

NO. 1 OF THE ST. FRANK'S MAGAZINE APPEARS WITHIN!

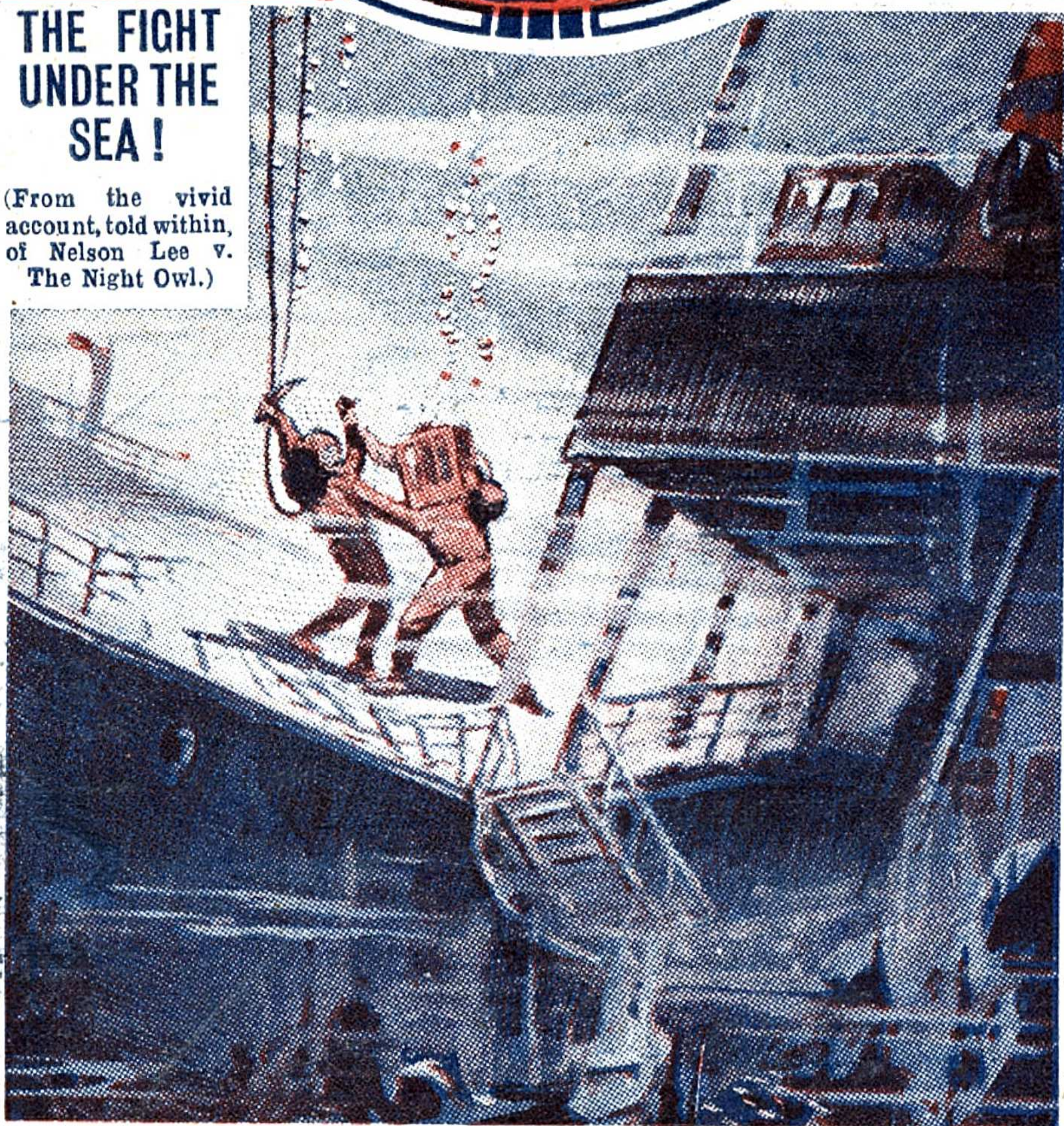
THE NELSON LEE

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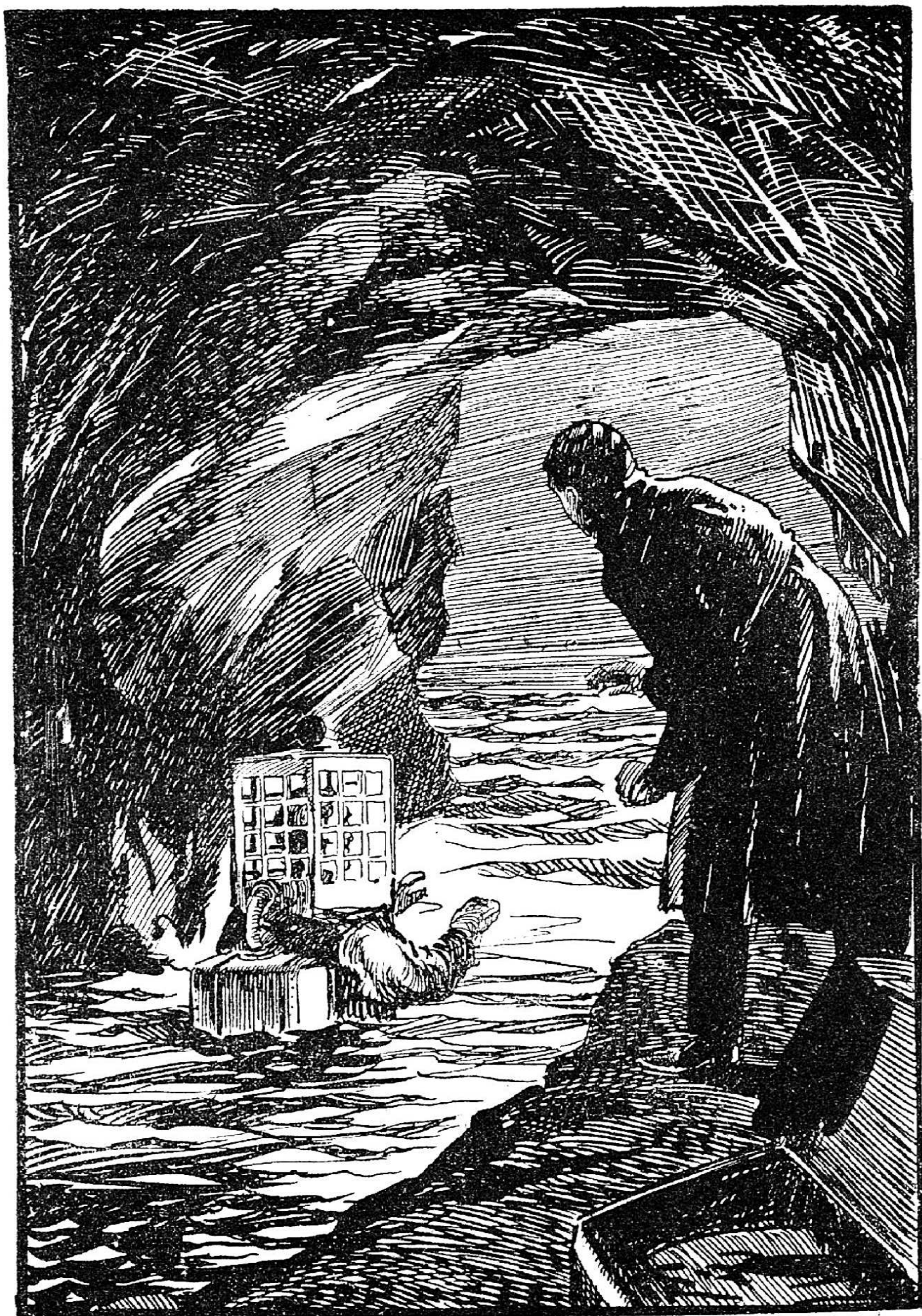
THE FIGHT UNDER THE SEA!

(From the vivid
account, told within,
of Nelson Lee v.
The Night Owl.)



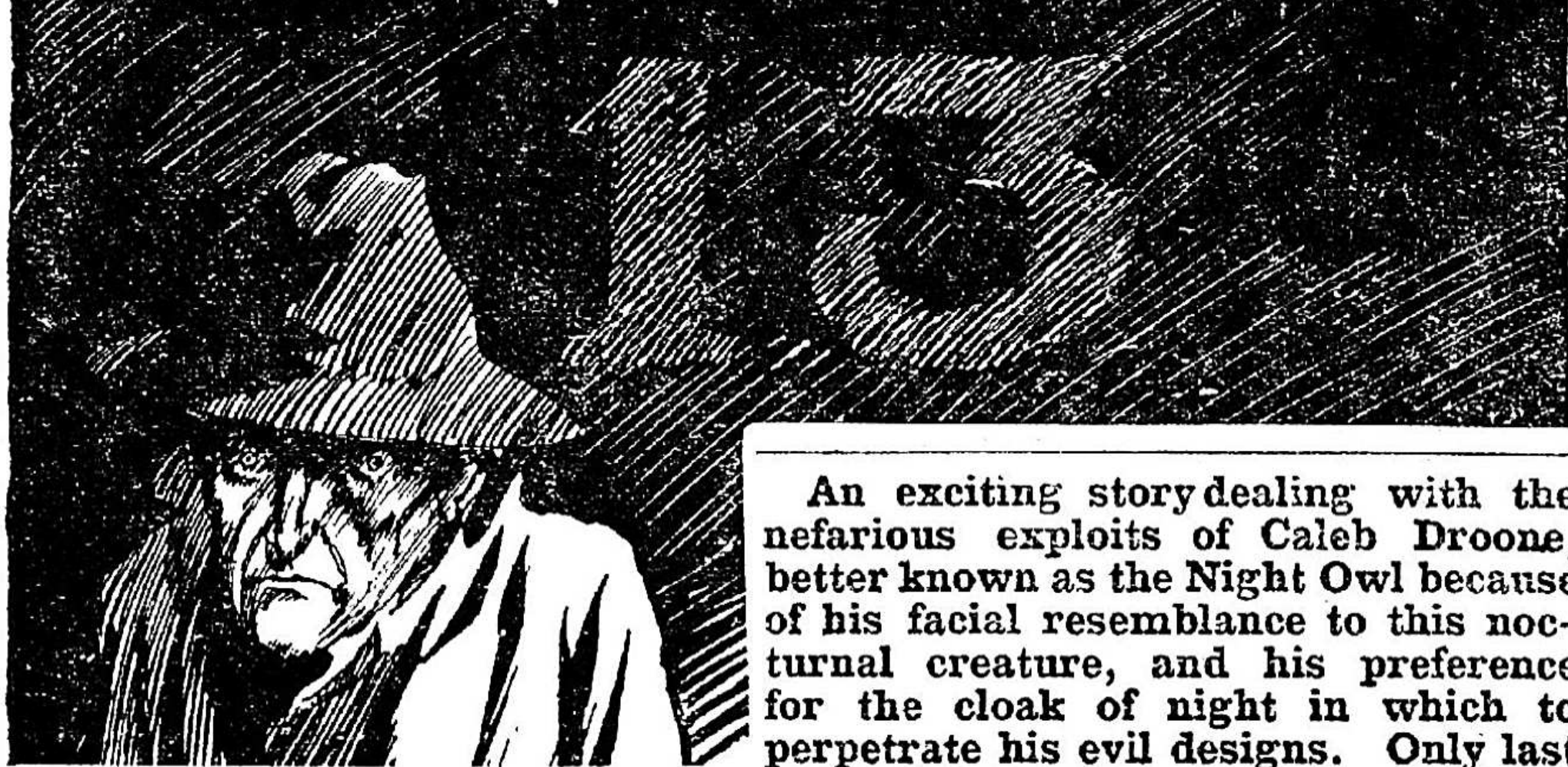
A Story of Thrills and Startling Adventures at St. Frank's is
told This Week in:—

THE SIGN OF 13!



I could almost have yelled with anxiety as the gov'nor vanished—dropping beneath that murky surface mysteriously and almost without a ripple.

THE SIGN OF



An exciting story dealing with the nefarious exploits of Caleb Droone, better known as the Night Owl because of his facial resemblance to this nocturnal creature, and his preference for the cloak of night in which to perpetrate his evil designs. Only last week a cargo steamer bound from

Lisbon to London was wrecked off Shingle Head, near Caistowe. The Night Owl is supposed to have been on board, carrying with him some priceless gems stolen from a Spanish grandee's mansion. The treasure is believed to have gone down with the ship in spite of the Night Owl's desperate attempts to save it. Nelson Lee, to whom the facts are made known, decides to begin salvage operations on the wreck. How, in so doing, he comes to grips with the terrible Night Owl, and the thrilling fight that ensues under water, are incidents wonderfully described in the following narrative.

Everyone will welcome the appearance of No. 1 of the "St. Frank's Magazine," for which we predict an even greater success than was accorded two years ago to its predecessor, "Nipper's Magazine."

Of particular interest this week to old readers of this paper is the interview with the author of our famous St. Frank's stories who, after years of unsuccessful persuasion has at last been induced to make known his real identity to the hosts of admirers who read his stories every week.

THE EDITOR.

The Narrative Related Throughout by Nipper.

CHAPTER I

A LESSON IN LANGUAGE!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE, to use his own expressive term, felt somewhat pricelessly braced. He didn't exactly know why, but the fact remained that as he strolled in the old Triangle at St. Frank's he positively beamed.

It was early afternoon, and incidentally, a half-holiday. The juniors had just come out from dinner, and quite a few members of the Remove were disporting themselves in the late November sunshine.

"Absolutely!" said Archie firmly.

"Eh?" Reggie Pitt paused as he was strolling by. "Talking to me?"

"Weil, as a matter of absolute fact, no," replied Archie. "The old tongue got loose, don't you know. I was thinking, laddie. The genial atmosphere of the weather grabbed hold of me, and all that. What I mean is, sunshine and gentle breezes and nippiness and so forth. This, in fact, is the kind of day when a chappie's tissues simply surge with energy. What?"

Reginald Pitt grinned.

"I never knew that you surged with energy of any sort," he remarked. "But I'll admit that it's a ripping day. Just our luck, of course. Things always happen like this."

"I'm afraid, old scream, that I don't follow the trend," said Archie.

"Why, there's no football match arranged for to-day, and it's gloriously fine," explained Pitt. "And on Saturday, when we're playing the River House, I'll bet it'll rain in torrents. That's just the way of things."

"Oh, rather," said Archie brightly. "In other words, absolutely! I mean to say, Fate, as it were, is generally a fickle jade, what? But an idea smites the old bean. In other words, a brainstorm assails me."

"Better be careful, old man," warned Pitt. "You're rather weak in that quarter, you know—"

"Kindly cease from being so dashed personal," interrupted Archie. "Why not, I mean, have the match with the River House chappies this afternoon? How about it? Priceless weather, and all that, and there you are!"

Pitt grinned.

"It's not a bad wheeze, but it can't be did," he replied. "Half the team has made other arrangements, and I expect the River House fellows have made their own plans, too. Quite apart from that, the Eleven has got to put in some practice."

Archie shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course, you know best," he said. "But there it is—the scheme. Take it, as it were, or leave it. What-ho! The chappie from New York appears in the offing. Greetings, Adams, old bird."

"Hail, O thou of wondrous tongue!" said Pitt solemnly.

Ulysses Spencer Adams, of New York, came to a halt in front of the two juniors. He was a comparatively new boy at St. Frank's,

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THE NEW YOUNG BRITAIN

and he was still something of a novelty in the Remove. The juniors had not got quite accustomed to his own particular brand of speech.

"Aw, gee! You guys sure make me tired!" exclaimed Adams. "You seem to think that I don't talk proper English. Say, how do you get that way?"

Pitt grinned.

"According to your ideas, I suppose your English is just about perfect?" he remarked, with a chuckle. "But you mustn't forget that we're terribly old-fashioned over on this side of the Atlantic."

"You said it!"

"I know I said it!" smiled Reggie. "We haven't got quite used to your wonderful New York improvements. In fact, lots of the chaps here don't know what the dickens you're talking about half the time."

Ulysses Spencer Adams sniffed.

"Guess some of these guys are dumb-bells," he said. "It's sure fierce when a real, honest-to-goodness feller hands out a wise crack. Say, in this joint he isn't even understood. You've sure got some boneheads around, I'll tell the world!"

Archie Glenthorne looked mystified, and Pitt grinned more than ever.

"There you are!" said Reggie. "There's just an example. I suppose you think you talked perfect English just then?"

"You bet your life I talked perfect English!"

"Good gad!" murmured Archie faintly.

"You see?" grinned Pitt. "Glenthorne's nearly overcome. He doesn't know what you mean by boneheads and dumb-bells! And he hasn't got the faintest idea what a wise crack is."

"Gee!" said Ulysses taking a deep breath. "Can you imagine that?"

Pitt strolled away, leaving Archie to the tender mercies of the American boy. The latter regarded the swell of the Ancient House with a kind of tolerant amusement.

Adams was already known in the Remove as "U.S.A.", for these were his initials, and he was a typical American. His father, Mr. Otis S. Adams was a millionaire, and was sometimes referred to as the "Cheese King," having made a vast fortune out of a special brand of pimento cheese.

"Ulysses of Troy," was another way of referring to the American boy, for he was a native of the City of Troy, New York State.

And Ulysses always spoke in the vernacular of New York.

"Say, you're sure some little nut," remarked Ulysses blandly.

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "Well, I mean to say, Phipps positively prides himself upon the young master's appearance. I agree, old darling, that I am certainly one of the nuts."

"Aw, that's the bunk!" said the American boy.

"Eh?"

"This Phipps guy," went on Ulysses. "Say, what's the big idea? You surely don't need that hired man around?"

"What?" said Archie, adjusting his monocle. "Good gracious! You don't seem to realise, old tulip, that I should be positively like a dashed fish out of water without Phipps. The dear chappie is part of my bally life! Without Phipps I should wilt away to a shadow, and dashed well perish!"

"Gee whizz!" said Ulysses, gazing at Archie in wonder.

"And kindly allow me to make a little correction," went on Archie. "Phipps, of course, doesn't sleep in a bunk. You made some remark just now——"

"You've got me wrong!" said Ulysses. "When I say that anything is the bunk, it just means that it's no good. That's real language, kiddo! For example, when it's a wet day you hand out this line of talk: 'Gee! Ain't this weather the bunk!' Get me?"

Archie shook himself slightly.

"Well, as a matter of absolute fact, no," confessed Archie. "The brain cells fail to absorb the trend. But now that we're on the old sub., kindly explain a few mysteries of the priceless American language."

"Surest thing, you know," said Ulysses promptly. "I guess you know what a nut is?"

"Absolutely," said Archie. "A nut is a chappie who dresses somewhat pricelessly."

"Forget it!" said the American boy.

"Eh?"

"Can that stuff!" said Ulysses. "We're not talking about snappy dressers. No, sirree! A nut, in real language, is a guy who's nutty—a feller who's weak in the head. In other words, a sap!"

"A—a sap?" repeated Archie blankly.

"Sure! A mutt!"

"Oh, absolutely," said Archie faintly. "A mutt, what?"

"A bonehead!" explained Ulysses. "In other words, a nut is what you'd call a lunatic!"

Archie stiffened.

"Dash it all!" he protested. "That's somewhat foul, don't you know! Kindly allow me to protest in chunks——"

"Aw, don't get sore!" interrupted the American boy. "A nut in American doesn't mean the same as a nut in English. And when you pull a line of bull on anybody it means that you're passing the big stuff."

"The big stuff?" repeated Archie, without the slightest comprehension.

"You bet your life!" said Adams. "Handing out the bull is giving a guy a line of talk that's exaggerated, I guess."

A gleam of intelligence came into Archie's eyes.

"What-ho! We see light!" he exclaimed. "Kindly allow me to get this clear, old son. If a chappie tries to spoof another chappie by spinning a dashed tall yarn, he's passing a line of bull, what?"

"You've got me!" grinned Ulysses, nodding.

"But, I mean, how extraordinary!" murmured Archie. "Thanks muchly, old dear—gratitude in lumps, and all that. I wanted to know all these things. I once heard you make

some remark to the effect that something was nifty. And I heard you call Armstrong a cheap skate. Kindly expound!"

Ulysses pointed to the clear blue of the sky.

"Do you lamp that?" he asked.

"Gadzooks! Do I what?"

"Do you see that sky?"

"Absolutely!"

"Well, that's a nifty sky," said Ulysses. "Nifty means good. If a guy likes a particular suit of clothes, he calls it a nifty suit."

"Oh, good," said Archie. "In future I shall instruct Phipps to get hold of a few nifty suits for me. But you referred to a lamp just now——"

"No, I just asked you to lamp the sky," said Ulysses. "That means look at it. A guy's eyes are his lamps—get me?"

"Dash it all! How extraord." said Archie, in wonder.

"Just the real language, that's all," said the American boy carelessly. "A cheap skate is a feller who's real, doggone mean. And when you make a wise crack, it just means that you've said something snappy."

"Snappy?"

"Something smart," explained Ulysses. "A wise crack is a joke, or a pun, or something like that. And if I say you're looking punk, I mean that you look rotten."

"Really?" said Archie. "Then if a bally wind sprang up now, and sundry quantities of rain swamped down, you'd call it a punk afternoon?"

The American boy grinned.

"Sure!" he said, nodding. "Say, you're some little learner. You're getting on real good. Keep it up, and you'll be sure swell—a real crackerjack!"

"A which?"

"Aw gee! Don't you know what a crackerjack is?"

"Sorry, old dear, but I must confess——"

"A crackerjack is an expert—get the idea?" asked Adams. "Only I guess you'll need to be careful, or you'll sure pull a bone!"

"I—I'll pull a bone?" repeated Archie blankly.

"Yep—you'll make a mistake," explained Ulysses.

"What-ho!" said Archie. "As you say, old tulip, I shall soon become a crackerjacker, what? I mean to say, I'll get a line on this nifty talk, and trot out some of the good old bull, as it were. I'll tell some of the chappies how punk they look, and how nifty I'm feeling, and I'll dashed well remark that they've said a mouthful!"

"Hot dog!" grinned Ulysses. "Say, that's the frog's instep!"

Archie was all at sea again.

"Hot dog?" he repeated, floundering.

"Just an expression," said Ulysses. "When a guy feels good, he says 'hot dog.' It means a frankfurter, too—a weenie."

"A frankfurter—a weenie," repeated Archie, quite beyond his depth.

"Surest thing you know," repeated Ulysses. "A hot dog is a frankfurter sausage—and some guys call them weenies. Gee! I'd sure give fifty cents for a hot dog right now!"

Archie gulped.

"Well, of course, tastes differ," he observed. "I mean to say, I can't possibly imagine myself enjoying a hot dog. The very thought sends assorted shudders down the old spine. However, we're learning."

And Archie, feeling that he had absorbed sufficient American for one lesson, edged away before Ulysses could carry the conversation any further.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIGURE ON SHINGLE HEAD.



"READY?" asked Edward Oswald Handforth crisply.

He hustled into Study D in the Ancient House, and found Church and McClure, his faithful chums, inspecting a small cage of white mice. These tiny specimens of the animal kingdom had just come into Church's possession—Church having swapped a pocket-knife for the entire outfit. He felt rather guilty about it, for the pocket knife had only one blade, and even that was wobbly.

"You got a bargain!" declared McClure. "Three white mice and a cage for that mouldy old knife! Why, Griffith must have been dotty!"

"He seemed satisfied," said Church. "I promised him my compass, too, but I can't find it—so Griffith is going to wait until it turns up."

Handforth gazed at his chums sourly, and turned up his nose at the mice.

"Take those rotten things out of this study," he said curtly.

"Eh?"

"Don't argue!" snapped Handforth. "I'm not going to have this study littered with white mice! You've been swindled, my lad! Those giddy mice won't live more than two days!"

"Rats!" said Church. "They're only youngsters, and I'm going to make a new cage for them this afternoon, and McClure's going to help me. You needn't worry—I'm not going to keep the blessed things in this study."

Church and McClure made a move to leave the apartment, but Handforth barred the way.

"What about going to Shingle Head?" he asked.

Church and McClure stared.

"Shingle Head?" repeated McClure. "What do you mean?"

"What do I mean?" hooted Handforth. "Didn't we arrange to go for a jaunt to Shingle Head this afternoon—to have a look for those ghostly figures? Buck up! I'm not going to wait long!"

Church and McClure exchanged glances.

This, of course, was the first they had heard of the proposed journey. But Handforth was always like that. It was one of his favourite habits to make all sorts of plans in his own mind, without even consulting his chums.

As a rule, he believed that they knew all about it, and it came quite as a surprise to him to learn that they were not very enthusiastic. Handforth was a great fellow for making plans for other people.

"Look here, Handy, we don't want to go to Shingle Head!" protested Church. "I'm going to make a cage for these white mice—"

"Blow the white mice!"

"This cage needs repairing, anyhow," argued Church.

"Bother the cage!"

"Yes, but look here—"

"I'm fed up with your excuse!" snapped Handforth. "Put those rotten things aside, and get your caps on! You know as well as I do that we arranged to go for a walk along the cliffs."

"We arranged it?" repeated McClure. "When?"

"Yesterday."

"You're dreaming!" put in Church. "We don't know anything about it—and we don't want to go to Shingle Head, anyway! Of course, you can go alone, if you like—I—I say, steady on, old man!"

Handforth was performing a somewhat significant action. He was, in short, slowly and deliberately rolling up his sleeves. Church and McClure regarded this action with growing uneasiness.

"Coming?" asked Handforth significantly.

"Of course—er—if you insist—"

"I do insist!" interrupted Handy. "And, what's more, if I have any more of your rot, I'll give you a taste of my right! You don't seem to understand that we're going on a keen detective investigation. I mean to probe this mystery to the core. I'm going to elucidate the problem!"

Church and McClure sighed—and resigned themselves.

Under the best of conditions, Handforth was a somewhat difficult fellow to get on with. But when he had one of his spasms of "detective work" on his brain, he was absolutely unmanageable. The only possible thing was to humour him.

Barely a week earlier there had been a shipwreck on the rocky coast—just at the point of Shingle Head. A cargo steamer, the Islington, bound from Lisbon to London, had run on the rocks during the storm, and had sunk in the deep water near the treacherous needles off the headland.

This shipwreck occurred at about the same time as the arrival of Ulysses Spencer Adams, and the latter had been given an opportunity to see that the St. Frank's fellows were not the duffers that Adams took them to be.

Nelson Lee himself had acted with wonderful heroism on that fateful night. It

was, indeed, mainly owing to the school-master-detective's pluck that the crew of the Islington had been saved. Only four men, out of the whole ship's company, had gone to their deaths.

Of the ship herself no sign remained, even at low water—for the battered wreck had slipped straight down from the rocks into very deep water. The bodies of those poor fellows who had perished had not been recovered.

And during the last few days rumours had arrived at the school—queer stories concerning strange, mysterious figures which

was something behind these rumours of mysterious figures. And he was bent upon investigating the problem—under the mistaken idea that he would meet with successful results.

Church and McClure had no real desire to go on this wild goose chase, but it was just a matter of Hobson's choice with them. To refuse would mean a dire and gory battle, for Handforth was in one of his fighting moods.

So the white mice were put aside for the time being. Church and McClure donned their caps and overcoats, and the famous



"Wot do you young shavers want in these 'ere parts?" asked the man bluntly.

Handforth and Co. were compelled to come to a halt, for the man barred the way.

had been seen on the rocks near the spot where the Islington had struck. The superstitious fisherfolk along the coast were convinced that these figures were the ghosts of the dead. For not once had these mysterious forms left the rocky prominence of the headland. They had just been seen once or twice for a mere moment or two—and had then vanished as uncannily as they had appeared.

None of the country people had dared to investigate, and Shingle Head had recently been left utterly desolate.

Handforth, apparently, believed that there

trio sallied forth. On the Ancient House steps they came face to face with Archie Glenthorne.

"What-ho!" said Archie brightly. "You can hardly say that to-day is punk, what? Kindly allow me to observe, laddies, that I am now pulling some bullocks on you. A nifty afternoon, what?"

Handforth & Co. gazed at Archie in wonder.

"The poor chap's gone off his rocker!" said Handforth bluntly.

"Absolutely not!" declared Archie. "A chappie off his rocker is a nut, you know."

A lunatic, in fact, is a nutty guy. He's what they term a sap! I trust you follow the old trend?"

"You hopeless ass!" said Handforth witheringly. "What the dickens do you mean by saying that it's a nifty afternoon?"

"The fact is, I'm speaking American!" explained Archie blandly.

Handforth & Co. staggered.

"American?" gasped Church, in a faint voice.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "I mean to say, American, when you come to positively get down to it, is a dashed difficult language to learn! Pitfalls, and all that sort of thing! Before a chappie knows where he is, he finds himself mixed up in all sorts of frightful mistakes! Adams has just been putting me through a preliminary course, as it were."

"Oh!" said Handforth. "And he calls this weather nifty?"

"Strange, laddie, but true!" said Archie.

"You fathead!" snapped Handforth.

"You mean nifty!"

Archie started.

"Now that you absolutely come to mention it, I believe you're right," he confessed. "Nifty, what? Good gad! What a ghastly bloomer, you know! I felt, somehow, that something was wrong."

"All the Americans use dotty words like that!" went on Handforth, with an air of scorn. "Haven't I been there? They're always talking about snappy guys, and passing the bull——"

"I—I mean to say!" interrupted Archie. "Of course! Not bullocks, what? When you want to spoof a chappie, you start buzzing forth a line of bull, what? Good! I shall proceed to startle Phipps by yanking out several lines of bull, and informing him that he has said quite a mouthful! I shall then ask him what kind of dope he has got for tea, mention casually that he is a dumb-bell, and whack out ten bucks or so, as a tip!"

"Ten bucks!" said Handforth.

"Dollars!" explained Archie airily.

"You—you idiot! Do you think I don't know that bucks are dollars?" roared Handforth. "But you can't give Phipps ten dollars as a tip, I suppose?"

"A mere figure of speech, laddie," replied Archie. "You see, I'm just perfecting my American speech. If you happen to be hard up, for example, I don't mind passing you a five spot!"

"A five spot?" asked Church. "What's that?"

"Hot dog!—er—I should say, gee!" protested Archie. "A five spot, my dear chappie, is a five-dollar bill! Dash it all, you're positively dumb! In other words, you're a frightfully cheap skate!"

"A cheap skate?" grasped Church.

"You," replied Archie, "have said it!"

"It strikes me, Glenthorne, you'd better drop all this American piffle!" said Church.

"Those expressions sound all right when Adams trots them out, but when you mix them with your beautiful accent, they become somewhat humorous. You'll never be an American!"

"Absolutely not," agreed Archie. "When it comes down to rock-bottom facts—that is to say, between you and me and the rest of us—I wouldn't bally well be an American for any old thing in the world! Gadzooks! The thought appals me vastly! I cannot imagine myself wearing horn-rimmed spectacles, hustling about hither and thither, telling the world that I am some little booster!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean to say, it's not in keeping with the dignity of a Glenthorne," went on Archie. "And I fear there are many American expressions which will always remain beyond my comprehension. I mean to say, what does it mean when a chappie spills the beans? And how can anything be the bunk?"

"Yes, Archie, you'd better give it up," said Handforth severely. "In fact, I'm surprised at you."

"Eh? What? I mean——"

"You!" went on Handforth accusingly. "The scion of a noble house! The younger son of Colonel Glenthorne—one of the most ripping aristocrats in the county! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Archie turned pink.

"But, really, old scream," he said feebly, "I didn't actually mean——"

"A fellow of your upbringing and breeding," continued Handforth, pointing a finger straight at Archie. "How can youorget yourself to such an extent as to pollute your pure English with this rotten American slang? I wouldn't use an American expression for anything in the world! I don't think enough of America, anyhow! But when it comes to England, I'm some booster!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did I say something funny?" asked Handforth sourly.

"Don't you call that an American expression?" grinned Church. "It's hardly pure English to say that you're 'some booster.'"

"Great pip!" said Handforth, startled. "A chap gets into the habit unconsciously! And here's this blithering idiot actually doing his best to learn the awful stuff! Let me hear another Yankee word from you, Archie, and I'll biff you on the rose!"

Archie looked penitent.

"Thanks, old dear," he said. "In other words, kindly accept large and sundry volumes of gratitude. I mean to say, you've positively brought me back to earth. I shall not tell Phipps that he is a big cheese, and that everything in the study is cute! On the contrary, I shall stick to my pure, undefiled English. Dash it all, a chappie must have some bally self-respect!"

And Archie lounged off, leaving Handforth & Co. grinning.

"That's what comes of having an American bouncer in the school!" said Handforth. "Adams is a fairly decent sort, but if he doesn't drop his American bluff, I shall have to take him in hand!"

Edward Oswald strode forward to the gates, and his chums followed. They had been half hoping that the slight distraction might cause Handforth to forget his original purpose.

But the leader of Study D was as firm as ever.

"Now, the best way to get to Shingle Head is to go through the village, take the Caistowe Road, and branch off along one of those little lanes," said Handforth, just as though his chums didn't know anything about the local geography. "When we get to the top of the cliffs we'll take our bearings, and then I'll go on alone."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"What's the idea of that?"

"Did you ever hear of Sherlock Holmes going into danger with Watson?" asked Handforth sarcastically. "You know as well as I do that Watson was always left behind. After all, he was only a duffer—just dragged in for the sake of effect."

Church and McClure glared.

"And are we duffers?" demanded Church.

"Dragged in for the sake of effect?" snapped McClure.

"Don't be so jumpy!" said Handforth hastily. "I didn't exactly mean that. I never knew such chaps for taking offence! I'm going to leave you behind because I don't want you to face the stark peril which lurks among the sinister rocks!"

Church puckered up his forehead.

"I read that line only last night," he said reflectively. "'The stark peril that lurks among the sinister rocks!' It was in that yarn called 'The Bloodstain on the Tiger Rug.' Pity you can't be original, old man!"

Handforth turned very red.

"I'm going to elucidate this mystery!" he shouted, apparently believing that a loud voice would cover up his confusion. "I'm going to find out what the mystery is down on the rocks at Shingle Head."

"But there's no mystery," protested Church irritably. "You can't honestly mean to tell me that you've been soaking in those old fishermen's tales? Who believes in ghosts nowadays? And how can you expect to capture ghosts at three o'clock in the afternoon?"

"Piffle!" said Handforth. "We're not after ghosts—we're after crooks! Those figures are members of some gang lurking about for an evil purpose. I shouldn't be surprised if they're smugglers!"

"With casks of rum, I suppose?" said McClure, with heavy sarcasm.

"Probably," agreed Handforth calmly.

"You—you really think so?" yelled McClure.

"Of course! Rum-running is a recognised trade nowadays," said Handforth, with an authoritative air. "Every day they're smuggling rum and whisky and gin into the United States—"

"But we're not in the United States!" howled Church.

"What does that matter?"

"What—what does it matter?" said Church feebly. "Why, you—you silly fat-head! They're got Prohibition in America, and the only way they can get the liquor is to smuggle it in! But there's no need for smuggling here—this country's still free, thank goodness!"

Handforth waved the argument aside with a sweep of his hand.

"That's nothing!" he said curtly. "These chaps are probably smugglers—and they won't be able to fool me! There are some caves down there among the rocks, and we're going to investigate every one of them."

"Are we?"

"Yes, we are!" said Handforth.

"But how can Church and I examine the caves if we're at the top of the cliffs?" asked McClure, with interest. "After all, we're only human—we can't be in two places at once!"

"Ass! You're coming with me—down into the caves!"

"But you just said—"

"Blow what I just said!" roared Handforth. "If you fellows are asking for trouble, I'll soon give you some! Don't talk so much. A good detective never talks! He's always a strong, silent man."

Church thought about making some remark regarding Handforth's habitual silence, but decided that this was an occasion for restraint. Besides, he had forgotten to bring his handkerchief, and even a small biff might set his nose bleeding.

Having passed through Bellton Village, the three juniors went along the Caistowe road, and finally branched off up one of the rutty little footpaths which led direct to the cliffs. Beyond them, a mile distant, lay the rocky promontory known as Shingle Head.

This treacherous headland had caused many a wreck and it was a place of evil name. The latest victim of those jagged rocks, the ss. Islington, now lay cut off sight beneath the calm waters of the Channel.

The vessel had been a total wreck, and neither the steamship company nor the insurance brokers had made any attempt at salvage. Such attempts, indeed, would have been futile. The vessel was written down as a total loss. Before sinking to her last resting place she had been practically battered to scrap-iron.

Handforth & Co. were getting near to their objective when they observed a stranger approaching along the footpath.

He was by no means a prepossessing character.

Handforth was at once suspicious. For some reason, Edward Oswald always suspected strangers of sinister motives. And this individual was well deserving of suspicion—for he was a tall, loose-limbed man, with a slouching walk, attired in rough, seafaring clothes. A greasy peaked cap was pulled over his eyes, and his deeply tanned face was very unbeautiful.

Two prominent teeth jutted out from his upper lip like fangs, and his left eye was covered with a black shield. A short clay pipe was protruding from a corner of his twisted mouth.

a surprise to the trio that the stranger himself came to a dead halt in front of them, and removed the pipe from between his lips.

"Wot do you young shavers want in these 'ere parts?" he asked bluntly.

Handforth & Co. were compelled to come to a halt, for the man barred the way.

"Why, we—we're just going for a walk to the cliffs," said Church.

"And what's it got to do with you, anyhow?" demanded Handforth, recovering himself. "We can go to Shingle Head if we like, can't we?"

"No, not if I sez you ain't!" replied the man promptly.

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"My hat!" murmured Handforth. "He's one of 'em!"

"Eh? One of whom?"

"One of the smugglers, of course!"

Handforth was hardly to be blamed for jumping to such a hasty conclusion, for the stranger looked the part to the life. But Church wasn't satisfied.

"Don't be an ass!" he muttered. "The chap's probably the engineer of an old coasting steamer."

Handforth's chums were in a fever of anxiety lest their leader should make some unguarded remark within the stranger's hearing. For once Handforth was cautious, and said nothing. And it came as a bit of

His tone was very aggressive, and the juniors glared at him. The stranger's whole attitude, in fact, was distinctly antagonistic.

"Look 'ere, youngsters!" he went on. "I don't want to use no threats, but if you've got any sense, you'll take my advice, and nip back the way you come. It ain't healthy for schoolboys along them cliffs."

"We've been there dozens of times," snorted Handforth.

"Mebbe. But this 'ere's different," said the man. "Anyway, you ain't goin' any further! Understand? I've got orders to allow nobody—kids, least of all—along them cliffs agin the Head. Go back the way you

come, an' step lively! I won't stand no nonsense, mind!"

Handforth and Co. bristled.

"If you think you can threaten us, you've made a mistake!" snapped Handforth hotly. "This is all public ground, and we've got just as much right on it as you have! Come on, you chaps! Don't take any notice of this ruffian! He's probably drunk!"

The stranger uttered a growl, and seized Handforth's shoulder.

"Just a minute!" he said harshly.

"Leggo!" roared Handforth, struggling.

"Really, Handforth, your strength is quite surprising!" said the stranger, with a startling change of voice. "I wished to avoid disclosing my identity, but you compel me to speak out. Come, come—don't look so startled!"

But Handforth and Co. were gazing at the man in utter stupefaction. For, although he looked just the same as ever, his voice was now the calm, familiar voice of Nelson Lee!

CHAPTER III.

THE SIGN OF 13.



"WELL, I'm blessed!" said Handforth faintly.

"Don't be so astounded, boys!" laughed the stranger. "Your attitude is quite a compliment to my little disguise. Am I really so changed in appearance that you do not recognise me?"

The three juniors were still agape.

"It's—it's not you, Mr. Lee!" panted Church. "I—I can't believe it!"

"Nevertheless, I assure you that I am none other!" said Nelson Lee.

"But your teeth, sir?" said McClure blankly.

"Oh!" Nelson Lee laughed, and slipped the unsightly, prominent teeth from his mouth. "Is that better?"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "It's a fair knock-out, sir!"

With those offending teeth removed, the whole appearance of that tanned face was altered. It lost a great deal of its evil aspect—and the juniors recognised a faint resemblance to Nelson Lee.

"I say, sir, what a wonderful dodge!" said Church breathlessly.

"The teeth?" laughed Lee. "Quite one of my oldest methods of disguise, Church. But you are right, it really is surprising how a few prominent teeth will alter a man's appearance. Now, boys, let me repeat my former advice—go back along the way you came—and ask no questions."

But Handforth was all agog with excitement.

"Oh, I say, sir!" he protested. "Aren't you going to tell us what it all means? Why are you disguised like this, sir, and

why mustn't we go along to Shingle Head?"

"I cannot explain that; but I have a very good reason for urging you to keep away," replied Nelson Lee. "I am conducting certain inquiries which I do not wish to be interrupted. And if you boys went along the cliffs at this point you might cause some serious complications. So consume your curiosity for the time being, and get back to the school."

"And won't you tell us anything, sir?" asked Church eagerly.

"I am afraid not."

"I'll bet it's got something to do with that wreck, sir," said Handforth keenly. "We've heard rumours that some strange figures have been seen lurking about at night—"

"You must never believe rumours, Handforth," put in Nelson Lee.

"And we were coming along to investigate, sir," went on Handy. "It's my opinion that some smugglers are at work—"

"Then it will come as a slight shock to your deductions, Handforth, to learn that the whole coast is free of smugglers, as far as I know," interrupted Lee gently. "Your theory is quite inaccurate, my boy. But I will tell you this much—there are certain criminals at work here, who are far more sinister—far more dangerous—than smugglers."

"My hat!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"But I'm telling you this in the utmost confidence, and I must pledge you to full secrecy," went on Nelson Lee, very seriously. "Furthermore, I want you three boys to give me your solemn promises that you will not make any attempt to visit this part of the coast until I give you permission."

Handforth's jaw dropped. He had just been planning to sneak down to Shingle Head after lights-out, in order to make some secret investigations on his own. But if he gave his promise to Nelson Lee, this plan would not be feasible.

"Criminals—eh, sir?" said Handforth briskly. "Of course, that doesn't interest me particularly. Come on, you chaps, let's be going."

"Really, Handforth, you can't fool me in that way!" chuckled Nelson Lee. "I don't think you gave me the promises I asked for?"

"I say, sir, don't be so jolly hard on us!" protested Handforth, throwing all pretence aside. "We'd love to help—"

"No doubt you would, Handforth, and I fully appreciate your generous thought," said Nelson Lee quietly. "But these criminals are altogether too desperate for you to deal with. I could not allow you to take any risks. Therefore, I shall require your pledged word that you will not come near this part of the coast again."

All Handforth's attempts to dodge the promise were unavailing. He had to give it

up—for, of course, a request from Nelson Lee was tantamount to a command. And it was all the more exasperating because Lee would not give the slightest detail of his plans.

The juniors were compelled to march back disconsolate, but brimming with curiosity and inward excitement. But Nelson Lee knew them well. Having given that promise, they would keep to it faithfully. The chums of Study D were as honest as the day, and their word was their bond.

Nelson Lee watched them until they were out of sight, and then he slipped the disfiguring false teeth back into position. And then, after a short wait, he turned aside across a meadow, and at length came to a small, ramshackle cottage. It was quite deserted, being a partial ruin. Unlocking a cupboard, he revealed his own clothing hanging up there. And in a very short time he had changed back into his own identity.

And it was Nelson Lee who emerged into the open again—after he had seen that the coast was quite clear. He walked slowly towards St. Frank's, in deep thought.

And, truly, Nelson Lee had plenty of food for thought.

He had made no misstatement when he had declared that he was dealing with desperate criminals. For, to be brief, the famous detective was pitted against Caleb Droone, the master-crook, and the Alliance of 13. This latter was a secret criminal organisation which Caleb Droone controlled. Droone was known to his own associates and to the police as the Night Owl—a name which fitted him like a glove.

For Droone worked always at night—and he looked like a human owl.

Nelson Lee had first crossed swords with the man several years earlier—before Caleb Droone had reached the pinnacle in his nefarious profession which he now occupied.

Droone had cause to remember that meeting, too, for it had been Lee who had sent him to a term of penal servitude. They had not met again until recently—actually on the deck of the ill-fated ss. Islington.

Nelson Lee had risked his life in the treacherous sea in order to carry a life-line on board. And there, on the wave-swept deck, the detective had come face to face with Caleb Droone.

The recognition had been mutual—and instantaneous.

The Night Owl, seizing his opportunity, had attacked Lee on the spur of the moment, and had succeeded in hurling him overboard. Assisted by a crowd of St. Frank's juniors, including myself, Lee had got ashore.

And soon afterwards the Islington had slipped from the jagged rocks, a total wreck, and had sunk to her last resting-place. Caleb Droone had been posted among the missing.

But Lee was not satisfied that the Night Owl was dead. He had discovered, in fact,

that Droone was still alive—and, furthermore, that he was actually in the neighbourhood.

It had caused Lee some surprise to know that this master-criminal was on such a small steamer as the Islington. And Droone had seemed to be worried, too—intensely anxious to get below. He had been prevented by the officers, who curtly informed him that all the cabins were flooded, and utterly inaccessible.

The inference, to Lee's mind, was fairly obvious.

Caleb Droone and one of his men had sailed from Lisbon for London, bringing with them something of exceptional value. This "something" had obviously been left down in the cabin, and Droone's anxiety was explained. For the prize he had been bringing to England had gone down with the ship.

Lee had recently been in communication with Scotland Yard, attempting to obtain information regarding Caleb Droone's movements. But Scotland Yard knew nothing except the one fact that the Night Owl had recently paid a visit to Portugal. Of his movements there they had no information. And Lee had heard nothing of any big burglary in Lisbon or elsewhere.

What, therefore, did that sunken prize consist of?

That it was of extreme value there remained no doubt. For the Alliance of 13 was intensely active. Caleb Droone himself was in command, and certain mysterious operations were in progress down among the caves near Shingle Head. Everything pointed to the one fact that Droone was making plans to recover that valuable "something" from the battered wreck.

And Lee certainly had no desire for Handforth and Co. to go butting in, and making things generally difficult. For a day or two, Lee had been making quiet observations and investigations.

Carefully disguised, he had lounged about, and had even got into conversation with two Alliance men. But, so far, he had met with very little success. He had been unable to discover anything definite.

But Nelson Lee was by no means discouraged.

And he was making certain plans of his own, too—careful preparations, which Caleb Droone would have found very startling if he had only known the truth. Lee, in fact, was nearly ready to act.

When he arrived back at St. Frank's it was growing rather late in the short winter afternoon, and a few lights were twinkling through the dusk of the Triangle. Tubbs, the Ancient House page-boy, met Nelson Lee as the latter entered the lobby.

"There's a gent waiting to see you, sir," said Tubbs.

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, sir. He come an hour ago," declared the page-boy. "A furrin gent, sir, although he do talk good English. Says he

must see you—come down from London a-purpose. He's in the waiting-room, sir."

"Did this interesting gentleman leave a card, Tubbs?"

"Yes, sir—I put it on your desk, sir."

"Very well, Tubbs—I will ring when I want you."

Lee, mildly interested, went to his study, and glanced at the card which was lying on his table. A slight gleam came into his eyes as he read the inscription: "Don Sebastien Santos, El Camino, Spain."

Lee rang the bell.

And having instructed Tubbs to show the gentleman in, a few minutes later Don Sebastien Santos arrived. He proved to be a small, elderly little gentleman, with aristocratic features, and an air of intense worry.

His skin was olive, his hair jet black, and beautifully dressed. Otherwise, he was quite clean-shaven, and attired in the height of English fashion. And his eyes were kindly. Nelson Lee took a liking to Don Santos at once.

"Ah, Mr. Lee, I am so delighted to meet you!" exclaimed the Spaniard effusively, after he had shaken hands. "I was distressed to find that you were absent, but now that I meet you, my worries are diminished."

"Whom must I thank for the introduction, senior?" smiled Nelson Lee.

"My excellent friend, Senor Jose Gomez, of the Madrid Detective Service," replied Don Santos. "You are acquainted—yes?"

"Very well, indeed," replied Nelson Lee. "I know Senor Gomez to be a very efficient officer, and a most excellent gentleman. Am I to understand that you have come from Spain for the especial purpose of consulting me?"

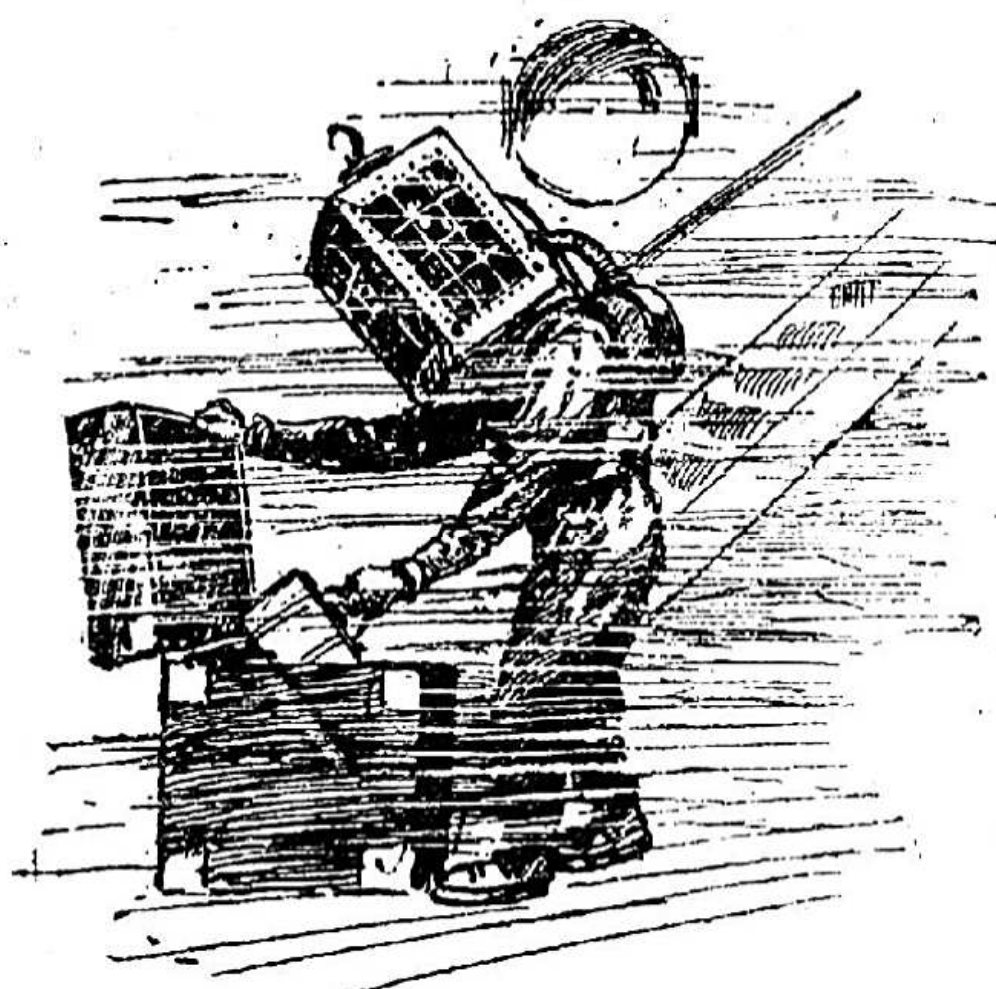
"Yes, yes! That is so!"

"But, my dear sir, you are apparently unaware of the fact that my duties in this school——"

"It is nothing!" interrupted Don Santos quickly. "My distress is so great that I am ready to grasp at the straw. Senor Gomez informed me that you are the most skilful detective in the world. No, no! Do not deny the statement, Mr. Lee! I come to you in deep trouble, and will be grateful for even the smallest assistance."

"You do not wish me to journey to Spain?"

"Ah, I cannot hope for such help as that!" replied Don Santos, with an expressive shrug. "However, let me tell you the object of my visit. If you are unable to help me, Mr. Lee, I will go away—satisfied, at least, that my journey has not been in vain. For you will at least advise me. In my own country I am a rich man—indeed, one of the ten richest in Spain. And my castle, at El Camino, is one of the most wonderful buildings in the whole kingdom. Many kings of Spain have honoured that noble roof."



But the most satisfactory sight of all was a small, neat attache case. One glance at this was sufficient for Nelson Lee.

"I should like you to explain the nature of your trouble," hinted Lee.

"I need hardly tell you that it is not a question of finance," replied the Spaniard. "I am rich—money does not interest me in that way. But surely you have heard of the famous Don Santos treasure?"

"I regret that I am learning of it for the first time."

"Madre de Dios!" ejaculated the Don. "You have not heard of the Don Santos treasure?"

"I must confess that my ignorance is colossal," smiled Nelson Lee.

"And yet, in Spain, the Don Santos treasure is spoken of with bated breath!" exclaimed the little man. "Listen! I'll tell you of it. Hundreds of years ago my ancestors—who were great men of the sea—brought this wondrous treasure from Peru. It consists of superb precious stones of all descriptions—gold settings of the most remarkable nature. Many of these gems were cut and fashioned by the ancient Incas of Peru. And for generation after generation this beautiful collection has been preserved at El Camino Castle."

"I imagine it to be of great value?"

"Millions, Mr. Lee—millions in your own pound sterling!" declared Don Santos. "Such diamonds—such emeralds! The treasure was the glory of my castle. And yet, barely a month ago, the castle was burgled, and the treasure stolen! And the best brains in my own country have been unable to trace the thieves."

"It is curious the matter was not reported in the newspapers——"

"No, no! I can explain," interrupted the Spaniard. "I have kept the matter secret—I would not allow the newspapers to

publish any reports. For such a revelation would do irreparable damage to my prestige. I could not allow the people on my estates to learn the truth. And for weeks past I have been moving heaven and earth to recover the lost collection."

"And you desire, of course, that I should return with you to Spain?"

"I had hopes of such," replied Don Santos eagerly.

"I am afraid that such a course is quite impossible," said Nelson Lee. "I am deeply interested, and would gladly come if such a course were possible. But at the moment I am engaged—"

"Wait—wait!" interrupted the stranger. "The Don Santos treasure was stolen by expert burglars—by men who employed the most modern appliances and methods. I am convinced that these burglars were either British or American. Ah! Do not imagine that I am insulting your countrymen—"

"My dear Don, we have our full supply of criminals in this country, I regret to say," interrupted Nelson Lee. "It is rather a pity you have no clue—no indication—"

"There is just one thing; but so trivial that I did not even regard it significantly," interrupted Don Santos. "I found a small card among the bushes in the castle grounds. This was days after the police had investigated. I placed the card in my pocket, and forgot all about it until I was travelling down to you, in the train. It may be nothing—I imagine it to be worthless. Indeed, it is not even established that the burglars left it."

"May I see this interesting card?"

The visitor took from his pocket a small, crumpled piece of pasteboard. It bore nothing except the printed characters "13" in the centre. Nelson Lee's eyes glittered as he held the card in his fingers.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "The sign of 13!"

"It—it suggests something to you, Mr. Lee?" asked Don Santos eagerly.

"It suggests—much," replied Nelson Lee. "And you tell me that the police have not even seen this—either in Spain, or here, in England?"

"You are the first man to see it, other than myself," replied the Spaniard. "It seemed to me that it was unimportant—in-significant. And I was so intensely worried that I gave it no real thought."

Nelson Lee lightly drummed the desk with his finger-tips.

"Nevertheless, my dear sir, this card may be of the very greatest importance. I want you to leave it in my possession, and to say nothing to the authorities. Just that simple card puts a different complexion upon the whole affair. I have hopes, indeed, of recovering the Don Santos Treasure without even journeying into Spain."

The little man jumped up, excited.

"But this is amazing!" he cried. "Tell me, Mr. Lee! What do you see—"

"You must allow me to remain just a little mysterious," interrupted Nelson Lee smilingly. "Return to London, Don Santos, and await there for a communication from me. If you will tell me where you are staying—"

"The Savoy Hotel, in the Strand," said the other. "I have a private suite—"

"Splendid!" said Lee, holding out his hand. "Leave the matter in my charge, Don Santos, and I will promise to do my utmost on your behalf."

The astonished Spaniard could do nothing but shake hands, and depart. He was completely mystified as to how Nelson Lee could possibly find any clue in that little card.

But after the Don had departed, Lee sat at his desk, tense and grim.

"Extraordinary!" he muttered. "It is only once in twenty years that one encounters such a coincidence as this. The Sign of 13! The facts are too obvious to be denied. It is a simple sum of two and two!"

Nelson Lee thought of Caleb Droone and the Alliance of 13. He knew that Droone had journeyed from Lisbon in the ill-fated *Islington*—and Lisbon was a handy port for many parts of Spain. The *Night Owl*, doubtless, had journeyed through Portugal after committing his daring burglary. And the treasure of Don Santos was now lying beneath the sea—here, off the coast of Sussex!

There was no guesswork about this—it was an absolute certainty. And Droone had been so certain of his ground that he had even left the well-known Alliance sign behind him—at the scene of his crime. By a pure piece of chance the police had seen nothing of that card, and so the one direct clue had been lost. But Nelson Lee had it—and, furthermore, he was hot on the track of the crooks.

And now that he had been positively commissioned on the case, the affair took on a different complexion.

The time for action had come!

CHAPTER IV.

AN ERRAND OF MYSTERY!



"WHY this gloom?" asked Reggie Pitt politely. "Why this air of funereal solemnity? You look as if you've just heard some bad news about your weekly re-

mittance!"

Handforth grunted.

"Speaking to me?" he growled.

"All those words wasted," sighed Pitt, with much sadness. "I don't want to be inquisitive, old man, but anybody can see that you're not in the best of humours. Had one of your rare rows in Study D?"

"I don't want any sarcasm!" said Handforth curtly.

He had just entered the common-room, ac-

accompanied by Church and McClure. Tea was over, and it had been a somewhat gloomy meal for the heroes of Study D. Handforth had descended into a depth of despondency from which Church and McClure could not arouse him.

"For the love of Mike!" said Ulysses Spencer Adams. "You sure look peeved! Say, what's made you feel so punk?"

"Punk?" repeated Handforth, glaring.

"Sure!"

"There's no such word as punk!" snapped Handforth. "Talk English, and I'll answer you!"

"Say, what do you know about that?" asked Ulysses. "Gee! This guy's sure handing me the air all right!"

"Oh, leave him alone," I grinned. "Handforth gets into these funny moods sometimes. It's not our business, anyway. Just leave him alone for a bit, and he'll come round."

"Blessed if I know why you chaps are so interested in me!" snorted Handforth tartly. "Can't I be miserable now? Have I got to ask the Form's permission to look glum? Before long I shall have to get a permit to sneeze!"

"It's nothing much," said Church, feeling that an explanation was necessary. "You see, Handy wanted to do some investigating—some detective work—and he found that it was impossible, that's all."

"Just when I was on the track!" said Handforth bitterly. "I'd got everything ready, and by this time I should have been pouncing on the crooks! And then Mr.—"

He paused, and glared at McClure.

"What's the idea of making those funny faces?" he asked sharply.

McClure turned red.

"Funny faces!" he snapped. "I was only winking!"

"First time I knew a chap winked with his mouth," said Handforth. "You screwed your whole giddy face into a door-knocker! My hat! I—I suppose you just—just—"

"Exactly," said McClure.

Handforth, with a start, remembered that he was supposed to say nothing. And the listening juniors were disappointed. They were not destined to discover the nature of Handforth's investigation after all.

"Why didn't you continue?" asked Clarence Fellowe. "We were waiting to hear of your deeds of muscle and sinew."

"Dry up!" said Handforth. "I don't feel like talking."

"That is sad," said Fellowe. "We really wish you had."

"Had what?"

"Told us of the clues—we're longing for the news," said Fellowe.

"You—you rhyming idiot!" snorted Handforth. "You can't say a giddy sentence unless you spout poetry."

Clarence Fellowe smiled from his lanky height.

"It's just a little habit—I've often tried

to nab it," he explained. "Kindly take no notice of my speech—ignore the so-called rhyming, I beseech. It comes quite without my knowledge—in any part of the college—"

"Gee whizz! This guy's a nut!" said Ulysses, staring. "Reeling out rhymes like a millionaire hands out bucks! Can you imagine that?"

"He's the Remove's official poet!" I grinned. "He's so tall that we call him Longfellow. We're getting him to write some poetry for the magazine!"

"A compliment I don't deserve," said Fellowe modestly. "Although I'll do my best to serve."

"Say, this is sure fierce!" exclaimed the American. "I don't want to get sore, but I guess it's an insult to the most famous poet in the world's history."

"Meaning Longfellow?" I asked.

"Sure—an American citizen," said Ulysses proudly.

"Rats!" snapped Handforth. "Longfellow may have been an American, but he wasn't the best poet in history. What about Shakespeare?"

"Aw, gee, that's the bunk!" said Ulysses. "Shakespeare was some class as a playwright, but when it comes to poetry—Longfellow's got the whole crowd beat. And he was sure an American—"

"Are you trying to teach us classics?" interrupted Pitt tartly. "Do you think we don't know that Longfellow was an American? Without any desire to insult him—blow him! We're concerned with our own poet—our tame, official rhymester! The chap can't help himself; he simply writes, and poetry results!"

"You flatter me unduly," said Fellowe. "You do, most truly! My rhymes are only silly—they come willy-nilly! When I try to speak out straight, the rhymes will come—but late! I cannot guarantee the metre—I'd rather have them neater!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Talking about metres, the fathead never runs short of gas!" grinned Pitt. "Look here, Clarence, we want you to make up a song about football for the next number of the mag."

"You overrate my skill," said Clarence; "but I'll try and work my will."

"Good! Now, the subject—"

"Master Nipper in here?" said Tubbs, putting his head in the doorway.

"Yes, Master Nipper is," I replied, looking round. "And what do you want Master Nipper for, anyhow?"

Tubbs grinned.

"Mr. Lee sent me to find you, sir," he replied. "Says he'd like you to go to his study as soon as you can."

"Oh!" I said. "All right."

Tubbs departed, and the fellows looked at me sympathetically.

"Five hundred, at least!" said De Valerie. "I expect Mr. Lee spotted you

smashing that window this morning. Of course, it wasn't your fault—"

"Do you think I could help the ball bouncing off the gymnasium roof?" I asked tartly. "All right—don't worry about me. I think I can wangle the gov'nor pretty well."

I hurried away, and presented myself in Nelson Lee's study. I found the gov'nor preparing to go out. He already had his overcoat and hat on, and gave me a quick nod.

"Get yourself ready, Nipper," he said briskly. "I want you."

My eyes gleamed.

"Going out, sir?"

"Yes."

"On that affair of the Alliance—down at Shingle Head?"

"Yes."

I was off like the wind to get my cap and overcoat. I knew a little about Nelson Lee's plans, but I had hardly expected that he would want any assistance from me. So it was a welcome surprise.

He was in the lobby, waiting, by the time I emerged from the cloakroom, and we both set off through the dark Triangle and out into the lane. I could tell, by Nelson Lee's very attitude, that he was bent upon some determined action. He was in one of his brisk moods.

"What's the game, sir?" I asked tensely.

"If everything goes well, Nipper, we shall do some great work this evening," replied the gov'nor. "I do not think it will be possible to capture the Night Owl, but there is a distinct chance that we shall deprive him of his ill-gotten booty."

"You mean the mysterious something which Droone was compelled to leave down in the cabin of the Islington, sir?"

"By all appearances, Nipper, the nature of that prize is no longer mysterious," replied Nelson Lee.

And, without going into anything further regarding his plans, Nelson Lee told me of his interview with Don Sebastien Santos. I listened with growing excitement, and by the time the gov'nor had finished, I was of the same opinion as himself.

"Why, there's not a doubt about it," I declared. "Everything fits in. Caleb Droone was bringing the Don Santos treasure away, and trying to smuggle it into England, when the ship was wrecked. He came on that small cargo boat to avoid the Customs and other officials."

"That is my own belief," said Nelson Lee. "But Fate stepped in, and deprived the Night Owl of his loot before he could land

it. As a result, the Don Santos treasure is now hidden beneath the water off Shingle Head."

I whistled.

"So this explains why the Night Owl and his men have been lurking about here ever since the wreck," I said. "I expect they've been making preparations to dive down for the treasure. And it's a cert that they'll do all their operations by darkness."

"Exactly," said the gov'nor. "And I have every reason to believe that he intends making an active commencement to-night. But I have seen no sign as yet of any capable diver—and, of course, it needs an expert for work of that kind."

"Of course it does, sir," I agreed. "But where do we come in?"

"If we are lucky, we shall forestall Droone."

"But how, sir?"

"I have not been idle during the last week," said Nelson Lee. "You may have heard me refer to a certain Mr. Jevons, Nipper?"

"I don't remember, sir."

"Well, Mr. Jevons is the inventor of a new diving apparatus," said the detective. "It is a device which has been thoroughly tested, and is even now being adopted, I believe, by the British Government. A man wearing the Jevons' diving-suit is not encumbered by life-lines and air-tubes."

"Oh, I remember, sir!" I said. "It's a square-looking diving-suit, isn't it—without the usual round helmet? The top part is just like a square box, with windows in it—and there are all sorts of pumps and taps and things. Do you think it's safe to go down with one of those suits on?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Considering that I have already been out towards the wreck twice, wearing such a suit, it is ample evidence that the apparatus is safe," he replied. "I can assure you, Nipper, that the Jevons diving-dress is the most efficient suit that has ever been devised. To-night I have hopes of reaching the wreck itself."

I took a deep breath.

"And what about me, gov'nor?" I asked.

"I am taking you with me because I must have an assistant," replied Lee. "My other experiments were conducted nearly a week ago—and then the sea became rough, and all diving operations had to be suspended. The man who was previously helping me—a member of the Jevons Company—has arranged to be here to-morrow! But the weather has calmed so completely that the conditions are ideal to-night. And I cannot afford to wait—even the delay of twenty-four hours might be fatal."

I was full of excitement at the prospect—and quite anxious, too. As we continued our walk along the Caistowe Road, Nelson Lee went into full details regarding the Jevons diving-suit. It was peculiarly suitable for the gov'nor's purpose, for he could walk straight into the sea from the shore—

thus entirely dispensing with boats and pumping apparatus. Therefore, even if Droone and his men were at work above the wreck, Nelson Lee would be able to reach the shattered Islington unseen and unsuspected.

Lee had his apparatus stored away in a small cave which was some distance from Droone's headquarters—for, according to what Nelson Lee told me, the Night Owl had established a complete camp farther round the headland.

And it was very necessary for the guv'nor to be cautious, for the Alliance men were keenly on the alert, and watching for any sign of activity from Nelson Lee. Under the circumstances, I was not quite comfortable. I felt that the guv'nor was going into great peril.

"Do you think it possible, sir, that Droone's men will be diving down to the wreck this evening?" I asked.

"It is possible."

"Then you might come face to face with the Alliance diver!"

"That, too, is not entirely unfeasible."

"Oh, guv'nor, there's going to be danger!" I declared. "I don't like it!"

"My dear Nipper, surely you can be satisfied that I shall take care of myself?" asked Nelson Lee gently. "And you seem to forget that I shall have a big advantage over any diver who is wearing the regulation suit—for I shall be unhampered by life-lines. But let us discuss other methods—somebody is approaching."

I had been unaware of this until Nelson Lee mentioned the fact. He proved to be a big, burly man, who paused as he was about to go by.

"Just a minute, gents," he said. "Am I right for the old lighthouse?"

"Yes—you take the first turning on the left," said Nelson Lee. "You will find that it is a small lane. You can't go wrong."

"Thanks, sir—much obliged!" said the other.

I wondered why he wanted to get to the old lighthouse—which, in truth, was merely a bit of ruin. It stood on the top of the cliff close against Shingle Head—and for many years past had been supplanted by a great new lighthouse which stood upon a rock, far out into the sea.

"Just a minute, my friend," said Nelson Lee, as the stranger was about to move on. "I think I recognise your voice. You are George Hayes, of Gravesend. Am I mistaken?"

The man caught in his breath.

"Why, durn me!" he ejaculated. "Who may you be, sir?"

"My name is Nelson Lee."

"Why, Mr. Lee!" exclaimed Hayes eagerly. "The last man in the world I expected to see down here. I didn't know you in the dark, sir. But, then, it's three years since we were on that job together, down

off Shoeburyness. Pleased to meet you again, Mr. Lee."

"Still in the same old trade, Hayes?"

"Why, yes, sir," said the man. "There's plenty of diving to be done these days. But I'm just taking a bit of a holiday this week," he added, with a touch of hastiness in his voice.

I listened with great interest. At first I had been puzzled—but now I remembered. I had been with the guv'nor on that case off the Essex coast—when we had recovered a big box of bullion from a sunken Thames barge. Hayes, the diver, had worked with the guv'nor.

A diver! And here he was, asking to be directed to Shingle Head! There was something in this that was extremely significant, and Nelson Lee realised this even sooner than I did.

Hayes was one of the most expert divers in England. Like many another man in the same line of business, he was his own master, and took work on under contract—and made quite a good thing out of it.

"Oh, so you're just down here on a holiday, eh?" said Lee casually.

"Yes, sir."

"You're not interested, by any chance, in the wreck of the Islington?"

"No, sir—never heard of the boat, Mr. Lee!" said Hayes quickly.

"Come, come, Hayes—you are by no means a good liar," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "In fact, as far as my experience goes, I have always found you to be an honest, trustworthy man. You cannot fool me like that. Out with the truth. Why should you attempt to bluff me?"

George Hayes breathed rather hard.

"Sorry, Mr. Lee," he said awkwardly. "Fact is, I was pledged to secrecy. The gentleman who engaged me said it was a tricky business, and I was to keep my mouth shut. Paying me extra money for keeping silent, too. But since you know all about it—"

"Not all, Hayes—but a little," interrupted Lee. "I don't like you being mixed up in this affair at all—it's not your class of work."

"You don't mean to say there's something—fishy, sir?"

"Considering that diving operations are intended they are naturally fishy," said Nelson Lee drily. "But your particular meaning of the word also applies, Hayes. I don't wish to influence you in any way, but I can positively assure you that your employers are criminals of the worst type."

"Good glory!" said Hayes blankly. "And the gent seemed so genuine, too, sir! Told me a yarn about leaving a valuable attache-case down in cabin No. 6—wanted to get it up on the quiet. Gave me to understand that crooks were on the job, and he had to be careful."

"I can well imagine that the gentleman was plausible," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"This meeting, Hayes, is a big stroke of luck. I had been wondering who they would get to do the diving—and now I know."

"Just say the word, sir, and I'll chuck the job up straight away," said Hayes stoutly. "No dealings with fishy chaps for me! I've always been straight, sir, and prided myself on it."

"There is no reason why you shouldn't be straight now, Hayes," said Nelson Lee. "In fact, you can materially assist my own plans, if you wish to do so."

"Just say the word, sir—that's all," exclaimed the diver promptly.

He had every reason to believe in Nelson Lee, for the gov'nor had paid him lavishly for his services on that other job. Quite apart from this, Hayes had a very great respect for Nelson Lee's courage.

"Thanks, Hayes," said Lee. "You cannot realise how opportune this chance meeting really is. It so happens that I am preparing to dive to the wreck myself. Have you arranged to make a descent at any certain time?"

They reckoned that eight o'clock this evening would be suitable, sir."

"Interesting! I shall be down at just about the same time," smiled Lee. "You will assist me, Hayes, by delaying matters as long as possible. And when you do descend, return after a time and say that you were unable to find cabin No. 6. This will give me time to find this attache-case first—which, it might interest you to know, contains the proceeds of a big robbery."

"You mean that, sir—serious?"

"Absolutely!" said Nelson Lee. "I think you can take my word, Hayes."

"Before anybody's, Mr. Lee," declared the diver. "That's a go, then! I'd rather work for you than anybody, sir. And if I can help you in this affair, I'm your man. I'll do just as you say."

Nelson Lee gave Hayes further instructions, and it was fully fifteen minutes before we parted company.

By all appearances, the Night Owl was in for an unlucky evening!

CHAPTER V.

BENEATH THE SEA!



"**T**ALK about luck, sir!" I declared, as we strode on again. "Why, that's about the most fortunate meeting I've ever known! I suppose you're quite sure about

Hayes? You haven't played into the enemy's hands by telling him about your own operations?"

"Unless I had been absolutely certain of Hayes' integrity I would not have said a word about the subject," replied Lee. "But Hayes is an honest man—and under all the circumstances I decided it far better to

take him into my confidence. He will help us, Nipper—very materially."

"Well, that's one load off my mind," I declared. "But I'm a bit uneasy about you going under the sea in that self-contained diving apparatus. Supposing something goes wrong with the air supply, sir? Supposing—"

"It is a mere waste of time to suppose anything, Nipper," interrupted Lee crisply. "Every time a man crosses a street in London he is in danger of being run over by a motor-bus or a taxi—and yet men continue to live year after year. We must be prepared for emergencies, that is all."

But, in spite of Nelson Lee's reassurance, I was worried. I was something like a man who sits beside the driver in a motor-car—jumpy and nervous, and always expecting an accident. At the wheel himself, he wouldn't be jumpy in the least.

And if I had been going on that diving expedition, too, I should have been perfectly easy in mind. But the thought of seeing the gov'nor go off, and leaving me to spend an anxious time ashore, greatly troubled me.

However, there was no sense in arguing or grumbling.

After reaching the cliffs at a most remote point, we crouched there for some time, whilst Lee brought out a pair of powerful night-glasses. It was a pitchy black evening, without moon or stars. But it was still possible to faintly see the foam curling round the rocks below.

The sea was quite calm, and in an admirable condition for diving purposes. But although Lee scrutinised the spot where the Islington sunk, there was no sign of any boat. And the caves in the vicinity were dark and showed no signs of life.

This, however, meant nothing—for we knew, for a certainty, that Caleb Droone and his men were lurking near by. The Night Owl was determined to recover that attache-case containing the treasure of Don Santos.

With great caution we descended the cliff by a roundabout route. Finally, we arrived at the mouth of an almost hidden cave. It was just round the headland, and well away from that section of the rocky coast occupied by the Alliance of 13.

At first it seemed to me that there was no cave there at all. But, by bending double, and squeezing my way through a narrow cavity, I found that a big open space loomed ahead. Groping into this, I followed Nelson Lee still further until we reached an inner cave.

Here the gov'nor switched on a powerful electric lamp.

"Here we are, young 'un," said Lee briskly. "You will observe that we are not without our apparatus."

Lying against the rocks were the various appliances connected with the Jevons diving suit. The suit itself was a lumber-

some clumsy-looking affair. And for a full half-hour Nelson Lee was occupied in preparing it.

He had to see about the supply of compressed air—he had to make certain that the valves were in full working order. His very life depended upon the efficiency of these details. And at last Nelson Lee donned the cumbersome suit, and gave it a thorough testing.

He looked a grotesque figure now.

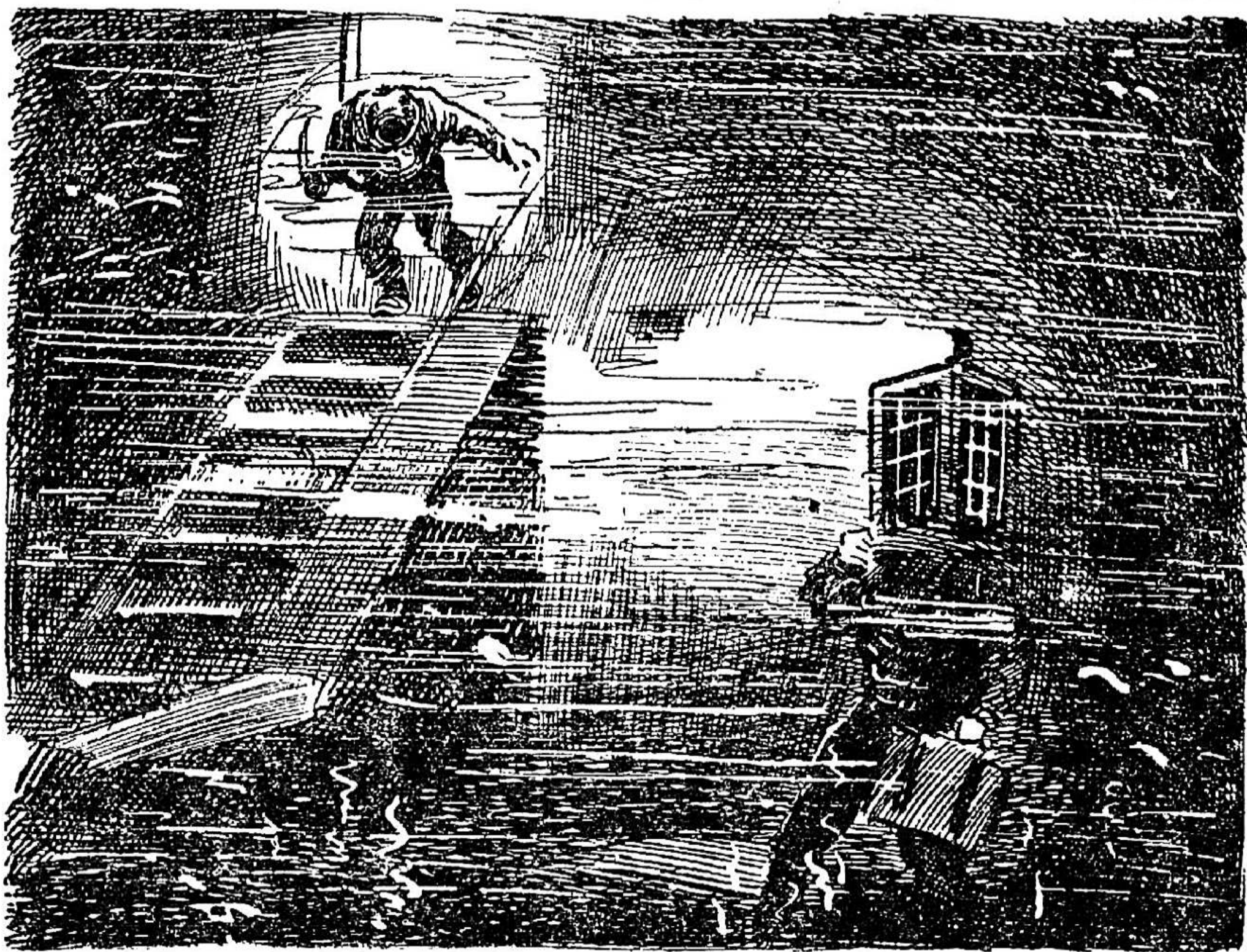
Unlike the ordinary diving suit, there was no round helmet. The headpiece rose straight up from the shoulders, like a big metal box, with rounded edges. On all

the better. Hayes has promised to fail in his mission, but we must be prepared for hitches. And once I have got that attached case, I shall be the winner."

When Nelson Lee was ready for the actual experiment I was very jumpy. I found that it was not even necessary for him to emerge into the open again. Indeed, I had been wondering how he would get through that narrow opening, wearing the diving suit.

I soon discovered how he meant to get out of the cave.

Deep down one end the water came lapping in—for at this point there was a deep



Two flat, unblinking eyes gazed at him. And Nelson Lee knew that he was facing the Night Owl!

sides there were glass windows. Lee had plenty of room inside to move his head about, and the apparatus was provided with powerful electric searchlights.

And in the event of emergency Lee could pull a lever, which automatically lifted the top half of the suit completely off. He would thus be able to wriggle free, and shoot towards the surface. Thus, if the air supply failed for some mechanical reason, the diver still had a chance of life.

"Splendid!" said the gov'nor, after he had emerged. "I will just give another look over the valves, and then I think we can start. The sooner I reach the wreck,

gully in the rocks. This was filled even at low tide. Lee had previously experimented, and he knew that he merely had to drop into this pool, and walk forward. He would thus proceed along the sea-bed out towards the wreck. And even a hundred watchers would never be able to spot him.

I was astonished, indeed, to find out exactly how much Nelson Lee had prepared—how thoroughly he had paved the way for this evening's work. While St. Frank's had been going on as usual, Nelson Lee had made all these plans.

I could almost have yelled with anxiety as the gov'nor vanished—dropping beneath

that murky surface mysteriously and almost without a ripple. Would he ever come back? Or would some disaster of the deep overtake him, and the sea claim another victim?

I needn't have been so very concerned.

Below the surface Nelson Lee was progressing slowly but steadily out towards the wreck. This was no chance work on the gov'nor's part. He had already tested the suit—he had already made preliminary trips towards the Islington.

And he knew his bearings.

Otherwise it would have been well nigh impossible for him to reach the wreck. He found it necessary to negotiate several treacherous rocks. And down here, although a good way from the surface, the currents were tricky. On two or three occasions he was nearly swept from his feet.

But at last, leaving the rocks behind, he found firm sand beneath his feet, and plodded out steadily. The powerful electric searchlight fitting the upper part of the diving suit was switched fully on. It revealed a dull, greenish vista before Nelson Lee's eyes.

The effect was altogether weird.

Fishes flitted by—ghostly and grotesque. Trailing portions of seaweed appeared now and again, and the wood was full of tiny creatures of the sea—unrecognisable in their native element.

A watcher from immediately overhead might have seen some sign of that light on the sea bed—but the chance was very remote. For the searchlight was shaded above, and only the sharpest of eyes, searching for such a glow, would have detected it.

As Lee progressed, the sandy sea bed shelved steeply—thus he was going into deeper and deeper water. The Islington, he knew, lay out some distance beyond the crags of Shingle Head. His journey was quite a long one. A full hour had elapsed before the detective found his objective.

A short time earlier he had believed himself to be at the steamer's side but the great bulky mass which loomed up proved to be the sheer rocks which arose here to rear their jagged heads above water.

But Lee knew that he was near by, for it was on these very rocks that the Islington had ripped her bottom plates to scrap-iron. And then Lee found the Islington herself.

He came upon the wreck suddenly—almost unexpectedly.

He was just at the bows, and he was more than delighted to find that the steamer had sunk almost on an even keel. She was now lying on the ocean bed, with her battered and twisted funnel sticking grotesquely upwards, and with the decks listing acutely to starboard.

This, of course, would make Lee's task all the easier. He reached the side of the vessel, and proceeded to climb laboriously

upwards by means of the festooned ropes which still hung there.

There was something eerie and ghostly about the whole business.

Lee's air supply was working perfectly, and as the apparatus was prepared for a four-hours spell, there was no cause for any anxiety. Only the tell-tale bubbles from the foul air exhaust were there to reveal his presence to anybody above. And by the time these bubbles reached the surface they would be well-nigh unrecognisable.

Lee reached the after-stairway after some trouble, and now the most ticklish part of his task began. For he had to penetrate right down into the lower decks of the ship—and he still had to locate cabin No. 6.

His task was easier than he had anticipated.

After descending the stairs, he found himself amid piles of wreckage. Doors were smashed, cabin furniture blocked the corridor, and the whole place was littered and jammed by wreckage of all kinds. Lee had to move this debris piece by piece before he could proceed.

But after clearing these obstacles away, he found that cabin No. 6 was quite near by. And the door, to his delight, was standing wide open—jammed there by further debris.

He entered, and even this was a ticklish business—for it must be remembered that the ship was listing over at an acute angle. The absence of any lifelines helped Lee considerably. His movements were entirely unhampered. And when he found himself within the cabin, he knew at once that he was in the right place.

He was not relying solely upon Hayes with regard to this cabin.

He had learned, from the ship owners, that Droone—under another name—had occupied No. 6. In spite of the terrible disaster which had overtaken the Islington, there still remained some semblance of order in the flooded cabin—now the home of sea creatures of many kinds.

The bunks still remained intact—the cushioned settee looked almost the same as ever. Even the porthole was intact. And, lying about loose, were articles of baggage—a suitcase—a gladstone bag—and a small cabin trunk. But, search as Lee would, he could find no trace of an attaché case.

He was beginning to fear that the small leather case had been jerked out of the cabin during the ship's descent. But, at length, he decided to open the cabin trunk—and wondered at his own obtuseness.

The locks of the trunk were secure—but these proved only a small obstacle. From the belt of his dress, Lee extracted a small steel crowbar from a socket. By means of this he smashed the locks in a very short space of time.

The lid of the trunk opened, and a rush of air bubbles hissed out. Even after all

this time, some air had remained in that trunk, imprisoned, in spite of the great mass of surrounding water.

But the most satisfactory sight of all was a small neat attaché case. One glance at this was sufficient for Nelson Lee.

It was about the strongest case of its kind that he had ever seen—provided with double locks, and strong straps.

Although he was quite convinced that he had discovered his prize he made assurance doubly sure by unstrapping the case, and smashing the locks. Then, very cautiously, he raised the lid.

The contents proved to be even more staggering than Lee had expected.

Carefully wrapped in squares of velvet were gems of the most wondrous size and beauty and lustre. Lee only unrolled one piece of velvet—for this was sufficient. The attaché case was filled with rare gems and antique gold settings—in short, the entire Don Santos Treasure, intact.

Lee closed the case, and strapped it up securely—for the locks were now useless.

And, with a feeling of satisfaction that only comes to one who has succeeded in a difficult task, he turned towards the doorway. Reaching the corridor, he passed along, and at length emerged upon the stairway. And he was just about to mount these tilting stairs when a figure loomed at the top. Even Nelson Lee was just a little startled for the first moment.

But it was only the figure of another diver. Hayes, apparently, was down on his job.

CHAPTER VI.

ENTER THE NIGHT OWL!



CALEB DROONE looked up sharply.

"What is it?" he asked in a cold, even voice.

There was something incisive and grim about that tone. But this was merely characteristic of the man. For the Night Owl himself was an unusual type of man.

He sat at a small table, and his surroundings were entirely peculiar. An inner cave was illuminated by means of two storm lanterns, where the silence was unbroken, save for the distant mysterious swish of the sea.

The Night Owl was making ready for his great attempt to recover the prize which had gone to the bottom so unfortunately in the Islington. It had been terribly galling for the master crook. He had stolen the Don Santos Treasure with entire success—he had succeeded in getting out of Spain with his loot—he had been within sight of the shores of England when the ship had struck the rocks.

And then, when it was too late, he had discovered that his cabin was flooded, and to reach it was impossible. The final

blow had been struck when the Islington sank—carrying down with it that treasure in precious stones which was worth millions.

It can easily be understood that Caleb Droone was determined, at any cost, to recover the prize. And this could only be done by means of diving operations. And now, at last, after careful preparation and after waiting for the fickle sea to calm itself, the moment had arrived.

This evening the descent was to be made.

And Droone had procured the services of one of the most able divers in England. If the man proved too curious after he had recovered the treasure, he would be dealt with drastically.

The Night Owl himself had been sitting at that table, directing operations for over an hour. He was a remarkable looking man. His clothing was sombre—his figure lean and slightly stooping at the shoulders. His very eyes were flat and unblinking—like those of an owl. His nose was thin and beaklike, his lips a mere straight line.

And now he looked up as one of his men came towards that little table. This second man was apparently a seafaring individual of a respectable type. Actually, he was one of the cleverest cracksmen in the Alliance. There were twelve members of Droone's gang, other than himself—thirteen, including Droone. And every man was picked—every member of that Alliance had his own particular task, and his own special place in the organisation. So perfectly did the Alliance work, that all its undertakings were done smoothly, accurately, and without hitch.

"No. 7 has just come in, Chief, with a report," said the man briefly.

"Is it necessary for him to see me?" asked Droone, in his even voice.

"No. 7 says that it's urgent," said the man.

"Send him!" commanded the Night Owl.

He never used a word that was not necessary. He only spoke when speech was essential. And his tone was always the same—always flat and utterly without emotion. There was something almost uncanny about this man.

No. 7 soon appeared—a short, stoutish man, looking alarmed.

"Just come in from scouting duty, Chief. I was along the lane an hour ago, and happened to see Hayes coming along—"

"The diver?"

"Yes—he's here now, Chief," said No. 7. "But I thought you ought to know that he was talking with Nelson Lee."

The Night Owl clenched his fist grimly.

"Well?" he said, without a change of tone.

"I was unable to overhear the conversation—"

"Fool!"

"It was impossible to get near, Chief," insisted No. 7. "If I had moved a yard, I should have been detected. But I heard

enough—merely by the intonation of the voices—to convince me that Nelson Lee and Hayes were talking on friendly terms. They parted after a long consultation.”

“Hayes? Where is he?”

“Here, Chief—preparing to go down to the wreck.”

The Night Owl pointed to the cave exit.

“Go!” he commanded. “Bring Hayes!”

No. 7 departed, and Caleb Droone remained a motionless figure at the table, but there was something in those flat eyes of his that boded evil. He was still in exactly the same position when George Hayes was escorted into the cave. No. 7 was with him. And behind came two other members of the Alliance.

George Hayes was looking uneasy. He instinctively knew there was something afoot here. And, since his conversation with Nelson Lee, his suspicions had been aroused. And he had seen many things which had suggested the true nature of this undertaking to him.

Droone’s whole attitude changed in the presence of the diver.

“Ah, Mr. Hayes, just a word, please,” said the Night Owl pleasantly. “I think I told you, during our first interview, that these operations were to be conducted secretly.”

“Yes, sir,” said Hayes.

“Have you kept your part of the bargain?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You have not, by any chance met a gentleman named Mr. Lee?”

Hayes was no actor—he flushed and started.

“Mr.—Mr. Lee?” he stammered. “I—I don’t know the gentleman.”

“You lie to me!” said the Night Owl curtly.

“By glory! You’d better not——” began Hayes thickly, his gorge rising.

“Hold him—and bind him!” commanded the Night Owl.

He had come to his decision on the instant—realising that the time for pretence was over. Since the diver had been in communication with Nelson Lee, the whole aspect of the case had altered. This man, engaged with such precaution, had already ruined the whole intricate mask of secrecy. And there was only one method of dealing with him.

Droone suspected Hayes of giving the game away—of telling Nelson Lee the full truth. And the Night Owl meant to make certain. By fair means or foul, he would force George Hayes to speak.

And, although Droone did not reveal the fact, he was startled. He had fooled himself into believing that Nelson Lee was not actively interested. In spite of all the watchful efforts of the Alliance, Lee had avoided detection. And this was indeed a revelation of Nelson Lee’s astuteness. For he had carried on his plans practically under Droone’s nose, without the latter being aware of it.

And Lee was the one man that the Night Owl feared.

“What’s the meaning of this?” demanded Hayes angrily, as he was seized.

“Why, you infernal scum——”

He fought desperately, but without avail. In a very short time he was rendered helpless, and he was securely bound, with his hands behind him.

“Just as I thought!” he exclaimed hoarsely. “Crooks—that’s what you are—all the whole bunch! If you think I’m going to do any diving after this——”

“We are not interested in what you think, Mr. Hayes,” interrupted the Night Owl smoothly. “You will tell me at once exactly what you told Mr. Nelson Lee, and what arrangements you made with him.”

The burly diver laughed.

“Oh, shal I?” he exclaimed. “All I’ll tell you is this—Mr. Lee warned me of your colour, and I’m glad he did! And that’s all you’ll get from me. I was prepared to go through with the agreement——”

“What did you tell Lee?”

“Go and hang yourself!” shouted Hayes.

The Night Owl advanced, cold and impassive.

“I will give you one more chance!” he said evenly. “What did you tell Lee?”

The diver was rather startled by Droone’s attitude, but he tried not to show it.

“If you think you can scare me with these theatrical methods, you’ve made a mistake,” he shouted. “You’d give a lot to know what I told him, wouldn’t you? And you’d give even more to know what Mr. Lee has planned for to-night, wouldn’t you?”

“Ah! So Lee has plans afoot—eh?”

Hayes bit his lip.

“No—I was just bluffing,” he said, gruffly.

“No, my friend, you are bluffing now,” said the Night Owl. “Will you speak freely, or shall I compel you?”

“Compel me—how?”

“You will see—if you still refuse.”

“I do refuse!” said Hayes. “You and your gang can go to blazes!”

Caleb Droone inserted his fingers into a waistcoat pocket, and withdrew a small phial. Slowly and deliberately, he unscrewed the special stopper. He advanced towards Hayes.

“Turn the prisoner round!” he commanded.

“What—what’s that?” asked Hayes hoarsely. “What have you got there?”

“Something to loosen your tongue—a powerful acid!”

Hayes recoiled with horror.

“You—you fiend! You daren’t——”

“To begin with, Mr. Hayes, we will have mercy on you,” said the Night Owl evenly.

“A little touch on the back of your left hand. If that is not sufficient then we will open your shirt, and try the effect of the acid upon your chest.”

The diver's brain was in a whirl. Until he had met Nelson Lee, only a comparatively short time earlier, he had believed his employers to be perfectly honest men. Certainly, he had thought that the operations were somewhat peculiar—but a professional diver is often called upon to undertake peculiar missions.

But now, with this startling abruptness, his employers had shown their true colours. They were not only criminals, but brutal ruffians into the bargain. There was something unreal about the whole affair—something suggestive of a Drury Lane melodrama. Unhappily for Hayes, it was grim reality.

But even now he could not believe that that phial actually contained acid, and that Droone was determined to use it.

"One final chance, Mr. Hayes," said the Night Owl. "Will you speak?"

"No, hang you—I won't!"

At Droone's orders, Hayes was turned round, and his left hand was pulled out so that the back of it was exposed. In his bound condition, the man could do nothing—and he was, moreover, held firmly by the three men.

The Night Owl, with a hand as steady as a rock, tipped the tiny phial up, and allowed one drop of the raw acid to descend upon Hayes' hand. The diver, for all his strength and brawn, gave a startled, agonised gasp as the deadly acid burned horribly into his skin. Even that one drop had caused a painful, ugly wound. The agony was, indeed, tremendous.

And for a moment it seemed that Hayes had gone mad.

Nearly blind with rage, and smarting under the great pain, he tore about the cave, in spite of his bonds. The three men had all their work cut out to hold him. But at last panting and exhausted, the burly diver was quelled. At length he was forced down to his knees and held there.

Caleb Droone, in the meantime, had stood looking on without the slightest trace of an expression on his face. His big, flat eyes were utterly unblinking. He spoke now.

"Well, Mr. Hayes?" he asked. "Shall we—proceed?"

"You—you inhuman devil!" gasped Hayes huskily.

"Tut—tut! That is no answer!" said the Night Owl. "Will you speak—or are you anxious for another taste?"

Hayes was no coward—his very profession told of his sterling courage. But there was something about this man that chilled his blood. Droone was like a fiend incarnate. And Hayes knew, instinctively, that he would be tortured without mercy until he spoke.

And a moment's thought assured him that the game was not worth the candle. By this time Lee would be at the wreck—probably have recovered the attache case. And, strong though Hayes was, the

thought of another drop of that deadly liquid turned his blood to water.

At first he had not believed that the threat would be carried out. But now he knew that worse was to come.

"You hound! I'll speak!" he gasped.

"Good!" said the Night Owl smoothly. "Do so!"

Hayes between his set teeth, explained how he had told Nelson Lee of the proposed operation. And, although he had made up his mind to withhold the rest of the conversation, he was compelled to speak. The threat of that awful acid was a certain tongue loosener.

"So!" exclaimed the Night Owl, at length. "Lee himself has planned to use a diving-suit so that he shall visit this wreck."

"Yes!" snapped Hayes. "And by this time Mr. Lee will have got that attache-case, I expect! Good luck to him! You don't stand any chance, anyhow. The man who fights Nelson Lee is always the loser!"

Droone raised a hand.

"Take him away!" he commanded curtly. "Keep him bound."

The diver was forced out of the cave by his captors, and as soon as Droone was left to himself, he dropped some of his mask. He paced up and down, clenching and unclenching his fists.

There was not much sigh of emotion on his owl-like face. But, actually, he was nearly mad with rage and alarm. Another man would have shown his violent temper in many ways. But Droone was the type who raged inwardly.

Even now Nelson Lee was at the wreck!

And the diver Droone had engaged was unsafe for the job. He was a traitor, and therefore not to be trusted. It was too late to even think of getting another diver this evening. Under no circumstances could one be procured within twenty-four hours.

And, meanwhile, Nelson Lee was actually at work! Unless the Night Owl acted at once, the treasure would be stolen from him—wrested from his very grasp. And it was quite useless to search for Nelson Lee's own particular cave. The detective would come back there, but how could Droone find it? The cliffs hereabouts were literally honey-combed with numberless caves—many of them quite inaccessible. It would take all night to search even half of them.

No! The only possible thing was to go down to the wreck—forestall Nelson Lee at his own game—failing that to meet Lee face to face, and deal with him drastically, there, fathoms below the surface!

Caleb Droone clapped his hands sharply.

No. 7 appeared, looking rather startled.

"Prepare the diving costume!" said the Night Owl smoothly. "Get the men ready for working the pumps."

"But Hayes won't go down, chief—"

"I am going myself!"

"But—but you know nothing about diving!" protested No. 7. "It'll be fatal, chief—"

"Do not argue!" snapped Droone. "Prepare!"

The man did not even presume to argue, but hurried away. At the same time, he was rather staggered by the Night Owl's decision. But Droone knew well enough that it was his only possible chance. And his cunning brain told him that he would have all the advantage.

For Nelson Lee was expecting Hayes to descend. If Droone could only get down to the wreck in time to come face to face with Lee, the detective would believe that this other diver was Hayes, and would not be prepared for any sudden attack.

The diving apparatus was ready, it only remained for the Night Owl to get into the suit, and be lowered. He had sufficient confidence in his own ability to carry the thing through with success.

And, in less than ten minutes he was out in the boat, immediately over the wreck of the Islington. The sea lay all around—dark and gloomy. The surf surged against the rocks fairly close by, and all along the coast the cliffs were black and forbidding. The night was so dark that this small boat was practically invisible, lying placidly there on the surface.

Hayes' apparatus was of the regulation type, a standard diving-suit, with air-pipe, life-lines, etc. And there, in the boat, with two men at hand to manipulate it, was the pump that would supply the diver with air.

Caleb Droone got into the clumsy diving-suit as quickly as possible.

His men knew better than to protest. Their chief was a man of action. Once he had made up his mind he was determined. Even if he went to his death, he would descend.

For it was his only opportunity of recovering that great hoard; the booty he had been at such pains to bring from Spain. For, without question, Nelson Lee would find that attache case, and make off with it if he was left in sole possession of the field.

Caleb Droone screwed on the metal helmet, and thoroughly tested the air supply before climbing over the side of the boat. Finding that it was to his satisfaction, he gave the order.

He got over the side, and descended the short length of ladder which trailed into the sea. He slipped off the last rung, and descended slowly deeper and deeper into the black water. Those above had taken the precaution to fix added lines, and he was lowered slowly.

Comparatively speaking, the water was not excessively deep, although quite deep enough for the entire steamer to be invisible, even at low tide. But there was no question about the position of the wreck. The diving boat, was immediately over the top.

So Caleb Droone could make no mistake.

He descended straight on to the deck of the sunken vessel.

The Night Owl felt very stuffy and he had a sensation of suffocation. But he knew that

this was only on account of inexperience. His air supply was perfect. It was only the confined space, and the knowledge that water was all around him, that gave rise to the feeling.

His feet touched the sloping deck, and he gave one heavy tug of the life-line—announcing to those above that he had reached the ship. In one hand he carried a powerful electric torch, and by the light of this he was able to dimly make out his surroundings.

He recognised the deck at once, in spite of the wreckage. And, without wasting a moment, he made his way towards the after staircase. The complete loneliness of the deck caused him to glow inwardly. He believed that he was the first one to arrive. Lee had not yet come.

But Droone had no sooner reached the head of the staircase when he started back. A greenish, unearthly light was gleaming below, down in the lower deck. And he discerned the figure of a diver, an unusual kind of diver.

But that one sight was enough for Caleb Droone.

He knew that Nelson Lee was here, and, what was more to the point, Lee was carrying the fateful attache case. It was now or never. If the Night Owl failed to beat his enemy, the game would be up.

And the odds were all on the Night Owl's side.

For Lee, coming up those stairs, believed the other diver to be George Hayes—an ally. Droone waved a hand, as though in friendly greeting. And Lee slowly and clumsily mounted the treacherous stairs.

He reached the top, intending to exchange a smile with Hayes, for he doubted if they would be able to talk. But, just as Lee came face to face with the other diver, he caught a glimpse of the countenance behind that circular glass visor.

Two flat, unblinking eyes gazed at him.

And Nelson Lee knew that he was facing the Night Owl!

CHAPTER VII

THE FIGHT UNDER THE WAVES.



IT was a shock; but Lee was ready on the instant.

The Night Owl's presence meant only one thing—that Hayes, wilfully or otherwise, had told the truth.

And Lee knew the honest diver well enough to believe that he had been forced to speak.

Any swift action was impossible, owing to the impeding water. And this is where Caleb Droone made his first mistake. He attempted to rush at Nelson Lee as the latter emerged from the companionway.

But Droone didn't rush—he lumbered forward clumsily, and overshot his mark. Nelson Lee, by pulling himself backwards, was able to stand clear of that intended rush.

And it was well that he did so.

For the glittering blade of a knife gleamed in the Night Owl's hand. His intention had been to make one vicious slash through Nelson Lee's diving-dress. Even if no fatal wound was caused, the suit itself would be ripped, and the water allowed to rush in.

When Droone attacked again, Nelson Lee was ready.

They grappled; Lee now taking great care to grasp his enemy's knife hand. The Night Owl, therefore was unable to use the blade to advantage. But he was a strong man—quite as powerful as Lee himself.

And there, on that sloping, slippery deck, the pair fought.

It was a battle for life.

Swaying to and fro, with frightened fish scurrying hither and thither, the two men stumbled and rolled. It was practically impossible for them to keep their feet. Again and again they toppled over—all their movements clumsy and grotesque in the water.

Nelson Lee, having had some experience of diving, knew the perils of such a fight. At the slightest provocation, a diver will sometimes stand on his head, owing to the very nature of his suit, and no efforts on his part will enable him to gain his equilibrium.

In the event of such a thing happening to Droone, he could at least be pulled to the surface. But if Nelson Lee got into that predicament, he would be entirely at Droone's mercy. Happily, his diving-dress was so skilfully constructed that there was not much danger.

But Droone still held that knife, and at any moment he might inflict a fatal stab or slash. It was more than Lee dared to do to release his grip on the Night Owl's wrist.

Those above, who felt the movements of the life-lines, thought nothing. They merely believed that Droone was moving about the ship, trying to find some means of getting below.

Nelson Lee had an instinctive feeling that he would lose, for his own costume was essentially the clumsier of the two. It was not designed for fighting on the sea bed. He had not the freedom of arm that Droone had. And the Night Owl himself realised his own advantage.

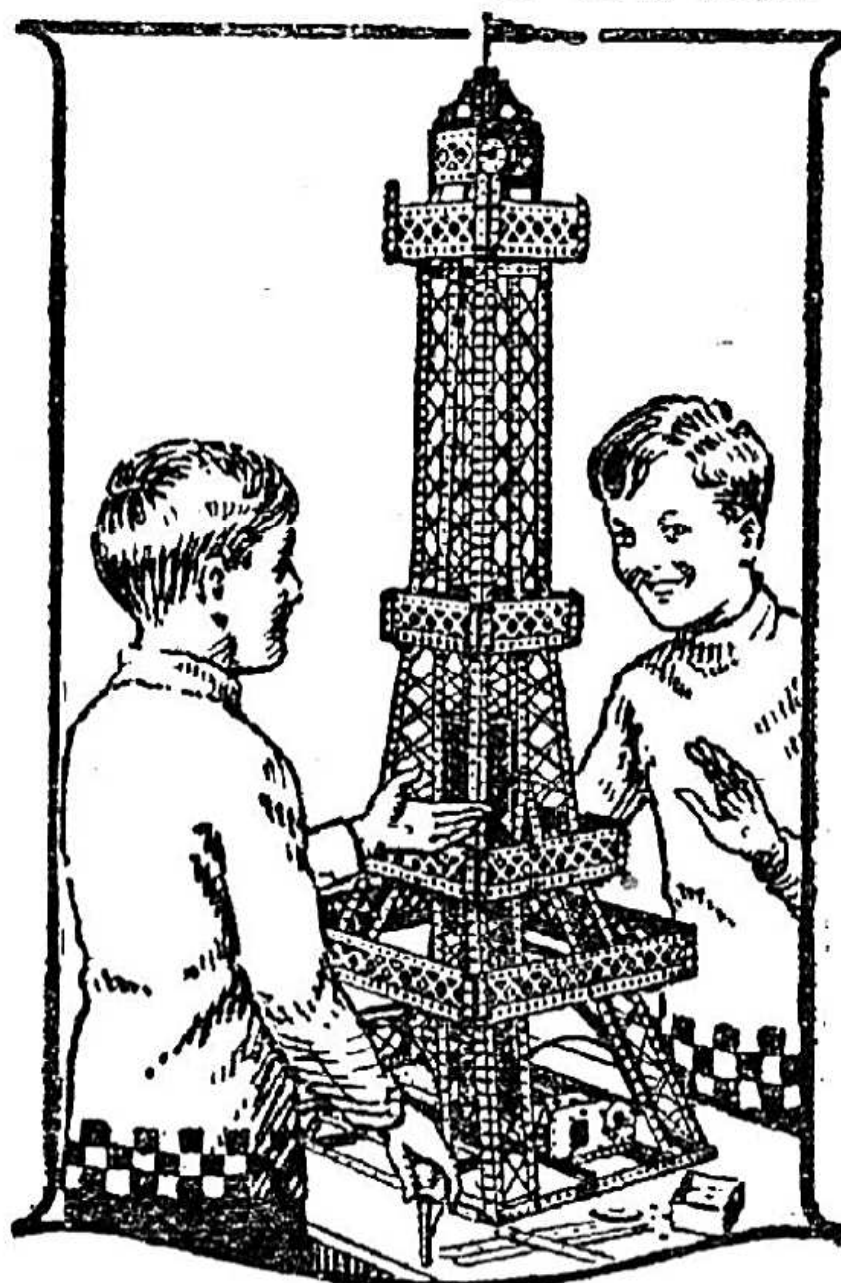
And, finally, by means of quick, desperate movements, Droone twisted over, and succeeded in pinning Lee down, in such a position that the detective was half held beneath the starboard rail.

The light in Nelson Lee's helmet was still gleaming, and by means of this he could see Caleb Droone's evil face. The Chief of the Alliance of Thirteen was glaring through the glass, triumph in every line of his features.

By a supreme effort, he wrested the knife free from Nelson Lee's grip, and raised it aloft. The attache case, during this struggle, had left Nelson Lee's possession, and was now caught against the rail.

By all appearances, Lee was doomed.

But the detective, even as the knife was about to descend, made a swift grab through



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the water at Caleb Droone's air-pipe. He seized it, and by a tremendous effort, doubled it over, in spite of its thickness and protection. Droone started back, and his murderous movement was arrested.

And then Lee had another idea—one that was almost an inspiration. Even in that tense moment he dimly wondered why it had not come to him before. Swiftly releasing the air-pipe, he grabbed at the life-line, and gave three vigorous pulls. By this time Caleb Droone was breathing freely again, and he was preparing for the fatal thrust. But before the blow could fall, the Night Owl was suddenly jerked upwards—out of reach. And, to his infinite rage and chagrin, he was pulled higher and higher.

Lee's ruse had succeeded!

He had given the signal for being pulled up. He had not known whether three tugs was the the arranged signal, but it had served. And the Night Owl, realising what had happened, was now pulling madly at the life-line, attempting to convey to those above that he wished to descend again.

But his men, on the surface, quite naturally assumed that some danger had threatened their leader. They mistook his frantic signals for peril, and believed that Droone wished to be pulled up to the surface. Accordingly, they were raising him as swiftly as they knew how.

Droone was pulled out of the water, and frantically his men hauled him on board, and were intensely relieved to see that he showed signs of life. They were not so relieved a few moments later, when his helmet had been unscrewed.

"Fools!" he snarled gaspingly.

"We—we thought——"

"You thought!" raved the Night Owl. "I had Lee in my clutches—I was about to finish him, and you pulled me up!"

The men were startled beyond measure.

"Waste no time—lower me at once!" commanded Droone curtly.

Again the helmet was screwed on, and again the Night Owl was lowered down into the cold water. But when he arrived on the deck of the wrecked Islington, he was utterly alone.

There was no sign of Nelson Lee, and no sign of the attache case.

The detective, in fact, had picked himself up, unhurt, after that narrow escape. Realising that Droone would soon be down again, Lee had lost no time in recovering the prize, and lowering himself to the bed. And even at this moment he was walking towards the shore—perfectly safe in the knowledge that the Night Owl could not follow. For he was in an ordinary diving-suit, and could not go beyond the limits of his life-line.

But Lee knew that there was no time to be lost. It was a long, tedious journey back to the cave; and it was quite possible that he should have some difficulty in locating it.

There was a distinct chance that Caleb Droone would instruct his men to make a wild search. And if luck was with the scoundrels, they would locate that cave in time. And Nelson Lee, even with my assistance, would have no chance whatever against the desperate members of the Alliance.

So speed was necessary.

Droone, as a matter of absolute fact, actually did give such orders.

Rising to the surface again, he tore himself free from the diving-suit, and rapped out his instructions. Every cave within easy reach was to be searched—every path to the cliff top was to be watched and held. Even now it might not be too late—there was just a possibility of regaining the attache case before Nelson Lee could get completely away with it.

The detective, triumphant and intensely satisfied with his evening's work, met with even greater success than he had hoped for. He located the entrance to the cave after the third attempt—at last arriving right in the hidden cavern itself.

I was waiting there, of course.

And, my goodness, what a wait! I don't think I can remember having experienced such an anxious time before. The minutes seemed like hours. After the gov'nor had been gone ninety minutes I began to give up all hope of ever seeing him again.

And when the time was stretched to two hours, I was in a hopelessly pessimistic mood. I wanted to dash away—to rush to Caistowe, and give the information to the coastguards, so that search parties could come out. But an instant's reflection told me that this would be no good. I might just as well wait longer. If the gov'nor was dead, what good could the coastguards do?

Besides, he had told me to wait for three hours, if necessary. It seemed to me that the time must be getting on towards midnight, and when I glanced at my watch, and found that it was only a little after half-past eight, I was dumbfounded. I was convinced that my watch had stopped.

And then, just as I was trying to picture what ghastly mishap had occurred to the gov'nor, my attention became arrested by some bubbles on the surface of that black pool.

I caught my breath in, and stared.

"The gov'nor!" I shouted huskily. "He's back!"

It seemed almost too good to be true—especially after I had practically given up hope. My electric torch was switched upon that stretch of inky water. And, sure enough, the bubbles were even now more apparent than ever. And I was still watching them when the clumsy headgear of Nelson Lee's diving-suit rose out of the water.

I dashed at him, and helped him out—freshly overjoyed to see that he was carrying the coveted suit-case. He had been successful!

"Guv'nor!" I panted, as the upper part of his diving-suit was removed. "Oh, you don't know how glad I am to see you! I—I thought you were gone for good!"

"And I can assure you, Nipper, that I thought so, too, at a certain period," said Nelson Lee grimly. "It may interest you to know that our friend, the Night Owl, nearly succeeded in knifing not only my suit by myself!"

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "You had a fight with him?"

"A desperate battle!"

"Right on the sea bed, sir?"

"Yes, Nipper—but all's well that ends well," said Lee. "Not that this affair is ended yet, by the way. It behoves us to act with speed and decision. If Droone locates this cave we shall be in hot water, indeed. We must get to St. Frank's without a moment's delay."

"But—but you've got the spoils, sir?"

"Yes, my lad—intact!" replied Nelson Lee, with satisfaction.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT OWL'S VOW!



THE Night Owl stood at the cliff top, staring down at the jagged rocks.

"Hopeless!" he muttered. "Utterly hopeless!"

He had sent his men on their task—attempting to locate that part of the coast where Nelson Lee would emerge. But now that Caleb Droone viewed the black scene from above, he realised the absolute futility of the scheme.

"They'll never do it!" he told himself. "Lee is no fool—he is a pastmaster of eluding enemies. He will slip through the fingers of these searchers like quicksilver!" Always quick at decisions, the Night Owl lost no time now.

Placing two fingers to his lips, he sent forth three peculiarly shrill whistles—penetrating sounds which could have been heard far and wide. But they did not sound human—they were like the cry of some night bird.

But it was a signal—telling his men to abandon their task, and collect at a given spot.

"I will beat Nelson Lee yet!" declared Caleb Droone, clenching his fists.

And then and there he registered a mighty vow that he would not only regain the treasure, but exact such a vengeance from Lee that the whole world would ring with the story.

Lee, in fact, was to be made an example of—an example, showing the Alliance of Thirteen's tremendous power. For Droone, although momentarily defeated, was by no means beaten.

Lee had forestalled him, but that was all.



"I will beat Nelson Lee yet!" declared Caleb Droone, clenching his fists. And then and there he registered a mighty vow that he would not only regain the treasure, but exact such a vengeance from Lee that the whole world would ring with the story.

Within ten minutes his men, all save one, had collected.

"There is one chance!" Droone said, in his even voice. "By this time Lee will have gained the shore. Take the shortest cut to the lane that leads to St. Frank's College. Waste no time. Run across fields and meadows. And prepare an ambush in a quiet part of the lane. If Lee comes, seize the attache-case, and make Lee a prisoner. Go!"

The Alliance men did not wait—they had their instructions, and knew by their leader's tone that strict obedience was essential. Like the wind they sped off across the darkened countryside.

And Droone was right—it was, indeed the only chance.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee and Nipper were making their way out of that cave. They moved with extreme caution, for they feared that any moment the Alliance men might swoop upon them.

Naturally, Lee had not prepared for any such event as this. For he had believed his own operations to be absolutely secret. It was only by pure chance that the Night Owl had learned of his plans.

And, of course, Droone would at once act upon the information he had received. Lee was therefore surprised—and just a little uneasy—to discover that no attempts were made to waylay us.

"I don't like it, Nipper!" said the guv'nor grimly.

"Don't like it, sir?" I repeated. "Well, there's no accounting for tastes. Personally, I wasn't longing to have a scrap with about ten armed crooks this evening——"

"Don't deliberately misunderstand me, Nipper," said Lee. "And this is no occasion for lightness. We have been allowed to get up these cliffs purposely. I feel certain that an attack will come later."

"Don't you think it's possible, sir, that Droone has taken fright and bunked?"

"It is, indeed, just within the bounds of possibility, but highly improbable," said Nelson Lee. "But Droone is not that kind of man. We must be particularly cautious—and we shall certainly be wise to reach the school by a roundabout route."

Accordingly, we did not take the usual course and go along the footpath to the Caistowe road. Instead, we prowled along hedgerows, falling into ditches every now and again, and made our way round by such a course that we finally emerged in the lane on the other side of Bellton.

"Splendid!" said Lee, speaking after a silence which had lasted for almost half-an-hour. "Now, Nipper, I think we are fairly safe. For Droone would never set his men upon us on this side of the village. But even now we shall continue to move with caution. We must not take anything for granted."

Therefore, instead of taking the lane, we moved cautiously along on the other side of the hedge.

And just as we were beginning to feel that we were perfectly safe, the surprise came.

It was with intense satisfaction that we drew near to the school. Lee had that valuable attache-case in his possession—containing the Don Santos Treasure intact.

And we were now only a few minutes' walk from the school gates.

And then, as we hastened our steps slightly, something rose out of the very ground apparently. It was a dim, human figure—a figure that uttered a peculiar whistle.

The next moment other figures arose like Red Indians waiting in ambush. And then, before we knew where we were, half-a-dozen men were grappling with us. Nelson Lee, with a sudden intake of breath, fought with all his strength.

With great presence of mind he had stuffed the attache-case into his overcoat—so that it would not leave his possession. And, incidentally, that very attache-case saved him from a knock-out.

For one of the Night Owl's henchmen drove at Nelson Lee with a heavy club. In the nick of time Lee dodged, and the stick struck his chest with a great hollow sound that must have startled the assailant. Even as it was, Lee's ribs were bruised—but the attache-case saved him from a blow over

the heart which would have rendered him unconscious.

"Help!" I roared at the top of my voice. "Help! Help!"

I saw no reason why this fight should be kept secret. For, without a doubt, if we were left to ourselves, there would be only one result.

Never for a moment did I believe there would be any reply. But, to my joy and amazement, a hail came almost at once.

"Hallo!" it came. "Who's that?"

"Help!" I screamed. "Here—nearly opposite the stile—behind the hedge! Help!"

"Hurrah! St. Frank's to the rescue!"

"Some of the chaps, sir!" I gasped.

And then I was unable to say anything more. For two of the enemy grabbed at me and bore me to the ground. Something that felt like a life-preserver struck me on the head—actually, I believe it was a fist. I saw numerous stars, and descended into the ditch.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee was nearly overpowered.

Droone's men would dearly have loved to have finished the guv'nor off straight away—but the Night Owl had given orders that Nelson Lee was to be brought in, a prisoner.

But he was not such an easy victim to capture.

However, with four men grappling with him he had not much chance. And unless assistance came practically on the instant, he would be borne swiftly away across the dark meadow. The Alliance men cared nothing for me—they had received no instructions to make me a prisoner.

But help was near at hand.

And, most surprising of all, the rescuers were none others than Chambers & Co., of the Fifth!

If I had had time to think, I would have known that it was past the Remove's bedtime. The Fifth, however, were allowed half-an-hour extra—and Chambers and Phillips and Bryant, and three other Fifth Formers, had all gone for a jaunt together to Bannington Grammar School—to celebrate somebody's birthday. They had received special permission to remain out rather late. And just at the crucial moment of our fight the heroes of the Fifth were proceeding up the lane on their bicycles.

"My hat!" said Cuthbert Chambers. "Some of those Remove kids in trouble!"

"Yes, that sounds like Nipper's voice," said Bryant.

"And he seemed pretty urgent, too," went on Chambers. "We'd better have a look, and see what the trouble is. Come on!"

They jumped off their machines, dived through the hedge, and a short distance away they could see some dim forms struggling.

"There they are!" roared Chambers valiantly.

He dashed into the attack—for Chambers had great ideas of himself as a fighter. And, even as he ran to the rescue, he pictured himself being talked about all over the school on the morrow.

But, even in the gloom, Chambers was not to be deceived.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "Come on, you fellows! There's a whole gang here!"

"Hold them, boys—hold them!" came a faint, desperate voice.

"Mr. Lee!" roared Bryant, in amazement.

"They're tramps!" yelled Chambers.

"Footpads! You—you ruffians! Leggo of Mr. Lee at once!"

Biff!

Chambers brought his fist round with a crash, and sent it thudding into the first face he could see. And by this time the other Fifth Formers were on the scene, piling in with a will.

The Alliance men were hardly to be blamed for losing heart.

Already spent by their struggle, they had no stomach for this fresh fight. Besides, they had the impression that half the school was coming through the hedge. This was owing to the braininess of Stevens—who, for the moment, was still on the other side of the hedge.

He suddenly let out a roar.

"Come on, you chaps—all the twelve of you!" he shouted. "This way!"

Stevens had read somewhere that a trick of this sort had once worked well. And he not only shouted, but rang two or three bicycle bells as a kind of chorus.

The enemy lost heart—and fled.

For these men had more to fear than a fight against schoolboys. Capture, they knew, would mean the police—and a trial—with certain convictions. And as most of them were wanted on far more serious charges than assault, they had no wish to get into the hands of the police.

There was, indeed no object to be gained by remaining.

The advent of the Fifth Formers had rendered their task hopeless—they had no means whatever of carrying Lee off, as they had been instructed. It was even impossible to gain possession of the attache-case—which was still tucked in Nelson Lee's overcoat.

And so, breaking away from the fight, Caleb Droone's men fled.

They went helter-skelter across the meadow, only thinking of liberty. Several of the Fifth Formers gave hot pursuit.

"No, boys—don't follow them!" called out Nelson Lee. "They are desperate men—let them go!"

And the Alliance men vanished—to face their chief, and to report failure.

Caleb Droone was waiting, in a fever of impatience—although he showed no signs

of this. He was immobile when the men arrived.

"Sorry, sir, we lost him!" said one of the men.

"Lost him!" snapped Droone. "No. 6! Tell me what happened."

No. 6 answered huskily, explaining all the circumstances.

"And the attache-case?" demanded the Night Owl.

"We didn't even see it, Chief."

"A fine parcel of fools!" snarled Droone. "And this is all the results I obtain—after so much preparation. Well, we must start again! The Don Santos Treasure is not lost yet—we still have time."

"But it'll be too risky, Chief—"

"Silence!" commanded the Night Owl. "I am not beaten!"

He walked away, and paced up and down for a few moments.

"Collect everything together, and prepare for immediate departure!" he ordered.

"We leave the coast at once."

"Where to, Chief?"

"I will tell you—later."

"What of Hayes, the diver," asked No. 6.

"Leave him—we have no further use for him now," said the Night Owl.

And within an hour Droone and his gang had vanished—flitting into the night like evil birds of prey.

In the famous detective's study the guv'nor and I faced one another. We were a fine-looking pair—muddy, torn, and bruised and battered.

"What an evening, sir!" I said breathlessly.

"Yes, upon the whole, Nipper, I think we can safely say that he have had a rather strenuous time of it," agreed Nelson Lee. "But we are the winners, young 'un—for here is the Don Santos Treasure."

And, what was more, Nelson Lee allowed me to have a look at it. The attache-case was unpacked. The soaked wrappings were removed, and all those wonderful, glittering gems were revealed.

By the time the amazing collection had been repacked I was almost bereft of speech. Never had I seen such glorious gems before.

"Well, thank goodness it's all over, sir," I declared. "But what a pity we didn't nab Caleb Droone!"

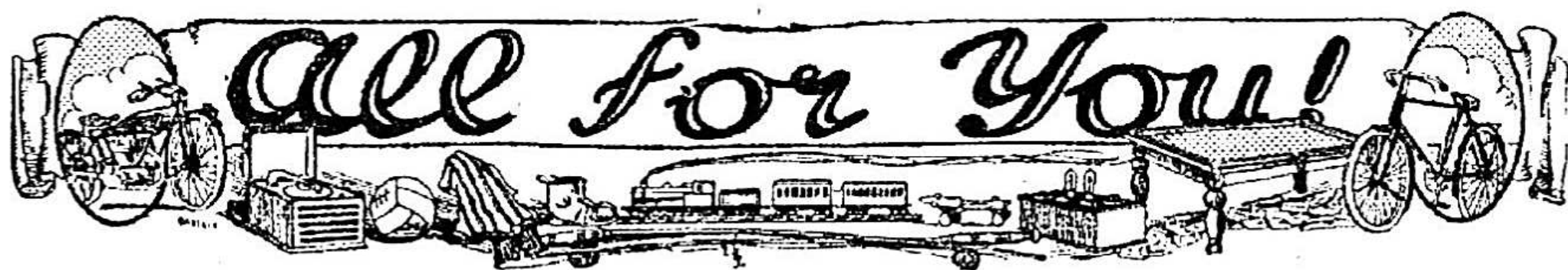
Nelson Lee looked grim.

"The Night Owl's time is coming!" he said quietly.

But even Nelson Lee did not know how determined Caleb Droone was to recover the Don Santos Treasure. And I should have been a bit startled if I had known of the thrilling adventures which were to befall in the immediate future.

THE END.

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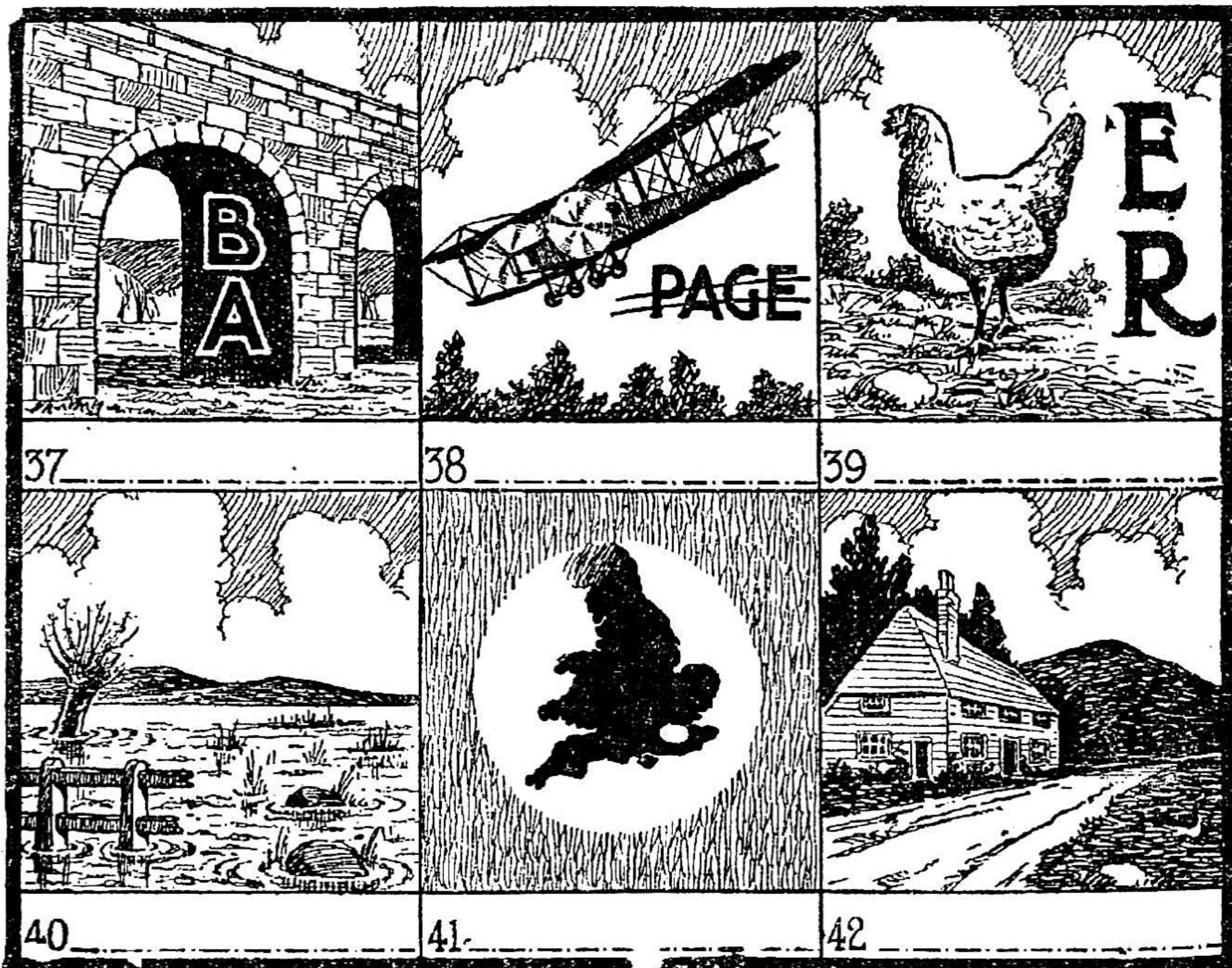
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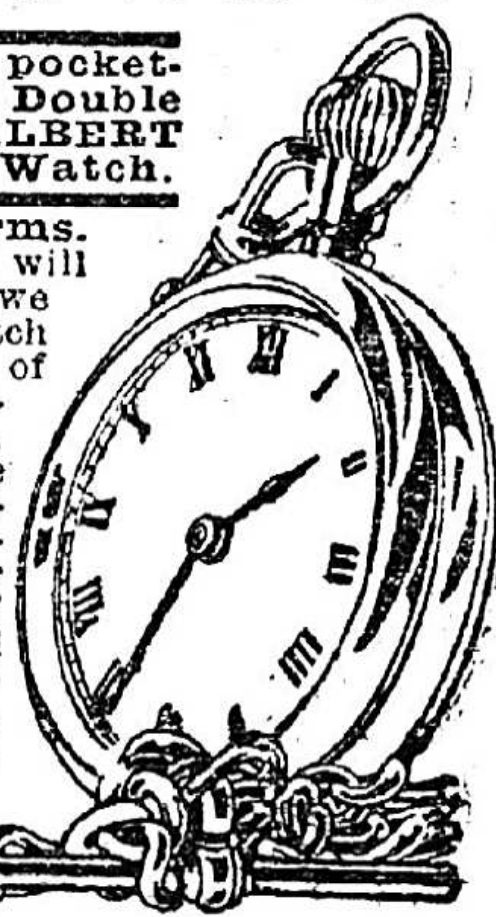
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A CHAT WITH OUR AUTHOR ON HIS RETURN FROM AMERICA.

By THE EDITOR.

GLAD TO BE HOME

"And you are really glad to be home again, Mr. Brooks?" I said, as I sat in my Editorial chair, facing the creator of St. Frank's. "Does that mean that you do not care for the United States?"

Mr. E. Searles Brooks, looking bronzed and healthy from his recent sea voyage, shook his head.

"Not at all," he replied quickly. "There are many things in America that I like very much indeed. But, on the other hand, there are things that I greatly dislike. With your permission, I intend to write a series of short articles for the Old Paper, giving my impressions on various aspects of American life and American scenery."

"I shall be delighted to publish them," I said. "And I think our readers will appreciate such articles, too. I hope you can let me have the first of the series soon, Mr. Brooks."

"It is practically ready now," replied my visitor. "You see, during my travels across the United States, from coast to coast, I kept a note-book, and jotted down everything of interest that I saw. Indeed, I am thinking of calling this series 'My American Note-book.' How does that strike you?"

"Excellent," I replied. "And now, with regard to future stories——"

"I thought it would not be long before you touched on that subject," laughed the writer of our school stories. "Well, it is getting near to Christmas, and you already have the yarns for immediate use. Beginning with the New Year, however, I propose to start a new series—something different, if possible, to anything that we have had before. I am planning this series now, and I can promise you that it will be as strong as anything I have written."

A LITTLE WAGER

I looked up from a few notes I had been making.

"I have half a mind to publish this chat of ours in the Old Paper," I said, smiling. "I fancy our readers would be quite interested."

Mr. E. Searles Brooks looked dubious.

"Indeed?" he said. "If you do that, you will be revealing my name—which, hitherto, has been enshrouded in mystery," he added, with a smile. "Do you really think the readers are interested in me? After all, I am the man behind the scenes, so to speak. Nipper is given the credit for writing the weekly stories——"

"Our readers are highly intelligent," I

reminded him. "They know well enough that Nipper, although founded on a real, live boy, is a fictitious character after all. You are the actual author of our stories; and I feel that our readers would be interested to know the name of the man who created the League of the Green Triangle, Professor Zingrave, Eileen Dare, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, and—last, but by no means least—the famous schoolboy characters of St. Frank's. Yes, Mr. Brooks, I shall certainly publish this little chat of ours."

Our author laughed.

"I am something of a Mystery Man, so far as our readers are concerned, I will admit," he said. "They do not know my name, my age, and they have no idea of my appearance—the latter, perhaps, being fortunate," he added, with a twinkle. "And what is more, I am willing to wager that the readers of 'The Nelson Lee Library' care practically nothing about me. They want the stories, that's all."

Mr. E. Searles Brooks lay back in his chair, and I eyed him grimly.

"Very well, my dear fellow," I said, "I will take you up on that wager!"

PUTTING IT TO THE TEST

"You will take me up?" he repeated, staring. "Yes, but how——"

"I will publish this conversation of ours," I said, with determination. "Furthermore, I shall put this wager to the test."

"How?" he smiled.

"By asking our readers if they would like to see your portrait!" I replied relentlessly.

"How do you like that, Mr. Brooks?"

"But, good heavens, man——" he gasped.

"It was you who suggested this wager, and you will have to bear the consequences," I interrupted firmly. "It is for our readers to settle the matter."

"Oh, well, there is no reason why I should be concerned," said Mr. Brooks, in a scoffing voice. "There are precious few readers who will trouble to write to you concerning my portrait."

"My opinion differs from yours," I replied. "Personally, I fancy our readers are far more interested in you than you suspect. And, having had your name revealed to them, will want to know more. I will warrant that a great many will request me to publish your photograph."

Would you, my chums, be interested to see a portrait of Mr. E. Searles Brooks?

It is really up to you to settle this matter,

THE EDITOR.

**TELL YOUR CHUMS THAT No. 1 OF THE
MAG. IS OUT TO-DAY!**

No. 1. Vol. 1.

Edited by Nipper.

December 1, 1923.



St. Frank's Magazine

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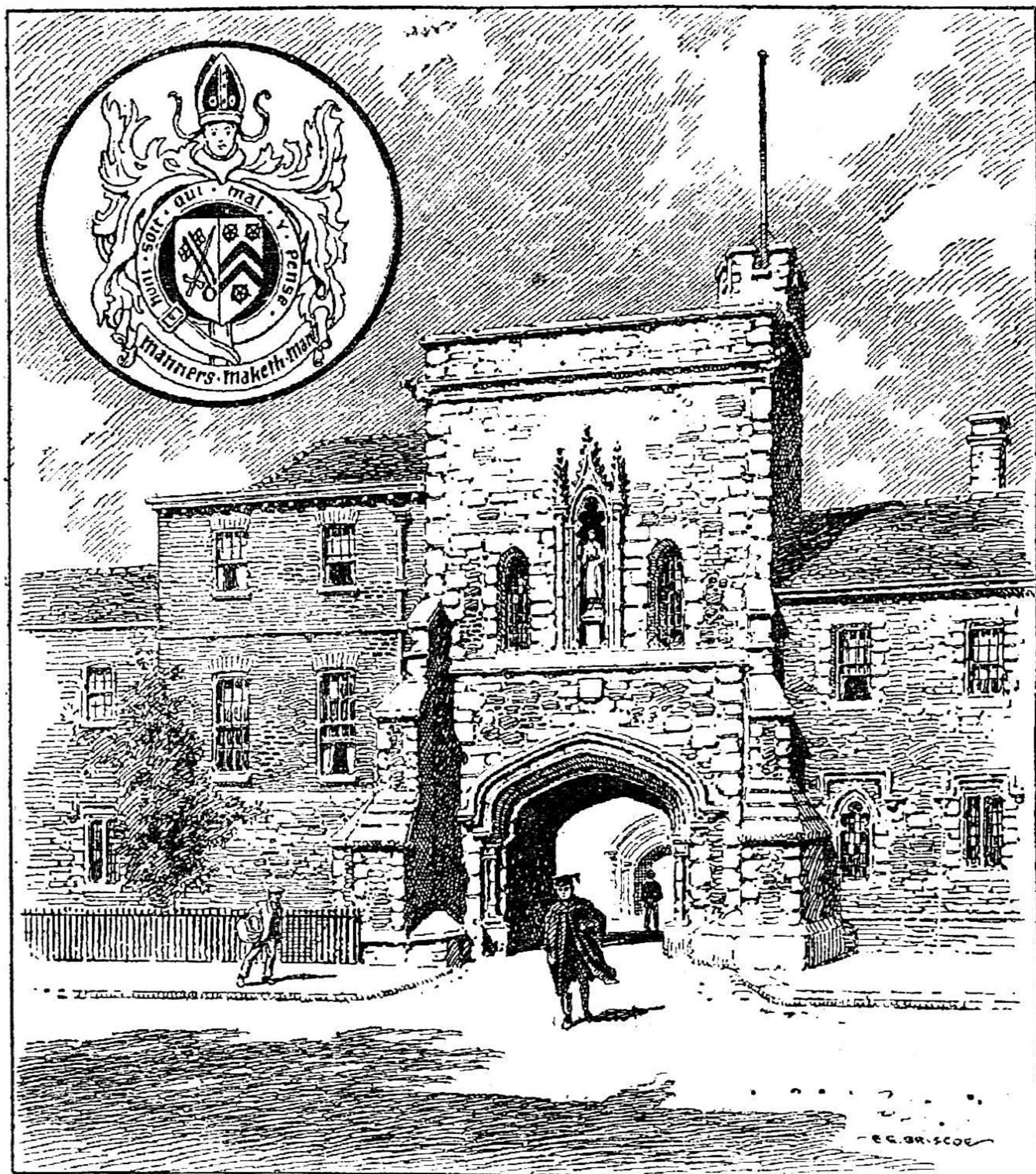
ARE YOU FEELING BLUE? —

— THEN THE INSIDE SHOULD BE READ!

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

SPECIAL SERIES OF ART SKETCHES BY MR. E. E. BRISCOE.

No. 3. WINCHESTER.



The Entrance to Winchester College. The Outer Gate, showing Middle Gate beyond.

Winchester College, or, as it was first called, "The Newe Sainte Marie College of Wynchester," was founded in 1387 by William of Wykeham, also founder of New College, Oxford, and was finished in 1394. "The chapel," we read in "Winchester College Notions," "forms the south side of Chamber Court, and still presents much the same outward appearance as in Wykeham's day. Chambers, which form the

other side of the court, are the rooms in which college men live.

"Wykeham's College is, the oldest of English public schools. Not that schools were a new idea in Wykeham's time. Wykeham erected a school on new lines, making it an independent foundation, instead of being, as the earlier grammar-schools had been, mere appendages or dependencies upon monastic or collegiate institutions."



Editorial Office,
Study C,
St. Frank's.

My dear Chums,—Directly it became known that I was starting a new Mag., letters of congratulations, suggestions and contributions have been pouring into Study C in an ever-increasing stream. It is impossible for me and my staff to acknowledge individually every one of these communications and at the same time bring out No. 1. of the St. Frank's Magazine. I have decided that it would be better to get on with the Mag., and to ask my numerous well-wishers to accept through these columns my very best thanks for the keen interest they have taken in the paper. For the same reason I have had to keep our study door locked, and I trust none of you, my chums, will take offence at this necessary precaution to avoid the many interruptions that would otherwise ensue from budding contributors and others.

ORIGINAL INTENTIONS

Not so very long ago, as many of you will remember, I was responsible for a magazine bearing my own name which ran with considerable success for a year. In response to numerous requests, I had hopes of reviving the Mag. early in the present term. Unfortunately, these hopes were dashed to the ground as a result of the affair, now happily ended, with Buster. As soon as I became reinstated again as your leader. I lost no time in getting busy with the Mag., and convened the meeting we held last week to settle the title and policy of the new paper.

A DOUBLE RESPONSIBILITY

The new title, the St. Frank's Magazine, is

a distinct improvement. As Editor, I feel now a double responsibility. It is no longer merely a personal affair as was Nipper's Magazine. We have, in addition, to produce a paper that will be a credit to the great name of St. Frank's. Judging from the tremendous enthusiasm and the brilliant talent available in the school, I feel confident that the St. Frank's Magazine will earn for itself the reputation of being in the front rank of school magazines.

THE POLICY OF THE MAG.

As it is usual for the editor of a new paper, like the Prime Minister of a New Government, to explain what is known as his policy, or intentions, at the earliest possible moment after he has taken office, I will briefly set out the main object of the St. Frank's Magazine. Primarily, it is to amuse—not to instruct. I might here mention by way of warning that he who expects to find any dryasdust theses or highbrow stuff in the Mag. had better give it a miss and invest his money in, say, a copy of Einstein's "Theory of Relativity." We want to make you forget your troubles in good, healthy laughter by showing you something of the funny side of life at St. Frank's. You must not mind if we occasionally make you the butt of our humour. Remember that our intentions are good. School names will be freely used in the stories and articles—just to give them a bit of bite—without fear or prejudice, and the contributors will be drawn mostly from boys at the school.

Sorry I cannot say any more for the present, except my earnest wish that you will thoroughly enjoy this week's number, and will be pining for next Wednesday to come round again with No. 2. of the Mag.

Your old chum,

NIPPER.



ABSOLUTELY A ROTTEN GANG!



*A Jolly Old Yarn of the Prairie, Bushrangers
and All That Kind of Stuff.*

By Archie Glenthorne.

CHAPTER I.

JIM STRONG staggered forth out of his jolly old shack.

It was Saturday afternoon on the prairie. The prairie was covered in grass and bits of rock, and all that kind of thing. The sky was a sort of topping sky-blue. It was a top-hole afternoon, if you follow me. I mean to say the sun was shining, and everything in the garden was bright.

Jim Strong was a strapping kind of chappie. A jolly good sort, and all that. Frightfully brave and a jolly good shot. He had all sorts of guns and what-not hanging round his middle, and a priceless hat, with a brim miles wide.

Well, the old bean stood outside his hut and lighted a fag. On the prairie there isn't much to do, so to speak, on a Saturday afternoon. No cinemas to go to, or anything like that. It's rather quiet. Deadly dull, in fact, as a rule.

But as the old fruit puffed at his gasper, he suddenly saw two little dots simply dashing towards him across the prairie. Jim Strong absolutely stared.

"My hat!" he gasped. "It's two chappies on horseback! Jim, my lad, they're in some kind of trouble. Bags of it. And they're coming to the jolly old shack for help!"

They were.

In a few jiffies the old lad could hear the horses' hoofs, and all that sort of stuff. In a few more jiffies or so he saw who the riders were. Then the old bean absolutely stared. I mean to say, his optics nearly fell out of his headpiece. For the riders were a man and a simply priceless girl!

They dashed up to the jolly old shack, and dismounted. Jim realised that they were a cowboy and his beautiful daughter.

"Stagger forth, old tulip," shouted the cowboy, "the bushrangers are after us!"

"Dash it all—what?" gasped Jim Strong fearlessly. "Then you and the girl had better do the hiding stunt, so to speak. I'll rally round and save you, and all that kind of rot!"

Jim led the two into his drawing-room and went back outside. At once his eyes spotted a whole heap of horsemen fairly hopping along towards him. It was the jolly old bushrangers!

CHAPTER II.

NEARER and nearer they came. Jim Strong stood leaning against the door, as cool as an icicle—absolutely! As cool as a cucumber, so to speak.

The old bean never raised an eyebrow. The horsemen were very near now. There were simply tons of them. Five or six, at least, as it were. Anyway, there were a bally old crowd of them! And they started pulling out their shooters.

Pop, pop, pop!

Bullets hissed round the old fruit like wasps. He never even moved, but simply pulled out his gun and started shooting back. It was dashed foul! I mean to say, here was the old ass, and millions of bush-ranger chappies simply potting at him like anything!

But the old nut went on potting back. He laid out about a hundred, and then his pistol went "click." He finished all his cartridges and all that sort of stuff!

"Put up your jolly old hands!" yelled the chief of the rotten gang.

"Not me!" Jim yelled back. "I'm not afraid of you, and what not!"

By this time the bushranger chief had caught hold of the old lad. He was surrounded and taken into the drawing-room. The cowboy and his gal were hiding under the jolly old piano. But the rotten gang absolutely pulled them out.

They were all bound and gagged, and so forth. It was awfully thrilling, and that sort of thing. Absolutely! Then they were taken out into the back garden and stood up against the old garden wall. The chief of the bushrangers produced a whacking great revolver.

"Now we'll fire at the victims, and all that sort of rot," he said.

"Excuse me, old fruit," interrupted one of the other bushranger chappies; "but what about shutting these people into the jolly old shack and firing it?"

"Absolutely, yes!" replied the chief. "Top-hole, you brainy lad!"

So they were taken into the shack, and the bushrangers collected firewood and what not. And over it they poured petrol and all that kind of stuff. When it was all done, the chief of the bushranger chappies ignited a Bryant & May.

"We're going to fire the jolly old shack!" he hissed, as it were. "You'll all be killed. Absolutely!"

"You're absolutely a rotten gang!" hooted Jim bravely. "Release us, and so forth, at once!"

But the bushranger chief took no notice. He dropped his lighted vesta and then the whole gang simply vamoosed. Rode off, as it were. It was absolutely priceless. There were the dear old lad and the cowboy and the gal all tied up, with flames bursting about them, and all that sort of thing. I mean to say, it was dashed rotten!

But Jim Strong got a brain-wave.

"I've struck a jolly old wheeze!" he cried, and the very next moment he bit through his gag.

Then he bit through the ropes that tied his hands and feet. And after that he bit through the cowboy and his gal. He set them free, as it were.



"Jolly good, you brainy old lad!" cried the cowboy. And the gal absolutely hung round his neck, and all that sort of stuff.

"Jolly good, you brainy old lad!" cried the cowboy.

And the gal absolutely hung round his neck, and all that sort of stuff. But Jim did not wait. He dashed off to the bathroom and came dashing back with a basin of water. With this he put out the jolly old flames.

Then he and the cowboy staggered forth and jumped on their horses.

They rounded up the rotten gang and gave them to the sheriff, or what not. And after, Jim married the gal, and all that rot. I mean to say, absolutely!

COMING NEXT WEEK IN

**THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY
& ST. FRANK'S MAGAZINE.**

THE TREASURE OF DON SANTOS!

Another Long Thrilling Story of the Night Owl-Series.

CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE MAG. BY ARCHIE, HANDFORTH,
FELLOWE, E. SOPP, and other Famous Names.



E. Sopp's Fables

By
Edgar Sopp of the Fifth

No. 1. The Fable of the Fellow who Listened to Things.

THERE was once a Fellow in a big School who made a big Blunder. The School was known as St. Frank's College, and it was a Vast Seat of Learning—to say nothing of being a Place where much Mischief abounded.

The Fellow in Question went by the name of Walter Church, and was generally acknowledged by all to be a Good Sort. He lived in a Room in that part of the School known as the Ancient House; and he shared this Room with a Boy named Arnold McClure, and another Boy named Edward Oswald Handforth.

Now, it came to pass that Handforth and McClure wandered forth into the Wilderness, in search of succulent Mushrooms for tea. In other Words, they went into Bellton Wood on their vegetarian Quest. Church was left Behind, owing to the Fact that he had a number of Lines to write for a Stern Gentleman named Mr. Crowell.

The Task being Irksome, Church developed a most unusual Energy, and, lo, the Lines were all written by the stroke of Three. With a great Load off his Mind, Church ventured forth in search of his Companions. But ere he had covered five yards in the Triangle, he was approached by an Undesirable Junior called Teddy Long; and the Undesirable Junior was in a State of considerable Excitement. He halted in front of Church and spoke, saying many Words in one Long Breath, the result being somewhat Jumbled.

However, the Purport was thus: Had Church heard the Latest?

And it appeared that the Latest was a startling piece of News concerning Handforth's Pater. There had been a Report in the Morning Newspaper to the Effect that

Sir Edward Handforth had been Arrested the Previous Evening on a charge of Drunkenness.

Now, Church was much Angered to hear this, and he reviled the Undesirable Junior, calling him a Fathead and a Silly Young Idiot for believing such Tittle-Tattle. He also seized Long by the Ear and twisted this Member severely. But Long, howling with Vigour, protested that the Story was True. He had Heard it from Chambers of the Fifth, who, in Turn, had heard it from Another Fellow.

It must be Recorded that Long was known Far and Wide as a liar—his Reputation was Horrible. So Church ignored the Outrageous Story, dismissing Long with the Curt injunction to Go and Eat Coke.

But Behold! before he could reach the Gates, he was Accosted by Numerous other Fellows, who All spoke of Sir Edward Handforth's Arrest. It was not a Rumour, after all, but the Truth! Church listened to these Things with Dismay, and he Sorrowed for his Leader, who so far knew Nothing of this Blow.

And Church went Forth into the Lane, and seeing two Laden Wayfarers afar, he approached, and, lo, they Proved to be Handforth and McClure, returning with their Spoils.

Now, Church had a Kind Heart, and he wished to Break the News gently. So, with much Delicacy, he Repeated to Handforth the Story that his Pater had been Chucked into Chokey for singing "Yes, we Have No Bananas" at the Top of his Voice in Piccadilly, to the Annoyance of peaceful Citizens.

It was Church's intention to add his Sympathy, but he had no Opportunity. For Handforth brought round his Right with much Effect. Whereupon Church Bit the Dust



Handforth and McClure wandered into the wilderness to pick mushrooms.

of the lane, and visions of Wondrous Stars appeared before his Eyes.

Considering that his Intentions had been Good, this Treatment was Jolly Rough, to say the Least of it. And when Church Came To, Handforth had Gone—and was, Indeed creating Havoc among the Fellows in the Triangle.

And it came to pass that the Newspaper was produced, and Handforth Devoured the paragraph and Laughed Long and Loud. For it referred to a Young Blood named Sir E. Hadforth, a Rich Noble who had supped Not Wisely but Too Well, and had even gone to the Length of trying to Blow Out the Electric Lights of Leicester Square.

Thus Church possessed a Fine Example of a Black Eye, and it was Many Days and Many Nights before his Appearance returned to Normal.

MORAL: NEVER TAKE ANY NOTICE OF IDLE GOSSIP.

TIMELY TOPICS



By Our Very Tame Humorist.

We extend our sympathies to Handforth, who met with an unfortunate accident while keeping goal in the St. Frank's—Helmford match last Saturday afternoon. Handforth was kicked on the head by a Helmford forward—whose injured foot, we are glad to report, is progressing as well as can be expected.

We have heard, on the best authority, that Chambers of the Fifth has purchased a safety-razor. Apparently he intends to shave off the down which, in certain lights, can be observed on his chin. We respectfully suggest to Chambers that microscopes can now be bought fairly cheaply.

It is said that Teddy Long has been getting into hot water lately. After a thorough examination of Teddy, we can see very little sign of it. Judging by his neck, he doesn't get into water of any sort.



PAINFUL PARODIES

Three Short Spasms
By

Clarence Fellowe.

(With Apologies to the Author of "Yes! We Have No Bananas!")

As Sung by Church and McClure After a Scrap with Handforth in the Dormitory:

Yes! We have no pyjamas. We have no pyjamas to-day—

We're all rags and tatters—

And not that it matters—

We've black eyes and bumps—and say,

We have an old-fashioned thick ce-AH, Oh, we feel Hor-rib-ly quee-AH—

But YES! We have no pyjamas. We have no pyjamas to-day!

As Sung by Fullwood & Co. When out of Funds:

Yes! We have no Havanas. We have no Havanas to-day—

We've Rajahs, Marcellas—

Some chaps call them smellers—

But WE think they're fine—and say,

We've got the good, homely old Play-AH, That fine, priceless old stay-AH—

But YES! We have no Havanas. We have no Havanas to-day!

If Mrs. Hake's "Special 2d. Sultana Buns" Had voices, They Would Sing Thus:

Yes! We have no sultanas. We have no sultanas to-day—

We've air holes inside us—

Ask all who have tried us—

We're just made of bread, they say—

When you bite us and then turn you gaze on You MIGHT locate a rais-ON!

But YES! We have no sultanas. We have no sultanas to-day!



THE PROBLEMS OF TRACKETT GRIM

THE CLUE OF THE TORN PYJAMAS!

Being the amazing adventures of Trackett Grim and his worthy assistant Splinter.

BY
ED. O. HANDFORTH.

THE CALL FROM HATTON GARDEN.

TRACKETT GRIM frowned darkly, and glared at the telephone.

"That instrument annoys me, Splinter!" he said, in his calm, even tones. "Three times it has disturbed my concentration of thought, and you had better muffle the bells— But stay! Probably it is a client at the other end of the wire!"

Splinter, the detective's sharp young assistant, looked astounded at this amazing deduction of his master's, and stepped over to the telephone with brisk strides.

The scene was the famous criminal detective's consulting-room in Baker's Inn Road, and the time was close upon the ghostly hour of midnight. But Trackett Grim thought nothing of this; night and day were the same to him, for his massive intellect was always busy.

Splinter, after listening at the receiver for a second, uttered a sharp exclamation, and turned to his master.

"Sir Glitter Dazzle is speaking from Hatton Garden, sir!" he said excitedly. "Wants a word with you at once—urgently!"

Trackett Grim nodded, and rose from his chair.

"Ah! The famous diamond merchant!" he murmured, in his cold, incisive voice. "I suspect, Splinter, that Sir Glitter has been the victim of a dastardly robbery!"

He yanked the receiver from his assistant's hand as he spoke and placed it to his ear. Instantly an excited, roaring voice became audible, and Trackett Grim recoiled with his ear-drum buzzing painfully.

"Is that you, Mr. Grim?" yelled Sir Glitter Dazzle desperately. "Good—very good! For heaven's sake come to my help at once! A terrible catastrophe has overtaken me—a most appalling disaster has occurred at my house! I am absolutely at my wits' end, and unless you come to my assistance I shall go mad—insane!"

Trackett Grim clicked his teeth—all his faculties instantly alert.

"What is the nature of this ghastly happening, Sir Glitter?" he inquired, his voice quivering with interest. "I infer that you have been the victim of an atrocious robbery——"

"Of course I have, you fathead!" interrupted Sir Glitter Dazzle frantically. "I have been robbed of my clock—my precious alarm clock——"

"By thunder!" muttered Trackett Grim hoarsely. "Are you sure of this, my dear sir?"

Sir Glitter Dazzle snorted.

"Sure of it!" he gasped. "Why, the clock is gone, Mr. Grim—absolutely vanished! But I must have it back before breakfast! It is exceedingly vital that you should recover the clock for me! Will you come at once—this very instant? I will reward you handsomely if you will only— Ah! Great goodness! I am struck down—I am stunned——"

Sir Glitter Dazzle's voice trailed off to a despairing whisper, and then vanished in a hissing gasp.

"Great heavens above!" exclaimed Trackett Grim in a choking voice. "Sir Glitter has been stricken to the floor within my very hearing!"

THE FOOTPRINTS ON THE CARPET.

A FEW moments later the famous detective had recovered from his astonishment, and was tearing down the stairs with Splinter at his heels.

They were soon seated in their fast racing car, speeding towards Hatton Garden, where the diamond merchant's house was situated. The long ride was accomplished in record time, and twelve minutes after they had started Trackett Grim and Splinter were standing outside Sir Glitter Dazzle's mansion—which stood in the very centre of the enormous park-like space known as Hatton Garden.

"Queer place!" said Splinter, looking

round. "Wonder why it's called Hatton Garden, Sir?"

The famous criminal detective smiled.

"A relic of the past, my dear Splinter," he observed. "Doubtless some individual was ordered—on this very spot—to put his hat on for some reason, and ever since then the place has been known as Hatton Garden! A mere elementary deduction—childishly simple!"

Trackett Grim swept the surroundings with his eyes, and then strode round to the library window, followed by the faithful Splinter. As they reached the casement the great detective's expression changed, and he bounded forward.

"See!" he exclaimed gleefully. "Sir Glitter Dazzle is recovering his senses! In a moment he will be himself again!"

Trackett Grim entered the library as he spoke, and the diamond merchant stared at him dazedly from his position near the telephone. He had been lying stretched at full length—but he sat up, and looked at the newcomers blinkingly.

"Ah! Mr. Grim!" he muttered. "I was talking to you when something bashed me on the cranium! By jingo! It must have been—"

"The robber, undoubtedly!" cut in Trackett Grim keenly. "It is obvious that he hit you on the head with a vase—for the broken pieces are lying all around you!"

Sir Glitter Dazzle snorted.

"Nothing of the sort, Mr. Grim!" he exclaimed. "That vase was dislodged from a shelf over the telephone—possibly I knocked it in my excitement, and it crashed down upon me! But it is nothing—all I want is my stolen alarm clock! Can you find it—can you recover the priceless timepiece?"

Trackett Grim nodded, and ran his eyes over the library carpet. Instantly they became filled with triumph, and he stooped down and picked up a scrap of pink cloth. After scrutinising it carefully under his powerful lens, he transferred his forty horse-power gaze to the floor, and observed a series of huge footprints there. They could not have been made by the diamond merchant, for his boots were in full view as he sat upon the carpet.

"Ha!" said Trackett Grim gloatingly. "Now for the apprehension of the miscreant who pinched the clock!"

THE CELEBRATED DETECTIVE'S TRIUMPH!

TRACKETT GRIM dashed into the hall on the trail of the footprints, passed through the hall doorway, and hurried along the great garden, with Splinter at his heels.

Bending down low over the footprints, the great criminal detective followed them across to an out-jutting wing of the house, through another doorway, and up to a bedroom on the first floor. It proved to be occupied by a black-bearded merchant dressed in pink pyjamas—who was sitting up in bed.

Trackett Grim's fierce eyes shot across the room and fixed themselves on the stranger's night attire.

"You dastardly rotter!" barked the detective. "You are the thief who stole Sir Glitter's alarm clock! It is useless to deny your guilt, for— See! I have a portion of your pyjamas—found in the library."

The stranger nearly fainted with surprise, and glared at the marvellous investigator with eyes starting from their sockets.

"Trackett Grim!" he roared. "Great pip! Your accusation is amazing—astounding! But you have made a terrific blunder, my dear sir! I am no thief! I have been out somewhat later than usual, and as I am desirous of waking at 7 a.m. for the purpose of keeping an important appointment, I merely borrowed my employer's clock! I would have you know, sir, that I am Sir Glitter Dazzle's trusted secretary!"

Trackett Grim started back with a cry of amazement.

"This is truly extraordinary!" he muttered. "Even my stupendous brain is incapable of coping with the situation! But



"Ah, Mr. Grim!" he muttered. "I was talking to you, when something bashed me on the cranium!"

I cannot accept your statement: it is obvious that diamonds are concealed within the clock, and that you intended to steal them! I know it!"

The celebrated detective produced a pair of handcuffs as he spoke, but before he could make use of them an astonishing interruption occurred. Sir Glitter himself—having followed Trackett Grim and Splinter—bounded into the room and dashed towards the alarm clock with a look of happiness on his face.

"Ah! Found at last!" he gasped, clutching the timepiece lovingly. "Thanks to your amazing cleverness, Mr. Grim, my clock has been returned to me! But my secretary was right—there are no jewels here. The clock contains something far more precious to me!"

As he spoke the diamond merchant extracted from the interior of the clock a beautiful set of false teeth, and slammed them into his mouth with a sigh of contentment.

Trackett Grim had succeeded in restoring them to him, and Sir Glitter Dazzle was so pleased that he handed the great criminal detective a fat cheque on the spot—which he stuffed into his pocket with a nod, for he placed no value on the money whatever. Was he not the world-famous investigator, who lived only for his work—the work he had raised to a fine art?

He was—but he took care to cash the cheque the next day, remarking to Splinter that even marvellous investigators must live.

MI MAJOR

By **WILLY HANDFORTH.**

MI Major duzzent no I'm writing this. If he did he wood probaberly punch mi hed. That's the worst of him. He's so quick-tempered. He duzzent give a chap a charnce.

But Nipper told me he wanted something to fill up the maggerzeen with. So I sed I wood write an artickle about mi Major.

It izzent eesy. You must have something to rite about.

You carn't rite about stupid things. That's wy its so difficult to rite about mi Major. Only larst nyght I azked him to lend me a bob till to-morrow and he asked wy? I sed to get some tuck. And he sed Wy, you must be gambolling.

I never gambol. No one in the third Form duz. We leave that to chaps like Fulwood and Co.

So I sed yore a silly as and I don't want yore roton muny. I tryed to cleer out of Study D but the rotor grabed me by my colour and puled me back.

You yung hooligon he sed cuming hear trying to boro muney and then cawling me names he sed take that and that and then that.

Mi Major can hit hard when he lykes and no mistake.

Then he sed hears too bob for you, Willy and don't make yoreself sick. O thanks offully I sed and did a bunk.

Mi Major's reely a jolly good sort wen you cum to no him. He flayres up all of a sudon and gives you a bif. But he duzzent meen any harm.

Its only his way.

Thats becos hees such a chump. Hees an orful chump. You shud see him at home. Once mi dad cort him taking mezerments on

the stares. Wot ar you doing he sed ar you going to be a bilder.

No sed mi major I'm going to be a detektive, Mi dad roorared with lafter. Wot with feet like yores he sed.

Detektives don't hav to yewse there feet mi Major sed they have to pick up clews.

Well don't you drop any clews on the stayres sed mi pater.

Mi Major never sor the joke. He thinks heez a tek. Wy heez ritten a story in this maggerzeen about Trackett Grim. I think its a roton story.

When I see my brother I shall tell him so. He carn't even spell correkly. At his age that is a drefful thing.

I carn't spell so very well wel miself. Occazunally I may make a speling mistake. But I am in the Thurd. Mi major is in the Remove so he ort to be able to spel.

I wud back myself to beat him at speling any day.

I can lick him too at most things. Once he tryed to punch mi hed. I was standing up agenst the wall by the fyves-corts. He amed a blow at mi hed.

I ducked and his fist hit the wall. It dident harf hurt his figures.

He darnced about shaking his hand as tho he wanted to throw it away. And by the time he had done shaking it I had cleered off.

I carn't think of anny more to say about mi Major. He thinks an offul lot of himself. But so do all the fellers in the Remove. All of them have sweled hed.

Even Nipper—

(This article is about Handforth. The Author's ideas about myself may appear some other time—Ed. St. Frank's Mag.)

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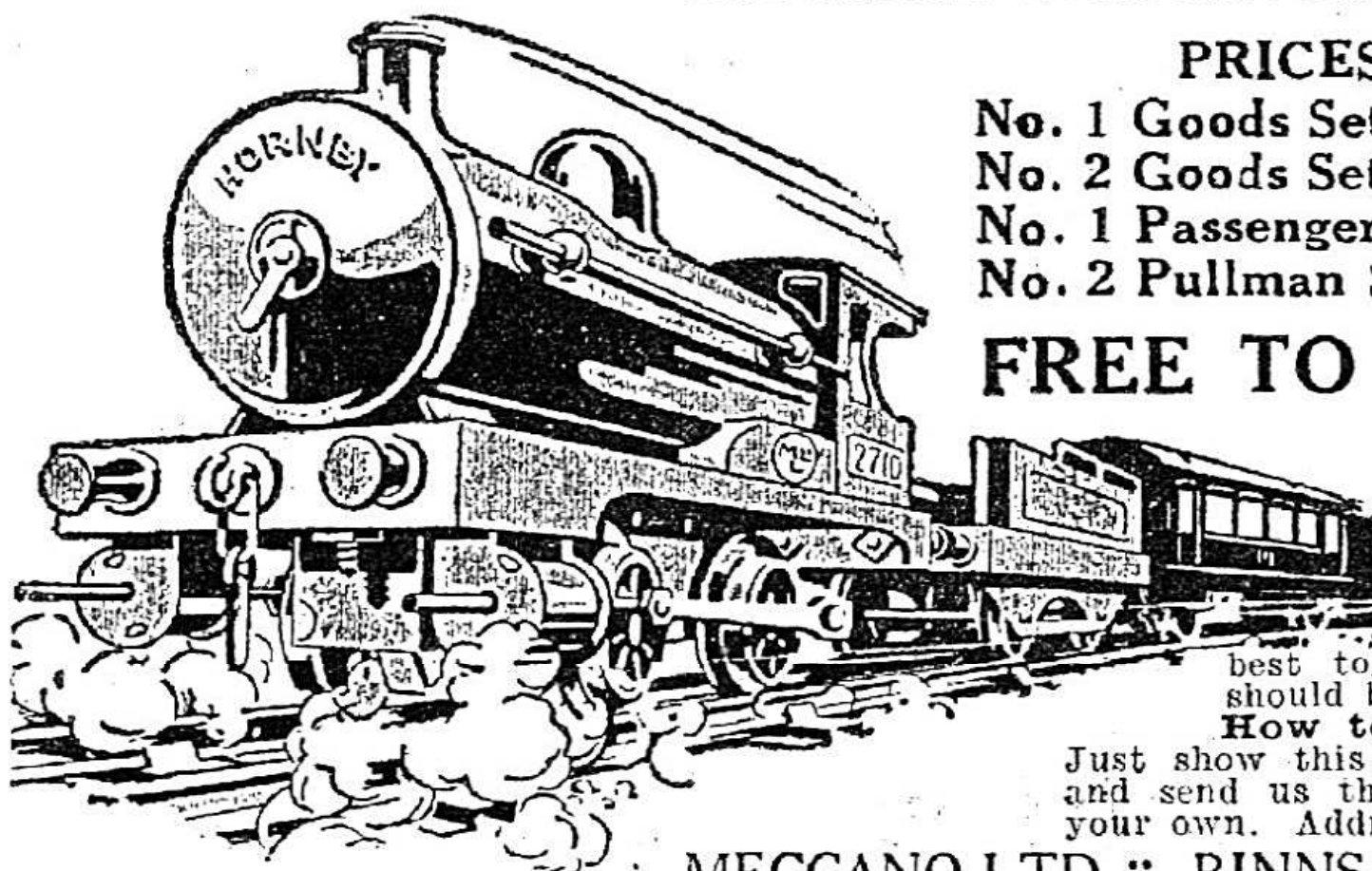
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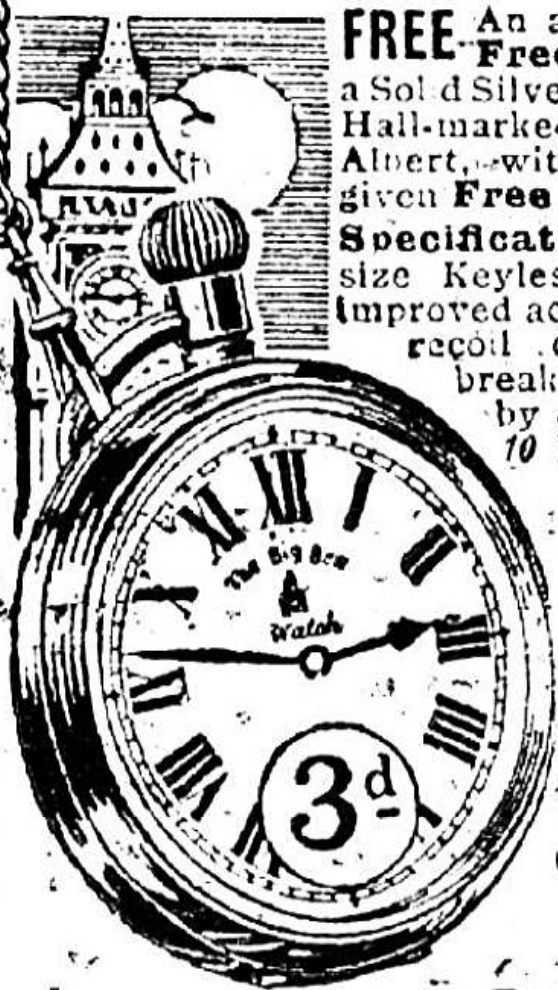
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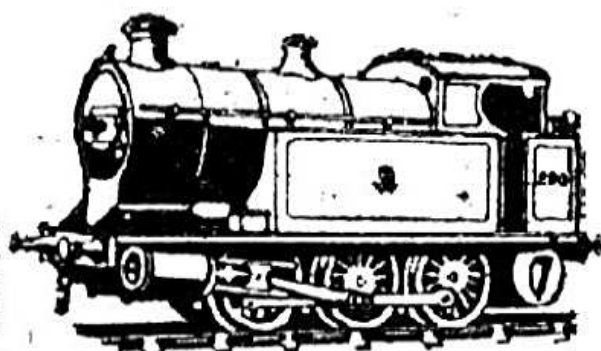
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