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"The Prison Breakers," "Amazement Island," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

Dr. Theodore Leverett—The Sarcophagus—Tragic Visitors—The Alarm.

"**W**ONDERFUL! Splendid! A veritable treasure of treasures!"

Dr. Theodore Leverett murmured the words to himself in a sort of ecstasy as he rubbed his hands smoothly together, and peered through his gold-rimmed pince-nez at the bulky, curiously-shaped object which lay on a bench before him. His eyes were gleaming with an intense inward excitement.

Dr. Leverett was alone, and the apartment in which he stood was a strange one. It was, in fact, his own private museum. The building was only a small one; and consisted simply of one room, which was oblong in shape. At one end was a large window, and at the other the door. Both sides of the apartment were packed with glass cases and other articles, many of them extraordinary and of wonderful value and antiquity.

The museum was situated quite to itself at the very bottom of Dr. Leverett's large garden of his house in Hampstead. Other gardens were on either side, while at the back was nothing but a lonely plantation, with a rarely-used lane beyond. On the other side of that the heath stretched out bleakly. It would have been possible, in fact, to have shouted at the top of one's voice within the museum, and nobody would have heard.

It was because of this loneliness, in fact, that Dr. Leverett had chosen the spot as a site for his museum. He was essentially a man of quiet habits—a man of solitude. Grey-bearded, and slightly bald on the crown of his head, he had a decidedly distinguished appearance. His back was bent somewhat, for he was well past his sixtieth year.

Nevertheless, Dr. Leverett was still hale and hearty, and as active as many men twenty years his junior. He was famous in the world of science and exploration, but his home life was quiet. Indeed, the doctor was something of a recluse. A bachelor, his whole interests were centred in his museum and his work. His household merely consisted of a butler, a manservant, and two female servants.

"Wonderful!" he repeated, his voice vibrating with enthusiasm. "What a discovery! What an astounding revelation for the world! This thing before me is nothing more nor less than the coffin of the Pharaoh Mejduraam—one of the ancient kings of Egypt of whom little or nothing has ever been

discovered. Yet I have here the coffin of Meyduraam, and within it is the mummified body of the Pharaoh himself!"

Dr. Leverett had got into the habit of murmuring to himself, and did so almost without being conscious of the fact. Now his voice rose a little higher than usual, for he was labouring under great mental excitement.

His eyes were fixed upon the quaint object which lay on the bench before him. It was an ancient Egyptian sarcophagus—in plain words, a coffin made of stone—but it was very different from many other sarcophagi which Dr. Leverett had at various times examined. These others had been heavy, cumbersome articles; but this sarcophagus now before him, although made of stone, was comparatively light, and quite capable of being carried by two men. The idea of a sarcophagus was originally intended to consume the body placed within it within forty days. But the term was also applied to any stone coffin or mummy-case.

And this sarcophagus was of extraordinary interest, for it contained the mummy of one of the most ancient kings of Egypt, and also one of the most little known. The doctor knew very well that when he made his discovery known to the world, the Egyptologists would regard it as the most wonderful and stupendous event of modern times.

The various famous mummies in the British Museum and other places, although extremely valuable, were insignificant compared to this one which now reposed within its stone case upon the low bench. Even the celebrated mummy of Ramses II, discovered at Deir-el-Bahari, near Thebes, in 1881, and now preserved in the museum at Cairo, would be counted a far less important discovery than the mummy of Meyduraam, who reigned over Egypt thousands of years before.

Dr. Leverett knew that he would be talked of throughout the world once he made known the facts. Before doing so, however, he intended examining the mummy alone in his own museum. It was little to be wondered at that he thrilled with emotion now that the supreme moment had arrived.

The Egyptologist—for Dr. Theodore Leverett was an Egyptian historian of no little renown—had come by the mummy over eight months before during one of his many visits to the land of the Pharaohs.

For the fourth time Dr. Leverett had journeyed to the Fayoum, after his tenth visit to Luxor, Thebes, and the ancient Temple of Karnak. He had been attracted to the Fayoum, not because he was interested in those fertile lowlands, but because, out on the desert near the Fayoum stood the mysterious and almost unknown Pyramid of Meyduraam.

This pyramid was almost as much of an enigma as the Sphinx itself. No white man had ever entered the pyramid, although many had tried to do so. While on this last visit Dr. Leverett had come in contact with two Egyptians who declared that they knew of the secret entrance to the ancient tomb of the Pharaoh Meyduraam.

The doctor had attempted to bribe his two informants into directing him to the entrance and showing him the interior of the pyramid; but the men had flatly refused to do anything of the sort. They had accepted a large sum, however, and promised to obtain for Leverett the mummy which lay hidden within the great pile.

To be brief, the sarcophagus containing the valuable mummy was procured and conveyed secretly to Cairo. Dr. Leverett was in Cairo at the time, and he was greatly excited when he learned that the mummy had been concealed in the cellar of a temple in the native quarter of the town. Before he could remove it, however, the two Egyptians were found mysteriously murdered. How they had died, or by whose agency, remained a grim puzzle. But Dr. Leverett knew enough of ancient Egypt to realise that even he, himself, was none too safe.

So he returned to England post-haste, and had then sent instructions out to Cairo to have the mummy taken from the temple and securely packed, and dispatched to London. The preparations for the event had taken several months; but now, at last, the mummy had arrived. It had been delivered only a few hours since.

"At last!" murmured Dr. Leverett exultantly. "After all these months of waiting, the most valuable mummy in the world is in my possession. Were I in Egypt at this moment I would be fearful of unknown peril. But I'm in London—in free England—and I am safe! I never expected to see the mummy after those two poor fellows had been done to death. But my agents in Cairo did their work well—and this is the result!"

It was little wonder that Dr. Theodore Leverett was greatly excited. This was the biggest event of his life, and he knew that it would bring him wonderful fame.

For some time he gazed at the sarcophagus with intent interest. It was sculptured elaborately, and covered with mysterious hieroglyphs. But the deciphering of these, he decided, could wait. It was the mummy he was anxious to see. If it were well-preserved his discovery would be more valuable than ever. But he was afraid that the journey may have affected the embalmed body very materially.

The stone lid of the mummy-case was wonderfully thin, and perfectly made. Exactly how it was fixed Dr. Leverett did not know, but he soon set himself to the task of finding out. It was not so difficult as he imagined, for a short examination revealed some cunningly concealed catches. With these fastened, the sarcophagus—so well made was it—was absolutely airtight and secure.

With quivering fingers Dr. Leverett pushed the catches back, and then the lid, with a little grating noise, responded to his exertion, and came apart. Very carefully the Egyptologist lifted the lid from the coffin, and propped it against the end of the bench. One glance within the sarcophagus set all Dr. Leverett's fears at rest—for he had had uneasy suspicions that the bribed Egyptians may have tricked him. But there, before him, the grim mummy lay in its resting-place—a resting-place from which it had never been moved during thousands of years.

Swathed in folds of gauzy, almost transparent linen, the mummified body of the Pharaoh Meyduraam was perfectly preserved and absolutely intact.

"Wonderful!" gasped Dr. Leverett, his eyes glittering behind his glasses. "My highest hopes are realised. I never dared——"

Suddenly he paused, and turned swiftly.

The doctor's hearing was excellent, in spite of his age, and quite abruptly a click had sounded at the window at the end of the museum. The night was still, and the hour just after ten. In that quiet part of Hampstead ten o'clock was fairly late, and nothing was moving—or, at least, nothing usually occurred. For years Dr. Leverett had been alone in his museum during the evening, and never once had he been disturbed by the slightest interruption.

So now, on such an occasion as this, moreover, he was on the alert instantly. And as he turned he uttered a short gasp of surprise and alarm. For climbing in at the window were two men!

"What is this?" rapped out the old man angrily. "Who are you——"

"That thou wilt learn in a very few moments, O wise and learned doctor!" exclaimed a harsh voice, which seemed to have the chill of death in it.

Leverett almost staggered.

For the words had been uttered, not in English, but in a language he knew well—a language of ancient Egypt, dead and almost forgotten! Dr.

Leverett understood it perfectly, for he was thoroughly conversant with all things appertaining to Egypt—the Egypt of thousands of years ago.

And a cold wave of impending peril seemed to shiver through him.

In a second he knew that tragedy was in the air.

"What wantest thou?" he asked hoarsely, in the same strange tongue.
"What seekest thou here?"

"Thou knowest our language, then?" went on one of the strangers. "It is well, for your English is difficult to speak. Know then that we are here for the purpose of claiming that which thou hast stolen—and to punish thee for placing desecrating hands upon a sacred treasure. See, Khufa Ath, the dog has already opened the coffin!" he continued, turning to his companion, and speaking with suppressed passion.

Dr. Leverett had gone pale, but he stood perfectly steady, and took stock of his two mysterious visitors. They had advanced into the museum, and now returned the doctor's gaze. They were both attired in European clothes, but the clothes sat ill on their well-proportioned figures, and were obviously uncomfortable.

Their faces were swarthy and clean-shaven, and their eyes glittered evilly, and with a kind of mad hatred. Dr. Leverett knew instantly that these two were not ordinary Egyptians. They were, on the contrary, members of the ancient race now almost extinct.

"Who art thou?" said Leverett huskily. "From whence comest thou?"

"A question thou need not have asked," said the man who had already spoken. "Canst thou not guess, O foolish one? I am Ramses Rhamsiptah, the High Priest of the Sacred Worshippers of the Meyduraam Pyramid!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Leverett, in English.

On several occasions he had heard a rumour that was given credence in the Fayoum that the Pyramid of Meyduraam was inhabited by a little band of ancient Egyptians. But the doctor had always regarded the story as a myth.

Now, indeed, he was being given proof that the rumour was actual truth!

"What--what dost thou want with me?" asked Leverett.

"I have already spoken!" exclaimed Ramses Rhamsiptah fiercely. "I, and the noble Khufa Ath--by my side--are here to recover the sacred remains of King Meyduraam of Egypt, who lived and ruled over the land nigh four thousand years ago. Also, knowest thou, we have come hither to avenge thy sin."

The words were spoken deliberately and coldly, and Dr. Leverett, whose knowledge of Egypt and the East was vast, knew that his position was one of terrible danger. The high priest had said quite sufficient to convince the doctor that there was no escape; that he and his companion had, indeed, come to avenge their fancied wrongs. In their eyes, the crime of taking the mummy from the pyramid was an unpardonable one.

Dr. Leverett was strong and active, but he knew that he would be like a child in the hands of these two stalwart Egyptians. He guessed that they intended to deal with him first, and afterwards take possession of the sarcophagus and its contents.

And what was to prevent them?

The museum was absolutely deserted and alone. The house was at least a hundred and fifty yards distant, and a cry for help, uttered within the museum, would not reach the ears of a soul. The position, indeed, was an appalling one--or would have been but for one fact.

And that fact took the concrete shape of a little button upon the wall of the museum near the door. It was, really, an electric bell-push which communicated with the house. Two presses on that button would bring

Dr. Leverett's butler to the little building. And now, without hesitation, the doctor stepped across the floor and pressed the button long and urgently.

But even as he did so the eyes of Ramses Rhamsiptah were upon him. And as the high priest saw what was being done a curious sound left his lips. It was unintelligible, but it nevertheless expressed fury and alarm. Obviously he was well acquainted with the use of electric-bell pushes.

With a hissing intake of breath he whipped something from his pocket, fumbled for a moment, and then thrust his arm out as though throwing something. But Dr. Leverett saw nothing leave his hand.

The next second the doctor felt a slight sting upon the shin of his left leg.

What happened next was dramatic and tragic.

Without a sound, Leverett crumpled up and lay upon the floor in a heap.

The two mysterious Egyptians took utterly no notice of their victim. They gave their whole attention to the sarcophagus. Very quickly, but with great care, they replaced the cover of the mummy case and fixed it securely. When they had done that, however, Ramses Rhamsiptah suddenly stood bolt upright in a listening attitude.

A sound of hurried footsteps reached his ears.

Without speaking, but casting a keen glance at his companion, he softly crossed to the window and passed through into the night. Khufa Ath followed, and then the sash softly slid down, and gave a slight bump.

Simultaneously the door opened and a rather stoutish man appeared. The very first thing his eyes rested upon was the huddled up form of Dr. Theodore Leverett—for the old scientific explorer had fallen near the door.

"Heavens above!" gasped the butler. "What's ailing you, sir?"

His face went white, and he gazed at the still figure fearfully.

Then, with a little shiver, he knelt down, and looked at his master more carefully. Dr. Leverett lay silent and inert, and his face was almost yellowish. The butler stood up, shaking violently.

"The master's took bad!" he muttered, almost panic-stricken. "What'll I do? He always hated doctors like the poison they sell as medicine, and said he wouldn't let a doctor touch him for no money."

Vincent—as the butler was named—could hardly collect his thoughts as he edged a little way from the form at his feet. But one thing he was decided upon; he would not remain in the museum alone with that—that still object.

He stepped nervously to the door, and then panic seemed to seize him. He did not think that Dr. Leverett was dead, but in a kind of fainting fit. And his panic was not actually connected with his master's alarming condition alone; the museum was a grim and ghastly place to such a stolid and matter-of-fact man as Vincent. In addition to the sarcophagus upon the bench two other mummies were propped upright against the wall in glass-fronted cases, and several skulls and a complete skeleton were displayed about the room. The butler, in fact, always had a feeling of awe-struck horror whenever he entered the museum. To stay in there alone was asking a little too much of him.

He raced up the garden with all the speed his portly frame was capable of. A big clump of trees hid the house, but after he had passed through these the lights of the building gleamed warmly in the darkness.

Vincent had not the slightest suspicion that his master's condition had been brought about by foul play, and that strangers had been present. He would have been even more panic-stricken had he caught a glimpse of the two mysterious Egyptians.

But Ramses Rhamsiptah and Khufa Ath had slipped away like shadows—silently and swiftly—as soon as they had left the museum. They went

right away from the spot, the high priest deeming it unwise to remain after the alarm had been given. Although seemingly immobile and calm, the Egyptians were furious. They had thought to conclude their work straight off, but now they knew that such a plan could not be carried out. And so they decided to leave the vicinity altogether until the early hours of the morning, when they would be able to return and find everything quietened down. It would then be a simple matter to carry off the sacred mummy.

Vincent burst into the house, where he had been entertaining a couple of friends in his own quarters. They were both men of his own class, but they had never visited the private museum, and were thus unacquainted with its curious aura of mysticism.

"The master's took bad!" gasped Vincent hoarsely. "He's lyin' on the floor looking as though he's had a stroke. You two fellows rush down to the chamber of horrors with the brandy flask and some cold water. I'll be down in two minutes, after I've 'phoned for help!"

Vincent's friends were thoroughly startled, but not at all averse to visiting the "Chamber of Horrors"—as the butler always described the museum. And as their visit was to convey succour to the doctor they were all the more eager. Armed with the brandy flask and a bowl of cold water, they hurried down the garden.

Meanwhile the butler was at the telephone, hesitating.

"Who shall I ring up?" he muttered perplexedly. "The master'll be in his worst tantrums when he comes to if I call a doctor. Yet I must have advice from somebody or other, because it may be serious. I'll have to ring up some of his friends— Ah, there's the professor! He was here only yesterday!"

Without further hesitation Vincent rang up Professor Cyrus Zingrave, the famous scientist. But when Zingrave's number was obtained the butler learned that the professor was not in, but was expected any moment. A message would be given to him the very instant he arrived.

"That won't do!" muttered the butler, hanging up the receiver. "The professor may be hours before he arrives, and Dr. Leverett may be in a serious condition."

A few moments thought, and then Vincent called up another number, and this time he got hold of the man he wanted.

"Hallo! Is that Mr. Lee—Mr. Nelson Lee?"

"Yes!" came a clear-cut voice across the wires.

"I'm Vincent, sir, Dr. Leverett's butler. You're a friend of the doctor's, sir, and I want you to come round at once—as fast as you can."

"What for? What's the trouble?"

"The doctor's took mortal bad, sir," said Vincent urgently. "He's in a fit, or something. I'm afraid to stay alone with him, or call a doctor——"

"Right!" interjected Nelson Lee's voice crisply. "I'll be with you as fast as ever a taxi can bring me!"



CHAPTER II.

Face to Face—Heart Disease?—The Hidden Document—A Puzzle.

PROFESSOR CYRUS ZINGRAVE stepped briskly into the hall of Dr. Leverett's house as Vincent opened the door in answer to his ring.

"Oh, it's you, sir," exclaimed the butler, in surprise.

"Yes, I arrived home only a minute after your telephone-call," said Professor Zingrave in his soft, musical voice. "Were you expecting anybody else?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Nelson Lee."

"Indeed!"

"As you wasn't in, sir, I rang up Mr. Lee, too—and he's on his way now."

"Ah, that's very interesting," exclaimed Zingrave smoothly. "So our excellent friend, Mr. Nelson Lee, is to shortly honour me with his company. I have not met Mr. Lee for several months, and the meeting to-night will be a keen pleasure."

"The master, sir——"

"Yes, your master. What has happened, Vincent?" asked the professor briskly. "I hope nothing serious is wrong. Where is Dr. Leverett?"

"In the museum, sir. He's lyin' on the floor unconscious——"

"Dear, dear! That won't do!" interjected Zingrave. "Come, we will go at once!"

Without removing his overcoat or hat, the professor followed Vincent out of the house by a rear door, and they descended the garden. Zingrave was rather surprised to learn of Leverett's sudden illness, for the Egyptologist had always been in the very best of health. Zingrave had no idea that matters were far worse than the butler supposed.

The professor had visited the museum only the previous day, and had chatted with Dr. Leverett for a considerable time. The pair had been friends—friends in the sense that they had many interests in common. For Professor Zingrave was exceedingly interested in all things connected with ancient Egypt. Although not completely devoted to Egyptology, he was nevertheless well versed on the subject.

Indeed, there were very few matters connected with science and exploration that Zingrave was in ignorance of. He was a wonderfully clever man; a man with an iron will, and a powerful influence over his fellow beings.

But Professor Zingrave, in spite of his cleverness—or, perhaps, because his cleverness had run into dark grooves—was not merely the scientist the world supposed him to be. He was, in addition, the greatest and most sinister criminal in the British Isles.

In plain truth, Professor Zingrave was the Chief of the League of the Green Triangle—that infamous and all-powerful criminal organisation which was the most baffling mystery that Scotland Yard had ever been up against. The League of the Green Triangle was known to exist; but who its members were, how many they numbered, or who ruled them, was an unfathomable puzzle.

The league held sway over the country like some venomous reptile, spreading its clutches in every branch of commerce and profession. Its working members were under the entire control of a body of men—every one famous and looming large in the public eye—who styled themselves the Governing Circle. And Professor Zingrave was the head of them all.

Scotland Yard had used all its ingenuity to no avail—and the Criminal Investigation Department of London's police headquarters is a remarkably efficient body of men, what ever may be said to the contrary. The police net is a terrible thing to become entangled in, but the League of the Green Triangle had never been entrapped in its meshes.

There were only two men who knew the secrets of the league. They were both outsiders; that is, they had no connection with the league whatever. They were, on the contrary, using all their energies in a great campaign to bring the league to ruin.

One of these men was Nelson Lee, the celebrated detective. The other was Douglas Clifford, a young man who had once been in the clutches of the Green Triangle and who had supplied Nelson Lee with his information. Douglas Clifford, now disguised as an elderly man; and living under the

name of John Merrick, was working with the great detective in the fight against Professor Zingrave and his colleagues.

Already Nelson Lee had accounted for several of the most important members of the Governing Circle. But this does not mean to imply that the league was any the less powerful. In spite of all its set-backs it was still a flourishing concern—still at the height of its glory—still a menace to honest citizens.

And all the advantage lay with Nelson Lee. For while he was possessed of all the facts, while he knew exactly who he was fighting against, the Governing Circle, on the other hand, were unaware of the identity of the man who was fighting them. Even Professor Zingrave regarded Nelson Lee as a perfectly harmless individual. In spite of all his cleverness the professor was at a disadvantage.

Dr. Leverett had been acquainted with Zingrave only in the latter's scientific capacity. For the Egyptologist had been a man of the most strict honesty, and had associated with Zingrave merely because the latter was greatly interested in Egyptology. In all probability, Leverett had never even heard of the Green Triangle. For he was so wrapped up in his own hobbies that he gave no attention to the newspapers, and the doings of the outside world.

Of late Zingrave had been taking a great interest in Dr. Leverett's work, and had been a frequent visitor. And Nelson Lee had, some time back, performed a service of great magnitude for the doctor, and the two had become well acquainted. It was for this reason that Vincent, the butler, had apprised the two men of Leverett's unfortunate condition.

Thus Professor Cyrus Zingrave and his greatest and deadliest enemy were shortly to come face to face.

The butler, although relieved by Zingrave's arrival, was still greatly perturbed, and when he led the way into the museum he looked at the two men who were already there with eager, anxious glances. But Vincent's friends had been unable to render any assistance to Dr. Leverett. They had bathed his head with cold water, and had forced a little brandy between his lips. But the result had not been encouraging.

Professor Zingrave frowned as he surveyed the scene.

"Who are these two men?" he asked sharply.

"They were visitors of mine, sir," answered the butler, in a tentative voice. "They've been rendering first aid, although they don't seem to have done much good——"

"Well, I don't think your services are longer required, my good men," said the professor, kneeling beside the still form on the floor. "You may remain, Vincent."

The butler's acquaintances were rather glad to leave, for their nerves were somewhat shaken, and after they had gone Vincent stood by watching while Zingrave examined the body of Dr. Leverett. Almost at once the professor looked up.

"I'm afraid you will be shocked, Vincent," he said quietly. "Dr. Leverett is dead!"

"Dead!" gasped the butler. "Heavens, sir, it can't be true! You must be mistaken, sir! The doctor was as healthy——"

"Tut-tut! I know what I am saying!" interjected Zingrave, with a frown. "Leverett has been dead for quite half an hour; he was probably dead when you first discovered him. He must have expired like the snuffing out of a candle!"

"The doctor dead!" groaned Vincent distractedly. "It's—it's horrible! And yet only two hours ago—at half-past eight, when he came down here from the house—he was as healthy as ever he'd been in his life!"

Professor Zingrave rose to his feet.

"A man who has spent most of his life in Egypt and the East is liable to sudden heart attacks," he said shortly. "I have long suspected that Dr. Leverett would go off in this way. It is certainly a case of heart failure."

"It's awful, sir. I—I'm mortally upset!"

"Then pull yourself together, and help me to lift the body on to this couch," went on Zingrave.

He lifted the doctor's feet as he spoke, and between the pair of them they shifted the body from the floor on to the couch. While this was being done Zingrave's eyelids opened wider for a second, and then flickered back to their normal position.

"You had better go indoors, Vincent," he said abruptly.

And the butler was only too glad to be released, for he was trembling like a leaf in the wind. The very instant Zingrave was alone he bent over the body, and took from his pocket a tiny pair of glittering nippers. A moment before he had seen a tiny splinter of dark brown wood sticking in Leverett's trousers just above the left ankle. And now, with the nippers, he removed it, and walked swiftly across to the light. His eyes were glittering strangely.

"Can it be possible?" he muttered. "A minute ago I was positive that heart disease was the cause of death. But this puts a different complexion on the matter."

The little splinter of wood was blunt at one end and as sharp as a needle at the other, and was nearly an inch in length. About a third of its length, from the pointed end upwards, it was of a much darker hue, that portion being almost black.

Zingrave sniffed at it sharply, and then he caught his breath in with a little hiss. Being a man of science he knew at once why the wood was discoloured at the point.

"Poison," he murmured tensely—"deadly poison! And unless I am mistaken it is a poison almost unknown to science!"

With his free hand he took from his pocket a little silver box, and deposited the splinter carefully within it, and then snapped the lid to. After that he crossed to the body, lifted up the trouser leg, and jerked down the sock. There, quite distinctly, was a tiny red spot, tinged at the edge with a greenish-purple circle. At first glance it looked merely like a little pimple, and would call for no comment under ordinary circumstances. Even Zingrave himself would have suspected nothing had he not first seen the cause of the mark in the shape of the little splinter.

The door of the museum opened with a slight creak. Instinctively Professor Zingrave jerked down the trouser and twisted round. Before him, in the act of closing the door, stood Nelson Lee.

"Good-evening, professor!" said the great detective smoothly. "Vincent informed me that you were here, and that Leverett is dead. I only trust that the latter part of his information was incorrect."

"I am afraid Vincent spoke the truth," replied Zingrave softly. "Dr. Leverett expired from heart failure some little time ago."

"Dear me! I always understood he was strong and healthy."

"Most people thought so, Mr. Lee, but I knew better. Leverett often confided to me that he would probably collapse under stress of great excitement. I strongly suspect that he was excited over this ancient sarcophagus we see here on the bench."

Nelson Lee nodded, and moved across to the dead man. Although he had given absolutely no sign of it, he had observed that quick movement of

Zingrave's with the left trouser leg, and he was inwardly curious. To his trained mind the little action presented possibilities.

Had Professor Zingrave been what he purported to be, the great detective would have suspected nothing. But Zingrave was the chief of the Green Triangle, and that made all the difference.

But he meant to do absolutely nothing to put Zingrave on his guard.

Nelson Lee's mind was filled with suspicions, but he had no time to formulate any definite one. He examined the body of the unfortunate Leverett, and then looked at the professor with pursed lips.

"Well?" asked Zingrave softly.

"Heart failure, certainly," answered Nelson Lee. "No doubt about it."

The two men looked at one another steadily. For a second their eyes met, and neither flickered an eyelid. These two, face to face, were a curious contrast. Nelson Lee, with his tall, well-knit frame, impassive face, and steel-grey eyes, was a strikingly different personality to that of his companion. Zingrave was not so tall, but, in a way, he was even more imposing. With his almost dead-white face, long black hair, and eyes that seemed to glitter like liquid pools, he was obviously a man of tremendous intellect. But there was something in those amazing eyes of his which seemed to betray his true scoundrelly character. Perhaps it was only a momentary flash, but Nelson Lee was struck by it.

"There really seems nothing for us to do," exclaimed the detective evenly, and allowing his gaze to drop to Dr. Leverett's form. "I suppose the police will have to be informed, for an inquest will almost certainly be necessary. An exceedingly unfortunate affair altogether."

"Quite so, Mr. Lee," answered Zingrave. "What do you propose doing?"

"I? Well, personally I intend going back home," replied Nelson Lee, reaching for his hat. "There is absolutely no necessity for me to remain, that I can see. It is simply an ordinary case of heart failure, and my talents are in no way required. I'm not a doctor."

"I, myself, will see that everything is all right," said the professor. "As you say, it would be a mere waste of time for you to stay here. I wish you good-night, Mr. Lee. I hope to have the extreme pleasure of meeting you again, but under more favourable circumstances."

"A hope that is heartily reciprocated, professor. Good-night!"

Nelson Lee held out his hand, and the two men shook hands tightly. The detective had a strong desire to exert all his strength and crush his companion's hand to pulp. But he merely nodded, and passed out of the museum.

But Nelson Lee had made none of the investigations he was desirous of making, and Professor Zingrave was perfectly satisfied that the detective had not the slightest suspicion. But here Zingrave was totally wrong, for Nelson Lee was filled with a foreboding that Dr. Leverett had not died from natural causes. And he meant to satisfy himself upon the point, one way or the other, with as little delay as possible.

But to do so in the presence of Zingrave was impossible. Accordingly Nelson Lee resorted to a simple ruse; and, simple though it was, the professor had no idea of what was afoot.

When Nelson Lee left the house he walked away briskly; but as soon as he had traversed a hundred yards he crossed the road, and very slowly and cautiously walked back until he was opposite the house he had just left.

The road was a very quiet one, and at that hour of night, close upon eleven, was practically deserted. Indeed, a swift glance up and down showed

him that not another soul was in sight. The houses were set well back from the road, and all had deep front gardens. Just at this spot, too, there was no electric standard.

The detective crouched just inside the gateway of a large house which showed no lights, and there he waited.

He waited for twelve minutes, and then the front door of Dr. Leverett's house opened, and he caught a glimpse of Professor Zingrave's form outlined against the light streaming from the hall. The door closed, and the famous scientist stepped lightly down the steps and walked swiftly down the drive. Nelson Lee watched him as he passed through the gateway, and then proceeded up the road to the main thoroughfare faintly visible at the top.

Not until the professor's form had completely disappeared did Nelson Lee venture out.

"I do not think the professor will return to-night," he muttered grimly. "I have an idea that—— But I will not form any theories until I have data to work upon."

He crossed the road and swiftly mounted the front door of the Egyptologist's house. The butler opened it in answer to his ring, and was somewhat surprised to see Nelson Lee again.

"Has Professor Zingrave gone?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, a few minutes ago," answered Vincent huskily.

"Well, it really doesn't matter. I left something of mine down in the museum. I presume the place is locked up?"

"Yes, sir, until we know what we've got to do. But very shortly the— the body will be brought up to the house," replied the butler. "This'll mean a tremendous upset all round, and I'm nigh off my head with worry."

"I can well understand it, Vincent, and I sympathise with you heartily," said Nelson Lee sincerely. "If you will let me have the key of the museum——"

"Certainly, sir. It's here."

The butler produced it from his pocket and handed it over.

"You are coming down with me?" asked the detective.

"I'd rather not, sir," said Vincent nervously.

A minute later the detective was striding down the garden path towards the museum. He particularly wanted to be alone, and had had no fear of Vincent volunteering to accompany him. Once inside the museum he switched on the electric light and set to work coolly and swiftly.

He was alone with the dead—alone with a man who had died but an hour since, and with others who had died thousands of years ago. For the mummies in their glass cases were alone enough to shake the nerves of many a strong man. But in spite of his weird surroundings, Nelson Lee was quite unmoved.

He bent over the feet of the dead man, and a moment's examination revealed the tiny red spot upon the shin just above the ankle. As he saw it the detective's jaw grew grim and set.

"By Heaven, what is this?" he muttered grimly. "My suspicions are proving only too true. But I must not form too hasty an opinion."

He produced a powerful magnifying-lens and examined the little puncture with intent care. When he had done he rose upright and looked straight before him with eyes that gleamed with a set purpose.

"Murder!" he exclaimed to himself. "Nothing less than black murder! Dr. Leverett was killed by a mysterious poison—a poison which leaves no

trace, and which gives every indication that heart failure was the cause of death. By James, I wonder—I wonder!”

He was thinking of Professor Zingrave. The professor had examined the dead man's leg—had certainly seen that little red spot. Indeed, it was more than probable that Zingrave had removed the instrument which had caused the puncture.

And yet Zingrave had declared that Leverett had died from heart failure! Why?

Nelson Lee's mind was flooded with grim thoughts. The very fact that Zingrave had hidden the true state of affairs was startlingly significant. But the detective did not waste time in pondering over the problem. In the back of his head he had an idea that in some way the League of the Green Triangle was responsible for the doctor's death.

In that supposition Nelson Lee was wrong. But he had been started on a fresh trail which was to lead to the most amazing adventures.

He did not wish to remain in the museum too long, or Vincent would begin to wonder. A very short investigation revealed the fact that at least two men had entered the apartment by the window. Here was another mystery. Why had they entered? Leverett had obviously been killed by something in the nature of a dart, and that could have been easily flung from the window without any entry being made.

Apparently the murderers had intended carrying something away with them. But what? Nelson Lee's gaze swept round the museum and finally rested upon the sarcophagus.

“Ah, probably this mummy-case has something to do with the grim affair!” he thought. “A sarcophagus of the most curious design. Probably it contains a valuable mummy; but I do not intend to carry my investigations further to-night—at least, while my unfortunate friend lies here.”

He intended leaving the museum at once. But before doing so he was attracted to a little cupboard set in the wall—a cupboard which had something of the appearance of a safe. The key was in the lock, and Nelson Lee swiftly opened the door. There was nothing within the cupboard but a little pocket-book.

“After all, I suppose I am prying into affairs which do not concern me,” he thought. “This appears to be a private memorandum of Dr. Leverett's—What's this, though? His life possibly in peril from Egyptians! A sacred mummy—By Jove, perhaps this little pocket-book will throw some light on the murder!”

Nelson Lee read on for a few moments, and his eyes became more grim. When he finally thrust the pocket-book inside his coat his teeth clicked together.

“I shall certainly take this with me,” he muttered. “When I get home I will read it carefully, and by the slight insight I have already obtained regarding its contents, I am convinced that the mystery of Leverett's death will be a mystery no longer. It will simply remain for me to bring his murderers to justice.”

The detective felt extremely thankful for the impulse which had led him to open the little cupboard. Had he left the museum without having done so the whole course of later events would have been altered.

It is on seemingly trifling details which tremendous issues rest, and in this particular case the issues were to prove both amazing and stupendous.

Five minutes later Nelson Lee was on his way to Gray's Inn Road, and his mind was filled with grave and puzzling thoughts. Instinctively, he knew that he was on the threshold of a great adventure.

CHAPTER III.

A Conference—The Diamonds of Meyduraam—An Amazing Scheme—
The Decision.

ELEVEN-THIRTY was booming out as Professor Zingrave led the way into his laboratory adjoining his mansion in Grosvenor Square. The laboratory, as a matter of fact, had been built out from the rear of the main building. Zingrave was followed by Sir Roger Hogarth, the well-known shipowner, and Mr. Austin Sheldon, a gentleman of independent means. Both were Governing Members of the League of the Green Triangle.

Zingrave switched on the electric-light, and closed the thick sound-proof door. The laboratory was warm and bright, and was provided with several easy-chairs. Sir Roger Hogarth, a rather heavy man, sank into one of the chairs at once.

"What's the object of this hasty conference, Zingrave?" he asked curiously.

"Steady! Give me time to explain!" laughed the professor. "I may say at once, however, that I have a big proposition on hand, and that you, Sheldon, will probably have to take a hand in it."

Austin Sheldon laughed, and lit a cigar. He was a small, wiry man, bronzed with much travelling, and clean-shaven and somewhat bald.

"If it's anything easy, I'm your man!" he said genially.

Zingrave's strange eyes rested first on one man and then on the other.

"Well, it's about diamonds!" he exclaimed. "Diamonds by the score—diamonds worth a fabulous sum! The whole thing may strike you as being a mad scheme; but it's a chance. The league's always ready to have a bit of a gamble, and that's the category in which I shall place this business. A huge gamble which may fall to the ground, or which, on the other hand, may end in complete triumph."

"You're deucedly puzzling!" growled Hogarth.

"It is impossible for me to explain all in a moment. You must have patience, my dear Sir Roger!" exclaimed Zingrave musically. "Well, to begin with, I think you both know that I have taken a great interest in Egyptology. I have been on very friendly terms with Dr. Theodore Leverett, and he has provided me with much information concerning the land of the Pharaohs. Have either of you ever heard of the Meyduraam Pyramid?"

"I seem to have heard the name somewhere," said Sir Roger vaguely.

"My dear man, don't display your ignorance so blatantly!" laughed Sheldon. "The Meyduraam Pyramid is one of the most puzzling piles in the whole of Egypt. It is not far distant from the Fayoum, in the Libyan Desert."

Professor Zingrave nodded.

"Exactly!" he agreed. "This pyramid is one that has never been entered by white men—that is, Europeans. Yet it is a well-known fact that the pyramid is honeycombed by passages, and that there are many strange and mysterious caverns within it. It is even said that Meyduraam is inhabited by a little band of ancient Egyptians——"

"Nonsense!" interjected Sir Roger tartly. "Sheer rumour, Zingrave!"

"On the contrary, the story is absolutely true," said the professor, in even tones. "I have positive proof of what I am saying. Now Dr. Leverett has informed me—and I already knew it beforehand—that the pyramid is popularly supposed to contain fabulous treasure in the form of diamonds and other precious stones. And I am absolutely sure that there is truth in the tale! The pyramid of Meyduraam contains a huge fortune—a stupendous prize for any man who could once gain an entrance!"

Austin Sheldon pursed his lips.

"This is all very well, Zingrave," he protested. "But what's the idea of stuffing all this information down our throats? You have already said that no white man has ever gained entrance to the pyramid. I think I see your idea; but it is absolutely impracticable! The league could very well do with this ancient Egyptian treasure; but there is one drawback. The pyramid of Meyduraam is completely inaccessible!"

"In addition," went on Zingrave calmly, "even if a man did find himself within the pyramid—even if he gained possession of the diamonds—he would certainly be captured by the ancient priests and probably put to death!"

"Then why in the name of mystery are you wasting time by discoursing on the subject?" demanded Sir Roger Hogarth testily.

"Because there is a chance of success," replied the professor. "I admit that it is rather a slender chance, but, as I said before, the whole thing will be something in the nature of a gamble. It might succeed and it might not. In any case, not a shred of harm will be done."

Zingrave paused for a moment, and paced up and down.

"Just recently I have visited Dr. Leverett on several occasions," he went on quietly; "and Leverett had confided to me a secret which was not to be revealed until next week, and which will now never be revealed at all. Through the agency of two Egyptians, he obtained an extremely valuable mummy from the pyramid—a mummy contained in a wonderful sarcophagus. The mummy is, as a matter of fact, none other than that of the Pharaoh Meyduraam, after whom the pyramid takes its name."

"You suggest, I presume, that the league should steal this mummy——"

"My dear Sir Roger, pray be sensible!" protested Zingrave. "I am after much higher game than a mere mummy, however valuable it may be. To be brief, this mummy was conveyed to Cairo and left there. Shortly afterwards the two Egyptians who knew the secret of the pyramid, and who obtained it, were found ruthlessly murdered."

"By whom?" asked Sheldon interestedly.

"That is a question which can be answered without much thought," replied Zingrave. "Without a doubt, the unfortunate men were killed by the priests who inhabit the pyramid. But although they took the lives of the thieves, they did not recover the mummy, for the latter arrived at Dr. Leverett's house at Hampstead only yesterday."

"Accordingly," said Sheldon, "Leverett is now in the seventh heaven of delight, I presume?"

"He was," replied Zingrave significantly. "Scarcely more than an hour ago, however, Dr. Theodore Leverett was murdered in his own mansion!"

"Good heavens!"

"Murdered!"

"That is what I said," proceeded the professor calmly. "He was killed by a mysterious poison which gives every indication that heart failure is the cause of death. I may say at once that both I and Mr. Nelson Lee were soon upon the spot, having been called by Leverett's butler."

"What the deuce was Nelson Lee doing there?" asked Sir Roger uneasily.

Zingrave laughed with a silky smoothness.

"Lee is dealt with," he exclaimed. "I soon discovered that Leverett had been killed by poison, but when Lee arrived it was a simple matter to convince him that the unfortunate man had died of heart failure, and that there was nothing to be done. Nelson Lee went off perfectly satisfied, and he may be eliminated from the affair altogether. I am extremely pleased that Lee did not discover the truth, for I have strong reasons for wishing Leverett's death to cause no sensation. I don't want Lee to commence investigations, for that would upset my plans. By convincing him that the

death was a natural one I played a bold and successful stroke. The local doctor, without a doubt, will find nothing to arouse his suspicions."

"You think that Leverett was killed by an Egyptian?" asked Sheldon curiously.

"I not only think it—I am convinced of it! The priests of Meyduraam have tracked the mummy to England, and their first task was to kill the man who had been responsible for its theft. I am quite sure that the Egyptians—for I am sure there were two of them—intended carrying the mummy away with them; but Leverett gave the alarm before dying, and so frustrated their plans. They will return for the sarcophagus when everything is quiet—very possible within a few hours from now. That is why the league must act swiftly and surely."

Sir Roger stroked his eyebrows.

"If you brought me here to give me a headache you're succeeding infernally well!" he growled. "I'm hanged if I can gather what you're driving at, Zingrave!"

"I am getting nearer to the point every moment," said the professor softly. "The chief feature of the affair lies in the fact that this sarcophagus will be stolen from Leverett's museum by the Egyptians and conveyed back to the pyramid. It was while I was thinking of that that a stupendous idea occurred to me. You will possibly say that it is an insane idea, but it is not a case where absolute certainty must be established. If the whole thing comes to nothing no harm will be done."

"But what's the idea?" asked Sheldon.

"Suppose a living man were inside the sarcophagus instead of the mummy?" said Zingrave evenly. "Suppose he lived until Egypt were reached? He would be taken into the mysterious pyramid and would have a singular advantage once inside. The diamonds would be completely at his mercy, and he would be able to make his escape with ease, for the priests would be so terrified at the mummy coming to life that they would offer no resistance."

Austin Sheldon jumped to his feet.

"You said that we should think the idea insane," he exclaimed sharply. "If this is the scheme, Zingrave, I wish to have nothing more to do with it. You must, indeed, be mad to suggest such a wild and absurd——"

"Wait!" interjected Zingrave, turning his strange eyes upon Sheldon. "Such an opportunity as this will never occur again. It is a chance in a lifetime. The Meyduraam Pyramid is absolutely inaccessible, and yet here we have a chance of getting an agent of the league within the ancient pile. The sarcophagus will certainly be taken back to Egypt; and I propose to remove the mummy and substitute a living man!"

Sir Roger laughed harshly.

"I don't suppose there would be much difficulty about that," he exclaimed. "But the man wouldn't be living for long! Even though he survived suffocation he would die from starvation and thirst before a week had passed."

"You must be joking!" said Sheldon. "Why, I've never heard such a preposterous suggestion in all my life. It will be a month at least before the sarcophagus is inside the pyramid. And what will have happened to your precious substitute, Zingrave, at the end of a month?"

"Nothing," replied Zingrave quietly—"absolutely nothing!"

"But the man will be dead!"

"On the contrary, he will be very much alive!"

"After a month inside a stone coffin?" asked Hogarth angrily.

"Yes, after a month inside a stone coffin!"

There was something in Zingrave's tone which caused his two companions

to calm down somewhat and stare at him with undisguised amazement. Zingrave had often surprised them, but this seemed too utterly extraordinary for words. Yet both Hogarth and Sheldon knew that the professor was in deadly earnest. And the Chief of the Green Triangle was never in deadly earnest except when he was filled with a set purpose.

"But, on the face of it, the thing is impossible!" ejaculated Sheldon.

"On the face of it, yes. I agree with you," replied Zingrave quietly. "Please bear in mind that I never stated that the project would be successful. I said there was a strong possibility of the scheme maturing favourably. It is, in fact, something in the nature of an experiment. I am provided with an opportunity for testing a new drug which I have invented."

The two men were greatly interested.

"A drug?" asked Sheldon curiously.

"Exactly. As you know, I am a man of science, and I am constantly experimenting. And most of my experiments are of such a nature that they may be of use to the league. Well, some months ago I made a remarkable discovery in this very laboratory. In short, this drug I speak of is of the most amazing nature. When injected into the blood of a living being all animation is suspended. The man is to all intents and purposes dead, but at a certain time he will come to himself again, and will be just as strong and healthy as he was before the drug was administered. He wakes up, in fact, at the exact point where he passed into oblivion."

"But—but this is impossible!" ejaculated Sir Roger. "A drug which causes apparent death! A drug which suspends life for a given period of time! Really, Zingrave, you cannot expect us to believe your wild statement."

"Whether you believe it or not, the fact remains the same."

"But have you tested this drug?" asked Sheldon.

"Yes!"

"With success?"

"With absolute, unqualified success!"

"Heavens, you amaze me!" gasped Sheldon. "It seems, then, that you are not relying upon theories? You have already had proof of the value of your drug?"

"I never make statements unless I am sure of my facts," said Zingrave grimly. "Perhaps you will now listen to me more calmly, and not think that I have suddenly taken leave of my senses?"

"One moment," said Sir Roger. "Whom did you experiment on?"

"Several animals——"

"But not a human being?"

"No."

"Ah! That makes all the difference," exclaimed the baronet sourly.

"Men have experimented on animals before, but the same results are not obtained when the treatment is applied to a human being."

Professor Zingrave snapped his fingers.

"Why this quibbling?" he demanded curtly. "Cannot you trust me? Have I not proved my words on every other occasion? Have I ever deceived the Governing Circle? I tell you I am absolutely convinced that this drug will have precisely the same effect upon a man as it has had upon animals."

"And what was the effect?"

"I will give you one instance," replied the famous scientist. "A collie dog of mine, strong healthy dog, was one day contentedly gnawing a bone over by the wall yonder. While patting the animal I injected a dose of the drug by means of a hypodermic syringe. Instantly the dog gave a convulsive shudder and rolled over, apparently stone dead."

"James!" ejaculated Sir Roger.

"Within an hour the collie was stiff and cold. Its eyes were glazed, and there was absolutely no suspicion of a heart beat. To all intents and purposes the animal was as dead as a dog can be."

"And how long did it remain so?" inquired Sheldon.

"For twenty-nine days exactly."

"And did it require no food during that time?"

"My dear man, I have already said that the dog was as good as dead," replied Zingrave. "On the twenty-ninth day I was busy with an experiment when I suddenly became aware of a curious gnawing sound from the box in the corner. A moment's examination revealed the astonishing fact that the collie was absolutely itself again, and had actually continued eating its bone as though nothing had happened! The dog, in fact, had come to life abruptly and was as healthy and as strong as ever it had been."

"By Jove, how absolutely amazing."

"Moreover, several cats on which I experimented seemed to require no air," went on the professor. "I injected the drug and then placed two of the cats inside a box with the lid tightly closed. No air could enter. Yet, at the end of a fortnight, the cats were as lively as ever. I admit, however, that a human being may not be so hardy. But one fact is certain—if we substitute a living man for the mummy inside the sarcophagus, and make provision for air, he will come to himself in a perfect state of health at the expiration of a month. By that time he will be inside the pyramid of Meyduraam!"

Sir Roger Hogarth and Austin Sheldon were silent for a few minutes. The daring audacity of Zingrave's proposal took their breath away. It was so utterly bizarre and extraordinary that they could scarcely grasp its full meaning. Sheldon, however, was keen upon one point.

"All this is wonderful," he said bluntly, "but there's one drawback—a drawback which seems likely to prove an insurmountable stumbling-block."

"What is that?"

"A subject on whom to experiment!" replied Sheldon. "No man will willingly consent to undergo such an ordeal. Death is more probable than escape, for, as you say, the whole thing is a game of chance. You cannot force a man to do this thing, either——"

"I do not intend to," interjected the professor smoothly. "I have long been waiting for a chance to test my drug upon a human being; and here is a chance which will very probably end in bringing much grist to the league's mill. And I have a man in mind who will be only too eager to undertake the task."

"Eager?" asked Sir Roger incredulously.

"Exactly—and not only eager, but anxious," said Zingrave. "He is not a member of the league, but is, on the contrary, a man who has been marked down for death. I am referring to Frank Hungerford."

Sheldon raised his eyebrows.

"Frank Hungerford?" he repeated. "By Jove, I begin to understand!"

Sheldon was well acquainted with the facts concerning Frank Hungerford, for he himself had informed Zingrave of Hungerford's danger to the league. A week before, Hungerford, a young man, had frustrated one of the league's most daring robberies. And he had done more. He had undertaken a little amateur detective work, and had followed the league-men and had discovered much more than was healthy for the league. He had, in fact, discovered the identity of one of the great organisation's controlling agents, and the whereabouts of a vast amount of stolen property.

The Governing Circle had acted promptly.

While Hungerford had actually been on his way to the police-station, to place his information into official hands—information which would have

meant a great loss to the league—he had been kidnapped, and conveyed to a lonely house. And he had been a prisoner ever since, awaiting the sentence of the Governing Circle. The latter had decided that Hungerford was a peril, and that he must die.

"Hungerford is the man who will undertake this task," went on Zingrave in soft tones. "To-night he was to have been silenced for ever—and he knows it. He knows that there is no escape for him. Well, we shall offer him a chance of life, and I am sure that he will be only too eager to grasp at it. Even a slender thread is welcome to a doomed man."

"You will place him inside the sarcophagus, instead of the mummy?"

"Exactly. In fact, he will have no option—it will be Hobson's choice. No ordinary league-member would consent to undergo the ordeal, but Hungerford is totally different. Already doomed, the proposal will be in the nature of salvation. And we shall promise him great wealth if he is successful in his project. In any case, being substituted for the mummy will be no worse than sudden death, so he really will not care what happens."

"Suppose he point-blank refuses?"

Zingrave shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"As I have already said, he will have no option," he answered. "Whatever his own views may be, he will be placed inside the sarcophagus. Once he wakes up and finds himself within the pyramid, he will certainly try to find the diamonds, and will make his escape. At Port Said a man will be waiting to receive the diamonds—you, Sheldon, will be that man."

"Suppose he doesn't appear?"

"If he escapes from the pyramid he will certainly journey to Cairo, Port Said, or Alexandria. Our agents will be on the watch—and he will know it. He already grasps the league's terrible power. I think he will carry out the league's orders, Sheldon. If he doesn't appear at all—Well, we shall know that the project has failed, and that Hungerford has been killed. His fate will be decided just the same as though he were silenced to-night, and we shall have lost nothing. As I said before, the thing is in the nature of a gamble."

"I'm hanged if I can grasp it all!" grunted Sir Roger.

"Personally, I have a strong notion that everything will work out smoothly," went on Zingrave. "There is no reason why it shouldn't. Regarded calmly, the adventure is extremely simple and straightforward. Here is an opportunity for us to send a man into the Meyduraam Pyramid, and we are taking full advantage of it."

Austin Sheldon lit a fresh cigar.

"And when does the work commence?" he asked abruptly.

"At once, without a moment's delay. It is already past midnight; but when the league works it works swiftly. But what do you two fellows think? Do you feel inclined to a little wager as to the ultimate result of the experiment?"

"I think it will succeed," said Sheldon quietly.

"And I—well, I'm hanged if I know what to think," exclaimed Sir Roger Hogarth. "Anyhow, it's a hare-brained scheme, but there's no harm in it. If you like to amuse yourself in this way, Zingrave, you can. There's certainly a chance of immense profit if the scheme pans out as you anticipate."

The three men laughed. The amazing plot was complete. It now remained to be seen what would be the result. And at once, without a moment's longer delay, orders were given, and everything put in train for the commencement of the plan—and for the truly appalling ordeal of Frank Hungerford.

CHAPTER IV.

The Pocket-Book—Nelson Lee on the Watch—The Substitution.

NELSON LEE bit fiercely into the end of a cigar he had just lighted, ruined it, and finally flung it into the heart of the fire.

The detective was standing on the hearthrug in his consulting-room at Gray's Inn Road, and Nipper, his young assistant, was watching him. At the table sat Douglas Clifford, poring over a little pocket-book intently.

It was only a short while since Nelson Lee had arrived from Hampstead, and he had found Nipper and Clifford awaiting him. Briefly he had told them what had occurred, and had stated his suspicions regarding the League of the Green Triangle.

"I can't rest!" exclaimed Nelson Lee grimly. "What Zingrave's scheme is I do not know, but I am sure that he had some reason for misleading me regarding poor Leverett's fate. Zingrave declared death to be due from heart failure, and yet he knew all the while that poisoning was the actual cause."

"The Green Triangle's up to some new game, sir," said Nipper, with conviction.

"Yes, but what game, young 'un—what game?" went on the great detective. "We know now that Leverett was murdered by Egyptians. The very nature of the poisoned spot on his shin is proof that some barbarous method was used—some method unknown to modern science. By James, I mean to get to the bottom of it all!"

He crossed over to the table.

"Let me see that pocket-book again, Clifford," he said quietly.

Clifford handed it over with a grim look.

"This statement proves beyond doubt how Leverett met his fate," he exclaimed. "Those Egyptian fellows must be absolutely devilish."

"And yet I do not see how they can be very well blamed, looking at the case from their own point of view," said Nelson Lee. "This mummy is probably their idol; they worship it, and to kill the man who caused it to be stolen was only justice in their eyes. But they are in England now, and must conform to civilised ways. If it is within my power I mean to bring poor Leverett's murderers to justice."

The detective picked up the pocket-book and turned over the first page. There were only a few pages written upon; the rest were all blank. Dr. Leverett's writing was bold and clear, and the following statement was written down:

"CONCERNING THE MUMMY OF THE PHARAOH MEYDURAAM.

"This mummy was obtained for me some months ago from the mysterious Pyramid of Meyduraam, on the edge of the Libyan Desert. While the mummy was lying hidden in Cairo the two men who had removed it from the pyramid were brutally murdered in such a manner that no clue was left which would lead to the punishment of the assassins. I am sure that the murderers were the priests who inhabit the Meyduraam Pyramid, and that they had come to Cairo in order to recover the mummy, which they probably worship. They only succeeded in murdering the men who had confiscated the sarcophagus. They were unable to trace their property.

"The mummy has now been delivered to me here in London, and I think there is no further danger from any source. I may be technically a thief, but I have obtained this most remarkable mummy in the interests of science and exploration. Possibly I shall pay the penalty precisely the same as my

two agents were forced to pay. They were murdered in the open street by means of tiny poisoned darts, which came from an unknown quarter.

"I am setting these facts on record for one particular reason. There is a bare chance—though a very slender one—that the emissaries of the Meydurnam priests will travel to England in search of their property. And if they find it in my museum I shall most certainly share the fate of my two agents. But here, in England, I do not fear the consequences.

"In the unlikely event of my being found dead, however, I wish it to be understood why I have died. I shall probably laugh over these notes at a future date, when the remarkable mummy is safe in the British Museum. But it is a whim of mine to set down the facts, and I hereby do so.

"THEODORE LEVERETT."

Nelson Lee tossed the pocket-book on to the table.

"The thing is as clear as daylight," he exclaimed. "The fate which Dr. Leverett almost treated as a joke overtook him on the very day he wrote these notes—for I believe they were only penned this morning, just after the arrival of the sarcophagus."

"Those Egyptians must be devilish clever, sir," said Nipper, in an awe-struck voice.

"And I think we hold the trump card, my lad," went on the detective. "It is obvious that the Egyptians intended carrying the sarcophagus away with them, but were probably disturbed by Vincent. They will come back in the small hours to complete their work—or perhaps they will leave it until to-morrow night. In any event, I mean to waste no time."

"What are you going to do?" asked Douglas Clifford curiously.

"I and Nipper are going to set off at once for Hampstead," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "I do not think we shall be too late, for much time has not passed, and the Egyptians will certainly not return to the museum until Dr. Leverett's body has been removed. Nipper and I will watch and wait, and when the Egyptians arrive to finish their task—that is, to take the sarcophagus away—we will follow them and afterwards have them arrested. They must be made to pay the penalty for their crime."

"But cannot I help, Mr. Lee?" asked Clifford.

"I'm afraid this is hardly a time when your valuable services will be required," replied the detective. "Too many cooks spoil the broth, you know, and I am rather doubtful about allowing Nipper to come!"

"Then you can jolly well be doubtful!" exclaimed Nipper indignantly. "I'm blessed if I'm going to let you back out of it, guv'nor! I'm in this biz., and don't forget it!"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"Get your hat on, then!" he said briskly. "We're going off straight away!"

"But what about the Green Triangle?" asked Clifford intently.

"Ah, the Green Triangle!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, suddenly becoming grave. "I shall have to devote my attentions to that aspect of the case later on. Zingrave has got a hand in the pie somewhere, and I shall not rest until I find out the meaning of it. I'm not going to worry my head or waste time on the matter now, however. Crisp action is what is wanted now!"

And five minutes later Nelson Lee and Nipper had started off for Hampstead. They had parted with Douglas Clifford in Gray's Inn Road, Clifford being rather glum. But he realised that the detective had acted wisely. Too many hands were worse than none at all.

It was well after midnight when Nelson Lee and Nipper arrived at Hampstead. By this time the detective knew that Dr. Leverett's remains would

have been conveyed to the house. The museum, accordingly, would be absolutely deserted.

It was impossible to gain access to Leverett's garden from the front, and so Nelson Lee made a detour, and finally arrived in the little lane bordering the heath which ran parallel with the bottom of Leverett's garden. Here a little plantation was all that separated the two nocturnal visitors from the museum.

A lonelier spot could hardly be imagined. The heath on one side, the plantation on the other, with long gardens leading up to the houses. Trees abounded in these gardens, and the houses themselves were almost invisible. From the standpoint of solitude, Dr. Leverett could scarcely have chosen a better situation for his museum.

The very lane itself was not used by half a dozen people during the day. At night it was absolutely quiet and deserted.

"This way, Nipper," murmured Nelson Lee.

They clambered over a low fence, and then plunged through the plantation to the fairly low wall which barely concealed the rear of the museum. Before Nelson Lee had progressed ten yards he came to a halt and looked at the ground intently. It was gloomy and dim, but the detective's eyesight was keen enough to detect certain marks.

"We are evidently taking the same path as the Egyptians took," he exclaimed softly. "See, Nipper, the bushes are trampled down, and the grass flattened. Leverett's murderers approached and left the museum along here."

They walked on with great care, for there was a bare chance that the mysterious Egyptians were in the museum even at that moment. But when the pair at last took a walk round the little building they were soon satisfied that it was quite empty and that they had the place to themselves.

"The poor old chap's body has been removed to the house long since," muttered Nelson Lee. "I do not think we need fear disturbance, my lad. Vincent, or any of the other servants, would rather enter a lion's cage than come down to this museum to-night. Now where will be the best place for us to conceal ourselves?"

"What about the roof, sir?" said Nipper shrewdly.

"Ah, the roof! Excellent, young 'un—excellent!" said Nelson Lee crisply. "There is a skylight in the roof, and if the Egyptians enter the museum we shall be able to observe their every movement without their being aware of our presence. Moreover, it will be a simple matter to reach the roof, for the trees are handily placed."

The detective led the way, and in a very short time he and Nipper were sitting—or, rather, sprawling—upon the lead roof of the museum. The slope was gradual, and so there was no danger of their slipping off. They lay one on either side of the skylight, and were practically indistinguishable from the roof at a distance of ten yards. Certainly nobody could suspect their presence unless the roof itself was actually inspected.

They were both warmly attired in thick overcoats, woollen gloves, and mufflers. And it proved to be a cold job, for the night was chilly and somewhat damp. But there was no rain and scarcely any wind.

A distant clock boomed out the hour of one.

"Getting a bit cramped, sir," murmured Nipper.

"Don't grumble so early in the vigil," said Nelson Lee. "We may have to wait hours yet. Indeed, it is possible that we are merely wasting our time."

"That's lively, anyhow."

But Nipper was only grumbling for the sake of conversation. When another hour had passed, however, he was really beginning to feel a little fed-up. At last two-thirty chimed out in the distance.

"Oh, when I think of my little bed!" grunted Nipper disgustedly. "Practically two hours and a half we've been stuck on this rotten roof, gazing at the stars which can't be seen, and waiting for something to happen. I say, gov'nor, how do you find these tiles?"

"To speak frankly, Nipper, they are not exactly like a feather bed."

"Not by long chalks!" growled Nipper. "I wouldn't mind so much if they were slates; they'd be smooth then. But these blessed tiles are all lumps, and I'm aching——"

"Quiet, lad!" hissed Nelson Lee sharply.

"Hallo! What's up——?"

"Shssssh!"

Nipper himself had heard nothing, but he remained perfectly still, and completely forgot his aches—which were not nearly so bad as he made out. He had passed many a worse vigil than this.

Nelson Lee's ears had not deceived him, for very soon a faint rustling was heard from the direction of the plantation. And then the two hidden watchers received something of a surprise.

A voice floated up to them from below.

"Quiet as the grave, Jim!" came the voice. "I reckon this is going to be a soft job, if you ask me. This way. We'll be inside in two seconds!"

From below came the sound of the window being forced. Nelson Lee and Nipper looked at one another with curious expressions upon their faces.

"What's it mean, gov'nor?" breathed Nipper. "They—they ain't Egyptians!"

"I am at a loss," replied the detective softly. "We were certainly expecting the Egyptians to come, but that voice was exceedingly English. Can it be possible that these men have been hired by the Egyptians? I hardly think so. They would not trust their precious mummy to strangers."

Nipper suddenly gazed down through the glass skylight into the interior of the museum. Up till now all had been pitch darkness below.

"Look, sir!" murmured Nipper tensely.

But his master was already staring downwards through the glass. The ordinary electric light had not been switched on, for it might have attracted attention from the house, although it was not probable. Anyhow, these strangers evidently meant to take no risks, for they had produced three or four little electric lamps, and these had been switched on and placed in different parts of the room. All of them were directed towards the sarcophagus.

There were three men, and a fourth stood in the shadows. It seemed as though his hands were tied, and his feet also secured. In addition, a thick gag was placed over his mouth. Although Nelson Lee had no idea of what was going on, this fourth man was Frank Hungerford. The young man had consented to undergo the experiment, for it mattered little to him what became of him. He knew that he was doomed. And any chance of life—however slender—was better than sudden death. He had come here of his own free will, knowing that any outcry would mean a swift doom. But once within the museum his three companions had thought it wise to bind and gag him while they attended to the preliminary details.

"Can't make it out, sir," murmured Nipper. "There's a chap there who seems to be bound up, and——"

"By James!" whispered Nelson Lee suddenly. "Do you see that tall man, Nipper—the one who is directing the operation? He is Frederick Bayley, ~~one of the controlling agents of the League of the Green Triangle.~~"

"My hat, you're right!" breathed the lad. "Oh, crikey, this is getting more mysterious than ever! What the dickens is the league up to? And where are those giddy Egyptian merchants?"

"The whole thing is a puzzle, but I will fathom it out!"

The unseen watchers continued to gaze down into the museum. What they saw filled them with amazement. The work that was going on below was of the most astounding nature. Without any delay the three league men removed the cover of the sarcophagus, and then very gingerly took out the precious mummy and laid it upon the floor.

Bayley and one of the helpers then commenced to remove the outer linen which swathed the ancient body. Meanwhile the other man was busily doing something to the stone coffin.

"Look at that, sir!" whispered Nipper excitedly. "I'm blessed if the chap isn't boring some little holes all round the top edge of the mummy-case! That must be a jolly sharp instrument he's using, for the thing is made of stone."

"Soft stone, probably, and very thin," murmured Nelson Lee. "And the holes are being bored in such a position that, with the lid on, it will be almost impossible to observe them. But I, too, am at a loss to understand the meaning of these preparations."

The celebrated criminologist was soon to be enlightened.

After ten minutes had passed the outer covering was completely removed from the mummy, which had been swathed in the curious linen from the crown of his head to the feet. The face had not hitherto been visible, but it could now be seen, dark brown and crinkled, and shrunken like a dried leaf.

As soon as this outer covering had been removed the mummy was lifted and carefully deposited at the rear of the big couch. The couch was then pushed back, thus completely hiding the gruesome object.

Exactly what happened next Nelson Lee and Nipper could not see, for Bayley and his companion worked in the shadow, and they themselves were in the direct line of view. The third man was still busy on the sarcophagus.

But Nelson Lee and Nipper could see, at least, that the fourth man, who had been bound and gagged, had been laid flat on the floor. Ten minutes later the two watchers gazed at one another with glances that were full of stupified amazement.

The fourth man was apparently a dead body. He had been carried to the centre of the room, attired only in shirt and trousers, and a pair of thin shoes. He was a smallish man, somewhat lean and skinny.

His face was chalky white, and upon the forehead, in dead earnest to its pallor, was a curious mark—a scar, probably, in the shape of a half-moon. But there seemed to be absolutely no doubt that he was stone dead. His eyes were open, and they were glazed and dull.

"By heavens, has this man been murdered before our eyes?" breathed Nelson Lee. "Nipper, I have never been so astounded in all my life! What in the name of all that is infernal does this mean? What are these scoundrels doing?"

But Nipper could scarcely find his voice. He was watching intently. And he saw the seemingly dead man wrapped and swathed in the bandages which had just been taken from the mummy. It was a long job, and fully half an hour had elapsed before it was completed. Then Nelson Lee was forced to admit that it was absolutely impossible to detect that a substitution had taken place.

The figure which was placed inside the sarcophagus a few minutes later was, to all intents and purposes, the original mummy. It was fastened securely inside, and then the lid was placed on the stone coffin and the catches made firm.

The whole affair was so fantastic that it almost seemed like a dream. The mummy had been removed from the sarcophagus and a living one substituted!

By now Nelson Lee was quite sure that the apparently dead man was alive. For there would have been no object whatever in placing a dead body within the mummy-case, unless, of course, the league had done so in order to get rid of a victim. But that would have been a clumsy method.

The holes which had been bored, too, clearly showed that the man within the stone coffin was alive. But before Nelson Lee could ponder further over the matter, there was a sound of quick footsteps from the plantation and then the low murmur of excited voices below. Frederick Bayley acted quickly. The man who had given the warning slipped off among the trees, but there was no time for the others to climb out of the museum. Therefore the window was softly lowered and fastened. Then the three men, taking their electric lamps, stepped swiftly across to a big recess which was curtained off. The folds of the curtain concealed their figures, and the next moment the museum was in utter darkness.

"What's the sudden alarm about, sir?" asked Nipper.

"Not a sound, lad! The Egyptians, I expect!"

"Oh, crikey! How many more surprises?"

The pair lay on the roof still and silent, and very shortly they heard stealthily approaching footsteps. Then, once again, the window was forced open. But this time nothing was to be seen through the skylight except for a brief flash. A wax-vesta flared out, and during that moment Nelson Lee and Nipper clearly saw four swarthy-featured men. In truth, they were Ramses Rhamsiptah, Khufa Ath, and two others of their race. That one glimpse revealed the sarcophagus to them, in precisely the same position as it had been when they left the museum hours before.

With great care the mummy-case was transferred out of the window, over the low fence, and through the plantation.

"You remain here, Nipper," Nelson Lee exclaimed softly. "I am off after those dark-faced sons of the East. It will be a risky game, for I may be spotted by the league man who gave the alarm to our friends below. But I shall have to take my chance."

Without waiting for Nipper to reply, Nelson Lee slipped along the roof and hauled himself into the tree which overhung. A moment later he had climbed rapidly downwards, and was lost to Nipper's view in the darkness.

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CHAPTER V.

At a Loss—Nelson Lee Decides—The Visitor—Off to Egypt.

"A H, Nipper! So you returned home first—eh?"

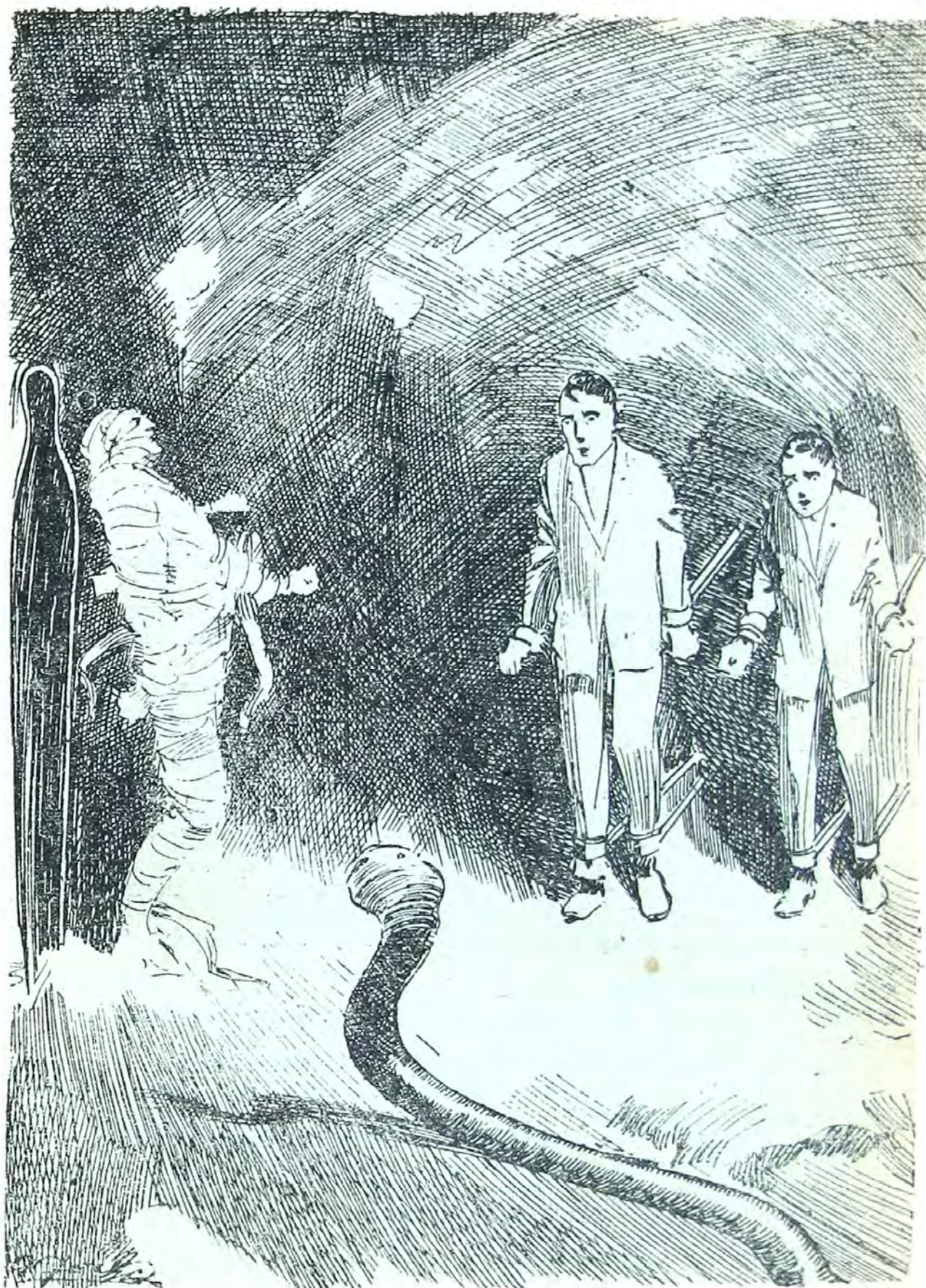
"I've been in about ten minutes, sir," replied Nipper cheerily.

"Well, have you tracked those blessed Egyptians down?"

Nelson Lee removed his overcoat and hat. It was in the small hours of the morning, and he had just entered the consulting-room, to find Nipper sitting before the fire, which had been making valiant efforts to get up under the influence of Nipper's careful coaxing.

The detective sank into a chair and lit a cigar. His face was as immobile as ever, but there was a grim little twist about the corners of his mouth, and a steely glitter in his eyes which only appeared there when he had a firm purpose fixed in his mind.

"First of all, Nipper, tell me what happened after I left?" he said



And then the thing happened. A shuffling sound came from the sarcophagus.

Crash! The stone lid fell to the ground, and the weird swathed figure that had been within fell out on to the floor and commenced a series of convulsive struggles. (See page 38.)

"I've got nothing to report at all, guv'nor," said Nipper promptly. "About five minutes after you'd gone, Bayley and his pals left their place of concealment and hooked it clean away. I didn't follow the beggars, because there would have been no object in doing so. I came straight home, after having a squint round the museum."

"H'm! I didn't expect much more," remarked Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "For my part, I soon discovered that the sarcophagus had been carried to a motor-car which was out in the lane. I awaited my chance, and managed to cling on to the back. The place was tremendously dark, and so everything was in my favour."

"And where did the car go to, sir?"

"A rather deserted house in the St. John's Wood district. I merely watched the mummy-case carried indoors, and then came home like yourself. The house is one with a large drive, and so nobody saw the sarcophagus removed from the motor-car except myself. Even the chauffeur of the car was an Egyptian like the others. My lad, we are up against an exceedingly curious case!"

"What I can't understand, sir——"

"Not a word to-night—or I had better say this morning, because we are disgracefully late birds," said Nelson Lee, jumping to his feet. "Off to bed with you, young 'un. We are both going to have a sound sleep. When we wake up, we may be able to think a little more clearly. There is much work to be done when daylight comes."

Accordingly, the pair were soon in the land of slumbers. When they sat down to breakfast, a little later than usual, they were both looking thoroughly refreshed and fit.

"Can you think any better now, sir?" asked Nipper, with a grin. "Last night's affair seems more like a nightmare to me than actual happenings."

"Let us review the train of events from their commencement," said Nelson Lee quietly, as he poured out the coffee. "Things have happened with remarkable swiftness. Late last evening Dr. Leverett was murdered by Egyptians. In the small hours of this morning emissaries of the League of the Green Triangle broke into the museum and substituted a living man for the mummy which had primarily caused Leverett's death. Later on, the Egyptians returned and carried off the sarcophagus, without having any suspicion of the trick which had been played upon them."

"That's the whole thing short and sweet, sir," said Nipper. "What do you make of it?"

Nelson Lee looked grave.

"I do not feel like committing myself to words, young 'un," he said quietly. "I have not the slightest idea what the league's motives are. To-day I shall carry out some investigations, however. Immediately after breakfast you will set off to the house in St. John's Wood, and will watch it closely until I relieve you."

The plan was carried out. In point of fact, for the next two days the house of the Egyptians was watched day and night. During the first hour of his vigil, Nipper caught a glimpse of two swarthy faces within the house. But after that neither he nor Nelson Lee saw a single sign of the men from the East.

Two mornings later the famous detective paced his consulting-room with sharp strides. Nipper was standing in the room regarding his master anxiously. One of Nelson Lee's minor helpers was on the watch at the house in St. John's Wood.

"I can stand this no longer, Nipper!" exclaimed Nelson Lee grimly. "Two days wasted—two days spent for no purpose whatever! Dr. Leverett has been found by a coroner's jury to have died from heart failure, and

there was no question whatever of foul play. Yet you and I know that he was murdered, and that his murderers are at present in London."

"Are you going to act, sir?"

"Yes, this morning," replied the detective. "I have refrained from informing the police about the matter because I wished to discover, if possible, what the league is up to. I wanted to find out why that man with the scar had been substituted for the mummy. The whole thing is a mystery. I am at a total loss for an explanation. There is one which struck me this morning, but I dismissed it at once."

"Why, sir?"

"Because it was too utterly preposterous for consideration," replied Nelson Lee. "I have learned that the Pyramid of Meyduraam is supposed to contain untold wealth in the shape of diamonds and other precious stones. Could the league have substituted the man for the mummy so that the former would thereby gain admittance into the pyramid?"

"That might be the explanation, sir," exclaimed Nipper excitedly.

"But think, lad—think," protested his master. "It will be a month, practically, before the sarcophagus finally reaches the pyramid. How can we believe such a state of affairs as I have outlined?"

"It's hardly likely, sir. No man could live for such a time without food or drink."

"Anyhow, I delayed action in order to give myself a chance of finding out the truth. I don't know whether I have done wisely or foolishly," went on the detective. "In any case, it is too late now. But no harm has been done by the delay. The house of the Egyptians has been watched constantly, and they have made no move, which seems to point to the fact that they are lying low. If the man who is the mummy-case is actually alive he will come to no harm in this short period of time."

Before Nelson Lee could speak further the door opened, and Mrs. Jones, the landlady, appeared.

"There's a lady wishes to see you, sir," she said hesitatingly. "You told me not to admit anybody, but the poor soul seems so worried——"

"I'm afraid it is utterly impossible for me to see the caller," interjected Nelson Lee sharply. "Kindly tell her that I am too busy this morning."

Mrs. Jones left, but a few moments later returned with a small piece of paper on which were written the words:

"I only wish to see you for two minutes, Mr. Lee. Oh, please don't refuse me this simple request. My son is lost, and I am distracted.—MRS. HUNGERFORD."

Nelson Lee jerked himself into a chair and waved his arm.

"Show the lady up," he said gruffly.

Mrs. Hungerford was not long in coming, and her very aspect soon made Nelson Lee rather regret his original curt refusal. For Mrs. Hungerford was obviously terribly distressed, and there was a look of appeal in her eyes which was extremely pathetic.

"It's about my son, Mr. Lee—my son Frank!" she began, very quietly. "He disappeared over a week ago, and the police can find no trace of him whatever. I have come to you to ask your advice."

Nelson Lee tapped the table with the end of a pencil.

"Will you kindly allow me to say, at once, that I really cannot see my way clear to help you," he said gently. "At the present moment I am engaged upon a case which cannot possibly be neglected."

"But I don't wish to claim all your time, Mr. Lee," said the visitor quickly. "That is why I asked for the two minutes' interview. Can you

keep your eyes open for any sign of my son while you are attending to your other business?"

"I really am afraid that would be impracticable. Whenever I take up a case I always do so with the intention of devoting all my entire energies to the matter," said Nelson Lee, who really sympathised with the lady, but wished devoutly to get rid of her. "Why do you not advertise in the newspapers, and use various other means of discovering your son's whereabouts? I expect he will turn up——"

"I don't think he will!" exclaimed Mrs. Hungerford sadly. "I have a terrible belief that something awful has happened to him. Only the night before he disappeared he was saying some curious things in an excited voice which I could not understand. He declared that he had got on the track of a gang of criminals. Oh, Mr. Lee, I believe that he has met with some terrible catastrophe."

"I sympathise with you——"

"I want more than your sympathy, Mr. Lee—I want your help," said Mrs. Hungerford earnestly. "This league, as Frank called them——"

"League!" interjected Nelson Lee sharply. "Did your son mention any name?"

Mrs. Hungerford passed a hand across her brow.

"Yes, there was something," she said, looking up. "Something about a square, I think, or a triangle. I forget——"

Nelson Lee exchanged a swift glance with Nipper.

"Perhaps this lady's visit is not so far beyond the mark, after all," thought the detective quickly. "So her son is another victim of the accursed league—probably because he discovered things he ought not to have done."

He looked at his visitor questioningly.

"What sort of a looking man was your son, Mrs. Hungerford?" he asked, in order to gain time to collect his thoughts.

"A smallish man, Mr. Lee. But he has one distinctive mark," said the lady. "It is a scar on his forehead—a red scar in the shape of a half moon——"

"By jumping Jupiter!" roared Nipper, leaping to his feet.

"Silence, my lad!" protested Nelson Lee, with perfect coolness, and without having moved a hair. "So your son is distinguishable by a scar upon his forehead, Mrs. Hungerford? Dear me, that is extremely interesting."

"If you could only give me a little hope, Mr. Lee——"

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"I have an idea that I shall have news for you before long," he said quietly—"news of the whereabouts of your son. But please do not rely too much upon seeing him alive. No—no, don't think that! I do not say that he is dead. On the contrary, it is possible that he may be restored to you before a week has passed."

The visitor was overwhelmed, but Nelson Lee absolutely refused to prolong the interview by a minute. And the very instant Mrs. Hungerford had passed out of the consulting-room Nelson Lee clapped Nipper on the back, and the lad saw that his master's eyes were glittering.

"We're on the track at last, my boy," he exclaimed briskly. "We now know the identity of the man who was placed in the sarcophagus. I am more determined than ever to waste no further time. You and I are going to St. John's Wood this very minute. We will find out the devilish truth one way or another before an hour has passed!"

And off they went by taxi to St. John's Wood. The house was a rather dingy one in a quiet little avenue, and as Nelson Lee and Nipper stepped up

to the gate they saw a man leaving the front door with a pair of steps on his back. He was a painter, and in the front garden were pails and ladders and various other articles connected with decorating.

"By Heaven, what does this mean?" exclaimed Nelson Lee tensely. "The man I put on the watch is not here, and—— Hi, my man, a word with you!"

The workman with the ladder turned and looked at the pair curiously as they came up.

"What of the tenants of this house?" asked the detective bluntly.

"What of 'em?" repeated the workman. "Bloomin' queer lot, they was—Turks or Injuns, or summat. They've gone!"

"Gone!" ejaculated Nelson Lee between his teeth.

"Yes, two days ago," said the workman. "Good job, too, if you ask me! We don't want them sort o' fellows in England! The house is one that's let furnished, you see, and that rummy crew took it for a month. But they'd only been 'ere a few days——"

Nelson Lee did not wait to hear any more. He and Nipper reached the roadway again and walked slowly away. The detective's face was grim and set.

"The Egyptians were too clever for us!" he said bitterly. "In spite of the house being watched, they have given us the slip. What a terrible state of affairs. Cannot you realise what this means, Nipper?"

"It means that we've been diddled, sir," said Nipper huskily.

"Mrs. Hungerford's son is out of our reach now—probably well on the way to Egypt, packed inside that sarcophagus like a dead man. Indeed, I strongly suspect that he is dead by this time."

During the ride home the great crime investigator scarcely said a word; but when he reached Gray's Inn Road there was a surprise for him. A visitor was waiting, and it was none other than Martin Caine, cleverly disguised, and with a thickly bandaged hand.

Martin Caine was one of the league's controlling agents, but at the outset of Nelson Lee's campaign he had saved Caine's life, and the latter had sworn to help his rescuer in the work against the great organisation. On more than one occasion Martin Caine had proved himself to be an extremely valuable ally.

He now brought important news. Owing to an accident he would have come two days sooner, but could not possibly do so under the circumstances. It was he, he declared, who had received orders from the Governing Circle regarding the proposal to Frank Hungerford.

Caine had suggested to Hungerford the whole scheme, and Hungerford had agreed to undergo the ordeal, as already recorded. Thus Martin Caine knew all the facts concerning the sarcophagus and the substitution.

These facts he now related to Nelson Lee. Curiously enough the detective's theory was extremely near the mark. But he now knew the actual facts, and they amounted to one positive certainty.

Frank Hungerford was alive, and on his way to the Pyramid of Meyduraam. If he succeeded in his project, he would hand over his gains to Austin Sheldon, who would be waiting at Port Said.

After Martin Caine had gone, Nelson Lee was silent for fully half an hour. Then, with an abruptness which startled Nipper—who hardly knew what to think of the amazing case—he jumped to his feet and commenced looking up information in various books.

Then he grabbed hold of Nipper's coat and dragged the lad to his feet.

"Pack!" exclaimed the detective briskly.

"Eh? What the dickens——"

"Pack! Get busy, young 'un, and pack your portmanteau," went on Nelson Lee. "We're off on a long journey immediately. If we hurry we can catch a train which leaves for Southampton in two hours' time."

Nipper stared open-mouthed.

"Where are we going to, sir?" he asked excitedly.

"There is only one place where we should go to, Nipper," replied his master. "To Egypt! To the land of the Pharaohs! To the Pyramid of Meyduraam!"

"Oh, lor'!" gasped Nipper, almost speechless.

"We are going to Egypt with a double purpose," went on Nelson Lee calmly. "Firstly, to do our very utmost to rescue Frank Hungerford, and to avenge Dr. Leverett's death; and secondly to deal with another Governing Member of the League of the Green Triangle—Mr. Austin Sheldon!"

CHAPTER VI.

In the Desert—The Simoon—The Dying Priest—Into the Pyramid!

THE desert!

The sun blazed down from a sky of absolute blue. Two figures moved slowly along in the weltering heat. They were a pair of donkeys, and upon their backs were seated a man and a boy, attired in airy white clothing and pith helmets.

Needless to say, they were Nelson Lee and Nipper.

Behind them, now almost lost in the haze, were the fertile lowlands of the Fayoum. Ahead, and all round, was the vast desert. On all sides it stretched, in great undulating hills and dales of grey-brown sand. Not a green shrub was visible, and right away to the horizon in the distance nothing could be seen but sand, sand. The sun's full glare blazed upon it, and the air quivered and vibrated with the great heat.

But there was something else besides the sand in the distance—about two miles ahead, and seeming almost to be very near at hand. It was the great pile of the Meyduraam Pyramid—that solitary erection of forgotten days which was a puzzle to all modern mankind.

"Egypt's not so bad, sir," remarked Nipper, speaking for the first time within ten minutes. "I've been in hotter places, I'll admit, but this is simply terrific. I tell you what I'd rather see than that dull old pyramid."

"What's that, Nipper?"

"Why, a pier and a row of bathing machines, and the deep blue sea!" exclaimed Nipper. "My hat, we've been in Egypt over a week now, but this is the hottest day by a long way. Do you think we're going to have a storm?"

Nelson Lee looked up at the sky.

"I'm not much of a judge of Egyptian weather," he replied, "but it seems to me that the weather conditions are absolutely perfect. And I'm not exactly impressed by the pyramid ahead of us. It strikes me as being a formidable proposition, young 'un."

Nipper nodded.

"I wouldn't mind betting a quid to a speck of sand that our efforts are fruitless," he said candidly. "You mark my word, guv'nor! We shall mess about here for a week or two, and then give it up as a bad job!"

"Even so, Nipper, we shall not have visited Egypt for nothing," said Nelson Lee firmly, as the donkeys jogged along. "It is my intention to

deal with Austin Sheldon, by hook or by crook, before we return to England. By Jove, I mean to have some satisfaction out of this journey to the East!"

Indeed, one of the principle objects of their journey—that of releasing Frank Hungerford from the pyramid—seemed pretty hopeless now that they had actually arrived on the desert.

Weeks had passed, for Nelson Lee and Nipper had been delayed in Port Said and Cairo. It was now nearly a month since Dr. Theodore Leverett had been murdered. What had happened to Frank Hungerford during all this time? Was he still alive? Was he still under the influence of Professor Zingrave's wonderful drug?

Reviewed calmly, the situation was hardly encouraging. In England it had seemed fairly easy to gain access to the pyramid and to rescue the unfortunate man. But out here, within sight of Meyduraam itself, the proposition was very different. The great pyramid looked forbidding and grim. It was utterly alone, the nearest human beings living two hours donkey-ride off, in a little oasis on the borders of the Fayoum.

Nelson Lee had done his best to obtain information regarding the pyramid, but he had hardly been successful. The natives regarded the pyramid in something like awe, and if they knew anything, they took care to say nothing. And the white folk in the vicinity could only declare that there was no known entrance to Meyduraam, and that it was a sheer waste of time to attempt to find one.

All this was scarcely encouraging. But Nelson Lee doggedly determined to press on. Successful or unsuccessful, he would do his very utmost to gain an entrance into the mysterious pyramid. It was, apparently, a well-known fact that a little band of priests inhabited the great granite pile, and the natives were uneasy when talking of the subject.

"The nearer we grow the more formidable the pyramid looks," remarked Nelson Lee, gazing ahead steadily. "The time is now well on in the afternoon, Nipper. We will camp near the pyramid and watch. Perhaps at night we shall see something which will give us a clue."

Nipper merely grunted. He didn't think any good would come from watching.

And the lad was right!

The pyramid was reached at last, and the pair camped in the shadow of it. Right up into the sky the vast edifice rose, and seemed to be absolutely solid. Yet somewhere within it an Englishman was at the mercy of the barbarous priests. It was composed of huge granite blocks, and to climb to the top of it would have been a herculean task. Nipper had mentally decided—beforehand—to do the climb; but now that he saw the pyramid at close quarters, he changed his mind with great promptitude.

The pair were rather tired, and it was pleasant lolling in the shade after the heat of the donkey-ride. The silence was absolute—a silence which is almost indescribable. The sun sank fairly swiftly, and night came on.

Lying on their rugs, Nelson Lee and Nipper watched the pyramid in turns. But when the moon rose, although the spectacle was grand in the extreme there was really nothing of a satisfying nature to behold. These two were alone, alone on the desert, with the great Meyduraam Pyramid for company. Of other human beings there was not the slightest sign or indication.

Overhead the sky was deep, deep blue, and spangled with wonderful stars. The whole heavens seemed to be ablaze, and for a long time Nipper lay upon his back and studied the stars. He had been in many parts of the world, but he had never seen such a beautiful sky as this.

The peace and quietness of the desert was something to wonder at.

And the night passed uneventfully. At the first streak of dawn the watchers decided to give up their vigil and to return to the oasis for food and drink. They would return in the late afternoon for another night's careful watching.

When the sun was fairly in the heavens again Nelson Lee and Nipper were just off the edge of the desert, and the pyramid could be seen rising in the distance. For the best part of the day they slept, and then rose refreshed.

They were being cared for by a hospitable gentleman who rejoiced in the name of Halil Mohammed, and he was rather inclined to smile at their efforts. He did not know why these two Britishers were so interested in the Meyduraam Pyramid, but he made it clear that they were wasting their time. Nelson Lee, however, took no notice of the native's bland smiles. He would pursue his own course.

In the afternoon he and Nipper started off on their hardy donkeys, prepared for another night's watch. It was a good two hours' ride to the pyramid, although the latter seemed comparatively near. To-day was even hotter than the previous day, and after the pair had been on the rough track for a quarter of an hour, Nelson Lee glanced sharply at the sky.

Instead of being blue, as it had been a hour since, it was now yellow and dull; the sun had taken on a curious aspect, and looked like a molten disc of bronze. The horizon ahead, across the desert, was hazy, and the pyramid was almost hidden.

"Nipper," said Nelson Lee suddenly; "we're going back."

"Going back, sir! What for?"

"Look at the sky," said the detective. "I've noticed that unhealthy appearance of the sky before, in other parts of the world. There's a storm brewing—or not exactly a storm in this case. Probably a simoon."

"Oh, well, we haven't come far!" said Nipper. "Get round, you image!"

The last polite remark was addressed to the unoffending donkey, and presently the pair were on their way back to the oasis. By the time they arrived the sky had taken on quite another aspect.

Halil Mohammed was glad to see the Britishers, for he knew that they would not have stood much chance had they been caught out in the desert by the sand-storm. For it was one of those dreadful, abrupt sand-storms which threatened to burst at any moment. The sun had now disappeared, and although it was still high in the sky, darkness was rapidly falling.

As Nelson Lee and Nipper watched, they became aware of a low, far-away moaning sound, increasing in intensity every moment.

"By gum, this simoon, or whatever it's called, is gathering up quickly, sir!" remarked Nipper. "How long will it last?"

"Probably only a short while. In half an hour it will be all over," replied Nelson Lee. "But it might mean death to be caught in it. I am thankful we had only just started out!"

The sound of the approaching desert storm had now grown to a dull roar. In the sheltered oasis it was fairly safe, but Nelson Lee and Nipper sought shelter now. The roar suddenly seemed to increase to a terrifying howl, and the simoon was raging in all its fury.

Out on the desert any hapless traveller would have been in a sorry plight. The wind roared with terrible force, carrying with it impenetrable clouds of stinging, blinding, hot sand. The gale was like an exhaust from a blast-furnace, hot and stifling, whirling across the desert like a thousand furies. At one moment it was sweeping along in a steady rush, and the next whisking round in dreadful whirlpools, sucking up the sand as though some gigantic engine of destruction were at work.

The whole surface of the desert changed—hillocks became levelled and hollows were swiftly filled. Nelson Lee and Nipper were amazed and awestruck with the fury of the storm. Lightning played every now and again, but this was caused by the friction of the sand upon the air. Not a drop of rain fell, and an awful darkness had descended, blotting out everything.

It was appallingly awful while it lasted. But fortunately it did not last long. For ten minutes or so the scorching sand drove across the desert in blinding sheets, and the air was filled with a medley of strange sounds. Then, abruptly, the darkness began to lift. The wind lessened, and the air became clearer. In an astonishing short space of time the simoon was over. It had passed on as swiftly as it had approached.

Nelson Lee and his young assistant, coming out into the open, found the sun shining brilliantly. Hardly a breath of wind stirred, and the air was placid and clear. The only sign of the recent storm was a thick haze over the desert towards the west.

"I say, guv'nor, what a good thing we don't have those little things over in England!" remarked Nipper huskily. "Thank goodness it was short and sweet!"

"A lucky thing we weren't caught in it, young 'un!"

"Rather, sir!"

When, a little later, the pair started off again, the sky was deep blue once more and the sun was shining gloriously. It seemed as though such a thing as a storm was impossible. There was absolutely no sign left of the recent disturbance.

After an hour's ride the pyramid looked larger and nearer. But it had a sort of sinister aspect, as though defying all comers. Nelson Lee was riding a little ahead, silent, and thinking deeply.

A sound seemed to reach his ears, and he looked up sharply. Sounds out on the desert were so uncommon that the detective was instantly on the alert, and his keen eyesight saw something almost at once.

He slipped from his saddle and hurried across the loose sand. Nipper, too, had heard, and he was hard at his master's heels.

There, almost buried in the sand, lay a human being—a man. His dark face was almost black now, and his eyes swollen and bloodshot. Even one glance was sufficient to show Nelson Lee that the fellow was in a bad way.

"Water!" he croaked. "Give me water!"

Nelson Lee understood the words; indeed, he would have known what to do without any words, for the man's lips were parched and swollen to a huge size. In a moment he was drinking greedily and swiftly.

"Ah! I am better—the agony of thirst has gone," he said hoarsely, his head resting on the detective's knee. "Praise be on you, stranger, for this succour! I am dying fast, but my agonies are now easier to bear. I can die in peace."

"You were caught in the sand-storm?" asked Nelson Lee gently.

"I was blown hither and thither, as the very seeds are borne by the wind," said the Egyptian weakly. "I was choked—my lungs are filled with sand—I am nearly blind. May those be accursed who sent me out of the pyramid!"

Nelson Lee started.

"The pyramid!" he ejaculated. "Do—do you know the secret of the entrance?"

"Who better? I am one of the race; I am one of the sacred priests of Meyduraam," croaked the dying man. "I earned the displeasure of Ramses Rhamsiptah, and he cast me out. But I talk too much—I let my tongue run

"No, no! Talk on!" urged Nelson Lee. "I have rendered you a service, my friend; now you render me one. Tell me how to find the entrance to the pyramid."

The dying man shook his head.

"I wish you no ill," he muttered. "To give you the information you want would be death for you. If you entered the pyramid you would surely be killed——"

"I can look after myself!" interjected the detective, who was trembling with excitement. "Tell me the secret, and I shall be grateful. You were in agony, and I came to your relief. Will you not render me a service in return?"

The priest suddenly lifted his head, and his bloodshot eyes flashed.

"I will tell you!" he said, in a mere whisper. "I am betraying nothing, for I have been cast out. Death is the reward of those who speak—but I am dying fast, so nothing matters. Curse Rhamsiptah! May you enter the pyramid, white man, and slay the son of a dog!"

And then, in little gasps—for he was on the verge of collapse—the dying priest revealed the secret of the entrance to Meyduraam. On the west face of the pyramid, the tenth granite block from the right, and then the fourth up. Nelson Lee and Nipper listened intently, their hearts beating fast. By a miracle, they had obtained the information they wanted.

"But—go—go far distant!" whispered the Egyptian weakly. "Shun the pyramid as though it was accursed. Death is there! I have given you the secret, but I tell you to go across the desert—away, away. Even as I, it would be better for you to be caught by the dreaded storm than to enter the tomb of Meyduraam. It is dark there; the light of day never enters, and once you bid farewell to the sun, you will never see it——"

His voice trailed away, and he sank back, limp and motionless.

Five minutes later the priest was dead. The simoon had, at least, claimed one victim. But Nelson Lee and Nipper, although gravely concerned, were excited and eager. As quickly as possible they buried the poor remains, and then the detective turned his eyes towards the great solitary pyramid.

"The secret is ours, Nipper!" he said quietly. "By a stroke of Providence, we have been guided to our goal. This is no work of chance—it is the hand of fate. Grave, unknown danger lies before us, but our duty is clear."

"We are going to enter the pyramid, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"As soon as night falls, my boy. Frank Hungerford is there, and if it is within human power, we are going to rescue him from his ghastly tomb. Our own lives may pay the forfeit, but we must not hesitate."

"I'm ready, guv'nor!" said Nipper steadily.

And they mounted their donkeys again, and continued the journey across the trackless desert to the Pyramid of Meyduraam.

CHAPTER VII.

The Passage—The Cavern of Death—Rescued By Fate—The Starlight.

OVERHEAD the stars gleamed brilliantly, and the desert was bathed in moonlight. The silence was a silence like no other in the world.

There was something awesome in the scene, and Nelson Lee and Nipper were subdued and silent. In the shadow of the great edifice, which had been raised by unknown hands thousands of years before, they stood almost fascinated and spellbound.

The pair were standing on a broad ledge, a little distance from the ground. Before them a black gaping hole yawned. It was no more than two feet broad, and four feet high. But it was the entrance! The secret was theirs. It had taken Nelson Lee fully an hour to discover the working of the stone block which formed the door, in spite of the dying Egyptian's explicit instructions—but he had succeeded at last.

"Come, Nipper, we must be moving," exclaimed the detective softly.

"I was thinking, sir," said Nipper in a low voice. "This silence—this terrible feeling of mystery and lurking danger. Isn't it wonderful——"

Nelson Lee patted the lad on the back.

"Very wonderful, indeed, young 'un," he said quietly. "But you mustn't give way to thoughts. We've got to keep our nerves on the stretch, and turned up to the highest pitch. We are about to plunge into the Unknown, and we shall need all our wits."

Nipper shook himself.

"Right-ho, guv'nor!" he exclaimed briskly. "Lead the way. I'm ready for any old thing! There's a Britisher inside this little pig-sty, and we've got to haul him out. And I don't expect the danger will be anything much, when we come to it."

The detective smiled grimly to himself, but he made no answer. Instead, he switched on his electric torch, and stepped into the dark tunnel which gaped before him.

It was cut out of the solid rock, and its sides were smooth and glossy with the use of countless years. The beam of light ahead revealed nothing; the passage was straight and sloping slightly upwards.

But Nelson Lee kept his eyes open for snakes. He was not sure that snakes existed in the pyramid, but he knew that there was a possibility of it. Nipper brought up the rear. The lad was not even feeling nervous. He only experienced a curious inward excitement, and a longing to get at the grim truth. Was Hungerford alive or dead? Had the substitution been discovered by the priests?

And what of the priests? Were they sleeping in some unknown quarter of the pyramid, or would they pounce upon the intruders and make them prisoners? All sorts of thoughts flashed through Nipper's brain.

The heat was stifling. Lightly clad as they were, in less than five minutes they were perspiring freely, and their breathing was a little difficult.

An indescribable smell was in their nostrils. It was the smell of a decay began in remote ages, rising, probably, from the impalpable dust of these mysterious ancient Egyptian labyrinths.

Very soon their backs were aching, for they were compelled to walk in a somewhat doubled position. Nelson Lee was the most affected, for he was the taller of the two. But he did not speak, for he had already cautioned Nipper to make no exclamations.

The tunnel suddenly sloped more steeply, but after about twenty feet, Nelson Lee was surprised to find himself in a kind of cavern. A flash of his torch revealed the place as a little chamber, about eight feet square and six feet high. On the opposite wall was an opening, even smaller than the one they had just emerged from. It was evidently the continuation of the tunnel.

In this little chamber, the explorers rested for a few minutes, and wiped their wet brows.

Then, without speaking, they pressed on. Both of them had their revolvers ready for instant action—although it seemed as though they had the grim place to themselves. Not a sign of life had they seen, and everything was still.

The silence, in fact, was awful. It was a silence which cannot possibly be described. The desert without had been almost nerve-shaking in its silence, but this—the interior of the Meyduraam Pyramid—was a hundred-fold more intensified.

And the darkness, when the electric-torches were switched off, was like something absolutely solid. It was a darkness which seemed to stifle one.

The explorers were in the very deepest recesses of the great pyramid now. In a vague way they wondered what lay before them. The odds were terrible, but they did not hesitate. They were armed, and there was not much prospect of their being taken by surprise—not while they remained in these tunnels, anyhow.

The passage was uneven now. In some places it was tall and wide, but in others Nelson Lee had difficulty in squeezing through. And the heat was overpoweringly exhausting the whole time. It seemed to radiate from the very rock walls.

After a sudden sharp turn to the left the tunnel went straight for a few yards, and then formed itself into another cavern. This one, however, was much larger, and the detective's torch was hardly capable of penetrating the blackness.

Before Nelson Lee could look round him a startling thing happened.

Without the slightest warning—without any preliminary sound—there was an abrupt cry. It echoed and reverberated on the rock faces like the report of a cannon. Nelson Lee and Nipper were utterly startled. But the detective instantly switched his light out. At the same moment he grabbed Nipper, and drew the lad to him.

What happened next was wild confusion. The sound of shuffling feet became apparent, and then warm, clammy hands touched the faces of the two intruders. They started back, only to feel other hands behind them. Nelson Lee clenched his fists. He and his young companion were trapped—hemmed in by unknown foes!

"Fight, Nipper—fight!" he hissed tensely. "Use your revolver, and fire haphazard. I will do the same. The reports may frighten——"

But he was allowed to speak no further. Neither could he use his revolver. For his wrists were suddenly seized, and his legs pulled from under him. Like a tiger he fought for his liberty, but the odds were dead against him. At last he lay still in the fetid atmosphere.

Near him a series of wild shufflings sounded, accompanied by a plentiful quantity of good British exclamations. Nipper, evidently, was putting up a good fight. But he, too, was not a Samson, and he succumbed into panting silence within a minute.

Then, held by many hands, the pair were carried away.

The darkness was absolutely solid. By the sounds, Nelson Lee gathered that he and Nipper were being carried through another of the mysterious tunnels. This one, however, sloped steeply downwards for a time, and then became level. A sharp turn to the right, and then a curious hazy glow seemed to be in the air.

It grew stronger and stronger, until Nelson Lee could faintly distinguish the forms of the men who were carrying him. After another ten yards the tunnel ended, and a great cavern was entered.

Instantly, the prisoners felt a difference in the atmosphere. It was cooler and fresher, and Nelson Lee found himself wondering why it should be so. Probably there were some secret ventilation holes in the face of the pyramid.

A strong odour of incense was in the air.

Without ceremony, the captives were jerked to their feet. Then, still held firmly, they were forced across the smooth rock floor. There was light

here, and Nelson Lee and Nipper gazed round them curiously, careless, for the moment, of their peril.

The cavern was big and lofty. In half a dozen different positions stood quaintly-designed braziers, and they were all glowing with a curious orange light. This light, although comparatively dim, was absolutely brilliant after the terrible darkness. And the prisoners could see everything with perfect clearness.

Round the walls of the cavern were mummies—scores of them. All propped upright, in their open-fronted cases, they looked like sinister sentinels. Their crinkled and yellow faces were perfectly preserved, and it was hard to believe that they had had no life for thousands and thousands of years.

In a prominent position, separate from the others, stood the sarcophagus of the Pharaoh Meyduraam. Nelson Lee felt a glow of satisfaction thrill through him as he saw it. The sarcophagus had arrived! Frank Hungerford was there—but was he dead or alive?

The lid of the mummy-case was off, and rested over the front, hiding the contents from view. Nelson Lee found himself wondering if the substitution had been discovered, and if Hungerford was now dead.

Then his attention was attracted by the spectacle right in front of him. He and Nipper had been taken to the far side of the cavern, and were now standing before a kind of raised dais. Upon it, in flowing robes, sat a strange figure.

It was a man, clean-shaven, and with glittering black eyes. Upon his head was a curious conical covering, and it could be seen that it was studded with huge diamonds—priceless diamonds which glistened and scintillated like fire. On either side of the dais was a carved pedestal—and both pedestals had bowl-shaped tops. These, Nelson Lee saw at a glance, were almost filled with dull, semi-transparent stones. They were uncut diamonds of wonderful size and purity. The rumours of the treasure of Meyduraam were no idle ones.

“Oh, fools! Why camest thou here?”

The voice was harsh and fierce, and Nelson Lee looked up at the robed figure. Nipper was all attention, too. Both knew that this evil-eyed man was the High Priest of Meyduraam—Ramses Rhamsiptah.

“Thou art in the sacred Worshipping Chamber of Meyduraam,” went on the high priest, bending forward and speaking the passionate words in his own strange tongue—regardless of the fact that his listeners might not understand. As a matter of fact, Nelson Lee and Nipper were in utter ignorance of the language, and knew not one word. “How thou entered, I know not; but the light of day will never meet thy eyes again. Oh, fools! The stranger who enters Meyduraam never leaves. I, Ramses Rhamsiptah, pass sentence of death upon thee both. Here, in this sacred chamber, shalt thou die the death of intruders!”

The prisoners were quite unmoved. As they couldn't understand a word, this was hardly to be wondered at. Ramses Rhamsiptah twisted his face into a cruel smile.

“You die, British dogs!” he snarled, in English. “You die!”

Nelson Lee opened his mouth to speak, but the high priest rose abruptly, and stepped down from the raised platform. With a sinuous glide, he walked across the floor of the cavern to a narrow doorway, and disappeared. Instantly the prisoners were bundled across to a portion of the wall where some curious-looking articles were protruding from the rock.

Nelson Lee saw instantly what was going to happen. Four metal arms stuck out from the wall, and there were cunningly-contrived clips at the ends. With his arms outstretched and his legs apart, he was secured to the

four metals arms, a clip on either wrist and one on either ankle. The most galling feature of the thing was that the clips merely snapped to. Yet such was his helpless position, he couldn't lift a finger to help himself. The slightest movement caused the sharp edges of the metal to bite into his wrists and legs.

Nipper was treated in precisely the same manner, and then the Egyptians moved silently away, their feet making no sound. They passed out of the chamber like grim shadows. The door closed—a great slab of rock—flush with the wall.

The prisoners were alone.

The only exit was the one by which they had entered. This yawned darkly in the other wall of the cavern. But, utterly helpless as they were, what could they do? The silence was terrible, and the light from the braziers flickered weirdly on the uncanny scene.

"What's going to happen, sir?" asked Nipper, in a hoarse whisper.

"I don't know, young 'un," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "Something ghastly, you may be sure. We have not been left alone here for nothing. These devils—these so-called priests—are preparing some terrible fate for us. I realise now that our project was pretty hopeless. Something of this sort was bound to happen."

Nipper was eyeing the sarcophagus.

"How did they get that blessed thing in here, sir?" he said curiously.

"Well, it is certain it was not brought in by the passage we traversed," said the detective. "There is another entrance, an entrance the dying priest did not reveal to us. Probably it is shorter and easier to negotiate —"

"Hush, guv'nor! What's that?"

They remained silent, their hearts beating furiously. A slight sound had come from a little hole low down in the wall. They watched, fascinated, dreadful of what was to meet their gaze. Something moved near the floor, and the next instant Nipper let out a gasp of horror.

"Look, sir!" he whispered. "A—a snake! A terrible great serpent, and we are utterly helpless! Oh, the fiendishness of the thing!"

Nelson Lee did not speak. He, too, had seen. A huge snake had made its entrance into the cavern, and was even now wriggling closer and closer. It was horrible! The snake would approach until it touched its helpless victims. The situation was one that few men could have borne with calmness. A bite from those deadly fangs, and——

The great detective was galvanised into life.

"Hungerford!" he roared, in great bellowing tones, which echoed and re-echoed throughout the confined apartment. "Hungerford! Wake up, man! Hungerford!"

It was a slim chance—a bare thread of hope. If Hungerford was nearly out of his enforced trance he might awaken into life at the sound of his name. Nelson Lee and Nipper watched the sarcophagus with terrible anxiety. And, meanwhile, the snake was coming closer and closer.

And then the thing happened—the thing that Nelson Lee had hardly dared hope for. Professor Zingrave's amazing drug proved its marvellous qualities. A shuffling sound came from the sarcophagus.

Crash!

The stone lid crashed to the ground, and the weird swathed figure that had been within fell out on to the floor and commenced a series of convulsive struggles. Frank Hungerford had come to life, and the linen wrappings had been so bound that a few struggles would release him. In a minute the young man—the victim of the league—was free.

He stood up dazedly and blinked. He was in possession of his full strength, astonishing as it seemed. It was as though he had been to sleep for a few hours.

"Hungerford! You are in the Pyramid of Meyduraam!" said Nelson Lee tensely. "The priests are near by. Kill the snake and release us! We may, by a miracle, escape if you act promptly and drastically! I am Nelson Lee, and came to rescue you!"

Hungerford stared, and then proved his sterling worth. He gazed at the snake, which was almost at his feet, and then lifted the great stone lid of the sarcophagus. It descended upon the snake and crushed it—crushed it to instant death.

The happenings of the next few minutes were swift and exciting. Hungerford released the prisoners, and then saw the pedestals of the diamonds. A double handful of the precious stones were transferred to his pocket, and then the trio fled—fled with the speed of desperation. The priests were on the other side of the pyramid, probably unaware of what was happening. It was a race for life—a desperate flight.

Nelson Lee leading, with his torch flashing on the rock, they raced along the stifling passages. Streaming with perspiration, they never once paused for breath. It seemed as though they would never get out of the dreadful ancient pile.

"Do you think we shall do it?" gasped Hungerford. "Does this tunnel lead to the open?"

"Guv'nor," croaked Nipper huskily—"guv'nor! Are we going the right way?"

"Yes, and if I am not at fault we are not far distant from the exit," panted Nelson Lee laboriously. "But we're alive, Nipper—we're still in the land of the living. And we have to thank Hungerford——"

"You've got it the wrong way about, Mr. Lee," declared the rescued man. "It is I who have to thank you. Oh, if ever we get out of this inferno alive I will show my gratitude——"

Nelson Lee suddenly let out a whoop.

"The stars," he cried exultantly—"the stars! By Heaven, what a glorious night!"

A few moments later the trio were taking in great gulps of cool night air upon the ledge outside the tunnel entrance. And the sight of the sky was like a glimpse of paradise to them.

Free! They had emerged from the terrible pyramid and were breathing the pure air again. The joy of those first few moments were too ecstatic for expression. It seemed to the spent and exhausted trio that they had emerged from their tombs—that they had risen from the dead and had come to earth again.

CHAPTER VIII.

In Port Said—Sheldon Tricks Nelson Lee—The Chase—Retribution.

PORT SAID sweltered—as usual. But to Nelson Lee and Nipper, as they lounged on the verandah of their hotel, the heat seemed fairly moderate. After the dreadful experience of the pyramid, ordinary heat was as nothing.

Frank Hungerford was with them, and he was looking brown and healthy. His awful experience in the sarcophagus had not affected him in the least. Indeed, he declared that he was in better condition than ever.

The three had wasted no time after leaving the Pyramid of Meyduraam. In spite of their exhausted condition, they had put as many miles between themselves and the devilish priests of the pyramid as possible before dawn. Dawn, in fact, had found them within the fertile lands of the Fayoum.

A short rest, and they had started for Cairo. At Cairo Hungerford was provided with clothes and baggage, and then the train conveyed the adventurers to Port Said. It was now evening, and they had been in the picturesque town a couple of hours.

The heat of the day was still in the air, and it was pleasant sitting on the verandah in deck-chairs. The terrible adventure they had so lately passed through seemed almost like some grim nightmare.

"I am glad you have told me all, Hungerford," said Nelson Lee, lighting a fresh cigarette. "You have arranged to meet Mr. John Benson, then, in this town?"

Hungerford nodded.

"Benson is waiting for me," he replied. "He will wait a month—or, at least, he would have done. But I am quite sure that my presence in Port Said is already known to him. The league's spies are everywhere, hang them!"

"Benson, of course, is merely an assumed name," went on the detective. "I don't know whether you have heard of the gentleman, but his real name is Mr. Austin Sheldon. He is, in reality, a Governing Member of the Green Triangle."

"Well, it doesn't matter to me what he is!" exclaimed Hungerford. "The thing that's worrying me is this. I've managed to bring away an extremely valuable collection of diamonds from that pyramid, and I don't see why that scoundrel should have them."

"Neither do I," agreed Nelson Lee. "But I wish to catch Sheldon red-handed. If I can get him at bay with some of the diamonds on him, I think I can deal with him very effectively. There will be a large amount of bluff in the business, but I think Sheldon will fall into the trap. And once he has committed himself he will be done for."

"What are your plans, gov'nor?" asked Nipper.

"Well, it will be necessary for you, Hungerford, to go and hand over the diamonds to Sheldon as originally planned. It is really necessary to do so in order to insure your own safety, for, as you said yourself, I have no doubt that Sheldon already knows that you have arrived at Port Said. As you came in by a different train to the one Nipper and I took, I do not think there is much danger of his connecting you with us, for this hotel is full of travellers."

"And what will happen after I have interviewed Benson—or Sheldon, or whatever his confounded name may be?" asked Hungerford.

"I'm not exactly sure. We must wait events," said Nelson Lee. "Sheldon is waiting at a small hotel near the native quarter of the town, and I suggest that you go there as soon as night has fallen."

Accordingly, not long afterwards, Frank Hungerford sallied out carrying upon him half the diamonds he had annexed from the worshipping chamber of the pyramid. He saw no reason why he should take the lot. Perhaps he had a foreboding of disaster; anyhow, it was decidedly fortunate that he adopted the plan, as events turned out.

As he had expected, Austin Sheldon was in his room at the hotel, and seemed in no way surprised to see the visitor. The Governing Member was attired in a white drill suit, and looked cool and easy.

"We will get to business straight away, my young friend," he said calmly, when they were alone. "You have just arrived, I presume, from the Pyramid of Meyduraam?"

"I have—Mr. Austin Sheldon."

Sheldon's eyelids flickered.

"So you know my real name—eh?" he exclaimed coolly, but with an evil glitter in his eyes. "Upon the whole, that was an unwise revelation to make to me, my young friend. You are aware that the league agreed to trouble you no more, and to reward you liberally if you succeeded in carrying out the plans. Have you done so?"

Frank Hungerford placed a small linen bag upon the table.

"Judge for yourself!" he said curtly.

Sheldon examined the bag's contents with eager eyes, and although the diamonds before him were worth at least fifty thousand pounds, he looked up with a quick glance of suspicion.

"Is this the lot?" he asked sharply.

"How many more did you expect?" rapped out Hungerford, who had no intention of being pleasant with his scoundrelly companion. "I only just managed to escape from the pyramid with my life, and you are lucky, indeed, to get any diamonds at all. Suppose I had kept them for myself?"

Sheldon chuckled wickedly.

"You would not have kept them long!" he exclaimed. "You do not seem to be aware that practically every big town in the world is honeycombed with spies of the Green Triangle. You would have paid a grim penalty if you had turned treacherous."

"This bluff is all very well," said Hungerford calmly. "I doubt if there is another agent of the Green Triangle in Port Said except yourself. I am not a fool, and you cannot stuff your lies down my throat with ease! There are your diamonds, and now I want my safety assured."

"You have the league's word that you will not be harmed," replied Sheldon curtly.

Hungerford was silent. He realised that but for Nelson Lee's presence and safeguard he would be in a dangerous position. For the young man fully believed that Sheldon would hire some native assassin to put him out of the way that very night. Nelson Lee, however, would be on the watch.

"And now tell me of your adventures!" exclaimed Sheldon, lolling back in his chair. "I'm extremely curious to learn how the drug affected you——"

Hungerford walked to the door.

"Your curiosity will have to remain unsatisfied, I'm afraid," he interjected. "I'm a straightforward man, and I don't pretend a geniality which is false. I have delivered the diamonds according to the programme, and I now leave you to your own devices. It was agreed upon that I should receive a liberal reward, but I don't feel inclined to stain my fingers with touching anything that has already been in your hands!"

And Frank Hungerford left the room without another word, leaving Austin Sheldon scowling furiously. That last remark of his visitor's had cut deeply, even through Sheldon's tough hide.

But the scowl soon vanished, and it was replaced by a malicious smile of triumph. Had Nelson Lee only known it, the Governing Member was in possession of more facts than the detective was aware of. Nelson Lee's plans, in fact, were not destined to materialise as he anticipated.

The detective believed that Sheldon was going to play directly into his hands. In reality, it was the reverse that actually happened.

For Sheldon already knew that Nelson Lee and Nipper were in Port Said, and that some arrangement had been come to between the famous detective

and Hungerford. Whatever the scheme was, Sheldon intended to nip it in the bud at the very outset. He was, in fact, going to act drastically.

"Before another day dawns, Hungerford will be dead!" muttered the Governing Member. "He has performed his task, and now his original sentence will be carried out to prevent him being a danger to the league. Nelson Lee, too, will never live to set foot in England again. Zingrave will commend me highly when he learns of the good work I have accomplished."

Sheldon placed his panama upon his head, and left the hotel. The moon was shining down upon the roofs of Port Said. Somewhat dingy in the daytime, the town now looked almost like a fairy paradise in the clear white light. But Sheldon had no time to waste on admiring the scene.

In the hotel doorway, under a lamp, he took from his pocket the bag containing the diamonds, and placed it in another pocket. He could see nobody watching him, but he knew, nevertheless, that Nelson Lee was not far distant.

Lighting a cigarette, Sheldon walked away towards the native quarter of the town. He did not look behind him, or to right or left. Even had he done so he would have seen no sign of a shadower. Yet both Nelson Lee and Nipper were on the track, congratulating themselves that everything was going smoothly. In plain truth, Nelson Lee was walking straight into the trap which had been carefully prepared for him. To give Sheldon his due, he had proved himself to be extremely smart—for a man must be keen indeed to get the better of Nelson Lee.

But his scheme was a fiendish one. Seemingly a gentleman, he was nothing more nor less than a foul murderer at heart.

Right into the native quarter he penetrated, taking no notice of the curious glances which were bestowed upon him by the motley throngs who inhabited the streets. At last, in a quiet backwater, he walked slowly past a narrow doorway. As he did so he thrust his hand out and placed something into the palm of a man who was crouching in the doorway. The incident had not taken one second, and nobody could have observed it even at close quarters.

Yet the diamonds had been handed into the care of one of Sheldon's lieutenants, and they would be immediately taken to a safe place. Sheldon, knowing all he did, had not left the precious stones in his room because there was a possibility of his property being searched during his absence. And he did not wish to carry the diamonds about with him. Therefore, he had transferred them in a safe manner—and in such a manner, moreover, that nobody could ever discover where the diamonds had disappeared to.

Having passed the doorway, the Governing Member, with a fixed purpose in his mind, walked on until he came to a small, dilapidated mosque. It was a tumble-down building, and more or less a ruin. The door gaped open, and Sheldon passed inside. Instantly he produced an electric torch and flashed it before him. Then, picking his way through the debris and ruins, he at last came to a flight of dilapidated stone steps, and descended to a musty and evil-smelling vault.

"Now I am prepared for Mr. Nelson Lee!" he muttered fiercely.

One hand was in the pocket of his white drill coat, and it remained there. He waited, knowing that the greatest enemy of the league would appear before long. And, sure enough, he soon heard footsteps overhead, and then a light flashed down into the vault.

"Back, Nipper!" hissed a voice. "We don't know where the scoundrel has gone to, and we'd better be cautious."

"Perhaps it's a trap, sir——"

"I think not. But, in any case, we are prepared for emergencies."

Sheldon crouched back into a recess, and smiled evilly to himself as he saw Nelson Lee and Nipper descending the steps into the vault. He was in no way disturbed by the fact that there were two opponents against him. And it was not because he had confederates; on the contrary, Sheldon was absolutely alone.

But he had such diabolical means of protecting himself that he could afford to be confident. He did not care to trust anyone else with his dreadful secret. It was his fixed intention—coolly and deliberately planned—to silence both Nelson Lee and Nipper for ever, and to drop their bodies down a disused well at the rear of the mosque. The pair would disappear as completely as though they had been wiped off the earth, and not a soul would ever be able to discover what had become of them.

For sheer cold-bloodedness Sheldon's scheme was hard to beat. The man was apparently a refined gentleman, with easy manners and a handsome exterior. But Austin Sheldon's soul was as black as crepe, and he was fully prepared for the terrible crime he contemplated.

Nelson Lee and Nipper stood in the centre of the vault, and both of them held revolvers. The detective also flashed an electric light about the slimy apartment.

"Has Sheldon escaped us, after all, Nipper?" he exclaimed tensely. "Has——"

"No, Sheldon has not escaped!" exclaimed a calm, jeering voice, and Sheldon himself lounged into view from the deep recess. It was the one fatal mistake he made. Had he been content to act without disclosing his presence, Nelson Lee and Nipper would assuredly have been doomed. But he was a man who loved to gloat over his victims, and he gave way to the impulse of the moment.

"Sheldon, by James!" rapped out Nelson Lee. "Hands up!"

The other laughed.

"And suppose I refuse?" he exclaimed coolly. "You're not such a fool as to drill that lead into me, Mr. Nelson Lee. You see, I know that I'm beaten, but I should be interested to learn what evidence you have against me?"

Nelson Lee was certainly taken aback at the other's attitude.

"At present my evidence is nil," admitted the detective candidly. "But before you leave this place, Sheldon, you will be well within the grip of the law."

The Governing Member chuckled amusedly.

"Indeed!" he mocked. "When I leave this place, I shall leave it alone. You and your brat will remain here—and you will never see the light of day again."

"I didn't know that you were a humourist, Sheldon?" said Nelson Lee coolly. "I may as well inform you at once that I know your record. You are a Governing Member of the League of the Green Triangle——"

"Quite correct," said Sheldon calmly. "I admit it frankly, Lee. I also begin to realise that you are a greater danger to the league than the circle ever guessed. By thunder, it is well that I decided upon this course of action."

"My hat! What a bluffer!" murmured Nipper.

"The man certainly is a cool customer," agreed Nelson Lee, with a grim frown. "But I warn you, Sheldon, this pleasantry will avail you nothing. Both Nipper and myself are armed, and you are at our mercy——"

Sheldon laughed shrilly. In one second his true nature asserted itself; he dropped the cloak of calmness, and stood revealed for what he was.

"I am at your mercy," he snarled. "Let me tell you that this thing is a trap. I lured you here, you fool, and now I'm going to settle with the pair of you. Those revolvers don't worry me in the least, for my own weapon is absolutely silent, a thousand times as deadly, and at this very moment it is pointed at you!"

Nelson Lee forced himself to remain calm.

"This bluff——"

"Bluff," cried Sheldon—"bluff! Within one minute, you hound, you will be dead! I will tell you how you will die. This is my weapon!"

Sheldon flashed something from his pocket, but as he did so Nelson Lee instinctively switched off his electric torch, and the vault was plunged into pitch darkness. A furious snarl left Sheldon's lips, and a tiny humming ping sounded close against Nelson Lee's ear.

"Quick, Nipper! We must capture the scoundrel!" roared Nelson Lee. "I don't know what this infernal weapon of his is, but we will take no chances!"

And before Sheldon could act again—indeed, barely a second had passed since the light had flashed out—Nelson Lee and Nipper plunged forward into the darkness. Sheldon had had no time to escape, and he found himself grasped by determined fingers.

And in a second the scoundrel knew that he had blundered. He had waited too long—his opportunity was lost.

He seemed to go into a mad frenzy, and bit and kicked and screamed like a wild beast. The strength he exerted was wonderful, and Nelson Lee and Nipper were utterly unable to hold him down. The fight was taking place in utter darkness, and was a wild confusion of thuds, exclamations, and foul oaths from Sheldon.

"He's going, sir," gasped Nipper. "He's slipping away—— Ah!"

Sheldon's fist crashed into Nipper's face, and the lad fell back. In a second the scoundrel was upon his feet. He twisted like lightning, intending to make a dash for the steps. But the floor was slippery, and the twisting movement too sudden. Sheldon thudded to the stone floor. The next second a wild choking scream echoed horribly through the vault.

Dead silence followed.

Nelson Lee and Nipper, quivering visibly, rose to their feet, and the former pressed the switch of his electric torch, which he had just taken from his pocket. The beam of white light shot through the darkness.

And there, upon the floor, lay Austin Sheldon, doubled up, and with an awful look upon his face. In one instant it could be seen that he was dead! He had tricked Nelson Lee and Nipper to the mosque for the express purpose of killing them, and he had himself fallen a victim to his own murderous designs.

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The manner in which Sheldon had died showed more plainly than anything the fiendish nature of the man. His weapon was nothing more nor less than a little spring pistol of a repeater type which released tiny poisoned darts. The idea was Professor Zingrave's, and had probably been suggested to him by the tragic death of Dr. Lovereck. Anyhow, the weapon was infinitely more deadly than any revolver, for the slightest prick from one of the darts caused instant death. It was not necessary for the weapon to be aimed at a vital spot. The face, the arm, the leg—anywhere, in fact, and death followed almost instantaneously.

As Nelson Lee had switched off the torch Sheldon had released one of the darts. Owing to the abrupt darkness Sheldon had aimed badly, in spite of the close range. The dart had hummed past Nelson Lee's ear, had rebounded, and, by a trick of fate, had embedded itself, point upwards, between two slabs of stone. When Sheldon had slipped, his hand touched the deadly poison of the dart, and death had followed at once.

Retribution had been swift. In a way, he had died by his own hand, and Nelson Lee felt nothing but absolute relief to see the scoundrel stark and lifeless. He had ridded the world of one of its most callous rogues.

Upon the whole Nelson Lee was satisfied with the result of the case. The league had certainly scooped in a valuable collection of diamonds, but that could not be helped. Another Governing Member was wiped out, and Frank Hungerford was restored to his mother.

But Nelson Lee strongly disadvised any return to England. He knew that the league would not keep faith, and that Hungerford's life would be in peril. Therefore, with the fortune which Hungerford realised on the diamonds—which were rightfully his—he and his mother met at Cape Town, and proceeded to Australia. Under a new name, in a new land, they would have no fear of the dreadful League of the Green Triangle.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!

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FENTON ASH,

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HUGH ARNOLD, a young English lad, goes out to the far North with an expedition. He is joined by an Irish sailor—MIKE O'GRADY, and also VAL RUXTON.

The latter and Hugh become fast friends, but one day Val hints that Hugh joined the expedition under a false name, and says that Amaki, a neighbouring Eskimo, has been asking for tidings of a certain explorer whose name is well known in the scientific world. For some reason, Hugh turns pale.

The camp is raided by a neighbouring party, but Hugh and Ruxton, with two sailors, put up a stiff fight. The attackers are beaten off, and a trap is laid for them.

Having captured the strangers, the leader—GRIMSTOCK—comes upon the scene, and it seems that Hugh and Ruxton are in for a bad time.

Hugh and Val Ruxton are sent out by Grimstock to make observations, but return to find the camp deserted—they are left to die in the dreary white wilderness.

A short time afterwards, while the two chums are out together, Hugh thinks he sees some mountains and pastureland far out to sea. Val Ruxton, however, tells him that what he sees is only a mirage.

Hugh, however, is quite right, and after travelling many weary miles the chums enter the "Green Land."

They fall in with a party of men dressed in the armour of the Vikings of old. These men, it seems, are expecting an attack by sea, and the chums, with their followers, offer to fight for them.

The offer is accepted just as a huge fleet of war-galleys is sighted. The enemy has come, and the "berserker"—the old lust of battle—seizes Hugh and Val in its grip. (Now read on.)

— —

The "Berserker"—How the Chums Captured a War Galley, and What Followed—A New Mystery.

THEIR eyes, too—though this they knew not—were glistening as they had never glistened before, while their faces became suffused with a red glow of hectic fever.

Then, as the two officers, Rudlaff and Kern, drew their swords and waved them frantically in the air, in time to the barbaric music, Hugh and Ruxton drew theirs and waved them with no less energy—and even Mike and Cable and Melka followed suit.

They were all, indeed, by this time, behaving like men who had "looked

upon the wine when it was red"; men who had drunk so deeply that they "saw red."

As had been said, it was the "berserker" that had taken possession of them, the mysterious, irresistible fury and lust of battle of the ancient sea-wolves; the passing madness, which, we are told, made the weak strong, turned cowards into momentarily brave men, and men who were already both brave and strong, into god-like heroes, capable of feats of seemingly impossible prowess.

The Vikings were now all under the influence of this "berserker"—even to the strangers within their gates—or rather, on board their vessels.

And now, the two fleets had drawn so near to each other that the bowmen began to send their arrows hissing through the air, and the slingers their showers of stones.

To ward off these missiles, the shields were brought into play, and as they were turned this way and that, they flashed like thousands of brilliant points of light.

Soon, again, as the vessels drew closer still, other and heavier missiles were brought into play. Javelins and spears were hurled with such force as often to plough their way through both shield and armour behind it. Then was heard the death-cry, that rose even above all the frenzied clamour of the shouting throngs, and told that the soul of some stricken one had gone to the Vikings' "Stormland."

Such was the scene, such were the sounds that were heard, as the opposing vessels began to crash into one another, and the fight commenced in grim, deadly, earnest!

It was a stirring and exciting spectacle that was presented, or would have been presented—had there been any eye-witnesses aloft, say, in an airship, to look down upon it—as the two fleets came into action.

The sun was shining brightly, and it sparkled not only upon the dancing, foaming waves, but upon the thousands of pieces of polished metal worn by the armed men who crowded the opposite craft.

It shone, too, upon gorgeous banners of various designs, which swung aloft beside or above the bellying sails and the creaking cordage. They were the banners of the Vikings of old, and the devices emblazoned on them in glowing colours were representative of Odin or other Scandinavian deities.

It was around these banners that the fight always waxed hottest. Wherever any of the rival vessels became locked together, and boarders from one crowded on to another, there was no pause in the struggle that ensued until the banner flying overhead had been hauled down. This once done, however, the effect was almost magical; the beaten side submitted at once, and yielded themselves prisoners.

The first of the enemy's fleet with which the "Cedric" came in contact was a large war-galley called the "Colbrand." She flew the proud banner of Colbrand, the celebrated giant of Scandinavian mythology. She was commanded by a big, heavily-built Viking, named Osric, himself almost a giant, who was the son of Gerwulf, the rival chieftain.

The Colbrand was a larger craft than the Cedric, and came crashing down upon her with a terrible force, amid a perfect hail of arrows and other missiles.

There was a great shock as the two came together, and ere there was time to realise what had happened, Osric had sprung on board near the bow, at the head of a party of boarders. Evidently, the officer in charge of the Cedric was known to him, for he singled him out by name.

"Now, yield ye, Rudlaff!" he cried, as he rushed forward. "Yield ye, or by Colbrand, our patron, thou diest, here and now—thou and all the crowd of nithers thou hast around thee!"

In his haste to get at Rudlaff, the boastful warrior actually tried to sweep past Hugh, as though he had been brushing aside some "churl," too insignificant even to cut down.

Now, Hugh was not in any mood to relish being thus treated. Had the man's manner been different, he might have given way; for, of course, Rudlaff had the first right in such a case. But Hugh's blood was up, and this swaggering warrior was so insolent that Hugh did not stay to reason.

He planted himself, therefore, right in the fellow's way and aimed at him a blow with his axe, which, however, the man caught, deftly enough, on his shield. At the same moment there was an outcry behind Hugh. Another galley had crashed alongside, and a boarding party were already clambering over the bulwarks at the stern.

Rudlaff had no choice but to turn to deal with this new danger.

"Leave this to me and look ye after the strangers," he cried hastily, to his lieutenant. And Kern, obedient to his orders, thereupon went forward, with some of his men, to support Hugh.

Thus did it come about that the two chums and their followers bore the brunt of the formidable attack led by Osric.

Ruxton, darting to Hugh's side, had been just in time to save him from a sinister blow aimed by one of Osric's lieutenants, one whose name they afterwards found to be Lahrmund, a stalwart, bearded fellow, nearly as big as Osric. This man quickly showed himself to be no mean fighter, and at once took up all Val's attention.

Mike and the others rushed up to aid their leaders by holding back the rest of the boarding party, and they were aided in turn by Kern and his men, and thus did our heroes' first fight that day commence.

As to how it went on, not even they themselves could afterwards have given any coherent account. The "berserker" confuses the senses and spreads a strange kind of mist before the eyes of those under its influence—so 'tis said, and their recollections of this eventful struggle certainly seemed to bear out the statement.

What is certain, is that the boarding party on this side were forced back in the face of the resistless counter-attack led by the two chums. The opposing leaders, both wounded, but still fighting stubbornly, retired sullenly, till they reached their own vessel.

Here they halted, and seemed as though they would have been quite willing to throw off their grappling hooks and sail away in search of some vessel which might prove less difficult to capture.

This, however, Hugh was by no means in the humour to assent to. No sooner had the assailants been driven back on to their vessel, than they found those they had been attacking, tumbling over the bulwarks after them. And so determined was this onslaught that Osric and his men were, for a while, swept back across their own deck.

There they rallied their men and turned to bay, and a fierce and hard-fought fight ensued, in which the two chums contended desperately against a force numbering something like three times their own.

The position at this time was a somewhat curious one. The two vessels were head on to each other, the bows, which overlapped, so to speak, being firmly held together by grapples. In the stern of each a fierce fight was raging, leaving more than half the deck of each free.

This space was occupied only by a few "thralls," or other non-combatants, and amongst these were the old man, Amaki, and his two native followers.

Eskimos are not by nature a fighting race, and these particular members of it made no pretence at being an exception—though they could use a rifle well enough when required for shooting game for their larder. As regards this present fight, they had done no more thus far than look on with

apparently languid curiosity, displaying only just energy enough to keep out of the way of hard knocks.

Now all was suddenly changed, and there followed some most mysterious proceedings. Old Amaki, after looking cautiously but keenly around, approached one of the "thralls," and a short but evidently earnest talk ensued. Lybendo was called to assist at the conference, and then, after a few more words, and more cautious glances round, he and two or three others disappeared below.

Scarcely a minute, however, elapsed ere they reappeared, carrying with them some pretty heavy loads. Amaki and his strange thrall friend—a tall, elderly man with grey-bearded face—caught up the loads and assisted to carry them to the bow, and so over the bulwarks on to the deck of the vessel on which Hugh and his men were still desperately fighting.

Lybendo and his companions, after another visit below, quickly followed with more loads, which were placed out of sight under some spare sails.

Meantime, the chums had been fighting like the heroes of old against practically overwhelming odds. At first, their impetuous rush had carried everything before them, and many of their enemies had turned tail and sought safety below the deck.

But Osric and Hahrmund, though, as stated, both wounded, were stubborn fighters, and had not only managed to stay the rout, but, after a while, succeeded in rallying their followers and putting fresh heart into them.

The men who had sought safety below were rounded up, and returned to help their leaders, who now, once more, took the offensive, and attacked Hugh and his small following with fresh fury.

This time, it was the chums who had to give ground. It had become obvious that their courage had led them too far, and landed them in an untenable position. Of course, they had been hoping and expecting that Rüdloff would follow with his men to their assistance, having no idea that the jarl had as much as he could do to hold his own against a separate attack.

Hugh managed to snatch a moment to look round, and it was as much as he could do to repress an exclamation of dismay as he saw that the grappling irons had somehow been removed or given way, and the two vessels were drifting apart.

(To be concluded shortly.)

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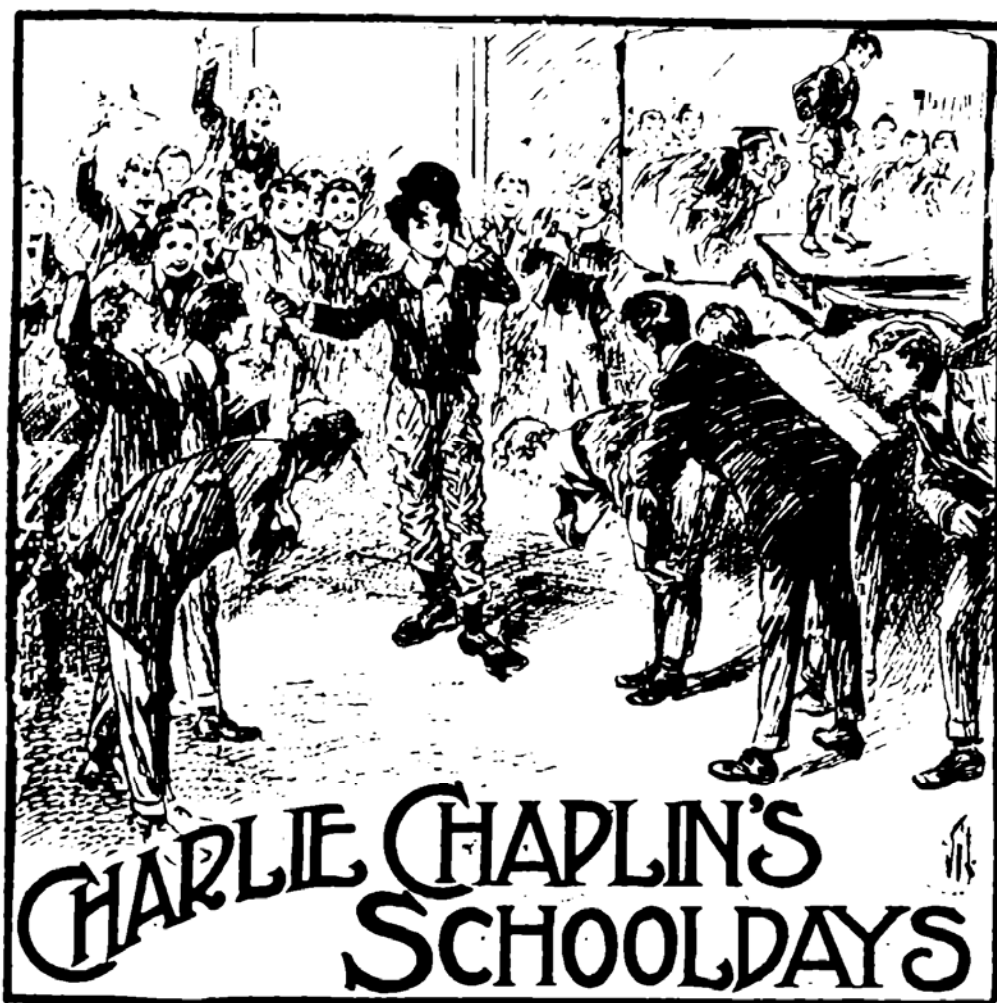
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