to frustrate Rymer's evil designs, is also in quest of the effigy. Owing to a fire at the late peer's house, the effigy is lost. News comes of its having been taken to Paris, and thither Rymer proceeds, followed by Nelson Lee on his heels. The detective traces the effigy to Spain.

(Now read on.)

IN THE HANDS OF BRIGANDS.

THE next instant, from behind a dozen rocky boulders, a dozen heads appeared, and a dozen rifle-barrels gleamed.

"Hands up!" cried a stentorian voice. "Every man is covered, and the first to move gets a bullet through his heart!"

Don Jose glanced at the speaker, and then at Nelson Lee.

"La Navaja!" he gasped.

Resistance would have been worse than useless. Three rifles were levelled at Nelson Lee, three at Don Jose, two at each of his remaining servants, and two at the detective's guide.

Twelve pairs of glittering eyes were watching them like cats watching mice, and twelve forefingers were curled round as many triggers, waiting only for a single word from La Navaja to send them to their doom.

"You can lower your weapons," said Don Jose bitterly, "we surrender."

Led by their chief, the brigands swarmed from behind the rocks; and in less time almost than it takes to tell the travellers were disarmed, and stripped of all their valuables.

At a sign from La Navaja two of the brigands then advanced towards Don Jose de Vadilla and pinioned him.

Don Jose turned to La Navaja.

"Why have you ordered me to be bound?" he asked. "Surely you will permit us to resume our journey, now

that you have plundered us of all we obssess?"

The brigand-chief took off his plumed hat and made his captive an ironical bow.

"Carajo! You insult our hospitality, senor," he said. "It is not every day that we have the opportunity of entertaining so distinguished a guest as Don Jose de Vadillo."

Don Jose shrugged his shoulders.

"In other words," he said, "you are going to take me to your stronghold and keep me a prisoner, in the hope that my friends will ransom me?"

Again La Navaja bowed.

"And my servants?" asked Don Jose. "Are they to be taken prisoners too?"

"One, alas, is dead!" said La Navaja, with an air of mock distress. "The other two will be set at liberty in a moment or two."

"And my friend here?" continued Don Jose, glancing at Nelson Lee. "Will he also be set at liberty?"

"That remains to be decided," said La Navaja. "Who is he?"

"He is an Englishman," replied Don Jose. "It is a dangerous game, amigo mio, to meddle with a subject of the British Empire."

La Navaja uttered a scornful laugh.

"Danger is part of our trade, senor," he said "What is the Englishman's name?"

"Nelson Lee."

"Diablo! Then we have captured two prizes instead of one!" cried La Navaja exultingly. "We are in luck. There will be two fat ransoms instead of one."

He signed to two of his followers, and in the twinkling of an eye the detective was pinioned in the same fashion as Don Jose. The latter's servants and Nelson Lee's guide were then provided with a mule apiece, and ranged in a line before the brigand chief.

"You two," said La Navaja, addressing the servants, "will now proceed to Torre Esperanza, and inform la senora that her husband is a prisoner. Say to her that the ransom we demand for his release is one hundred thousand pesetas. That sum must be brought to this place at midnight on Wednesday. He who brings it must place the money on that boulder, and then ride away without looking behind him. If my conditions are honourably obeyed, Don Jose will be set at liberty on Thursday morning. If any treachery is attempted, he will be shot. Now go!"

The servants put spurs to their mules and galloped away, only too glad to have escaped with their lives.

"As for you," continued La Navaja, turning to the guide, "you will return to Algeciras, and report to the British Vice-consul that his distinguished compatriot—Senor Nelson Lee—has been captured by me. You will say to the consul that the ransom I demand for the Senor Lee's release is the same as for Don Jose de Vadillo—namely, one hundred thousand pesetas. You have heard the instructions I have given to Don Jose's servants. Repeat them to the consul, and tell him that the same conditions apply to the Senor Lee. That is all. Be off!"

The guide wheeled his mule round, and galloped back in the direction of Algeciras. The brigands waited till he was out of sight, and then, having blindfolded their prisoners, they started off for their mountain stronghold.

FOUND—AND LOST!

HALF an hour's steady riding brought the brigands to their secret lair, which was a spacious cave at the foot of one of the lesser mountains.

The only way by which the cave could be approached was through a deep and narrow ravine bounded on either side by perpendicular walls of rock, fully two hundred feet in height.

At the end of the ravine, and in front of the cave, was a semi-circular space, which the brigands had enclosed with a wooden stockade. Within this stockade were a number of roughly constructed sheds, which served as stables for the mules. In the centre of the stockade, opposite the mouth of the cave, was a massive gate, padlocked and barred.

Having stabled their mules and horses, the brigands led their prisoners into the cave, and removed the bandages from their eyes.

"I have no desire to cause you more inconvenience than is necessary," said La Navaja to Don Jose. "If I order your bonds to be removed, will you give me your parole that you will not attempt to escape?"

"Most decidedly no!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, before his fellow-captive could reply. "Neither of us will make any terms whatever with you!"

La Navaja bared his yellow teeth in an ugly grin; then again adressed himself to Don Jose.

"Are you of the same mind as the Englishman, senor?" he asked.

Don Jose glanced at Nelson Lee, who returned the glance with an almost imperceptible nod of his head.

"Yes," replied Don Jose, "if Senor Lee will not give his parole, neither will I."

La Navaja called to one of his followers.

"Bind these two more securely, and carry them into the inner cave," he said. "You are appointed their gaoler, and your life shall answer for it if they escape."

Their arms were already pinioned to their sides, and as soon as the fellow had lashed their legs together and had tethered their wrists behind their backs, he partly dragged and partly carried them into a smaller cave, which opened out of the back of the larger one. Having flung them down on a heap of straw on the floor of the cave, he left them

to their own reflections whilst he went outside to assist his comrades to unload Don Jose's baggage-mules and carry in the plunder.

"Why did you refuse to give your parole?" asked Don Jose, when their gaoler had departed.

"Because I mean to escape," said Nelson Lee.

Don Jose shook his head.

"I have heard it said that you British never know when you are beaten," he said. "But surely you must confess that you are beaten now. In the first place, look at the way in which we are bound. Even if our captors were to leave us to our own devices, we could never free ourselves from——"

He checked himself with a gasp of amazement, for even as he spoke the detective quietly put out a hand and touched him on the arm.

"Dios mio! Is it possible that you have already freed your hands?" he gasped.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Nelson Lee coolly.

Further conversation was interrupted at this point by the advent of the brigand who had been told off to mount guard on them.

Evidently he regarded his office more or less a sinecure, for he merely cast a careless glance at the two men on the heap of straw, and then returned to the larger cave, where his comrades were busily engaged in unpacking Don Jose's baggage.

For the next three or four hours the cave re-echoed with the sounds of drunken revelry. The brigands were celebrating their victory. Then La Navaja, overcome by the potent wine, curled himself up on the floor, and was presently fast asleep. One by one his companions followed his example, until at last the only man who remained awake was the man who had been ordered to keep watch on Don Jose and Nelson Lee. Knowing that he was responsible for their safe custody, he had drunk but sparingly.

When the last of his comrades had succumbed to the effects of the wine, he plucked a blazing faggot from the fire, and stole into the inner cave. Finding that the two prisoners were apparently sound asleep, he returned to his seat by the fire, unslung his rifle, and placed it across his knees. Then he buried his chin in his hands, and settled down for an all-night, solitary vigil.

In the meantime Nelson Lee had contrived to loosen his remaining bonds, though he had been shrewd enough to leave the ropes in such a position as to convey the idea that they were still securely knotted.

With infinite caution he now wriggled out of the loosened ropes, and set to work to free Don Jose's arms. When this had been accomplished he whispered:

"The rest you can manage for yourself. I am going to reconnoitre."

Without waiting for his companion's reply, he crept on his hands and knees to the opening between the two caves.

The scene which met his gaze was highly picturesque. One half of the outer cave was shrouded in black shadow, whilst the other half was illumined by the fitful light of the flickering fire. Their gaoler was seated on a low wooden stool, his back towards the entrance, and his eyes fixed on the fire.

Around him, stretched at full-length, were the sleeping forms of La Navaja and his ten companions. In one corner was a stack of rifles, in another a pile of plunder.

And, mounting guard, as it were, above the sleeping brigands, from the rocky shelf on which it had been placed, was the grotesque statuette of the Silver Dwarf—now glittering in the flash of a leaping flame, now swallowed up by one of the snakelike shadows that ever and anon shot to and fro across the cave.

"There's only one way!" mused Nelson Lee. "It would be madness to tackle that chap in the cave here. However quietly I did it, there would be a great risk of awaking some of the others. I must try to lure him outside."

He lowered himself until his body was absolutely flat on the ground; then dragged himself inch by inch round the dark side of the cave.

Reaching the entrance at last, he rose to his feet and silently glided to the middle of the enclosure. There, having concealed himself behind a huge boulder, he gave vent to a low, doleful whine.

Hearing it, the man in front of the fire turned and glanced towards the mouth of the cave.

"Caramba! That's odd!" he muttered. "We've no dogs here, and yet if that wasn't a dog I'll——"

The whine was repeated.

"It's a dog!" he exclaimed. "I must see into this at once. If it's one of Don Jose's, which has followed its master here, the sooner I make an end of it the better."

He stole to the mouth of the cave, and peered into the pitchy darkness outside. He whistled to the supposed dog, but the only answer he received was a low, impatient yelp.

"It's outside the stockade gate," he muttered.

He slung his rifle over his shoulder, and pulled out a ponderous key; then hurried across the enclosure, and unlocked and opened the gate.

"Curse the brute! Where is it?" he growled, striving in vain to pierce the inky darkness.

He pursed up his lips to whistle again, but even as he did so a stealthy footstep behind him caused him to spin round with a gasp of alarm. The next instant a pair of sinewy hands encircled his throat, and a low voice hissed in his ear:

"One cry, and you're a dead man!"

Too late the brigand realised that he had been tricked. Despite the warning, he strove to shout for help, but the fingers that gripped his windpipe strangled his cry; and a moment later, with a swift and sudden move-

ment, the detective tripped him up and planted one knee on his chest.

Game to the last, he plucked a dagger from his belt, and aimed a furious blow at the detective's heart. Quick as thought, Lee loosed one hand from his opponent's throat and seized his uplifted arm. With a dexterous twist that well-nigh wrenched the arm from its socket he forced the man to drop his weapon; then he clenched his fist and dealt the brigand a blow between the eyes that momentarily stunned him. A second and a third blow followed in quick succession; and then, before the fellow could recover his scattered wits, the detective dragged him across to one of the sheds, gagged him with a handkerchief, and bound him hand and foot.

Flushed with triumph, Nelson Lee then stole back to the cave. By that time Don Jose had removed the last of his bonds, and a moment later, with the Silver Dwarf tucked under the detective's arm, the two men left the cave and made their way to the stables.

They had saddled their horses, and were leading them across the enclosure, when suddenly, from the direction of the cave, a startled cry fell on their ears, followed a second later by an ear-splitting chorus of oaths and yells.

"Quick! Mount and ride for your life!" gasped Nelson Lee, as he vaulted into the saddle. "One of them has evidently awakened and discovered our absence."

He had scarcely finished speaking ere a number of brigands rushed out of the cave, each with a blazing faggot in his hand.

"There they are!" shouted one.

Half a dozen rifles were immediately unslung; but before the brigands had time to fire the detective and Don Jose had vanished through the open gate, and were galloping down the ravine.

Half mad with baffled rage, the scoundrels rushed to the gate and poured a random volley into the darkness.

One of the bullets carried away the tip of Don Jose's ear, and another drilled a hole through the fleshy part of Nelson Lee's arm.

With these exceptions, however, the fugitives were unscathed; and a moment or two later they galloped round the turn at the end of the ravine and passed out of the line of fire.

"To the right!" cried Don Jose, when they reached the end of the ravine. "That's our nearest way to Torre Esperanza."

"You know where we are? asked Nelson Lee.

"Perfectly. I know every inch of this neighbourhood, every road, and every bridle-path. I could find my way about it blindfold."

"Good! Do you think they'll pursue us?"

There was no need for Don Jose to reply, for even as Lee asked the question the thunder of hoofs was borne upon the wind. But the mules of La Navaja's band were no match for the milk-white Arab of Don Jose and the thoroughbred Cleveland bay which Nelson Lee had borrowed from the consul. For half an hour, perhaps, the dull thud of the pursuing hoofs were still to be heard in their rear; but after that the sounds grew fainter and fainter with every passing minute, until finally they died away altogether.

"Victory!" cried Nelson Lee, waving the Silver Dwarf above his head. "At last we have shaken them off! At last my quest is ended! At last I have secured the Silver Dwarf——"

Alas, he had spoken too soon! They were riding at that moment down a narrow winding mountain-path. On their right was a sheer drop of five hundred feet, at the bottom of which was a valley, dotted with fields and vineyards. And just as Nelson Lee was boasting of his success, his horse tripped over something on the ground and stumbled forwards on his knees.

So completely was the detective taken off his guard that before he knew what was happening the Silver Dwarf was jerked out of his hand, balanced itself for an instant on the edge of the path, and then vanished into the valley below.

MARK RYMER PICKS UP THE SCENT.

AT noon the following day Mark Rymer arrived at Algeciras. In accordance with the Prefect's promise to Nelson Lee, the professor had been detained for twenty-four hours in Paris in order to give evidence at the judicial inquiry into the death of the silversmith's assistant.

The police, of course, had not been able to secure any evidence of the professor's guilt; and although he had but little hope of regaining his first advantage, he had nevertheless set out for Spain by the first available train.

Like Nelson Lee, his first act upon reaching Algeciras was to seek an interview with the British vice-consul.

"Glad to make your acquaintance," said the consul, when the professor had introduced himself. "What can I do for you?"

"Do you know Don Jose de Vadillo?" asked the professor

The consul started, smiled, and nodded his head.

"Do you know whether he has returned yet?" continued the professor.

The consul laughed outright.

"What an odd coincidence!" he said. "Do you know, I had Mr. Nelson Lee, the great detective, here yesterday asking the very same question!"

Rymer arched his rounded shoulders, blinked his deep-set eyes, and softly rubbed his claw-like hands.

"How strange!" he said, in a purring voice. "I didn't know that Mr. Lee was acquainted with Don Jose."

"He wasn't," said consul. "But he's acquainted with him now, by Jove!"

"What do you mean?"

"Haven't you heard the news? All Algeciras is agape with it."

"I have only just arrived, and you are the first person I have spoken to. What has happened?"

"Well, it seems that when Don Jose was in Paris he bought a silver statuette, which is known by the name of the Silver Dwarf. For some reason or other, Mr. Lee is very anxious to secure this statuette, and for that purpose he followed Don Jose to Algeciras. He arrived here at noon yesterday, and came to see me. I told him that Don Jose had left a few hours before for Torre Esperauza. He asked me to provide him with a horse and guide, which I did; and at one o'clock he started out in pursuit.

"About seven o'clock last night the guide returned with the news that they had overtaken Don Jose, but that shortly afterwards the party had been surprised by a band of brigands under the leadership of the notorious La Navaja. Don Jose and Mr. Lee had been carried off to the brigand's stronghold, and the guide had been sent back to inform me that La Navaja demanded the sum of one hundred thousand pesetas for Mr. Lee's release.

"I immediately wired to my Government for instructions. I received my instructions this morning; but by the time they arrived the necessity for interference had passed away."

"How? Has Mr. Lee escaped?"

Half a dozen rifles were immediately unslung, but before the brigands had time to fire the detective and Don Jose had vanished through the open gate, and were galloping down the ravine.

"Yes. The news was brought into Algeciras about an hour ago by one of Don Jose's servants. He reports that his master and Mr. Lee arrived at Torre Esperanza shortly after daybreak this morning, but immediately collected a number of servants, and returned to hunt for the Silver Dwarf."

"To wrest it from the brigands, do you mean?"

"No. Mr. Lee contrived to bring it away with him when he and Don Jose escaped;

but as they were riding along the edge of the valley which runs down to San Roque, Mr. Lee's horse stumbled and fell, with the result that the Silver Dwarf was jerked out of his hand and fell some four or five hundred feet into the valley beneath. Owing to the darkness it was useless to hunt for it then; but, as I have already explained, they returned to look for it."

"Have they found it?"

"That is more than I can say."

"Where was it lost?"

The consul described the spot. The professor had travelled in the neighbourhood the year before, and knew where the place was situated.

"I'll go there at once," he said. "I have an urgent message to deliver to Don Jose, and it seems to me, from what you have just told me, that I shall be more likely to find him at the place you have described than at Torre Esperanza."

He thanked the consul for his information, and bowed himself out. A quarter of an hour later he was galloping towards San Roque as fast as a Barbary pony could cover the ground.

It was almost dark by the time he reached the lower end of the valley described by the consul. Pulling up at a wayside inn—the Taberan de los Montes—he dismounted, and called for a glass of wine.

"Do you happen to know Don Jose de Vadillo?" he asked, when the landlord had served him.

"Yes, senor," replied the landlord. "Everybody hereabouts knows the good Don Jose."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"Yes, senor. He rode up the valley this morning with an English senor and a party of servants."

"Is he up the valley now?"

"I think so, senor. I have not seen them return."

"Then they haven't found the—er—the thing they're looking for?"

A blank expression crossed the landlord's face.

"I do not understand the senor," he said. "I did not know that Don Jose was in search of anything. What is it that he looks for?"

"A silver statuette, fashioned in the form of a dwarf."

"Cojones! And I never knew!" gasped the landlord. "Why, I found the thing myself this morning! It was lying amongst the vines, in my vineyard at the foot of the hill!"

"You have it now?" cried the professor, with a fierce thrill of exultation.

"Yes, senor."

"Show it to me."

The landlord dived back into the house, leaving the professor standing by the side of his pony at the door. Scarcely had he disappeared when a clatter of hoofs was heard. With a gasp of alarm the professor spun round, and even as he did so Don Jose and Nelson Lee cantered round a turn in the road, not more than a hundred yards away!

Quick as thought, Mark Rymer sprang to the door and vanished into the tavern. At the same instant the landlord came out of a room at the end of the sanded passage with the Silver Dwarf in his hand. The professor darted down the passage, seized the astonished landlord by the shoulders, and pushed him into the room.

"Look at me!" he said, in a harsh, commanding voice.

Paralysed with bewilderment, the dull-witted Spaniard obeyed.

For a second or two the professor stared him full in the face, his eyes contracting to the merest pin-points, and glittering with a strange weird phosphorescence that came and went. Then he calmly took the Silver Dwarf from the landlord's hand and held it up before his widely-staring eyes.

"You have never seen this in your life!" he said, speaking slowly and deliberately. "You have never even heard it mentioned! You know nothing about it!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth ere the clatter of hoofs was heard outside the tavern door, and an instant later the voice of Don Jose was heard calling for the landlord.

The professor made a quick pass in front of the landlord's face, and pushed him out of the room.

"Go! Attend to your customers!" he said.

The landlord pulled himself together, like a man awakening from a dream, and shuffled off towards the door. The detective and Don Jose had reined up outside the tavern, but had not dismounted.

"Are you the landlord?" asked Don Jose, when that worthy appeared.

"Yes, senor."

"Then you are the owner of those vineyards at the foot of the hill?"

"Yes, senor."

"My friend"—here Don Jose glanced at Nelson Lee—"my friend and I have been searching for a small silver statuette, fashioned in the form of a dwarf. It was lost, in the early hours of this morning, somewhere in the neighbourhood of your vineyards. We have taken the liberty of thoroughly exploring them, but have failed to find it. It has occurred to my friend that perhaps you found it yourself before we arrived. Did you?"

The landlord shook his head.

"No, senor," he said; "I have neither seen nor heard——"

Before he could complete his sentence his wife, who was plucking a fowl in one of the front rooms of the tavern, suddenly thrust her head through the open window and interrupted him with a cry of indignant surprise.

"Manuel—Manuel," she cried, "how darest thou tell such lies to good Don Jose de Vadillo? Fie on thee!"

He stared at her in blank amazement.

"Puneta! Thou hast taken leave of thy senses!" he growled. "What lies have I told the good Don Jose?"

"Thou knowest thou art lying!" she retorted vehemently. "Hast thou not just said that thou didst not find the silver mannikin?"

"Ay; and I spoke but truth!" he replied.

She lifted up her hands in pious horror.

"Manuel, I blush for thee!" she said. "Thou knowest that thou didst find the silver mannikin in thy vineyard, and brought it home with thee! Surely thou canst not have forgotten! Why, it is but a moment ago that thou wert telling the other Englishman——"

"The other Englishman?"

It was Nelson Lee who spoke, his voice vibrating with suppressed excitement.

"Yes, senor," said the landlord's wife. "That is his pony beside the door. He arrived a few minutes ago and spoke of the silver mannikin. My husband told him that he had found it, and went to fetch it from the room at the end of the passage. The Englishman followed him, and is now——"

The detective waited to hear no more, for at that moment the click of an opening window fell on his ears.

Hastily dismounting, he thrust the startled landlord aside, and darted down the passage.

He dashed into the room at the end, and found that it was empty. He sprang to the open window, and eagerly peered out.

The light was failing fast, and night was coming on apace. For an instant he saw nothing save a spacious, ill-paved stableyard. Then his eyes fell on the well-known figure of Mark Rymer, who was just in the act of climbing over the low stone wall which divided the yard from the fields beyond.

The detective was unable to see whether the professor had the Silver Dwarf or not. But he argued to himself that Mark Rymer was not the sort of man to leave the tavern empty-handed. Without a moment's hesitation, therefore, Lee scrambled through the window, and tore away in hot pursuit.

Down the lane, across a number of fields, over the bridge which spanned the river, and for upwards of two miles along the road to Linea, he chased Mark Rymer, seldom losing sight of him, and inch by inch reducing the gap between them, until at last he was less than a dozen yards behind.

Suddenly, to Nelson Lee's amazement, the professor pulled up, seated himself on a grassy bank by the side of the road, and drew out his cigar-case.

"So you've given in at last, have you?" panted Lee, pulling up in front of him.

"I beg your pardon—— Oh, it's Mr. Lee, is it?" said the professor, as he carefully selected a cigar and replaced the case in his pocket. "Given in? I do not understand you."

"You'll understand me presently!" said the detective grimly. "Where's the Silver Dwarf?"

The professor bit off the end of his cigar and lighted it.

"The Silver Dwarf?" he repeated, between the puffs. "I beg your pardon! How thoughtless of me! Permit me to offer you a weed!"

He pulled out his cigar-case again, and held it out towards Nelson Lee, who waved it aside with an impatient gesture.

"This is no time for foolery!" he said. "You have stolen the Silver Dwarf from the Taberna de los Montes, and I insist upon you returning it to me at once!"

"You insist?" said the professor, peering and blinking in his usual owl-like fashion. "You insist? That is a curious way of putting it, Mr. Lee! To whom did the Silver Dwarf belong?"

"To Lord Easington, of course."

"Exactly. But Lord Easington is dead. I am his heir——"

"You are not!" interrupted Nelson Lee.

"And consequently all that belonged to Lord Easington belongs to me," continued the professor. "In other words, the Silver Dwarf is mine; and yet, in spite of this, you insist—insist, mind you!—that I should hand it over to you—to you, an outsider! You amuse me!"

The detective made no reply, but set to work to explore the ditch and the surface of the road. The professor lazily puffed at his cigar, and watched him with an air of amused indifference.

"You're sitting on it, I believe!" said the detective at last.

"Dear me! I hope not!" said the professor, rising to his feet in pretended alarm.

The detective examined the place where he had been sitting; then he suddenly darted forward, and ran his hands down each side of the professor's body.

"No; it isn't in my pocket!" said the professor pleasantly. "Would you like me to take off my boots, or will you take my word for it that it isn't there?"

"What have you done with it?" demanded Nelson Lee, almost beside himself with chagrin.

The professor flicked away the ash from the end of his cigar. Then he arched his rounded shoulders, and peered into the detective's face.

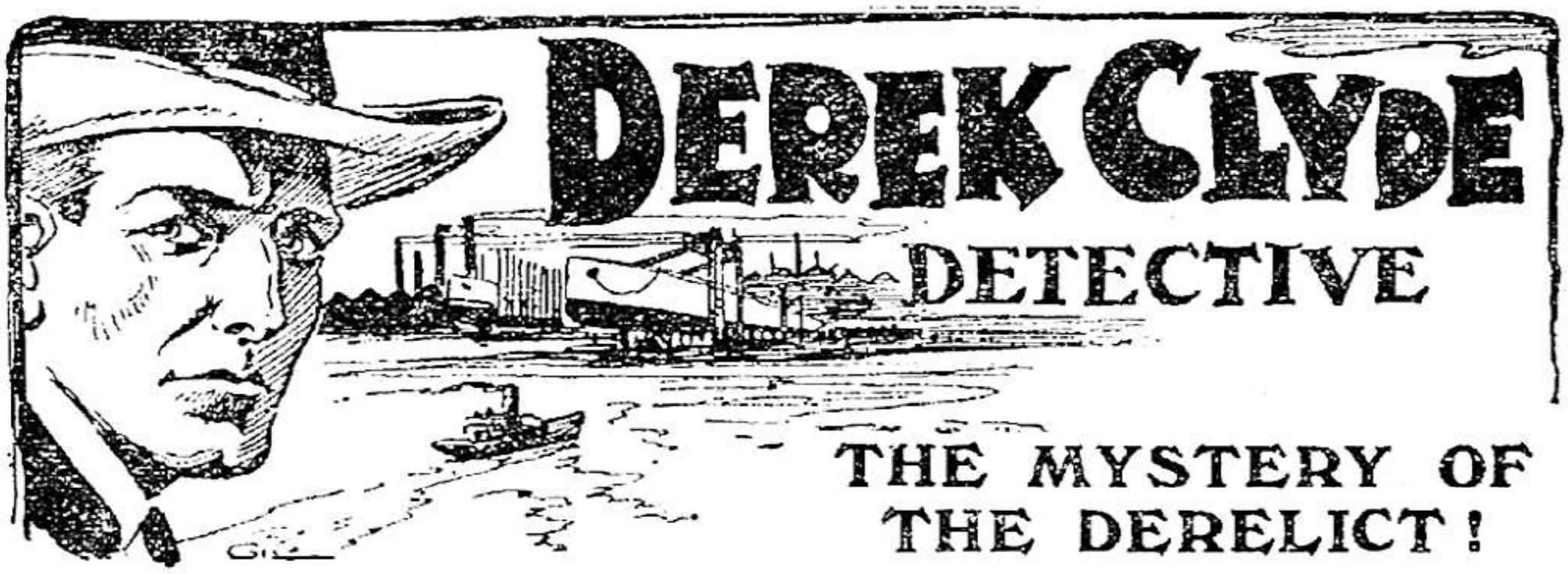
"I won't tell you what I've done with it!" he said. "But I'll tell you this. Neither you nor I, nor any other human being will ever set eyes on the Silver Dwarf again! Good-night!"

He turned on his heel, and glided away in the direction of Linea. For a moment the detective stood irresolute; then a sudden thought flashed into his mind, and he started to retrace his steps to the Taberna de los Montes.

(To be continued.)

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

GRAND NEW COMPLETE TALES OF THE FAMOUS SCOTS DETECTIVE!



"HELLO! Who is it?" Derek Clyde called over the telephone at ten o'clock on a blustery night in December.

"Murdoch is speaking," was the reply from the Central Police Office. "I've had word of a murder down by the river, and I thought you might like to come with me."

"I'm not so sure that I would. The weather is beastly, and I've just settled by the fire with a pipe and a book."

"Don't come if you don't want to. Please yourself. But I'm told it is a queer affair, brutal and mysterious."

"Oh, that makes a difference. I'll come, then."

"Very well, Clyde. I'll pick you up on the way. I shan't be long."

Dropping the receiver on its hook, Clyde looked regretfully at the blazing fire, and sighed. He hesitated for a moment, then went into his bedchamber and discarded his slippers and dressing-gown. By the time he was ready to start, in cap and overcoat, Inspector Murdoch was waiting for him in a cab in St. Vincent Place.

He hurriedly joined him, and a few minutes later the two stepped from the vehicle in Robertson Street, close to the mouth of a court. Both were recognised at once by the crowd that had assembled. Low voices uttered their names, and a constable who was on guard touched his helmet to them. Buffeted by a howling wind that blew from the Broomielaw, stared at by wolfish, bloated faces, they passed down the court to a dwelling at the bottom of it, and were admitted by a little, elderly man with grey hair, and cunning, clean-shaven features. He was Dory Mings, the proprietor of a cheap and squalid lodging-house. He was quaking with agitation.

"So you've brought Mr. Clyde with you, inspector," he said. "It's awful, sir. You'll be shocked. It gave me the cold shivers, I can assure you, when I first saw the——"

Inspector Murdoch cut him short, and he and the detective followed him up the staircase, and into a small room where the light was burning. They stood aghast, horrified by the sight that met their eyes. It was a poorly furnished bedchamber, lacking a carpet. Stretched in the middle of the floor, with a long-bladed knife lying by his side, was a middle-aged man with a fair moustache who wore a seaman's uniform.

He had been stabbed in all of the upper part of his body, from his waist to his head. He was bleeding from at least a dozen wounds, and blood was spattered on the boards, on the furniture, at the base of the walls. The blows must have been dealt in a very fury of passion with the utmost ferocity. The inspector was almost sickened, and even to Clyde, who had seen murder in so many tragic forms, the sight was revolting.

"Who is he?" asked Murdoch, turning to the proprietor. "A lodger of yours—eh?"

"No, sir, he's not," Dory Mings replied. "I don't know who he is. It was my lodger that killed him. He is a sailor. Peter Cornish is the name he gave. He has been staying here for a couple of weeks, and he's been visited three or four times by the dead man, who must have had some business with him. Good Lord, isn't it awful? Cornish must have been off his head with rage to have——"

The proprietor paused, shaking with agitation again. And presently, when he was in a calmer mood, he gave a clear account of what had happened.

"It was about an hour ago that the murdered man called," he began. "I had a glimpse of him as he came in and went upstairs. I was busy in the kitchen, and after a bit the sound of angry voices above brought me to the hall, where I listened for a few seconds.

"The two men were quarrelling. Cornish said something about not paying him another penny, and the other man shouted at him, 'If you don't I'll tell the police what I saw by the glare of the light!' Those were the very words. Then their voices sank low, and I returned to the kitchen.

"I hadn't been there long when I heard scuffling noises, and the sound of a heavy fall. I hurried to the hall again, and as I got to the foot of the staircase Peter Cornish came tearing down. His eyes were blazing,

and his clothes were splashed with blood. He yelled at me not to stop him, and as I jumped aside he dashed by me and out of the house. I was so frightened that I didn't go after him. I went upstairs, and when I had seen the body here, lying as it is now, I ran down and called for the police."

"How long is it since Cornish escaped?" inquired Inspector Murdoch.

"More than half an hour, sir," Dory Mings answered.

The inspector nodded, and took a note-book and pencil from his pocket. To him it was an ordinary crime of passion, committed from some motive in which he was not particularly interested. But Clyde held a different view.

His curiosity had been stirred by the statements that had been made, and he was rather inclined to think that it might prove to be a very sensational kind of murder. Having glanced around the room, he searched the dead man, and found on him some letters and papers, which he briefly examined.

"Ah, these disclose the poor fellow's identity!" he remarked.

"What have you got there?" asked Murdoch.

"A Board of Trade certificate. The man was a seaman."

"That is obvious from his uniform, Clyde. And who is he?"

"It appears from these letters that his name is James Falconer, and that he was the second mate of the cargo steamer Pentland."

"I know that vessel, sir," said Dory Mings. "She runs between Glasgow and American ports, and she has been in the river for a couple of weeks."

"It was a couple of weeks ago, you have stated," said Clyde, "that the man Cornish came to you. I wonder if he was one of the crew of the Pentland?"

"That I can't tell you, sir. He may have been."

"Did he bring any luggage with him, Mings?"

"No, sir; he had only the clothes he wore."

"On the previous occasions when James Falconer called to see Peter Cornish, did you hear any of the conversation between the two?"

"Not a word, Mr. Clyde."

"And you heard to-night only what you have just repeated to us?"

"That's all, sir. What Cornish said about not paying another penny, and the dead man's threat to tell the police what he saw by the glare of the light."

"We must have a description of the man Cornish," Clyde continued. "What is he like, Mings?"

"He is about thirty years of age, sir," Dory Mings replied. "Rather a little man, heavily built, with a black beard and moustache. He has a swarthy complexion, and his eyes are rather slantwise, like a Jap's. There may be just a touch of Japanese blood in him, but in other respects he's as British as British can be."

Inspector Murdoch, who had been listening, scribbled again in his note-book.

"The description won't be of much value," he declared. "The first thing the fellow will do will be to shave off his beard and moustache."

Clyde nodded.

"And the second thing he will do," he said, "will be to get out of the country as quickly as he can. But if he has a Board of Trade certificate in his own name—as doubtless he has—he won't dare to show it anywhere. He will endeavour to obtain a berth on some vessel without papers, and he won't go very far lest he should be caught while travelling. No, he will probably try at Leith, or Blyth, or Sunderland."

"How is he to be identified, Clyde?"

"By what Mings has told us. It will not be easy for a man with a swarthy complexion and slanting eyes to elude the observation of the police at any port where ——" Clyde paused, and glanced again at the corpse. "Come, Murdoch, we'll be off now," he added.

They descended the stairs, and left the house. When they had passed by the constable and the crowd who were still assembled at the mouth of the court, they walked for a short distance in the direction of the river. The inspector stopped.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I am going to find the steamer Pentland," Clyde replied. "I want to make some inquiries."

"What for? You are not likely to get any information that will throw light on the murder."

"I am not sure of that. I have an idea that I shall, though I may be wrong."

"I won't come with you, if you don't mind. I have some important work waiting for me."

"Very well. You can leave the matter to me. I'll help you with this case, which is a rather curious one."

"I'll be glad if you will, Clyde. Very good of you. Call at the police office later, and let me know if you have learned anything. Meanwhile I'll have a description of Peter Cornish circulated."

With that Murdoch struck off towards the heart of the city, and Clyde pressed on to the Broomielaw, where he questioned a sailor whom he met, and was directed to the steamer Pentland.

A CUNNING ROGUE.

A WEEK elapsed, and what Derek Clyde accomplished during that period may be briefly related. It was at Leith, where he started his investigations, that he first got on the track of a sailor whom he believed to be Peter Cornish.

At that port, on the morning after the murder, the man had tried to ship on several vessels without the necessary papers, and had been refused. He had altered his appear-

ance, and concealed the slant of his eyes, for he was described as wearing a green patch over one eye and as being clean-shaven, except for a fringe of black beard around his chin.

From Leith he went south, and made similar attempts at Blyth, at North and South Shields, at Sunderland, and at East and West Hartlepool. Thus the detective traced him step by step, and he finally heard of him again at Middlesbrough, and there lost track of him.

He had not meanwhile reported his success to Inspector Murdoch, who was of the opinion that the fugitive had escaped to Liverpool or London, or some other big port, and had probably got out of the country by now.

At Middlesbrough Clyde stayed, having good reason to think that Peter Cornish was in hiding there, waiting for an opportunity of stowing himself aboard of some vessel. For three days he persevered in his efforts. Shabbily attired, and with his features disguised, he made guarded inquiries in the quarter of the town in which sailors lived.

He spent two nights at different lodging-houses, and at a late hour on the third night, after another unsuccessful day, he got a cheap and dingy apartment on the first floor of a house to which he had not been before. He was still confident that Cornish was in Middlesbrough. He meant to renew his search on the morrow, and that morning he sent a wire to Murdoch asking him to come and help him.

There was no lock to his door, but to that he gave no thought. It was not likely that any of the other inmates of the dwelling would imagine that he might have something worth stealing. He lay awake for a time, his brain active. At length drowsiness stole upon him, and he was yielding to it, was on the point of going off to sleep, when he was roused by a faint, rustling noise.

He sat up in the darkness, and his heart gave a quick throb. The dusky figure of a man was creeping stealthily, quietly, towards the bed, drawing nearer to it inch by inch. Clyde at first supposed the intruder to be an ordinary thief. He had placed his revolver under his pillow, and as he was about to reach for it he sprang to his feet.

The man had just made a sudden rush for him, and he caught the gleam of steel in his hand as he flung himself at him. It was a knife that the fellow had. Dealing him a staggering blow, Clyde seized his wrist, and gave it a sharp twist. He heard the weapon clatter to the floor. He kicked it aside with his foot, and leapt again at the fellow, who snarled a blood-curdling imprecation as he closed with him.

"You cunning devil!" he panted. "I'll fix you!"

A startling suspicion had occurred to Clyde a moment before, and the truth now flashed to his mind. It was not a thief he was fighting with. He hadn't a doubt that his assailant was Peter Cornish, the fugitive murderer.

"I've got you at last, Cornish!" he blurted out imprudently. "You're the scoundrel I've been looking for!"

An oath burst from the sailor's lips. He was of lean and wiry build, and in his rage and desperation he was a match for the detective. Clyde was afraid that he might get the worst of it, and would lose the fellow. He could not call for help, for bony fingers were fast at his throat, squeezing it tightly, and his efforts to break the hold were of no avail.

The two floundered and scuffled across the room to the open doorway, and through it to the landing. And when they had fought here for a few seconds they reeled to the top of the staircase, and toppled over with a crash. They rolled and slid to the bottom, and landed in the lower hall with a force that threw them apart.

In a trice Peter Cornish had jumped up and rushed from the dwelling; while Clyde, who had fallen underneath, and had been bruised and shaken, lay there half dazed for a short interval. By the time he had got to his feet the man had disappeared in the night, and nothing could be seen or heard of him. No alarm had been raised. All was quiet, save for a low, confused murmur of voices. Brawls were too frequent in this neighbourhood to attract much attention.

"The man was Cornish beyond a doubt," Clyde said to himself as he ascended the stairs to the bedchamber. "By some means he learned that I was making inquiries about him. He has been dogging my steps, and thus he discovered where I was lodging to-night."

What would the fugitive do now? Would he get out of the town, or would he go to the harbour and try to slip unobserved on board some vessel that was to sail on the morrow? No, it was more likely that he would return to the place where he had been in safe hiding for the last two or three days.

CORNERED.

CLYDE was inclined to that opinion, but he wasn't going to take any chances, as he might be wrong. Having pulled on his clothes and put his revolver in his pocket, he left the house with the intention of giving information to the police, and having them watch the harbour and the railway station and the suburban roads.

His course led through a dark and quiet part of Middlesbrough, and when he had gone for some distance, and was passing a piece of waste ground that was littered with heaps of bricks and clothed with rank weeds, he heard a faint, hollow moan. It came from the waste ground, and sounded to him like somebody in distress. He stopped to investigate, and, after a brief search, in which he used his electric torch, he made a startling and tragic discovery.

In a shallow excavation, beneath a canopy of drooping bushes, lay the body of a small, clean-shaven Japanese. It was he who had uttered the moan. His head had been crushed by a blow from a blunt weapon, and he was just drawing his last breath. He was clad only in his underwear, and at his feet, rolled in a bundle, were a tweed cap and a shabby jacket and pair of trousers. It was to be presumed that he had lived for some little time after he had been attacked.

Why had he been stripped? How was that curious fact to be accounted for? It was a mysterious crime, and Clyde was puzzled at first. But as he knelt by the side of the excavation, with the glow of his torch playing on the body, a plausible explanation of the mystery suddenly occurred to him.

"The dead man is a Japanese sailor, and it was Peter Cornish who killed him," he reflected. "He met the poor fellow yonder in the street, and in his desperation he dealt him a murderous blow, and dragged him here. Then he tore off his own garments, put on the clothes of his victim, and stole his papers.

"His next step will be to remove the patch from his eye, and shave the hair from his chin. It is his purpose, of course, to ship on some vessel by means of the stolen papers, hoping that the corpse of the Japanese will not be discovered for several days. The scoundrel has two murders on his soul, and doubtless another as well."

They were logical deductions. Clyde believed that he knew exactly what Cornish had in mind. He was sure that he did. He had been making inquiries at the harbour, and he had learned what vessels were to sail on the morrow. He hurriedly departed, and presently he met a constable, to whom he reported the crime. Then he pressed on his way, and a walk of a quarter of an hour brought him to the police-station.

A sergeant was in charge, and talking to him was Inspector Murdoch, who had arrived in the town that evening, and had been trying to find the detective. Clyde disclosed his identity to him, and gave an account of his struggle in the lodging-house and of his gruesome discovery on the waste ground.

"The poor fellow was killed for a cunning motive, not for robbery," he continued. "A Japanese line of steamers, the Samaka-Maru,

Realising that he could not escape, the man swung round, at bay, and attempted to draw a weapon from his pocket. But before he could do so, Clyde had him by the wrist with one hand, and by the throat with the other.

have for several years made Middlesbrough their port of call in this country. The Nagasaki, of that line, is to sail to-morrow morning, and they are short-handed. I am aware of that. Peter Cornish knew it too, and it is his intention to ship on the vessel as a Jap by means of his victim's papers, trusting that he will be far out at sea before the murder is discovered. We'll go to the liner now, Murdoch, and I wouldn't mind betting that we will find Cornish there. You and I will be able to deal with him. We needn't take anybody else with us."

. . . . . .

It was before daybreak, when the first flush of dawn was quivering on the horizon, that Clyde and Inspector Murdoch slipped aboard the Nagasaki. All was bustle and activity, for the vessel was to sail with the tide in the course of an hour. The captain came forward to the visitors, and inquired in fluent English what they wanted. Clyde whispered to him, and drew him aside to a spot which was in shadow.

"We are looking for a fugitive murderer," he said, "and we have reason to believe that he is one of your crew. Have you engaged a new hand in the last hour or so?"

"Yes, one of my own countrymen," the captain replied. "Higosha Togo is his name."

"He is not of your country," declared Clyde. "He is an impostor."

"But he speaks the language, sir."

"He picked it up in the East. He is a sailor."

"I do not see how he can be the person you are looking for, gentlemen. His papers are correct. He has a seaman's certificate, and another paper showing that he was discharged from a vessel in London, and came to Middlesbrough to get back to Japan on another vessel."

"He is the party we are after. Where is he?"

"I am not sure, sir. I saw him a few moments ago. He may be below, or——"

The captain paused abruptly.

"There he is," he murmured.

He jerked his elbow to the left, and Clyde and the inspector, glancing in that direction, observed a little brown man who was gliding stealthily across the deck towards the gangway. At the same instant he made a rush, and then, realising that he could not escape, he swung round at bay and attempted to draw a weapon from his pocket. But before he could do so Clyde had him by the wrist with one hand, and by the throat with the other.

"We have you, Cornish!" he exclaimed.

The man fought madly, like a wild beast at bay, and his assailants had all they could do to hold him. It was only after a desperate struggle that he was overpowered and fettered. He still resisted, appealing to the captain and the crew, swearing that a mistake had been made, and it was with no little difficulty that Clyde and Murdoch dragged him from the liner.

He was bundled into a cab, and driven to the police-station; and when he was charged with the murder of James Falconer he denied his guilt, denied even his identity. No statement could be got from him, and he was in the same obstinate mood when he was taken to Glasgow the next day.

. . . . . .

A week had elapsed since the arrest of Peter Cornish, and he had not meanwhile opened his lips, when a couple of constables brought him one morning into a room at the Central Police Office in Glasgow. Inspector Murdoch was at his desk, and Clyde was seated by his side. The detective had a newspaper in his hand.

"I have something here that will interest you, Cornish," he said. "It is an article in this paper. Yesterday the steamer Orient arrived in the Thames from Baltimore, and the captain reported a strange and tragic discovery which was made in mid-Atlantic.

"He sighted the schooner Missouri drifting helplessly, and the men whom he sent on board found the dead body of the skipper lying across the scuppers with a bullet wound in his chest. You know what this will mean to you, so perhaps you will be willing to clear up the mystery which I have already solved to a great extent. You have committed three murders, and you will assuredly be hanged for one of them."

Peter Cornish was silent for a moment, a savage, wolfish glitter in his eyes. What vague hopes he might have entertained had been crushed.

"Curse the Missouri!" he blurted out with an oath. "I thought she was at the bottom of the ocean! It wouldn't make much difference to me if she had been, though. I'll tell you the whole story. Our skipper, Bent by name, was a human brute if ever there was one! He treated us like dogs, and on the night of the storm he ordered me to do something that would have cost me my life.

"That is what started the trouble. When I refused to obey him he pulled his revolver, and he would have killed me if I hadn't shot him first. The storm grew worse, and some of us were washed overboard by the waves. Then the steamer Pentland came along, and I was saved, my surviving comrades being drowned in the attempt to leap from one vessel to the other.

The man stopped. He glared venomously at Clyde for a moment, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You've brought me to this by your cunning work, and I wish I could get even with you," he muttered sullenly, as the constables led him off. "You are sending me to the gallows. The rope is as good as around my neck. I know that. I'll have to swing for the murder of Jim Falconer, but it is a satisfaction to me to feel that I killed a blackmailing scoundrel, who was worse than I am."

THE END.

(Continued rom page 14.)

ful submarine lay submerged, firmly interlocked with the wreck.

I may as well explain at once that wireless messages were immediately dispatched to the Admiralty from the liner. The exact position of the derelict was given, and a destroyer and a salvage ship set off for the spot.

Although we didn't know it until some time afterwards, the hulk was easily located, and the submarine was salved—lashed by steel chains and hawsers to the side of the rescue ship, and taken into dry dock. Except for her buckled and torn foreward plates, she was not much the worse for her mishap. And within a month the Admiralty had made their tests, and had entered into negotiations with Mr. Maxwell.

The old derelict, by the way, was blown up, and sent to the bottom, One danger the less for ships that used the wide Atlantic.

There was great excitement when we trooped up the temporary accommodation ladder of the liner. We entered by means of one of the big openings that are only used in port—finding ourselves on Deck H, far below the boat decks.

It was like walking out of the dark night into the centre of a superb hotel. We found ourselves in a wide, mahogany panelled corridor, with soft carpet under foot, and with little artistic sprays of electric lights along the walls.

A grand staircase led upwards near by. Stewards were hovering about—officers, and nurses, too. This part of the vessel had been completely shut off, but now and again we caught sight of inquisitive passengers, peering from beyond barriers.

We were all taken straight away to the second class lounge—which had been set aside for our benefit. And here we found hot broth, medical necessities, and every attention we could thing of. The lounge was a superb place with mirrored walls, soft carpets and comfortable lounges and chairs.

And while we were partaking of the food, the liner got under way again.

It was all like a dream—it was so wonderful after what we had feared. We were safe now—and there was nothing but luxury and comfort in front of us. And a good sleep would put every fellow right.

Nelson Lee and Mr. Maxwell had vanished almost from the first. They had, in fact, been taken straight into the captain's cabin. And the members of the Shark's crew were carted about somewhere else.

Lee made a pleasant discovery.

The ship was the Lauretanic, of the famous Star Line—the biggest passenger vessel afloat. And her skipper was Captain William Manning—whom Nelson Lee knew intimately. Many and many a time had Lee crossed the Atlantic under Captain Manning's care.

There were warm greetings, and after Lee and Mr. Maxwell had washed, shaved and changed into borrowed clothing, they felt themselves again—more particularly as they, too, had partaken liberally of sustaining broth.

They gathered in the skipper's cabin, and went into full details regarding the disaster.

"Well, gentlemen, I'm mighty glad to have been of assistance," said Captain Manning, as he poured out three stiff whiskies. "You'll join me? Good! Just what you need. 'Pon my soul, Lee, you're about the last man I expected to pick up from an old hulk in the Atlantic."

"You never know what you're going to pick up at sea, Captain," smiled Nelson Lee. "I want to thank you heartily for all that you have done, and for sending those wireless messages to the Admiralty——"

"Rubbish!" interrupted the skipper. "Duty, that's all. Now, I'm wondering about your position. Of course, you'll have to come on to New York with us——".

"New York!" interrupted Lee quickly. "You're outward bound, then?"

"Why, yes," said Manning, his face breaking into a smile. "Ye gods! Did you think we were on the homeward trip? I'm afraid you're disappointed, Lee—there'll be no sight of old England just yet awhile."

Nelson Lee was not astonished—he had been prepared for something of the sort. The Lauretanic was not bound for Southampton—but for New York! This meant that all the boys would be taken to the United States!

It was, of course, absolutely out of the question for us to be landed on British soil—the liner had lost valuable time in picking us up, and certainly would not delay another moment. Whether we liked it or not, we had to remain on board—and go on the journey to New York City.

When the juniors found this out there was quite a little excitement.

"New York, eh?" said Handforth enthusiastically. "That's ripping! I'm jolly glad we were shipwrecked now. It means we're going on a Freeman's trip to the United States!"

"Oh, good!"

"We'll be able to see the bright lights of Broadway!"

"Rather!"

"Cowboys, and all that!" went on Handforth cheerfully. "Red Indians and wigwams! Cattle rustlers and——"

"On Broadway?" I grinned. "Don't get so excited, old man. I don't suppose we shall be allowed to land, anyway."

"What?"

"We've got no passports," I pointed out. "Besides, our passages haven't been paid, or anything. We shall have to stay on board until the ship goes back to Southampton."

This caused some of the fellows to look rather disappointed—not that they cared much in their present tired and exhausted condition. All they wanted was sleep—and they got it.

For soon afterwards we were taken down to Decks F and H, and distributed along the

corridors into various second-class staterooms. The first-class was full up, in any case, and there was no accommodation left for castaways. Fortunately, the second-class accommodation was not overcrowded, and there was ample room for us.

And, sinking into the soft, luxurious beds, the Remove went to sleep. And the Lauretanic continued placidly on her way across the Atlantic.

Such was the trip which Fate had decided—we were bound for New York!

CHAPTER VI.

A LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE!

"THIS," said Archie Glenthorne, "is dashed queer!"

He raised himself on an elbow, and gazed about him, fumbling vainly for his inevitable monocle. Archie was still heavy with sleep, and he looked round with an expression of wonder in his eyes.

He saw a comfortable room, with an electric light glowing in the ceiling, and with carpet on the floor. There was a well upholstered lounge, and a mahogany arrangement with nickel fittings fastened to one wall—complete with mirrors and cupboards.

Archie was astonishingly near the roof, and he couldn't quite understand this. On the other side of the room were two beds—one on top of the other. Handforth occupied the lower bed, and Handforth was lying on his back, with his mouth open, emitting wonderful noises.

"Gadzooks!" murmured Archie, rather startled.

He transferred his gaze to the upper berth, which was exactly opposite his own bed—this apartment being, in fact, a four-berth cabin. McClure slept peacefully enough undisturbed by Handforth's racket.

Bending over, Archie gazed below. And there, in the berth immediately underneath him, Church was lying flat on his face, with his arms outstretched, breathing thickly into the pillow.

"Dash it all!" said Archie. "I sincerely trust that I don't do that kind of thing whilst partaking of the good old dreamless. I mean to say, it's so bally undig.! Handforth, old lad, arise! In other words, cease the dashed bombardment and gaze round."

Handforth snored louder than ever.

Archie, more awake, gingerly lowered himself from the upper berth, and reached the floor—to find, to his utter horror, that he was attired in pyjamas that were at least five times too big for him.

Archie gazed at his reflection in the long mirror, and turned pale.

"What-ho!" he observed faintly. "Greetings, old lad! I should say, what a ghastly looking object! It appears that some foul blighter has been playing the deuce while I indulged in the forty winks!"

Archie had been too tired upon retiring to notice the size or quality of the pyjamas that had been handed to him. But now he was feeling himself. The sleep had made a new fellow out of him.

"Of course, the whole thing is poisonous!" declared Archie. "And I'm dashed if I know where we are! I mean, the bally caravan wasn't as big as this the last time I saw it! It seems that a change has come about——"

And then Archie remembered. The whole thing came to him—the terrible ordeal on the derelict, the rescue, and the sustaining broth in the lounge. After that Archie knew nothing—he didn't even remember going to bed. But now he was feeling decidedly well.

He seized Handforth, and shook him with violence. Handforth closed his mouth with a snap, and then uttered a gurgle. He sat up, blinking.

"Wow!" he moaned. "I—I bit my blessed tongue!"

"Good!" said Archie. "You dashed well deserved it for making that animal-like noise! I mean to say——"

"What the—— Where the—— How the——"

Handforth paused, and looked round.

"Absolutely," said Archie. "Jump out, old lad, and dash about. I must admit that I'm feeling somewhat sprightly. The old tissues are fully revived, and large quantities of hunger are gnawing at the old vitals. In other words, the inner individual is yelping somewhat vociferously for supplies!"

Handforth slowly got out of bed.

"My hat!" he said. "What do you think you've got on? You're wearing your grandfather's pyjamas!"

Archie winced.

"Kindly refrain from discussing a painful subject," he said sadly. "I don't know how it came about, old lad, but there you are! And permit me to remark that your own appearance is somewhat ghastly, too. I mean to say, I dashed well wouldn't be buried in an outfit like that!"

Handforth gazed at himself in the mirror. Then he staggered. He was attired in a long, flowing nightshirt, which gathered about his ankles in folds.

"Great pip!" said Handforth faintly.

But, after all, they needn't have been startled. They had come on board without any wardrobes; and their night attire had been loaned by stewards and other members of the crew.

And the fellows found, to their surprise, that they had slept the round of the clock, and many hours beyond. For it was now early morning. They had been rescued late on Saturday night, and now it was Monday morning.

Furthermore, their clothing had been thoroughly attended to. Shirts and collars were spotlessly clean, and so were the underclothing, socks, etc. All the juniors' suits

had been pressed, and were looking like new.

By the time they were dressed they felt clean and tidy and very comfortable. Handforth and Co. arrived on deck, and found a number of other juniors there. The ordinary passengers had not appeared, for the hour was just six o'clock. The early morning sun was shining, and the Lauretanic was forging her way through clear, crystal blue seas.

"What-ho!" observed Archie, extending his chest. "This, as it were, is the life! Vast quantities of ozone, and all that kind of rot. Absolutely! Kindly allow me to indulge in a few healthful draughts!"

And Archie proceeded to fill his lungs with the keen sea air. Handforth and Co were already walking round the deck—Handforth declaring that a constitutional of this kind was necessary after so much sleep.

Practically all the juniors were themselves again. Not one was showing any ill-effects from the exposure on the derelict. The sustaining food, and the long sleep had worked wonders.

And now, this morning, all attired in clean linen, and newly pressed suits, they felt thoroughly respectable. Archie was rather horrified regarding the future, but the other fellows didn't particularly care.

"Well, I must say this is a bit different to that old hulk," said De Valerie cheerfully. "This is sheer luxury—even though we are in the second-class. I'm blessed if I know why they need first at all!"

There was something in what De Valerie said, for the second-class accommodation was wonderfully luxurious and comfortable. And the deck space was extensive enough for the most energetic fellow.

"Heard the news?" asked Tommy Watson, coming up and joining the group.

"What news?"

"Why, Nipper's just heard from Mr. Lee that we shall probably be allowed to land in New York," said Tommy Watson eagerly. "That means we shall have a bit of a spree before coming back."

Handforth sniffed.

"Fathead!" he said scornfully. "Of course we'll land in New York. There'd be a row if they tried to keep me on board! And once we're in the United States, we shall probably remain for a proper visit. Why not? We've got the holidays in front of us, and we can do what we like!"

"If we're allowed ashore, we shall be lucky," said Reginald Pitt.

"Lucky?" repeated Handforth. "What do you mean?"

"My dear ass, you don't seem to understand that there are such things as passports and visas," said Pitt calmly. "Before anybody can land in New York they've got to have passports, and goodness knows what else. And we haven't got one between the lot of us. Personally, I don't think we shall be able to land at all!"

"They'll stick us on Ellis Island, perhaps," suggested Bob Christine.

"You asses!" snorted Handforth. "Just let them try to keep me out—that's all! I'll show 'em something! I'll jolly well strangle them with their own red tape!"

But Handforth, of course, always considered that he could break rules and regulations with impunity. If we did, indeed, get ashore in New York, it would only be through the guv'nor's powerful influence. I knew that he had a fairly large amount of "pull."

"There's some more news, too," said Tommy Watson. "Mr. Lee has been tremendously busy. He's sent wireless messages to all our people, saying that we're safe, and that everything is O.K. And there are hosts of replies, too. I expect we shall see them later on."

This was true enough. We did see them. There were messages from Handforth's pater, from Tregellis-West's guardian, and from fond parents of all kinds. Some were messages of anxiety, and some were messages of curt disapproval. But, on the whole, we had every reason to feel completely satisfied.

Nelson Lee, I knew, was now preparing to use the wireless again—asking permission to take the fellows ashore in New York—and give them a bit of a good time before returning.

After all, permission was almost certain to be granted, for we were on the way, and those at home would know that their sons would be in excellent hands if they remained with Nelson Lee.

And there was no need to worry about school now. The summer holidays were actually on. So why shouldn't we go for a trip in the States? We should be able to find plenty of interest there. There were all sorts of discussions among the juniors as to what part of the country they would prefer to visit.

And there was an overwhelming majority in favour of going West. Somehow, there was a certain fascination about the idea. There was no longer any Wild West, and the juniors knew it—but such names as Arizona and New Mexico and California seemed to have a sort of attraction.

Many of the fellows had been out West before—and they wanted to go again. But well over half the Remove had never even seen New York. And the prospect of staying there was alluring.

And it had all come so unexpectedly.

Two short days earlier we had been in the Lake District, peacefully carrying on with our caravan tour, without the faintest prospect of going to the United States.

But Fate had decided otherwise. And here we were—the whole Remove—safely on board the Lauretanic, steaming towards the City of skyscrapers. There wasn't one fellow in the whole crowd who regretted that experience on the derelict.

Now that it was all over, and there was no longer any peril, many of the fellows

wondered why they had had any misgivings. It seemed a trifle now—a mere incident. Indeed, it was something to talk about—something to describe in letters home

The Remove felt that it had assumed a position of importance in the world. They had become famous. Wireless messages had been sent home, and the newspapers of England and America were full of the story. Thirty or forty boys marooned on a drifting derelict!

The passengers on the Lauretanic were keenly interested, too, and the juniors told and retold the story with great relish. Handforth was doing nothing else for hours—until, in fact, he began to get hoarse.

And, curiously enough, every time he told the story, the derelict grew smaller, and the perils and tortures of thirst became more harrowing. Some of the good people who heard the yarn wondered how on earth we had ever come through alive. Handforth's propensity for exaggeration was unfortunate!

Fatty Little was just as well as ever. He complained of peculiar pains within him and ascribed these to the fact that he had starved for so long. The other fellows correctly guessed that the pains were caused by over eating. For Fatty had been packing stores on board almost continuously since he had awakened. His chief idea was to make up for lost time, and he was fairly successful.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE TROUBLES OF MR. ROGER STERLING!

"THEN you think it can be arranged?" asked Nelson Lee.

Captain Manning nodded.

"Easily," he replied. "You are such a well known man, Mr. Lee, that the emigration authorities will put no obstacles in the way, I am sure. Besides, the case is quite exceptional, and the New York people will appreciate that."

"Well, personally, I don't anticipate any great trouble——"

"You needn't," interrupted the skipper. "You can rely on me, Lee, to use my influence, too. You'll all be able to go ashore—the whole crowd of you. If you decide to come back with us on the homeward trip, all the better. But I suppose you'll make a bit of a stay while you're there, eh?"

"That is quite possible," said Nelson Lee, smiling. "I know the boys are quite keen on the idea. Of course, I shall take up the whole matter of finances with the company in New York. The boys are on board, and their passages must be paid."

It seemed that the Remove had no cause to be unsettled in mind. With Nelson Lee to look after them there was every certainty that things would be O.K.. The famous schoolmaster-detective was now chatting with Captain Manning in the latter's cabin.

They were smoking two of the captain's excellent cigars, and sipping some of the captain's fine old port. And Nelson Lee had never felt more robust in his life. The adventure, indeed, seemed to do him good.

"Curiously enough, Captain, I was thinking of taking the boys on a trip to the Pacific coast of America this summer," said Nelson Lee. "I had already been in communication with my old friend, Lord Dorrimore. I think you met his lordship on one occasion?"

Captain Manning chuckled.

"I did!" he said drily. "He made a trip on this very boat, and I'm liable to forget that black friend of his—one Umlosi, an African Chieftain of some kind. Lord Dorrimore is a most delightful fellow, and I have often wanted to meet him again."

"Dorrie is elusive," said Nelson Lee. "I am never surprised when he suddenly turns up. If his yacht appeared across our bows this morning I should take it quite as a matter of course. Well, Dorrie was keen upon going to the Pacific coast via the Panama Canal, and I think we should have undertaken that trip but for this affair."

"His lordship will be disappointed," said the captain.

"Probably," agreed Lee. "But he will no doubt start off at once in the Wanderer—his private yacht—and join us somewhere on the other side. Dorrie is a wonderful fellow for getting what he wants. Personally, I should prefer to take the boys overland—for that will be an education in itself. It will broaden their minds to see the mighty extent of the vast United States."

"Still keeping them at learning, even during the holidays?" smiled the skipper.

"In a way, yes," said Lee. "Geography in the class-room is all very well, but cannot compare to travelling over the actual ground. The boys themselves will benefit enormously by the whole experience."

"A very fine idea——"

The captain paused as the buzzer of his private telephone sounded. He excused himself, and placed the receiver to his ear.

"Yes? Oh, it's you, Mr. Hardy," he said briskly. "Why, certainly. Come

straight along. What's that? You don't mean to say—— Oh, all right—better come here, and we'll talk it over privately."

Lee rose to his feet, but the captain pressed him back into the chair.

"You'll sit just where you are, Mr. Lee," he said. "Mr. Hardy's business may be private, but not from you. The chief purser," he added, explaining Mr. Hardy's position on board.

Within a few minutes the gentleman arrived—a stout, well fed looking individual with a pleasant face. At the moment he appeared to be greatly worried, and he was hardly pleased to find Nelson Lee present.

"Did I understand you to say, Mr. Hardy, that one of the passengers reports a loss?" asked the captain.

"Yes," replied Mr. Hardy, glancing at Lee.

"You needn't be afraid to speak in front of Mr. Lee," said the skipper. "In fact, you couldn't speak in front of anybody better. Considering that he is one of the finest private detectives living, this matter might prove of interest to him."

The Purser sat down, and readily accepted a glass of port.

"I'm hanged if I can understand how the infernal thing happened," he growled. "These passengers are so careless that they need keepers—some of them, at least. Here's a man comes to me, and reports that he's lost some documents that are worth about twenty million dollars!"

"How much?" asked the captain staring.

"Sounds a good bit, doesn't it?" asked the purser. "But the man positively assures me that they're worth every penny of that much—and probably more. The amazing thing to me is that they don't hand such papers into my care at the beginning of the voyage. They lose the things, and then come wailing to me about it. I've no patience with blockheads like that!"

And the purser drank off his wine with a grunt.

"Who is the gentleman, exactly, and what is the nature of these remarkably valuable documents?" asked the skipper. "Twenty million! That's a pretty large sum—even in pounds sterling."

"That's queer—the fellow's name happens to be Sterling," said Mr. Hardy. "He's travelling alone in one of the first-class state-rooms—Roger Sterling, from London. By what I can understand, he's on his way to Los Angeles, and he owns some pretty valuable property over there."

"I presume these documents are connected with his property?"

"Connected with it!" echoed the purser. "They are the property! Mr. Sterling tells me that he was carrying papers which are nothing more nor less than title deeds to a pretty big tract of ground just outside Los Angeles which was worth about fifty thousand dollars a few weeks ago. As everybody knows, there's a good lot of oil round about Los Angeles."

"I cannot understand it, Mr. Lee. I am more puzzled than I can say," he declared. "I've carried those papers about with me constantly. They were in a small dispatch case in this cabin, and I never dreamed for a moment that there was any possibility of a theft."

"Quite a number of fortunes have been made in that part of the country," said the skipper. "I wouldn't mind a few odd lots of ground myself."

"Sterling, it seems was in a pretty fair way of business in London," continued the purser. "His son died out in Los Angeles—got killed in a street car accident—six months ago. The title deeds of the property were sent over to Mr. Sterling, who never took much interest until a week or so ago. Then he had a cablegram informing him that oil had been discovered on the property. And that ground is now worth anything from twenty to thirty millions in dollars. That's the way property jumps in value over there. If you

happen to strike it rich you're a multi-millionaire."

"Well, upon my word," said the captain slowly. "And this man has lost the title deeds to his newly acquired oil property, eh? Does that mean to say that the thieves will be able to claim the ground?"

"Very possibly," replied the purser. "What do you think Mr. Lee?"

"I should say that there is every likelihood of the rascals claiming ownership and getting away with it—as the Americans say. It's far easier to pull off a crooked deal over there than it is in England. It's the man with the goods on him that gets the results. Of course, it depends to a great extent what kind of deeds these are. I would like to have a chat with Mr. Sterling. Possibly we may be able to recover his property before reaching port."

"The poor man's nearly off his head with worry," said the purser. "I'll give you the number of his cabin, Mr. Lee, and I'll tell him you're coming to see him."

The purser continued talking with Captain Manning for some little time, and the skipper decided to use every effort within his power to locate the thief or thieves who had stolen the papers from Mr. Sterling's state-room.

And, later on, Nelson Lee had an interview with Mr. Sterling himself.

The latter proved to be a rather fussy little gentleman who had spent most of his life in the outfitting business. He had had an extensive business in Kilburn, but had left this in the hands of a manager while he went out West to take charge of his new property.

"I cannot understand it, Mr. Lee—I am more puzzled than I can say," he declared. "I've carried those papers about with me constantly. They were in a small dispatch case in this very cabin—and I never dreamed for a moment that there was any possibility of a theft. The purser tells me that I ought to have given them into his charge as soon as I came on board."

"That, certainly, would have been safer," said Lee. "But it is idle to discuss that now. Please tell me how you discovered your loss, and all the details that you can bring to mind."

"In London I deposited the papers with my bankers," said Mr. Sterling. "They advised me to be particularly careful on my journey over, and I accordingly purchased a strong dispatch case with a burglar proof lock."

Nelson Lee smiled amusedly.

"I know the kind," he said. "Almost any child can open them."

"Possibly so—possibly so," agreed Mr. Sterling. "But I never really dreamed that there was any actual danger. Why should I? How could people know what my dispatch case contained — particularly as I made a point of keeping it inside my travelling bag—and always locked the latter?"

"You certainly took precautions."

"When I came on board I did not suspect that there was any possibility of danger," continued the other. "I have this cabin entirely to myself—I insisted upon an exclusive state-room. Whenever I go out, I lock the door—and until today I was perfectly comfortable, and free from all worry."

Mr. Sterling rose to his feet, and paced up and down.

"This morning I left my cabin for breakfast," he went on nervously. "As usual, I locked my door—for I will have none of the stewards interfering in my room unless I am present. Well, when I returned I found everything precisely the same, and did not suspect that thieves had been at work."

"Did you discover the loss at once?"

"Yes, within five minutes," replied Mr. Sterling. "I opened my bag, and the dispatch case, and you can imagine my horror when I discovered that the latter was entirely empty. The papers had gone! In some extraordinary, mysterious way, they had been taken whilst I was at breakfast."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I had been referring to the title deeds just before going down to the dining room," replied the worried man. "That is what makes it so astoundingly mysterious. I will put it in a nutshell, Mr. Lee. I was reading these papers when the gong sounded. I put them away in the dispatch case, locked them up, and then came out of the stateroom—locking that, too. And yet when I came back after less than an hour's absence, the deeds had vanished."

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"And you saw no sign of the locks having been tampered with?" he asked.

"None whatever."

Lee was thoughtful for a few minutes. The case was certainly more interesting than he had originally believed. There was just that touch of mystery about it that appealed to his highly trained faculties. An ordinary case of shipboard robbery was not likely to interest him a great deal—but this affair certainly seemed to be unusual.

"Have you made any friends on board?" he inquired slowly.

"Friends?" repeated Mr. Sterling. "Why, no. Just an acquaintance or two, possibly—but nobody whom I would call a friend."

"You have not discussed your business at all?"

"Good Heavens, no!"

"Nor your proposed destination?"

"I have not discussed my business, my destination, or in fact, anything connected with myself," said Mr. Sterling precisely.

"This being the case, Mr. Lee, you will easily appreciate why I am so mystified. I cannot believe that a petty thief would ransack my bag and dispatch case for the possible chance of securing a little booty."

"No," agreed Lee. "The man who so cunningly conquered these locks was obviously aware as to the prize. It was a prearranged plan, Mr. Sterling. The man awaited his opportunity, and performed his work with the skill of a professional cracksman. I should like to look at the bag and the dispatch case."

They were shown to him, and he found unmistakable signs that the locks had been tampered with. As far as he could judge, the thief had used skeleton keys to aid him. All the locks were simple and easy to conquer.

"Yes, Mr. Sterling, we've got to recognise the fact that there is somebody on board who knows a great deal more of your business than you suspect," said the famous detective. "And if you have discussed your private affairs with nobody on board, it stands to reason that the thief had earlier information, and deliberately booked his passage on this vessel so he could be near you."

"I cannot possibly understand," said Mr. Sterling nervously. "And those title deeds mean a vast fortune, Mr. Lee. Possession is nine points of the law, they say—and I believe that applies more in America that it does in England. Men who are thoroughly accustomed to the laws in California will probably be able to prove their ownership of the property—although it is already mine. What with graft, and criminal cunning, I shall be defeated. Without those title deeds in my possession, I might as well be a pauper."

Nelson Lee tried to soothe him.

"No good purpose will be served by getting into a panic, Mr. Sterling," he said quietly. "I quite agree that the affair is very serious, and I will do my best to recover the papers before the voyage is ended. Can you suggest anybody as the possible thief—any man employed in your business? A secretary? A manager—anybody, in fact, who knew of your plans?"

Mr. Sterling shook his head helplessly.

"I cannot suggest anybody," he replied. "I cannot think—— But wait! One moment! Can it be possible——"

He broke off, his eyes suddenly gleaming.

"Something has just occurred to me," he went on quickly. "I have a son, Mr. Lee—a young fellow of eighteen—I have recently taken him into the office. He knew of my proposed trip to America, and the reason for it. And several times during the last three months I have found it necessary to take the boy in hand for mixing with questionable company. I learned that he was gambling for big money at some notorious resort in the West end."

Lee nodded slowly.

"I think we have arrived at the root of things," he said. Undoubtedly your son told his gambling friends the whole story, and in those vicious night-club circles men of every type are to be found—professional crooks, international thieves, and the elite of the criminal fraternity. They are men who pose as gentlemen, generally in evening-dress, and frequently with assumed titles. I shall make it my duty to give the passenger list a close scrutiny."

By the time Nelson Lee left Mr. Sterling's state-room he was feeling quite keen to continue his investigations. And Mr. Sterling himself was far more comfortable in mind. There was something about Nelson Lee's very personality that instilled confidence.

Exactly an hour later Nelson Lee had picked up a very hot scent.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHORT SHRIFT!

REGINALD PITT looked grim.

"Something's got to be done," he said firmly.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie Glenthorne. "Dash it all, we can't allow it! The honour of the good old Remove, what? The good name of St. Frank's at stake, and all that kind of stuff! This, in fact, is where we've got to dash about and do things."

"We have!" said Pitt, nodding.

I looked at them, and frowned.

"When you've finished talking in riddles, perhaps you'll be good enough to explain," I suggested. "What's got to be done? And what is it that we can't allow? Choke it up, my sons!"

"Fullwood and Co.!" said Reggie briefly.

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "Light begins to dawn. Have those rotters started some of their shady tricks already? I was half afraid of it, you know. It's rather a pity they weren't left behind on the derelict."

"Somebody blundered," said Pitt. "Of course, they ought to have been left behind. Unless we're careful, they'll give the whole Remove a bad name. I've been watching Fullwood and Co., and for hours past they've been in one of the first-class state-rooms."

"Gambling, eh?" I hazarded.

"Of course—playing cards with a set of sharpers," went on Pitt. "The cabin is occupied by the Hon. Herbert Standish—a weedy young bounder without any forehead and only half a chin. Pots of money, I suppose, but no brains. I reckon he's got a giddy clique of sharpers in there with him."

"And Fullwood and Co. have got thick with that gang?" I asked.

"Thick isn't the word," said Pitt. "The cads live there."

I nodded.

"Then something certainly must be done," I declared. "We'll get the chaps together, and hold a Council of War. We've got to teach Fullwood and Co. a lesson, and the sooner we do it the better."

"What-ho!" said Archie approvingly. "This, as it were, is decidedly the stuff."

And, five minutes later, the Council of War was held—the committee consisting of Reggie Pitt, Archie, Bob Christine, Handforth and Co., and a few others. They heard the news with rising indignation.

"By George!" said Handforth. "Let's go straight off!"

"Hear, hear!"

We'll yank the cads out, and frogmarch them round the deck," said Handforth grimly. "We'll bump them until they can't sit down for a week! And then we'll take 'em below and shove 'em in the stokehold!"

I grinned.

"No need to be quite so drastic as that, old man!" I said. "And we don't want to create a scene unless we can help it. It's only fair to give Fullwood and Co. warning. If they don't heed it, we'll take action."

"That's the idea," said De Valerie.

Handforth, of course, wanted direct action—his idea was to deal with Fullwood and Co. summarily. But that sort of thing wouldn't do. And it was only justice that we should give the bounders of Study A a chance.

It was evening now, and dinner was over. Night was settling upon the Atlantic—a calm, still night, with clear skies. The great liner was ploughing her way across the sea steadily, and with scarcely a trace of motion. Indeed, below in the great saloons and lounge, it was hard to realise that one was on board a ship.

We couldn't very well take any drastic action with Fullwood and Co., because they were not engaged in any rascally behaviour. They were on the second-class deck, leaning against the rail in a group. And now and again Fullwood would take his watch out and glance at it.

It was decided that we should speak to them quietly first. And Handforth and I were chosen to deliver the warning. To be more correct, Handforth wasn't exactly chosen—he insisted upon coming with me, and it saved a lot of trouble to let him come.

We faced the three juniors squarely.

"Staying out here this evening?" I asked.

"Yes, for a bit," said Fullwood.

"Not going forward, to the first-class quarters?" I went on.

"What's that got to do with you?" demanded Fullwood suspiciously. "We're not answerable to you where we go."

"You cads!" said Handforth hotly. "We've heard that you chaps have been gambling and drinking in the Hon. Herbert Thingummy's cabin. If you go there again we'll slaughter you!"

"Mind your own confounded business!" snapped Fullwood.

"It so happens that it is our business," I declared. "We don't want you chaps to give the Remove a bad name. What's more, we're not going to have it. Take my tip, Fullwood, and keep away from the Hon. Herbert in future."

Fullwood scowled.

"It's a pity you can't look after your own affairs," he sneered. "You can go and eat coke! We'll do as we like!"

"An' we don't want any interference from you!" added Gulliver sourly.

"All right," I said. "I've just given you warning—— Steady on, Handy. No need to cause a scene here. You'd better take it from me, Fullwood, that we're in earnest."

"What the dickens do you mean?" demanded Fullwood thickly.

"I mean that we won't have you or your pals gambling and drinking in that man's cabin," I replied. "He has a rotten crowd in there, and the decent people are already talking. Stay out of it, and we'll leave you alone. But if you don't take this tip—well you'll know all about it."

And I walked away, dragging Handforth with me. The leader of Study D was inclined to be sarcastic.

"Is that what you call dealing with the cads?" he sniffed. "My only hat! You're as weak as a giddy rat! I should have wiped up the bounders on the spot. You make me tired!"

"If they ignore what we told them, there'll be plenty of wiping up to be done later," I pointed out. "And I've got an idea that drastic action will be necessary, too. But we had to do the right thing."

Before half an hour had elapsed my words proved to be true. Several fellows who were on the watch reported that Fullwood and Co. had sneaked into the Hon. Herbert's cabin on Deck B—a big, luxuriously appointed private room. The door was closed, and the voices of men and the chink of glasses could be heard from the open window.

The committee held another meeting.

"Of course, there's only one thing to be done," said Pitt. "We'll invade the place, seize Fullwood and Co., and yank 'em out. No good going there and asking them to come quietly. We'll use force."

"Hear, hear!" said Handforth.

"Come on—let's be moving!" I exclaimed. "No need to make any plans—it's all straightforward. We'll teach the rotters a lesson they won't forget in a hurry."

In the meantime, Fullwood and Co. were enjoying themselves in their own particular way. Ralph Leslie was the only one who was actually playing cards, for Gulliver and Bell had not sufficient money. They stood by, watching and smoking.

The beautiful state-room was filled with the fumes of tobacco and spirits. And it contained three others in addition to Full-

wood and Co.—the Hon. Herbert, and two of his questionable friends.

To look at casually, they were gentlemen, attired in spotless evening-dress, well-groomed, and with highly polished manners. But any trained detective would have set them down at once as sharpers—professional card-players, who made a practice of systematic cheating.

But Fullwood was a bit of an expert in that line himself—and so far he had more than held his own. The young fool did not realise that he was being led on. He had won a matter of ten or twelve pounds—and, in consequence, he was playing recklessly, and winning. But this streak was not likely to last long.

Mr. Simon Hawke and Mr. Al Roker were concentrating most of their attentions upon the Hon. Herbert. The latter had heaps and heaps of money, and he was getting rid of it at a surprising rate. What he didn't know about the game of poker would have filled volumes. And at present, with a little drink in him, he was throwing his money away rashly.

And then, at a most interesting point of the game, the door opened and about ten St. Frank's juniors marched in. The Hon. Herbert and Mr. Simon Hawke started up, frowning.

"Get out of here?" said the Hon. Herbert thickly.

"Sorry to intrude, but we need our charming young friends," I said calmly. "We shall only keep you a minute. Fullwood—Gulliver—Bell! This way, please—and step lively!"

Fullwood and Co. were on their feet, pale with rage.

"You—you interferin' cads!" snarled Fullwood. "Get out of here!"

"Don't talk—act!" roared Handforth.

He led the way. He rushed at Fullwood, and this was the signal for a general attack. In a moment the state-room was in complete confusion. Mr. Roker and Mr. Hawke were pushed out of the way, and the Hon. Herbert was literally swept into a corner.

And the invaders seized Fullwood and Co., and rushed them outside. The young rascals had no chance. Kicking and struggling in vain, they were yanked out, and laid flat on the deck— three fellows to each of them. Then they were ruthlessly frogmarched along the wide promenade towards the second-class deck. The few passengers who observed the trouble regarded it as a mere schoolboy rag.

As soon as we had gone, the Hon. Herbert picked himself up, quivering with rage.

"I'll report to the captain!" he stuttered hotly.

"Don't trouble—we were fools to let those youngsters join us," said Mr. Hawke. "Well, I suppose we'd better break up the party now. Can't very well go on with only three of us."

And five minutes later Mr. Hawke and Mr. Roker went to their own cabin. They hadn't done so badly, considering. Since the commencement of the voyage they had relieved the Hon. Herbert of seven or eight hundred pounds.

"Those infernal boys might have caused some trouble," said Roker savagely. "A lucky thing none of the officers came along just then."

"That's why I cleared out," said Mr. Hawke. "We didn't want any publicity. If there's any trouble afoot, I always avoid it."

They sat down, and helped themselves to whisky.

"Better go easy on the drink," suggested Mr. Roker, as he noticed his companion indulging in a stiff dose. "Don't forget what you've got on you, old man. I hear that that fellow Lee is interesting himself in Sterling's business."

Mr. Hawke uttered a contemptuous grunt.

"I'm not afraid of Lee," he declared. "I did that job pretty thoroughly, Al, and they'll never prove a thing. And I carry those papers in my breast-pocket always—where they're safe."

Al shook his head.

"I'm not so sure of that," he said doubtfully. "Don't forget that this Nelson Lee fellow is a pretty smart guy. I don't think he suspects us at all, but it's just our darned luck that he should come aboard."

"Yes, it's a bit of a nuisance," agreed Mr. Hawke. "We didn't figure on him being on this ship when we booked our passages. But you needn't worry. Even if he suspects, he can't prove anything."

But Al Roker was not quite so easy in mind.

"You can bet that Sterling's been gassing," he said. "He's probably told Lee all about that fool son of his, and the way he joined our parties back of Jermyn Street. Lee might put two and two together, and fix on us."

"Confound your doubts and suspicions!" snappy Mr. Hawke curtly. "You're getting cold feet, Al—that's what's the matter with you! What in the name of blazes do you think Lee can prove, anyway? I've got those title deeds in my pocket, and as soon as we step ashore at New York we'll take the Twentieth Century, Limited, to Chicago, and then hop to Los Angeles on the Santa Fe. I'll have that property fixed out in my name, with every legal knot bound so that all the lawyers in the country can't touch me. I know a few things about real estate, Al, and you can take it from me that we're on the softest thing that ever came our way."

"That's what you said when we planned this trip two weeks ago," said Roker. "I'll admit it was dead easy to get those papers from old man Sterling. By glory! What an old idiot to leave his valuables lying round loose in a ship's cabin!"

"Loose?" smiled Mr. Hawke. "They were locked up—and the poor fool thought that they were safe. It's a good thing for us.

Al, that people with money and valuables haven't got much sense!"

"You bet it is," said Mr. Roker, with conviction.

"Well, we don't want to stay here," went on Mr. Hawke, rising to his feet. "We'll go into the smoking-room and have a cigar. And I fancy we'd better drop the Hon. Bertie for the rest of the trip. Those infernal boys might cause trouble."

The pair left the cabin, and lounged along the wide promenade deck. It was very pleasant out there, and Mr. Roker lingered for a while before going inside.

They would have been considerably astonished, not to say startled, if they had been able to peep into their own state-rooms just then. For the richly panelled door of the wardrobe cupboard opened, and a figure stepped out into the gloom.

The cabin was in total darkness, and the mysterious figure cautiously opened the door and peered out. The coast was clear. He passed along the corridor with leisurely steps, and he emerged upon the deck smoking a cigarette.

"An hour well spent," murmured Nelson Lee placidly. "I rather fancy that our two friends will receive a shock before so very long!"

CHAPTER IX.

VIA WIRELESS.

"THERE'S something in the wind!" I declared firmly.

Handforth leaned over the rail, and sniffed at the air.

"Can't smell anything," he said. "A bit of a seaweed niff, perhaps, but that's all. Or it may be the perfume from the refuse hole. Haven't you seen 'em chucking out tons of stuff from a kind of window lower down?"

I grinned.

"My dear chap, the matter doesn't interest me," I said. "You're always so literal, Handy. When I said there's something in the wind I didn't mean a smell! There's something in the air—something brewing!"

"Fathead!" said Handforth witheringly. "Why can't you use plain English? I've got no patience with chaps who talk in riddles! What's all this rot about brewing? Might think you were referring to beer!"

"No, I'm not referring to beer either," I chuckled. "In fact, I think I'd better change the subject. Come on, Montie."

Sir Montie Tregellis-West, who had taken no part in the conversation, hooked his arm into mine, and we walked off. Handforth stood there, gazing after us indignantly.

"Mad!" he said, in a withering voice. "Clean dotty!"

Sir Montie and I walked along the wide promenade deck, until we came to a spot where we were quite alone.

"Now, dear old boy, what is it?" asked Montie. "I must confess that I am somewhat puzzled—I am, really."

"Well, the fact is, I was a little incautious," I confessed. "Saying things in front of Handforth is liable to lead to trouble. He's such a beggar for investigating mysteries."

"But you were sayin' somethin' about the wind——"

"Yes. And I meant it," I replied. "Ten minutes ago I had a word or two with the guv'nor. I met him on the boat-deck, and there's a gleam in his eye that means only one thing. He's on the track of somebody."

Sir Montie looked at me doubtfully.

"I think you must have been mistaken, dear fellow," he said. "As far as we know, Mr. Lee isn't investigatin' any mysteries, an' this is hardly the place for detective work, anyhow."

"My dear, sweet innocent," I said gently. "Don't you know that a big liner of this sort is just the very spot for crime? Don't you know that there are probably some of the world's cleverest crooks on board?"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie, startled. "You're jokin', dear old boy!"

"I'm serious," I insisted. "I know for a fact that the guv'nor's been thick with the skipper, and he's had two or three interviews with a Mr. Sterling. But he won't tell me a word—and that's good enough in itself! If we keep our eyes open we shall probably see something very interesting before long."

As a matter of fact. I was rather annoyed with the guv'nor. I knew that something was afoot, and I was naturally interested. But he smiled in that peculiarly aggravating way of his, and told me not to bother. I knew well enough that something big was afoot.

And while I was puzzling my head in this way, Nelson Lee himself was chatting with Captain Manning in the latter's cabin. The skipper was not only astonished, but rather worried.

"Extraordinary, Lee—that's all I can say," he declared, at length. "Man alive, you work pretty rapidly! And you actually spent half an hour in the wardrobe cupboard of that state-room?"

"A very instructive half-hour," nodded Lee.

"But the risk!" expostulated the skipper. "Supposing you had been wrong in your suspicions? Supposing you had been caught there? Why, it would have been a dreadful scandal."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"I was fairly certain of my ground before I took the step," he replied. "You see, I knew these men for what they were—international crooks. I have never actually come into contact with this pair before. But I know their type well. And I was perfectly prepared for discovery. I should have been ready if they had found me in their cupboard. But why discuss all this? They

didn't find me—and now I am in possession of definite information. I have, in short, located the thieves who took Mr. Sterling's property."

"Yes," growled the skipper. "And I suppose you want me to clap the pair in irons?"

"Well, something will certainly have to be done."

"I don't like it—I don't like it a bit," said Captain Manning. "They're first-class passengers don't forget—and there'll be the very deuce of a scandal if a word of this leaks out. Bad for the ship, and bad for the company. There'll be all sorts of inquiries if those fellows are locked away somewere—all sorts of whispers and an infernal amount of talk. Look here, Lee, can't you wait until we get into port?"

"But I told you at the very start, the matter is in your hands, and I shall abide by your decision," replied Lee. "After all, you are the commander of the ship, and while we are at sea, your word is law. I don't suppose any particular harm will be done if these men remain at liberty until we reach New York. They certainly cannot escape. And by waiting we should avoid a scandal."

"That's my idea precisely," said Captain Manning. "What's the good of putting these men in irons now? I'll have a whole force of detectives waiting in New York, and the pair will be nabbed without any fuss or trouble. I'll get the wireless busy straight away, and the detectives can come on board with the pilot."

Lee nodded.

"Yes, I think that will be just as well," he said. "Although, frankly, I would prefer to clap the fellows under lock and key this very instant. There's many a slip—— You know the old saying, Manning. However, if it'll suit you better, we'll let the matter rest as it now stands."

"Good," said the skipper. "Thanks, Lee. I'm sure the company will be indebted to to you for the concession. What about Sterling? Are you going to tell him the truth?"

"Yes—later on," said Lee. "But it would be very unwise, I think, to put him in possession of the facts straight away. I'll give him to understand that I have discovered a clue, but I shan't tell him that I've got my eye on the culprits. Perhaps you'll let me prepare the wireless messages to the New York police?"

The captain was only too willing, and very soon afterwards the Lauretanic's radio instruments were humming with activity. Nelson Lee gave very precise instructions, and full particulars.

And in due course the reply came through.

The police authorities in New York promised to send a force of detectives on board the pilot's cutter. These detectives would be picked up by the Lauretanic with the pilot—and the arrests would at once follow.

And, after all, nothing more than this was required.

But with a snarl of fear, he leapt to one side, and even as Lee clutched at him he dipped over backwards. And he went down—down towards the sea.

For Mr. Hawke had the stolen property on him, and would be caught red-handed. There would be no fuss—no trouble. Being the last morning of the voyage, the other passengers would be too busy to care what was going on. And, probably, the bulk of the Lauretanic's company would never know what had happened.

So Mr. Simon Hawke and Mr. Al Roker were permitted to move about with perfect freedom, having no knowledge that danger was so near at hand. The precious pair would certainly have been surprised if they had known that Nelson Lee had accomplished so much.

They lived in a kind of fool's paradise.

Believing themselves absolutely safe, they were actually marked men—ready to be pounced upon when the right moment arrived.

And by the end of the following day—when the liner was on the last lap of her trip—Mr. Hawke was feeling in excellent spirits. For one thing, he had been watching Nelson Lee rather closely, and he had fully satisfied himself that the famous detective was not interested in Mr. Sterling's affairs.

For Lee spent most of his time lounging on deck, reading and smoking, or listening to the orchestra in the lounge. Certainly,

there was not the slightest indication that Nelson Lee was at work.

This was easily explained—because Lee's work was done. But it made the crooks comfortable, and they were more convinced than ever that there was no reason for them to count Lee as a possible enemy.

And then came the shock.

It was on the morning of the last day. There was an unusual bustle and activity on board. Passengers were packing up, getting ready for going ashore, trunks being hauled out into the corridors, etc.

And large numbers of the crew were busily engaged with the mail bags. For hours these had been coming up from the holds, the noisy little donkey engines puffing and hissing. And now the thousands of mail bags were packed in enormous numbers on the second-class promenade deck—on both sides of the ship. The second-class deck, in fact, was practically filled.

The St. Frank's fellows were eagerly looking forward to the first sight of land. The weather throughout the trip had been perfect—sunny and calm, and seasickness had been practically impossible.

Mr. Hawke and Mr. Roker took things fairly easily that morning. They dressed with leisure, deciding to go down to breakfast after the crowd had been dealt with. And while they were indulging in an early cigarette in their state-room, a tap sounded on the door.

Roker was on the point of going out, and he opened the door at once. A neat youth in uniform stood there holding an envelope—a radiogram. It was addressed to Mr. Simon Hawke, and Roker took it at once. He closed the door, and turned, looking puzzled.

"Who's sending you wireless messages, Hawke?" he asked.

Hawke said nothing—he took the envelope and slashed it open. Then he looked at the message—a long, rambling statement concerning railroad shares, the current price of rubber, and the possibilities of trade in the Republic of Panama.

The effect of this seemingly innocent business wire was instantaneous.

"Gosh!" muttered Mr. Hawke. "Quick! Lock that door, Al!"

"What the——"

"Code!" snapped Hawke briefly. "This is from Schultz."

"Schultz?" repeated Roker tensely.

Hawke sat down, and rapidly decoded the messages, using a pencil and a scrap of paper. The key to the code was obviously in his mind, for he needed no aid. And as he proceded, his eyes glittered, and his jaw became set.

Roker, in the meantime, stood looking on anxiously. He knew Schultz—an attorney in New York with offices in West Fourteenth Street. Schultz had a fairly extensive practice, and he was just about as crooked as a corkscrew. He was generally in touch with large numbers of the criminal fraternity.

Hawke had cabled Mr. Schultz from London, giving him an inkling of the game that was afoot, and that big money was involved. In fact, Mr. Hawke wanted the lawyer's assistance as soon as he arrived on American soil.

And Schultz was now sending a message in code! Somehow, it struck Mr. Roker as being significant. Why couldn't Schultz have waited until they arrived—a mere matter of six or seven hours?

"Al!" said Hawke abruptly—"they're after us!"

"What!" gasped Roker.

"This message is pretty brief now that I've decoded it—but it's significant enough," exclaimed Hawke. "When the pilot comes on board this morning there'll be four detectives with him—and they're going to nab us!"

"Good glory!" said Al faintly.

CHAPTER X.

THE PRICE OF DELAY!

MR. SIMON HAWKE cursed volubly.

"Of course, we've got to thank Lee for this," he exclaimed, in a savage voice. "We thought he was as harmless as a kitten—but all the time he was setting the trap."

"But—but I don't understand," said Roker dazedly.

"You wouldn't—your brains always were dead!" snapped the other. "Look here—listen to this! Schultz has found out that these detectives are coming on board. Schultz is a pretty smart guy, and he's well in with some of the Secret Service men—plenty of graft over on this side, you know."

"Well?" said Al impatiently.

"He's tipped us the wink—that's all," went on Hawke.

"But, curse it, what's the good of that?" demanded Roker, his voice rising with anxiety. "Does he think we can jump overboard, or what?"

"Yes!" said Mr. Hawke. "He thinks we can jump overboard!"

"The man's mad—crazy!" panted Al.

"No, he's not—he's about the best pal we've got," said Mr. Hawke. "And don't shout so much, you fool! If things go right, we shall have to thank Schultz for a whole lot. He's instructed some of his men to start off from the Jersey shore in a big, powerful motor-boat. There'll be about six men on board—all armed, and ready to help us."

"But how—how?"

"That motor-boat will be hovering round the vicinity of the lightship where the pilot is taken on board," said Hawke. "The Lauretanic can't stop before then, so it wouldn't be any good for the motor-boat to come out further. We shall have to keep our eyes pretty wide open."

"I don't see how——"

"You never see anything!" snapped Hawke irritably. "Can't you understand, man, that this is our only chance? Once those detectives are aboard we shall be nabbed on the spot. Lee has left us alone until now to avoid a scandal, I suppose. He's going to give us a surprise at the last minute. Well, thanks to this warning, we'll be able to beat him yet."

"By jumping overboard?"

"Exactly," said Hawke. "It's a pretty desperate plan, but there's nothing else for it. Schultz is a first-class man to take all this trouble—I'll see that he's well paid for it. We can both swim, and there's nothing to be afraid of. We shall be in that launch before the detectives know what's happened."

And then, at length, the lightship hove in sight. The Lauretanic was slowing down. Her engines had ceased for the first time for days, and the effect was strange to most of the passengers. They had grown so accustomed to the steady throb and the vibration that everything now seemed uncannily quiet.

Mr. Roker and Mr. Hawke stood by the rail on the other side of the ship, and they were intently watching the movements of a big, rakish-looking motor-boat that was nosing about near by.

The pilot was evidently a dare-devil kind of a fellow, for he brought his little craft up remarkably close to the Lauretanic's side. Mr. Hawke, watching, knew that the moment had arrived.

This was the rescue boat!

And on the other side of the great liner the detectives were preparing to come aboard.

"Come on—better get it over!" muttered Hawke tersely.

The pair of them placed their hands on the rail, and got ready for the jump. It required nerve and courage. It was a tremendously deep dive down to the sea, and there was always the prospect of injury or drowning. But the thought of capture gave the men courage.

Nelson Lee was watching—he had kept his eye on the pair for well over an hour. Something had made him half suspect that they were not as easy in mind as they tried to make out.

And Lee, seeing them staring at the motor-boat, suddenly divined their intentions.

He snapped his teeth, and noticed that a good many juniors were near by

"Quick, boys!" he shouted. "Hold those two men!"

At the same second, Lee flung himself forward. He arrived just as Mr. Hawke hurled himself over the side. Lee succeeded in touching the man's coat, but no more Roker had hesitated and was still on board.

But with a snarl of fear, he leapt to one side, and even as Lee clutched at him, he tipped over backwards. And he went down—down towards the sea. Loud shouts sounded from all along the liner's side, and from several decks.

"Man overboard!"

"Look—look!"

Both Roker and Hawke were swimming—clumsily, and with difficulty. The motor-boat had swung round, and was now speeding towards them. And Nelson Lee stood looking on, his lips compressed.

"What is it, guv'nor?" I asked breathlessly.

"The men are tricksters of the worst type, and they have succeeded in getting away with documents that may be worth millions."

"My goodness!" I exclaimed. "And—and can't we do anything?"

"Yes—when we get ashore," replied Lee. "But at the moment we can only look on. It would be idle for me to jump after them—and, as you can see, they will be well away within a few minutes. The detectives will find the birds flown."

Lee nodded towards the sea.

Hawke and Roker had already been hauled into the motor-boat, and the latter was now speeding away, roaring with an open throttle. She left a white, creamy wake, and clouds of blue smoke.

The wireless was already at work, and Nelson Lee hoped that before long the motor-boat would be tracked, and the rascals captured. Nelson Lee assured Mr. Sterling that he would do his utmost.

He did.

In fact, Nelson Lee was destined to have several other adventures with Mr. Simon Hawke and Mr. Al Roker. And the St. Frank's Remove in New York met with all sorts of adventures, too—many of them highly amusing.

But I shall have to tell of them in another place—there's not room now. But you can take it from me that we had some pretty lively times among the bright lights of Broadway!

THE END.

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8. Essex.
9. Sussex.
10. Somerset.
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12. Warwickshire.
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14. Leicestershire.
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16. Glamorgan.
17. Worcestershire.

What you have to do is to fill in on the coupon on this page your forecast of the order in which the counties will finish up. To the reader who does this correctly we shall award a prize of £100, and the other prizes in the order of the correctness of the forecasts.

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I forecast that the Counties will finish the season in this order:

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No. 2	No. 11
No. 3	No. 12
No. 4	No. 13
No. 5	No. 14
No. 6	No. 15
No. 7	No. 16
No. 8	No. 17
No. 9	

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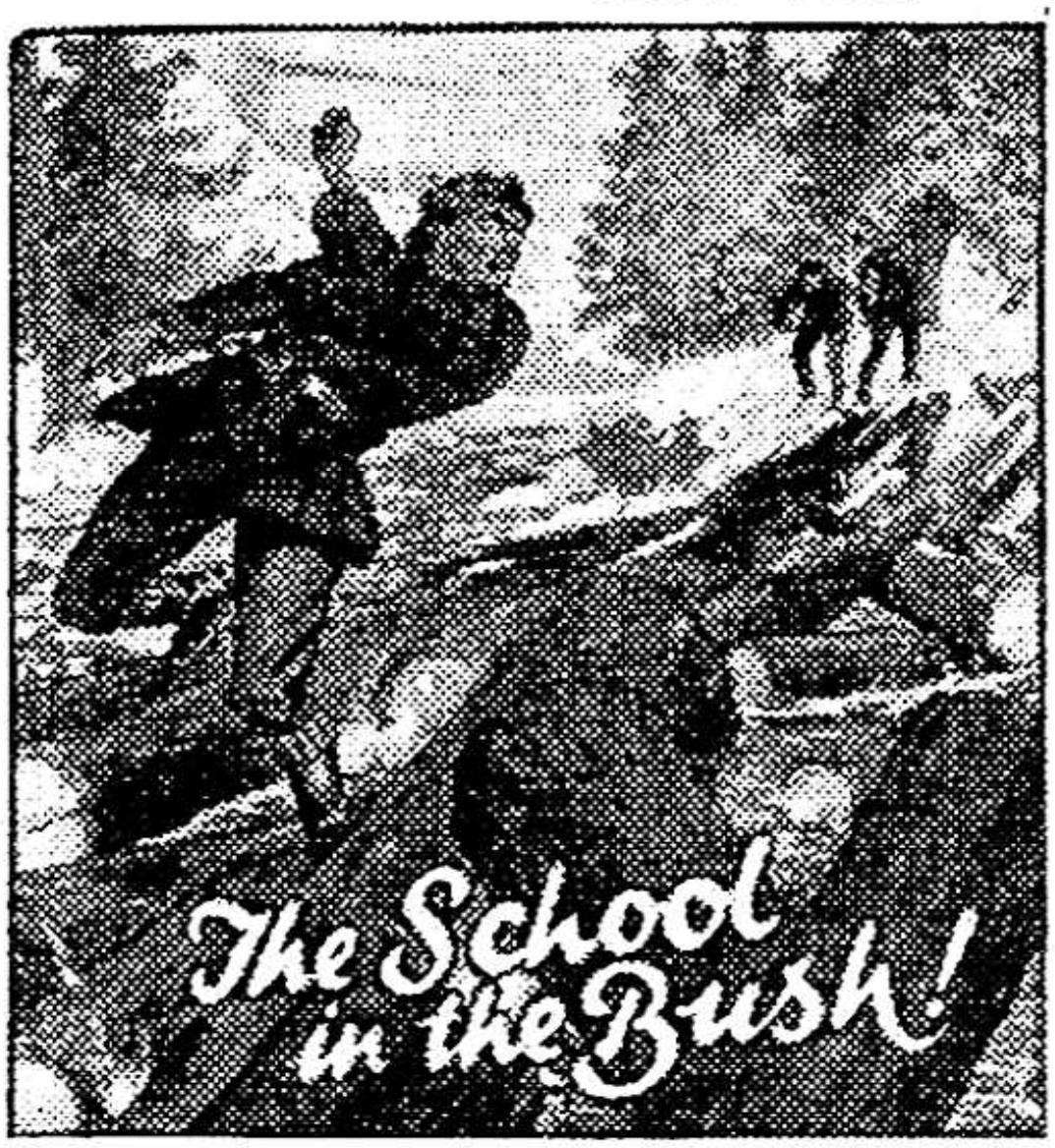

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