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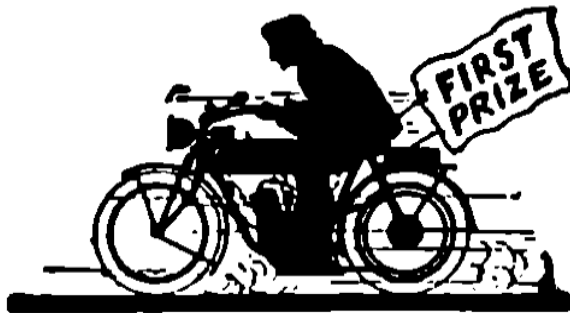
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WRITE YOUR SHEET OUT IN THIS FORM.

I
of

Have shown the papers mentioned to my chums, who have
signed their names on my list, and I have got them to read them.

Let your chums sign their names and ad-
dresses on one side of the column, like this.

Name of paper which they have read.

THE JUDGE:

The Decision of the EDITOR of the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY" must be accepted
as ABSOLUTELY FINAL.

The Great Submarine Mystery.

A Stirring Long Complete Story of Nelson Lee, Detective, and his Assistant, Nipper.

CHAPTER I.

Trouble at Gray's Inn Road.

THE room was quietly, tastefully, but comfortably furnished, and an atmosphere of brooding, restful calm seemed to hang over it.

From without in the Gray's Inn Road there drifted through the open window the roar of mingled traffic—the hooting and buzzing of fleeting taxi-cabs, the deeper note of motor-buses, the sonorous hum of passing trams, and the thousand and one other noises that go to make up the voice of mighty London.

In the centre of the square of rich Turkey carpet stood a large, flat-topped mahogany desk, chaotically strewn with a litter of documents and newspaper cuttings. A telephone occupied a prominent position, and an open directory showed that it had been recently used.

The entire one side of the room was lined with shelves, well-filled with books, ranging from ponderous tomes to the smallest of publications, and the brown-papered walls were scarcely discernable for the multitude of black-framed pictures that filled up practically every square inch of space.

To the chance observer it would have seemed that the room was unoccupied, but such was not the case.

Drawn up before the cheery fire that crackled briskly in the wide grate was a comfortable saddlebag armchair, and hunched back in its soft embrace was one of the most remarkable characters of modern times.

Despite his reclining position, it could be seen that the man was remarkably tall and thin. Attired in a blue dressing-gown, with red plush slippers on his feet, he leant back, puffing leisurely but regularly at a much blackened briar, his thick brows knitted in thought, and his keen grey eyes fixed broodingly upon the blazing embers.

A writing-pad was set upon his knee, a pencil in his hand, but neither were in use. It was a strong, clever face that the occupant of the room possessed. Aquiline-nosed, firm-lipped, and redolent of great mental concentration and confidence.

It could even have been called good-looking, but for the lines that wreathed nostrils and lips, and the wrinkles that hung beneath the sunken yet clear eyes.

The telephone-bell suddenly rang out sharply and insistently, and with a little gesture of impatience Nelson Lee, the most famous private detective of his time, rose and placed the receiver to his ear.

"Hallo! Yes, this is Nelson Lee speaking. Yes—yes. No, I'm afraid it's utterly impossible. I can't take on anything at present, inspector. No, not

for a week at the least. What, the Eppingham murder? Mean to say you're still puzzling over that? Find out where Morton's butler was on the day in question, and perhaps you'll get on the right scent. Good-bye!"

And with a quiet, half-scornful smile, the detective slammed the receiver back on its hook and sank back into his chair.

Not for all the gold in the world would Nelson Lee have undertaken a fresh case at that moment. Only that morning he had returned from the East Coast, where he had gone, at the Government's special behest, to investigate the case of an apparently undiscoverable secret wireless plant which German spies were making good use of.

But the wireless installation had not been undiscoverable to Nelson Lee. He had succeeded where many others had failed, though it had taken him over a week to do it, and with the fervent thanks of his grateful country still ringing in his ears, he had returned to his rooms in Gray's Inn Road to take a much-needed rest.

Never had the famous detective been so busy as during these stirring times of the great war with Germany—and never had man done better work than he had done to crush the evil spy menace and stamp out the serpent of secret service that writhed its insidious coils through every city, town and hamlet in the British Isles.

"By gad, it's good to be back in old London again," he muttered under his breath, slowly refilling his pipe. "No matter where one goes, there's no place like London. I'm going to give work the slip for a short time. I think I deserve a holiday. What I want is a few days absolute rest and quietness—quietness above all——"

Nelson Lee broke off short and sat up with a sharp exclamation of annoyance. From below stairs somewhere a deafening crash and clatter of shattered china had come welling up to his ears, mingled with shrill feminine shrieks of alarm, the wild stamping of feet, and guffaws of boyish laughter.

"Peace and quietness," grunted the detective under his breath. "A lot of that I can expect to get with that young ruffian Nipper in the house. I wish to Heaven he was back at school again. What confounded idiocy has he been up to now, I wonder."

Nelson Lee was not kept long in ignorance. Heavy footsteps came stamping up the stairs, to be followed by a sharp rap at the door.

"Come in!" called the detective wearily.

The door swung open, and a very plump, much-dishevelled and crimson-faced dame flounced over the threshold, panting for breath and waving her hands agitatedly in the air.

"I can't abide it no longer, Mr. Lee!" she shrilled gaspingly. "Either that young himp of mischief leaves the 'ouse or Hi do. Hi've stood 'is games and torments long enough. Flesh and blood will insure it no longer. Worn to a shadder Hi ham with the worry of hit hall. Has I was only saying to my sister-in law, Hannie, yesterday, it ain't as though hit was

Nelson Lee heaved a deep sigh and shook his head wearily at the fire.

"My dear Mrs. Jones, what on earth is the matter now?" he said sharply. "Don't stand there wasting your breath and my time. Come, what is it?"

"What is it? Why wot helse could hit be but that young scaramouch, Master Nipper. Abide it Hi won't, Mr. Lee. Life ain't wuth livin' with 'im under the same roof. Might as well be in a lunatic banylum, one night, or helse——"

"Will you please state your grievance, Mrs. Jones, or else leave the room."

"Fourteen plates, six cups, five saucers, and a soup tureen I've broke, an' half through 'im. Eugh, Hi can see the 'orrid creatures now, five or six of them there were, with pink eyes—"

"In the name of sense, what are you talking about, Mrs. Jones. Pink eyes. Five or six of what? Are you mad—have you been drinking?"

"Drinking? Me drinking, Mr. Lee!" snorted the landlady, in high indignation. "I'd like you to understand, Mr. Lee, that not a drop of liquor has passed my lips for the last ten years or more—"

"Must inject it, or pour it in her ear through a funnel," came an audible voice outside the door.

"Mice, all sorts of mice; white an' with pink eyes," went on Mrs. Jones almost hysterically. "Let 'em loose in the kitchen Master Nipper did, right under my feet. Wot can you expect? Mice I can't abide. I 'ad the tray in my 'ands, an' down it went, crockery an' all, an'—"

"That'll do, Mrs. Jones, that'll do," cut in Nelson Lee sternly, though there was a faint smile playing around the corners of his mouth. "I think I understand precisely what has happened, thanks to your lucid account. Nipper, come in here at once!"

There was no mistaking the ringing command, and there was a shuffle of feet as a bright-faced youth of about sixteen, with crisp brown hair and twinkling blue eyes, sauntered into the room.

"Hallo, guv'nor!" he asked with an innocent air. "Did you call me? Do you want me for anything?"

"Yes; I want to know what you mean by the mad-brained prank you played upon Mrs. Jones. For two pins I'd pack you back to school right away!" snapped Nelson Lee.

Nipper grinned easily. He knew that the famous detective would never dream of carrying out his threat.

"Prank! I didn't do it purposely," he replied with some show of indignation. "It was quite an accident. They're some mice I promised to buy for young Titcum, at St. Ninian's. I was taking them out into the garden when the blessed cage came open and they all hopped out. They're quite harmless. Mrs. Jones had nothing to be frightened of."

"Ho, biudeed!" snorted Mrs. Jones, with a baleful glare at the lad. "I likes that, I do. 'Orrid little vermin, I can't abear 'em. Give me the cold chills all down my spine they do. You did it o' purpose, Master Nipper, you know you did."

"Rats! Think I'd let 'em go of purpose? Why, I've lost three of them as it is, and they cost a tanner apiece."

"That'll do," cut in Nelson Lee tersely. "You can go, Mrs. Jones. I'll see that Nipper doesn't interfere with you again."

Still mumbling and muttering under her breath the outraged landlady flounced from the room and slammed the door behind her.

"These sort of goings on have got to stop," said Nelson Lee, sinking back in his chair again. "You've got to leave that good woman alone, Nipper, and you've also got to pay for all that china you caused to be smashed. No, there's no use arguing. I know the sort of accidents that happen when you're about."

"That's a bit of alright," grinned Nipper, turning away towards the window. "Just because a bumblefooted old geezer happens to catch sight of a blessed harmless little mouse and drops a trayful of china an' smashes the lot, I get the blame, I have to pay for it."

"I've half a mind to send you away," resumed Nelson Lee calmly, tapping the ashes from his pipe and leisurely filling it again. "I've no use for you

here, I'm not going to do any work for a week or so. I want a rest, and it doesn't seem as though I shall be able to get it with you in the house."

"Go on, I don't make any more noise than a spider," grinned Nipper. "And besides you know you couldn't do without me, guv'nor. Who'll there be to warm your slippers ready for you, tuck you into your little bed at night, and see that you take your medicine regularly——"

Nipper ducked adroitly as a pillow came hurtling at his head, and there was a shattering crash as the flying article struck a big jardiniere and sent it toppling from its stand to the ground.

"Well, there, who's making the noise now? Whose to blame for that? Strikes me you're a hundred times worse than I am, guv'nor."

CHAPTER II.

An Urgent Case.

NELSON LEE sank back in his chair with a sign of despair, muttering something about "incorrigible young ruffian," and at the same moment there was the roar of a motor-car drawing up outside, followed by a violent peal at the front door bell.

"I'm not in to anybody—I refuse to see anybody at all, even if it's the King of England," declared the detective vehemently. "I'm not undertaking any more cases until I've had a few days rest."

An instant later Mrs. Jones came stumping up the stairs again, and thrust her head around the door.

"A gentleman to see you, Mr. Lee," she said. "Hon hurgent and important business."

Nelson Lee shook his head stubbornly.

"I can't see anybody at all," he said firmly. "Please give the gentleman my regrets, Mrs. Jones, and tell him that it is utterly impossible for me to see anybody at present—not for another week, at least. Say I'm ill, dying, gone to the front—anything you like."

Mrs. Jones departed to the nether regions. There was the hum of voices below, and then she came stumping up again, bearing a slip of white paste-board in one grimy hand.

"Gentleman sends up 'is card. Sez 'e simply must see you," she announced. "Won't keep you many minutes. Most 'orribly hurgent."

Nelson Lee frowned and snatched irritably at the card. Then as he glanced at the name inscribed upon it he gave a slight start of interest, and bit his lip hesitantly.

Mr. John Ventall, Ventall & Sons,

Roydd's Exchange, E.C.

The name was quite a familiar one to the famous detective—in fact, he had met its owner on several other occasions. John Ventall was one of the biggest insurance brokers in the world, and chairman of Roydd's Exchange, that gigantic exchange which practically guided the destiny of every ship that sailed the high seas.

Nelson Lee turned the card over, and written on the back were the following words:

"Dear Mr. Lee,—Must see you, if only for a minute. Most important. As a special favour, oblige.—J. V."

The detective read it through thoughtfully and chewed perplexedly at his nails. He was in a quandary—between two stools, so to speak. One side of his being urged him to refuse the interview; the other, the keen, alert, business side, urged him to grant it.

It took him a full moment to make up his mind, and then, with a petulant shrug of his shoulders, he rose to his feet and flung the card on the mantel-piece.

"Very well, show him up," he said curtly.

"Wot-ho, nice week's holiday you're going to get!" grinned Nipper under his breath! "I knew this is how it would be. The old guv'nor'll never get out of harness."

A second later Mrs. Jones ushered the visitor into the room.

John Ventall was a portly, broad-shouldered man of about fifty, with a tawny beard and moustache, gold-rimmed eyeglasses, and a strong though kindly face.

At the present moment he looked considerably flustered and agitated, and with an impulsive gesture he strode across the room and grasped Nelson Lee by the hand.

"Mr. Lee, this is very good of you! I am more than grateful to you for seeing me!" he cried heartily. "It is most urgent business on which I wish to consult you—most urgent indeed."

The detective scanned his visitor keenly as he motioned him to a chair, and resumed his own seat.

"Before you say anything, Mr. Ventall," he said slowly, "I would like to assure you that it is utterly impossible for me to take up any work at present. I am resting, and don't intend to do anything for a week or so."

John Ventall's face clouded with disappointment, as he mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief and placed his silk hat on the table.

"I am sorry to hear that, Mr. Lee," he said ruefully. "But perhaps you will change your mind when I have told you my story. I have been commissioned by Lloyd's to elicit your services at any cost. You can name your own price. No price will be too high."

Nelson Lee shook his head, though he betrayed a slight look of interest.

"I can say nothing at present, Mr. Ventall," he said quietly. "I am not binding myself down in any way. But if you care to tell me your story, you will find me a ready listener."

John Ventall mopped his brow again, and then drew a bundle of clippings from his pocket. Nipper drew nearer and perched himself on the edge of the table. He invariably shared in all his "guv'nor's" secrets and confidences.

"It's like this, Mr. Lee," started off the insurance broker glibly. "Of course, you know who I am—I think we have met before—and you know that I am the chairman of Lloyd's Exchange?"

Nelson Lee bowed his head in silent assent.

"And no doubt you will have noticed, Mr. Lee, the serious losses we have met with of late owing to the depredations of German submarines in the North Sea?"

"Yes; but, of course, you raise the premium in accordance with the enhanced risks?"

"Yes; but that does not cover us with the serious losses we have suffered of the last few weeks. No less than fourteen boats have been sunk in that time. All have been insured up to the hilt, and we have lost thousands and thousands of pounds."

Nelson Lee wrinkled his brows puzzledly.

"Really, I don't see what I can do for you in this matter, Mr. Ventall," he said slowly. "And——"

THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY

"You will see in a minute," went on the broker hurriedly, tapping the bundle of papers that he held in his hand. "Have you noticed any peculiar fact about the sinking of these ships, Mr. Lee?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

"Well, I will point something out to you. No less than eleven out of these fourteen ships belonged to the same line—the Orvis line, owned by Samuel Mellor."

Nelson Lee opened his eyes wide, and then screwed them up again, as he glanced quizzically at John Ventall.

"Ah, I see what you mean!" he said slowly. "You are—er—hinting, Mr. Ventall, that you have a suspicion that everything is not above board. Speak out, don't be afraid. You mean that you think there has been foul play somewhere—that you do not think that all those boats were sunk by German submarines?"

"Exactly! I am positive they were not!" burst out the shipping broker excitedly. "I don't believe it for a moment, nor do my partners, or the other members of the Exchange. That is why they have sent me to you. Does it not strike you as being somewhat suspicious that so many Orvis Line boats should be sunk—taking it on an average. There is no reason why the Germans should make a dead set at the particular line. There was a case last week when three vessels were in sight of one another. One was an Orvis—a boat of quite small tonnage. Not half a mile away was the *ms. Ulena*, a cargo boat of 9,000 tons. Yet that boat was ignored, and the Orvis chased and sunk—at least, so it seems, though the submarine was not seen."

"Does not that seem suspicious?"

Nelson Lee pressed his hands together, and his lips tightened. John Ventall's story had strangely interested him—had aroused all his detective instincts. As the broker had said, it certainly looked very suspicious that such a large proportion of the Orvis Line boats should have been sunk. It seemed scarcely likely that the German submarines would make such a dead set at them. And Samuel Mellor, the owner of the Orvis Line. He knew him well by repute, and the man had a none too savoury reputation, though nothing had ever been proved. Some years before he had been hauled up on suspicion of having deliberately scuttled one of his boats for the sake of the insurance money, but a legal technicality had got him off scot-free.

"You suspect Mellor?" he asked, looking up suddenly.

"Well, I don't trust him," replied John Ventall evasively. "Though, of course, we have nothing definite to go on in the way of suspicion, save the strangeness of the whole affair. I bought a paper as I came along just now. Another Orvis Line boat went down early this morning in the North Sea, just off Hegnes. We have been forced to raise the premiums to an abnormal figure; but Mellor pays them without a murmur. If things go on like this much longer, Mr. Lee, we shall be ruined."

"And what is it you want me to do?" asked the detective.

"We want you to take the case in hand. We want you to find out if there is any foundation for our suspicions. We want you to try and find out whether the boats are really sunk by German submarines or mines, or whether they are deliberately scuttled. You may name your own fee."

Nelson Lee leaned back in his chair and puffed thoughtfully at his pipe. Already his prospective holiday seemed to be becoming a glorious uncertainty. He was sorely tempted to take up the case that John Ventall offered him.

"The fee—that can be discussed at a later date," he said slowly, with a casual wave of his hand. "Yes, I will take up your case, Mr. Ventall—not

for the money, but because it interests me. And if this man Samuel Mellor is the scoundrel you think him to be, it is only right that he should be brought to book."

John Ventall gave vent to a little exclamation of satisfaction, and Nipper clapped a hand to his mouth to repress the whoop of delight that rose to his lips. Work for Nelson Lee meant work for him as well, and he was just beginning to get bored with doing nothing.

"You have lifted a great weight off my mind, Mr. Lee," cried the broker sincerely. "And you may be assured that both myself and all the members of Lloyd's will be eternally grateful to you if you can only succeed in clearing this affair up."

"You may be certain that I shall do my best," said the detective drily. "By the way, do you know when the next Orvis Line vessel will be calling?"

"Yes; the Carolina sails from Janis Wharf on Wednesday morning, bound for Pernambuco with a valuable cargo, which has been heavily insured."

Nelson Lee nodded. He had no more questions to ask at that point, and a few moments later John Ventall rose and departed, highly satisfied with the result of his visit to the famous detective.

"You'll hear from me in a few days, Mr. Ventall," were Lee's last words. "When, no doubt, I shall have something to report. Good-day!"

As the front door slammed behind the broker, Nelson Lee rose, and crossing the room, selected one of the many big reference volumes of newspaper clippings that entirely filled a bookcase.

"Well, Nipper, and what do you make of the case?" he said, as he resumed his seat and skimmed over the leaves.

"I think you'll be on a wild goose chase, guv'nor," returned the lad directly. "It certainly seems strange that all those ships of the same line should have been sunk, but I reckon it's all coincidence. It must have been the blessed Germans."

"Maybe and maybe not," said the detective quietly. "Personally I think not. 'This man Mellor'—he tapped the book before him—"has got a none too clean record. It was only by a legal flaw that he got off in that case some years ago. It was practically proved that he scuttled one of his vessels. There are other things against him as well, not generally known to the public."

"Well, what do you intend to do, guv'nor? How are you going to make a start, and when?"

"To-day, almost at once," said Nelson Lee. "There is a great shortage of labour down at the docks."

Nipper stared blankly.

"What's that got to do with it?" he asked puzzledly.

"Quite a lot," replied the detective, with a slight smile. "Sort out some of your old clothes, my lad. You and I are going down to get a job on board the s.s. Carolina, which sails from Janis Wharf on Wednesday morning."

Nipper's eyes widened, and he gave a low whistle of amazement.

"My hat, I see your game now, guv'nor," he gasped. "You mean to be on board the blessed boat. But supposing it's not sunk, we'll have to go straight along to Pernambuco."

"Oh, no; we touch at Havre first," said the detective. "It seems to me to be the only feasible way to get to the bottom of this affair. Of course there's a certain risk. The Germans are none too considerate in the manner in which they torpedo British boats."

"Blow the risk, this is going to be a fine old spree," muttered Nipper gleefully.

Half an hour later two strange figures left a certain house in Gray's Inn

Head and went slouching away in the direction of Holborn. Few, if any, would have recognised Nelson Lee, the famous detective in the tall, gaunt man with the faded, slop suit, the tattered cap, and the dusty boots, or his equally famous assistant Nipper, in the grimy-faced lad who paced along by his side.

CHAPTER III.

On Board the SS. Carolina.

AS the morning mist curled away from the murky waters of the Thames in grey curls the s.s. Carolina, Orvis Line, hove away from Janis Wharf and turned her sharp prow downstream towards the mouth of the river and the open sea.

Two figures leaned over the port rails and gazed calmly at the busy scene of life around them. Cranes were creaking, syrens were shrilling, and men were swarming like ants aboard the many vessels warped alongside the dock wharves, either discharging or taking aboard cargo.

Nelson Lee puffed thoughtfully at his pipe, and half smiled to himself as he gazed at his work-stained hands.

"Well, Nipper, so far so good," he said slowly. "We have succeeded far better than I had dared hope. We've nothing to do now but sit tight and await events."

"Nothing to do," almost groaned the famous detective's youthful assistant. "I like that, guv'nor! My back's almost broken, and I'm as stiff as a poker lugging those blessed cases about, swabbing the decks, and a hundred and one other things. Phew, catch me signing on aboard a mouldy cargo boat again! And it'll probably end in our being blown sky-high by a German torpedo or a rotten mine."

As Nelson Lee had said he had succeeded far better than he had dared hope since he had left his rooms in Gray's Inn Road two days before.

He and his youthful assistant had had but little difficulty in getting a berth aboard the Carolina as deck hands. Labour was at a premium, and besides, the majority of seamen had decided to give the Orvis Line a wide berth owing to the ill-luck that seemed to dog its course.

Sailors are a superstitious crew as a whole, and the sequence of calamities that had befallen the vessels of the Orvis Line had not failed to affect them, so much so that the Carolina had almost been held up by a shortage of hands, even though the skipper had offered an increased pay as an inducement to sign on.

Thus it was that Nelson Lee and Nipper were almost welcomed with open arms when they offered themselves at the wharf.

The detective had had but little time to take stock of the vessel and its crew. The previous day he and Nipper had been kept busy from morning till night stowing cargo, and this was the first opportunity they had had to snatch a brief rest and a word together.

"As I said before, guv'nor, I reckon you're on a wild goose chase," declared Nipper, as the boat churned onwards through the grey waters.

"The skipper seems quite a decent sort, and I was talking to one of the men who was aboard the last Orvis boat to be sunk. He says it was torpedoed in the Channel, and he swears that he saw the periscope of the submarine. That don't look much as though the boat was scuttled, does it?"

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders as he tapped the ashes from his pipe. "It's my duty to make certain of things before I give any definite opinion, my boy," he said quietly. "I have taken this case up, and I've

got to see it through. And if I did not think there was something in John Ventall's suspicions, I would not have taken it up."

Nipper turned away with a wry grimace as the voice of the second mate hailed him.

There were but few signs to denote the great war that was raging across the water on the shores of France and Belgium. Things seemed just the same as in peace times, save for a fussy little torpedo-boat that came spuming in from the North Sea, and an enormous hospital transport, vividly marked with the Red Cross, that lay alongside one of the wharves.

By noon the Carolina had passed out through the mouth of the Thames, and England's shores were but a mere line on the horizon. It was then for the first time that the grim menace of war became more apparent as a long line of ominous grey battle-cruisers steamed by on their ceaseless patrol, guarding and keeping free the seas that were their own domain.

It was an impressive sight, and Nipper's heart beat a little quicker and his pulses throbbed as he stood watching the bulwarks of Britain's might.

"By gum, for two pins I'd join the army," he muttered to himself. "Wonder what the gov'nor'd say if I did! Hallo, what's that?"

A sharp, crackling sound broke suddenly upon his ears. The captain of the Carolina was staring upwards into the sky from his stance on the bridge, and Nipper followed his gaze. It was an aeroplane fleeing across the heavens like some gigantic dragon-fly, and by its shape the lad knew it to be British.

It was gone almost as soon as it was sighted, though the faint rattle of its engine could still be heard in the distance.

Nelson Lee's eyes and ears were well on the alert as he attended to his duties that day. He felt certain in his mind that was there any foul play in connection with the sinking of the boats of the Orvis Line, the captain and the officers must be in the know.

But nothing in the slightest way suspicious could he discover. A ceaseless watch was kept on all sides for any sign of hostile submarine craft, and every precaution seemed to be taken.

"H'm. I'm beginning to think Nipper may be right, after all," mused the detective to himself. "This looks very much like a wild goose chase, and yet I can't help feeling that there's something wrong."

He was still musing, weaving endless chains of suppositions as he lay in his bunk a couple of hours later. He felt in no mood for sleep, though he knew that he would have to take his watch in a very short time.

He must have fallen into a doze from which he suddenly awoke with a start, every sense on the alert.

Something was amiss up on deck. Voices rang out, and there was the tramping of booted feet and other sounds of confusion. Then came the sharp bark of a gun.

Nelson Lee was out of his bunk like a streak of lightning, and made a dash for the companion-way, followed by the other sailors who had been awakened from their sleep.

In six strides he had reached the top, and as he stepped out on deck and gazed around, a cry of amazement burst from him at the surprising sight that met his gaze.

All was confusion on deck, and small wonder at it. Two hundred yards away on the port bow the long grey form of a submarine had just risen again. "And——"

Several men were swarming over the deck, an evil-looking gun had popped into view, smoke still wreathing from its muzzle from the shot that had been fired.

The collapsible flagstaff was being reared up, and an instant later a

flag flew to the crest, and as the wind smoothed out its folds a murmur of dismay went up from those aboard the Carolina.
It was the German flag—the black eagle on a yellow background.

CHAPTER IV.

Torpedoed.

NIPPER came hurrying across the deck, his face flushed with excitement.

"There, guv'nor," he cried. "What did I tell you? I knew we were on a wild goose chase. This knocks all Ventall's suspicions into a cocked hat, doesn't it?"

Nelson Lee dug his hands deep into his trouser pockets, and gave a shrug of his shoulders.

"It certainly looks like it, my boy," he said quietly. "That's a German submarine right enough. Still, we've other things to think about at the present moment. They're going to sink the boat. See—they're signalling now."

A man, evidently the commander of the submarine, had emerged from the conning-tower, a megaphone in hand, which he placed to his lips.

"I'll give you five minutes to take to the boats," he shouted in good English, his voice ringing clearly across the water. "Hurry up, now!"

Captain Barkis of the Carolina came hurrying along the deck, biting his lips with annoyance, and pulling irritably at his long beard. He issued a few peremptory orders, and in great haste the davits were swung round and the boats lowered.

There was no time for any of the sailors to go below to save any of their belongings. The reputation of the Germans was well known, and it was obvious that the submarine commander would not allow a second more than the short time he had allotted.

The deck of the submarine was now crowded with German sailors, who laughed and jeered at the Britishers as they hurriedly swarmed down into the boats.

"The dirty dogs," muttered Nipper savagely. "My hat, guv'nor, wouldn't I just like to have a gun to have a pot at 'em. And they call this warfare. I only wish a torpedo-boat or something would come up and put a hole through 'em."

"Hurry up there, last boat putting away!" roared Captain Barkis, and thinking that Nelson Lee was just behind them, Nipper swarmed down a rope into the reeking craft below.

It was not until he had seated himself on one of the thwarts, and the boat had cast away, that he realised with an acute sense of dismay that there was no sign of the detective.

"He must have got in one of the other boats," he muttered hopefully. "It's not like the guv'nor to get left in the lurch. And I saw him on the deck only a moment ago."

But Nipper was wrong. Nelson Lee was not in one of the other boats!

At the last moment the famous detective had recollected certain important papers that were in his seaman's chest down in the fo'castle—papers that he was in no wise anxious to lose.

A quick glance around showed him that there were still two of the boats to be cast off, and after an instant's hesitation he suddenly swung round on his heel and darted back along the deck.

One of the other sailors shouted a warning at him as he passed, but Nelson Lee paid no heed to it. Reaching the stern hatch he went floundering down the steep steps and along the gloomy passage to the fo'castle.

Coolly but hastily he dragged his chest out from beneath his bunk. It was locked, and another few precious seconds were lost in fumbling for his keys.

At last the lid was flung back, and diving down beneath the jumble of clothing the detective drew out the bundle of papers for which he had risked so much.

"And just about in time," he muttered, as he scrambled to his feet again. "And——"

But Nelson Lee spoke too soon. Even as he set his foot upon the bottom rung of the companion ladder there came a thunderous rending crash as though the very world had come to an end, and the ship reeled over and over like a drunken thing.

Nelson Lee's grasp was torn away, and he was flung to the floor with a force that almost stunned him.

For a full minute he lay blinking dazedly up at the wooden ceiling above him, dimly realising the truth of what had happened.

He was too late. The boats had all sheered off, and the German submarine commander, as good as his word, had discharged a torpedo at the Carolina.

The detective knew that the vessel was doomed—was sinking fast. From where he lay he could hear the water pouring through the great gap in her side that the torpedo had made and the ominous sound galvanised him to action.

With swimming head he managed to stagger weakly to his feet and start to claw his way desperately up the steps. The thought of being drowned like a rat down in that gloomy fo'castle seemed to lend him added strength and clearness of brain.

Before he had surmounted half the distance a great wave came deluging through the open hatch, almost sweeping him from his hold and drenching him to the skin.

How he managed to cling on Nelson Lee never knew. For what seemed an interminable time he hung on as the water bubbled and broiled around him, and then, as the ship gave another drunken lurch he took in a great gasp of fresh air and positively sprang up through the hatchway like a rabbit out of its hole.

Dashing the water from his eyes he cast a swift glance around. The s.s. Carolina was foundering fast by the bow. Already the deck was awash, and the stern rising high in the air.

It was no time for thought. Nelson Lee realised that if he stayed much longer he would be sucked down by the sinking ship. He had not even time to take in his bearings or to see if there was any signs of the lifeboats that had put off.

He wrenched his boots madly from his feet, tore off his coat, and, springing on to the gunwale, dived into the sea.

He struck out strongly as soon as his head cleft the water, his one object to put as great a distance between himself and the doomed craft as possible. For several minutes he swam on, and then, turning over on his side, glanced back.

There was no sign of the s.s. Carolina. She had sunk like a stone, and nothing but a few floating bits of debris marked the spot where she had taken her last dive to the sea bed.

The detective lay floating on his back, filling his lungs with great gulps of fresh air.

"The boats can't be far away," he ruminated to himself. "They're bound to pick me up. They must have noticed my absence."

Once, twice, thrice he raised his voice and shouted at the pitch of his lungs, but there was no response. Raising himself as high in the water as he could he gazed around on all sides—but not a single boat was to be seen.

The sea had risen somewhat, and his vision was restricted by the billowing waves.

Nelson Lee's heart sank a trifle. He knew that he could not hope to survive for long in the almost ice-cold water.

With the energy of fear he struck out vigorously again, heading he knew not in which direction, and every now and then letting out a stentorian shout for assistance in the hopes that he might be heard.

His strength commenced to flag visibly and a mist to swim before his eyes. Life seemed never so sweet to the detective as during those terrible moments. It was not the first time he had been face to face with death—but on this occasion it seemed that there was to be no hope for him.

"Help! Help!"

Again and again he shouted, but the wind buffeted his own voice back into his ears. He could scarcely keep himself afloat now. The water was lapping up over his mouth and nostrils, and there was a terrible drumming in his ears.

And then, just as a crimson veil seemed to sweep down and envelop him, the sound of voices came faintly to his ears, he felt his head bump against something hard, and strong arms lifted him clear of the water.

CHAPTER V.

A Staggering Discovery.

FOR the next few minutes all was a blank to Nelson Lee, until he suddenly opened his eyes to find them staring straight up into the grey skies above, and to feel the salt spray hissing against his face.

He was lying flat on his back on some hard surface. For some time the detective remained in that position, striving to collect his scattered wits, and then with an effort he sat up and stared around—and a great gasp of amazement escaped his lips as he realised where he was.

He was lying on the flat, armour-plated deck of the German submarine, which was almost awash of the waves. The conning-tower reared up before him, and, standing around were several German sailors, regarding him with evident disfavour.

"Himmel, throw the cursed English dog back into the sea again, Otto," he heard one of them growl. "What you wanted to pull him out at all for I don't know."

"Englishman or not one Englishman, one couldn't see him drown," returned one of the other sailors sullenly. "We are not all——"

A firm step along the deck cut the fellows' remarks short, and a clean-shaven, fresh-faced German officer, swathed in oilskins came into the focus of Nelson Lee's gaze.

"Hallo, is this the fellow you dragged out, Froitheim?" he asked sharply, in his native tongue, which Nelson Lee was well acquainted with. "He's still alive I see. Let's have a look at him."

As he spoke he leaned forward and peered keenly into the detective's

face, and as he did so a puzzled expression crept across his countenance and he gave a sharp exclamation of surprise.

"Mr. Nelson Lee, by all that's wonderful!" he ejaculated. "This is a strange meeting, indeed."

Nelson Lee returned the stare with one of blank bewilderment. Who on earth was this young German officer who seemed so well acquainted with his name?

"You have the advantage of me, Herr Lieutenant," he replied stiffly in his best German, and with all the dignity that his semi-recumbent position would allow.

The young lieutenant showed his white teeth in a smile, and with a quick movement, whipped off his cap.

"Ah, now perhaps you recognise me, Herr Lee?"

The detective gave one look, and his eyes opened wide in amazement.

"Franz Muller! Well, I'll be hanged!"

Instinctively the detective sprang to his feet, and the next instant the surrounding German sailors witnessed the amazing sight of their commander shaking hands with the "accursed English pig," whom they had saved from the sea.

It was an extraordinary meeting. Five years before, Franz Muller and Nelson Lee had met in London, when the young German had entrusted the detective with the recovery of some important private documents that had been stolen from him on his way across the Channel.

Needless to say Nelson Lee had not failed. The documents had been placed back in their owner's hands within twenty-four hours, and Muller's gratitude knew no bounds.

Since that day the two had not met again until now, under these strange and dramatic circumstances; before as friends, now alienated as enemies by the sword of war that had been drawn from the scabbard of their respective countries.

It was a startling coincidence and a peculiar situation—a situation which was saved by the spontaneous, genuine manner in which Franz Muller brushed all worldly matters to one side and greeted Nelson Lee just as he would have greeted him had war never been declared.

"Well, this is absolutely the strangest thing I've ever struck," said the young lieutenant; "I should never have expected to meet you here, Herr Lee. Our countries are at war with one another—by national decree we are deadly enemies; but we can forget that for the moment, that is, of course, if you are willing?"

And he stepped back with a little tightening of his lips.

"By all means," said Nelson Lee sincerely. "I could never bring myself to coldbloodedly look upon you as an enemy. Muller, although I am none the less loyal to my country by so speaking."

"Ah, that is how I feel," replied the young German, a trifle sadly. "My whole heart and soul is with my country, and yet I wish this war had never been. Still, we will not talk of that. Come, how is it that you are here in the North Sea? What were you doing aboard that boat? And what are you doing in those sailor clothes?"

"Himmel, I am letting my tongue run away with me. I was forgetting, you are wet through. Come below, I will fit you out with dry garments, and you shall be placed safely aboard the first trawler or neutral vessel we see."

The German sailors looked on with black and sullen scowls as the young commander seized the detective by the arm and led the way down through the conning-tower into the heart of the great submarine—one of the latest and best that Germany possessed.

If Nelson Lee hoped to see anything of the wonderful vessel's mechanism he was sadly mistaken. At the foot of the steep iron ladder he was whipped sharply round to the right and hustled into the tiny cabin that was set aside for the commander.

"Forgive my apparent roughness—you will understand," said Franz Muller quietly. "Also excuse my absence for a few minutes. I will have some dry clothes sent into you."

He departed, closing the door behind him, and a few moments later Nelson Lee felt the steel hull of the vessel begin to throb and vibrate to the beat of the electric dynamos, and he knew that the submarine had sunk beneath the surface of the water again.

"Well, by jingo, if all Germans were of the same type as Franz Muller, what a different thing this war would be," muttered the detective beneath his breath, as he plunked himself down on the edge of the bunk that filled up one side of the tiny cabin. "He ought to have been born a Britisher—that's the only way I can put it. Phew, this is the strangest experience I've ever struck in all my life, and——"

He broke off short as the door swung open and a big, brawny German sailor poked his head and shoulders through, and with a black scowl of hatred threw a bundle of dry clothes on the floor and held out a glass of steaming rum.

Nelson Lee drank the latter down with gusto. He was shivering with cold, and the raw, hot spirit sent the blood coursing through his veins again and made him feel a new man.

In less than a couple of minutes he had stripped off his dripping clothes and slipped into those that the sailor had brought him, and no sooner had he finished than Franz Muller made his reappearance.

"We have submerged for the time being," volunteered the young German. "but we are keeping a sharp look out through the periscope for any sign of a vessel to put you aboard. Now tell me, Herr Lee, how came you aboard that boat, and in those sailor's clothes?"

"Why, on a matter of business, of course," answered the detective with a slight smile. "I should have thought you would have guessed that, Muller. It was in the interests of a case that I have got in hand. Ah, perhaps you can help me in this," he finished up as a sudden inspiration struck him.

"Help you, I help you?" echoed the young German blankly. "And how can I help you, Herr Lee?"

"By telling me one thing," replied the detective, leaning forward quizzically. "Why have your submarines made such a dead set against those boats of the Orvis Line. Why have you been deliberately singling them out and sinking them? Is there any special reason for it?"

Franz Muller stared blankly.

"I don't understand you," he said puzzledly. "I do not single out any special boats to sink. I take them as they come. I have been the only German submarine patrolling this part of the North Sea for the past fortnight, and during that time I have only sunk three vessels."

"That's nonsense," said Nelson Lee briskly. "Why eleven boats of the Orvis Line have been sunk during the past three weeks—and the Carolina makes the twelfth."

"And that is the only one that I have sunk of that line," declared the German lieutenant vehemently. "I always take down the names and particulars of the vessels that I am fortunate enough to sink, that their sinking can be verified by your English reports of their loss."

"Then it must have been another of your submarines that is responsible for their loss."

"Impossible, I tell you mine is the only submarine that has been patrolling this part of the coast for the past fortnight. You are wrong, Herr Lee."

CHAPTER VI.

Saved From the Sea.

NELSON LEE knitted his brows puzzledly, and glanced keenly at his companion. He knew full well that Franz Muller was telling the truth, and after a momentary hesitation he related to the young German the full story of the strange case that had taken him aboard the ss. Carolina as a common deck-hand.

"No, they were not sunk by German submarines," declared the lieutenant convincingly, when the detective had finished. "I can assure you on that point, Herr Lee. Had it been so their loss would have been claimed by us. No, no; they must have struck mines and foundered, or else there was foul play as is the suspicion of the gentleman whom you are working for."

Nelson Lee gave a shrug of his shoulders. He was surprised, almost astounded by Muller's vehement denial of the fact that the Orvis vessels had been sunk by either his or other German submarines. For the second time that day his theories had been turned upside down. Firstly, by the appearance of the submarine that had sunk the Carolina. This he had considered put Mr. Ventall's suspicions out of all reckoning.

And now that opinion was quashed by what he had just heard from Franz Muller.

Nelson Lee realised that he had come to a loose end—that he would have to go back to where he had started, and commence all over again.

And he would have no more definite foundation than that which he had had in the first place. It promised to prove to be one of the most difficult cases which he had ever undertaken—merely for the fact that there was not the merest clue or definite suspicion to go on.

In fact, as Nipper had said, it would probably be a "wild goose chase."

And the thought of Nipper brought another subject into the detective's mind.

"The boats from the Carolina," he asked, looking up eagerly, "did they get away safely, Muller?"

"Yes; I have no doubt they are almost in sight of land by now," replied the young lieutenant. "I am not like some of my compatriots," he added, a trifle bitterly. "My ideas of warfare, Mr. Lee, are, I hope, honourable ones. I am not what you call a 'pirate,' or a 'murderer.'"

"I know that only too well, Muller," said Nelson Lee sincerely, "else I should not be here now. I owe you a deep debt of gratitude for the way in which you have treated me, and some day perhaps, when this war is over, we may meet again, and——"

The detective's sentence remained unfinished. There came a knock on the door of the tiny cabin, and a petty-officer appeared in the aperture.

"Herr Lieutenant, we have sighted a trawler about three miles to starboard," he said in German. "Do you wish us to rise and signal her?"

"There are no other boats in sight—no British destroyers?" questioned Muller sharply. "You are sure of that?"

"Quite, Herr Lieutenant."

"Very well. Tell Baumer to rise to the surface."

The petty-officer saluted again and disappeared, and Franz Muller turned to Nelson Lee.

"Well, Herr Lee, I am afraid we must part," he said quietly. "It is not safe, nor convenient, for many reasons, that you should remain aboard here any longer than is strictly necessary. I will have you placed aboard the trawler. That is all that I can do."

"It is all that I desire, and I am more than grateful to you, Muller," replied the detective sincerely. "You have treated me with every kindness and consideration, and I sha'n't forget it. I hope and trust that when this terrible war is over we shall meet again under more pleasant circumstances and be able to renew our friendship."

As he spoke he extended his hand, and Franz Muller seized it with a half-glad, half-sad smile, and shook it warmly.

"I hope the same, Herr Lee," he said, a trifle huskily. "But I fear that next meeting of ours is a long way off. Probably it will never come at all."

A second later the rattle and shrill of screws and levers announced the fact that the submarine had reached the surface, and that the conning-tower was being opened.

Lieutenant Muller led the way out and up the steep iron ladder, and Nelson Lee heaved a sigh of relief as he stepped out on to the plated deck into the fresh air and the light of the waning afternoon.

On all sides stretched the rolling expanse of green sea, deserted, save to the east, where, at a distance of a couple of miles, lay a dingy, brown-sailed fishing trawler, beating up against the wind.

Obvious signs of dismay were visible on deck as the fishermen aboard sighted the lean, grey form of the submarine speeding towards them, and the confusion increased as the German flag was run up to the peak of the collapsible flagstaff.

They made a clumsy endeavour to fling over the tiller and take to flight; but it was a futile proceeding, for the speed of the submarine was far in excess of theirs. Hand over hand the distance between the two decreased, until, when only a bare five hundred yards separated them, Lieutenant Muller raised his megaphone to his lips.

"Heave-to! We don't mean you any harm!" he shouted.

There was a momentary silence, as though those aboard the trawler doubted the good faith of the words, and then a burly, black-bearded seaman advanced and leaned across the bulwarks, his hollowed hands to his mouth:

"What d'you want, you bloomin' German varmits?" he bellowed. "I've met yer sort afore, an' I don't trust you. Wot's the game? Take us fer a Dreadnought?"

"Heave-to! I tell you that we don't mean you any harm," reiterated the submarine's commander through the megaphone. "I have a refugee from a sunken British vessel here, and I want you to take him on board."

With an ill grace, and evidently still somewhat suspicious, the skipper of the trawler flung the tiller over again, and the little craft came to with her main-sheet flapping idly in the wind.

Franz Muller lost no time in getting the affair over. With lightning quickness one of the collapsible boats with which the submarine was fitted was produced and put together, and a couple of the German sailors stepped in and picked up the paddles.

Once again the lieutenant turned to Nelson Lee, and the two shook hands warmly.

"Good-bye, Herr Lee, till our next meeting."

"When the war is over—may it be soon," said the detective warmly.

And with a final word of farewell he stepped into the boat, and was speedily rowed across to the waiting trawler. The skipper favoured the two

German sailors with sullen scowl, and the detective with a keen look of curiosity.

"You're English, I suppose?" he grunted shortly. "There ain't no underhand trick in this, is there?"

"You may assure yourself on that point, skipper," replied Nelson Lee, as he stepped aboard. "I am as English as you are, as I will prove to you in a few moments. Hallo, what's the matter now?"

A warning shout had come ringing across the water from the submarine, and the two men in the collapsible boat bent to their oars with a will.

Sailors were running excitedly up and down the deck of the submarine and beckoning frantically to their companions, whilst others hurriedly unshipped the collapsible flagstaff.

"What the dickens is the matter with them?" muttered Nelson Lee puzzledly to himself. "They seem alarmed about something. I can't see anything wrong."

"Ay, but I can!" suddenly cried the skipper of the trawler excitedly. "Look—look, over there to the North. Go it, you daisy, give the varmits socks!"

Nelson Lee spun round, following the direction of the man's stumpy finger. There was small wonder for the alarm aboard the German submarine. Not three miles away, ploughing through the water towards them was a British destroyer, dense clouds of black smoke billowing from her funnels, feathers of white foam hissing up from her prow.

It was a stirring sight, and Nelson Lee caught his breath sharply. He would have given all he possessed to have seen the German submarine sent to her last account, but for the fact that Franz Muller was aboard—and Franz Muller had befriended him.

The men in the collapsible boat pulled like madmen. It was indeed a race against time, and a cheer of excitement went up from those aboard the trawler.

Even as the collapsible surged alongside the submarine and the two sailors sprang out, dragging the light craft after them, a gun barked from the destroyer and a shell came screaming across the sea and sent up a great column of foam thirty yards from the submersible.

Like rabbits into their holes the German sailors dived into the open conning-tower. Lieutenant Muller was the last to go. Cool as a cucumber he turned and waved a hand in the direction of Nelson Lee, and the next instant the conning-tower closed upon him.

Crash!

Another shell from the destroyer came moaning across the waste of waters and burst just in front of the submarine, even as the vessel dived like a seal and vanished from view.

The destroyer had no time to waste in exchanging views with the trawler. Hand over fist she came howling up, surged past in a smother of foam and headed on in the direction she surmised the submarine to have taken, and in next to no time she was a mere spot on the horizon.

"The beggars have got away!" grunted the skipper of the trawler. "It's just like trying to catch eels with your bare hands. And now, my man," he went on, turning brusquely to Nelson Lee, "wot might you have been doing aboard that 'ere submarine?"

"I'm a survivor from the ss. Carolina, which she sent to the bottom a matter of six or seven hours ago," explained the detective. "The other members of the crew got off in the ship's boats, but I was left behind and picked up by the submarine."

The skipper still looked somewhat suspicious, but Nelson Lee soon put his

doubts at rest. He had taken the precaution to remove his papers from the other suit which he had discarded, and the production of his certificate as deck-hand aboard the Carolina was enough to convince the man.

"And I want to be put ashore as soon as possible, captain," he finished. "It is absolutely essential that I should be."

The skipper of the trawler gave a short laugh.

"Essential or not," he grunted. "You won't be able to put foot on dry land for another couple o' days at least."

Nelson Lee gave a sharp exclamation of dismay. Two days—two whole days before he would be able to put his fears at rest as to whether Nipper was safe or not.

"Surely you can manage it before then?" he asked anxiously. "Come, skipper, it's worth twenty pounds to you if you set me ashore within twelve hours."

The master of the trawler opened his eyes and stared curiously at the others.

"Twenty pounds!" he echoed. "Where's a man like you—an ordinary deck-hand—goin' to get 'old of twenty quid I'd like to know?"

Nelson Lee gave a wry grimace. He had not desired to give his real identity away, but now he saw that it would have to be done.

"I am not an ordinary deck-hand, if you would have the truth," he said quietly. "My name is Nelson Lee. I was aboard the Carolina on business."

The skipper looked more astonished than ever.

"What, Nelson Lee—Nelson Lee, the famous detective?" he gasped. "Ere, I say, 'oo yer getting at?"

Nelson Lee smiled quietly as he produced the packet of papers which he had risked his life to save from the sinking Carolina, and which conclusively proved the truth of what he said, including as it did various passes from Scotland Yard, which had in the past enabled him to do things which otherwise he could not have done.

The skipper's face was a study as he glanced through them.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered at last. "This is a fair knockout! I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Lee. I've hoften 'eard of you in the past, but never had the pleasure of meeting you afore. And, by gum, it's a rummy place to meet!"

"And now will you put me ashore within twelve hours?" asked the detective as he grasped the man's horny palm.

The skipper shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"It can't possibly be done, sir," he said stoutly. "It was absolutely straight wot I told you just now. I sha'n't be able to land you for at least two days—not even if you was to offer me fifty times twenty pounds."

The detective's face dropped, and he bit his lips in dismay.

"I tell you what I will do, though, sir," went on the skipper of the trawler. "If we sight a boat inward bound I'll signal 'er, and put you aboard. That's the most I can do, and in any case I'll make you as comfortable as I can while you're with us."

Nelson Lee realised that there was nothing else to do but to submit to the inevitable, anxious though he was to set foot on dry land again. What had become of Nipper, he wondered? Had he got safely away from the sinking Carolina? If so, had the ship's boats been picked up, or managed to make shore?

Again he knew that even if Nipper were safe he would be worried out of his life as to what had become of the detective himself, especially when he discovered that he was not amongst those who had been saved in the lifeboats.

CHAPTER VII.

Nelson Lee's Resolve.

SKIPPER RAWLINS, of the trawler Nancy Lee, out of Hazeby, was as good as his word. He did everything he could to enhance the detective's comfort aboard the grimy little trawler.

There were two bunks in his cabin, and one was immediately placed at Nelson Lee's disposal.

The following two days were the longest that the detective had ever experienced in all his life. Every minute seemed an hour, every hour a day. Time hung heavily on his hands, for he had nothing to do save sit and smoke and scan the waste of waters on all sides in search of a speedier inward-bound vessel to which he might be transferred.

True, he had plenty of time for thought, and hour after hour he would sit pondering over the strange case of the sunken Orvis boats. There was no doubt about it, John Ventall's suspicions were justifiable. There was something mysterious about the whole affair, and Nelson Lee meant to get to the bottom, even though now he would have to start all over from the beginning again.

His one line of deduction had apparently failed. The sinking of the Carolina by the German submarine had at the time convinced him that everything was in order and that he was on a wild-goose chase. There was no question of foul play there.

In fact, he had quite decided to throw the whole case up, and report to Mr. John Ventall that his suspicions were unfounded, until his amazing interview with Lieutenant Franz Muller, the commander of the German submarine, and the latter's candid admission that the Carolina was the only Orvis Line boat that had been sunk by his, or any other of his fellow-submarines.

That left eleven of the Orvis vessels unaccounted for. It was preposterous that they could all have struck mines. Besides, the crew of several of them had declared with conviction that the boats had been torpedoed—some of them even went so far as to swear that they had caught sight of the submarine.

Nelson Lee had to confess himself utterly at a loss, though he was grimly determined to hang on to the case until he had come to some definite conclusion. He had never yet taken up a case without having brought it to a conclusion of some kind, and he did not mean to break his record.

If the Orvis boats were all sunk by German agency, he would assure himself on that point. If it was otherwise, if it was as John Ventall suspected, that the boats were being deliberately scuttled by Samuel Mellors's hirelings for the sake of the insurance money—well, he would assure himself of that point.

And not until he had done either of the two would he relinquish his endeavours.

CHAPTER VIII.

Given Up For Dead.

NEVER had Nelson Lee been so glad to see the shores of Britain as when, true to the space of time Captain Rawlins had mentioned, the Nancy Lee sighted land, and a few hours later hove through into the tiny harbour at Hazeby.

A bluff, hearty farewell to Captain Rawlins, and a promise to communicate

with him, and with all possible speed the detective made his way to the railway-station.

He was in luck's way. A train for London was just on the verge of starting, and he had only just time enough to purchase a ticket, snatch a paper from the bookstall, and take his seat ere it rumbled forth on its journey.

No one would ever have dreamed that the unshaven, lean-faced man in the coarse, blue sailors' trousers and guernsey was Nelson Lee, the world-famous detective, the man whose name was known in every continent and island on the globe practically.

He smiled whimsically to himself as he caught a glimpse of his reflection in the window-pane, and then eagerly opened the paper he had purchased.

The sinking of the *Carolina* was, of course, two days' old, and he knew better than to seek for mention of it on the front page.

Haphazardly he opened out the paper and ran his eyes down the columns, and, as he did so, a sharp exclamation burst from his lips.

"NO TRACE OF NELSON LEE."

"Presumed that the famous detective met his death in the sinking of the *Carolina*. All other members of the crew saved."

For several long minutes he stood staring in dismay until the black type danced before his eyes.

His presence aboard the *Carolina* had been made known, and he had been given up for lost. Who could have informed the Press that he had been a member of the crew of the ill-fated vessel? There were only two persons who could have done it. The one was John Ventall, and the other was Nipper.

Annoyance and worry struggled for supremacy in Nelson Lee's mind—worry, for he knew the troubled state of mind his young assistant would be in over his presumed death; annoyance that his movements had been made public for the delectation of such people as Samuel Mellors, who, were he guilty of any underhand work in connection with the sinking of the *Carolina*, would naturally be put upon his guard as to any future actions.

The detective crumpled the paper up into a ball and leaned back with furrowed brows. Had he only seen the paper earlier he would have sent Nipper a wire, informing him of his safety. But it was too late now. He would reach Gray's Inn Road just as quickly himself.

Nelson Lee had already made up his mind how to act under the circumstances. For the time being, at any rate, his safety and his return to London must be kept a dead secret between Nipper, John Ventall, and, of course, Mrs. Jones, his estimable landlady. Beyond them the knowledge must not be spread lest it should impair the ultimate successful issue of the baffling case he had taken in hand.

It was advisable that Samuel Mellors should remain in ignorance of the fact that he had survived the death that the newspapers had credited him with.

It was a great relief to the detective to know that Nipper was safe, as was apparent from the fact that the papers announced that all the members of the crew of the *Carolina* had been saved save himself.

"Poor little beggar! I hope he hasn't taken it to heart," mused the detective to himself. "He ought to know that I've as many lives as a cat, and that newspaper reports aren't to be depended upon. It isn't the first time I've turned up almost in time to witness my own funeral."

A couple of hours later the train rolled into its London termini, and within a couple of minutes Nelson Lee was bowling along in a taxi in the direction of Gray's Inn Road.

He did not wish for an ostentatious arrival, that might lead to his recognition by any bright newspaper man, or any casual acquaintance, so he dismissed the cab at Holborn end of the road and walked briskly up to his chambers.

His key-chain and bunch of keys was still intact, and after a quick glance round to see that the coast was clear, he quickly unlocked the door and stepped into the hall.

From below came the odour of cooking, and the shuffling footsteps of Mrs. Jones; but there was silence above.

On tiptoe the detective stole cautiously up the stairs, and halted for a second outside the door of his consulting-room. Then, with steady fingers, he turned the handle and pushed it noiselessly open.

From the dead silence one would have thought that the room was unoccupied; but it was not so.

A great lump rose up into Nelson Lee's throat, and a strong mist before his eyes, at the sight that met his gaze as he peered around the jamb of the door.

Seated before the oak table, in the chair that he himself was wont to occupy, was the bent form of Nipper. The lad's shoulders were bowed, his face buried in his outspread arms, and before him, laid out reverently on the cloth, were the pair of old and worn red plush slippers he had so often placed before the fire to warm for the return of his guardian and "guv'nor."

Nelson Lee's strong lips quivered ominously. Even as he watched the boy's bowed shoulders heaved, and a sound that was unmistakably a dry, choking sob came faintly to his ears.

"Dear old guv'nor! It can't be true—it can't be true. I won't believe it! I don't want to believe it!"

It was more than Nelson Lee could stand. The lad's anguish and grief touched him to the heart, and with a swift movement he dashed the mist away from before his eyes and strode noisily into the room.

"Well, Nipper, here we are again, my boy! Turned up again like a bad penny, you see!"

Nipper was out of his chair like a shot of a gun. Wild-eyed and white-faced and trembling he stood staring at the detective, and then, with a wild yell of relief and delight, he sprang forward and positively hugged Nelson Lee in his joy.

"Guv'nor—guv'nor, it's really you! I knew you'd come back! I knew you weren't dead!" he cried huskily. "I've been worried out of my life. Why didn't you let me know? Where have you been? How did you escape from the Carolina? Where——"

"Whoa—whoa! One question at a time, Nipper," said the detective, laughing somewhat shakily in an attempt to disguise his own emotion at sight of his young assistant's delighted relief. "I couldn't let you know before. I only set foot on shore a few hours ago, and the boat which I was aboard was not fitted with wireless. Wait a minute; let me get these things off and make myself comfortable. By Jove, it's good to be back again!"

Five minutes later the detective was comfortably ensconced in his favourite armchair, clad in his favourite dressing-gown, and smoking his favourite pipe.

Somewhat sheepishly, and hoping that he was unobserved, Nipper snatched the pair of red plush slippers from the table and passed them over. Nelson Lee took them without a word, though there was a twinkle in his eye.

"Has anybody called?" he asked, as he lit up.

"Called! Has anybody called!" grunted Nipper savagely. "Oh, no—only about five hundred people from every newspaper in London, from Scotland Yard, and every part of London, including some cold-blooded, impudent old scoundrel of an undertaker, who in the case of your body being recovered offered to give you a gorgeous free funeral for the good advertisement it would give him! He went downstairs without touching a single step. I kept his hat in remembrance of him."

And Nipper pointed to a muchly battered top-hat that depended from the gasolier in the centre of the room.

Nelson Lee laughed heartily, and then, without further delay, concisely related exactly what had happened to him since the sinking of the *Carolina*.

Nipper sat listening with wide-open eyes, and they opened even wider when the detective told of the conversation he had had with Franz Muller, the commander of the German submarine.

"Well, I'll be blowed! That's a fair knock-out, guv'nor!" gasped the lad, when the detective had finished. "What do you make of it? I'm absolutely stupored. I felt pretty certain that Mr. Ventall was all at sea with his suspicions, especially when that German submarine popped up and blew a hole in the *Carolina*. It seemed obvious that that was how all the Orvis boats went down. Do you think that commander fellow, Muller, or whatever his name is, was giving you the straight goods when he told you that his lot had only sunk the one boat?"

Nelson Lee nodded briefly.

"I'm certain of it," he said decisively. "There would be no reason for him to have lied on the point. Yes, you can depend upon it, if the Germans had sunk all those boats they wouldn't go out of their way to disclaim having done so."

Nipper rubbed his chin puzzledly.

"Well, if they didn't sink 'em, who the dickens did?" he grunted. "And how were they sunk?"

"That's just what we're got to find out."

"You don't think that they all struck mines, then?"

"It seems hardly possible. No, I don't mind admitting that I'm absolutely at loss for the present. But there's one thing I am certain about, and that is that there's some foul play somewhere. The fact that the *Carolina* was legitimately sunk by a German submarine was a mere coincidence—an unfortunate one, perhaps. But even had we not fallen in with the German craft the *Carolina* would have gone down just the same."

"Gone down just the same! And——" Nipper started off, but the detective cut him short.

"We'll drop the subject for the moment," he said quietly. "I'm hungry. Just run down to Mrs. Jones and inform her politely that I am still in the land of the living and that I have returned with a very substantial appetite."

"And, by the way, you might also get on to the 'phone to John Ventall and tell him that I am not in any immediate need of a coffin, and for the present that I want the fact that I am still alive kept dark. Also ask him not to call here. Tell him that I have still got the case in hand and that I will communicate with him in a few days' time."

CHAPTER IX.

Submarine No. F142.

NELSON LEE did not leave his rooms all that day or the next. For hour after hour he sat before the fire in his dressing-gown, smoking pipe after pipe, and scarcely speaking a word to Nipper or to his landlady.

He was the first one to admit that this case that John Ventall had put into his hands on behalf of Roydds' Exchange, was utterly baffling him, for the time being.

In his own mind there was a certainty which grew stronger and stronger, that the boats of the Orvis Line had been deliberately sunk. There was some underhand work going on somewhere, and Samuel Mellors was at the bottom of it.

Theory after theory he formulated and as rapidly dismissed.

On the morning of the second day he received a frantic wire from John Ventall informing him that the s.s. Severn, another of the Orvis boats, had gone down off the Nore—presumably having either struck a mine or been torpedoed.

Nelson Lee's jaw set firmly as he read the wire through.

"By Jove, it's about time I did something!" he muttered grimly to himself. "Ventall will be thinking that I'm all hot air and no do. And I'm absolutely at a loose end. Nipper, just run out and get me a paper."

Nipper was getting quite worried about his guardian. It was the first time he had ever known the detective to be so utterly at loss and so long in bringing to a successful conclusion any case that he took in hand.

The "Evening News" which he brought in contained brief details of the sinking of the s.s. Severn. According to the captain's version a couple of hours after they had left the mouth of the Thames a sudden explosion had occurred on board the vessel, and she had sunk in half an hour. Whether she had struck a mine or had been torpedoed by a submarine he could not tell.

And the paper commented meaningly upon the strange sequence of misfortunes that had befallen the vessels of the Orvis Line. It seemed that even public suspicions had been awakened.

The sinking of every vessel had been attended by an explosion—and Nelson Lee had been assured by John Ventall that not a single ounce of anything explosive had formed a part of the cargo of any one of the sunken boats.

This altogether quashed the supposition that the vessels were deliberately blown up by someone on board.

The newspaper even openly stated:

"It would be interesting to know what business it was which took Mr. Nelson Lee on board the s.s. Carolina, the sinking of which was attended by his own loss. But small hopes are held of the recovery of his body."

Nelson Lee made a wry grimace. It was not a pleasant experience to read of his own alleged death in the paper.

Idly his gaze wandered down the page, and then came to a sudden stop on a certain paragraph, and his eye lit up with keen interest.

VON TIRPITZ'S LATEST RUSE.

German Submarines Disguised as British and bearing

OFFICIAL BRITISH NUMBERS.

"A remarkable instance of German cunning and treachery has to come to light with the story of Captain James Wright of the ss. Orlando, which

arrived safely at Tilbury this morning. The captain reports that at six bells this morning, when thirty miles south of the Nore, a large submarine rose to the surface within three hundred yards of the ship. All fears and doubts were set at rest at sight of the number—F 14a, which is that of one of the latest British submersibles launched.

"To the captain's amazement the submersible opened fire on the Orlando. Three shells were fired, all of which happily missed their mark, and then for some unknown reason the submarine submerged again and was no longer seen.

"It is a known fact that the British craft F 14a is at present operating in the Dardanelles, and the only conclusion that one can draw is that the submarine was a hostile one deliberately sailing under false guise and colours in order to attain a certain degree of safety, whilst performing its nefarious work off the British coast.

"The number was plainly seen by the captain and most of the members of his crew and there is no question of doubt as to the accuracy of the statements made. Captain Wright declares that the submarine was unmistakably of a British type, which leads one to conclude that it was specially constructed for the perpetration of further foul atrocities."

Nelson Lee's brow furrowed puzzledly as he scanned the paragraph, and then turned back and read it through again. It set a strange train of thought running through his mind. Instinctively he brought the peculiar incident to bear in connection with the mysterious sinkings of the vessels of the Orvis Line!

Had this impostor of a submarine anything to do with the case that John Ventall had put into his hands? Could this submarine have been responsible for the sinking of the many craft that sailed under the colours of Samuel Mellors?

It was probable, and yet, no, it was impossible.

"Muller would have been bound to know," mused the detective to himself, "and I am certain that he would not have hesitated to have told me the truth. The fact that a German submarine was scouring the North Sea in the guise of a British vessel and bearing a British number would obviously be known to the commanders of every other German ship. Otherwise there would be the danger of their sinking their fellow countrymen. And if I take that line of deduction it points to the fact that the submarine was not a German one, which seems absurd on the face of it."

Nelson Lee carefully filled his pipe, put a match to it and leaned back in his chair with the paper on his knees. For the first time since his previous conclusions had been shattered by the incident connected with the sinking of the Carolina by a German submarine, he began to see a glimmer of light before him.

He had, indeed, struck a new train of thought, and the more he turned the matter over in his mind the more convinced he became that he had hit upon something valuable at last—something worth following up, and which would prove more remunerative than his ill-fated trip upon the ss. Carolina.

"By jingo, I believe I've hit upon it!" he muttered almost excitedly, under his breath. "I believe I've got upon the right line at last! And yet it seems the wildest, most improbable theory that I've ever evolved. Improbable in one sense and yet so possible in another. If it should turn out to be true, well then, Samuel Mellor is a cleverer scoundrel than I've ever given him credit for."

The famous detective's every nerve was athrill. He honestly believed that he was on the right scent at last, and Nipper looked on curiously as

Nelson Lee rose from his chair and paced moodily up and down the room, puffing at his pipe until it glowed like a furnace, and the dense clouds of smoke threatened to choke the two of them.

But Nipper knew better than to interfere or to make any comment. He knew the detective's every mood, and therefore he divined that at last his guv'nor had come somewhat near fathoming the mystery of the sinking of the boats of the Orvis Line.

For a good half hour the detective continued his restricted perambulation, stopping only every half hour or so to replenish his pipe, and then at last deviated across to the telephone that stood upon a bracket in one corner of the room.

"City, 06345."

Nipper pricked up his ears. The number given was that of John Ventall's private office at Lloyd's Exchange.

Sharply a reply came ringing across the wires, and Nelson Lee knew that it was the voice of the man he wished to speak to.

"Nelson Lee speaking," he said briskly. "When does the next Orvis Line boat sail, Mr. Ventall?"

"Ah, I was beginning to wonder whether you really were alive, Mr. Lee! Wait a moment, I'll give you the information you require— The ss. Mary Hope sails from Janis Wharf to-morrow evening with the tide, and she's insured up to the hilt. Mr. Lee, for Heaven's sake, are you getting anywhere near the bottom of this business? We can't stand it much longer—"

"I believe that I am on the right scent at last, Mr. Ventall," replied the detective calmly. "That is all I can say at present, but in the meantime, do you know if Samuel Mellors is in town at present?"

"Yes, he's at his London office now. I saw him in the Exchange only a few moments ago. The confounded scoundrel, I'm certain he's at the bottom of all this. For two pins I'd accuse him to his face, and—"

"Don't do that," cut in Nelson Lee sharply. "Leave everything to me, Mr. Ventall, and I can promise you within a couple of days that I'll either solve this mystery or chuck up the case for good and all. Good-bye!"

With an air of finality the detective replaced the receiver on its hook and returned to his chair.

Nipper could contain his curiosity no longer.

"Well, guv'nor, what have you discovered?" he asked eagerly. "Do you really mean what you said just now? Do you really mean that you've found a clue at last?"

"Yes, my boy, I think I have," replied the detective. "It's a pretty vague one, and I'm not going to detail it to you until I've made myself more certain on several little points."

Nipper's face fell.

"That means—"

"It means some work for you," cut in Nelson Lee equably.

The lad gave a wild halloo of delight. The enforced inactivity of the last two days had not been at all to his liking, and he was only too anxious to get into harness again.

"I want you to do a bit of shadowing," went on the detective, scribbling something on a writing pad. "This is the business address of Samuel Mellors—36a, Robins Court; it's just at the back of Roydd's Exchange. I want you to wait until Mellors leaves this evening, and follow him to wherever he goes. You can't mistake the man—he's as fat as a pig, red-faced, black, walrus-like moustache, and generally wears an old-fashioned top-hat, and a gold watch-chain, like one of his own ship's cables. You'd better get into one of your old suits and slip along at once."

"But what am I to do when I have followed him, and——"
 "Use your own discretion," remarked Nelson Lee concisely. "If things turn out as I hope and expect, you will send me a telegram in our code, telling me where to meet you. Address it to yourself—you mustn't forget that I went down with the Carolina."

Nipper knew better than to argue or to ask further questions. Not a little puzzled and at sea, he scurried off to his bed-room and changed into one of the many old suits which he kept for what he called his "business."

He was back again in a few moments, a cap cocked over one eye and a handkerchief wound around his neck. Nelson Lee gave a nod of approval and pushed a couple of golden coins across to him.

"You will probably need those for railway fares," he said meaningly. "I believe that Mellors lives somewhere out in the country, Essex way. Follow him, and keep your ears and eyes well open. I shall act according to what you see and hear, and I shall remain here until I hear from you."

CHAPTER X

Nipper Takes a Hand.

NIPPER had to confess himself utterly mystified as he left the house and strode down Gray's Inn Road to Holborn.

"Well I'm hanged! I wonder what the dickens the gov'nor's little game is?" he muttered puzzledly to himself. "He might just as well have let me know what the wheeze is. Follow Samuel Mellors; what in the name of sense is the use of following Mellors? I thought this was a wild goose chase in the first place, and blowed if I don't think the same now. The Carolina was sunk by a German submarine, and it was a German submarine or submarines that bust up all the other Orvis boats. How else could they have been sunk?"

But Nipper was fated to alter his views in a very short space of time. Little did he dream of the stirring adventures that lay before him, and the startling knowledge that he was to glean before another day had passed.

Still racking his brains in an attempt to scent out the trail that Nelson Lee had hit upon he jumped on to a 'bus and allowed himself to be carried up as far as the Bank, amusing himself on the way by chipping the conductor and reducing that worthy to a state of impotent fury which had reached its height just as the lad slipped off at his destination, and with a derisive wave of his hand, plunged through the traffic across to Roydd's Exchange.

Robin's Court was one of those narrow, gloomy thoroughfares so familiar to the City, with austere-looking blocks of offices rearing themselves up on either side. Scarcely a gleam of sunshine ever penetrated there.

It was just after three o'clock when Nipper reached there and wandered along to No. 36a, where a fog-begrimed brass plate informed the passer-by at large that all business of the Orvis Line of steamships—managing director, Samuel Mellors—was transacted within.

Nipper was an old hand at the game of shadowing without attracting undue suspicion or attention. He bought a couple of apples from an old fruit-seller at the end of the court, and lounged negligently against the building opposite 36a, apparently dividing his attentions between the com-

modities that he had just purchased, and a copy of the "Boys' Realm" which he drew from his pocket.

He had not been there ten minutes when a taxi-cab drew up outside the offices of the Orvis Line, and an unwieldy figure of a man squeezed himself out through the door, tossed the driver a coin and waddled up the steps.

There was no mistaking Samuel Mellors. Every item of Nelson Lee's description was correct—the red face, the black, walrus-like moustache, the old-fashioned top-hat, and the ponderous gold watch-chain that spanned his immense expanse of waistcoat.

"So the old beggar was out," muttered Nipper under his breath. "Well, he can't leave the office again without my spotting him. I can't say that I like the look of him. He's got swindler and rogue written all over his face."

The taxi drove off again and the lad resigned himself to a further wait. He was prepared to wait all night and all the next day should it be necessary. Four o'clock struck and then the half hour. Both Nipper's apples had long since been consumed and his "Boys' Realm" had been perused from cover to cover.

Five o'clock, and even as a distant clock chimed forth, the door opposite swung back on its hinges and the corpulent form of Samuel Mellors waddled out into the street. There was a smile of unctuous satisfaction on his face as he drew on his gloves and spoke to another man who had followed him out—a lean, spare individual in a black frock coat, who was obviously one of his directors.

Every word they spoke came distinctly across the narrow court to where Nipper lounged.

"Well, that's all settled then, Scarfe," wheezed Samuel Mellors in a fat voice. "The tide turns at three-thirty-five. Instruct Captain Martin that he must lift anchor at the earliest possible moment. Never mind about the rest of that cargo if it isn't aboard by then."

"Very well, Mr. Mellors," replied the other obsequiously. "I can promise you that the Mary Hope shall sail with the tide. Would you like a taxi?"

"No, I'll walk to the station," granted the managing director of the Orvis Line. "It's only round the corner and I've got a few moments to spare."

And with a curt nod he set his stumpy legs to work to propel him down the court.

Nipper waited until he had reached the corner and swung around to the left, when, for the sake of appearances he gave a yawn, crumpled up his paper and stuffed it into his pocket and then strode briskly after his quarry.

It was an easy matter to keep Samuel Mellors in sight. There was no mistaking that broad, squat figure of his, or the peculiar-shaped top-hat that he wore.

Hands in pockets, Nipper followed some twenty yards in the rear as Mellors trotted along up Lombard Street. Twice he stopped to speak to acquaintances of his, and on each occasion Nipper glued his face to a shop-window and took an inordinate interest in the contents.

Near the juncture of Lombard and Gracechurch Street, Mellors turned into one of those old-fashioned hostels for which the City is so noted, and strolling past Nipper caught a glimpse of him propped up against the counter noisily conveying a dressed crab to his mouth with one hand, clutching a sparkling glass of champagne with the other, and leering in what was meant to be an alluring manner at the girl on the other side of the counter.

"Greedy old hog, he certainly does himself well," muttered Nipper under his breath. "Hope he doesn't keep me waiting about here long."

Nipper's hopes were realised. Samuel Mellors glanced at his watch, hurriedly bolted the remains of his crab, leered again in farewell to the barmaid and came waddling forth again.

For a man of his size he certainly covered the ground at a good pace, and Nipper had all his work cut out to keep up with him as his quarry headed dead away up Fenchurch Street and turned into the main line station.

"Strikes me this is another wild goose chase," grumbled the lad to himself. "What on earth did the gov'nor want to send me to follow this old beggar for? Strikes me he's going straight home to his place in Essex, wherever that may be. I don't see that this is going to get us any further towards solving the mystery as to how those boats were sunk."

Nipper was somewhat irritated. Shadowing Samuel Mellors promised to be somewhat slow and unproductive work, and he even began to wonder to himself whether Nelson Lee had deliberately sent him out on a wild goose chase in order to get him out of the way.

But, no, that was not like Nelson Lee at all. It could be depended upon that if the famous detective wanted Samuel Mellors shadowed, then there was some very good reason for it.

The managing-director indulged in another drink at the station-buffet, wandered across and purchased a couple of papers at the bookstall, and then made his way over to the ticket-office.

Nipper was on his heels at once, his ears on the alert.

"First return Crafthaven."

Crafthaven. Nipper had heard of the place, though he had never been there. It was a tiny village stuck down in the midst of the Essex marshes almost on the bank of the Thames.

"Quiet as a church and as dull as ditch-water," groaned the lad under his breath, as, waiting till Mellors had got out of earshot, he booked a third return to the same place. "My hat, I am going to have a lively time—I don't think."

A glance at the indication board showed him that the Crafthaven train was even then due to start. He passed through the barrier a few yards behind Mellors and watched that worthy carefully select and enter an empty first-class smoker.

Nipper took his seat in the carriage behind, and a moment later the train was roaring away through the outskirts of London, seemingly soaring over the very house tops of the miles and miles of squalid streets that stretched away on either side of the line.

Nipper put his feet up on the opposite seat and gazed moodily out of the window. He felt disappointed and a little bit annoyed that Nelson Lee had not taken him more fully into his confidence and given him at least some reason for chasing Samuel Mellors down into the country.

"I wonder what his game is," he muttered to himself. "He thinks he's on the right track, there's no doubt about that, and the gov'nor seldom makes a mistake. And yet I'm hanged if I can bring myself to believe that Mellors had anything to do with the sinking of those boats. It was the Germans did that right enough."

Mile after mile flew beneath the wheels of the speeding train, and just over half an hour later it drew up with a grinding and squealing of brakes. Nipper popped his head out of the window and caught sight of the name Crafthaven on the board.

The porpoise-like form of Samuel Mellors came hurrying down the plat-

form past him, and Nipper was on his heels like a flash, following him out through the station exit.

There was a motor-car waiting outside, and to his dismay his quarry clambered into it and was driven off.

"Well, that's done it," grunted Nipper disgustedly under his breath. "How the dickens can I keep in touch with the beggar now, and I wonder how far out he lives. Might be miles and miles for all I know."

But he was in luck's way. Even as he stood wondering what action to take—whether to inquire his way to Samuel Mellors' house or not—the station-master emerged from his office and hailed one of the porters.

"Hi, Wilkins, you might run up to Mr. Mellor's place with this parcel. I forgot all about it or I'd have given it to him just now. It won't take you ten minutes."

Nipper's movements were clear enough now. He waited till the porter had shambled away some distance up the road and then followed on behind.

CHAPTER XI.

Nipper Keeps a Close Watch Upon Samuel Mellors.

THE village was left behind, and it soon became pretty obvious where Samuel Mellor resided. Flat open country stretched away in front, and there was only one house in sight, a big grey-stone structure, that stood in its own grounds.

The porter turned through the gates with his parcel. Assurance was made doubly sure by the name painted on the posts—Orvis House.

Nipper peered tentatively up the drive. Samuel Mellors himself was standing on the broad steps and his car was just rolling away to the garage.

Nipper crossed the road, sat himself in the hedgerow and scratched his chin puzzledly.

"Well, now what's the next thing to be done, I wonder," he muttered to himself. "I wonder what the gov'nor expects me to do, or what he expects me to find down here."

The detective's words recurred to him. "Keep your ears and eyes well open."

"All very well to say that," went on the lad. "Seems to me there's a fat lot to hear and see down here."

Still, Nelson Lee's commands would have to be obeyed. He would have to find something to see and hear, and he realised that it was his duty to keep as close a watch upon Samuel Mellors as he possibly could.

Already darkness was creeping down, and lights were beginning to spring up in the big house. For another quarter of an hour Nipper remained where he was, becoming more and more convinced that nothing could possibly come of his visit to Crafthaven.

The mournful hoot of a passing vessel came drifting up from the river a mile away, and save for that everything was as quiet as the grave.

At last Nipper rose to his feet, with a little shiver. The night air was chilly, and it was now quite dark.

Stealthily he crept across the road and through the open gates of Orvis House. The drive was fringed with trees and shrubbery on each side, and screened by this he made his way up towards the glimmering lights.

There were only two in the front of the house, and they were on the second floor, but there were others round on the east wing. One room was quite a blaze of light; and with a quick glance around to see that the

coast was clear Nipper darted across the intervening space and crouched down beneath the window from which the glare came.

The curtains were drawn, but there was a narrow gap between them, and scarcely daring to breathe Nipper slowly raised himself and peered through.

There was nothing at all startling in the scene that met his gaze.

A table was laid for dinner, a table that positively sparkled with silver-plate and cut glass. Samuel Mellors was entrenched in solitary state at one end, wedged into his chair like some fat hog, with a capacious serviette tucked under his several chins.

He was eating soup noisily, and, between each gulp, running through a bundle of letters that reposed beside his plate.

At his grunting command a wooden-faced butler got busy with supplementary dishes.

Nipper suddenly began to realise that he was hungry. His mouth positively watered at the sight of the rich food that was placed before Samuel Mellors.

"By gum, this is a nice sort of job, I don't think!" he groaned under his breath. "Cramped up here watching that fat hog tucking into his grub. And that's about all that I shall see, I suppose. About the only news that I shall be able to send the gov'nor will be that old Mellors made a good meal and went to bed. Most suspicious."

But Nipper was soon to retract his words and alter his views. After galloping noisily through each course, Samuel Mellors suddenly rose to his feet and pushed back his chair. He took a quick glance at his watch, and strode through into the next room, slamming the door behind him.

Nipper saw a light spring up in one of the windows to his left, and dropping down he crept along on hands and knees towards it.

Here the curtains were not drawn at all, and the window was open at the bottom. The room beyond was evidently Samuel Mellors private study. Bookcases lined the walls, and an enormous mahogany desk was a prominent object.

It seemed even to dwarf the corpulent figure of the shipping magnate as he sat before it. Even as Nipper watched he drew a telephone towards him, and barked some number which the lad did not catch.

Nipper drew closer to the window. Here, at any rate, was a chance to use his ears.

"Hallo—hallo!" wheezed Mellors, almost engulfing the transmitter in his big, loose-lipped mouth. "Is that you, Danvers? Ah, is everything all right? You got back safely, then? Yes—yes. I'm coming now. Yes; the Mary Hope sails with to-morrow's tide. I'll be with you in ten minutes."

He slammed the receiver back on its hook and pressed a button by his side. The butler entered from the other room.

"Bring me my big coat and a cap, Baines. I'm going out for a stroll before I turn in."

A little tinge of excitement ran through Nipper's veins. Things were waking up a bit. It was likely that he was to see and hear something after all. Where was Samuel Mellors going at that time of night, and who was the man whom he had addressed as Danvers.

And then there had been the reference to the Mary Hope, the Orvis boat which was to set sail from Janis Wharf the following morning.

"There might be nothing in it at all, and yet there might be a lot," muttered the lad under his breath. "Anyhow, I'm going to find out. It can't be very far away that Mellors is going, for he said he'd be along there in ten minutes. Probably going to see some harmless old dodderer down in the village."

He waited another minute, watching whilst Samuel Mellors slipped into

his great coat, and then darted back across the drive into the shrubbery, where he laid low.

The light in the study was extinguished, a door opened and slammed, and the unwieldy form of the shipping magnate strode past within a few yards of him and bore on down towards the gates.

Nipper was after him like a cat after a mouse, crouching low in the undergrowth and moving with the stealth of a panther. He was an old hand at the game of shadowing.

It was evident that Samuel Mellors was not going down to the village. Reaching the gates he swung round to the left, crossed the road, and took to a narrow lane that wound down in the direction of the river. It was obvious that he had not the slightest suspicion that he was being followed. A cigar was glowing between his lips, and the slight breeze brought the aroma wafting back to Nipper's nostrils.

For quite half a mile shadowed and shadower held on their way until Nipper could hear the murky waters of the Thames rippling and gurgling against the banks as it flowed down to the sea.

An enormous dark structure suddenly loomed up against the sky, and at the same instant the moon broke through the clouds and bathed the surrounding country in its silvery light.

Nipper gave a little gasp of amazement as he caught sight of the peculiar-looking building towards which Samuel Mellors was steering.

It stood in a field almost on the very bank of the river, and was surrounded by a high iron fencing with a spiked palisade on the top. It was at least two hundred feet in length, by fifty in breadth. There was not a single window in the whole structure—not even a skylight in the roof, and a creepy silence overhung the whole place.

"Looks like a workshop of some kind," muttered the lad under his breath. "What the dickens can it be for, and what's it doing stuck out here on the marshes."

He crouched down in the hedgerow as he saw Samuel Mellors stride across the field and halt before an iron wicket-gate set in the surrounding fence.

He either knocked or rang, for an instant later the gate swung open, engulfed the ponderous form of the shipping-magnate, and then swung to again.

Nipper was temporarily baffled, and all his curiosity was aroused. Where Samuel Mellors had gone he was anxious to follow, but the question was, how was he to gain admittance to the mysterious building without being seen.

To surmount that iron-spiked palisading was a practical impossibility.

Still there was no use his sitting there chewing his nails. He must either find or make a way of admittance. The moon suddenly retired behind the clouds again, and the lad was quick to take advantage of the temporary darkness.

Bending low, and taking advantage of every bit of cover, he darted swiftly across the open field and flung himself down in the gloom of the high, corrugated-iron fence. Not a sound came from within, and after a time he rose to his feet again and commenced a detour of the vast structure.

The back and one side he traversed, and then, as he came out in the front facing the river, he found more cause for amazement and bewilderment. For a deep channel, almost equal in breadth to that of the building, led straight up from the river and flowed beneath two enormous iron gates, through into the interior of the mysterious erection.

Nipper stopped short and stared puzzledly.

"Well, this is a regular knock-out!" he muttered under his breath. "What on earth is the place? Looks more like a gigantic boathouse than anything else. Perhaps it is a boathouse; but who on earth would keep a boat here. The best thing I can do is to get inside and find out."

But that was the question. How was he to get inside? As he had decided before, it was utterly impossible to attempt to surmount the formidable obstacle presented by the high, spiked fence.

But Nipper was never long at loss for a way of getting out of a difficulty. Even as he stood racking his brains an idea flashed upon him.

If he couldn't gain an entrance by land, why shouldn't he do so by water?

On hands and knees he shuffled quietly down to the edge of the broad, deep cutting that led up from the river and vanished beneath the iron gates. It was the gates that he wished to examine, and stretched out flat on his chest he plunged one hand beneath the water.

It was as he had surmised. The gates did not stretch down to the bottom of the cutting. They scarcely extended six inches beneath the surface.

But what lay on the other side? There was the chance that were he to dive under he might be trapped and drowned like a rat in a trap. But Nipper had no time for the consideration of risks. His one aim was to gain entry to this strange building to see what was within, and what business it was that took Samuel Mellors there.

Instinct seemed to tell him that he was on the verge of an important discovery.

Quick as lightning he suddenly stripped off his coat and removed his boots. These articles he concealed in a clump of shrubbery near by.

And then, without a sound or a splash Nipper crept down to the water's edge and slipped in like an eel. It was icy cold, but the lad was as hard as nails, and two short strokes brought him up against the gates.

A half a dozen great gulps filled his lungs almost to bursting point, and then down he went, the water gurgling and bubbling in his ears, to come up the next instant on the further side of the gates, with the cold air beating in his face.

Nipper need have had no fears. The river cutting stretched straight away in front of him and vanished beneath another pair of iron gates—the absolute replica of those behind—which were set in the vast building that loomed before him.

On all sides he was now surrounded by the high corrugated-iron walls. It was too dark for him to see clearly, but the open space that encircled the building seemed to be lumbered with machinery and wooden crates of all shapes and sizes.

Of Samuel Mellors there was no sign. The whole place was as silent as the grave, but through a chink in those other closed gates that now confronted him a ray of light was shining.

Now that he had come so far Nipper did not mean to turn back. With only his nose above water he swam silently onwards, drew close in to the edge of the bank-cutting and hung on for a brief moment.

This was to be a more risky dive than the previous one had been. For all he knew he might bob up right under the astonished nose of Samuel Mellors and whoever his companion "Danvers" might be.

"In for a penny in for a pound," grunted the lad philosophically to himself, and down he went like a seal and up on the other side.

CHAPTER XII.

The Submarine Shed.

A GLARE of light that almost blinded him was the next thing that Nipper knew, and more by luck than judgment he managed to hang on to the edge of the gate, shiekling his eyes with one dripping arm and expecting every second to hear a yell that would herald his discovery.

But the yell never came, though he could hear the distinct buzz of voices, and at last he raised his head again and gazed curiously around him. The amazing sight he saw almost caused him to release his hold on the gate and plump down beneath the surface again.

High above him towered the strutted iron roof of the vast building, with four or five arc-lamps spluttering and dazzling and casting their brilliant radiance down upon a certain object that floated placidly upon the surface of the water.

Nipper stared and stared again. At first it looked like nothing so much as a gigantic whale, and then the truth burst upon him like a thunderclap—it was a submarine, one of the biggest submarines that he had ever set eyes on. There was no mistaking the curved, grey sides with the water still dropping from them, and the conning-tower reared above with the hatchway flung back.

A submarine, here, stowed away on the Essex marshes, on the very bank of the Thames, within thirty miles of London! Nipper rubbed his eyes and stared again. What on earth could it mean! Surely the authorities must be aware of its presence.

"Well, this is the rummiest go I've ever struck!" muttered Nipper under his breath and still scarcely able to believe his own eyes. "And what's Mellors rousting about here for. What can he have to do with the submarine? I knew he built boats, but I never knew that he built submarines. Perhaps that's the meaning of it all, and——"

Nipper broke off short, his eyes almost bulging out of his head, his mouth wide open in amazement.

Painted in white letters on the grey side of the submarine was the number—F 14a!

Nipper's brain positively reeled. F 14a! Why, that was the number of the mysterious submarine which the papers had been full of that morning—the presumed German submarine sailing under false colours and bearing a false number.

Nipper's breath was positively taken away. He knew very well that it could not be the genuine British submarine, F 14a, for it had been openly stated by the Admiralty that the craft bearing that number was even then operating in the Dardanelles.

What could it mean? There was some bigger mystery here than his brains were capable of dealing with. Could Mellors possibly be in league with the Kaiser's minions? Could it be possible that this shed on the Essex coast was giving shelter to one of the enemy's submarines?

No, he couldn't bring himself to believe that. Surely the British Government were too watchful to allow of such a happening. There was only one thing to be done, and that was to get to the nearest post-office as soon as possible and send a telegram to Nelson Lee.

Nipper's mind was made up on the instant, and then, even as he prepared to dive back the way he had come, the sound of voices broke louder on his ears, and two figures emerged from a door within ten yards of him.

There was no mistaking the corpulent, unwieldy form of Samuel Mellors,

and his companion was a tall, thin man with a heavy, black beard, attired in oilskins and smoking a cigar.

Nipper's heart beat fast as, retaining his hold on the edge of the iron gate, he sank back in the water until only his face rested upon the surface.

He knew that the slightest sound would betray his presence, and he thanked his lucky stars that the dark shadow cast by the high side of the tank screened him effectually from view.

"You'll have to get out as soon as the tide comes up, Danvers," Samuel Mellors was saying, "and lie up in the usual position. And don't make the silly bloomer you made the other day with the Orlando. You might have ruined everything then, and, as it is, the papers and the public are beginning to get a bit suspicious."

"It wasn't altogether my fault," replied his companion, throwing the butt of his cigar away, which fell with a hiss into the water within an inch of Nipper's upturned face. "The Orlando was pretty much of the same cut as your boats. You must admit yourself that they take a bit of distinguishing. However, it won't occur again. Perhaps it would have been better if we had completed the job and sent the Orlando to the bottom. How much longer are you going to keep this game up? Strikes me you won't have many boats left if you keep on as we're going."

Samuel Mellors leered knowingly.

"We can easily build some more—at the same price," he said, with an unctuous chuckle; "or buy some old hulks up from some other firm."

"It is getting a bit of a risky game now," went on the other. "The men are beginning to grumble, Mellors. They want higher pay. We never know when we're likely to be sent to the bottom now that it has been discovered that the real F14a is at the Dardanelles."

"Change the number," snapped Samuel Mellors laconically. "Alter it to the F4a, which I happen to know is lying in Dover Harbour at the present moment. If the men want a little higher pay—well, they can have it. We can afford to give it them."

The two men moved further away up towards the other end of the building, and Nipper drew a great breath of relief. Every word that the two men had uttered seemed to have seared itself into his brain in a confused jumble of wild oppositions.

He couldn't make head or tail of it—the submarine there in a shed on the edge of the Essex marshes, and bearing that mystic number, F14a! The strange conversation that had taken place between Samuel Mellors and his companion, Danvers!

Nipper had to confess himself baffled. There was only one thing to be done, as he had decided before, and that was to wire for Nelson Lee.

Without a sound he dived down into the water, and came safely up on the other side of the gates. A few strokes brought him to the next barrier, and a few minutes later he scrambled out on to the bank beyond and crept across to where he had left his clothes.

The night wind was blowing up cold, and Nipper was shivering in every limb, as, dripping wet as he was, he tumbled into his garments.

Then, exercising the same stealthy caution, he crept back along the wall and darted across the field to the lane.

A quarter of an hour later, just as the combined village grocer and postmaster-general was in the act of putting up his shutters for the night, he was amazed to see a dripping form dart past him into the shop, grab a telegraph-form, and scribble feverishly on it.

"Ullo! Wot's hup? Been 'aving a swim with all yer clothes on?"

"No, it's merely perspiration," snapped Nipper irritably, slamming the

telegraph-form down on the counter. "You might get that off at once, please."

He had addressed the wire to himself, as Nelson Lee had advised him to do, and now all he had to do was to sit and await the arrival of the famous detective.

Everything was closed by this time except the railway-station. Nipper made his way there, and was lucky enough to fall in with a sympathetic porter, to whom he pitched a yarn telling that he had accidentally fallen into one of the ditches that bordered the roadside. The result was that he was given a seat in the porters' room, where there was a bright fire burning that speedily dried his wet garments.

It was then just ten o'clock.

"I reckon the wire ought to get there in about half an hour," mused the lad to himself. "Even if the guv'nor comes at once he won't arrive much before half-past eleven."

It was warm and comforting in the little waiting-room, and Nipper's head soon began to nod.

The next thing he knew was when he suddenly awoke with the hiss of steam and the rumble and roar of wheels in his ears. The clock on the wall pointed to five and twenty minutes to twelve.

Nipper dashed out, just in time to meet the few belated wayfarers who had alighted from the train. His heart sank as he scanned each one. It seemed that Nelson Lee had not come.

There were only five passengers in all—a couple of old women laden with parcels, a portly farmer and his wife, and a black-bearded mechanic with no collar and a rusty bowler hat.

"Well, I'm hanged! He must have missed the train," groaned Nipper under his breath; "and there's not another until midnight. Of all the rotten luck! If only I——"

"Got a match on you, guv'nor?"

It was the black-bearded mechanic who had spoken, as he shuffled up with a foul-looking pipe between his teeth.

"No, I'm sorry; I'm afraid mine have got wet," replied Nipper, fumbling in his pocket and withdrawing a sodden box of vestas.

"Confounded young idiot! I always told you to carry your matches in a water-tight box. Don't stare at me like that, hang you!"

Nipper started violently, and his mouth gaped open in amazement. It was the voice of Nelson Lee, and in a flash he realised that the mechanic before him was the famous detective in one of his many effective disguises.

"Guv'nor——"

"Shut up, you young ass! You don't know who might hear you. Give me a hundred yards start and then follow me."

Nelson Lee turned tail as he spoke and went shuffling away up the road away from the village. Nipper stood for a few moments rubbing his chin perplexedly, and then set out in pursuit.

A quarter of a mile beyond the village he came upon the detective seated comfortably in a hedgerow coolly smoking his pipe.

"I came as soon as I got your wire," he said laconically. "Well, what's happened?"

Nipper plumped down beside him, almost too excited for words.

"Guv'nor," he gasped, "it's a regular knock-out. What do you think I've discovered?"

"A submarine," replied the detective equably, tapping the ashes from his pipe.

Nipper gaped in blank amazement, his eyes almost starting out of his head.

"Submarine," he spluttered. "How—how the dickens did you know that?"

"I guessed it! But never mind, let's hear all about it."

Nipper dived into his story with alacrity, and in brief, terse sentences related exactly what happened since he had left Gray's Inn Road until up to the present.

"What in the name of sense does it mean, guv'nor?" he finished up. "What's that submarine doing there? What's it got to do with Samuel Mellors? Is it a German submarine or a British one—or what? It's numbered F 14a."

"You're getting dense, my boy," said Nelson Lee, with a quiet smile. "The whole facts of the matter are as follows. That submarine belongs to Samuel Mellors. He had it specially built for him, and that is the vessel which has sunk all the boats of the Orvis Line—deliberately sunk them for the insurance money. It's a clever scheme, and worthy of such a rogue as Mellors. He knew very well that the Germans would be blamed for the sinking of the boats. For safety's sake he had a British number painted upon it—the F 14a. That's where he made his first mistake, in not ascertaining that the F 14a was in British waters."

"The number is being altered to F 4a," cut in Nipper quickly, his mind harking back to the conversation that he had overheard between Samuel Mellors and his companion, Danvers.

"That is only to be expected. You see the whole scheme now?"

Nipper nodded dazedly. The devilish cunning of the whole thing almost took his breath away.

"But that big shed, right smack there on the bank of the river, with the submarine inside," he gasped. "Surely the authorities know something about it? Surely they——"

"Certainly! They know everything about it except the truth," smiled Nelson Lee. "That shed is supposed to belong to a certain professor who is engaged upon the construction of a new type of submarine. It was started long before the war. That part is quite sound. Mellor lives quite close. He must have known about the submarine, and then when the war broke out his cunning scheme occurred to him, and he must have bought this Professor Danvers up. They are now working together."

"Well, I'm blowed!" That was all Nipper could say for a good five minutes, as he sat there thinking over all the detective had told him. Of course, it was all as clear as daylight now.

"Then the next boat to be sunk is the Mary Hope," he cut in suddenly—"the one which sails with this morning's tide from Jarvis Wharf. I understand what Mellors meant when he told this chap Danvers to get out as soon as possible and hang about the usual position off the Nore."

"Yes, the next one marked down is the Mary Hope," admitted Nelson Lee. "But we've got to prevent that if we possibly can. I'm afraid Mr. Samuel Mellors has come to the end of his tether."

For another half-hour or so the detective sat quiet, puffing at his pipe, and then just as the first grey tinge of dawn was showing in the East he rose suddenly to his feet.

"I shall return to the village to fix things up, and also to send a wire to Scotland Yard and to the Admiralty," he said. "You get back to that shed, Nipper, and keep your eyes well open. I'll join you there almost at once."

"But what course are you going to take? What do you intend doing?"

"There's only one thing to do, and that is to strike while the iron is hot. We must catch the rogues red-handed. The submarine must be prevented from leaving the shed."

A few brief words were exchanged between the two, and then Nelson Lee swung round and walked rapidly away in the direction of the village, while Nipper retraced his steps towards the big submarine shed.

"Well I'm blowed; so John Ventall was right after all!" he muttered under his breath. "Trust the guv'nor to get to the bottom of a thing once he starts. Why, Mellors might have gone on sinking his own ships for months and months but for him. Phew! What a nerve the chap must have."

Whether Samuel Mellors was still in the big shed Nipper did not know. He gained the shelter of the high palisade in safety, and wriggling along on his chest commenced a stealthy patrol of the place. Meanwhile, he waited for the arrival of Nelson Lee and the police.

Almost before he realised it, he was right on top of the steel wicket-gate through which the shipping magnate had entered, and as he glanced at it a thrill of excitement ran through him.

The gate was not locked—it was ajar on its hinges!

For several minutes Nipper remained crouching where he was, scarcely daring to breathe. It was evident to him that the gate had accidentally been left undone. Not a sound came from within. Everything was as silent as the grave.

Nipper's curiosity got the better of him. Quiet as a mouse he rose to his feet, and, sidling forward, peered through the narrow aperture. There was not a soul in sight. The yard beyond was utterly deserted.

"In for a penny in for a pound," muttered the lad under his breath. "The guv'nor 'll be along in a few minutes with the police. I might as well wait inside as out."

And without hesitation he passed through the gate, pulled it to behind him, and stole stealthily across the yard to the big building. His luck was certainly in. The door at the back was unlocked.

Within the vast shed there was no sign of life. The arc-lamps above were still sizzling and spluttering, and the long grey form of the submarine still lay floating motionless on the surface of the water.

Nipper's curiosity got the better of his customary caution and discretion. On tiptoe he crept forward to where a gang-plank stretched out from the tank-side to the sloping deck of the submersible. The conning-tower cap was flung back on its hinges. Nipper's eyes were well on the alert, and one of the first things that he noticed was that the number had already been altered from F14a to F4a. The paint had hardly had time to dry.

"If'm! I guess you've made your last voyage, my beauty," muttered the lad to himself. "I wonder where the dickens everyone has got to. The place seems absolutely deserted; and it's almost about time that the guv'nor arrived."

The longer Nipper stood staring at the graceful form of the submarine the more he desired to examine it at close quarters. With a suddenness that was typical of him, he crept out across the gang-plank and up the narrow steel ladder that was fixed to the side of the conning-tower.

Nipper was soon fated to repent his rashness. Scarcely had he set foot on the top rung and leaned over to peer down into the interior of the submarine when a door was suddenly flung open down at the other end of the big shed and there came the tramp of footsteps and the sound of voices.

Nipper's heart almost stopped beating, and he threw a wild glance of dismay around him. He was caught like a rat in a trap. There was not a single place where he could conceal himself, and in another minute he would be in full view of the new-comers. He could distinctly recognise

the wheezy voice of Samuel Mellors and the sharper tones of his companion Danvers.

"By gum, this has done it!" groaned the lad under his breath. "This has put the lid on it with a vengeance. What the dickens shall I do?"

For an instant he had a wild inclination to dive down into the tank and escape by the way he had entered on the first occasion, and then he took the only course that seemed open.

The open hatchway of the conning-tower yawned before him, and quick as lightning Nipper scrambled over the edge and slid down the steel ladder into the bowels of the submarine.

An electric light was burning dimly below, and Nipper stood gazing around in bewilderment, seemingly completely surrounded by masses of intricate and complicated machinery, valves, piston-rods, wheels and levers, and electric motors that supplied the power for driving the vessel when submerged.

Forward and aft were the torpedo-tubes, with torpedoes slung ready in their racks: but there was not a sign of life anywhere.

"Well, this is a nice mess," grunted Nipper to himself. "I hope to the dickens nobody comes down here."

But the lad's hopes were vain ones. Even as he stood staring blankly around there came the scrape of footsteps upon the steel deck above and a dark form cut off the light that streamed down the open conning-tower.

With fastly-beating heart Nipper scuttled away down the narrow passageway between the motors. A steel door, standing ajar on his right, caught his eye, and he dived through it, like a rat into his hole, to find himself in a tiny compartment fitted up with a narrow bunk and a folding table.

There was only one place of shelter and Nipper sought it. Dropping down on hands and knees he crept into the narrow space between the bunk and the floor, and lay there in the darkness wondering what on earth was going to happen next.

Where was Nelson Lee? Surely it was about time he and the police put in an appearance.

The hull of the submarine suddenly vibrated to the tramp of many feet. Somebody was issuing orders in a sharp voice, and a motor began to clug and buzz.

"Hallo! What in the name of sense is up now?" Nipper wondered to himself, and then the truth burst upon him with stunning force. He drew out his watch, and its luminous dial told him that it was just twenty minutes past three.

The tide was flowing in, was almost full, and the submarine was about to set forth for the open sea. And here was he cooped up like a rat in a trap without the slightest chance of escape.

Yes, there was one chance, and that seemed to be a mighty slim one. If only Nelson Lee and the police would arrive on the scene. What had become of them—what had delayed them?

Never had Nipper been in such a tight corner as this. In vain he racked his brains as he lay there with fast beating heart. He was not at all keen upon accompanying the bogus submarine upon its nefarious expedition to sink the *Mary Hope*. And yet he had no choice in the matter.

The motor was now buzzing strongly and smoothly. He heard the conning-tower close with a dull thud, heard the sharp tones of the man Danvers, and then became aware that the submarine was moving forwards.

Nipper gave a muttered groan of dismay. It was all up, so far as he was concerned. Nelson Lee had delayed too long. He and the police would arrive only to find that the bird had flown.

What would they do? he wondered. What could they do, save seize the shed, and wait until that time when the submarine would return?

"Well, I've put my foot into it properly this time," thought the lad to himself. "I wish to goodness I'd never come inside, but had waited outside. We shall probably be spotted by some British torpedo-boat, and all blown to smithereens. And——"

Nipper broke off short, and crushed himself back as far as he could in the narrow space. The door of the tiny cabin had suddenly been flung open, and someone entered.

"Take her down carefully, Markis," said the voice of the man Danvers. "They're getting cursed watchful at the mouth of the Thames nowadays, and we don't want to be spotted. I'm going to turn in and have forty winks. I've been up all night. Call me as soon as you've got your bearings off the Nore."

A gruff voice made some inaudible reply, and then to Nipper's increased dismay a heavy body flopped down on the bunk above him. A sudden heaviness of the air conveyed the fact that the vessel had submerged, and was even then winding her way down the Thames towards the open sea.

Nipper's thoughts were none too pleasant ones as he lay there, cramped in every limb, and scarcely able to breathe owing to the change of temperature. And yet what else could he do, save to remain where he was, and trust to luck that he would not be discovered?

Danvers was asleep and snoring, and Nipper found that the regular chug-chugging of the motors was particularly conducive to drowsiness. Almost before he could realise it his eyes had closed, and he fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

Nipper Saves the Situation.

HOW long afterwards it was when he suddenly awoke with a violent start Nipper did not know, nor for the moment could he realise where he was. He sat up with a jerk, and banged his head against something hard with a force that half-stunned him, and sent him floundering back again.

It was only then that he recollected that he was on board Samuel Mellors' submarine, and that there seemed to be something exciting going on.

The door of the tiny cabin was ajar, and he could hear the voice of Danvers issuing orders, and the patter of feet as the men who composed his crew hastened to follow out his instructions.

"Yes, it's the Mary Hope right enough," he heard Danvers say. "I can tell by her cut, and the red-and-orange striped funnel. Submerge, Markis, and steer three points to the south!"

A thrill of excitement shot through Nipper. He must have been asleep for three or four hours, and now the Mary Hope, the Orvis boat for which the submarine had been waiting, had been sighted. In another few minutes her fate would be sealed, and she would be sent to the bottom by a torpedo, as many of her sister ships had been treated.

"By jingo, I'd give ten years of my life to be able to be out there and see it all!" gasped Nipper to himself. "But I should probably lose the whole lot if I as much as showed my nose. That chap Danvers seems to be a pretty desperate sort of fellow, the cool way he's taking it all."

Steady as a rock the submarine held on her way, and then she turned

her nose up again, and Danvers spoke once more as he bent his eyes on the periscope screen.

"Four hundred yards away, and she's doing about twelve knots!" he cried. "Get ready, No. 1 port torpedo!"

Nipper strained his ears, and his heart commenced to beat like a sledge-hammer. He heard the purr of well-oiled hinges and levers as the deadly Whitehead torpedo was placed in the tube. Then came a slight click and the hiss of the compressed air.

The torpedo had been dispatched upon its way.

There was a long silence—a silence that could almost be felt. Then there came a dull thud, just as though the submarine had been struck a heavy blow from without.

"Got her!" cried Danvers exultantly. "You hit her right in the bows, Markis. You might as well go to the surface. There's not another vessel in sight anywhere, and we want to make certain that the Mary Hopo goes to the bottom."

The motors chugged again as the ballast tanks were emptied, and the submarine floated up to the surface. Nipper heard the cap of the conning-tower unscrewed and flung back, and felt the immediate difference in the atmosphere as the pure salt air came gushing in.

"Yes, she's going down all right!" he heard Danvers say. "They're taking to the boats now. I reckon she'll sink in about three-quarters of an hour. That'll give them plenty of time to get off. And the papers will have something more to talk about to-morrow with the sinking of another Orvis boat," he finished up, with a chuckle.

"Yes, I guess you'll smile on the other side of your face to-morrow," muttered Nipper to himself. "Wait till you get back to——"

The lad broke off short, as a sharp cry of alarm and warning rang out from above.

"Look out there, men! Come in at once, unless you want to be blown to bits! There's a torpedo-boat coming up, hand over fist."

Nipper's heart gave a great leap, and for the first time a twinge of fear ran through him. He had no desire to be drowned like a rat in a trap, were the submarine to be hit and sunk by a shell from the approaching torpedo-boat.

Danvers was still yelping alarmedly, and it was evident that a panic had broken out amongst the men as they fought to get back into the submarine, and screw the hatchway down.

It was more than Nipper could stand. Like a rabbit out of its hole, he came scrambling out from beneath the bunk just as the sharp bark of a gun rang out. A heavy iron crowbar stood in one corner of the tiny cabin, and with the idea of using it in self-preservation should the occasion arise, he snatched it up and darted forth.

And even as he did so a sudden idea flashed into his mind. Right before him were the electric motors of the submarine, purring sweetly away. Quick as lightning he swung the heavy crowbar up in the air and flung it full into the midst of the complicated and delicate machinery.

There was a jarring, rending crash, that set the submarine quivering from stem to stern, a flash of sparks, and the motors stopped dead, shattered beyond repair.

"By heavens, what's happened. The engines have broken down—we can't submerge. We're done," screamed Danvers, running down from the direction of the still open conning-tower, and then his face blanched, and his eyes almost bulged out of his head, as he caught sight of Nipper standing defiantly in the centre of the passage-way. "Who in the name of goodness are you? How did you get here, you cub?"

Then his eyes fell on the silent, shattered motors, and he realised the truth. Almost foaming at the mouth with fury, he whipped a revolver from his pocket.

"You brat, I'll settle your hash for that!" he snarled, "I know you now—you're Nipper, that hound, Nelson Lee's boy. I'll soon send you to join him."

But it was not the first time Nipper had faced the muzzle of a revolver. Like a flash of lightning he ducked and flung himself forward. He felt the bullet whistle over his head, almost singeing his hair, and then he collared Danvers below the knees, and with a mighty effort flung the scoundrel over his shoulder.

The man fell with a crash on the steel-plated floor, rolled over and lay still.

Like a cat on a mouse, Nipper pounced on the revolver that had fallen from his hand, and made a dash for the conning-tower. Three terrified looking fellows, who evidently composed the crew of the submarine, fell back in dismay as the weapon threatened them, and before they could recover from their amazement, Nipper had clambered up the steel ladder and scrambled out on to the deck of the submersible.

It was a wonderful sight that met his gaze. Four hundred yards away on the port bow was the sinking *Mary Hope*, her stern high in the air, her prow deep in the sea, whilst a string of boats containing her crew were rowing hurriedly away from her.

And to the east, scarce a quarter of a mile distant, a torpedo-boat came surging along, great clouds of black smoke pouring from her funnels, feathers of foam hissing up over her sharp bows.

Nipper gave a wild yell of delight, and waved a handkerchief frantically in the air.

A few minutes later the destroyer had swung to, and one of her boats came pulling across to where the submarine floated helplessly in the trough of the sea. Seated beside the lieutenant in the bows was a lean-faced man, collarless, and wearing a dingy bowler hat.

"There's Nipper, lieutenant," said Nelson Lee, pointing with the stem of his pipe to where a lad sat perched on the top of the conning-tower, holding at bay with the point of a revolver three sullen-faced men who crouched at the foot of the steel ladder, "He seems to have captured the whole blessed vessel single-handed."

"He certainly does," muttered the naval lieutenant.

"Hallo, guv'nor," called Nipper cheerfully, as the boat came alongside, "I thought I recognised that hat of yours. I've got the whole lot of them cooped up downstairs—all except Mellors."

"The police have got Mellors all right, or rather what was once Mellors," said Nelson Lee gravely. "When he realised that the game was up, he shot himself before we could get the revolver away from him."

"Yes, I came back with the police just a few minutes too late," explained Nelson Lee an hour afterwards, as he and Nipper stood upon the deck of H.M. t.b.d. *Coral* speeding back towards the British coast. "The submarine had apparently only just gone, for we met Mellors leaving the shed, and the basin was empty. There was no sign of you, and as Mellors denied all knowledge of you, I sort of presumed that you had surreptitiously taken up your quarters on board the submarine. There was only one thing to do. I got hold of this torpedo-boat—she was lying off Gravesend, and set out in chase of the *Mary Hope*—trusting to luck as to what would happen."

"You saved the whole situation, Nipper, by smashing up those motors."

"Hang the situation! I was thinking of myself," grinned Nipper. "You can bet your boots I didn't want to stop in that submarine any longer than I could help. By the way—who is Danvers?"

"Danvers, as I thought, is the original inventor and proprietor of the submarine. It had been examined by the Admiralty, and they were quite aware of its presence there, but they were not to know of the use to which it was being put. Danvers succumbed to Mellors' bribes, and put the craft at his disposal."

Nelson Lee put another match to his pipe.

"Well, thank Heaven it's all over," he grunted. "Now I can go back and finish the holiday I never started—and it also might be worth while to acquaint the public at large that I am still alive and kicking."

And so ended the case of the great submarine mystery—one of the toughest problems that Nelson Lee and his young assistant had ever tackled.

Danvers and his companions received their just deserts in the shape of long terms of imprisonment. Mellors had already gone to answer for his sins before a higher Judge.

THE END.

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Melby, one of the other boys, takes a violent dislike to Dick Clare, and is especially jealous because the Headmaster takes special notice of the new boy.

The Gentle Gowl.

"**N**OW the fat is in the fire, Gowl," said Dick. "Won't there be a jolly flare-up? It seems to me, though, that Melby will have to bear the brunt of it, because it is jolly evident that you couldn't have known he was going to plant a pail on the stairs, otherwise you would not have romped over it in that ridiculous fashion. Oh, good-night, you beauty, and happy be thy dreams. I say, Tom, Foster can't be fooled. You notice he dropped on Melby at once?"

"Yes, because he's in our study, and because he's such a wretched sneak. Foster may be severe, but he's a splendid fellow. He won't make a chap convict himself, but he can see through Gowl like a piece of glass."

At eight o'clock the following morning the dreaded interview occurred, and it nearly made Dick laugh. Mr. Foster pitched on Melby as being far the easiest witness to handle.

"I have sent for you, Melby," he said, "to inquire whether you were implicated in the disgraceful incident that occurred last night?"

"Not for one moment, sir!" declared the veracious Melby, who had received an intimation from Gowl that he would be severely thrashed if he got him into trouble. "I wouldn't think of implicating myself in a thing like that. You will notice, sir, that all my rows arise over lessons, and that's because masters always ask me the difficult questions. It's just the same with my father. He looks up some rotten subject in the encyclopædia and then questions me, and because I don't know he calls me an idiot."

"We are not dealing with that matter. Did you give Gowl any information concerning these two boys breaking bounds?"

"Certainly not, sir! I wouldn't think of sneaking. My mother often says——"

"I don't wish to hear what your parents say. Do you know which boy placed a pail on the stairs?"

"Only by surmise, sir. I couldn't sneak of him. Of course, Vance often reports us, but I don't bear him enmity. It wouldn't be the first time he placed a pail on the stairs."

"You are trying to make me believe the porter left the pail there?"

"I prefer not to sneak, sir."

"Have you anything to say, Gowl?"

"Only that I hope the culprit will be caught, and flogged. I nearly broke my neck. I am bruised all over. My head is aching terribly, and my arm is sprained, while my shins are barked."

"Unlike Melby, who speaks of his parents," murmured Dick, "Gowl only speaks and thinks of himself."

"Very well," exclaimed Mr. Foster, "if you refuse to give me any information, I can only form my own conclusions. You have told me that you received information that Clare and Hart intended breaking bounds last night, Gowl. I believe that Melby gave you that information, and also that he acted with your connivance."

"Do you imagine that had I known the pail was on the stairs I would have fallen over it?" snarled Gowl.

"You knew some trick was to be played."

"I did not!"

"I can form no other conclusion than that you knew a trap was to be set to catch Hart and Clare, and the boy who set the trap was the one who gave you that information. It was your duty to have reported the matter to me, or, at least, to have warned the boys."

"You are accusing me without evidence!" cried Gowl.

"I believe you to be the instigator. I fail to see that it would be possible for me to form any other opinion, after your admission. However, if I am wrong you can easily prove it. You have only to speak the truth."

"I do not wish to reveal what I promised to keep secret."

"Why?"

"Because it would get the boy into trouble, and because I will not break my—Because it would be mean," added Gowl, as Mr. Foster's stern gaze was fixed upon him.

"Those two reasons can easily be overcome. I shall not punish the boy who placed the pail on the stairs, and I shall also pardon all the parties implicated. That boy can now give you permission to speak."

"Oh, I say, Gowl," cried Melby, "that's jolly decent, and you have my free permission to tell him you and I worked out the little jape together!"

"You can go," said Mr. Foster, and as they left the room he wondered whether the Head's idea that companionship with Dick and Tom would ever make Melby anything like truthful. It appeared quite hopeless.

"I say, you chaps," exclaimed the unblushing Melby, following the chums into No. 7, "seeing that I got you out of that awful row you ought to stick by me. Gowl will be worse than any Hun!"

"Serve you right if he flogs you, you horrid sneak!" said Tom.

"Oh, I say, that's beastly unfair! And I only told to screen you. Now Dick can easily stop Gowl's bullying. All you have got to do is to let me know his secret. Or, if you are too mean to tell me, you can hold it over his head. Tell him straight that if he doesn't behave himself, you will——"

"Oh, dry up, you silly kid!" exclaimed Dick. "Look here, you spoilt our little feast last night with your rotten sneaking, but if you like to scoot into the village I'll stand a slap-up tea, and you shall share, although you don't deserve it."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Melby. "I'll manage it for you. I shall be able to get all we require for ten shillings."

"You will get it with five—also I shall. I'll give you the money this afternoon."

Melby dodged Gowl for the whole of the day. He received several commands to go to the bully's study, but took no heed of them, and that evening he brought in a grand spread.

"It's a jolly cheap lot, Dick!" he exclaimed. "There's a cake, sardines, jam, and all sorts of things, and they only cost seven-and-sixpence. If you give me half-a-crown we shall be square. I had to stick up half-a-crown at the tuck shop, because I couldn't possibly get what we required for five shillings."

"All right!" exclaimed Dick. "Next time I pass the shop I'll pay it."

"I say, that's a rotten system—makes me look so small, you know. I can pay it all right."

"If you prefer paying it out of your own pocket, you can; but let's have tea. The water is boiling. Fetch out the condensed milk and sugar."

They soon had the table spread; but just as they were commencing Gowl strode into the study. He carried a stick, and as he locked the door the chums at once divined his intentions.

"You little viper!" he cried, striking at Melby's head, but he ducked in time, and Dick, who was sitting beside him, received the blow.

"Never could stand that sort of thing!" observed Dick, springing to his feet, and hurling the butter full in the bully's face. "All right, old chap, you can slog away, but you can bet I'll retaliate."

"I'm with you!" cried Tom, rushing in, and then things became mixed and lively. Gowl was strong, and big, but he found his hands pretty full, for the chums fought as though they meant it.

Gowl lost his stick, then he seized the teapot and was about to empty its contents on Dick's head when Tom caught it a blow with the flat of his hand which knocked it into the bully's face, over which tea-leaves were scattered, while he got rather more tea than he relished.

"Oh, I say, Gowl," cried Melby, "you are spoiling our grub!"

Gowl made no reply, but wrenching the cloth off the table he sent everything to the floor, then stamped on it, and after that he stormed out of the room.

"I think we hurt him a bit!" panted Dick.

"But he's ruined your carpet!" exclaimed Tom.

"And what about our tea?" cried Melby. "I won't stand this! You leave me to settle with him. He wants to get you expelled, Dick, but I'm on your side. Foster won't stand this, neither will I!"

"You come back!" exclaimed Dick, seizing him by the collar. "We are going to have no sneaking."

"I mean to have revenge."

"Rats! He never touched you, because you took jolly good care to keep out of it. I tell you what it is, Melby, if you dare to sneak where we are concerned I'll have you out of this study. Tom and I won't have anything to do with you."

"Oh, well, if you are going to chance it, I pity you, that's all!" said Melby. "If you don't have vengeance, Gowl will. He may be afraid of what you have to tell about him——"

"I have nothing to tell about him!" said Dick. "He has nothing to fear."

"Do you mean to say you haven't a secret of his?"

"I mean to say that I have never hinted at such a thing to you or anyone else. Not even to my best chum there, Tom. Ha, ha, ha! You look a trifle untidy, Tom. Still, we more than held our own."

"Yes!" exclaimed Tom. "The way that butter smacked him in the face was distinctly good. I'm sorry for the damage to your furniture, Dick, but——"

"Oh, bother the damage! I told you it would get damaged. There's got to be no sneaking, Melby. Just you bear that in mind, or it will be the worse for you."

"All right! I don't care. But I tell you this, Dick Clare, I know Gowl's nature pretty well, and he will have a terrible vengeance on you for this before you are many days older."

"Let him try!" laughed Dick.

"He will not only try, but he will succeed," retorted Melby. "You've made a foe of him for life, and he's not one to forget. He doesn't care what lengths he goes to when he's riled, and you can bet you've riled him now."

The Captain of the College.

HAL LAKIN, the captain of Ravenswood College, was striding up and down his study, sometimes looking at his watch, at others at the small clock on the mantelpiece.

The former told him it was half-past twelve, the latter that it was twenty

past, and both were wrong as he presently knew by the chiming of the college clock, then there was an angry frown on his brow as he set his watch right, and strode towards No. 7 Study, wherein he found its owners, Dick Clare, Tom Hart, and Melby.

"I told you to come to my study at twelve sharp, Clare," said the young captain. "Why didn't you come?"

"Phew! I clean forgot, Lakin."

"Come now," ordered the captain, making his way back, and when Dick entered the study Hal seated himself on the table, and fixed his eyes on the culprit.

"Now, look here, Clare," said Hal. "Mr. Foster, your Housemaster, informs me that he has always found you to be straightforward, and therefore I shall accept your word that you forgot—and did not hope that I should do the same."

"Correct! I never thought a single word about you. It evanesced from my brain-box."

"Next time I give you an order it will be wise to make a note of it—if your brain-box is so crowded with your studies."

"But you can bet it isn't. We have got a little scheme on and it requires deep thought, because——"

"Never mind about that. You bear the reputation of being truthful—which means to say you are honest. Do you call it honest to blackmail Gowl, as I am informed you are doing?"

"No; far from honest."

"You do not deny that it is true?"

"Look here, Hal," exclaimed Dick, looking him full in the eyes. "I don't know much about you, because I'm new to the college; but I know you must be a decent fellow, otherwise you would not be captain of a great college like this; besides, every boy speaks highly of you——"

"I did not bring you here to speak about myself," said the young captain coldly.

"That's obvious. What I have said is the prologue. You shall have the epilogue directly. I do not deny that I am blackmailing Gowl. What then?"

"It is a scandalous action."

"Because I don't deny it?"

"You know that I am referring to the blackmailing."

"Yes; and I also know that if you believe me to be so vile as to blackmail anyone you would not believe my word."

"Come, youngster," exclaimed Hal. "I have a certain duty to perform. Your remark gave me a wrong impression, the same as my reply gave you a wrong one. We are both agreed that blackmailing is a scandalous action. We are comparative strangers, therefore I cannot judge your true character any more than you can judge mine. From the few words we have spoken, and judging by your appearance, and from what I have heard concerning you from the masters, I form the opinion that you are utterly incapable of such a scandalous action as blackmailing. But don't you see, as captain of this college I have to make a report to your master, and therefore require evidence. Will you help me by answering all the questions I put to you, and before you hear those questions accept my assurance that they are not asked because I doubt your honour."

"Right! I'm a bit sensitive about honour. I have promised my mother to strive to attain my dead father's standard, and it wants some doing. The answer to the first question is that it is untrue to assert I have blackmailed Gowl, or that I would ever do such a thing."

"You know of some secret of his?"

"Yes."

"And have revealed it to no one?"

"That is the solemn truth."

"You have not threatened to do so?"

"Certainly not. You are the only fellow to whom I have ever admitted that there is a secret between us. I have never even referred to it to Gowl himself, except on one occasion when a boy hinted in his presence that I had some power over Gowl. I answered that if I had knowledge of some secret in the life of anyone I would not reveal it under any circumstances. It is the truth."

"I am quite confident of that, Dick," cried the young captain, slapping him on the back. "I had to speak to you as a matter of duty; and the very favourable impression you have given me will be an excellent thing for you, because in order that I may feel I am showing you no favouritism, I'm bound to lay it on all the thicker when you are run up to me for some of your giddy pranks. See, it's bound to do you good."

"Here, steady!" exclaimed Dick. "I don't want to be improved that way, you know."

"All right, you beauty. I'll warrant you and Tom Hart have got half a dozen schemes any one of which would get you into trouble. You see, I remember what I was like when a kid."

"Think you are improved now, Hal?"

"I don't know. In some things. But to emulate the character of a man like your father was—a man who gave his life for another—needs some striving, Dick. I know all about him from the Head. Hook it!"

And Dick left the study with the feeling that the Head had been wise when he nominated Hal Lakin captain of the college.

"His good impression of me is jolly well reciprocated," mused Dick, "and I expect with more reason. No chap could help liking him."

"What did he want you for?" inquired Melby, when Dick entered the study.

"Concerning a private matter which does not concern you," retorted Dick. "Come along, Tom. I want to speak to you about another private matter that doesn't concern Melby either."

"I call it beastly unfair," cried Melby. "You always leave me out."

"It's your own fault," declared Tom. "There's no trusting you, for you couldn't keep your mouth shut if you tried, and I'm jolly certain you never try. Go to your friend, bully Gowl, and tell him some of your precious yarns about us. That will amuse you."

The two chums entered the close.

"Look here, Tom," said Dick; "last night I went to explore the upper regions of the college, and got into the clock-tower——"

"You are not allowed there. I'm surprised at you."

"I want you to listen to reason——"

"Are you going to talk? If so, I don't believe I'll be able to listen to reason."

"What? Well, it isn't my reason, you know. I'll admit you wouldn't hear much reason from me. But you can see the island in the sea from the tower——"

"I know you can. I've seen it."

"I thought you weren't allowed in the tower."

"Correct. It doesn't follow because I am wrong in breaking rules that you are right; besides, it's my duty to tell a new fellow the rules—in case he wants to keep them."

"It's not likely, but I saw lights being flashed, and I believe someone was signalling. Now, I want to go and see Bill the boatman to square

accounts with him over the boat we smashed up, after which I want to hire another one for to-night, then you and I will go to the island and see if we can catch the signaller. See?"

"Suppose the doctor sees?"

"You are a shocking pessimist, Tom, and it's rather ridiculous to raise objections, because you know jolly well that you are coming. All we have got to do is to break bounds to get to the shore now, then break them again to-night."

"Suppose we are caught the first time?"

"Then we sha'n't be caught the second time; and if we are caught the second time it will be because we haven't been caught the first time. However, I believe I can arrange the matter. You wait here for five minutes, and we will see."

The result of this conversation was that the two worthies went down to the shore, and came in a little late for dinner, while Melby, who saw them go out, reported the matter to Gowl.

"Are you certain they went out?" demanded the bully. "I don't want to be made a fool of."

"Why, I saw them with my own eyes!" exclaimed Melby.

"I don't suppose you saw them with anyone else's eyes, you silly young ass. I shall report the matter to Foster, and if you have been lying it won't go well with you. Now, I've got a few fellows coming to tea to-night, so just you get the list of things I make out, and set the tea. You can get it at the tuck-shop, and put it down to yourself. I'll pay you cash, and you can square up when it suits you. See, you will get ready money that way."

"Shall I take it now, Gowl?" inquired Melby.

"No, you won't, you young idiot! You will take it when the things arrive—at least, you will take half-a-crown then, and I'll pay you the rest a week later. See. Here's the half-crown waiting for you—when the things arrive."

"But why not shove them down in your own name?"

"I want to help you with ready money for your trouble," answered Gowl, thinking it better not to mention that his credit at the shop was stopped because he had owed an account from the previous term.

"All serene," exclaimed Melby. "I'll work it. Let me have the list now, and I'll sneak out."

Melby's system was extremely simple. The amount came to about five shillings, and he knew perfectly well that the tuck-shop would not give him credit for more than half-a-crown, while he was already slightly in debt there. He borrowed seven shillings from Dick, paid cash for the provisions, and drew a shilling from Gowl—who found he wanted the half-crown, and clouted Melby's head when he said it wasn't honest.

"Well, so long as you do pay me to-morrow, of course that will be honest," admitted Melby. "But look here, Gowl; I saw Dick Clare out with Tom Hart, and they must have broken bounds. It's a good opportunity for you to get a dig at Clare for the shameful manner in which he talks about you, and I think you ought to give me another sixpence for the information. If you make it another shilling I will let you off the rest."

So Gowl compromised the matter for ninepence, and Dick paid for his tea, although he did not know that.

Just before he expected his guests, Gowl went to Mr. Foster to report that Clare and Hart had broken bounds.

"It is quite right, Gowl," said Mr. Forster. "Clare asked permission for them both to go out, and I gave it."

That maddened the bully. It was the second time Melby had made him look ridiculous in the master's eyes, for if he had gone to the supposed culprits, as he should have done before reporting them, he would have learnt they had leave.

Storming into his study he knocked Melby into the fireplace with a slap over the head, but after that the sneak was too quick for him.

Springing to his feet he darted from the room, and Gowl, in his fury, seized a half-pound of butter from the table and hurled it at the fugitive's head, which it missed; but it caught Hal Lakin full in the face, for he was entering the study just at the moment.

Melby's yells of terror turned to laughter as the butter scattered all over the young captain's face, then Melby fled, thinking that Gowl would be more competent to bear the brunt of it.

"I am sorry, Lakin," muttered the bully, as the captain shut and locked the door. "It was a pure accident."

"I know that, as far as I am concerned," retorted Hal, getting rid of as much butter as he could. "It was not an accident as far as you were concerned. Why did you sling the butter at Melby?"

"Well, I tried to catch him for cheeking me, and, failing that, flung it at him more in fun than anything else."

"You flung it at him in passion, and would——"

"No, I did not. As a matter of fact, I was not in the slightest temper."

"I don't believe a word that you are saying."

"Well, I don't care. You can do the other thing."

"It is my intention to make you cage," said Hal quietly. "You do not speak the truth, and you are an abominable bully. I can't stop the former, but I can and will stop the latter. If ever I catch you bullying a little boy again I'll thrash you, Gowl. Now, come to my study. I intend to speak to you concerning another matter."

"I have friends coming to tea, and——"

"You will come to my study now. Your friends can have their tea alone, or you can invite them some other day. But you will come to my study now, because the matter I have to speak about is urgent, and I have to make a report to the Head."

Hal unlocked the door and went to his room, not taking the trouble to turn to see whether Gowl was following him.

For nearly a minute the bully hesitated, but then he went, muttering fiercely as to the vengeance he would take.

But Melby wanted vengeance also, and he thought he knew a way of getting it on Gowl, for he happened to know that the bully had arranged to break bounds that night, and if he only gave Vance, the porter, warning, there would certainly be punishment and revenge.

Melby had not the slightest idea that Tom and Dick had also arranged to break bounds, otherwise he might have reported them as well. It was Vance's night out, consequently a good one for the purpose of the chums.

(Another rattling long instalment on Wednesday next.)

Next week's Enthralling Story of Nelson Lee and Nipper
will be entitled:

STOLEN PROPERTY;

or,

THE MYSTERY OF ROOM 124.

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