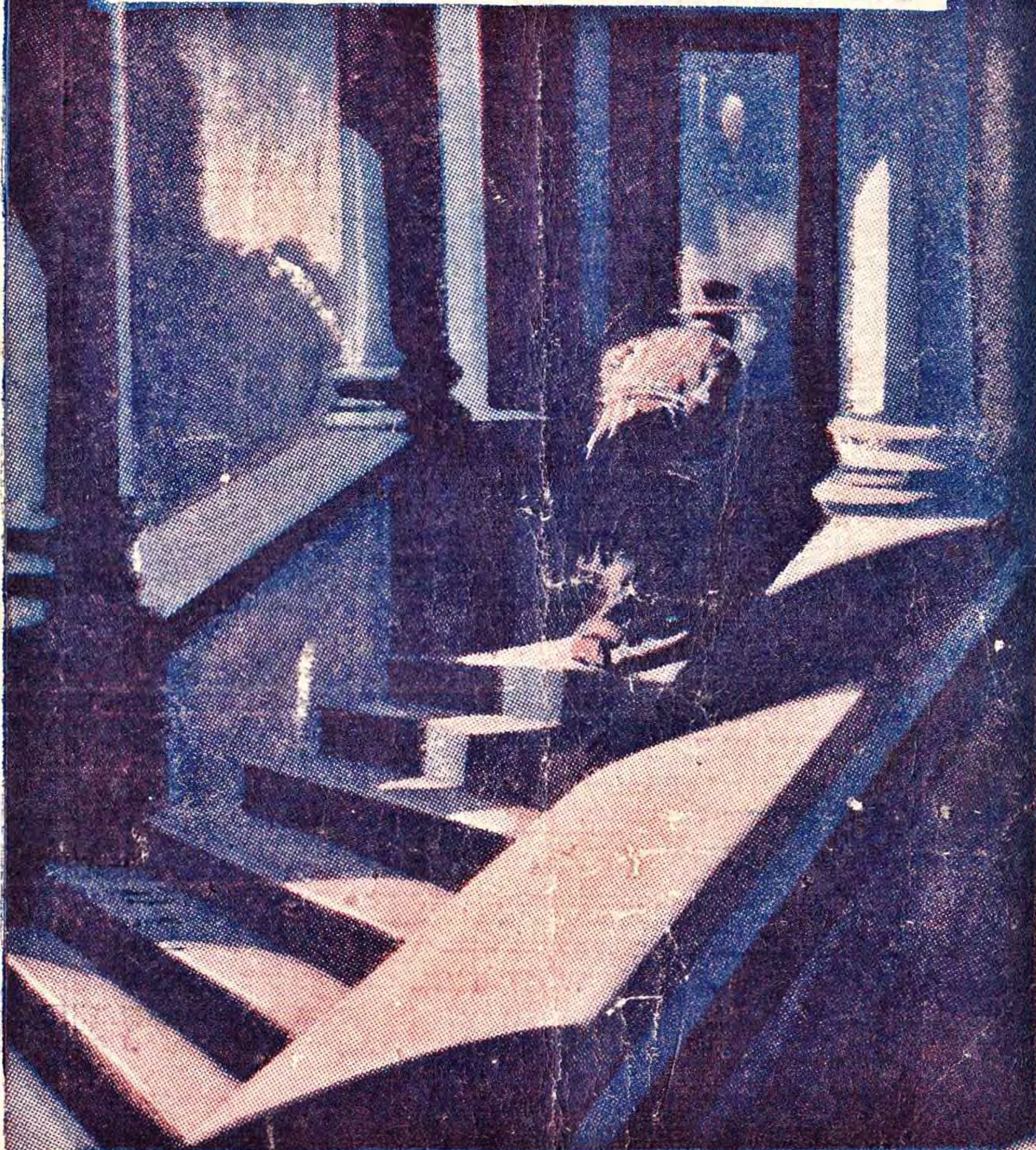


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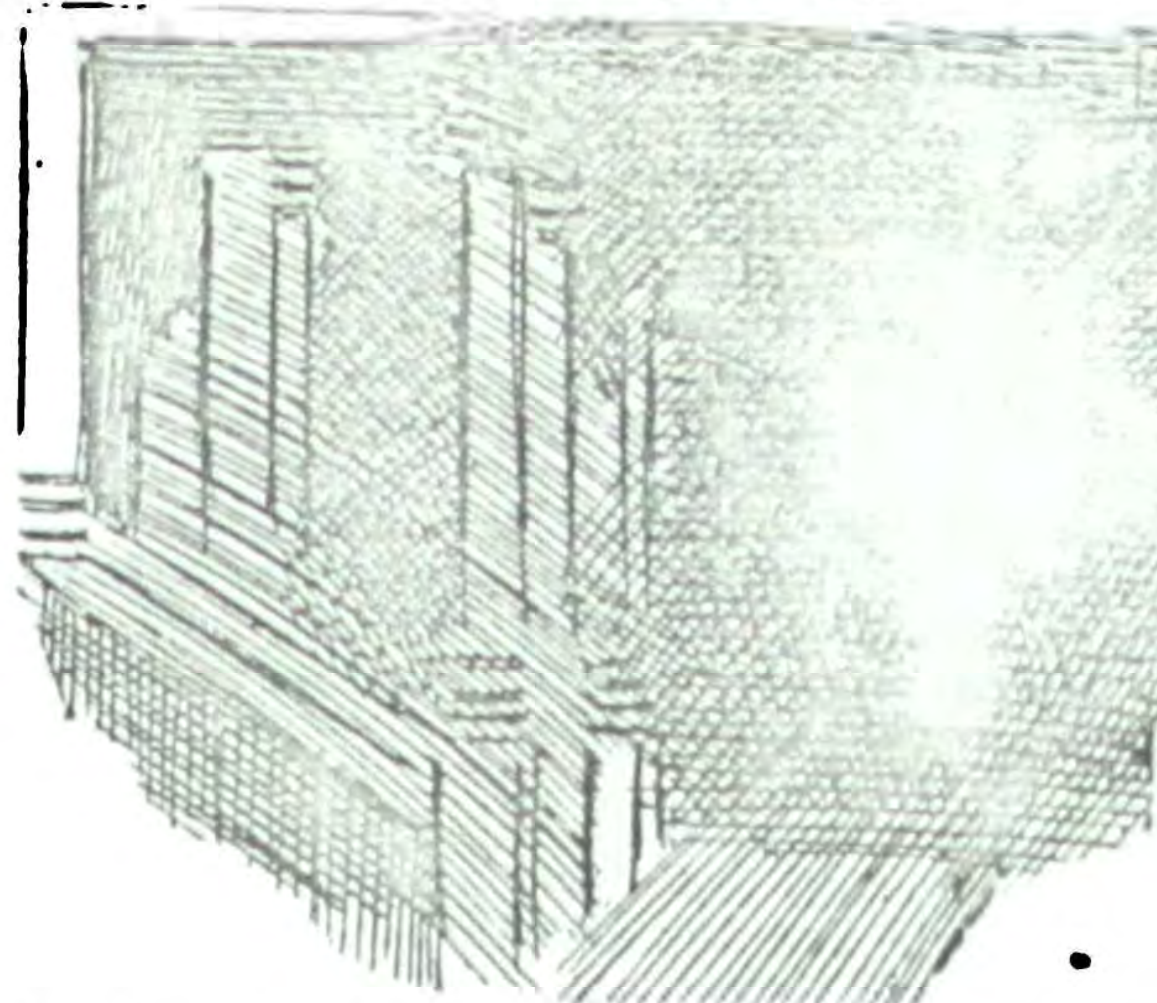
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THE PROLOGUE.

IN WHICH A RAILWAY TRAIN, PROBABLY
GROWING TIRED OF THE PERMANENT WAY,
LEAVES THE RAILS AT A CURVE, WITH DISAS-
TROUS CONSEQUENCES—AND NELSON LEE
AND AN IMPORTANT PERSON NAMED
NIPPER—MYSELF, TO WIT—MEET MR. PAUL
H. DANTON.

WHEN a real author writes a story,
he starts it with a prologue, as
often as not. I suppose he con-
siders it's more classy, or some-
thing; or perhaps it's really necessary.

Anyhow, I've been thinking of the
yarn I'm going to tell, and I don't see
why I shouldn't start mine with a pro-
logue. I just asked the gov'nor what he
thought—he's lolling lazily in the big
chair, smoking and reading—and he told
me to get on with the business instead
of jawing so much. He didn't use those
actual words, but that's near enough.

Well, having decided to open with a
prologue, I'll get busy.

One bright, early summer evening,
therefore, finds Mr. Nelson Lee and my-
self seated in a railway train. That's
the proper way to start a prologue, I
believe. I don't exactly know why a
summer evening should find us, but it
did.

And, having found us, it left us
stranded at a small station somewhere in
the Midlands. Stranded, that is, for a
short time. To tell the exact truth—it's
the best way, and saves a lot of trouble—

our train was shoved aside in order to
allow a faster express to buzz past.

It was a piece of rotten cheek, anyhow,
to shunt us out of the way. Our train
was called an express, but it didn't hap-
pen to be such an express express as the
other express. Now, I think I've ex-
pressed that rather well. (I just pointed
out that joke to the gov'nor, and he's
nearly slaughtered me for it.)

You see, Nelson Lee and I were on our
way to London from Manchester, and the
train we were waiting for was from
Liverpool. The Liverpool train was a
boat express, and so was considered more
important than ours.

It was nearly dark, and the electric
lights were going strong—all blinding
down, of course. Nobody was expecting
Zeppelins, because it was going to be a
bright, moonlight night; but regulations
are regulations. What's the good of the
Government making regulations if people
don't keep 'em?"

We had been waiting about five
minutes, and by this time we were pushed
against a small platform in an out-of-the-
way corner of the station. The main-line
platforms were deserted, for the Liver-
pool-London boat train wasn't scheduled
to stop. As it happened, it did stop—
suddenly.

I was leaning out of the window, hav-
ing nothing better to do, gazing at the
sights. The only sights in view at the
moment were a couple of pretty girls on
the opposite platform. One of them had

the sauce to wave to me, and I had the sauce to wave back. I don't mind looking at sights of that variety.

"Of course, I'm a fearfully staid chap usually, but if those girls had stayed there much longer I might even have winked to them. (There's another joke there, if you look for it. I haven't dared to point it out to the gov'nor this time.)

But the girls didn't stay there. I spotted another sight waddling along the platform. This time it was an elderly dame, as broad as she was high, and she beckoned the girls towards her with an imperious motion.

"Oh, crumbs!" I grinned. "They're going to get into hot water for waving to me! Well, I can't help it! They waved first, the bounders!"

"What are you talking about, Nipper?" asked the gov'nor, behind me.

"Oh, nothing, sir!" I said promptly.

Just then I heard a rumble in the distance, and I gazed up the line in the dusk. I couldn't see far, because there was a sharp curve just outside the station. My eyes are first-class, I believe, but they can't see round curves when there are trees and houses and embankments in the way.

I'm conscious of the fact that I've been treating the subject in a joky kind of way; yet, to tell the truth, there was grim tragedy in the air just then. I didn't know it at the time; but I knew it a minute later.

I was leaning out of the window, and I whistled cheerily. We should soon be on the way again, I thought. After the other express had roared through, we should start off practically at once.

Then we had a clear run to London, except for one stop. We were going to partake of supper at a decent little restaurant we knew of in Shaftesbury Avenue. The restaurant wasn't much to look at, but the proprietor knew what a good supper was. And so did we.

As I watched the permanent-way, I mentally decided what I should have in the grub line. By the time London was reached, I should have a terrific appetite, and, what with the Food Controller and other troubles, I was wondering how I should get enough grub to satisfy me. I'm not a food-hog, but I've got a healthy appetite. The gov'nor has sometimes insultingly remarked that I have lost my own appetite, and found a donkey's.

And then I saw the through express coming along. She was just appearing

round the curve, and I thought, even at the time, that she was going pretty speedily. She was late, and the driver was apparently making up for lost time.

Like so many other drivers, he miscalculated.

I was just finishing up my whistling solo with a few crescendo notes when my heart seemed to leap into my mouth. My gaze was fixed carelessly on the oncoming express.

The great locomotive suddenly seemed to sway; then it leapt clean into the air a matter of two feet. The whole ghastly affair was over in a few seconds, although it seemed ages to me.

I saw it all.

The express engine crashed down, staggered, and fell upon its side; and, behind, I saw the coaches pile themselves up, splintering and crashing fearfully. The noise, in fact, was appalling.

Just for one second a dead silence reigned. Then a series of wild cries came to my ears. Shrieks, groans, and shouts. And above them all came the roar of escaping steam. The disaster had happened about three hundred yards up the line, and so I could see and hear everything.

Nelson Lee, behind me in the carriage, jumped to his feet.

"What on earth was that, Nipper?" he asked sharply.

"Great heavens!" I gasped. "It's—it's a smash, gov'nor! That other express has come to grief on the curve!"

The gov'nor shoved me aside without ceremony, and looked out of the window. When he withdrew his head, he was grave.

"I am afraid the accident is terribly serious," he said quickly. "Come, Nipper!"

He opened the door and leaped down upon the track. I followed, and together we pelted along the permanent way in the direction of the train smash. I remember seeing those two girls for a second. They were bending over the stout old lady, who had collapsed upon one of the seats in a dead faint.

I won't attempt to describe the dreadful scenes we witnessed. I loathe harrowing details of railway accidents, and so I'm certainly not going to write any myself. I've got something else to write about.

And the accident wasn't half so serious as I had first supposed. Only two coaches had been smashed. The others were

derailed, but not injured. The passengers had received nothing worse than a shaking.

In the foremost coach, however, three poor people had been killed and several injured; and in the second coach about a dozen passengers were injured less seriously. Nelson Lee and I arrived just as the confusion was at its worst stage.

People were running from all directions, and the uninjured passengers were crowding out of the rear coaches, frightened and shaken. Many were fainting. The gov'nor paused in his run quite suddenly.

Almost at our feet lay a still figure. It was that of a middle-aged man—a gentleman, by the look of him. And he had apparently been thrown clean out of the coach. There was no sign of injury visible.

Lee bent down and made a brief examination.

"Nothing serious, Nipper!" he remarked shortly. "Stunned—that's all!"

The gov'nor is a bit of a doctor in his way. In fact, I'd sooner be attended by Nelson Lee any day than by a professional doctor. He soon discovered that the passenger had no broken bones.

The gov'nor's idea, of course, was to render all the service possible; and he was rising to his feet, with the intention of moving along to another injured passenger, when he pointed.

"I suppose that is the gentleman's valise, Nipper?" he asked. "Just see."

Just near me there was a small leather case, lying between the metals of the "down" line. It had burst open, and there were some bundles of papers lying near. I went over and looked at the valise in the dim evening light.

There was a name painted on the leather in black characters:

"P. H. DANTON."

I fielded the scattered bundles, and piled them into the case. But suddenly I paused, and looked at the things in my hand.

I was holding a neat bundle of papers, more like a tightly packed ream of small notepaper than anything else. It was tied with green tape. I looked at it more closely, and then started.

"My hat! This represents a decent sum!" I ejaculated.

For I saw that the papers were nothing more nor less than one-pound Treasury notes! There must have been five hun-

dred in this bundle alone, and there were three more exactly the same!

"Come, Nipper!" said the gov'nor impatiently. "Hurry yourself!"

"Look at this money, sir!" I exclaimed. "There's about two thousand quid here, I reckon—two thousand quid in one-pound currency notes!"

Nelson Lee took the bundle I handed to him. Then he placed it in the valise with the others, and snapped the thing to. Although it had been burst open with the impact, the lock snapped all right. Possibly Mr. Dainton had been looking into the valise at the time of the smash.

"It is fortunate for this gentleman that we happened to discover the money, Nipper," said Lee dryly. "Treasury notes are tempting. They are legal tender, and represent cash."

"But fancy carrying two thousand —"

"My dear Nipper, that is this gentleman's business—not ours," interjected the gov'nor. "I expect he has an excellent reason for carrying such a sum with him. It is not enormous, after all. But it will be as well, perhaps, to make sure that it is really his property. 'Dainton,' isn't it?"

Nelson Lee slipped his fingers into the unconscious man's lower vest pocket, and fished out a small card-case. I glanced round, shivering a little. The cries of the wounded, just near by, were awful to listen to.

Rescue work had commenced now. Very fortunately no fire was caused—and fire is the terrible danger in railway accidents. The death-roll would have been treble if a fire had broken out, for many people were pinned beneath the wreckage—people who were only slightly injured.

The locomotive was still hissing furiously, but something like order was being restored. Willing hands were rescuing the injured. They were all round us, and people were passing to and fro constantly, with stretchers and things. But nobody took any notice of us. The railway officials and others saw that we needed no assistance.

"Dear me! This is interesting," said Nelson Lee suddenly. "Yea, Nipper, this valise is Mr. Dainton's property. Come, we will carry the poor gentleman away from this pandemonium. I dare say the waiting-rooms are being prepared for the reception of the injured."

"What's interesting, sir?" I asked.

For answer the gov'nor passed me Mr. Dainton's card, and then brought out his brandy-flask, and forced some of the spirit between the injured man's teeth. Meanwhile, I looked at the slip of paste-board.

On it I saw:

"PAUL H. DAINTON,
Messrs. Bevison, Norton & Co.,
Gray's Inn Road, W.C."

Then, of course, I understood why Nelson Lee had said that it was interesting, for the premises of Messrs. Bevison, Norton & Co., engravers, etc., were situated only a few dozen yards from our own rooms in Gray's Inn Road. I remembered now that a Mr. Dainton was a junior partner in the firm.

Being a neighbour of ours, as it were, I knew other details concerning the firm. This Mr. Dainton, for example, was only a recent acquisition. He and Mr. Sidney Bevison were "the firm." There was no "Co." That was just for the sake of effect. The "Norton," too, had been out of the business for years and years; but, of course, the name was still used.

For Messrs. Bevison, Norton & Co., engravers, had been established for something like sixty-seven years. It was one of the oldest and most respectable businesses in London.

I had seen Mr. Bevison now and again. He was younger than Mr. Dainton, although the senior partner. Only a year or two ago old Mr. Bevison, the son of the founder, had died, leaving the business in the sole charge of his son and Sidney Bevison had taken Mr. Dainton into partnership with him.

I had never seen Mr. Dainton before, neither had the gov'nor. Naturally we were slightly interested. We felt that this man wasn't exactly a stranger, and I was glad that we had done him a service.

The brandy which Lee had administered soon had effect, for a little colour stole into Dainton's cheeks. He was a man of about forty-eight, well built, and dressed extremely well. His face was clean-shaven, and his hair, with little specks of grey here and there.

He didn't recover consciousness, however, and Nelson Lee and I managed to stagger with him out of the waiting-rooms, where a good many injured passengers were already being treated. Doctors were on the scene, and everything was bustle. Yet, at the same time, there

was an air of gloom and tragedy hanging over all.

Having seen Mr. Dainton comfortable, the gov'nor and I sallied out again. We helped with the rescue work with a will, the pair of us getting grimy and black with hauling the smashed woodwork and steel about.

About an hour later we went to the waiting-room again, carrying between us a poor girl of sixteen, who was suffering from a badly crushed foot. She was conscious, and bore the agony bravely. She was a nice-looking girl, too, and her father was with us. He, poor chap, was nearly distracted, although he hadn't suffered much.

We had helped him to extricate his daughter, and were now conveying her to the temporary "hospital" on a hastily-improvised stretcher. We arrived, and the girl's foot was soon being attended to.

Nelson Lee and I were leaving the waiting-room again when he turned towards the corner where Mr. Dainton lay. He had seen that the injured man was just on the point of recovering. The doctor informed us that he had been partially conscious for ten minutes past.

Now, as we stood near him, he opened his eyes. The gov'nor wouldn't have stayed, only both he and I were in need of a short rest. We had been working strenuously for over an hour without a second's respite.

"Feeling better, Mr. Dainton?" asked Lee pleasantly.

"My head—my head!" muttered the other. "Oh, what has happened? I feel that my head is on fire. For the love of mercy give me some water!"

About five minutes' before, the doctor told us, Mr. Dainton had refused to swallow any water. But now he drank eagerly, and his condition improved markedly. At the end of three minutes he was fully conscious.

"Yes, the accident—the accident, of course," he said quietly. "Good gracious! What a terrible crash it was! Am I badly injured, doctor?"

The doctor, in his shirt-sleeves, laughed.

"Just a bad bump on your dear sir," he said. "I have hurt your head, and I think you will have to continue your journey after a short rest. If the others were injured no more than yourself we should not worry."

"There are no bones broken" asked Mr. Dainton.

"You are quite sound," smiled the doctor. "There is not even a trace of concussion. You really had a miraculous escape. It appears that you were hurled clean out of the train at the moment of the crash."

Mr. Dainton nodded.

"Yes, that is so," he said. "I remember falling. It was terrible—terrible! Oh, but what of my valise? Good heavens! Have you——"

He was starting up with consternation in his eyes, but the doctor quietly pressed him back.

"Your valise is here," he said, indicating it with a nod of his head. "This gentleman—Mr. Nelson Lee—brought it in with you. You have to thank him for——"

"Mr. Nelson Lee!" echoed Dainton slowly. "Oh, yes, of course! I have heard the name before. I am glad to meet you, Mr. Lee. Thank you for what you have done. You are the private detective, I believe?"

The guv'nor smilingly nodded.

"I was fortunate in rescuing your valise, Mr. Dainton," he replied. "It was lying in the space between the down rails."

"I am grateful to you, Mr. Lee—deeply grateful!" said the other. "That valise contains some extremely valuable plans and documents. It would have been a great loss to me if they had been destroyed."

I stared a little. Mr. Dainton hadn't even mentioned the bundles of currency notes.

"I should think those notes would have been a loss, too, sir," I put in drily.

Mr. Dainton started.

"Notes—notes!" he echoed, with sudden vigour. "By Heaven, have you been prying into——"

"That is scarcely a pleasant word to use, Mr. Dainton," interrupted the guv'nor quietly. "Nipper has not been prying, neither have I."

"Nevertheless, you appear to have inspected the contents of my private travelling-case," said Dainton angrily. "That is hardly the act of a gentleman, Mr. Lee. Confound you for your infernal impertinence!"

I bristled with anger at those words.

"Why, your valise was lying open on the ground!" I exclaimed hotly. "There wasn't any impertinence at all! If it hadn't been for us, as a matter of fact, all that money of yours would have been scattered by this time!"

"My valise was locked securely!" ejaculated Mr. Dainton furiously. "I refuse to believe that it was found open. You are a detective—a scoundrelly spy! It is your business to pry into other people's affairs! How dare you open my private valise and examine its contents! How dare you——"

"What Nipper said was the truth, Mr. Dainton," put in the guv'nor, keeping his temper with difficulty. "We found your case lying open, and we replaced the contents, and fastened it up again. Under the exceptional circumstances, I will overlook your insulting words; but I should certainly expect an apology."

"An apology!" snapped Dainton: "You are a prying busybody, sir! If there is a single note missing from my valise, I shall place the matter in the hands of the police at once!"

"Well, I'm hanged!" I gasped, red with indignation.

Nelson Lee compressed his lips, and quietly walked away. The doctor followed us a few yards towards the door.

"He's unstrung," he said. "All the same, the fellow is deucedly ungrateful! Don't take any notice of his preposterous threat, Mr. Lee!"

"I assure you I shall dismiss the matter from my mind," said the guv'nor shortly.

And he passed outside, without even glancing at Mr. Dainton again. I followed, and proceeded to air my indignation.

"The rotter!" I gasped. "Threatening to report to the police—when it was us who saved his rotten money! Actually suspecting us of keeping some of the filthy stuff! Why didn't you answer him properly, guv'nor?"

"Because he is injured, Nipper," replied Lee. "And because it is really not worth the trouble. We know, however, that it will be wisdom on our part to have no relations with Mr. Paul Dainton. The man is obviously a cad. He does not even possess decency enough to accept a gentleman's word!"

"I felt like punching his beastly nose!" I growled.

"That would have served no good purpose, young 'un," said the guv'nor.

"Wouldn't it? It would have eased my feelings!"

"My dear lad, don't put yourself out," smiled Nelson Lee. "We can afford to ignore the man's coarseness. I told the doctor that I should dismiss the matter from my mind. I am going to do so—and you must do the same. Perhaps, in a

week or so, Mr. Dainton will have the courtesy to call upon us, at Gray's Inn Road, and apologise for his singular conduct to-night. I hope so."

We went down the line to see if we could be of further assistance, and were soon busy. Mr. Paul H. Dainton was forgotten completely. He was a cad and a rotter, and, as the gov'nor said, wasn't worth worrying about.

We didn't see him again.

But we little guessed how this incident was to be recalled before the month was out.

And that's the end of the prologue.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH SIR JAMES BATLEY CALLS UPON US, AND GIVES US SOME HIGHLY INTERESTING INFORMATION—NELSON LEE CONFERS WITH SCOTLAND YARD, AND WE LEARN MUCH CONCERNING MESSRS. BEVISON, NORTON & CO. AND WE ARE DECIDEDLY SUSPICIOUS.

JUST over three weeks later, on a hot, blazing morning, Nelson Lee and I were busy in the laboratory, making an important experiment in connection with the case of poisoning which was occupying the gov'nor's attention at the moment.

I was glad that this work had to be done, for the laboratory was cool and airy, and it was quite pleasant in there. Out in the street, in Gray's Inn Road, the summer sun was shining brilliantly, but with too much warmth for comfort.

London, in the middle of a heat-wave, wasn't the coolest spot on earth.

And in the laboratory Nelson Lee had appliances for keeping the place cool in the very hottest weather. So I wasn't to be blamed for liking that particular apartment better than any other on this certain morning.

We had nearly concluded the experiment when the 'phone bell rang.

"Oh, rats!" I said, irritably.

"See who it is, Nipper."

I passed through into the consulting-room, and grabbed the instrument.

"Who's that?" I demanded impatiently. "Hallo!"

"Am I speaking to Mr. Nelson Lee?" came a refined voice over the wires.

"No," I replied. "I am Mr. Lee's assistant."

"Is Mr. Lee at home?"

"Yes; but he's very busy," I said pointedly.

"I wish to consult Mr. Lee on a very important matter," came the voice. "Will you please fetch him to the telephone?"

"What name shall I give, sir?"

"Sir James Batley, of the Treasury."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "All right, sir! Hang on a moment!"

I hadn't thought that the 'phone-caller was such a distinguished individual as a Government department official. And in less than a minute the gov'nor was speaking at the instrument. He was soon finished, and he hung up the receiver. He glanced at his watch, and lit a cigar.

"Well, what's the trouble, sir?" I asked. "What's wrong at the Treasury? Have they mislaid an official, or are there a few million pounds knocking about that want finding?"

"I have no idea of the business upon which Sir James wishes to consult me," replied the gov'nor. "He asked me to go to the Treasury without delay at first, but then, on second thoughts, decided to visit me here. Sir James will be round in about a quarter of an hour."

"Must be important, then," I said. "I can understand a Government official asking you to visit him; but I should say a disaster has occurred if the official decides to take the trouble to visit you. Perhaps they want you to be Prime Minister," I added.

Nelson Lee grinned at my third-rate humour, and passed into the laboratory again. We finished the experiment just as Sir James Batley drove up in his whacking great motor-car. He was shown up into the consulting-room, and found the gov'nor and me very business-like.

"I have come to you, Mr. Lee, because I am anxious to enlist your services," said Sir James, after he had shaken hands. "You have, on several occasions, performed excellent service for the Government, and in this affair you will have ample opportunity of proving your very remarkable ability."

That was a pretty good way to begin, anyhow. Perhaps Sir James intended his words to be flattering. They weren't. They were just the truth.

"Scotland Yard has been hard at work for a fortnight, and the official police have, I believe, made certain headway," went on the Treasury gentleman. "But the matter is so urgent that I wish to have the best brains in the kingdom at

work upon the case. Your unique experience with crime and the criminal classes, Mr. Lee, may possibly help the Government very materially. It is a case of 'all hands to the pump,' and your hands are exceptionally able."

"May I inquire what the trouble is?" smiled the gov'nor.

"I am about to tell you," said Sir James, toying with the seal on his heavy gold watch-chain. He was a slim gentleman of about sixty, and had been a famous politician for many years. "At the present moment there are a number of false Treasury-notes in circulation, both ten-shilling and one-pound—chiefly the latter."

"A Scotland Yard friend imparted that information to me a week ago, Sir James," said Nelson Lee. "He was quite worried about the matter."

"With excellent reason, Mr. Lee," said Sir James. "The number of false notes which have been issued is appalling. We had fully believed that the new one-pound notes were incapable of being forged. Of course, a clumsy attempt might be made—we were prepared for that. But the actual fact is staggering. The country is flooded with counterfeit currency notes—and it is almost a matter of impossibility to detect the forged from the genuine."

"I did not think the matter was so serious as that," remarked the gov'nor.

"It is serious, Mr. Lee—terribly serious!" said Sir James Batley gravely. "These spurious notes are undoubtedly the most perfect forgeries which have ever been circulated. I, myself, cannot detect the difference between the worthless imitation and the actual currency."

"But there is a difference?"

"Certainly! The false notes possess several minute flaws," said Sir James. "They are invisible to the naked eye, however. It is only possible to detect those flaws by the aid of a powerful light and a powerful magnifying lens."

"They are clever men at work, apparently," said the gov'nor.

"They are so clever that the notes are still being issued broadcast," said Sir James. "The police have made no arrest, and, so far as I can understand, they are at a deadlock. Their investigations have reached a point beyond which it is impossible to proceed. The whole matter is most distressing. The country is literally flooded with worthless currency. For all I know to the contrary, I

may have some of the false notes in my purse at this very minute."

"And you wish me to investigate, Sir James?"

"If you are agreeable," said our visitor. "It struck me, Mr. Lee, that you may possibly succeed where the official detective force has failed. The matter is so urgent that I am really desperate. I quite realise that you may be unable to assist even in the slightest degree. Yet, on the other hand, your knowledge of London's underworld may lead you to investigate in certain quarters which the police have overlooked. You will work, too, in an unofficial capacity—and that may mean a great deal. Much as I admire the Criminal Investigation Department, I nevertheless appreciate the fact that your abilities are of a much higher standard than those of the average Scotland Yard detective. In short, Mr. Lee, I want you to do your very utmost in this vital matter. If you fail no harm will be done; and if you succeed—Well, you may be sure that the Government will repay you handsomely. As a beginning, I should suggest that you confer with Scotland Yard. Having learned all the known facts, you will then, of course, work on your own lines."

That was rather a decent speech of Sir James's. There was no flattery intended, and it was rather nice to know that he really appreciated the gov'nor's sterling abilities. He evidently had more faith in Nelson Lee than in Scotland Yard; and that was certainly gratifying. I decided that for a Government official Sir James Batley was a remarkably sensible man.

Nelson Lee lay back in his chair, silent for a few moments.

"I will get to work just as soon as possible, Sir James," he said at last.

"You accept the Government's commission, then?" asked our visitor.

"I can scarcely do otherwise," smiled the gov'nor. "Since you have such faith in me, Sir James, I feel that it is incumbent upon me to prove that your confidence is not misplaced. I appreciate your compliments, and I will do my very best. I cannot say more than that. Please let me add, however, that it is impossible for me to give any guarantee of success."

"My dear sir, I fully realise that!"

"It is possible—probable, even—that my efforts will be a complete failure," went on Nelson Lee rather unnecessarily,

I thought. "But, as you yourself said, it is a case of 'all hands to the pump.' I will gladly lend my hand in this critical matter. You can give me no further information, Sir James?"

"I could do so, but I should prefer you to talk the matter over with the Chief Commissioner of Scotland Yard," replied the other. "He, of course, has the whole matter at his finger-tips, and will tell you everything he knows. I shall, of course, acquaint him with the fact that you are interesting yourself in this grave business."

"I will visit Scotland Yard this afternoon," said the gov'nor.

Shortly afterwards Sir James Batley left, and Nelson Lee was very thoughtful. He looked at me absently through a haze of cigar smoke. Then he rose to his feet and paced the consulting-room a few times.

"It's a tall order, Nipper," he remarked, after a bit.

"Yes, it seems a bit steep, sir," I said. "I wonder whether we shall be successful? It would be a fine smack in the eye for the Yard if we collared the forgers."

"My dear Nipper, I have no desire to smack Scotland Yard in the eye, as you vulgarly put it," said the gov'nor. "In this particular affair I am working—or shall be working, since I have not started yet—with the official police. They will supply me with information, and I shall return the compliment, if possible."

"There doesn't seem to be any starting-point," I said, frowning.

"We cannot be sure of that until I have interviewed Sir Donald Lyle, Nipper."

"Until you have? What about me?"

"I don't see why you should interest yourself—"

"Don't you, gov'nor?" I growled. "Well, I do! I'm in this business, don't forget! When you go round to Scotland Yard I want to come with you."

"Since you have given me your orders, Nipper, I cannot, of course, refuse," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "Perhaps you would prefer me to drop out of the affair altogether? Perhaps you will interview Sir Donald—"

I grinned.

"Oh, come off it, gov'nor!" I said meekly. "If you don't let me come, that's the end of it. But I jolly well want to come. We're on Government work now, and we shall have to look alive

if we're going to defeat these forgers. They must be clever blighters to flood the country with bad currency. I say, I wonder if these notes in my pocket are duds?"

Nelson Lee chuckled, and promised to let me go with him. Accordingly, that afternoon, we trotted round to Scotland Yard. We were at once shown into the private office of Sir Donald Lyle, the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police—and therefore the head of Scotland Yard. The gov'nor knew him well, of course, and I'd met him once or twice.

He had been expecting us.

"Sir J. Batley informed me that you were going into this forgery affair with us, Mr. Lee," said Sir Donald. "I'm glad. The more brains the better—and your brains are of the right quality. To be quite frank, we are at a deadlock. We have got to a certain point, and we can't get any further."

"What is that certain point?" asked the gov'nor.

"I'll just tell you the outlines as a commencement," said the Chief Commissioner, lying back in his chair. "Details can come afterwards. Well, our experts were not long in identifying the paper upon which the false currency is printed. The paper is very similar to that used for the genuine notes—but not quite the same. The watermark is a masterpiece of imitation. Just see for yourself, Mr. Lee."

He handed the gov'nor two one-pound Treasury notes—at least, that's what they looked like. But one of them was a worthless forgery. It was really impossible to tell which was which. The imitation was an amazingly clever piece of work. It had evidently been produced by master artists and the most modern machinery.

"You say that you have identified the paper?" asked Lee.

"Yes. It is manufactured by the well-known paper-making firm of H. & L. Smith's, Ltd., of Leatherhead," said Sir Donald. "They, of course, are above suspicion. This paper is manufactured by them, and it leaves their factory in considerable quantities at regular intervals. They supply four big London firms with this special quality of paper."

"Only four?"

"That is all. And two or three other firms in the provinces."

"Surely that narrows down your line of inquiry?"

"One would suppose so," said Sir Donald. "But, as a matter of fact, we cannot get beyond that point. The four London firms which get this paper are Messrs. Rodney's, Ltd., H. J. Metcalfe and Sons, Ltd., Bevison, Norton and Co., and the London Elite Engraving Co., Ltd. Every one of those firms——"

"Bevison, Norton & Co.," I ejaculated suddenly.

In a flash I saw that train smash again. I saw Mr. Paul H. Dainton; I saw the bundle of one-pound currency notes——Currency notes! Great Scott! There were thousands of them! I believe I gulped in my sudden excitement. I know I went as red as a beetroot with suppressed emotion.

I saw the gov'nor and Sir Donald Lyle looking at me curiously. Nelson Lee was quite calm, but there was a look in his eye which bade me hold my tongue. If I had a suspicion, I had better keep it to myself. That's what the gov'nor said with his eyes. Suspicions were not much good unless they were substantiated by facts.

"Well, Nipper?" asked Sir Donald, "what of Bevison, Norton & Co.?"

"Oh, nothing much, sir," I said promptly. "They're neighbours of ours, that's all. Their place is in Gray's Inn Road, you know."

The Chief Commissioner nodded.

"I see," he went on. "There's nothing very remarkable in that, my lad. All these firms, Mr. Lee, as I was saying, are above suspicion. They are of the highest integrity. They cannot possibly be suspected of producing counterfeit currency. They have their good names to consider. It would be the height of absurdity to suppose that such well-known firms would resort to professional forgery."

"But surely you have approached them on the subject?" asked the gov'nor.

"Of course. We have not hesitated to make the most intricate inquiries and investigations," said Sir Donald. "My men set to work systematically, and each firm is visited, and their books examined, their stocks of paper overhauled, their workshops turned inside out. The result in each case was—nil. We had suspected, possibly, that there was a leakage of paper, through the medium of a traitorous employee. But this was not the case."

"You have proved, then, that those four firms are entirely innocent?"

"Positively. The same applies to the provincial firms. That is why the affair is such a complex puzzle," said Sir Donald, with a frown of anxiety. "So far as we have been able to discover, everything is in perfect order. Every ounce of the paper which leaves the factory of Messrs. Hillmantle's, Ltd., is accounted for."

"And yet the forged notes are printed on that paper?"

"Undoubtedly."

"There must be a flaw somewhere."

"That is obvious. But I'm hanged if we can find where," said the Chief Commissioner. "In time, no doubt, we shall be successful. But the matter is so urgent that we cannot afford to waste a day. These false notes are being put into circulation constantly, and the matter is attaining appalling proportions. Once we discover the leakage of paper we shall be on the right track."

Nelson Lee stroked his chin, and looked at me absently.

I tried to look unconcerned, but I was seething with inward excitement.

"You have no suspicions against any particular individual—say a member of one of these firms?" asked Nelson Lee.

"In point of fact, I suspect everybody," smiled Sir Donald. "But there is nobody who is receiving special attention. Several of the Yard's best men are hard at work on the case, but they don't seem to make headway. The fellows who are printing and issuing these counterfeit Treasury notes are extremely clever men."

"Personally, I am rather inclined to suspect that the paper is finding its outlet by means of an employee of one of the four firms mentioned," said Nelson Lee. "It is even possible that a director of a firm is the guilty party——"

"My dear Lee!"

"It is all very well to say that these big business houses are above suspicion," went on the gov'nor. "In my opinion, Sir Donald, they are not! It must be quite apparent to you that the false currency could only be produced upon the very latest machinery. In short, they are produced by a plant which is specially designed for the manufacture of bank-notes."

"Precisely."

"Very well. Where is there such a plant as that except in the workshop of

a big firm? Frankly, Sir Donald, I don't think these notes can have been produced in an engraving works of a firm such as—Messrs. Rodney's, Ltd., for example. I should like you to give me a few more details concerning the four firms which are in regular receipt of paper from Hillmantle's, Ltd."

The Chief Commissioner was very obliging. He told us all about Rodney's, Ltd., and H. J. Metcalfe & Sons, Ltd. Then he came to Bevison, Norton & Co. This is where I became interested.

"As for Bevison's," said Sir Donald, with a smile, "they're about the soundest firm in London. It is an old-fashioned engraving business. Yet I don't know whether I ought to say that. For they possess the most up-to-date machinery, and work exclusively for the very highest customers. No, no, Lee! It won't do to suspect such a firm as Bevison, Norton & Co. They have been established for over sixty-seven years, and they now hold contracts with half-a-dozen foreign governments for the supply of bond warrants and bank-notes, and that sort of thing. The firm possesses a record which is absolutely honourable in every particular. It really represents the high watermark of business enterprise and absolute honesty."

"You give Bevison's a good name," remarked Nelson Lee.

"Certainly—they deserve it," was our companion's reply. "To suggest that they have anything to do with forgery is not only preposterous, but farcical. The partners, at the present day, are Bevison and Dainton. Mr. Bevison, I believe, is at present in Spain, securing a contract for bank-notes, or something like that. And Mr. Dainton is staying after the firm's interests at home."

And then Sir Donald gave us a brief outline of the record of the London Elite Engraving Co., Ltd. After that he and the gov'nor had a bit of a jaw, and then we left him.

Strictly speaking, I don't suppose there was any necessity for me to have gone. But I was very keen, nevertheless. Both the gov'nor and I saw things which Sir Donald Lyle naturally missed. At one point at the time of the accident, a tremendous force.

Mr. Paul Dainton had possession of a large number of pound currency notes—all of them in bundles, as though they had just come off the

printing-press. And he had flown into a fury, and had insulted the gov'nor abominably when he learned that we had seen these bundles.

To say the least, the facts were significant.

Nelson Lee and I got into a taxi just in Trafalgar Square, and I could see that the great criminologist was not inclined for conversation. He lay back and looked at the sky absently, puffing gently at a cigarette.

And so I held my tongue—not literally, of course.

We reached home in due course, and it was not until we were in the laboratory that Nelson Lee condescended to speak. It was beautifully cool in the laboratory after the heat and dust of the streets.

"Well, Nipper, what do you think of it?" asked the gov'nor abruptly.

"Why, I think that Bevison, Norton & Co. are the forgers!" I replied promptly. "That's what I think, sir."

"Oh, you do?"

"Absolutely."

"And how do you come to that interesting conclusion?"

"I suppose you haven't forgotten that railway accident in the Midlands, have you?" I asked. "What about Dainton and those bundles of bank-notes? What about his unaccountable fury? I tell you, gov'nor, the thing's as clear as daylight."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I'm afraid you are rather too prone to jump to conclusions, my dear Nipper," said Lee, seating himself upon the corner of the laboratory bench. "You say that the whole thing is as clear as daylight? Really, I fail to see it."

"But—but—"

"There is not one iota of evidence against the engraving firm just down the road," went on Nelson Lee calmly. "Mind you, I shall keep a very special watch upon Messrs. Bevison, Norton & Co., because I agree with you in thinking that they are connected with this singular flood of bad currency."

"There you are!" I exclaimed triumphantly.

"Exactly—but I am no further," said the gov'nor. "I am like the police, Nipper: I can get to a certain point, and no further. Bevison's possesses an unsullied record. To bring a charge against such a firm as that is a very grave matter. They are not merely an ordinary printing house; they are in the

confidence of some of the most famous banks in the whole world. They have never betrayed that confidence. How, then, can we assume that such an untainted firm should descend to criminal forgery?"

"It's a bit thick, guv'nor," I admitted.

"Mr. Dainton's conduct was extraordinary," continued Nelson Lee. "But it was not even suspicious. And, Nipper, it would be foolish for us to make the fatal mistake of suspecting the firm because of the boorishness of its junior partner. In all probability he is a man of honour, although lacking in manners. Surely, there was nothing remarkable in the fact that he carried two thousand pounds in Treasury notes with him? There is no law against a man doing that. And his anxiety can be explained by the fact that he thought he had lost the money. Even to a rich man like Mr. Dainton, two thousand pounds is not a trifle."

"Well, it's jolly queer!" I said flatly. "After all, guv'nor, it's a bit off-side to suppose that all the work-people of that firm are confederates in a gigantic fraud. But the forged notes are produced somewhere, aren't they?"

"I will not dare to deny that statement, Nipper," smiled Nelson Lee. "I am now going to make a very close examination of this note," he added, producing one of the forgeries which Sir Donald had given him.

Then and there he examined the counterfeit under the light of a powerful electric lamp, and with the aid of a lens. At first glance there was no difference whatever between the original and the false. But there was a difference, and by this means we could distinguish the two.

"If anything, Nipper, the bad note is more finely produced than the genuine one," said Nelson Lee. "It is a masterpiece of the engraver's art, and it could only have been produced by expert professional engravers, on the very latest colour-printing machines."

"And Bevison, Norton & Co. do a lot of colour-printing, sir," I hinted.

"Exactly." Nelson Lee looked thoughtful. "Bevison's are engaged in producing bank-notes for several foreign governments—mainly South American republics. Upon the whole, Nipper, the facts are really very significant!"

"But there's no proof——"

"Ah! That is what we have to discover," said the guv'nor. "And, what is more, young 'un, we are going to set to work right away."

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH I VISIT A CINEMA AND EMERGE INTO A THICK MIST—I THEN MAKE A MOST ABSURD BLUNDER, BUT DON'T BLAME MYSELF IN THE LEAST—INCIDENTALLY, I DISCOVER THINGS, AND THOSE THINGS ARE AMAZINGLY SIGNIFICANT.

DURING the next day or two the guv'nor was very busy. His inquiries, however, although fruitful in a certain way, were not absolutely satisfactory. He was quite unable to get hold of anything definite.

For example, Nelson Lee discovered that the false notes were largely in circulation in Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Glasgow, Cardiff, Southampton, Portsmouth—and, of course, London. And he discovered that Mr. Paul H. Dainton, the junior partner in the firm of Bevison, Norton & Co., had visited each of those famous towns quite recently.

Yet there was no evidence in these discoveries.

It was strange that Mr. Dainton should have visited all those towns just previous to a flood of counterfeit Treasury notes—it was more than suggestive—but it was not conclusive evidence.

Mr. Dainton had toured the country on business; in every town and city he had left ample proof that his visits had been innocent. But this was probably a blind. And, try as he would, the guv'nor could not conjure up a single shred of evidence which would lead to a conviction.

We suspected Bevison, Norton & Co.—but that was all.

Nelson Lee even went to the trouble of looking into Mr. Dainton's history. All the facts concerning his past life were capable of bearing the full light of day. There were one or two periods which Lee could not trace, but there was nothing surprising in this.

So far as the world knew, Mr. Paul Dainton was an honourable man.

In fact, I began to have an idea in the back of my noddle that my original suspicions had been off-side; that Mr. Dainton was merely an ill-mannered hog,

and nothing more. In any case, it was necessary to have an absolutely open mind. Just because of that railway-smash incident it wouldn't do to jump to hasty conclusions.

And as for Mr. Bevison being involved in the forgeries, this was quite out of the question. He was the younger of the two partners—although "senior" from a business standpoint. At present he was in Spain, on perfectly legitimate business. Nelson Lee very soon obtained positive information on this point.

Where, then, was the starting-point for an investigation?

To be precise, the starting-point was in Holborn, for it was there that I first of all ran into the mist. Because, you see, I happened to butt my head bang against something of the utmost importance.

It was this way.

One evening, a day or two after our visit to Scotland Yard, I was feeling particularly fed-up. The weather had been rotten all day—muggy and drizzly—and the guv'nor hadn't made much progress. Neither had I. We were both tired and irritable, and Lee wanted the consulting-room to himself, in order to look up some records, or something. At least, when I asked him a question he snappishly told me to be quiet or go out somewhere. And, as I couldn't very well be quiet, I went out.

The guv'nor is like that sometimes. I don't blame him. After working hard, and achieving no possible result, it is bound to leave a general, irritable, all-over-like feeling.

So I mooched along Gray's Inn Road, mooched into Holborn, and then mooched into a cinema. For the first half hour I glared at the screen as though the thing had done me an injury. There was a rotten, long-drawn-out drama being shown, and it bored me to the point of tears.

In fact, I was thinking of leaving the place in disgust when a sparkling comedy came on—one of those quiet comedies which get hold of you. By the time that was finished I felt better. I didn't glare any longer. Then came a topical picture, and after that Charlie Chaplin.

Now, I always did like Charlie. He's a splendid tonic for the "blues." And in a few minutes I was chuckling. Then I laughed, and after that I roared. When at last I left the cinema I was as cheerful as a sandboy—although my

spirits were somewhat dampened when I emerged into the cheerless night.

For a change had come about. The drizzle had stopped, and Holborn was blotted completely out by a thick, damp mist. In addition, the night was as black as ink. This made the whole aspect of things rather uncomfortable.

For, what with the darkness and the mist, it was like walking in a regular November fog. Yet it was summertime. Nobody would have thought so; but then, we have rummy weather in London. The mist would lift later on, of course. And it wasn't a choky mist—just a grey blanket of dampness.

Buses and taxis were running, but only very slowly. I walked along Holborn cheerfully enough, and wondered if the guv'nor would be in a better humour when I arrived home. I didn't mind the mist at all; in fact, I rather enjoyed the experience. It was certainly thick in Gray's Inn Road—after I'd found that famous thoroughfare.

And this wasn't so easy, although I know the whole district by heart. I reached our side—the side on which Nelson Lee's rooms were situated, I mean—and walked along, whistling.

It was so dark and misty that I couldn't see the edge of the pavement, and more than once I nearly barged into some other befogged pedestrian. But although the weather looked like November, it didn't feel like it. For the atmosphere was muggy and close, and I was uncomfortably warm. It was one of those damp, warm nights when a fellow's clothes seem to develop a fit of extraordinary affection, when they cling to your skin and make you irritable.

As I wandered along the sidewalk I mentally resolved to indulge in a good hot bath as soon as I got indoors.

In another minute I spotted our old door, and fished out my key. Mrs. Jones was probably in bed by now, I thought, as I thrust the key into the lock. At all events, the electric light wasn't switched on in the hall, and the stairs were dark.

"H'm! Guv'nor's out, I suppose," I muttered, as I groped forward.

I mounted the stairs leisurely, wondering a little at the "feel" of the balustrade. Somehow or other, it wasn't as smooth as usual; my hand didn't slide up it very easily. And, strangely enough, it actually seemed smaller.

"The dampness, I suppose," I thought.

Then I caught my foot against one of the stairs, and stumbled on to my knees. I lay where I was for a moment, quite unhurt, but puzzled. It was a jolly funny thing. I'd never caught my foot on the stairs before—and I'd mounted 'em hundreds of times in the dark.

I was wondering if the fog had got into my head, when I became aware of voices. Two men were talking in one of the rooms just above. In the consulting room, I judged. The gov'nor evidently had a visitor.

Who could it be?

I listened, wondering. No, these voices were strange—both of them. Nelson Lee wasn't talking, anyhow. That was queer. Who could be jawing in the gov'nor's consulting-room at this time of night? It wasn't very late, of course—but quite late enough to make the thing seem curious.

Now that I was quite still, the voices were more distinct. To my surprise, too, they seemed to be raised in anger. I was so puzzled that I sat there on the stairs, and stared up into the darkness with a feeling that something was absolutely wrong. I couldn't tell what it was—but I had a vague sensation of strangeness.

"It's risky, sir, that's what it is," I heard somebody say.

"Nonsense, Garrod! For heaven's sake, don't get nervous," another voice exclaimed. "If there ever was a possibility of danger, it is past now. Scotland Yard has done its worst—and that didn't amount to much, did it?"

"That's all very well, sir, but——"

"'But—but'! You're always showing the white feather, Garrod!" said the other voice angrily—and it was a voice which seemed curiously familiar. "I tell you there is no danger of any sort. Don't be a fool, Garrod!"

I was staring blankly into the darkness now.

"I'm not a fool, sir!" said the unseen Garrod, with equal heat. "But I know when I've gone far enough. This game's gone far enough, Mr. Dainton—that's what I say! We'll have the police on us next!"

Dainton!

I nearly fell down the stairs in my amazement.

Of course, it was Dainton's voice right enough—Paul H. Dainton, of the firm of Bevison, Norton & Co. But, what in the name of all that was rummy, could

he be doing here—in Nelson Lee's apartments?

I groped for the banisters to steady myself, and found them. Then I got another shock. The banisters were square—perfectly square! And the banisters had always been curved and ornamented before!

"Great Scott!" I gasped, with a flood of realisation.

I just stood there, quivering.

The truth was as clear as daylight to me—why the dickens hadn't I realised it before? I was in the wrong house! This wasn't the gov'nor's place at all! My head seemed to swim for a second; then I became intensely alert.

The wrong house!

Yet I could have sworn the door was ours; in the mist it looked exactly the same. I'd never made such an extraordinary blunder before. And the key, too! My key had opened the front door of this house! I remembered, now, that the key had turned very stiffly in the lock—I'd been compelled to force it, in fact—but, at the time, this hadn't struck me very forcibly. The lock wanted oiling, I had supposed. And I'd walked in, as bold as brass, without taking the slightest precaution in the way of silencing my tread.

And, because I hadn't taken any precaution, I hadn't been heard. If I had deliberately entered the house, knowing that I had no right there, I should have been heard and collared, as sure as fate. That's just the "cussedness" of things.

I stood on the stairs, gathering my wits; for, to tell the truth, they were badly scattered for the moment.

I got hold of myself, so to speak, shook myself, and thought things out.

First of all, where was I?

Within the establishment of Messrs. Bevison, Norton & Co., as sure as fate! Talk about Providence! Unconsciously, I'd walked right into the heart of things, and I had already heard sufficient to tell me that the gov'nor's suspicions regarding Mr. Paul Dainton were more than justified.

It was the luck of a blunderer, nothing else. For I had blundered, and no mistake. I don't claim credit when there isn't any due. In my wildest moments I should never have thought of breaking into this place, with the possible chance of hearing something of importance.

But I was there, and I had heard.

Somewhere just above me, in one of

the rooms on the first floor, Mr. Dainton, the junior partner, was talking with another man—named Garrod. Who was Garrod, anyhow. It didn't take me more than a second to "place" Mr. Garrod.

He was the works-manager, of course—the chap who was in sole charge of the establishment. I remembered, now, that the manager lived on the premises, in a little flat over the old-fashioned offices. He was a bachelor, and lived alone, being looked after by an old housekeeper.

And I remembered other things.

Messrs. Bevison's place was situated on the same side as the gov'nor's house, and about seven "doors" away. The private entrance was just beyond the business office, and quite separate from it.

I pictured this side of Gray's Inn Road to myself, as I had seen it hundreds of times in broad daylight. It's queer, but a fellow never realises the truth about things until something happens to make him think.

The private door of Bevison's was an exact duplicate of our door—I realised that important fact, now that I seriously thought things out. Of course, the two doors were like twin-brothers. And—even more—there were other doors, belonging to other houses very much the same as ours.

But Bevison's particular door was fitted with just the same kind of brass knob in the centre; the keyhole plate was the same; the knocker the same. True enough, our door was painted dark green, and Bevison's dark brown—but de-
to like that couldn't be seen at night.

I saw how I made the mistake.

In the darkness and fog I had marched up, peering at the shops and doors as I went. Everything had been enveloped in the mist. And, suddenly spotting this door, I had mistaken it for the gov'nor's. That wasn't very surprising, after all.

But what was surprising was that my key fitted the wrong lock. It was just a queer trick of fate. After all, locks don't vary very much, and I daresay if any ordinary citizen tried his key in the locks of every door in his particular street he'd find that ten per cent. of the locks would succumb.

Anyhow I was in the wrong house, and there wasn't any sense in wondering how I'd made the blunder. The lobby and hall and staircase were very much the

same as the lobby and hall and staircase in the gov'nor's house. And this wasn't surprising, either, considering that Bevison's place was in the same block of buildings.

Now that I knew the truth, however, I could feel that the carpet on the stairs was different, and the stairs themselves were a trifle more steep. Half-consciously I had known all this before, but the full significance of it all hadn't impressed itself upon my brain-cells. I don't know whether that's the right way to put it, but it sounds all right; so I'll leave it.

And as for the stern reality of the affair?

Well, Mr. Paul Dainton and his manager, Garrod, were quite near to me, in a room just on the first landing—a sitting-room, I suppose. And I was standing on the stairs, afraid to move an inch now, fully aware of the fact that I was an intruder and an eavesdropper.

But I hadn't been an eavesdropper by design. I'd heard the words purely by accident, and it struck me that there was something amazingly significant in that scrap of conversation.

In brief, I knew this: Dainton and Garrod were up to something shady—Garrod was getting nervous, and had told Dainton so. Dainton had said that Scotland Yard had done its worst, and that "worst" didn't amount to much. There was no danger of any sort.

Great Scott! The whole thing was as clear as daylight—hit me in the face. What was the bloody business? Uttering forged Treasury notes, of course! Scotland Yard had made inquiries, and had found nothing. The police regarded Messrs. Bevison, Norton & Co. as a firm high above suspicion.

Why, the gov'nor would be able to bring off a terrible coup!

I was wildly anxious to rush off with my startling news. I decided that my best course was to creep down the stairs, and—well, it would be idiotic to remain in the house a second longer than I could help.

And then, just as I was beginning to shift my position, a door opened!

A flood of light filled the passage above. I gasped with consternation. Just for one second I really and truly thought that I was caught red-handed. I had a good explanation, of course—the truth. But Mr. Dainton wouldn't believe the truth even if I voiced it. He

wouldn't believe me when I said that I'd entered the place by accident. Oh, no! I was Nelson Lee's assistant, and he was a crook. He'd take it for granted that I was spying on him.

And then things might be awkward. Crooks, when they are caught, are liable to be violent. Besides, it was to my best interests to leave this house without letting the rotters know that I'd been there. Even now I didn't possess an atom of proof. Dainton could deny everything, and slip through the net. Before any action was taken, we should have to obtain real evidence.

I stared upwards, my heart in my mouth. The light which came out of the door-opening revealed everything clearly—the staircase and the landing. It was impossible to go out without being spotted, because the shaft of light went right down into the hall.

But I saw that the door was only open a trifle, and was moving slightly. Evidently somebody—Dainton, in all probability—was preparing to leave, and he had opened the door, and was just saying a few final words. Tons of people open doors before they really want to make their exit from a room.

And this gave me my chance.

Just above me, at the head of the stairs, there was a dark corner. Anybody descending the stairs would pass it, but it was in deep shadow. If I could only get there, I might remain undetected.

Anyhow, it was better than the stairs. I was in a rotten position. Dainton might come out any second, and then he'd see me. I moved up like a cat, and crouched into the corner. Fortunately I made no noise, and I was so quick that when the door opened, a moment later, I had vanished.

I'd only just been in the nick of time. I pressed myself against the wall, and prayed by the moon and the sun and the whole solar system that I shouldn't be spotted. If Dainton looked into the corner as he went by, he'd see me, as sure as the dickens.

"That's all right, Garrod," I heard Dainton saying. "Just get on with the business as I've told you. I'm going down to Southampton to-morrow by the 6.40 from Waterloo. I'll be back on Thursday. Just plod along, and don't be such an infernal pessimist! Leave details to me. We shall come to no harm."

"I wish I could believe that, sir!" exclaimed Garrod.

Dainton came down the stairs. I almost grinned. He didn't even glance into the corner, and in another minute the front door closed with a snap. I heard Garrod give a little sigh, and then the light snapped out. Garrod had closed the door.

"Now's your time, Nipper, my buck!" I muttered.

I didn't wait for further trouble to happen along. I just slid down the stairs, and then paused in the hall for about half a minute. It would be as well to let Mr. Dainton get quite out of sight.

But I'd forgotten the mist. Dainton must have been swallowed up at once. I softly opened the door and slipped out, pulling the door gently to behind. The lock clicked a trifle, but I couldn't help that. I don't suppose Garrod heard it, anyway.

Just two minutes later, I entered the gov'nor's consulting-room. I hadn't made a bloomer this time!

Nelson Lee was sitting at his desk, writing. He laid his pen down and yawned.

"You're late, young 'un!" he remarked.

I marched up to him with a flushed face.

"I've got terrific news!" I announced. "Guess what it is!"

Nelson Lee looked at me smilingly.

"Have the Dutch invaded Holland at last?"

I glared.

"I suppose you think that's funny, gov'nor—bringing out that fat-headed old chestnut when I'm bursting with real news!" I roared. "Rats to Holland! I've got news about those forged Treasury notes!"

The gov'nor chuckled.

"I'm sorry, Nipper," he said, yawning again. "Well, I give up. You shouldn't ask me to guess, you know. Tell me what you've discovered."

"What's the good of me trying to startle you?" I growled, in disgust. "You seem in a better temper than you were when I went out, anyhow, and that's a good thing. I've found out that Dainton is the culprit!"

"I understood that you were going to a picture theatre," said the gov'nor, looking keen. "Have you been making some investigations on your own, you

young rascal? Come on! Out with it! You'll burst something if you keep it in much longer!"

I poured out my yarn in a flood, and Nelson Lee listened intently.

"Quite remarkable, Nipper," he said, when I had finished. "Nevertheless, your adventure was not altogether uncommon. People have entered wrong houses by mistake on many an occasion. The remarkable part is that you should have entered the premises of Bevison, Norton & Co. at such an opportune moment. The words you overheard, young 'un, are conclusive. Paul H. Dainton, the junior partner of the firm, and Garrod, the manager, are accomplices in this great Treasury note fraud."

"And you'll act, sir?" I asked eagerly. Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I don't see how I can act yet," he replied. "We know that Dainton is the guilty man. This evidence of yours, on top of our adventure at the time of that express accident, clinches the matter finally in our minds. But the police want facts, my boy—hard facts!"

"Well, we can supply facts——"

"I think not. Your story is interesting and instructive, but the police could not arrest Dainton upon such flimsy evidence," said the gov'nor. "And if they arrested him on suspicion, that would be worse than useless. A thorough search of his papers and the firm's premises would probably be abortive."

"Then we're still stuck?" I asked disappointedly.

"By no means, Nipper. You have discovered some exceptionally valuable information," said Lee. "A general who attacks before he has laid all his plans invariably meets with disaster. We must lay our plans thoroughly, and, to begin with——"

"Yes, gov'nor?"

"To begin with, we have the interesting fact that Mr. Dainton is visiting Southampton to-morrow evening," went on Nelson Lee calmly. "It was very obliging of Mr. Dainton to refer to that matter on the stairs, Nipper. He leaves Waterloo by the 6.40 train. Why is he going to Southampton?"

"To utter another batch of notes, probably," I said.

"Exact! That is the probable explanation of his visit to the south coast," replied Nelson Lee. "It will be as well, Nipper, for us to keep an eye upon Mr.

Dainton. I think I shall leave this affair in your hands."

"Good!" I said heartily.

"Accordingly, you will also leave Waterloo by the 6.40 train to-morrow evening."

"And shadow Dainton?"

"Yes. See where he goes, and find out, if possible, what his game is."

"Right you are, sir," I said. "I'm on this like a bird!"

But I little guessed then what a strenuous time I should have of it during my short stay in the neighbourhood of Southampton. Shadowing Mr. Paul H. Dainton didn't seem to be a very exciting pastime—but it was!

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH I MEET WITH SUCCESS UP TO A CERTAIN POINT, AND THEN TRY CONCLUSIONS WITH EDWARD—AFTER THAT THINGS GET INTERESTING, AND A SCARECROW PLAYS A SURPRISING PART IN A DRAMA WHICH TURNS OUT TO BE A COMEDY.

THE 6.40 train for Southampton left Waterloo at 6.41.

This was because of a slight disagreement between the guard and a stout passenger who insisted upon kissing his wife good-bye three times. At least, I suppose it was his wife. The fact that he kissed her three times seems to cast a doubt upon it, though.

The guard was apparently a hard, lous man, for he went along the train bundled the stout passenger into his compartment, and slammed the door. Probably he made a few remarks, because I saw his lips moving. I was too far up the train to hear the nature of those remarks, however. I guessed what they were.

Anyhow, we got off, and the kissed lady waved affectionately. I sat down, grinned, and proceeded to bury myself. Not literally, of course—only in the pages of a thrilling adventure novel I'd purchased on the bookstall for the modest sum of sevenpence. To be buried for sevenpence was cheap.

I was quite contented, for everything was going O.K. I'd arrived at the station in good time, and had secured a good seat.

Mr. Dainton strolled along three minutes later, and didn't deign to look at the third-class carriages. They were



One by one we dropped into the room beneath.—(See p. 25.)

for such common people as myself. Dainton entered a first-class smoker, shoved a well-packed travelling-case upon the rack, and settled himself to read the newspaper.

He hadn't seen me, and he was quite at ease.

He seemed so contented, in fact, that I hadn't the heart to tell him that I was on his track. I wasn't disguised at all. If I couldn't shadow Dainton without letting him see me, then I'd give up the detective business altogether.

Nothing happened on the journey. I kept my eyes on the train at the various stops, but my quarry didn't show himself, and when we reached Southampton, the shades of night were falling, as the poets say.

The weather was fine and the roads dry, but the sky was very overcast, and the night promised to be a black one. This was all the better, perhaps; and as long as it didn't rain, I was contented.

My job was to find out where Dainton went, and to discover, if possible, what he did. If we had only had vague suspicions against him, this task of mine would have savoured, perhaps, of spying. But the guv'nor and I knew that Dainton was a crook, and the odds were that he was in Southampton for the purpose of handing over a fresh supply of counterfeit money to a confederate, with the ultimate object of having it put into circulation.

Under those circumstances, I was quite contented in my mission. I realised, of course, that Dainton's visit to Southampton might be quite innocent; but, from his words the previous night, this didn't seem likely.

Once outside the station, Dainton proceeded to perform a very prosaic function. He went into a restaurant and fed his face. I hung about outside, and called him a glutton and other things. Fortunately, I could see him sitting at his table near the door, and, as it was nearly dark outside, there wasn't any danger of his spotting me.

He came out at last and boarded a tramcar. I did the same, only I went inside. He'd gone on top. After a decent little ride, Dainton got off, and I was nippy this time, because if I lost sight of him I should never be able to find him again.

We were somewhere in the neighbourhood of Southampton Common, I believe. Anyhow, the district was quiet, and I

had to go jolly carefully. But Dainton hadn't the ghost of an idea that he was being followed. I could have gone as near as three yards without his suspecting.

Quite abruptly, he turned into the gateway of a large modern villa. It was a gentleman's residence, and, although the house itself was new, the garden was obviously old, for high trees grew in profusion. A short, gravel pathway led up to the somewhat insignificant porch in front of the house.

Dainton rang the electric bell and waited. I sauntered quietly by, and saw the door open.

"Ah, here you are!" exclaimed a friendly voice. "Come in, Dainton! Come in, my dear fellow! I didn't expect——"

The door closed, and I didn't hear any more. I wasn't particularly struck by what I'd heard. It seemed as though Dainton had merely come to Southampton for the purpose of a friendly call upon a genial pal. There had been nothing villainous about that greeting.

The front of the house was pitch-dark, and the blinds were up. I could just see the faint shadow of the curtains. Obviously, Dainton and his host were not sitting in the dark, so they were in a rear apartment.

I wasn't going to be done! I could see myself hanging about in the road for hours and hours. In fact, Dainton might be staying the night with his cheerful friend. It was necessary to find out something, and then clear off. If I could catch a glimpse of the two men in one of the rooms, smoking and chatting, I should know that there was nothing criminal in this affair; or, at least, I should establish the fact that Dainton wasn't in Southampton on "shady" business.

I scouted round, and then nipped over the wall at the side of the garden. In two ticks I was padding softly across the lawn, and arrived at the rear. There, glowing invitingly, I saw a lighted window. The venetian blind was down, but the slats were not fully closed. That's the worst of venetian blinds. It's so easy to leave them "open" without knowing it!

There was no sense in hanging about, and so I noiselessly approached the window. The garden was perfectly quiet, and I didn't anticipate trouble from any quarter. And when you're not antici-

pating trouble, it generally comes. That's the way of things in this troublous world. A flower-bed lay beneath the window, and I was forced to step upon it. But I didn't care a jot, for I saw something which sent my blood rushing through my veins with satisfaction.

As I said, the slats of the blind weren't properly closed. Of course, they were far from being open, or even partially open. But near the bottom of the window there was a tiny crevice between two of the slats. Upon close examination, I found that one lath had got hitched up a trifle.

Anyhow, I could squint through. I could only see about a foot of the wall opposite, and, of course, anything else that happened to be in the same line of vision. And there was something else! I saw two hands opening a travelling-case, and about seven inches of waistcoat. Dainton's waistcoat—for a cert!

But I couldn't hear a word, and I couldn't see Dainton's face, or the face of his host—just the hands and the piece of waistcoat. This was really natural, for it was apparent that Dainton had the leather case on the table before him.

"Nipper, my lad," I said inwardly, "your luck's in!"

I really spoke too soon, in the light of after events; but, to put it clearly, my luck was in one way and dead out in another. Before I could properly focus the hands and the bag, the straps were unfastened.

The hands disappeared for a moment. They went below the line of vision. Then they appeared again, and the beringed fingers were grasping a bundle of one-pound Treasury notes. Three times the hands went down, and three times they reappeared with a similar bundle.

"My hat! Here's proof!" I murmured elatedly. "Forged currency by the giddy ton! I fancy a raid on this chap's safe to-morrow. I'll have good results, and Mr. Dainton will have a bit of difficulty in explaining——"

The noise of a boot crunching on gravel sounded behind me. I turned abruptly, and was just in time to see a big figure looming up.

"Who's that there?" demanded a powerful, gruff voice.

I didn't think it necessary to answer that impertinent question. I decided that discretion was the stout for a case like this. I don't believe in asking for trouble. And that's what it would have amounted to if I'd shown fight.

I didn't show fight. I attempted fight with an "I" in it—which means flight. But I was too late—worse luck! I wasn't allowed to flee. Even before I could dodge, a hand caught hold of my shoulder.

I say a hand, but it felt more like a 28lb. weight. It just dropped on my shoulder, and I was nearly bowled over. At the same time, some exceptionally strong fingers dug themselves into my flesh.

"No, you don't, you young hound!" said the man harshly. "You're up to no good here—that's certain! I'll take you indoors, and let Mr. Peele have a look at you. Hold still, you fool!"

But I didn't hold still. I struggled desperately. I knew what it would mean if "Mr. Peele" saw me. Dainton would see me, too, and Dainton would recognise me. Then the fat would be in the fire.

There was no sense in arguing; the only thing was to get free, and then bolt for it. I couldn't see who my assailant was, but I could feel him; and I realised all at once that escape was impossible.

He was as strong as a cart-horse, and held me like a vice. And, still struggling, I was forced round the house to a side door. Just as we arrived the door opened, and Dainton and another man appeared. The latter was a tall, clean-shaven, smart-looking chap.

"What's the matter, Edward?" he asked sharply. "We heard——"

"This young shaver was outside the library window, sir," said the other, "and an awfully awkward Edward. I was just looking up the garage when I saw him come across the lawn. He was in the window——"

"George!" snarled Dainton. "Bring him inside, man—bring him inside!"

"That's right, Edward," said Mr. Peele. "Bring the rascal indoors."

Edward experienced no trouble now. I went quietly. What was the good of resisting and getting myself hurt? My shoulders were black and blue already. Edward's fingers were like steel teeth. I'm pretty strong and agile myself; but I'm not superhuman. It was impossible to escape from this burly rotter. I judged him to be Mr. Peele's chauffeur. But he'd missed his vocation, he ought to have been a strong man in a circus.

I found myself inside the room I'd been squinting into. It was nicely furnished, and I went on to the door, which was a

big, burly fellow, with quite an honest face. I believe he was honest, too. And I didn't blame him for collaring me. After all, he'd only done his duty.

"Leave the fellow here, Edward," said Mr. Peele huskily. "I'll call you later. You shall have a sovereign for your smartness."

"Thank you, sir," said the gratified Edward. "I thought it best to grab the young scamp. He was up to no good, I'll be bound. Scoutin' for some burglars, as like as not. Maybe I'd better fetch a policeman——"

"No, no, no!" snapped Dainton sharply. "We'll attend to the fellow, Edward. We—we don't mean to be harsh with him. We'll give him a talking to, and then let him go. You can leave us now."

Edward withdrew, closing the door after him. I stood in the room straightening my collar. I was quite cool now, and fully determined to keep my eyes open for any chance of escape.

Dainton and Peele, of course, guessed that I had seen those pretty little imitation currency notes—and their nerves consequently, were on edge. I was just about to make a casual remark when Dainton strode up to me, jerked my face up, and glared into it.

"Great heavens! This—this lad is Nipper!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"Nipper?" echoed the other man.

"Nelson Lee's youngster!" snarled Dainton.

Peele swore furiously, and turned pale. I felt rather flattered. These men were rather afraid of me, anyhow. But the looks they bestowed upon me were not altogether reassuring.

So far as I could see, Mr. Peele was quite a respectable gentleman—outwardly. He evidently lived in good style. Edward was the chauffeur, of course, and I'm pretty sure he knew nothing about his master's shady dealings. He'd merely collared me because I was trespassing.

But now I was alone with Peele and his visitor. They knew that I was Nelson Lee's assistant—and they did not attempt to hide their confusion and fury. They knew, in a moment, that their little game was "kiboshed." They probably had visions of the Old Bailey and prison cells and stone quarries; and visions of that sort are rather calculated to make a man desperate.

Dainton partially recovered himself.

"What were you doing outside this window?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Oh, nothing!" I replied. "Just hanging about, you know." Then I grinned. "Look here, Mr. Dainton, what's the good of beating about the bush? If you hand me in charge for trespassing you won't do yourself any good. Better let me go——"

"Yes, I shall let you go!" snarled Dainton bitterly. "That is likely, isn't it? What did you see? You infernal fool, Peele! That blind was not closed properly! This young spy must have seen——" He paused.

"Must have seen what?" I asked. "Were you up to something crooked, then?"

Dainton didn't answer. I could see that he was panic-stricken, and I didn't like the look in his eyes. He was looking dangerous. The door was locked, so I couldn't make a bolt for it. And yelling wouldn't be any good.

The two men, very white about the gills, stood by the fireplace, talking in low tones. I couldn't hear anything that Peele said, but I could see by his looks that he was scared "to death," as the Yanks say.

Then Dainton started, and a few of his words came across the room to me:

"... we let Nipper escape ... game will be up, Peele. ... Everything at stake ... must act drastically ... his life or our liberty!"

Peele looked terribly frightened. These last words of Dainton's were not exactly pleasant. My life or their liberty! Surely they weren't contemplating murder? Yet the situation was so acute that Dainton was quite capable of any crime. He was desperate, and would probably act hurriedly and with decision.

He saw himself in convict's garb, and that startled him. He'd commit murder rather than—— I paused in my thoughts. Dainton was talking again. He apparently thought that I couldn't hear.

"We must, Peele—we simply must!" he whispered. "Don't be an infernal coward, man! We can ... motor-car ... lay him on road ... leave him there ... he'll be found ... morning ... thought to be an ordinary accident ... truth will never be known ..."

"Good heavens!" Peele gasped. "We can't, Dainton—it's too awful!"

Dainton went on talking, and Peele

gradually lost his expression of horror and fright. These men, after all, were not professional criminals. In this moment of peril, however, they were determined to save their skins at all cost.

I was grim. A motor-car! I was to be taken to a quiet spot, I judged, and then run down in cold blood! In the morning I should be discovered, and it would be assumed by the police that I'd been run down by a passing car!

Well, I'd have something to say when they commenced their vile operations. Peele, I saw, was being talked over by his stronger-willed companion, and very soon the pair were nodding together. They'd come to some decision, and, although they were still pale, they looked more at ease.

Dainton turned to me suddenly.

"We're going to let you go free, you young rascal," he said.

"That's very kind of you," I replied calmly—"but I don't believe it!"

Dainton laughed.

"My dear Nipper," he said, coming over to me, "you seem to doubt——"

He didn't say any more, for at that moment he dealt me a treacherous, cowardly blow. I'll admit freely that I wasn't expecting anything of the sort. Dainton had acted well, and he gave no hint of his dastardly intention.

While he was speaking he brought his right hand up. I caught a flash of something—it looked like a heavy glass paper-weight—and then, as I attempted to dodge, the thing came down on my head with a terrific thud.

Not being in a fit state to see what happened immediately afterwards, I'll skip about half-an-hour. I can't fill this gap in, because I was in the land of dreams during that half-hour—or, at least, in the land of nightmares.

The whack had been a beauty, as whacks go. When I came to myself I was aware of a jolting sensation, and a low hum sounded in my ears. I lay quite still, and gathered my wits.

This didn't take me long, for Dainton's cowardly blow, although severe, had not been dangerous. My head felt as though it were splitting, and there was a fearful throbbing inside my brain. But in less than two minutes after recovering my wits I knew that I was in a motor car.

I was being taken to the scene of execution!

That's what it amounted to, anyhow.

Everything came back to me. I didn't move, and I didn't open my eyes. Evidently my captors thought that I was still unconscious, and if I let them see that I wasn't I should be whacked a second time. By pretending to be stunned I should certainly hold the advantage.

In fact, instead of being alarmed, I was quite amused. I began to see that the situation was not desperate—or it would not be desperate if I acted my part all right.

The car was going fairly quickly, but nobody was talking. Perhaps Dainton was alone. I didn't open my eyes to see, anyhow. That would have been dangerous—and it was unnecessary. I was unconscious, don't forget, and chaps who are unconscious don't open their eyes.

So I contented myself with thinking over the events of the evening. This fearfully drastic step of Dainton's proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the situation, from his point of view, was desperate. In fact, "there was no doubt, no possible doubt, no possible, probable shadow of doubt"—as Sir W. S. Gilbert says—that Dainton was the author of the Treasury note forgeries.

After I had been bowled over, Dainton and Peele had evidently fetched the motor-car out—Peele's car, of course. Edward, the chauffeur, was certainly not in this grim business. He'd gone home, I expect. And Peele would have some yarn or other for him in the morning. When I was found dead on the road there would be nothing to connect the tragedy with Peele and his visitor.

But there wasn't going to be a tragedy, if I could help it. It had been neatly arranged that I should play the principal part in the tragedy. I'm not conceited, though—I didn't hanker after playing the principal part.

At last, being curious, I peeped through my nearly closed eyelids, and just saw that I was in the tonneau of the car, which was an open one. Somebody's feet were close against me—Peele's, I reckoned. Dainton was driving. Or perhaps it was the other way about.

Quite suddenly the throttle was closed, and I heard the brakes grinding. The car came to a stop.

"This place'll do," I heard Dainton exclaim. "Very lovely just here, and

"We can see a mile in either direction. The road's as clear as a desert. Now, Peele, we shall have to be quick."

"It's a ghastly business, Dainton," said Peele huskily.

"Confound you, man, don't croak now!"

The two jumped out, and then I was dragged into the road. My heart was beating hard now. Discovery would mean death—I knew that right enough. My only hope lay in keeping still. Once the rotters found out that I was conscious, the game would be up.

I decided to jump up suddenly, and make a dash for the fields. In the darkness I should stand a chance of eluding my pursuers. But I didn't act just yet. Dainton was bending right over me as I lay in the dust of the road.

"Is he coming round?" I heard Peele ask.

"No. The boy's still insensible," said Dainton. "I'm glad of that; I don't want to stun him again. It's a rotten business, Peele, but it's got to be done. We'll take the car a hundred yards up the road, and then come back at full speed. Your car's heavy, and I'll steer the two off-side wheels right over him. He'll be kill——"

Peele nearly choked.

"Don't talk about it, man!" he panted. "Get it over!"

I nearly chuckled with glee. I wasn't a bit nervous now. Why, the whole thing was comic. They were going to leave me in the road—unconscious—while they went with the car a hundred yards up. Then they were coming back at full tilt with the generous intention of flattening me out. As soon as the car left me all I had to do was to get up and walk away!

It was rather unkind, perhaps, to disappoint my cheerful companions, but that couldn't be helped. I wondered what they'd say when they rushed back and found the road bare and desolate and Nipper-less.

I heard them get into the car, and I opened my eyes.

The automobile was just moving off. It was a huge touring car, with steel-studded tyres as fat as young balloons. The car must have weighed tons, and with the two off-side wheels—front and back—running over me, I should have been squashed as flat as a steel plate. Death would have been certain, anyhow. For, of course, Dainton would steer the

wheels right over my chest, or my neck, or perhaps right over my napper.

The night was pitchy black. I saw the rear-light of the car disappearing down the road. And then I acted. I hopped to my feet and dived clean into the hedge beside the road. I faintly saw a gap, and smashed through it. My idea was to crouch behind the hedge and watch. I was as safe as eggs now. They'd never be able to recapture me in that darkness.

Although my head was aching, my brain was as clear as crystal. And I got a bit of a shock a second later. On the other side of the hedge there was a field of cabbages, or mangels, or something. And, right before me, a man was standing! He was motionless, and stood there as though petrified.

Then I realised the truth. It wasn't a man at all—the thing was a scarecrow! It was a good 'un. The legs and arms were stuffed, and a turnip did excellent duty for a face, with an old cap on the top of it. The whole figure was clothed in a mouldy tweed suit.

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

A wild, weird notion had come to me. I gazed up the road, and saw that the motor-car hadn't turned yet. It was just on the point of doing so. What made me perform the act I don't know. It must have been the spirit of mischief within me, which, the gov'nor says, is always near the surface.

Anyhow, I grabbed the scarecrow, jerked it off its stake, and dashed back through the hedge into the road. A glance showed me that the car was half-turned. It was a good two hundred yards away.

The scarecrow was fairly heavy, and I laid it in the middle of the road, broad-side on, just as I had been lying. Then I dived through the gap once more, chuckling hugely. This affair was rather humorous, I thought.

Even in that perilous moment—or it would have been perilous if I hadn't recovered my wits—my sense of humour came to the fore. I could just see the scarecrow lying in the road. I grinned at it.

"Won't Dainton be surprised!" I chuckled. "He'll think he's run over me for the first second. Then, when he discovers the shocking truth, he'll have about ten fits! My hat! What a lark!"

I simply couldn't be serious. This affair, which had promised to be a grim

drama, was turning out to be a farcical comedy. I pictured Dainton's face when he found that he'd "killed" a scarecrow!

The big car was rushing down the road now. It wasn't going at full speed, by any means; but the rotters apparently preferred to get the "job" over quickly. One crunch, and I should be finished with. That was the cheerful idea.

The car came on, its headlights rather dim, but powerful enough to show up the still figure in the road. Dainton was steering, and he controlled the car so that the off-side wheels made straight for my "manly chest." As it happened, that chest was only composed of straw, or hay, or something equally as soft. Any amount of running-over wouldn't kill it—although the farmer might say things when he found his beautiful scarecrow so ill-used. But that was his trouble.

Whizz! Crunch!

The wheels caught the figure fairly and squarely. The car shot past, and I caught a vision of the poor scarecrow lying mangled against the opposite hedge. It had been hurled there with the force of the collision. And I also saw Peele's white face staring out over the side of the tonneau.

Then the car roared on, gathering speed. The red rear light grew smaller and smaller, and the hum of the engine dwindled away. I simply stared down the road in sheer amazement.

Dainton and Peele had gone straight on!

"Great Jupiter!" I roared aloud. "They—they think—— Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!" I doubled myself up and roared with laughter. I couldn't help it. My trick had been a hundred-fold more successful than I had ever hoped for. In spite of the grim nature of the whole affair, I just howled with merriment. It was the funniest thing I'd seen for months.

Dainton and Peele actually thought that they had performed their dread work! In the dimness, Dainton hadn't seen that the object on the road was nothing but a stuffed dummy! I'd never dreamed of this.

Dainton's mistake was natural enough. How on earth could he have guessed that a substitution had been made? He'd seen the figure, and he'd run clean over it, and Peele had seen it hurled aside, mangled and battered. The

two rotters thought that I had been killed!

There wasn't any need to stop the car and view the result of their villainy. Considering the weight of the car, and the fact that the wheels had gone right over the figure's chest, death had been certain.

And so Dainton had sped straight on. He hadn't the pluck to stop and make certain. And, besides, it would have been unnecessary. That's what he thought, at all events.

I was hugely pleased.

For, of course, this result was highly satisfactory. Dainton assumed that I was as dead as a door-nail, and that he was safe. Naturally, he would feel a sense of security which was absolutely false.

The hour wasn't late, as I soon found. And I started trudging along the road with the intention of reaching the nearest town or village—for, of course, I didn't know where I was.

And luck favoured me again—Luck with a capital "L." Considering everything, I decided that this particular night was my birthday—if that's not too Irish.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH I REPORT TO THE GUV'NOR, AND HE AND I AND DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR MORLEY GO FOR A RAMBLE ON THE TILES BY WAY OF A CHANGE—WE INTERVIEW MR. DAVID GARROD, AND THEN WAIT UP TO WELCOME MR. PAUL H. DANTON, WHO IS EXPECTED.

I was just 1.30 a.m. when I stepped out of an express at Waterloo. By this time I was feeling as fit as a fiddle. My head was aching still, but not badly. That blow had been severe, but I'm a tough beggar. That's the best of having a thick skull. The guv'nor's always saying that I've got a thick head, so I suppose he's right. He ought to know.

Fortune had smiled upon me. Five minutes after I'd started trudging along the road after that scarecrow-killing comedy, a big motor-car had come along—not Peele's car, you see, not your boots. I stopped the speed merchant, and found that the car was in charge of a chauffeur only.

He was going to Winchester, which is just about twelve miles from Southampton. The spot where the "murder" had been committed was only five miles from

Winchester. The obliging chauffeur gave me a lift, and I arrived at the station in time to catch an express for London.

That wasn't bad at all; in fact, it was distinctly good. And by half-past one I was at Waterloo, and long before two o'clock I was home, having romped to Gray's Inn Road in a taxi.

I wondered what Dainton was thinking at that time. Probably he was suffering from fits of horrid remorse at his fearful crime.

Nelson Lee was in the consulting-room, wearing no collar and a ragged dressing-gown. I thought I'd dropped into a casual ward for a moment. He was smoking a dirty old brier, and one of his socks had a hole in the heel.

"Hallo, Nipper!" he said, laying down some documents he'd been looking into. "You're home early. I didn't expect you before breakfast."

"Pity you can't chuck that mouldy old dressing-gown away, sir," I said. "You've had it about fifty-five years, more or less!"

"My dear Nipper, I consider comfort above all else," said the guv'nor. "Well, what's the result of your trip? You are looking cheery enough! Do I see a bump on your forehead, young 'un?"

"You do!" I said. "And I feel it, too—and that's more to the point! Guv'nor, I've been murdered in cold blood!"

"Apparently you thrive on the treatment."

"Anyhow, Dainton thinks he's murdered me," I amended.

And I squatted down, and told Nelson Lee exactly what had occurred. He listened with great interest to my report. His eyes gleamed when I spoke about the bundles of currency notes, and he looked grim after that. A sparkle of amusement entered his eyes as I referred to the "murdering" incident.

"That was a cute trick of yours, Nipper," he said approvingly. "In fact, a master-stroke. I congratulate you, my boy. You had to use your wits pretty quickly to grasp——"

"Hold on, sir!" I grinned. "I only did it for a joke, you know. I didn't guess that Dainton and Peele would make such a bloomer. My idea was to give them good value for their money—that's all. It seemed a pity to disappoint them, so I shoved the scarecrow in my place. But they not only accepted the bait, but swallowed it whole!"

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"You've done splendidly, Nipper!" he said quietly.

I didn't want better praise than that, and I flushed a little with pleasure. When I please the guv'nor, I'm happy; and when I displease him, I'm miserable. As he'll tell anybody, I don't often displease him, and so I'm seldom miserable.

"I have been thinking deeply on this Treasury matter, Nipper," said the guv'nor. "I have arrived at certain conclusions, too. I have not been idle during your absence. It is my belief that Dainton and Garrod are partners in this great fraud. Mr. Bevison, I have reason to believe, is an honourable man. He is abroad, and has no idea that his famous old firm is being prostituted by a scoundrel whom he has very foolishly taken into partnership."

"Oh! You think Mr. Bevison's innocent?"

"I am sure of it. Dainton had succeeded in getting Bevison out of the country, and the engraving works are being used for the purpose of producing counterfeit currency," said Nelson Lee. "And I further believe that several contracts with South American Republics have been allowed to lapse in order to secure the paper for the manufacture of the false currency. It is even possible that Dainton had faked up evidence to the effect that consignments of bank-notes have been sent to the bottom of the Atlantic by enemy submarines. This would give him large stocks of paper to use for unlawful purposes. Whatever he has done, he has done it so cleverly that the police were unable to detect any flaw. Your story, Nipper, clinches the matter. We must act—and act at once!"

"To-night?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes, to-night!"

"How? What are we going to do, guv'nor?"

"It is obvious that Garrod, the manager, is responsible for the actual printing of the counterfeit stuff," went on Nelson Lee. "He can't work in the daytime, for then the usual business of the firm is being transacted. I have learned that Garrod never enters the offices until two o'clock in the afternoon. What is he doing all the morning?"

"Sleeping!" I said promptly.

"Exactly! Having worked during the night at the machines, producing the bad money, he naturally required rest," said Nelson Lee. "It is highly probable

that Garrod is at this minute engaged in his nefarious task. We are going to find out, Nipper. We are going to break into Messrs. Bevison, Norton & Co.'s premises!"

"Any old thing!" I said. "I'm game! I've been murdered to-night, so I don't care!"

The guv'nor smiled and crossed to the telephone. He rang up the Yard, and was soon talking with Detective-Inspector Morley. He merely asked the worthy inspector to come round at once.

Within fifteen minutes, Morley was on the spot, and by that time Nelson Lee had dressed himself decently. He told Morley everything, and ended up by saying that he intended paying a surprise visit on Mr. David Garrod.

"It is possible that Dainton will return to-night, after what occurred near Southampton," said Nelson Lee. "He will be upset and worried. Well, Morley, I want to catch these scoundrels red-handed. Dainton may decide to give up the whole business, being sick of it all, and then we should never lay fingers on him; for he would, of course, destroy all evidence."

The inspector scratched his head.

"It's a bit steep, breaking in," he said doubtfully. "Of course, if we find the evidence, it will be all right. But we haven't any authority to force our way into Bevison's place. I haven't got a search-warrant—"

"My dear fellow, under the circumstances drastic measure are permissible," said the guv'nor. "Nipper's key—and mine, too, I suppose—happens to fit Bevison's private door, so we've only got to walk in."

"Oh, all right! It'll be a feather in my cap if this thing turns out well," said Morley. "I must say you've been doing wonders! Dainton's certainly the crook we're after—we can't locate him!"

"Oh, when we get busy, we do things!" I remarked genially.

The inspector didn't quite like that, but he only grinned.

In another minute we were all outside the private door of Bevison, Norton & Co.'s premises. But the door wouldn't budge. It was bolted on the inside! We hadn't considered that possibility.

"That's done it!" I said, with a grunt. "We're diddled!"

"Not at all, Nipper," remarked Nelson Lee. "There is the roof."

"The roof?" said Morley.

"That portion of a building which protects the remainder from the weather," explained the guv'nor humorously. "It happens, Morley, that this house is situated in the same block as my own. There are skylights, and the leads are quite easily crossed. We can easily get into this place."

And so we went into our own place again, mounted to the top landing, and then went up into a little, disused attic. There was one of Mrs. Jones's trunks lying there, though, and we used this to stand on in order to reach the skylight.

I went through first, and the others followed. It was nice and fresh up there at nearly three o'clock in the morning—and nasty and dirty, too! We got across the intervening roofs without any trouble at all. Once the inspector skidded and nearly dived head-first into Gray's Inn Road, but that was only a detail. Curiously enough, old Morley seemed quite concerned for the minute. He didn't think it a detail at all.

Well, we got to the skylight, and had no difficulty in opening it. It was an old thing, anyhow.

Nelson Lee flashed his light below, and we saw a fairly big room, lumbered up with all sorts of kelter—packages and bundles and disused stock.

One by one we dropped on to the room beneath.

Nelson Lee led the way out of the room, and we found that it opened out upon a tiny landing. We were in the private portion of the building, where Garrod lived.

If the guv'nor's surmise was correct, the manager was now far below, in the workshops. We descended the stairs, and at length arrived upon the landing I had seen previously. From beneath one of the doors came a stream of light.

We crept forward, and applied his light to the keyhole. He remained still for a few moments, and then rose.

"Come on—together!" he muttered.

As he spoke, he opened the door and strode into the apartment. We followed his example. I caught a glimpse of David Garrod seated at a desk on the other side of the room. He pushed his chair back and swung round.

"Who—what—what does this mean?" he stammered, turning deathly pale.

"My name is Morley—I am from Scotland Yard!" he said grimly. "Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Garrod, but it was

necessary. In short, we suspect that you are concerned with the uttering of forged currency notes——"

"What nonsense is this?" snapped Mr. Garrod angrily.

"If it will interest you at all, we are acting upon definite information," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "Mr. Morley was wrong when he said that we suspect you. We don't suspect, Mr. Garrod—we know!"

"I—I'm afraid you will have to pay dearly for this unwarrantable intrusion," said the manager, keeping his composure with difficulty. "It is not for me to resist, seeing that you are three to one; but if you can find any evidence of what you say on these premises, you're welcome to it. I warn you, however, that you will have to answer for your conduct!"

Morley looked a bit doubtful.

"What do you think, Mr. Lee?" he asked. "Under the circumstances——"

"Under the circumstances," said the gov'nor deliberately. "I am going to search these premises, Morley. This action on our part may be somewhat high-handed, but we have ample justification. Mr. Garrod, I wish you to regard yourself as under arrest for the time being——"

"On what authority?" snapped Garrod fiercely.

"On my authority," replied Lee. "I am ready to answer for the result of to-night's work. Keep your eyes on this gentleman, Morley! I should never act as I am doing unless I was positively convinced of my facts."

I grinned a bit. We had certainly carried off the thing with a very high hand, but it was the only thing to do. The gov'nor meant to get to the root of this business straight away, and then it would be proved that he had plenty of justification. The very fact that my life had been attempted by Dainton was significant.

Nelson Lee looked on the table against which Garrod had been sitting. He picked up a flimsy sheet of paper, and I looked at it with him. It was a telegram—a night telegram—and apparently it had only just arrived.

"This must have come while we were on the roof," murmured the gov'nor. "It's a special telegram, as you see, Nipper. From Southampton, too."

"Am coming London immediately. Arrive three-thirty.—D."

"That's rather interesting, eh, my lad?"

"Dainton's coming to London by a night train!" I exclaimed. "That's the result of our little tiff, of course. Dainton's feeling a bit nervy. He'll be surprised when he sees me again!"

Garrod glared at us.

"You have not seen Mr. Dainton to-night?" he exclaimed, startled.

"Haven't I?" I said sweetly. "That just shows how little you know. Mr. Garrod. If you take my advice—and it's good advice—you'll own up straight away, and avoid unpleasantness. You're booked for penal servitude, anyhow!"

"You infernal young fool!" snarled Garrod.

But he was startled, all the same. You see, he didn't know what had happened, and that made him thundering uneasy. But he still stuck to his indignant "don't-know-anything-about-it" attitude. He confessed complete ignorance of the forgeries.

Leaving Morley with the prisoner, the gov'nor and I searched the premises hurriedly, but we couldn't find anything. It was now about ten past three, and Nelson Lee suddenly gripped my arm.

"An idea, Nipper!" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming. "Dainton will be here in twenty minutes. Unless we adopt some ruse, we shall very probably draw a blank—and that will be disastrous. Having gone so far, we simply must make good."

"What's the wheeze, gov'nor?" I asked eagerly.

"Well, I don't think it will be wise to continue our search," said Lee. "We haven't got time, young 'un—we can't do anything in twenty minutes. But if Dainton arrives, and finds Garrod alone, he'll probably tell the whole story—the story of what happened at Southampton——"

"But he won't find Garrod alone, gov'nor," I protested.

"I shall be Garrod," said the gov'nor.

"You!" I gasped.

"Exactly. I shall have to make up hurriedly, but I think I can manage the trick," said Nelson Lee crisply. "Then, my dear Nipper, we shall have the excellent Mr. Dainton in a cleft stick. He will probably tell me everything—thinking that I am Garrod. You and Morley will be concealed, and will hear the confession. That will be sufficient, I think, to warrant an immediate arrest."

"Rather!" I exclaimed excitedly.
 "But can we do it in time?"
 "We'll try, at all events!"

And the gov'nor got busy straight off. It looked as though some excitement was in store.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH MR. DANTON IS VERY OBLIGING—HE INCRIMINATES HIMSELF HOPELESSLY—AND THEN THE EXCITEMENT STARTS—THE GUV'NOR IS BOWLED OVER, AND I NEARLY SHARE THE SAME FATE, BUT OLD MORLEY BUTTS IN, AND EVERYTHING IS O.K.

MR. PAUL H. DANTON arrived five minutes late—that is, at twenty-five minutes to four. The first grey streaks of dawn were appearing as he let himself in by the front door.

Of course, Garrod had unbolted the door when the telegram had arrived.

For the last twenty-five minutes we had all been tremendously busy. To begin with, we'd rushed round to our own rooms, taking Garrod with us. Fortunately, he took things calmly, and didn't resist.

And Nelson Lee, in his own consulting-room, quickly transformed himself into a second edition of Garrod. Of course, he couldn't do it thoroughly—there wasn't time—but when he'd finished he looked amazingly like our captive. Garrod himself was amazed.

Then the gov'nor made him strip off his coat and waistcoat, which were of a distinctive pattern, and Lee donned them himself. Meanwhile, Morley had rung up to the nearest police-station for a couple of men to be sent round.

These worthy gentlemen of the force arrived just as the work had finished, and the three of us were left in the consulting-room in charge of Garrod, while we rushed back to Messrs. Dainton, Norton & Co.'s premises. It was quick work, and no mistake, but we managed it all right. Just one breathless rush. For if we didn't get finished by the time Dainton arrived the whole plan would be messed up.

But we did get finished in time, so what's the good of talking? I shall be accused of writing stuff just to fill up the lines. Real authors do that, of course; it's a regular practice. Some books could do with cutting down to half their length. But

I'm never long-winded—I always put everything terse and sharp.

But it strikes me that I'd better get on with the yarn. As I said, Dainton came at three-thirty-five. Everything was in readiness for him. Morley and I were safely concealed. I was in a cupboard, and Morley squeezed himself behind a heavy book-case which was placed across a corner. The gov'nor and I shifted the book-case back, so that the poor old inspector was a prisoner. But he could hear everything all right, and that was all that mattered.

Nelson Lee had arranged the electric light in such a way that he would be able to sit in shade, while Dainton would be in the glare of light. So he couldn't see things too plainly. And the gov'nor, of course, could imitate Garrod's voice as easily as winking.

Lee was sitting down in the chair before the desk, reading. I heard Dainton coming up the stairs; then he entered the room hurriedly, and closed the door behind him with an unnecessary slam. Obviously, Mr. Dainton was agitated. What he saw did not make him suspicious in the least. Garrod, his manager, was seated, and the room was otherwise empty. Dainton couldn't know that thirteen stone of solid humanity was squeezed behind the book-case, and a few other stone packed into the cupboard.

"Why, what's the matter, sir?" asked Garrod.

If I hadn't known the truth I should have sworn that the voice was Garrod's. The gov'nor's a masterpiece at that sort of thing, and although he hadn't heard the manager's voice for more than half an-hour, he mimicked it with amazing accuracy.

"You may well ask what the matter is?" exclaimed Dainton huskily. "Look here, Garrod, this business is going to finish—to night! I've come here to destroy everything in the way of evidence. It's got to be completed before the morning. There must be absolutely nothing to show that the forged Treasury notes emanated from this establishment!"

I grinned to myself. Dainton had given himself away in the first minute. Three of us had heard him openly confess that he was responsible for the forgeries. It was a good start, to say the least. But better was to come.

"What has happened, sir?" asked the gov'nor, in a startled voice. "You

weren't like that when you left for Southampton——"

I heard Dainton pace up and down the room erratically.

"I'll tell you what has happened, Garrod!" he exclaimed fiercely. "That interfering brute, Nelson Lee, is on our trail——"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Nelson Lee, wondering. I daresay, how he could be on his own trail.

"Don't get panicky, you fool!" snapped Dainton, who was pretty panicky himself. "I tell you we're safe so long as we destroy every atom of evidence before the morning. Lee's assistant—Nipper, they call him—followed me to Southampton, and saw me handing the notes to Peele. Nipper's dead now!"

"You—you don't mean——"

"Hang you, Garrod, don't snivel!" snarled Dainton furiously. "The thing had to be done. You don't want to go to penal servitude, do you? Nipper couldn't be allowed to go free with the knowledge he had gained."

"You—you killed him?"

"Yes. It was necessary!" panted Dainton. "Heaven knows, I didn't want to go to such lengths, Garrod, but I had to—I had to!"

"It's a funny thing, but I didn't feel at all dead."

And I was hugely elated. Dainton had put his foot into it properly. Whatever he said afterwards would be useless. And, again, Dainton very kindly obliged. Under the circumstances he couldn't very well do anything else.

Perhaps if he had been thoroughly cool he would have detected the slight difference in Garrod. But he was hugely agitated, and wasn't likely to detect the fraud—especially as the guv'nor was in the shadow.

"Come with me!" said Dainton sharply. "The first thing, Garrod, is to destroy all the notes we have in hand. We'll go to the basement at once and start on the work. Move yourself, man! There's no danger so long as we get everything cleared up before the police can take action."

As the police had taken action already, that remark of Dainton's was rather useless. But he didn't know it. I heard the guv'nor get up from his chair, and then the two men left the room.

"I'm in this!" I muttered to myself. "I can't leave the guv'nor all by himself."

"I left the cupboard, and stepped quietly across the room, forgetting all about poor old Morley behind the bookcase. He couldn't get out until that heavy article of furniture was shifted."

I caught a glimpse of Nelson Lee's back disappearing along a passage, which presumably led to the business part of the establishment. Dainton, of course, was leading the way. I followed on behind in absolute silence.

We went down some stairs, and then into a little office, and from this into the workshops. Dainton switched on one or two lights as we proceeded, but only small, shaded ones.

At last we came to a heavy door. This was opened, and Dainton and the guv'nor disappeared down some stone steps into the spacious basement. This was brilliantly illuminated, and I wondered if the guv'nor would be spotted. I daren't go down after them, but watched from the top.

I saw Dainton bend down and insert a tiny key into something which looked like a small crack. Then a portion of the matchboard lining of the basement swung open, and a black cavity was revealed.

"My hat!" I thought. "A secret cellar, or something!"

I heard a switch click, and Dainton plunged into the secret cellar. The guv'nor followed hard on his heels. And I, not to be outdone, descended into the basement.

The trick door had been left open, and I peeped round it. I looked into a small cellar, which was even more brilliantly illuminated than the basement itself. There was a small plate-proving machine, and lots of other things which had obviously been used for the production of squiffy currency notes.

"Now, Garrod," said Dainton sharply, "fetch out those——"

Then he paused suddenly and stared hard at the supposed Garrod. And he saw that something was wrong. But what did it matter, anyhow? He'd led us to the very place we wanted to find, and exposure didn't matter a rap now.

"Why—good heavens——!"

Dainton gasped out the words, and then brought his fist round with swinging force. The guv'nor wasn't quite prepared for the blow, although he dodged. Dainton's fist caught him just below the ear, and he went down with a thud.

Before Lee could rise Paul Dainton rushed up the stairs at full tilt. Then he slammed the door with a crash, and stood panting feverishly. If he thought that he was safe now, he was very soon enlightened upon that point.

"Hands up, please!" I exclaimed briskly.

The fellow turned round with a gasp, and found himself looking into my revolver. I thought it was as well to prevent him getting away. He'd be needed at the Old Bailey when the trial came on.

"Nipper!" he panted wildly.

I believe he went mad then. I had been expecting him to fall in a faint at seeing me alive. But he didn't. He just flung himself at me with the fury of a wild cat. My revolver went off with a deafening report, and the bullet tried to bore a hole through the ceiling of the basement.

Then we struggled. Great Scott! It was a terrific struggle, too. Dainton was in the last stage of desperation, and I soon saw that there wasn't much chance for me. He knocked me right and left, but I clung to him like a leech.

At last, however, he had me down. I fancied I heard a dull crash from somewhere in the distance. Dainton had his knee upon my chest, and he held me down to the floor. Then, after he had regained his breath, he suddenly leapt to his feet and made a bolt for the steps leading up into the workshops.

At that second there was a scuffle of footsteps, and the inspector himself came pelting down. There was a terrific collision at the top of the stairs, and Dainton tumbled down from top to bottom, and lay groaning. He was completely knocked out of time by that fall.

"You young rascal!" roared

Inspector Morley, glaring at me. "Why in thunder didn't you help me out of that corner before you came down? I heard your shot—or somebody's shot—and hurled the book-case completely over!"

"Jolly good thing you did," I gasped dazedly. "My hat! We've had some excitement; but everything's O.K."

And everything was O.K.

Dainton hadn't hurt himself much by that fall, but he had been quite finished, so far as fighting went. We got the gov'nor out easily enough, of course, and then our prisoner was marched away.

The whole truth came out, of course. It seemed that some months before Mr. Bevison, who was then "the firm," became acquainted with Paul H. Dainton, who was a remarkably clever engraver. At first the junior partner had proved himself to be a particularly clever man, and Bevison had trusted him to the last letter.

Then, while Mr. Bevison was away abroad, on the firm's legitimate business, Dainton had played the traitor. The senior partner, of course, was totally innocent of wrong-doing, and knew nothing of the actual facts until it all came out after the arrests.

Dainton, with the help of Garrod, the treacherous manager, had used the firm's plant, paper, etc.—and its good name protected him—for the purpose of producing false Treasury notes.

Without the up-to-date machinery belonging to the famous old firm Dainton could never have achieved his scoundrelly purpose. As it was, the only reward he received for his baseness was a nice little stretch of penal servitude. And Garrod's reward was of the same choice variety. And so was Peele's.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK Will Appear the First Story of
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TOM CRAWLEY, champion light-weight boxer, is a boy stoker on board *H.M.S. Flyer*. Whilst on leave he learns that his father's fishing smack has been torpedoed. It promises to go hard with Fisherman Crawley, until

DAN SIMMONS, an old friend of the lad, and proprietor of a well-known boxing hall, shows a way out of the difficulty by offering Tom a fight with Jimmy Yowl, famous bantam-weight. The offer is accepted. Leave for the contest being refused, Tom takes "French leave." He wins the fight, and on leaving the hall is arrested as a deserter. Eventually he is pardoned.

Soon after the event, German battle-ships bombard the coast of England, and the *Flyer* goes into action.

(Now read on.)

A HOT CHASE.

LIKE a thing of life the *Flyer* dashed onward. Tom Crawley had been with her on trial trips, when she had made her record speed, but he seriously doubted whether she had ever moved at the pace she was making now.

On she flashed, on, on. The crew could hear the distant echoing guns, but they could see nothing, not even the line of the coast they had just left. Overhead dark clouds hung. Ashore no sign of a light was to be seen. From the strengthening swell Tom knew that they were steering far out to sea, which meant that they were attempting to get between the enemy destroyers and the Belgian coast, so as to cut them off.

Tomkins was full of fight, eagerly looking forward to the crash that he said was bound to come.

"Attack 'em in their own nests, sink 'em every time they come out, say I."

he cried. "And if ever I get a chance at a Hun——" The way he drew and swept his sharpened cutlass round told the rest.

There would be small chance for any Hun that ran foul of that highly-tempered blade.

Captain Walsh and his first officer were on the bridge.

Every man was at his post. The guns were ready to bark at sight of the enemy. The chief engineer was down below urging the stokers on to do their best. Too many raiders had stolen out from the viper's nest at Zeebrugge and shelled the British coast of late for the peace of mind of the active officers of the British Navy.

They were as anxious to force a fighting chance against the tip-and-run rascals from Flanders as any of their men.

On swept the *Flyer*, for an hour or more, and then a word was given, and the searchlights streamed out across the sea.

They moved to right and left, wavered, and then focussed in a silver arc upon the object they were searching for.

As the *Flyer* rose on the swell Tom's eager eyes, straining into the glare of light, copied two enemy craft, for they were certainly not British, being too high for'ard for that, speeding for dear life to the south-east.

He could see them leap and dip, roll and swerve, sometimes almost driving clear of the water it seemed, and spurning the spray forty feet into the air.

Boom! One of the *Flyer's* guns spoke, and the destroyer trembled from stem to stern. Boom! Boom! Boom!

At regular intervals the guns spat fire, smoke, and noise, and the shells went hurtling over the sea. Tom could see them burst, the flash and report thrilling him.

Here was no target practice now, but the real thing. Good old *Flyer*! Good

old British Navy! Why don't you make a stand, Fritz, and fight it out like a man?

Ah! The Germans, in their mad retreat, were firing, too, hoping against hope, maybe, to stop the pursuit.

Tom's heart beat fast now, and a lump rose in his throat, almost choking him, and a nervous tremor stirred him to the depths of his being.

Only for a moment, however, just as it might have been had he entered a boxing-ring for an important fight; the next, he was as calm as ever, and smiling the old smile.

The enemy's shells were woefully short.

"He's no idea of the range," chuckled Tomkins. "Tom, old sport, 'e don't know where 'e are."

"He may send one aboard us in a minute," said Tom Crawley. "Best not to shout till its over, old man."

But no; the enemy's shells not only fell short, but also wide.

"And what of ours?" asked Tom.

The words had scarcely passed his lips ere Tomkins whipped off his cap and yelled like a madman.

"Right bang on the bloomin' target!" said he.

He was right. Distant though the enemy destroyer was, Tom could see the flash of the shell burst, and when the arc of light was over again only three of the enemy's four smoke stacks could be seen. The fourth had been blown clean away.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" roared the gallant crew of the Flyer; and Captain Walsh's face wore a grin smile.

"Keep at it gunners!" he roared. "Let 'em have some more!"

Not that they could hear him. There was no chance of that, but it didn't matter a rap. Every man aboard the British destroyer was at his duty. And so the shells burst in a perfect hail around the doomed German ship.

Suddenly she fell right behind her sister ship, and lay lame upon the water. Her guns spat viciously, but the moral of her officers and crew had been broken, and the vessel had a decided list to starboard.

Men were sliding down her slanting decks, and flames could be seen licking their way up.

Now a shell from the Flyer hit her bang and she, and an explosion fol-

lowed. So plainly could everything be seen in the brilliant rays of the search-light that Tom espied Germans jumping into the sea.

Poor devils. Glad though he was at the triumph achieved by the Flyer, yet he could feel all a sailor's sympathy for the luckless Huns. They were going to their death; and the Flyer had far more important work to do than to stop and pick them up.

A last shell hit the enemy vessel, whose gunners served their pieces to the last, and she listed badly, and went down by the head.

The Flyer raced onward after number two, in the strengthening wind and rapidly rising sea.

"Poor devils!" muttered Tom; "bad as they were, they'd plenty of pluck; but a Hun seaman can't fight a Britisher. They ain't in the same class."

MAN OVERBOARD!

THE second of the enemy vessels was making a running fight of it.

Though her shells burst a long way short of the Flyer, yet she kept up the bombardment, and the pursuing vessel fired in her turn, though not as often. Her commander was anxious to find the range, but he did not like wasting valuable ammunition for the mere fun of the thing. During the running fight the Flyer had slackened speed a trifle to aid her aim. This had given the leading enemy vessel a chance of lengthening the distance that separated the two ships.

"I'm afraid we may not run her down before she gets safe beyond the limit of the enemy's mine fields," said Captain Walsh. "I must have some more shells."

The necessary orders were given, and a few minutes afterwards, with her guns racing at full speed and the hull of the vessel trembling under the fierce fire the Flyer made, perhaps her record.

Came the chief engineer from below, black with coal dust and oil, and with the perspiration streaming down his cheek.

"She won't stand any more skipper," he cried, "unless you want us to blow up. The finest steel will melt if it is put to a much greater test than I'm applying now."

The skipper eyed the enemy ship

through his glass, and shook his head with a sigh.

"And yet I'm afraid it won't do. The devils will escape us."

So it proved, for after a stern chase of another hour and a-half, the order was given to cease the pursuit.

Fritz had evidently got hold of something very fast ahead there, and the start conceded was too much.

It might be dangerous to go on. Therefore the *Flyer* was turned about, and at half-speed made her way back towards the coast of England. She had bagged one of the enemy raiders. If there had been more than two participating in the attack upon the British coast, some of the others had perhaps been intercepted; and, at any rate, Fritz had been taught that he could not bombard defenceless coast towns with impunity.

The crew of the *Flyer* were overjoyed at the success their commander had achieved. And yet there were some grumblers. Witness Tomkins:

"And I never had a chance of a dig at a single one of 'em," he growled, as he gripped the handle of his cutlass. "I never have no luck."

But soon he had other things to think about, for the sea was rising, and the wind was blowing half a gale. Also the rain began to fall, though only fitfully.

Pitching and rolling to her heart's content, the *Flyer* sped back to port. The crew remained at quarters. A close lookout was kept. Wireless messages crackled at the masthead, and the news was soon passed round that a second destroyer had been sunk by a Portsmouth boat. The rest had got away, and for the time being the seas were safe.

"Then the sooner I gets to my bunk," growled Tomkins, "the better I shall be pleased."

"I'm not anxious," said Tom Crawley. "I'd as soon be up here as down there, when the ship's rocking like this. Blow the waves." The sea beat against the side of the ship, and the spray, leaping upwards, drenched him.

"Tain't safe up here," said Tomkins. "What's to prevent yer sliding into the sea?"

The words were hardly out of his mouth ere—crash. The *Flyer* drove her bows hard against some floating object, off which she swung like an express turned by the points in the railway track.

The swerve sent Tom Crawley staggering.

He lost his balance, fell, and slid on the slippery deck to the side of the vessel.

The sea was near. As the *Flyer's* deck slanted down to meet the waters, a gasp of horror burst from Tom's lips.

He clutched madly at the deck, but his hands could find nothing to grip hold of. A despairing yell echoed like a death-knell in the horrified Tomkins's ears. For Tomkins had seen his chum thrown down and go sliding towards the sea, and had made a desperate effort to save him. But he had missed by a foot, and had slithered down, so that he had to struggle hard to save himself, and he was no swimmer either.

"Tom! Tom!" he wailed, and shuddered, closing his eyes.

When he regained his footing, as the *Flyer* righted herself, and looked, Tom Crawley had gone. He had been swallowed up by the seas.

Poor Tom!

"Tom, Tom!" groaned Tomkins, in a burst of agony he could not control. "Old pal! Old pal!" and his wide eyes stared vacantly at the grey of the heaving sea.

"Man overboard!" shouted a petty officer, racing aft. "Man overboard!"

But by the time the destroyer had slowed down more than a mile had been covered, and though her searchlight played upon the sea, shifting from one place to another, no trace of the lost seaman could be seen. Old hands knew that little short of a miracle could save the lad.

And, after a while, finding that there was no chance of picking the brave boy up, the *Flyer* pursued her course, and in due time steamed slowly back to harbour, with some of her plates strained by her collision with that unknown floating object.

THE RESCUE.

BEFORE he made his final plunge over the side of the *Flyer* Tom Crawley managed to steady himself for a moment or two.

He fought as bravely to save himself as ever he had fought in the ring, and even in those terrible seconds while he was waiting for the ship to right herself he was as cool as a cucumber.

But it was not to be. His fingers relaxed their grip, and down he went into

the sea. The water closed over his head, and he fought and struggled in the wake left behind by the fast speeding Flyer for some little time before he managed to rise to the surface and take a breath of life-giving air again.

Tom Crawley had often marvelled at the speed developed by our very modern destroyers; yet never in his most enthusiastic moments had he ever gauged that speed so accurately as now.

The Flyer was gone when he looked about him, gone from view. He could hear her, but he could not see her.

Placing his right hand to his mouth while he trod water, he shouted at the full stretch of his lungs in the vain hope that he might make himself heard. Vain hope. The wind beat the words back into his teeth, and the spray filled his mouth.

He gave it up, and swam slowly, wondering how long he would be able to keep it up.

The water seemed very cold, and he shivered. But the exercise made him warm, and he commenced to calculate the hours that remained before the day broke, and to wonder in what part of the Channel he had been deposited. If he were anywhere near the ordinary course taken by inward or outward bound craft, the chances of his being picked up would be about even, he reckoned.

But could he last out? Could he?

Tom Crawley was a sound swimmer, could swim for miles, and knew enough about the game to rest himself and husband his strength. Yet this was no mean task that had been set him.

For a long time he flapped out in the heaving sea, the only bit of comfort vouchsafed him being when the Flyer had bent her searchlight beams upon the sea. When he saw those silvery rays he believed that the ship would come back for him, and pick him up.

But when she drifted further and further away, and finally the light went out, and she vanished, a feeling of despair almost crushed him, and he wondered whether it were worth while struggling on.

And his hopes rose again as he found himself withstanding the ordeal fairly well.

And at last, as he swung his arms slowly about, his hand struck against something hard, a heavy substance that was floating upon the sea.

His heart gave a leap, and he felt about him, and swam alongside the object, which was of considerable size. As he kicked his feet down they struck against it, proving that it lay deep in the sea.

And anon, as he had discovered that it had breadth, he hauled himself up and sat down upon it, his legs awash, but his body resting.

Well, at any rate, he would see the dawn, he thought; and his chance of rescue had increased a thousandfold.

He suffered considerable discomfort as he sat shivering in the keen wind, but his spirits were soaring now.

At last the dawn broke, and as the light of day flooded the sea, revealing every object that floated upon it, Tom Crawley discovered that he was floating upon a submerged timber ship, whose side was rent as if by a torpedo, and whose cargo was being slowly washed out of her by the force of the sea. It was doubtless upon the sunken hull that the bows of the Flyer had struck.

Well, then, the ship's bad luck had been good luck for him. Therefore he smiled.

He was very cold, very hungry, but not half so miserable in the daylight as he had been at night, for he could see a steamer to the north in the far distance, and trails of smoke dotting the horizon here and there, signs that there were plenty of ships about.

He reckoned that, with any sort of luck, he ought to be picked up before the day waned to a certainty.

The wind began to die down, the sea to fall, and the clouds to disperse. Then the sun burst through and shone down upon the sea, warming him, and strengthening the hope that had been born within him.

Help would come soon; he felt sure of it.

And as his aching eyes searched the seas, after a long while he espied two steam trawlers making towards him.

He pulled off his shirt and waved it frantically round his head.

"Ship ahoy! Ship ahoy. Ahoy!"
Did those aboard hear him? Had they seen him?

Yes, for they came nearer and nearer, the foremost drawing apart from her sister, and coming up rapidly.

And then, with a shout, Tom leapt to

(Continued overleaf.)

his feet and stood unsteadily upon the deck of the sunken timber ship, trembling, but overjoyed.

His astonishment increased as the boat drew even nearer, and as soon as he'd made out her name and her number a roar rang from his lips, for he knew that she was the trawler commanded by John Thwaites, the Borrowmouth fisherman.

And there upon the bridge, peering down at the strange spectacle of this castaway seaman, leant John Thwaites himself.

Hoarse commands rang from Thwaites' lips. Signals were telephoned down to the engine-room. The fishing boat drew alongside the sunken vessel.

Then a rope was thrown, and the eager hands of Tom Crawley sought for it, and grasped it.

He floundered into the sea, and was then hauled like a newly caught fish up out of the sea and on to the deck of the rescue ship.

"It's a bit of luck we found you, mate," grunted the skipper from the bridge.

Tom Crawley smiled.

"Well, I'd sooner you found me than anybody, John," he exclaimed, and Fisherman Thwaites started.

"Bless my soul, it's Tom Crawley!" "Ay, John, it's me right enough," said Tom. "I got chucked overboard of the Flyer."

"And they'll report you lost in Weathersca!" ejaculated the skipper.

"Not a doubt about it. But I'm worth a score of dead men yet, John."

"Ay, ay, that you are, that you are," said the skipper, as he scuttled down to the deck and embraced little Tom Crawley, drenched though the latter was. "Tom—Tom—it'd have been a sad blow to me if I'd lost you, for I look upon you as if you were my own son; and—then—there's Mary."

"She doesn't care about me," said Tom, his eyes lighting up with a jealous flash.

"She does lad—she worships you."

Tom's face beamed.

"Think so?"

"Ay, I'm sure of it, though she don't say much. Now, get you along, twee: decks, my lad, and have some breakfast and a change of clothes. I must mark the position of this derelict down, so that she can be blown up, for she's a menace to shipping as bad as any submarine."

(To be continued.)

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