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THE AMAZING
CASE OF THE

LOST EXPLORER

A TALE OF NELSON LEE V. JIM THE PENMAN

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THE AMAZING CASE OF THE LOST EXPLORER

Another Thrilling Story which tells
of NELSON LEE and his further
adventures with "JIM THE PENMAN."

By the Author of "*The Lightning Clue*," "*The Great Will Forgery*," "*The Forged Marriage Lines*," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

Detective-Inspector Morley on a Wrong Scent.

"**W**E'VE got him, Lee—we've got the beggar!"

Detective-inspector Morley, of Scotland Yard, uttered the words in a triumphant voice as he burst rather forcibly into Nelson Lee's consulting-room. But as he stood in the apartment his expression changed. The famous criminologist was not there, neither was his young assistant, Nipper. The consulting-room, in fact, was quite deserted.

"Silly old idiot!" grunted Morley. "A nice sort of fool's game sending me up here!"

The inspector was politely referring to Mrs. Jones, Lee's excellent landlady, who had informed the visitor that both Nelson Lee and Nipper were at home.

A slight sound, followed by a remark in the unmistakable voice of Nipper, gave Morley a clue to where the famous detective and his assistant had disappeared. He smiled to himself, strode across the room, and opened a communicating door which was set in the opposite wall. He passed through a small lobby, opened another door, and then smiled again.

The Scotland Yard man had really no right to intrude in this fashion, but he was an old acquaintance of Lee's, and felt justified.

He was standing in Nelson Lee's well-equipped laboratory, where strange-looking appliances stood on benches, and where glass-stoppered bottles lined the shelves. A rather pungent smell assailed Morley's nostrils, but it was by no means unpleasant.

Nelson Lee himself was standing before the largest bench, attired in a long white laboratory overall, and in front of him were test-tubes, retorts, and a brightly flaming Bunsen burner. The famous detective set down a steaming retort, and glanced round. Nipper, who was close by, was also taking an interest in the visitor.

"Hallo! So it's you, Morley!" exclaimed Lee pleasantly. "Five minutes earlier, my dear fellow, and I should have ordered Nipper to bundle you out neck and crop."

Detective-inspector Morley grinned.

"I seem to have chosen my time well, then," he replied drily. "Hope I'm not disturbing you, Lee?"

"Not now. I have just concluded a very interesting experiment," was the detective's reply. "The result, my dear Morley, may have far-reaching

effects in a certain branch of criminal science. But you are looking rather excited, I perceive."

"I'm not exactly excited," said Morley. "I'm feeling 'good.' I've brought you rather important news, Lee."

"Well, let's hear it."

"We've got him," said the inspector grimly.

"That's interesting, at all events," was Nelson Lee's calm remark. "But who have you got?"

"Jim the Penman!"

Nelson Lee lifted his eyebrows and stared.

"Yes, we've located the world's greatest forger," went on Morley, with keen satisfaction. "Douglas James Sutcliffe, alias a dozen other names, and generally known as Jim the Penman. I've brought you a specimen of his latest work, Lee."

Nipper was apparently far from pleased.

"Well, I call it a blessed sauce!" he exclaimed grumpily. "Jim the Penman was our special game, Mr. Morley. It's just like the Yard to go and take the matter out of our hands. But it's all swank," added Nipper. "I'll bet you haven't got Jim the Penman at all!"

"Come, come, young 'un!" said Lee severely. "That's not the way to talk to a distinguished official of the C.I.D. I must admit, however, that the information Mr. Morley has brought is somewhat surprising. Personally, I did not think Scotland Yard was capable of nailing the excellent Jim to the wall."

The inspector looked injured.

"We're pretty smart usually, Mr. Lee," he protested. "This Jim the Penman has been a thorn in our side for months now, and we shall be glad to have him under lock and key."

"I thought you said you'd got him?"

"Well, we have practically. We know where he's located, and he'll be arrested this afternoon. I only got hold of definite evidence this morning, and I'm going to act swiftly. Sutcliffe's a slippery customer."

"He is, indeed!" said Lee grimly.

There was something in the detective's tone which caused the inspector to look up sharply. He said nothing, however, but took from his pocket a rather dilapidated envelope.

Nelson Lee removed his overall, lit a cigar, and they all adjourned to the consulting-room. Morley handed the envelope to his unofficial colleague.

"Just have a look at that, Mr. Lee," he said. "If that's not Jim's work I'll be willing to sing small. No other forger could accomplish such a complete thing. The brute's game was only twiggled by chance."

Nelson Lee withdrew from the envelope a letter, written on an expensive, cream-laid vellum, with a die-stamped crest and address at the top. The writing was neat and thick, and there were only a few lines. The signature at the bottom was that of a well-known baronet.

"This seems genuine enough," remarked the detective.

"Well, it isn't," said Morley. "I've just come from Sir Richard's, and he knows absolutely nothing about it. As you can see, it's a trick to obtain a large sum of money from Sir Richard's bankers."

"Yes, I see that," Lee replied. "Have you got a specimen of the baronet's real handwriting?"

The inspector handed over another letter, and Nelson Lee compared the two. There seemed to be no difference whatever. The forgery was undoubtedly a masterly piece of work. Lee examined it very intently.

He produced a large, powerful magnifying lens from a drawer of his

desk, and laid the forgery flat upon his blotting-pad. Then for five full minutes he studied the letter without uttering a word. Nipper and the visitor sat still, waiting.

But Nelson Lee had not finished yet. He opened another drawer, and took from it two sheets of notepaper, which were carefully pinned together and marked in the corner in the detective's own distinctive hand.

Finally, Lee lay back in his chair, pulled at his lazily smoking cigar, and looked at Detective-inspector Morley thoughtfully.

"You say you know where Jim the Penman is located?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, I've got him—that forgery proves it. No other man could have done it."

"Where is Jim at the present moment?"

"He's at an address in Limehouse—the building is under observation," replied Morley. "One of our best men on the job. No fear of Sutcliffe skipping."

"Limehouse—eh?" observed Lee musingly. "What street?"

"Number 46, Millcraft Street."

"H'm! Rather a choice neighbourhood."

"Well, it's not particularly salubrious," smiled Morley. "In fact, it's about the toughest quarter in that district."

"Have you seen Jim the Penman in Millcraft Street?"

"Not to recognise him," answered the other. "I traced that letter to Limehouse yesterday, and I'm dead sure of my man. He's disguised, of course—that's only to be expected."

Lee knocked the ash from his cigar.

"I'm sorry, Morley," he said quietly. "You're on the wrong trail!"

"What did I say?" murmured Nipper. "I jolly well knew that the Yard hadn't bested you, guv'nor. Jim's too smart a customer to be nabbed by the police."

The inspector frowned.

"On the wrong trail?" he repeated. "Nonsense, Mr. Lee! Can you tell me who forged that letter if Sutcliffe didn't? No other man could have done such a finished piece of work!"

"I can't tell you who forged the letter, but I can tell you who didn't," Lee said calmly. "Jim didn't—and I'll give you my reasons for thinking so. Mind, I'm not absolutely positive, but I'll wager you my bank balance that Sutcliffe never held the pen responsible for this forgery. It is clever—infernally clever—I'll admit that; but it isn't quite finished enough for Jim!"

Lee tapped the big magnifying glass which he held.

"By means of this lens," he went on, "it is possible to detect a certain uncertainty in the pen strokes. In brief, Morley, I can see that the letter is actually a forgery."

"Well, that's natural considering——"

"Not at all. Jim the Penman is an absolute genius with any and every sort of writing," was Lee's interjection. "Just as some men have a queer kink in their brain for memorising figures and such like, so Sutcliffe has an extraordinary ability for copying any handwriting. And his forgeries, my dear fellow, are totally unlike any other forgeries perpetrated. He performs them with such masterly skill, such amazing sureness, that it is absolutely impossible to detect the forgery from the original. I have had many experiences with Jim the Penman, and, coupled with his astonishing ability, he possesses a truly singular sense of audacity. In comparison with Jim's work, this forgery is somewhat elementary. It really

is a forgery—we can see that—therefore, it cannot be Jim's pen which is responsible for it."

Detective-inspector Morley looked crestfallen.

"You use a pretty strong argument," he growled. "But I am not altogether convinced now, Lee."

"Well, I'll press home another point," went on the great criminologist quietly. "This is something in the nature of a long shot, but I think it is admissible. You say that Jim is working from an address in Limehouse? Well, just cast your memory back a few weeks and recollect Jim's last escapade."

Morley wrinkled his brow.

"Why, Sutcliffe worked a clever fraud upon the lawyers of the late Mr. Anson Ramsdale," he replied. "Owing to your cuteness, Lee, he was traced to a private box in a certain West End theatre, disguised in feminine attire. We took him to Bow Street, and he pretended to commit suicide. During the night he made his escape from the mortuary, and has not been seen since."

"That's correct. But when Jim disappeared, didn't something else disappear, too?"

"You mean the twenty thousand pounds?"

"Exactly!" replied Lee smoothly. "Our genial friend walked off with a clear twenty thousand pounds in spot cash. I don't hold myself to blame for that, although I was engaged upon the case. Jim escaped while in charge of the police. But just consider the point I have mentioned, and perhaps you will realise the significance of my remarks."

The inspector chewed his lips perplexedly.

"Hanged if I can see what you're driving at!" he growled at last.

"My dear Morley, I'll make it a little clearer. Here we have a forger disappearing with a very large sum. He vanishes utterly, and no trace can be found of him. Is it likely that after a lapse of only a few weeks he would be operating from one of the lowest quarters of London? Do you think it probable that Jim the Penman would be residing in Millcraft Street, Limehouse, and working off a forgery which will, if he succeeds, only bring him in a bare three thousand pounds?"

"H'm! It doesn't quite fit, does it?" grunted the inspector. "I see what you mean, Lee. It's a subtle shot, but it's deucedly convincing."

"I really don't see evidence of Jim the Penman's handiwork here," continued the detective, tapping the forged letter. "It's altogether out of keeping with Jim's character. With twenty thousand pounds in his possession he wouldn't be skulking in Limehouse. On the contrary, it is far more probable that he is even now planning some fresh gigantic fraud. I have an idea that he only worked off that scheme on the late Mr. Anson Ramsdale's lawyers for the purpose of obtaining capital to finance a bigger scheme. If you are looking for Jim the Penman, I shouldn't advise you to waste your time in Limehouse," added Lee smilingly, and allowing his hand to rest upon a gilt-edged card which was tucked into a corner of his blotting-pad. "He is far more likely, indeed, to be this gentleman here."

Morley glanced at the card and chuckled.

"Mr. Arnold Collingwood—eh?" He smiled. "Arnold Collingwood, the famous explorer, who has returned after years in the unknown wilds—after he has long been given up as dead. No, I don't think we shall find Jim the Penman there, Lee."

"It was just an example," said Nelson Lee. "If Jim is to be found anywhere he will be found in high circles—that is what I mean. But he is

the cleverest rogue I have ever run against; and, frankly, he will not allow Scotland Yard to salt his tail."

The inspector rose to his feet with a rueful smile.

"You're a wonderful chap, Lee," he remarked. "I came here full of triumph, but you have effectively knocked the nonsense out of me. I am quite sure now that I was too confident. But whoever this forger is, I am going to nab him. I'll let you know about it later on."

"Thanks, do!" replied Lee, as he shook hands. "I shall be interested to hear who the man is."

When Morley had gone, Nipper, who saw him to the door, came back into the consulting-room, grinning.

"You soon settled his hash, guv'nor," remarked the lad comfortably. "Of all the cheek! Jim the Penman, indeed! Why, old Morley couldn't nab Jim in a hundred years."

Nelson Lee frowned.

"You mustn't speak disparagingly of a Scotland Yard official, Nipper," he said, in severe tones. "Mr. Morley is a smart man, but he is rather slow moving, and inclined to jump to conclusions. I didn't like to hurt his feelings, but it had to be done."

"You sort of knocked the stuffing out of him, sir," said Nipper. "I wonder who the chap is the inspector's after? This forgery is jolly cleverly done. I'm not surprised that he thought that Jim was responsible for it."

Lee threw his cigar-end into the empty grate.

"I expect we shall learn in good time, Nipper," he said quietly. "And, talking about Jim the Penman, I wonder what has become of him? He has been quiet for many weeks—ever since he disappeared so dramatically from the mortuary."

"Oh, I expect he is up to some new devilry."

"Undoubtedly. And I have got an idea," went on the detective musingly, "that it will be something which will eclipse all Jim's previous exploits. I only hope that we shall be able to spoil the scoundrel's game before it reaches a successful issue."

Even Nelson Lee would have been surprised could he have known how soon he was to run across the master forger again, and he would have been absolutely amazed at the astoundingly audacious nature of Jim the Penman's latest enterprise.

CHAPTER II.

The Great Albert Hall Lecture.

LATER on in the day—after tea, in fact—a telephone message came through from Detective-inspector Morley.

Nelson Lee and Nipper were just preparing to go out, and the detective had been expecting the 'phone call for some time. Morley explained, rather sorrowfully, that the man he had nabbed was certainly not Jim the Penman. He was, in fact, a clever American crook, who was badly wanted by the New York police on a charge similar to the one now brought against him.

"Well, that settles the question," Lee remarked, as he hung up the receiver. "I'm afraid the inspector is rather disappointed, Nipper."

"Well, it's his own fault, guv'nor," was Nipper's complacent reply. "He shouldn't be so cocksure. Still, he's got nothing to grumble at; he's netted his man all right."

"Yes, but this American forger is but a poor substitute for the notorious Sutcliffe. We must keep our eyes open, young 'un; we must have all our wits about us. When Jim does get busy again perhaps he'll pay us a few gentle attentions." Lee paused. "Well, we'll dismiss Jim the Penman from our minds for this evening, Nipper," he added. "We're going out to enjoy ourselves."

"Yes, sir, this lecture promises to be pretty interesting. And I am rather anxious to have a look at Mr. Collingwood's chivvy, too. I reckon he's a fine chap."

Lee and Nipper were just off to the Albert Hall. A great lecture was to be given there that night by Mr. Arnold Collingwood himself. The newspapers had hinted that some astonishing revelations were to be made, and both Nelson Lee and his young assistant were keen on attending the lecture.

It was only a short time since the startling news had been flashed over the world that Collingwood was alive. He had been the leader of an expedition into the remote regions of unexplored central South America. That expedition had started out from British shores seven years before, and it had been utterly and entirely swallowed up.

After the first year doubts had been expressed, and when the second year drew to its close it was generally acknowledged that some great misfortune had overtaken the expedition, and that the whole party had perished.

As time went on hope of seeing the expedition again had been abandoned. It was generally supposed that the party had either fallen victims to a terrible fever, or had been annihilated by savages.

And now, in this present year, the ill-fated expedition was practically forgotten. There had been some talk of sending out a search-party, its object being to finally settle all doubts, and to discover what had actually happened to the original expedition. But it had been nothing more than talk. A strong leader could not be found, and so the project was abandoned.

Then, like a thunderbolt, Professor Alexander Collingwood, the famous scientist, startled the whole world by declaring that his brother Arnold was alive. The professor—a man known in both hemispheres—made a statement to the newspapers, and this was published with great headlines in every quarter of the world.

It was that the professor had received a letter from Arnold Collingwood, announcing the fact that he and two companions had managed to reach the coast. No details were given, but it was made known that the lost explorer was even then on his way to Great Britain, and that he would give full details upon arrival.

Every civilised country had been set agog with the news. In the British Isles especially the excitement was general, for the loss of the expedition had created widespread interest. And now to suddenly learn that the leader himself and two others had survived was sufficiently astonishing. After seven years—after all hope had been abandoned—the lost explorer had returned!

Arnold Collingwood had arrived at Liverpool only a week previously, and had at once accompanied his equally famous brother to London. The professor was Collingwood's only relative, and as the latter had no home of his own he very naturally went to his brother's mansion.

The newspapers had been eager for fresh information, but the explorer had only hinted that he had an amazing story to tell. This, it was generally known, would be related at the great Albert Hall lecture.

In consequence, the famous building promised to be packed to suffocation. Every available seat had been booked beforehand at record prices. Nelson

Lee had obtained his tickets early, and he and Nipper were quite comfortable in the knowledge that their seats were close to the platform.

And while the detective and Nipper were on their way to the Albert Hall, Mr. Arnold Collingwood was having a short chat with his brother before setting out for the celebrated hall. The professor's house was situated in Belgrave Square, and was quite a palatial building, for Professor Alexander Collingwood was one of the world's greatest scientists and a man of immense wealth.

He and his brother were in the library enjoying cigars before taking a taxi to the Albert Hall.

"This will be a great night for you, Arnold," the professor exclaimed, in his deep, full voice. "When you have made all the facts public you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have set the whole world agape."

"Yes, I think the lecture will be a success," remarked the other quietly.

The professor was a grey-haired old man, tall, thin, and with bent shoulders. But he was vigorous and hale, and still full of brisk vitality. He led a most active life, and was, consequently, in wonderfully fit condition. He carried his sixty-seven years with astonishing ease, and had not had a day's illness for many years.

His brother, Arnold, was fourteen years his junior, but looked considerably more. He was a fine-looking man, with a tall frame and fully bearded face. He was deeply bronzed and lined and travel-stained. But he had not a single grey hair, and was wiry and as hard as nails. There was a great contrast between the two brothers, but there was little to be wondered at in this, for their paths in life were so widely different.

Before the pair spoke again there came a tap at the door, and the professor's butler appeared.

"Mr. Channing and Mr. Thornton, sir," he announced, addressing the professor.

But it was Arnold Collingwood who answered:

"Oh, show them in at once, Bryan," he said briskly. "I have been expecting them for half an hour past."

Two men were ushered in, and Collingwood at once shook hands with them heartily. The professor nodded and smiled. The strangers were as bronzed as Arnold himself, and one was short, sturdy, and clean-shaven, while the other was somewhat lanky, and boasted a luxurious moustache. They were well dressed, but with little care. Their ties were all askew, and they did not seem absolutely comfortable in their West End tailored clothing. Both wore wide-brimmed, soft slouch hats.

They were, as will be guessed, the two members of the original expedition who had succeeded in escaping from the interior with their leader.

"You told us to come along here, sir," exclaimed Channing respectfully. "I suppose we are all going along to the Albert Hall together?"

"That's right," Collingwood replied. "Gee, the time's getting on. You'd better go and get yourself ready, professor."

The scientist glanced at the clock, and agreed. He left the room saying that he would be quite ready in five minutes' time. Arnold and his two companions were left alone. As was obvious from their attitude, they were both common members of the expedition—two of the "crowd." But they had proved themselves to be heroes both, according to Arnold's statement.

"Prepared for the ordeal?" smiled Collingwood genially. "Don't forget you're going to face a huge audience in the Albert Hall, and we shall very likely be mobbed. That's the penalty all popular heroes have to pay."

Thornton laughed.

"I guess we can take care of ourselves, sir," he said, with a chuckle.

Arnold dropped his cigar into an ashtray, glanced quickly at the door, and bent close to his companions.

"Now, look here!" he exclaimed quickly, in a low, changed voice. "We have just got two minutes to ourselves, so we'd better make the best of them. You've got my instructions, haven't you?"

"Sure!" said Channing promptly.

"You've got to leave everything to me," went on Collingwood—"everything! You understand? If you two open your mouths too wide you'll mess up the whole game—and we can't afford to take any risks. Pressmen, especially, will probably be active. Don't make a single statement to any infernal newspaper man—don't say a word! Leave it all to me!"

"You can count on us being careful, Jim——"

Collingwood muttered a low oath.

"Stop that, you fool!" he hissed. "Collingwood's my name. While I am in this get-up I am nobody else but Collingwood."

Channing looked rather abashed.

"Keep your hair on!" he growled. "We're safe enough here, aren't we?"

"Safe enough! Why, the least breath of suspicion against us will ruin the whole scheme!" exclaimed the explorer tensely. "If one of you two give the game away you'll have to answer to me for it—and you'll have to answer with your life! This is the biggest thing I ever attempted, and it's costing me all I've got. If it fails I'm done; if it succeeds I can laugh at the whole world."

"Don't worry, Mr. Collingwood," said Channing deliberately. "We know exactly what we've got to do—don't we, Thornton?"

"You bet!" was the other's calm reply.

Collingwood passed his cigar-case to his two companions, and the three lit up in silence.

But what could it mean?

What was the explanation of the extraordinary whispered conversation which had just ensued?

Obviously everything was not as it should be. By all appearances there was some secret between Mr. Arnold Collingwood and his two companions which was of too vital a nature to be shared by anybody else.

But what was that secret?

As a matter of fact, these three men were just on the brink of perpetrating the most astounding fraud ever conceived. Mr. Arnold Collingwood was none other than the master forger himself—none other than Jim the Penman.

When Nelson Lee had remarked to Morley that Jim was more likely to be hidden in the personality of the returned explorer than in a squalid street in Limehouse, the detective made the comparison merely by chance. Yet he had been correct! Arnold Collingwood was really Douglas James Sutcliffe, and his two companions were confederates in the great fraud.

It was the biggest thing that had ever been attempted, and if it succeeded Jim the Penman would again prove to the world his astounding ability for perpetrating a fraud with the utmost sangfroid and confidence.

The conception of the gigantic scheme had taken place in Jim's brain quite two months before. He had accidentally come across some letters which had been written by the lost explorer, Arnold Collingwood, and gradually a plot had begun to take shape in the forger's active mind—a plot which almost took his own breath away.

But the very audacity of it, the very openness, assured Jim that nothing but success would crown his efforts.

But Sutcliffe did not make the fatal mistake of hurrying. Such a plan as was simmering within him must be carefully thought out to the last detail.

And he had taken his time. Moreover, it was impossible to carry the thing through with any likelihood of success without a large amount of capital. Capital had been the one great project.

For whenever Jim had attempted to obtain money by fraud he had always found that Nelson Lee was up against him. On several occasions the famous detective had frustrated Jim's forgery plots, and for that reason Jim had attempted only a comparatively small fraud on the last occasion, and even then he had been within an ace of failure.

The clever forger had managed to get hold of £20,000 in absolute cash. With this he had vanished, and ever since then he had been steadily and deliberately making his preparations for the great fraud which would, in due course, startle the whole world.

When his preparations had been completed, he had opened his campaign. His daring plan had the added advantage that he would be safe from the police. He was a marked man, he knew that well enough. Scotland Yard and the police of the whole country were on the look-out for him. But so long as he evaded them until the crucial moment, he knew that he would be secure. For who would possibly dream of looking for a much wanted criminal on the platform at the Albert Hall? Who would be insane enough to connect the notorious Jim the Penman with Mr. Arnold Collingwood, the lost explorer?

The utter daring of Jim's latest venture was practically an assurance of success. He would have preferred to have played a lone hand; but he had decided that it would be safer, and that all suspicion would be avoided, if he had two confederates with him.

At first sight the plan appeared to be terribly complicated and simply bristling with difficulties and perils; yet, in reality, the thing was quite simple. From first to last he relied upon the utter daring and audacity of the plan to carry him through, and there was no doubt that he pinned his faith upon a very stable support.

He clearly remembered the extraordinary case of the once-notorious De Rougement. This latter gentleman had told an amazing story, which had been implicitly believed. He had bluffed the whole civilised world—but had failed in the end.

Jim the Penman had no intention of failing. Unlike De Rougement, he would be successful. He swore to himself that he would be successful. The very check of the enterprise appealed strongly to Jim's curious and crooked nature.

The preparations had been thorough and singularly well-devised. But they were childishly simple. He knew very well that the real Collingwood expedition had actually perished—there was no doubt about that at all. He had no fear of exposure from that quarter. And it was seven years since Arnold Collingwood had been in England.

Supposing the lost explorer turned up now? Supposing he appeared with two members of the expedition, and told an amazing story of hardships and thrilling adventures? Provided the game was carried out plausibly it would be successful. As Jim the Penman well knew, it is really one of the easiest tasks in the world to gull the public. A little cool cheek and it would be possible to work the deception. And Jim was possessed of more than a little cheek—he had an unbounded quantity of it.

There was another fact which decided Jim upon his amazing course.

The lost explorer had only one relative—Professor Alexander Collingwood, the eminent scientist. And when the ill-fated expedition had started from Great Britain, the professor had been engaged upon research work in Australia. He had been in Australia more than three years, and he had not

seen his brother once during that time. Therefore, as will be obvious, Professor Collingwood had not seen Arnold Collingwood for over ten years. If Jim gave proofs that he was Arnold, he knew that the professor would accept him without questions. The matter of personal appearance was really of little account.

For seven years the explorer had been lost to the world. He had started out on his expedition clean-shaven, clear-skinned, and unlined. Now, when he returned, he was bearded and bronzed, and had suffered countless hardships.

How would it be possible to recognise him? Jim had decided that it was not even necessary for him to turn himself into Arnold Collingwood's double. He had obtained photographs of the explorer, and had disguised himself with extraordinary care. But the brown skin and the great beard hid any deficiencies, and he was confident of being accepted without question. His supposed hardships could easily be relied upon to account for any alteration in appearance.

The confederates were similarly safe. Jim had been very careful, and had been sure of his facts. He had picked upon two members of the expedition—John Channing and Richard Thornton—who had no relatives whatever. The trio, therefore, were in practically no danger of being exposed. The sole success or failure of the great scheme depended entirely upon Jim's treatment of the affair.

And he was sure that his natural gift of impudence would pull him through.

The two accomplices—whose real names, of course, were quite different to those given—were men to be trusted. They had worked secretly with Jim several times before, and he knew he could rely upon them.

But what was the reason for it all?

How could Jim expect to profit? The whole plot, as a matter of fact, was something after the nature of a "sprat to catch a mackerel." Jim the Penman was using the £20,000 with the utmost recklessness—in order to rake in some twenty times as great. How he proposed to do this will be made clear very shortly.

The campaign had been opened simply by a letter. Sutcliffe had laid his plans with cunning and care. He travelled out to Rio de Janeiro, and purposely went far out into the Brazilian forests. There he had concluded preparations which would prove that he had come from the interior. Several weeks had been spent in this way, but they were well spent. Then he had arrived at Rio in his present disguise, loaded with a large amount of fake evidence and specimens. He had at once cabled to his brother that he was safe, and that a letter would follow him by the next boat. He, himself, would travel to England by the steamer which had left Rio after the mail-boat.

Accordingly, the professor received the forged letter before meeting his supposed brother. That letter clinched matters absolutely—as Jim had been sure it would. Professor Collingwood, at least, knew his lost brother's handwriting as well as he knew his own.

With deep cunning Jim had altered the handwriting in a slight degree, to allow for the lapse of years. But in every essential it was the same, and, naturally enough, the professor had never had a breath of suspicion. The letter, following the cable, was positive proof that Arnold Collingwood was alive. In the communication Jim gave no details; he said that he and two men had succeeded in escaping from the interior, and would be in England a week after the receipt of the letter.

The programme had been carried out without a hitch. Jim had arrived.

and had been accepted as the lost explorer without a single suspicion. Who, indeed, could suspect? What reason was there for any doubt?

Professor Collingwood was an eminent scientist—a man whose word was absolutely trustworthy—a man who was known to be everything that was splendid and noble.

If he proclaimed the fact far and wide that his brother was alive, surely it would be absurd for anybody to cast a doubt upon the matter?

And Professor Alexander Collingwood, not having seen his brother for over ten years, accepted Douglas James Sutcliffe with open arms. Indeed, it is certain that had Jim taken considerably less care over his make-up he would have been accepted just as readily. That forged letter was really the only proof that was necessary. Arnold Collingwood had had a singularly striking handwriting—a handwriting very difficult to copy—but Jim had done it so cleverly that no expert on earth could have detected a false stroke.

The newspapers were already agog with excitement. They reported Jim's every movement with assiduous care; they hinted that some big surprises were to follow.

And now, on this particular evening, the vital moment had arrived. Everything would depend upon how the lecture was received. And Jim the Penman was serene and confident.

He had decided to become Arnold Collingwood entirely and utterly; he would abandon his own personality altogether. By so doing it was only possible to be certain of escaping detection. And he had instructed his confederates to follow his example.

But at this particular minute, being entirely alone with his companions in crime, he thought it as well to give them a final hint as to their course of procedure.

It had enraged him to be called by his own name, and in a few words he made it clear to both Channing and Thornton that Jim the Penman was dead for the time being.

"Don't forget that a single slip might mean the exposure of the whole game!" Jim finished up. "So far the fraud has been accepted without a suspicion from the whole civilised world, and there is every prospect of a huge triumph. By Heaven, if you give the thing away——"

"You'll give it away yourself if you're not careful," interjected Thornton sharply. "We know what we've got to do, Collingwood. Trust us, and you won't find us wanting."

Jim the Penman nodded.

"Well, understand," he murmured, "not a word. I don't see that you'd open your mouths too wide, but there's no sense in taking unnecessary risks. If pressmen get hold of you, refer them to me. You've got to say nothing. I can deal with those gentry in a way that'll warm their hearts and send them off rejoicing."

"By George, you're a cool card——"

"Yes, my man, I think we shall give the public a surprise," interjected Jim, changing his voice and giving his companions a significant look. "After all those years in the wilds, London seems a bit strange to us—eh?"

"It does, sir, and no mistake," replied Channing, taking his cue.

Jim had heard a very slight sound outside—a sound which had escaped the ears of his companions. And a few seconds later the heavy oaken door opened, and Professor Collingwood looked in.

"I'm ready, Arnold," he said briskly. "What's this—what's this? You tell me to go and get prepared, and make no attempt to do so yourself! Discussing the lecture—eh? Well, come along."

"Right you are, Alec!" laughed Jim.

And in a couple of minutes' time the four men were seated in the professor's magnificent Rolls-Royce, bowling gently towards the Albert Hall. The great hour had arrived.

CHAPTER III.

The Great Lecture and a Huge Scheme.

NELSON LEE came to a halt in the great auditorium of the Albert Hall, not far from the platform.

"Here we are, Nipper," he said.

The pair took their seats and looked about them with interest. The huge building was filling steadily. Already it was over three-parts full, and it was obvious that before long it would be packed to suffocation.

The brilliant electric light gleamed down upon a well-dressed throng. Every seat had been purchased, at record prices, and only well-to-do people could afford to attend this lecture. Lee noticed many famous men round him—great travellers, scientists, naturalists, doctors, and great numbers of well-known sportsmen.

The general public would have to contend with the newspaper reports. This gathering, vast as it was, was select and exclusive. And there was not a single being present who entertained the faintest shadow of a doubt that everything was not all what it seemed to be.

They had come to hear Arnold Collingwood, the returned explorer, lecture on the hardships and adventures he and his expedition had encountered in central South America. What reason was there for believing that the great man himself was undoubtedly dead, and that this man was an impostor?

Indeed, if any person had jumped upon the platform and had proclaimed the actual facts precisely as they were, the whole distinguished audience would have rocked in their seats with genuine merriment.

Once a suspicion arose against any man or enterprise it was very difficult to dispel it—if the suspicion is brought at the beginning. But when a man had got hold of the public as Jim the Penman had, no suspicion on earth would have uprooted that firm hold. Only positive facts would have ruined the scheme; and there was no prospect of such evidence being brought forward. From first to last extraordinary success had accompanied Jim the Penman's plot.

"I'm glad we booked our seats well in advance, Nipper," remarked Leo comfortably. "Upon my soul! I didn't think there were so many distinguished people in London at the present time. Even the cheapest seats have been eagerly purchased at top prices; there are titled people occupying the modest chairs usually filled by our suburbanites."

Nipper stretched his legs easily.

"I pity that crowd outside, guv'nor," he remarked, without looking at all pitiful. "They have got just about as much chance of getting in here as Jim the Penman has of getting into heaven!"

Nelson Lee chuckled. It was rather singular that Nipper should have mentioned the master forger's name at that particular time, for Jim the Penman himself was even then alighting from the Rolls-Royce outside the main entrance of the hall.

Then to Lee's ears came the sound of great cheering, and he knew the reason for it. Obviously the famous explorer had just arrived.

As Nipper had said, a vast number of people were congregated outside the Albert Hall, vainly hoping that they would be able to get in. Hundreds of others were streaming up with every five minutes that passed.

But it was hopeless for them to think of gaining admission. For every seat had been booked in advance, and nobody could be admitted who did not possess a ticket.

There was great disappointment, and, as usual, many unreasonable people became angry and excited. It was certainly rather annoying after travelling especially from Dulwich, from Croydon, from Cricklewood—or from a score of other places—to find that admission to the Albert Hall was barred.

But then, the building had only a certain number of seats; walls could not be stretched to accommodate the people who would have liked to get in. The evening was mild, and the early August sunset was glorious. Great crowds waited outside, not because they hoped to get in, but because there was a certain attraction in remaining.

And when Arnold Collingwood himself appeared there was a general outburst of cheering; the disappointed crowds had the satisfaction, at least, of catching a glimpse of the great explorer. There was no mistaking Collingwood's striking features and full beard. His photograph had been reproduced in practically every newspaper, and the sight of him in the flesh brought forth enthusiastic applause.

But the reception outside was nothing to that which the daring impostor received within. He did not appear on the platform immediately. Several distinguished travellers appeared first, followed shortly afterwards by Professor Alexander Collingwood. The great scientist was given a splendid reception.

Jim the Penman appeared after his supposed brother had made a short speech. He strode on to the platform from the rear, and before he reached the centre a great wave of enthusiastic cheering broke out from the vast audience.

Everybody cheered—old white-haired scientists, grizzled globe-trotters, and men of all ranks and stations. Arnold Collingwood, the explorer, was undoubtedly popular; he had completely "got hold" of the British public.

Of course, Collingwood had been somewhat famous before he had started on the expedition to South America seven years before. He had opened up new territory in Australia, and had discovered valuable mineral lands in British East Africa. These facts were actually true—Collingwood was a great man.

But the audience in the Albert Hall were not to know that the bearded, bronzed man before them was a rank impostor; that he had, in fact, never seen Arnold Collingwood in his life!

Nipper cheered with the rest, only more vociferously.

"Splendid chap, ain't he, guv'nor?" he said breathlessly. "My hat! I'd like to go on a trip with a man like him!"

"Yes, Nipper, he has certainly had plenty of experience," Lee replied. "I must see if we cannot arrange a private chat with him."

Nelson Lee and Nipper would not have expressed those opinions, perhaps, if they had known the actual identity of the man facing them!

Jim the Penman himself was feeling elated and perfectly at ease. Such an enterprise as this was exactly suited to his taste; he liked nothing better than ostentation, and it tickled his somewhat warped sense of humour to realise how completely he was hoodwinking the whole nation.

No further proof was needed to show how thoroughly he had gained the sympathy and enthusiasm of the public. And this was not the middle-class public, but the rich and influential.

Before Sutcliffe took his seat his two companions, "Channing" and "Thornton" appeared, and were given a reception which made them

inwardly chuckle. They, too, were enjoying this huge fraud. It was very much like a practical joke. They knew the capabilities of their leader, and were confident of ultimate success.

There was a short pause while the chairman—Professor Collingwood—made ready to deliver a short opening speech. The few words he had already spoken had been in the nature of an introduction.

Nelson Lee had been looking at Jim the Penman for some minutes. Perhaps if he had had a suspicion of the man's real identity he would have seen through the disguise; but he, too, accepted Sutcliffe without a doubting thought. Why, indeed, should he do otherwise?

"He has changed, Nipper," remarked Lee. "He has changed very markedly."

"You've met him, haven't you, sir?"

"Yes, once; over eleven years ago."

"That's a long time, sir."

"It is, indeed, young 'un," was the detective's reply. "And Collingwood has led a very hard life during those eleven years. The last six, in fact, are somewhat obscure; but we shall hear of his adventures to-night. I have an idea that Collingwood has a startling story to tell."

"Where did you meet him, guv'nor?"

"In British East Africa, while I was out there on a holiday after big game," replied Nelson Lee. "I don't suppose he would know me again. We only met for a few hours; he happened to be passing through the village with his party. He was a jovial, merry man then, and I have no doubt he has little changed. We shall see. That beard has made a great alteration, and his complexion was curiously clear."

"He looks like a giddy Hindu now," grinned Nipper.

Lee nodded. He was still looking thoughtfully at "Collingwood." But although he had met the real explorer, he still had no suspicion. He had chatted with Collingwood for an hour or two eleven years before, and so he could scarcely say he was acquainted with the man.

A minute later the detective was listening interestedly to the professor's opening remarks. He explained how he had received the famous cable from his lost brother, and how the cable had been followed by a letter.

"I do not mind admitting," said Professor Collingwood, "that I had an uneasy doubt that some cruel practical joker was at work when I received the cablegram. I could not readily grasp the fact that my brother Arnold was really alive and well. I waited with keen anxiety for the letter, and when it arrived I was both relieved and excited."

He paused, and smiled.

"My doubts were cast to the wind when I read that letter—when I saw that well-known and unmistakable handwriting," he continued. "I knew with certainty that by some miracle my brother had been spared; that he had returned to the world after nearly seven years of enforced silence. He has told me something of his story, and I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that it is an amazing record of hardship, peril, and bulldog courage."

The explorer smiled and shook his head deprecatingly. Inwardly, Jim was intensely amused. He did not remember any time when he had enjoyed himself so much as he was doing now.

After the professor had rambled on for five minutes further he took his seat, and Mr. Arnold Collingwood arose to address the great audience. This was the signal for a further demonstration of enthusiasm, and it was some moments before the lecturer could commence.

Jim the Penman was possessed of the "gift of the gab" to an astonishing

degree, and his imagination was vivid and inexhaustible. His story, of course, was pure inventive fiction from beginning to end.

But he told it with such skill, and described the expedition's adventures so minutely and so thoroughly, that it was impossible to doubt that he was speaking the precise truth. As a romantic writer of fiction Jim could have attained success immediately had he so chosen.

Story-writing, however, was far from Sutcliffe's line. It was his intention to make a great fortune in one swoop. He stood on the platform easily, and addressed the distinguished audience with a smooth flow of language and a subtle humour which was both entertaining and amusing. Arnold Collingwood had been noted for his lecturing capabilities, and Jim was keeping his character up perfectly.

"To look at me, ladies and gentlemen," he said smilingly, "I don't suppose you would think I had been through all the hardships I shall presently describe. But, happily, I am one of the hardiest beggars on earth, and I can stand any amount of knocking about. Thornton and Channing, here, have had their share of trouble, too."

The lecture was enthralling and in many respects startling. Jim was full of confidence, and as cool as ice. He had mapped out his story weeks beforehand, and had everything pat and ready. He had no fear of being bowled out by any chance question. Attention to detail had always been one of the forger's strongest points. It was this quality which rendered him so immune from exposure.

The time sped rapidly, and Jim still lectured. He described the expedition's earlier adventures. He told how it had penetrated into unknown, unexplored country, and how many difficulties had been overcome.

He and his men had survived untold hardships and terrible ordeals. These were described in detail, and with vivid realism. The audience sat enraptured, and even Nelson Lee found himself completely lost in the rich verbosity of the speaker.

Sutcliffe went on, with supreme calmness and audacity, to outline the nature of the country which the expedition had discovered. He said that it was easily reached by a tributary of the Amazon, and he would undertake to lead another expedition—a greater and more completely fitted-out expedition—to the wonderful land.

The climate was healthy, and the only drawback was a tribe of extremely hostile and murderous natives. These latter gentlemen had been responsible for the entrapping and the imprisoning of the party.

And now Jim came to one of the really important parts of his speech. The new country, he declared, was fabulously rich in gold, diamonds and minerals. The South African diamond-mines, the Australian goldfields, the Klondike—all were absolutely insignificant compared to this hitherto undiscovered tract of land.

"I am not asking you to believe all I say, ladies and gentlemen," exclaimed Jim the Penman frankly, "but, as you will readily understand, I should be a poor fool to stand on this platform and make statements which were untrue. If I did that I should prove myself to be liar and an impostor, for I intend to lead a relief expedition out to this country. What should I look like if the expedition discovered that my tale had been purely boast and bluster?"

The audience smiled. The thought of Arnold Collingwood being an impostor struck everybody as being humorous. Every soul in that building believed every word that Jim the Penman uttered. As he had himself declared, to tell a false story would be the height of folly.

And the very manner in which the speaker related his adventures proved

conclusively—or seemed to do so—that there was not a shadow of a doubt to be cast upon his narrative.

Moreover, there was proof—actual material proof—that he was open and truthful. Upon a large table were several cases. These contained wonderful specimens brought from the new country.

There were rough, uncut diamonds, nuggets of gold, and many varieties of precious minerals. All were but poor specimens of the treasures contained in the new land. It had been impossible to bring any more.

There is nothing so convincing as actual evidence—and this “evidence” had cost Jim three parts of the great sum he had lately obtained by fraud. These specimens had only been obtained at the expense of £16,000. Sutcliffe had got them from various sources, and their origin could not possibly be traced. Nobody could disprove his statement that they had come from the wonderful country he so vividly described.

Jim had acted wisely, and with consummate cunning, in providing this telling proof. The money had not been lost; he knew that. When he had carried out this great new scheme to its conclusion, he could easily realise the costly specimens.

But it went to show how thoroughly Jim the Penman had made his preparations. Those diamonds, gold and minerals—as well as many other articles—had more effect than volumes of words.

Everything was examined then and there by the famous gentlemen on the platform. Some were taken down into the auditorium, and handed round. When the interlude was over, not even Nelson Lee entertained the breath of a suspicion against the lecturer. The great detective had examined a gold nugget and some uncut precious stones, and he had been struck by their genuine worth.

Jim the Penman had committed his previous forgery for the especial purpose of getting hold of the necessary capital—£20,000—to purchase these faked specimens. They were real enough in themselves, but the story of their origin was certainly faked.

“And now,” went on Jim calmly, “I wish to refer to a remark I made a short while ago. I said that I intended leading a relief party into the interior. Perhaps you wondered at my choice of words? I purposely said ‘relief’ because there are many members of my original expedition still alive and well. They are held by the natives, and we three here only succeeded in escaping. The others, I am positive, are still alive, waiting for the assistance I promised——”

Jim could get no further.

There was a great burst of cheering from every corner of the huge hall. His words, clear and distinct, had been heard by all, and this revelation had come as a tremendous surprise.

The enthusiasm was enormous. Sutcliffe had relied upon that shot to have a big effect, but he was intensely pleased at the actual result. More than ever, now, he was fairly established in the hearts of the people.

Everybody had thought that Collingwood and Thornton and Channing were the sole survivors of the expedition. Now it was clear that many others still lived, and were only waiting to be rescued. It was a splendid piece of news.

When the excitement had died down somewhat, Jim was able to proceed. And now he came to the crux of the whole thing—so far as he was concerned. The really vital point had been held back so far; but now he outlined his scheme.

“It is my intention,” he exclaimed, “to form a large company, the name of which will be chosen later on. Everybody in the land will be

invited to purchase shares in this great company, and the capital required is £250,000. A quarter of a million, after all, is a fairly small sum for such a rich country as ours. But such a sum will be required to fit out a big expedition.

"The object of the expedition is to rescue my unfortunate companions, to rid the country of the savages, and to survey the lands from corner to corner. It will be a long and costly business—but the reward will be enormous.

"Shares can be purchased in the usual manner. I do not know at this moment how things will be arranged, but I fancy there will be many thousands of ordinary £1 shares issued, and the general public will be able to participate.

"I am a traveller—an outdoor individual," went on Sutcliffe, smiling. "I know very little about business. But everybody who purchases shares at once will be repaid ten, twenty, a hundredfold later on. Frankly, I expect to be inundated with applications, and I believe the capital will be raised within a week.

"For, you will understand, these shares will be treated as founders' shares, and everybody who possesses them will be in luck. They will be founders' shares in the great new company which will be formed later on when the new country is actually opened up.

"All this will be made public in every newspaper to-morrow morning. There will be full-page advertisements in every paper. And, considering the nature of the unopened land, and its singular value, a man who purchases a hundred shares will find that he will reap in a fortune. In any case, he will certainly get his money back many, many times over, and will obtain a handsome income.

"It is an opportunity unique in history. In the past men have made vast fortunes, and I venture to predict that very many fortunes will be made over this business. I know of what I am speaking. I have seen with my own eyes. I can judge the thing as it stands. I urge nobody to buy shares, for I am sure that urging is unnecessary. It must be obvious to you all, ladies and gentlemen, that such an opportunity as this very rarely occurs.

"As I have already said, I am confident of obtaining the £250,000 within a week. Already everything has been put in train for the fitting-out of the new expedition, and it will set out, I expect, towards the end of the year.

"And now I am going to tell you of certain happenings, and of various adventures which I personally went through while in the hands of the savages. I am going to tell you how I escaped death by inches, and how Channing here saved my life."

And Jim the Penman, having fully entered into the details of the promotion of the new company, went into long and interesting descriptions of several adventures which had been encountered during the escape from the interior.

He told all this with a frankness and a clearness which was remarkable, considering that it was pure fiction. The audience sat interested, and forgetful of time. And it was very late when Jim the Penman at last sat down.

The applause he received was terrific. And he knew positively well that the lecture had been a great success, and that the success of the new company would follow in due course.

It was a great game—a stupendous fraud—and there seemed every prospect of its being successful.

CHAPTER IV.

Nelson Lee Learns Something of Great Interest.

NELSON LEE laid the evening paper down and looked across at Nipper. Two days had passed since the startling lecture at the Albert Hall, and, as Lee could see from the newspapers, the whole country was aroused by the affair.

"Yes, Nipper," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully, "I shall certainly purchase some shares in this new company."

"How many, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, laying down a book.

"Well, a hundred pounds would be well spent, I imagine," the detective replied. "I just want to be in it, you know—that is all."

Lee, as a matter of fact, was very enthusiastic. He had followed the affairs of Arnold Collingwood closely, and knew that the promotion of the great company was a huge success.

It seemed probable that before the week was out the required capital would be obtained, and a large amount over. Everybody was anxious to purchase shares; people from every corner of the country were sending cheques and banknotes. The thing had taken hold of the public strongly.

A record would be created—that was certain.

And Jim the Penman, enjoying the hospitality of his "brother," was joyful and elated. But he did not allow his satisfaction to give him away. He was a most careful scoundrel, and was perfectly cool and calm.

His plan, of course, was obvious—or would have been, had anybody been in the "know." When the £250,000 was raised, he would convert it all into cash and untraceable securities, and quietly disappear.

The fraud was one of record magnitude. And if it succeeded it would not be any one man who would suffer, but tens of thousands.

After the revelation, of course, there would be a most unholy hubbub. But Jim the Penman did not concern himself about that. He would place Professor Collingwood in a terrible position; but the professor's worries were his own. Sutcliffe was out for money—and he didn't care who suffered afterwards.

The professor's position would be all the more perilous because he was co-trustee with his supposed brother. He would, in a way, be responsible for the money. But the famous scientist had no suspicion that anything was wrong.

The fact that Nelson Lee proposed to purchase shares proved how completely Jim the Penman's plot had succeeded. The most astute detective in Europe was a victim as surely as the most ignorant country farmer.

It was an extraordinary game of bluff.

Jim himself was little short of amazed at his triumph. The success of the unprecedented fraud left him almost breathless. And he knew that it would not be long before he and his confederates would have to make preparations to "skip."

"Yes, I shall certainly lay out a hundred pounds," went on Nelson Lee. "Perhaps you would care to purchase a few shares, Nipper?"

The lad grinned.

"Well, I don't mind having a few thousand, sir," he replied.

"I don't suppose you would mind," Lee laughed. "But, seriously, young 'un, I should advise you to draw upon your bank balance to the extent of ten pounds, at least. You might as well reap the benefit later on."

"Right-ho, guv'nor," Nipper answered; "I can spare a tenner. If you pay it for me I'll reckon it off future wages!"

"You young sweep!" growled Lee.

But he filled in a cheque for £110, and then came to a decision.

"It is quite early in the evening," he said. "I will run round to Belgrave Square myself, and hand the cheque to Collingwood personally. I am rather curious to see if he remembers me."

"Shall I come, sir?"

"No, there is no necessity for you to be with me, Nipper," Lee said. "I don't suppose I shall be longer than a hour."

The great detective little thought that his visit was to result in astounding consequences.

At the present time he was as completely deceived as anybody. He had attended the lecture, and had been greatly impressed by it. Never for a second had he connected Jim the Penman with the explorer.

This in no way reflected upon Nelson Lee's astuteness and ability. On the contrary, it merely emphasised the wonderful cleverness of his enemy. And now that Lee was to come into close contact with Jim the Penman, events were destined to take a quick, dramatic turn.

The evening was mild and fine. Nelson Lee taxied to Belgrave Square, and, curiously enough, his thoughts turned upon Douglas Sutcliffe. He wondered what had become of the master forger, and when he would meet Jim again.

It was strange that he should have such thoughts at such a time.

But when he arrived at Professor Collingwood's mansion, Lee dismissed Sutcliffe from his mind, and was soon waiting in the lounge-hall while the butler took his card in to Mr. Arnold. The latter, so the detective was informed, had just come in.

This was true. Jim the Penman had been busy at the city office, which had been specially rented for the business of the new company. And the forger was not only in a good humour, but light-hearted and happy. His plans were materialising splendidly.

"Gentleman to see you, sir," said the butler.

Jim was alone in the library, for the professor was attending a scientific meeting at the Zoological Institute's Hall.

The impostor took the slip of paste-board and glanced at it. As he read the well-known and equally well-dreaded name, he did not turn a hair. But for a moment he continued gazing at the card fixedly.

Jim was doing some quick thinking.

Nelson Lee! What could the detective's visit mean? Could it be possible that he had smelt a rat? Jim the Penman, for a single moment, felt a hollow kind of feeling at the pit of his stomach.

Then it passed, and he was as strong as ever again. His first inclination was to make an excuse, and to send the detective away. But would that be a wise course? If Nelson Lee suspected nothing, there would be no harm in seeing him; Jim was confident enough that he could bluff matters out all right.

And if Lee did suspect, his suspicions would only be strengthened if "Collingwood" declined to see him. For that would, in a way, be an admission that the explorer feared him. Whichever way it was looked at, it would be better to openly face the unwelcome visitor.

"Show Mr. Lee in at once, Bryan," said Jim, looking up.

"Very good, sir."

The butler withdrew, and Jim took a deep breath. It was the first uneasy moment he had experienced since the game had started. He could not help remembering that Nelson Lee had wrecked nearly all his other schemes.

Yet, before the detective was ushered in, Jim was at his ease again. He

assured himself that Nelson Lee could know nothing. What, indeed, could he know? This visit was certainly a mere matter of coincidence.

The forger rose easily, and moved a step forward as Lee appeared.

"This is a great pleasure, Mr. Lee," he exclaimed heartily.

"I think the pleasure is mine, Mr. Collingwood. I am glad that you are at home," was the detective's greeting. "Perhaps you do not remember me?"

Jim laughed as he waved the visitor into a chair.

"Your name, at all events, is sufficiently famous," he replied graciously. "I may have been away in the wilds for years, Mr. Lee, but I do not think there are many Britishers who have not heard of you."

Lee sat down and smiled.

"I have really called on a pure business matter," he said. "I attended your lecture at the Albert Hall, Mr. Collingwood, and I congratulate you upon your thrilling escape, and upon your excellent plan for forming a new expedition."

Jim listened politely. But he was as keen as a razor, and he knew at once that Lee was not acting. The detective was in entire ignorance of the identity of the man before him.

And Jim was quite right in concluding this. So far the detective was certainly still completely in the dark.

For several minutes he talked on the subject of the lecture. And Jim became quite at his ease, and actually amused. It tickled him immensely, this interview. The very man whom he most feared of all the others was talking with him, quite unconscious of the fact that his companion was his greatest enemy.

The situation was not without its grimly humorous side.

Jim had decided to leave Lee severely alone—so long as Lee remained inactive. But at the very first sign of danger, the forger intended to act drastically. He would make no mistake this time! But he was satisfied that Nelson Lee was just as thoroughly bluffed as the rest of the public. This visit was just chance.

And so it was chance.

But Chance—with a capital "C"—sometimes plays queer tricks.

"I have brought you a cheque, Mr. Collingwood," said Nelson Lee, handing over the slip. "I am interested in the new company, and wish to participate in the prosperity to come. You must pardon this informal method of transacting business, but I wished to make an excuse to meet you."

"I am only too delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Lee."

The detective looked at his companion smilingly.

"You do not remember our former meeting, then?" he asked.

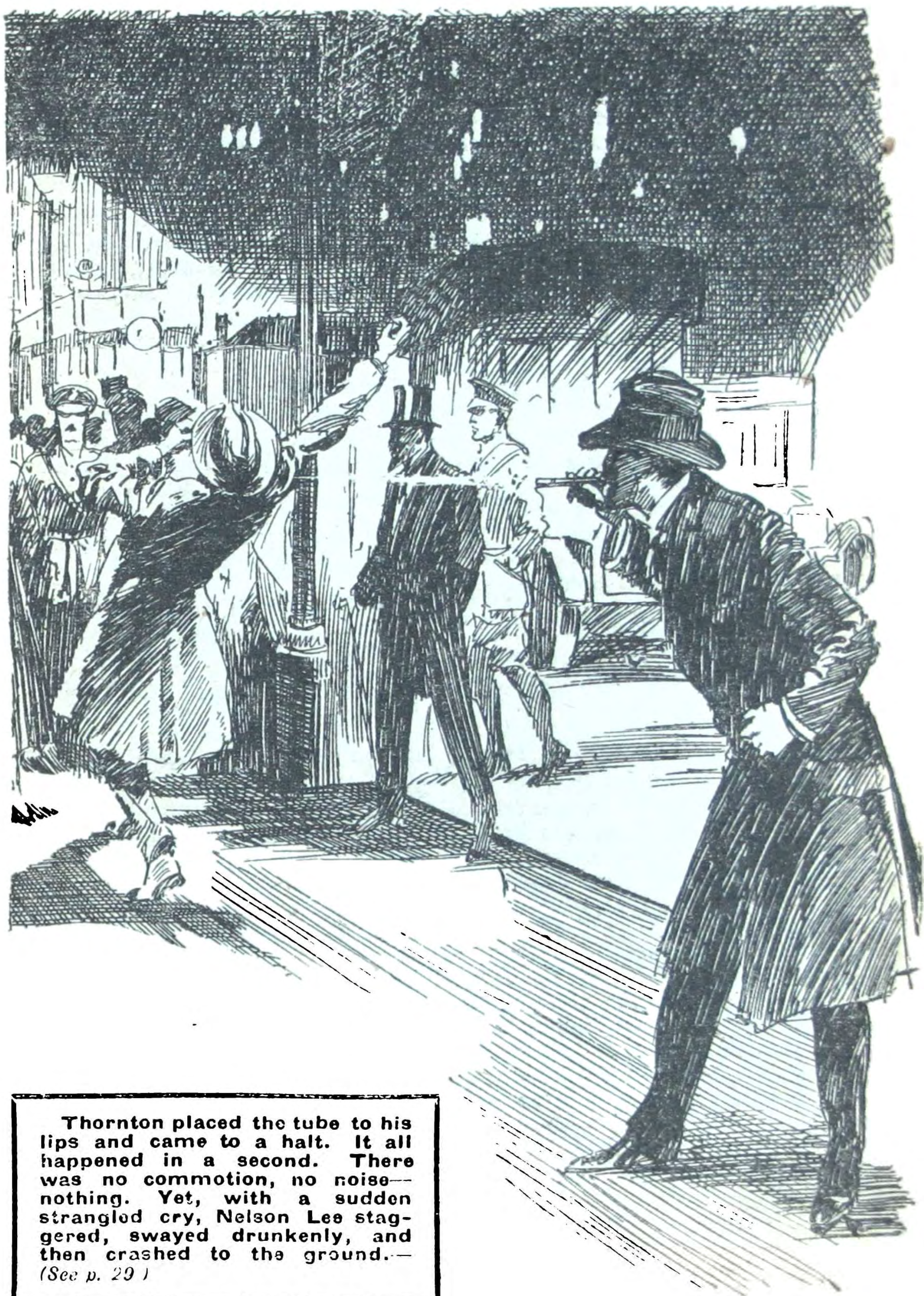
"No, I cannot say that I do," replied Jim, experiencing for the first time the difficulties of an impersonator who meets one of his original's acquaintances. "It must have been many years ago."

"Just about eleven."

"Oh, well, you must forgive me if I have forgotten you, Mr. Lee," smiled the other. "I have an excellent memory, as a rule, but eleven years is a long time. And I meet many people, and much has happened in my life since then. One is apt to let small matters slip from one's mind readily."

And even now Nelson Lee suspected nothing. He, himself, had no very distinct picture of that meeting with Arnold Collingwood, years ago. Considering the explorer's varied and adventurous life, it was not surprising that he had entirely forgotten the little incident.

"We met in a little village called Umtalni, in British East Africa," said



Thornton placed the tube to his lips and came to a halt. It all happened in a second. There was no commotion, no noise—nothing. Yet, with a sudden strangled cry, Nelson Lee staggered, swayed drunkenly, and then crashed to the ground.—
(See p. 29.)

the detective. "It was only a brief meeting, for you and your party were hurrying through the bush up country. You told me, I remember, of a very exciting adventure you had with a lion."

Jim smiled.

"By Jove, I think I do remember now," he said smoothly. "Yes, Mr. Lee, you are quite right. I do recollect a Britisher in the African Bush. You were after big game, were you not?"

"That is so. As a matter of fact I am always after big game," remarked Lee drily. "There are so many different varieties, you know, Mr. Collingwood."

Jim the Penman laughed.

"Tiring of hunting men, I suppose you turn your attentions to hunting animals now and again," he inquired genially. "Do you know, Mr. Lee, you are just the type of man I should like to take with me on my expedition. You would be an invaluable help, and your intrepid courage and determination are just the qualities required for the job. But I suppose your time is far too much engaged to spend a year or so exploring in South America?"

"I am afraid it is," was Lee's reply. "I can easily allow myself a few months, but your expedition, I believe, will be a somewhat extensive thing."

Jim the Penman produced his cigar-case and passed it across to Lee. But in removing one of the cigars the detective accidentally knocked the case out of Jim's hands, and it fell to the floor.

"Oh, I am sorry," said Lee hastily.

He made a move to bend down to recover the cigar-case; but Jim instinctively did so at the same time, and it was he who picked it up. Lee apologised, and both men laughed.

"These cigars remind me of that little incident which occurred at our first meeting," said Nelson Lee. "Do you remember that generous act you performed? A case, containing my sole supply of cigars, had got lost while my carriers were fording a stream. And you, like a good Samaritan, came to my rescue upon hearing of the disaster, and gave me a full box."

"As it happened I was very well supplied during that trip," remarked the impostor smoothly. "It is rather late to make the inquiry, but I hope you found the cigars of good quality?"

"They were excellent," smiled the detective. "Do you remember, also, that one of your carrier boys was bitten by a snake almost immediately after we had met? I dressed the wound for the fellow, and I have often wondered how he got on. Perhaps you have forgotten the little incident?"

Sutcliffe replied readily:

"Your treatment was very successful, Mr. Lee, and the man was quite himself within three days."

Lee glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"Well, I suppose I am wasting your time in a most unwarrantable fashion," he said, briskly rising to his feet. "I am delighted to have renewed my acquaintance with you, Mr. Collingwood. My sympathies are entirely with your great work, and you will, I presume, see that the shares I have purchased will be sent on to me?"

After a few more remarks Sutcliffe rang the bell for the butler to show Lee out. The forger was, by this time, highly amused at the interview. The cleverest detective in the country had been sitting beside him for close on twenty minutes, and he had been as safe as though he were a hundred miles away. Jim knew quite well that for the time being he actually was Arnold Collingwood; and this being so, every living person accepted him unconditionally and without a suspicion.

Nelson Lee was very soon in Belgrave Square again, and he walked away with a pleased smile on his lips, as though he had thoroughly enjoyed the interview.

But when he reached the end of the square he entered a taxi, and his expression underwent a change. It became grim and set, and there was a look in his eyes which would have told much to those who knew him intimately.

Nipper saw the look at once—as soon as his master stepped into the consulting room. And Nipper, who was shrewd and quick-witted, guessed that Nelson Lee had hit upon something big.

“What’s up, guv’nor?” asked the lad eagerly.

“I don’t know, young ’un—I don’t know,” replied Nelson Lee very slowly. “But something has happened which has come as a great shock to me. Let me think—I’ll tell you all about it in a few minutes.”

And Nipper waited with as much patience as he could muster for his master to explain.

CHAPTER V.

Nelson Lee’s Stratagem—And Its Reward.

“YOU’RE having a thundering good think, guv’nor!”

Nipper had remained silent for fully ten minutes, but he could contain himself no longer, and he expressed his feelings in unmistakable terms.

Nelson Lee twisted in his chair and faced the lad.

“I will just tell you what occurred, Nipper,” he said quietly. “As you know, I went round to Professor Collingwood’s house in order to meet his brother, Arnold. Well, the latter received me cordially—and the cheque even more cordially.”

Lee then explained briefly the conversation which had ensued. And he ended up by making a statement which caused Nipper to sit bolt upright in his chair, and to stare at his master with open-mouthed amazement.

“You’re—you’re dreaming, guv’nor!” he gasped.

“Well, there is certainly some excuse for you saying that, young ’un,” was Lee’s reply. “But I repeat my statement, and make it even more emphatic. The man I saw, the man I conversed with, the man who calls himself Arnold Collingwood, is not Arnold Collingwood at all!”

“Great Scott!”

“There is something about this business which strikes me as being more than queer,” went on Lee tensely. “In fact, Nipper, the more I ponder over it, the more strange it appears. Things are beginning to look extremely ugly. Do not forget what tremendous issues are involved!”

Nipper looked a bit helpless.

“It’s beyond me, sir,” he complained. “How the dickens do you know that the man is an impostor? Why, do you mean to say that Arnold Collingwood has been put away, or something, since that lecture?”

“Not at all! The man who gave the lecture was the man I saw, but he is not Arnold Collingwood. There is a fraud somewhere, and I suspect that a terrific scheme of——”

“But how do you know all this, guv’nor?” Nipper interjected.

“The first inkling was given to me by chance,” was the detective’s reply. “I happened to knock my companion’s cigar-case out of his hands. It was quite accidental. Just previous to that I had mentioned a story Collingwood had told me, eleven years before, regarding a fight he had with a lion. Well, Nipper, Collingwood had shown me a scar which had been inflicted

by one of the lion's claws. It was an ugly scar, but it was fortunately hidden beneath the left ear, and almost invisible."

"Well, sir?"

"When my companion bent down to recover the cigar-case, I had an absolutely clear view of the back of his neck and of the skin beneath his left ear," said Lee significantly. "The skin, my lad, was as clear as my own! There was no scar whatever! And yet that mark left by the lion upon Collingwood was so deep and so apparent that even eleven years of time could not have caused the scar to disappear. Collingwood himself told me at the time that he would bear the mark all his life."

"Then—then——"

"Then it was instantly apparent to me that the man I was facing, who called himself Arnold Collingwood, was a rank impostor. Needless to say, my lad, I was greatly shocked and amazed; but I think I kept my head. I gave the man no inkling that I had become aware of the true state of affairs, and he is even now sublimely unconscious of that fact. But who he is, I must admit, I have no suspicion. Moreover, Nipper, I at once set a trap for my friend which he fell into headlong and without a thought of danger."

"That was jolly neat, guv'nor!"

"Well, without boasting, I think I may say that I acted with promptitude and good judgment," replied Lee. "The trap I set for the fellow was quite successful, and one which he could not avoid tumbling into. Being an impostor, he had, of course, not met me eleven years before in British East Africa. That is why he failed to remember the meeting when I first mentioned it. I referred to an incident regarding some cigars which he had given to me at our first meeting."

"I suppose that was a faked yarn?" Nipper inquired eagerly.

"Of course! I merely referred to the matter in order to trick him," replied Lee. "Mr. Collingwood never offered me a cigar of any description, and so, when this man agreed with me, I knew that there was something radically wrong. But, to make assurance doubly sure, I also spoke of a native boy who had been bitten by a snake. Of course, no such incident occurred. It was merely a second trap. And the impostor fell into it as easily as he had fallen into the first. You see, his position made it impossible for him to guess my game. He thought that I was completely deceived, and supposed that I was merely referring to actual occurrences."

"Well, what are you going to do, guv'nor?"

"I hardly know, my boy. The position is somewhat difficult. I am determined, however, to learn the truth."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet and paced the consulting-room.

"One thing, at all events, must certainly be done," he went on. "Professor Collingwood must be told of the fraud. He must know that the man he is sheltering under his roof is not his brother at all. You may think it surprising that the professor should be so deceived. But, Nipper, you must remember that Collingwood has not seen his brother for over ten years. A man changes vastly in ten years, and this fellow has taken care to provide himself with a bronze complexion and a full beard. Up till this evening I have never had a suspicion against him, but now that my eyes are open, I am beginning to see quite a number of suspicious details which previously escaped my notice. Then, too, there's the question of motive. The motive is perfectly clear."

"Of course, sir. The blighter means to sheer off with all the money that's obtained for this company." Nipper paused and stared. "My stars! As likely as not that whole yarn was faked and invented! Perhaps there isn't

such a country! And, of course, the real Collingwood expedition actually perished."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"The issues are astounding," he said. "Just this one little discovery of mine has opened up amazing possibilities. Think, Nipper—think! What actual proof have we that the story of the wonderful new country is true? None whatever! The public have been completely gulled and deceived! The very audacity of the enterprise made it instantly successful, and the fact that Professor Alexander Collingwood is closely associated with the company is an assurance to the public that everything is above-board and perfectly honest."

"But do you think the professor is implicated?"

"Yes, but he is implicated innocently. He is the dupe of this man who calls himself the lost explorer. Professor Collingwood is a partner in the fraud unknowingly, and the sooner he is made aware of the facts the better," went on Lee briskly. "I shall make it my duty to nip this thing in the bud before it has gone too far. If I act at once, the gigantic fraud will be exposed and ruined."

"Who the dickens can have conceived such a wheeze, sir?"

"I don't know. I——"

Nelson Lee paused, and a fixed, intense look came into his eyes.

"By James!" he muttered. "I wonder! I wonder!"

"You wonder what, guv'nor?"

"Wait, youngster! A suspicion has entered my head, and it is too amazing for me to share it with you until I have obtained some sort of corroboration," replied the detective crisply. "Let me see! What is the time?" He glanced at his watch. "Fairly early yet, Nipper. I will visit Belgrave Square again—at once!"

"Let me come, guv'nor!" pleaded the lad.

"No; not this time. There will probably be plenty of work for you to do later on," was the reply. "I have an idea we are on the edge of a startling case. No; I won't say more at present."

And within five minutes Lee was hastening towards Professor Collingwood's address. He arrived just after dark, and was admitted at once. He scrawled on the back of his card that he wished to hand Mr. Collingwood a further cheque, having decided to invest a further sum in the new company.

As he had hoped, the explorer saw him at once.

"I did not expect to see you again so soon, Mr. Lee," smiled Jim the Penman, as the detective entered the library. "My brother is still at the Zoological Institute, but my friend Channing is with me, as you see. This is Mr. Nelson Lee, Channing."

The forger was somewhat surprised to see the detective again, but he realised that it would have been folly to refuse to see him. He was positive, moreover, that Lee was as unsuspecting as a babe.

And a further cheque was to be handed in! Sutcliffe derived peculiar satisfaction from accepting money from his mortal enemy. The situation was very strange, however. Jim was sure that Lee did not suspect, and he himself certainly had no idea that this visit of Nelson Lee's was in the nature of a ruse.

For once Jim the Penman underestimated the cleverness of his opponent.

Channing, the forger's accomplice, stepped forward as he was introduced, and took Lee's cordially outstretched hand.

"Honoured to meet you, sir," he said respectfully.

"The honour, I assure you, is on my side," exclaimed Lee. "You have shared perils and privations with Mr. Collingwood, and so you also share

the entire nation's admiration. I am proud to shake you by the hand, Mr. Channing!"

The words were uttered so frankly, so enthusiastically, that Jim was more assured than ever that he had nothing to fear. He was so completely confident of his disguise, and of his ability to carry the fraud through, that he inwardly laughed at his original misgivings. Nelson Lee, after all, was easily fooled.

"But I must apologise for disturbing you again, Mr. Collingwood," went on the detective crisply. "I was in this vicinity, and so I thought I would bring you another cheque while I was here. I have decided to invest another couple of hundred in the new company."

"That is very good of you, Mr. Lee!"

"Yes—good to myself!" laughed Nelson Lee. "When the country is opened up, and the company formed, I shall possess quite a decent number of founders' shares. And by what I have heard, Mr. Collingwood, the investment will prove a thoroughly sound one."

The impostor laughed, took the cheque, and placed it in a drawer.

"I'll go now," went on Lee. "Oh, yes, really! I only popped in, you know. My dear sir, pray don't trouble to ring the bell! I can very well see myself out of the house. Oh, and I was going to ask you a favour!"

"Yes, Mr. Lee?" said Jim questioningly.

"Will it be possible for us to have a long chat one day before the month is out?" was Nelson Lee's request. "I am highly interested in this new expedition, Mr. Collingwood, and it might even be possible for me to offer my services."

Sutcliffe looked delighted.

"That will be splendid!" he exclaimed heartily. "My dear Mr. Lee, there is nothing I should like better! By all means arrange an interview! Shall we say this day week—here, at my brother's house?"

"That would suit me admirably."

"Excellent! I will let you know the most convenient hour later."

"Then good-night, Mr. Collingwood," smiled Lee. "Good-night, Mr. Channing!"

They returned his farewell, and Nelson Lee left the room, closing the door after him. His request for an interview had been, of course, mere bluff; but it served his purpose well, for Jim chuckled to himself, and was positive that the detective was absolutely hoodwinked.

And then Lee acted very strangely.

The object of his visit had not yet been attained, and everything depended upon luck during the next minute. To his delight, he found the lounge-hall empty, and as he walked with a firm, hard tread to the door he looked round him keenly.

He reached the door, opened it, and then slammed it to with a heavy bang. But he was still within the house!

And now, with a noiseless tread, he slipped back and made straight for some curtains which covered an alcove at the back of the hall. Within ten seconds he was behind them, completely concealed.

"Phew! My luck is in!" murmured Lee. "I hardly hoped for such success as this!"

It was well that he had found a hiding-place so promptly, for the next moment the rattle of a key sounded in the door, and, through a tiny slit of the curtains, Lee saw Professor Alexander Collingwood enter.

The professor hung up his hat, and then entered the library. A murmur of voices came to Lee for a second, and then they died down as the door closed.

"I must wait," the detective decided. "It is early yet, and rashness would probably land me in grave trouble. By James, I wonder what the game really is?"

But he did not wait for long.

After fifteen minutes, the professor appeared again, and once more left the house. As the big front door closed on him, Nelson Lee came to a decision. He made sure that nobody was approaching, and then left his place of concealment.

With a cat-like tread he padded across the soft carpet to the door of the library. As he came to a halt he heard a soft laugh from within, and the scratch of a match. Then, clear and distinct, but quite low, a voice uttered some words.

Lee started, bent closer, and clenched his teeth.

For a full minute he remained against the door, tense and rigid. Quite suddenly he became upright, and slipped noiselessly across the hall to the front door. Without a sound he opened the door, passed out, and softly clicked the latch to.

Then he paused on the doorstep, gazed unseeingly ahead, and clenched his fists.

"Great Heaven!" he muttered intensely. "Can it be possible—can it be possible?"

CHAPTER VI.

An Hour of Excitement and Horror.

"JIM THE PENMAN! I am right—I know I am right!" Nelson Lee told himself, almost fiercely. "Jim the Penman!"

For once the famous detective was almost overcome with amazement. Before visiting the supposed explorer for the second time he had suspected a definite thing; but now that his suspicions were justified and corroborated, he could hardly believe the astounding truth.

Arnold Collingwood was none other than Jim the Penman!

Practically all along Nelson Lee had been perfectly satisfied that Collingwood was genuine. He had been as completely gulled as the general public. But that first interview with the supposed Collingwood had opened his eyes, and had set him thinking. And it had done more than that.

It had caused him to act with promptitude. And the result was altogether beyond his expectations. It had been quite a risky thing to lurk within the house after he had presumably left.

But the end he had gained was well worth ten times the risk. He had heard only a few words, but they were sufficient. Sutcliffe's confederate had laughed, and had made a remark to the effect that the professor was completely fooled. He had also mentioned the forger's name, and Jim the Penman, with sudden fury, had ordered Channing to close his mouth and to be more careful. Jim had used his own voice, and Nelson Lee knew that there was no mistake.

The great detective only remained on the doorstep a moment. Then he quietly stole down the short path, noiselessly opened the gate, and walked away down Belgrave Square.

"By James!" he muttered. "I knew that Jim was a cool customer, but this is almost beyond belief! It is staggering—stupendous! But, by Heaven, Jim is no fool! This scheme of his was within an ace of being successful, and he would have walked off with an appalling amount of booty!"

Even now it was possible that the forger would succeed in his scoundrelly scheme unless very prompt measures were adopted. And Lee decided, then and there, that delay would be foolish in the extreme.

Jim the Penman was badly wanted by the police; there were warrants out for his arrest. If the police got so much as a smell of Jim the Penman they would be only too eager to make an arrest. Detective-inspector Morley, in fact, would probably metaphorically fall upon Nelson Lee's neck if he "tipped him the wink," for Jim's capture would mean a large feather in Morley's cap.

"There are two things to be done within this next hour," Nelson Lee told himself. "The first is to give Scotland Yard the tip, and the second is to find the professor and make it clear to him how he is being used as an innocent tool. For, without Professor Collingwood's support, this plot would not have been nearly so successful. It was his fair and honourable name which has given everybody such absolute confidence. But the poor old chap has been painfully deceived."

Nelson Lee was very highly elated. At last he had got Jim the Penman in a corner out of which there was no escape. He smiled grimly to himself as he pictured the surprise arrest of the forger. Jim would have no chance whatever; he would be taken before he had recovered his wits.

But, unknown to Nelson Lee, he had another factor to deal with!

It was the height of misfortune, but Fate had determined that events should be so. At the very time Lee was cautiously stealing out of the professor's house, a man had paused on the opposite side of the road preparatory to crossing.

That man was Richard Thornton, Jim the Penman's other confederate!

There was nothing strange nor remarkable in Thornton coming to the professor's house, and it could hardly be called coincidence that he should arrive at this particular moment; but it was, at all events, decidedly unfortunate.

Thornton was a smart man—that was why Jim trusted him. Sutcliffe was not likely to take weaklings into his confidence. And as Thornton paused, and saw Nelson Lee stealing from the house, his brain worked rapidly.

He had been within the house when Nelson Lee had called, and had heard the detective leave as he thought. Thornton himself had been reading in a little room which was fitted with French windows, and he had left the house in order to purchase some cigars. Lee, therefore, had not known that the man had gone out. Now, as Thornton was about to re-enter the garden, he was surprised to see the detective making his exit.

At first it struck Thornton that the detective had called a third time. But then he noted the curiously stealthy manner in which Nelson Lee slipped out of the doorway and closed the door noiselessly behind him.

Thornton became filled with suspicions.

"By thunder! What's the game?" he muttered. "It's my belief that he has been there all the time; he only pretended to go! He may even have been listening—"

Thornton paused as the appalling possibilities fully dawned upon him. The whole game might be on the point of exposure! He knew very well that Nelson Lee had a particular interest in Jim the Penman and that the detective would give much to bring the forger to justice. It appeared as though matters had now reached a crisis.

"Lee is an infernal danger!" thought Thornton fiercely. "Jim thinks he's bluffed the detective the same as he's bluffed everybody else. But this doesn't look like it! What shall I do? What in thunder shall I do?"

His first thought was to consult Sutcliffe. But, if he did that, he would be

obliged to lose sight of Nelson Lee, and it occurred to Thornton that it would be just as well to shadow the detective and find out exactly what he was up to. Accordingly, when Lee commenced walking briskly down Belgrave Square, Thornton fell into pace upon the other side of the road and followed.

He mentally decided that if Lee entered a taxi he would give up the chase and report at once to Jim. But so long as Lee continued walking he would follow him. And, as it chanced, the detective did not charter a taxi.

During his walk he had much to think about, and his brain was clearer while walking, and his destination was not so very far distant. There was every necessity for immediate action, but no necessity for drastic hurry.

Thornton found his task a very simple one. Lee had no idea that he was being shadowed. A smarter detective did not exist, but there was no earthly reason for him to suspect the real nature of the night's events. It was purely a stroke of ill-fortune which brought Thornton on the scene at the crucial moment.

The man was thinking every bit as deeply as Lee himself. But whereas the detective's thoughts were ones of elation, Thornton was filled with a strange, uneasy alarm.

There was something decidedly wrong, and this became all the more apparent as his mind dwelt upon the facts. And the culminating blow came when his quarry turned into Whitehall and crossed the road—very obviously making straight for Scotland Yard!

Thornton drew his breath in hissing.

"Scotland Yard!" he snarled to himself. "Lee has come straight from Belgrave Square to here! By Jupiter, this looks darned unhealthy for me and him! In two minutes that rotten 'tec'll be inside the Yard and the whole game will be messed up!"

As clearly as sunlight on a summer's day it was apparent to Richard Thornton that he had only a brief moment in which to act. If he failed to act sheer disaster would follow.

For Thornton did not deceive himself. The signs were too obvious. In some unaccountable manner Nelson Lee had got on the track, and was even now about to obtain police assistance!

What happened next was dramatic and sudden.

Jim's confederate acted drastically; he acted on the spur of the moment. He acted with fear born of panic.

There were crowds about, for the night was not far advanced. But this factor did not deter Thornton in the least. Whitehall, at this particular spot, was dark and gloomy. Thornton hurried up close behind his quarry, taking something from his inner pocket as he did so.

He placed the something to his lips and came to a halt. It all happened in a second. There was no commotion, no noise—nothing. Yet, with a sudden strangled cry, Nelson Lee staggered, swayed drunkenly, and then crashed to the ground.

Instantly a number of people rushed to his side. But not a soul took any notice of Thornton. The man, pale-faced and breathing hard, turned on his heel and walked away. He had been responsible for Nelson Lee's collapse, and he was filled with a wild exultation.

There was no necessity for him to crowd round with the rest. The very fact that Lee had collapsed was sufficient proof that the treatment had been effective. For, at that particular moment, Thornton was the only man who knew what had actually happened.

The "something" which he had taken from his pocket was nothing more nor less than a short blow-pipe. In the end of it, by a cunning arrangement,

a tiny poisoned dart was fixed ready for instant expulsion. One puff was quite enough to send it speeding on its mission of death.

Under ordinary circumstances it would be remarkable that a man in England should carry such a deadly contrivance; but under these particular circumstances it was not at all remarkable.

The thing was supposed to be a specimen of the weapons used by the savage tribe in central South America of whom the lost explorer had talked so much. The weapon had been obtained while Jim was in Brazil, and Thornton was carrying it as a matter of course, for the three scoundrels had made a particular point of exhibiting specimens at any and every opportunity.

To hoodwink the people thoroughly it was necessary to keep the game going without a pause, and it was for this reason that Jim and his confederates each carried one of the little blow-pipes. Moreover, it had struck them that the deadly weapons would prove extremely effective in the event of unexpected disaster.

And Thornton decided that it was best, in any case, to act at once. And, having seen Lee fall, he was trembling and startled, but nevertheless filled with cruel satisfaction.

Even if his suspicions had been correct, the death of Nelson Lee was just as well. Jim the Penman would feel all the more secure to know that the great detective was finally rendered useless.

And what of Lee himself?

A miracle had not happened—the detective had not escaped. Thornton's exultation was fully justified. The tiny dart had sped through the air and had penetrated fairly deeply into the skin of Lee's neck.

The poison was intensely active, and it instantly took effect. Lee crashed to the ground, and the dart, owing to the sudden concussion, fell out of the insignificant wound, and was soon crushed to nothingness beneath the feet of the people who crowded round.

There was nothing to show what ailed the detective. Insensibility came at once, and when the first man reached Lee's side the latter was totally unconscious and deathly pale.

Police arrived on the spot promptly, and in less than ten minutes a motor-ambulance, with its bells ringing sharply, dashed up. And Nelson Lee was hurried off to one of the biggest London hospitals.

Arriving there, he was examined by three doctors, and they all decided that the detective's condition was extremely grave. He was suffering from blood-poisoning—and the poison was that of a deadly South American snake!

The identity of the patient was known before he had been admitted to the hospital, for Lee's card-case had told that much. And even while he was being taken away, a police-officer hastened towards Gray's Inn Road.

Nipper, who was expecting his master to return, heard the news with a face as white as chalk. The police-constable was blunt, and told Nipper right away that his master was dying—and was probably already dead!

For a few minutes Nipper was almost stunned by the appalling shock. Many and many a time he had half-expected that something of this terrible nature would occur. And now it had come! The worst had happened; and Nipper could hardly believe it. It was too terrible—too appalling.

But the lad was not so stunned that he was incapable of action. At first it seemed as though he could do nothing. But then, in a flash, he changed. In a sudden access of frantic anxiety he hoarsely told the constable to take him at once to the hospital.

And when Nipper arrived he went straight to his master and saw him. Lee was in a bad way, and the doctor quietly told Nipper that it was ten to one

whether he would live. His constitution was of iron, but the snake poison was deadly, and almost always fatal.

"Indeed," exclaimed the doctor, "if Mr. Lee had received a much larger dose he would have been dead before this. We have found the wound on the neck, and it seems to have been caused by a sharp instrument, coated with the poison."

It was owing, in fact, to Lee's sudden fall that he was still living. If that tiny dart had remained embedded in his flesh for a few minutes, no power on earth could have saved him. But the dart had been jerked out, and so the full amount of poison had not entered Lee's blood. Nevertheless, the situation was terribly grave.

And Nipper, far from being dulled by the shock, was quite the opposite. He became as sharp as a needle, and he set his shrewd wits to work. This great disaster had made his brain extraordinarily acute.

He remembered, in a flash, that Professor Collingwood had made a study of poisons. And Lee had once told Nipper that the professor made a speciality of discovering antidotes. It was more than probable that the professor would know of some balm or herb which would do more good than all the hospitals in London.

And another thought occurred to Nipper—a suspicion which he did not stop to contemplate until he was seated in a taxi, hastening towards Belgrave Square with all speed.

CHAPTER VII.

In the Nick of Time.

NIPPER sat with clenched teeth and fixed eyes as he was swiftly carried towards Professor Collingwood's residence. He knew very well that Lee had gone to Belgrave Square for the purpose of investigating.

And the detective had been struck down while at the very entrance of Scotland Yard!

"It's as clear as daylight!" Nipper muttered tensely. "Poor old guv'nor! Oh, if those dirty rotters have—— But it can't be! I'm going to save him—I'm going to bring the guv'nor back to life!"

He took hold of himself and pulled himself together.

"The guv'nor went to see the chap who called himself Arnold Collingwood," he went on to himself. "Mr. Lee made it absolutely clear that the chap was an imposter, and what's happened proves that his suspicions were justified. He probably found out the whole truth, and one of the rotters followed him and tried to kill him! By jingo, I'll ferret out the truth before I've done!"

But the immediate need was to seek the professor's assistance for the purpose of saving his master's life. It was curious indeed that Nipper should go to this house for aid. It was from there that the murder had been planned; and Nipper was bound for the same spot in order to bring back the life which was rapidly waning.

The lad knew well enough that if he failed here Nelson Lee would die. And everything depended upon speed. Although the taxi was going at a decidedly risky pace—the driver having been instructed—Nipper considered it to be a mere crawl, and he was constantly urging the man to go faster.

But at last Belgrave Square was reached, and Nipper simply flung himself at the front door. The very instant it was opened he breathlessly demanded of the butler to seek the professor at once. The butler was startled, but he had sense enough to see that this pale-faced lad would accept no denial. He took Nipper straight to the library.

Bursting in, Nipper found Professor Collingwood talking with his "brother." Inwardly, Jim the Penman was surprised, and not a little alarmed, to see Nipper. But his fears were soon set at rest.

In short, panting gasps Nipper blurted out his errand. He said that Lee had been poisoned by a certain variety of deadly snake-poison, and was likely to die, unless an effectual antidote was at once applied.

Nipper flashed a glance at the explorer as he spoke, and he was certain that he detected a gleam of satisfaction in Jim's eyes at the mention of the tragedy. As a matter of fact, this was the first Jim knew about it, but he instantly guessed that his confederates had been at work. And, although Lee's death might mean complications, it was good news to learn that he had been struck down.

But the professor put a damper on Jim's spirits the next instant.

"My dear lad—my dear lad," he cried excitedly, "you declare that Mr. Nelson Lee is poisoned? Upon my soul—upon my soul! Yes, yes, I have certainly an antidote, and we will hasten to the hospital without delay. Everything depends upon the quickness with which it is applied. I think we may save Mr. Lee's life!"

"Thank Heaven!" breathed Nipper fervently.

"But you must not be too hopeful, my poor boy," went on the professor gravely. "The antidote will only be effective if the poison is not too thoroughly taken into the system. But we must hasten—we must hasten!"

The professor quickly produced a key from his pocket, and rushed across to a little back cupboard. Unlocking this, he took out a small phial, which was nearly filled with some dark fluid. He placed the phial upon the table and bustled out to get his hat.

"This is extremely unfortunate," remarked "Arnold Collingwood." "I am intensely grieved to hear of Mr. Lee's condition. Why, he was with me only a short time ago, as healthy as I am myself."

Under ordinary circumstances Nipper would have been deceived by Jim's acting. But, with his brain in its present acute state, the lad could tell that the supposed explorer's voice rang as hollow as an empty cask. It was insincere, and there was lurking in Jim's eyes a look of mingled satisfaction and anxiety. Nipper read it all as clearly as a book.

And then something happened which made it positively clear to Nipper that this unknown man was responsible for the attempted murder. Nipper did not know, of course, that he was Jim the Penman, for Nelson Lee had told that secret to no one. But Nipper knew that he was a scoundrel.

Jim was startled by the fact that Lee's life might be saved. The forger guessed at once that Thornton had probably delivered the fatal blow; and Thornton would not have done that unless he had very good reason. It was necessary to Jim's safety that Lee should not be brought back to life.

And the forger performed a rash, hurried act.

He would never have resorted to such a move ordinarily, but the need for action was desperate. He sat down at the table, and reached for the cigar-box which lay on the other side.

At the same moment Jim turned his head to speak to Nipper. His arm, crossing the table, knocked against the little phial, and sent it crashing to the floor! Jim started round.

"Oh, upon my word! I didn't see——"

"You've smashed it!" roared Nipper frantically.

The lad was completely mad with fury. The action had been performed with consummate cleverness—but Nipper knew that it was deliberate. It had been no accident. And his suspicions were fully verified.

The professor's "brother" had attempted to destroy the antidote!

THE LOST EXPLORER

In a second Nipper was on his knees, and he snatched the phial before Jim could reach it. As he did so he breathed hard with relief and suppressed anger.

The phial was whole.

It was a stout little bottle, and the carpet was soft. But there was no mistaking the hidden chagrin in Jim the Peasman's eyes as he saw that his dastardly action had been futile.

"Thank goodness!" he exclaimed. "By George, I thought I'd broken it!"

The professor came in and took the phial. There was no time to explain what had occurred, and he and Nipper hurried to the waiting taxi. During the journey Nipper sat silent. He knew that it would be useless voicing his suspicions, for the professor would never believe them. He was so completely deceived that extraordinary proofs would be needed to convince him that he was being duped.

It was getting late when the hospital was reached. The surgeons were pleased to welcome the professor, and they all set to work at once. Nipper was left waiting in an ante-room, and the lad was nearly off his head with anxiety.

"Will the antidote be in time—will it be in time?" he kept asking himself.

The minutes passed draggingly. Now and again an attendant or a nurse would appear, and he would eagerly ask for information. But, so far, nothing was known. The professor and the doctors were in deep consultation, and the antidote was being applied.

The result would not be known for some time. And Nipper's fears were increased by the attitude of the nurses, who attempted to cheer him up, but hinted that he must be prepared for the worst.

The suspense was terrible. Nipper nearly went mad with it all, and to sit still was impossible. He paced up and down like a caged tiger, and the cold perspiration stood on his brow in transparent beads.

"Oh, when shall I know?" he groaned. "The guv'nor must live—he must!"

When an hour had gone by, Nipper felt that he could bear the strain no longer. To think clearly was impossible. There were many grim ideas in his brain, but he could not grasp them properly. When the suspense was over—

The door opened, and Professor Collingwood appeared.

Nipper stood stock still for a second, staring at the professor's face. It was grave and set, and expressionless.

"The guv'nor!" choked Nipper huskily. "Oh, tell me—"

"My boy, you have been very brave," interrupted the professor quietly. "I have now brought you excellent news, your fears may be set at rest. The antidote was in time. Mr. Lee is safe."

Nipper gulped heavily, and his eyes were wet.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" he muttered thickly. "Oh, I—I—"

Then he seemed to go off his head for a moment. He flung up his arms, and let out a wild, weird whoop. It was awe-inspiring and full-voiced. But Nipper didn't care a jot. He simply had to let off steam somehow, and the whoop was quite involuntary. His joy was too great to contain in silence.

"Dear me!" said the professor, "you must not make such noise, my dear lad! Think where you are in a hospital! I quite understand—"

Nipper gripped Professor Collingwood's coat-sleeve.

"Is the guv'nor conscious, sir?" he asked eagerly.

The professor smilingly shook his head.

"No, no! That would be too much to expect," he replied. "But we

have battled with the poison successfully, and all danger has passed. Your master is still in a state of coma, but that is only to be expected. Fortunately there is only a comparatively small amount of the poison in his system."

"When will Mr. Lee come to himself, sir?"

"He is strong and in wonderful health. I should give him until to-morrow afternoon," replied Professor Collingwood. "But, although he will recover full consciousness, he will not be able to move. He must remain in hospital."

Nipper was dismayed.

"For how long, sir?" he asked blankly.

"Oh, only for two or three days," was the reply. "There, there, my boy! You must be extremely thankful for this splendid piece of news. And, as a matter of fact, you must congratulate yourself for having saved Mr. Lee's life. It was solely owing to your promptness——"

"The gov'nor's saved!" said Nipper, with shining eyes. "Oh, isn't it great, sir?"

"Indeed, it is truly splendid!" the professor answered. "But who can have attempted to kill him? One of his numerous enemies——"

"No, sir; I know who instigated the murder," interjected Nipper, with a sudden change of manner. "That man in your house is a scoundrel and an impostor! Oh, if you'll only believe me, sir——"

"Good gracious! Of whom are you speaking?" asked the professor mildly.

"Oh, can't you realise? That man who calls himself your brother—he is not your brother at all! It was he who tried to kill Mr. Lee! It was he who——"

Professor Collingwood laughed gently.

"You are unstrung, my lad," he said, in a kindly voice. "You must not make these wild statements! Upon my soul, it is too bad to accuse my brother! But, there! You hardly know what you are saying!"

And Nipper realised that he had better keep silent. He had not one atom of proof to offer, and no good ever comes of unjustifiable suspicions. He had better wait until his master recovered. Then—and Nipper was grim—then things would happen!

He went straight home, mentally deciding to come to the hospital in the morning to hear his master's condition. Meanwhile, the professor went home, too, and he at once told his "brother" what Nipper had said.

Jim laughed heartily, and was highly amused. But the professor's words told him much. Nipper suspected, and Nelson Lee would recover consciousness on the following afternoon.

It was close upon midnight, but Jim, as soon as the professor had retired, got into consultation with his confederates, Channing and Thornton. The latter had already explained matters to Jim, and the forger knew that Lee must have been within the house after he had supposedly left. It was clear that the great scheme was going all wrong.

And Nelson Lee was again responsible!

Jim the Penman was cold with fury, but he was quite calm. Lee could not be reached now, but there was time for action. He told his accomplices to make a clean "get-away" the following morning, and gave them precise instructions.

In the afternoon Lee would recover consciousness, and would be able to speak; but until then Jim was safe, and much could be accomplished during the morning.

He had the whole morning in which to carry out his plans.

There was still time to make the great fraud a complete success.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Professor Understands—The Cipher Letter—Finis.

NIPPER presented himself at the hospital at nine o'clock promptly the following morning. The lad had spent a sleepless night, but was quite fresh now. The knowledge of his master's condition made him quite alert and eager.

To Nipper's intense joy, surprise awaited him. Nelson Lee was conscious! The detective had come to himself at seven-thirty, and was now able to talk and understand things.

Moreover, Nipper was permitted to see the patient.

There was no danger, and Nipper pleaded so hard that the doctor had not the heart to send him away disappointed. He told Nipper to return at eleven, and at that hour the lad presented himself. In a few minutes, Nipper was sitting on the foot of his master's bed, gazing at Lee anxiously and gladly.

"You look a bit groggy, guv'nor," he said critically.

"I am not surprised, my lad," was Nelson Lee's reply. "I assure you I feel extremely uncomfortable. It is not a pleasant sensation to be poisoned."

"But the professor said you wouldn't recover until this afternoon, sir."

"The professor was obviously wrong," replied Lee, who, although "groggy," was fully in possession of his right wits. "It is a pity the doctor wouldn't allow you to see me earlier, Nipper!"

"It was rotten, guv'nor! It's past eleven now!"

"Well, I dare say it is all the better. I must admit that at nine I was somewhat confused, and it was difficult for me to connect my thoughts. Now, however, I am quite all right. There is work for you, young 'un."

"Good, sir!" said Nipper heartily.

In a low voice, Nelson Lee told his young assistant everything that had transpired the previous night. Nipper was simply amazed to learn that the impostor was none other than Jim the Penman. And then he said that he wasn't surprised. It was just the sort of thing Jim would do.

"My hat! What a wheeze!" exclaimed Nipper. "I can't help feeling a certain admiration for the chap, guv'nor! But he's an awful scoundrel! If he had killed you——"

"He didn't—and it was not Jim who attempted to," Lee interjected. "I am quite sure it was Jim's confederate, the man who calls himself Richard Thornton. There is no time to lose, Nipper! You must get busy at once!"

"What shall I do, sir?"

"You will go straight to Scotland Yard," replied the detective quietly. "You will pick up the trail at the point I was compelled to drop it. Go to the Yard, tell all you know to Inspector Morley, and then have Jim arrested out of hand. It's the safest course. Explanations can follow afterwards."

Nipper lost no time in carrying out Nelson Lee's orders. The lad went to Scotland Yard, and was soon interviewing Detective-inspector Morley. The worthy Yard official was dumbfounded, but he was eagerly willing to effect Jim the Penman's arrest.

He, Nipper, and two plain-clothes men left the famous police headquarters and went straight to Belgrave Square. The time was then just after noon.

Meanwhile, Douglas James Sutcliffe had been active. All the morning he had been going quietly and methodically to work. The great sums of money which had come in from all parts of the Kingdom had been deposited in ten different banks. Jim had made a very plausible excuse for taking this course.

During the morning he had made a round of the banks, and withdrew huge sums from each, in spot cash. From one he drew out £20,000, from another £15,000, from another £25,000, and so on. He had made arrangements previously so that this business was easily and quickly transacted.

Jim had arranged things days before. He had prepared for a sudden emergency, and every bank manager was in no way surprised to find that this morning "Mr. Arnold Collingwood" required securities and currency notes for various sums. If Jim had not paved the way beforehand, he would have met with insurmountable difficulties. But everything depended upon speed, and the forger had made effective preparations.

The professor, Jim was well aware, was out. He would not return until luncheon-time. Then, of course, he would find that his precious "brother" had disappeared, together with something like £150,000 in absolutely spot cash!

Jim chuckled many times that morning. In spite of the unexpected difficulties, he was certain of getting away with a vast reward. When he returned for the final time, the hour was just after eleven-thirty. He had not been dallying.

He knew that his confederates were by now well away, and within an hour he, too, would be swallowed up. In the library, with the door closed, he proceeded to pack his ill-gotten gains away in two large portmanteaux. They were shabby, and didn't look as though they would contain a pound's worth of value. But each bag was being packed with untraceable securities and currency notes.

Jim was jubilant. Nelson Lee would not recover until the afternoon, and by that time he would be far from the reach of the law. Perhaps the forger would not have been so confident had he known that Nipper was even then discussing his arrest with Detective-inspector Morley!

And then another incident happened which upset Jim's plans drastically. While he was packing the portmanteaux, the library door suddenly opened, and Professor Collingwood appeared. He was hot and dusty, and somewhat irritable.

"Confounded heat!" he grumbled. "Oh, Arnold, so you are here? Good gracious! Whatever are you doing?"

The professor was surprised. But the next moment he was extremely shocked, for the face which was turned to him was full of fury and surprised hatred. Jim had not expected the professor to return until one o'clock, and yet here he was!

"What the fury are you doing here?" he snarled, moved out of his usual composure.

The old scientist gaped in amazement.

"Are you mad, Arnold?" he ejaculated. "What is all this? Bank-notes! Upon my soul, am I dreaming? What are these bundles of money——"

Jim realised that he had better act promptly, and, without a pause, he dashed at the professor, with a low snarl of fury. This sudden appearance had rather unnerved Jim, and he did not pause to consider the risks. He acted hastily and drastically.

The scientist was completely taken off his guard, but in a flash he realised that Nipper's warning had been timely. It was obvious to him that the man who called himself his brother was, indeed, a fraudulent impostor.

But the old man accepted the situation with wonderful promptitude. Jim had anticipated an easy victory. He did not care a jot what happened to the professor afterwards, and he cared still less what happened to him now. Since the old fool had chosen to interfere, he must accept the consequences.

But Jim found that Professor Collingwood was by no means an easy cus-

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tomers to tackle. He was getting old, but he was as tough as whipcord, and at the present moment a sudden-born fury came to his aid.

As Jim flew at him he gave a hoarse cry and counter-attacked. In a second the two men were locked together in a fierce embrace, and they struggled with appalling fury. The end, however, was bound to be one way. It was only natural that Jim should be the victor, but the professor put up a surprising fight.

Scarcely any noise was made, and nobody else in the house was attracted to the library. There was a big, clear space in front of the huge fireplace, and it was here that the struggle took place.

The professor clutched at Jim's coat and pulled it half off, while attempting to avoid a savage blow. As the coat was torn out of his hand a letter, ready for the post, slipped from the inner pocket of the coat, and fell unnoticed to the floor.

"You infernal scoundrel!" gasped the professor. "I'll——"

But he was unable to say any more. In a flash Jim bent down, picked up the poker from the fireplace, and lunged out fiercely. His aim was true, and Professor Collingwood fell quietly to the floor and lay still.

Fortunately, the poker had not struck him with full force. Had it done so, he would assuredly have been killed, but he was stunned, and that was sufficient for Jim's purpose.

.

"Yes, Mr. Collingwood is in," said Bryan, the professor's butler.

"Very good, my man. Just point out the room he occupies, and then make yourself scarce! I am an officer of the law."

It was Detective-inspector Morley who spoke. He and Nipper had presented themselves at the front door of the professor's house, and the two plain-clothes men were stationed in the garden, one on either side.

"An officer of the law!" stammered the butler. "I think I had better announce you, sir!"

"I think you had better do nothing of the sort!" said the inspector tartly.

"No need to wait for this old duffer!" put in Nipper eagerly. "That's the library door—over there, sir. Mr. Collingwood's in the library, isn't he, Bryan?"

"Why, yes——"

They waited to hear no more, but quickly crossed the lounge hall, and flung open the door. One glance within was sufficient to tell them that something dreadful had happened.

"Good heavens!" panted Nipper. "Jim's not here, and—and the professor——"

The voices, probably, aroused the old scientist. Twenty minutes had elapsed since the blow had been delivered, and now he made a movement and sat up with difficulty. His forehead was streaming with blood.

"Good gracious! What has happened?" he asked weakly.

"Your brother, sir?" asked Nipper, bending down. "I reckon he did this, didn't he? You remember I warned you against him——"

A furious growl arose in the professor's throat.

"Begad, you are right, boy! That infernal scoundrel!" he grated. "By Heaven above, I'll set the law on him! He assaulted me, and—and——"

The excitement was a bit too much for him, coupled with the pain and loss of blood, and he swooned off once more.

But it was perfectly apparent to Inspector Morley and to Nipper that the very worst had happened. Jim the Penman had received the warning in time, and had slipped away. It was the professor himself who had unconsciously given Jim the chance.

It was the height of misfortune, but nobody was to blame.

All the efforts of the police to trace the master-forger were in vain. He succeeded in getting clear away, and nothing more was heard of either Thornton or Channing either. By some peculiar methods of his own, the audacious criminal was safe in hiding.

And when the full facts were revealed, the country was shocked to learn that Jim the Penman had escaped with a sum something like £150,000.!

It was the biggest fraud that had ever been attempted or brought off, and it had succeeded.

Nelson Lee afterwards discovered something which gave him hope.

The detective was out of hospital in three days, and Inspector Morley showed him the contents of the letter which had been found in the library, which had dropped from Jim's pocket.

It was a letter in cipher, and was addressed to one of the forger's confederates. The great detective knew that he could discover the secret in time, and he hoped to get on Jim the Penman's trail before it was too late.

And, as it happened, that letter in cipher was to mean a very great deal.

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The island reached, the party begin to explore, and meet with a half-starved man named MIGUEL, whom they befriend. That same night, however, Alec sees the stranger prowling about the camp, evidently bent on some evil errand, and follows him to a distant camp, where he evidently has made an appointment, for there are others present to meet him. Unfortunately, Alec is discovered, and shots are fired at him. He escapes, but discovers that he is lost! A search party, headed by DR. CAMPBELL finds him, and he tells his story. On the return journey the doctor falls and injures his ankle. (Now read on.)

The Underground River.

THE injury to Dr. Campbell's ankle proved more serious than he expected. The next day passed, and several more; and still he was unable to get about, greatly to his chagrin. The ankle swelled up badly, and he was compelled to give it absolute rest.

Captain Barron came ashore two or three times and held conferences with his leader. The doctor told him about Slaney, and they discussed the question of the trustworthiness of the other fresh men they had taken on at Valparaiso. It so happened that Slaney had been the only one who had so far been sent ashore. The rest were still on board, and the captain decided that it would be best that they should stay there, where he could keep an eye on them himself.

Another matter which they discussed related to the safety of the yacht itself. There was no anchorage to be obtained where she was lying, but the mate and a party of men sent out to explore along the shore had found an inlet—a sort of deep bay or creek which ran inland for an unknown distance. The bottom of this was sandy, and offered a fairly good anchorage, with protection from winds from the west and north-west.

The captain's objection to it lay in the fact that there was not much room for turning or manœuvring his vessel. There was also the further objection that it would render a removal of the camp advisable to the shore of the creek so as to be near the ship.

As regards the first, there seemed to be no other haven available anywhere near that part of the island, so there was nothing to be done but make the best of it. And as to shifting their quarters, the doctor decided that, as he would be unable to begin his exploring work till his ankle was well, the camp might as well be moved at once. It would give the men something to occupy them while he was laid up.

So the removal was effected, and it was soon found that the new site was more convenient in many ways than the first one. There was a stream of beautifully fresh, clear water for one thing, which fell from the rocks a little distance from the shore, and then ran through two or three sandy pools into

the waters of the creek. This not only gave them a good supply of fresh water close at hand, but the pools made very welcome bathing-places. Finally, the site was more sheltered and less gloomy, for there was plenty of greenery round about the waterfall and the stream, above and below.

Also, the waters of the creek made a good fishing ground, and this supplied the party with a welcome change from fare they had been restricted to on board ship.

After the camp had been moved, Alec and Clive often spent a few hours in a boat in this new fishing ground. They had not, indeed, much else to do, for the doctor forbade their attempting any exploration while he was unable to accompany them. He had in mind what had already occurred, and did not wish his young charges to become involved in any more encounters with Miguel and Slaney and their native friends until, at any rate, he himself could be present.

So the young fellows found time hanging somewhat heavily on their hands. They searched for and brought in a few turtles, oysters, and so on, but passed most of their leisure in one of the yacht's boats, sailing or fishing, sometimes in the company of Ben Grove, and sometimes alone.

It was when they were thus out together that one day a strange and startling adventure befell them.

The deep bay in which the yacht was now moored became farther on, as has been noted, a creek, running some distance inland. At first it was very broad, but it gradually narrowed until it became a gloomy gorge amongst high and almost perpendicular rocks.

How far it really extended was unknown for the reason mentioned above, that the doctor had prohibited any exploring trips while he was laid up.

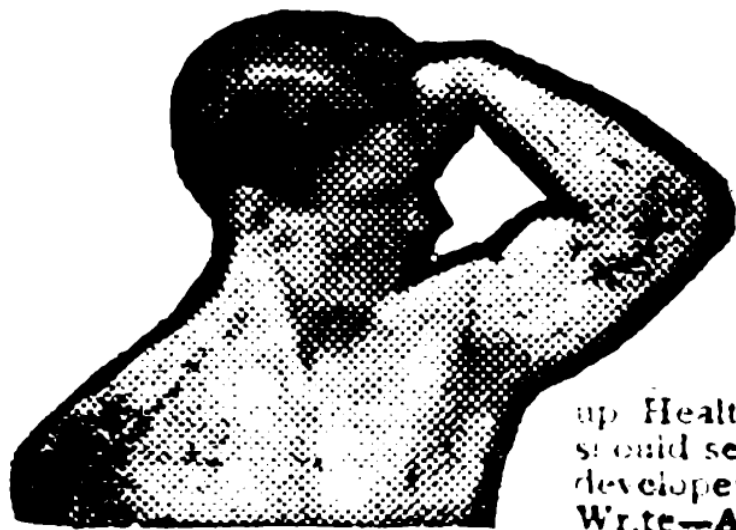
That it contained many species of fish good for eating was evident from the catches made daily. But the young fellows had also met with indications that there were some very big fish of some kind or other—monsters which did not sport themselves near enough to the surface to be seen.

This was proved by the fact that the fishers' bait had been carried off again and again by some creature or creatures which had not only swallowed it whole, but had possessed teeth and jaws strong enough to bite through their strongest lines, and so get clear away.

To capture one of these specimens became now the prevailing wish of the two, and many were the devices they resorted to and the stratagems they employed. They consulted Ben Grove and Tom Read, Captain Barron's genial mate, who had spent some years of his life in whale-fishing, and was an expert in the use of the harpoon-gun.

But even those veterans, experienced though they were, and wily and cunning as regards the capture of swimming creatures in general, were unable to contribute any really helpful suggestions. Their advice, and all the various hints which they offered in plenty, were tried in vain, and the

(Continued overleaf.)



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eventual results were always the same—the intended victims walked or swam off with the bait with the same old audacity.

This humiliating failure put them all upon their mettle. The doctor himself was consulted, and became interested. If the elusive monster was some creature as yet unknown to science, he naturally would like to get a specimen; and he, too, therefore exercised his ingenuity in trying to invent some effective plan for its capture.

"If 'twas only a 'spouter,' now," said worthy Tom Read, "an'nything as'd come t' the top, so's a body c'd see 'n, I'd know what t' do. We've got a harpoon-gun aboard, an' I'll lay he'd not get away once I got a fair shot at 'n."

"Ah, yes, Tom, I'm sure we'd be all right then!" Alec agreed, with something like a sigh. "But it's not that sort of creature, you see. It's some deep-water beggar which seems never to come anywhere near the surface. It's only our very longest lines—those that we send down deepest—that the beast goes for."

"I tell ye what, now, Mr. Alec. I've got some extra strong line—wire-woven it be called—as is strong enough a'most t' hold a ship; though it be small enough t' use in yer fishin'.—Let me get ye some, and fix up the bait on the hook in me own way, like we do fur sharks. We arranges the line in strands like, so as it gets between the critter's teeth, an' then it can't bite it through, though this line be such tough stuff that I doubt if it could snap it off even if it got a fair bite at it."

"Good for you, Tom!" cried both Alec and Clive, in chorus. "Set to work and do your best, and have it ready for us to start with to-morrow morning."

Thus it came about that, shortly after dawn the next day, the two friends were seated in their boat in their usual fishing ground, with Tom Read's new line and bait hanging over the side, the spare line being coiled round a small windlass fixed in the bow.

So determin'd were they to give the new gear a full and fair trial that they had brought a supply of food. They were prepared to pass the whole day there if necessary. They had also brought their firearms.

"If it should be really some deep-sea monster such as we have in our minds, and we drag it up to the surface, it may show fight," Alec had remarked. "So it may be as well to be prepared. We may find it necessary to put a bullet into it."

They had attached extra heavy leads in order to sink the bait as deep as possible, and, having thrown it overboard and completed all minor arrangements, they lighted their pipes and settled down patiently to await developments.

These came even sooner than they had expected or hoped for, and took a form they had not bargained for.

There was a sudden jerk, of such a nature as almost to pull the bow of the boat under water. The line ran out at terrific speed, the little windlass whirring round and round at such a rate that it became indistinct to the eye and looked a mere revolving jumble.

(To be continued.)